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Title: The Invisible Student: Undocumentation and Its Effects on UIUC Students

About the Author:

Keywords:

Abstract: Our research so far has allowed us to explore some of the aspects of Latino/a student life on campus. Our main focus is to understand the differences between the experience of undocumented students (or students from undocumented families) and those of documented status. As part of our research, we have conducted interviews with three undergraduate students, a graduate student, and one administrator regarding the different experiences of students on campus. Although our research is not complete yet, we have found that the individuals we have interviewed share some ideas about the lack of resources for undocumented students and students coming from undocumented families. Our main argument with this research project is that students of undocumented status, as well as students from undocumented families, face many obstacles due to lack of resources when pursuing higher education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In order to put this issue into perspective, we will give a brief history on Latino/a immigration into the United States and discuss some of the reasons why Latinos come to this country. We also discuss some of the University's history when providing resources for Latino/a students. Finding a better life and new opportunities, providing for a family, and getting a better education are some of the most common reasons why Latinos come to the U.S. They also come in search of the "American Dream;" although this is not available to everyone. For example, higher education is not easily obtainable, and if it is obtained, there is always trouble-finding jobs for undocumented individuals. It is also very hard to obtain citizenship or residency in this country. The University of Illinois has a history of offering resources to its Latino/a students. However, not much has been done in the past despite knowledge and data that show enrollment numbers were very small and dropout rates were high; regardless of this knowledge, there are still not many resources available to students. For example, there are not many scholarships offered for Latino/a students of undocumented background who attend the University. In addition, students are not finding what they need at places such as La Casa, which many at first consider a resource.

The interviews we have conducted have given us many perspectives to consider. When we interviewed the Associated Director of Admissions, he was very helpful and insightful since he had been in contact with students from both documented and undocumented backgrounds that have enrolled at UIUC. He told us that students from undocumented backgrounds were concerned about the challenges they faced when trying to find and apply for scholarships or finding jobs after they had obtained their degree. Another one of our interviews was with an undergraduate student who we have chosen to call Maria. She is a documented

student who told us that she felt it was important have resources that would help undocumented and documented students as early as high school so that they could get more information on the college application/financial aid process. Another undergraduate student that we call Juan was an undocumented student who told us he is facing many financial issues because he cannot receive financial aid. He also told us that he plans to move back to his country of origin once he gets his degree because he will not be able to find a job here.

By using interviews as our primary data-collection source, we gained insider perspectives from those affected by legal status at UIUC. It is important to know if the school is representing its students and giving everyone an equal chance.

Undocumented immigration is also a huge issue that this country is facing and we think it is important that the University partake in aiding potential students affected by legal status through helping them achieve higher education and later benefiting the community.

Initial Exercises:

- Question:**
1. How legal status affects a student's academic and social life on campus.
 2. What challenges do students face when coming from a family with undocumented status?
 3. Why is it important for a student coming from an undocumented-status family to go to college?
 4. What resources should be offered to these students/families of undocumented status? What kinds of resources, if any, are offered on campus?

Plan: In order to obtain the answers to our questions, we plan to interview the people who are willing to take part in our study. Our questions are focused around the legal status of University students and their families so, in order to get answers to these questions, we will try to find volunteers who are willing to talk to us around campus. We will use La Colectiva meetings and La Casa to find these volunteers.