

**The Road Less Traveled: School Counselors' Role in Helping Undocumented  
Students Move Beyond College Enrollment**

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### **Abstract**

Undocumented college-bound students face many obstacles when planning for college, and school counselors are well positioned to assist them. However, the focus is often on enrollment versus college completion. This article considers the preparation needs for undocumented college-bound students through the lens of both their unauthorized and first-generation status. Recommendations for school counselors are presented that focus on identification and invisibility of undocumented youth, policy and reform, and social/emotional preparations for college.

*Keywords:* school counselor, undocumented college-bound student, first-generation, college student

## **The Road Less Traveled: School Counselors' Role in Helping Undocumented Students Move Beyond College Enrollment**

Many undocumented students come to a fork in the road that requires them to decide whether to go to college. Each road presents unique and unknown challenges which can complicate the decision-making process. Although *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) permitted the pursuit of K-12 education regardless of immigration status, the right to education ends after high school graduation. This reality leaves undocumented students facing a plethora of challenges and limitations if they select the college route.

College attainment can be very beneficial. A college degree typically results in higher wages (Abel & Deitz, 2014), numerous health benefits (Schafer, Wilkinson, & Ferraro, 2013), the chance to have a positive impact on society, and mobility on the socioeconomic scale (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Unfortunately, traditionally underrepresented groups have lower rates of college attainment, including first-generation students (Yoshikawa, Suárez-Orozco, & Gonzales, 2017) and more specifically, undocumented college-bound students as a subset of this population. While there is research on the experience of first-generation immigrant college-bound students, and several programs have been developed to help them be successful in college (Atherton, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Olson, 2014; Petty, 2014), there is a lack of information available to school counselors about working with undocumented college-bound students.

### **First-Generation Immigrant College-Bound Students**

A significant proportion of undocumented college-bound students are also considered first-generation students since they are many times the first to attend college

in their families and in the country. Therefore, understanding the experience of the first-generation immigrant college-bound students can provide some insight into the challenges of undocumented college-bound students. First-generation immigrant college-bound students currently account for 1 in every 6 of students entering college (Irlbeck et al., 2014). They are defined as students whose parents do not have any post-secondary education (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). A range of barriers can hinder the first-generation immigrant students from completing college. For example, they are more likely to work while attending college, attend part-time, come from low-income families, be older, and have children (Irlbeck et al., 2014). They often struggle with the challenge of fitting into two contrasting worlds: at home and in higher education. They often have limited knowledge of college jargon, expectations, and traditions (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2014). Additionally, their families may not be able to offer support toward their collegiate experiences (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015; Ayón, Valencia-Garcia, & Kim, 2017). As a result, it is not uncommon for the first-generation immigrant college-bound students to enter higher education less prepared academically and psychologically (Ayón et al., 2017; Olson, 2014).

Undocumented college-bound students share similarities with first-generation immigrant college-bound students (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). Both groups are more likely to attend community college and more likely to attend part-time college while also working (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Both groups are often new to the college culture and unfamiliar with the demands, expectations, and jargon (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Petty, 2014). Also, each group has concerns about funding their education (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Kim &

Díaz, 2013). Although first-generation immigrant college-bound students have greater access to financial aid, they may also be reluctant to incur significant amounts of debt (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015).

One of the most notable similarities is the effect of the social and familial support experienced by both. These students must learn to exist and navigate in two worlds. The culture of home and the culture of college (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015; Irlbeck et al., 2014). However, their parents and family members are often unable to provide support in assisting them with this challenge, as they are frequently unequipped with the life experience to adequately guide and support their children (Gildersleeve, 2017). Level of family support has been shown to be an important factor in the college completion of both first-generation and undocumented college-bound students (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015). In a study focusing on resilience in undocumented Mexican male college students, Crawford and Arnold (2016) found that family and culture were particularly important elements of college persistence. Bjorklund (2018) found a similar result in the college persistence of undocumented Mexican female students. Moreover, Deli-Amen & Martinez (2015) recommended from their study of first-generation college-bound Students that it was important for school counselors to provide information about college culture to students as well as families throughout the K-12 years. This information may give the family tools to support the student as they seek college completion.

Ayón and colleagues (2017) identified five disadvantages faced by first-generation immigrant college-bound students in pursuit of higher education that should be on the radar of school counselors. First, first-generation immigrant college-bound

students are applying to college with minimal guidance from parents due to their limited educational backgrounds, and thus, these students must rely on institutional agents such as teachers and school counselors to demystify the college selection process. Second, college preparation in high school becomes very useful and vital for first-generation immigrant college-bound students. However, if the school fails to provide this service, the needs of these students go unaddressed. This is a similar concern for undocumented college-bound students as the desire to remain hidden can prevent schools from being aware of what types of information and assistance they should offer. Through an analysis of seven New York high schools, Neinhusser (2013) found that those with larger populations of undocumented college-bound students were more likely to explicitly offer services, rather than relying on students to identify themselves. Third, the first-generation immigrant college-bound students often lack rigorous academic preparedness, which can lead to a lack of readiness for college-level work. Fourth, first-generation students often view college as solely a means to desirable employment, rather than weighing college goodness-of-fit, which in severe cases can subsequently result in discontinuing enrollment (Ayón et al., 2017). The fifth disadvantage involves social-emotional concerns. First-generation immigrant college-bound students often report lower self-esteem and social acceptance, and as stated before, are likely to attend part-time, live at home, and work (Ayón et al.). This means that first-generation immigrant college-bound students continue to straddle two worlds and struggle to meet the increased demands and expectations of both.

As previously stated, the experience of the first-generation immigrant college-bound students are well researched, and they have access to various programs to help

them be successful in college (Atherton, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Olson, 2014; Petty, 2014). However, grant programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) also known as TRIO (represents the original three programs, not an acronym) has proven effectiveness, continue to be out of reach for undocumented college-bound students because they are federally funded (Gilbert, 2014; U.S Department of Education, 2007). While the similarities can better help educators understand the needs of undocumented students, it is important for school counselors to consider how this population differs from others in the first-generation category. School counselors need an understanding of the unique characteristics of undocumented college-bound students.

### **Undocumented College-Bound Students**

There are approximately 1.8 million undocumented students under the age of 18 in the United States (Camarota, 2015). The typical homes of origin of these students are Mexico, Central America, South America, Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe/Canada/Oceania (Rosenblum & Ruiz Soto, 2015). Undocumented students have either entered the United States (U.S.) without inspection (EWI) (e.g., crossing the border), overstayed their visa (visitor visa expired) (Chan 2010), violated their legal status (e.g., obtained legal immigration status but committed a crime), or falsified documents to enter the country (e.g., used someone else's passport). Regardless of how they arrived in the U.S., undocumented students are afforded free K-12 public education as a result of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982). This means that every year approximately 65,000 undocumented college-bound students graduate from high school (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Although many of these students are college ready (Kim & Díaz,

2013), only about 7,000-13,000 will enroll in higher education. According to Warren and Warren (2013), only 26% of undocumented college students attend college or have some college education as compared to legal immigrants (60%) and U.S. born students (58%) (Yoshikawa et al., 2017). In addition, undocumented college-bound students are more likely to begin their higher education at community colleges (Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015). Regardless of whether they begin their journey at a two- or four-year institutions, once enrolled, undocumented college-bound students face many challenges that hinder their success and prevent them from access to necessary educational and support services (Barnhardt, Ramos, & Reyes, 2013).

Approximately 500,000 (33%) children of undocumented immigrants live in poverty compared to children of U.S. parents (18%) (Warren & Warren, 2013). This results in several resource challenges faced by undocumented college-bound students. As the cost of college tuition continues to increase (Abel & Deitz, 2014), undocumented college-bound students struggle to manage financing college due to ineligibility for any governmental and state financial aid (Serna, Cohen, & Nguyen, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In addition, they typically do not have the financial support from their parents, and therefore, attending college can be a financial burden on the family (Martinez, 2014). Often, many students work full time and take a part-time course load (Martinez, 2014; Nelson & Nelson, 2013). They often have family responsibilities regarding housing and everyday living expenses, creating a struggle between prioritizing family needs and educational ambitions (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014).

According to the College Board (Kantamneni et al., 2016), undocumented college-bound students may face obstacles with admission, tuition, and financial aid.

Although all prospective college students experience these concerns, these challenges are exacerbated by the student's immigration status and lack of knowledge about the college process. In addition, once students initially negotiate the college process, they continue to struggle with accessing faculty and staff who can provide information about resources for undocumented students (Irlbeck et al., 2014). According to Barnhardt and colleagues (2013), the lack of knowledge regarding undocumented college-bound students found within higher education contributed to limited understanding of students' needs and available resources by faculty and staff. Limited assistance and mentoring during the college years further hinders undocumented students' success and, at times, their ability to work after graduation. Since faculty advisors' often lack knowledge regarding the concerns and challenges that undocumented students face, they are prone to missing opportunities that could assist undocumented college-bound students in the admission/financial aid process (Chan, 2010), dealing with socioemotional issues, and eventually college completion.

Undocumented college-bound students face an array of socioemotional issues because of their immigration status. Delva and colleagues (2013) outlined three broad categories of emotions that undocumented college-bound students may face: fear, loneliness, and depression due to the limits their status places upon them during and after college (Martinez, 2014). Fear of being "discovered" (fear of deportation) impacts their choices in almost all facet of their lives. They may not seek out support from their colleges or college-related resources because they are uncertain of the outcome in revealing their status. This uncertainty contributes to the development of feelings such as shame of being humiliated and helplessness for having to live in the shadows of

society. In addition to fear and shame, experiences of loneliness can contribute to depression for some undocumented college-bound students (Delva et al., 2013). Different ethnic origins, lack of legal status, and financial hardships (DeAngelo, Schuster, & Stebleton, 2016) often makes them susceptible to discrimination, racism, and stereotypes (Casabona, 2014). Incorrect assumptions portray undocumented college-bound students as being primarily Latino. As a result, many non-Latino undocumented college-bound students may choose not to identify themselves (Chuang, & Roemer, 2015). According to Chan (2010), “Latino-issue” stereotype has allowed non-Latino undocumented students to circumnavigate being described as undocumented because many believe it is safer not to expose one’s immigration status even if it means not receiving help with the college process. The Migration Policy Institute’s data (2013) reports that 15% percent of Filipino immigrants and 25% of Korean immigrants are undocumented; however, they are often invisible because they are in the U.S. without being profiled as undocumented (Chan, 2010). However, this cloak of secrecy contributes to their feelings of shame, loneliness, and prevents them from accessing resources.

School counselors must be aware that due to the social stigma of the undocumented status, the lives of these college students may be one filled with helplessness, powerlessness, and loneliness. Their reality is that college will come at a significant sacrifice especially without the assurance of employment (Navarrete, 2013).

### **Policies That Impact Educational Attainment**

Undocumented college-bound students are further differentiated from their first-generation immigrant counterparts by federal policies that affect their educational

attainment. Therefore, school counselors must be cognizant of the policies that impact the educational attainment of undocumented college-bound students. Consequently, these policies influence the integration, assimilation, and mobility patterns of undocumented college students beyond the challenges faced by typical first-generation students. For example, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an initiative designed to suspend (temporarily) the deportation of a segment of the eligible undocumented immigrant population who entered the U.S. before age 15 and are currently under the age of 31 (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). This program allows undocumented students to apply for work permits and increases their opportunities for economic and social incorporation. With a DACA status, students have legal presence but not lawful status, and their deferred status is a valid status that is in flux. (Martinez, 2014). Furthermore, DACA allows immigrant youth to access academic institutions, but the question remains whether they will be able to leverage college degrees into promising employment opportunities. Consequently, the ending of this program has left many undocumented college-bound students, parents, and schools unsure of how to serve and support students.

As described previously, financing education is a challenge for many students, especially for undocumented college-bound students who are limited by their illegal status. The ability to move from an illegal to legal status has been made more difficult by immigration policies such as the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act and the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (Martinez, 2014). IIRIRA and PRWORA collectively deny undocumented immigrants public benefits as well as post-secondary aid, allowing states

to charge out-of-state tuition regardless of their length of residence within the given state (Kim & Díaz, 2013). To address these concerns, tuition equity laws have been established in many states. Tuition equity is an in-state tuition policy for undocumented college-bound students (Nienhusser, 2013). For an undocumented college-bound student to benefit from this policy (e.g., be eligible for in-state tuition), they must attend a state's public post-secondary education institution, previously attend a high school for a specified number of years, and graduate or obtain their General Educational Development (GED) diploma in that state. The tuition equity laws are contingent on high school attendance and graduation, not on residency within the state. Additionally, the tuition equity laws allow for college tuition to be comparatively more affordable. Since undocumented college-bound students are not entitled to federal aid, in-state institution can still pose a challenge. However, some public and private colleges provide institutional aid that is not regulated or supported by the federal financial aid program.

Undocumented college-bound students must contend with their legal status, which essentially criminalizes them (McWhirter, Ramos, & Medina, 2013). They are prevented from doing typical youth activities, such as applying for a driver's license or federally funded financial aid (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). Due to their status, they face discrimination, shame, anxiety, and fear of deportation (Kim & Díaz, 2013; DeAngelo et al., 2016). School counselor must be aware that these challenges are not only obstacles to college enrollment but also barriers to college completion. Given this, how can professional school counselors best prepare undocumented college-bound students for life beyond high school?

## **Role of the School Counselor**

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recognizes that school counselors serve a proactive role in the college and career planning of all students. ASCA state's the responsibility of the school counselor is to "understand national, state, and local requirements and programs that may affect future opportunities for college and career readiness and therefore play a critical role in academic and career planning" (ASCA, 2013, p. 1). Although ASCA's position echoes their universal stance of supporting all students in K-12 setting (ASCA, 2017), there is a need to expand this policy to beyond college enrollment. This service is especially necessary for underrepresented groups who have typically been denied access to higher education (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013). The National Association of College Admissions Counseling offers guidelines, and best practices for working with undocumented college-bound students (NACAC, n.d.). However, more information about evidenced-based practices for how school counselors can help undocumented college-bound students achieve college success are needed.

Much of the literature, though limited in nature, focuses on the school counselor's role in college access for undocumented college-bound students. However, as the statistics suggest, merely enrolling in college is not sufficient to guarantee college persistence (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). School counselors can help address the disadvantages faced by undocumented college-bound students by providing the skills, knowledge, resources, and tools to help prepare them for the journey ahead (Urbina, Villares, & Mariani, 2017). Recommendations in the literature include informing undocumented college-bound students of in-state tuition policies, providing information

to students and families, and assisting them with making decisions about future choices (Neinhusser, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015); Ayón et al., 2017; Storlie & Jach, 2012). Yet there are no recommendations for how school counselors can go beyond enrollment and prepare undocumented college-bound students for success during college in addition to college enrollment.

With a lack of available information specific to this population, school counselors might find it helpful to conceptualize undocumented college-bound students as first-generation college-bound students. Given their similar needs, school counselors can adapt well researched strategies for working with first-generation college-bound students to the unique needs of this first-generation subgroup. It has been recommended that school counselors should seek to identify and gain knowledge of the needs of first-generation college-bound students (Ayón et al., 2017), address the barriers they face (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013), and develop primary prevention programs to help overcome these obstacles (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015). In a qualitative study of urban first-generation college-bound students, Reid and Moore (2008) found that participants identified the school counselor as a key provider of information and resources about college and the college selection process. Special attention should also be given to parents of college-bound first-generation students. Espino (2016) found that parents played a key role in children's educational aspirations. Findings such as these, along with knowledge of the undocumented college-bound student experiences, have informed the following recommendations.

## **Recommendations and Strategies of School Counselors**

There are several recommendations that the authors believe can be helpful to school counselors aiding undocumented college-bound student to move beyond college enrollment. These recommendations are framed utilizing the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies because undocumented college-bound students need support and interventions that focus on (1) counselor self-awareness, (2) client worldview, (3) counseling relationship, and (4) counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). In addition, the following strategies consider the challenges and the policies that hinder undocumented college-bound students' college access, retention, and persistence, while considering their dual status of undocumented and first-generation.

### **Counselor Self-Awareness: Advocate and Educate Around Policy and Reform**

The policies that impact undocumented college-bound youth and their families put limits on the services that they can receive to support their college pursuit (McWhirter et al., 2013). Sometimes the limitations these policies cause become misconstrued to mean that students are precluded from going to college. Students and families need all the relevant information to make the best decision (Ayón et al., 2017). Therefore, school counselors and school staff members should be educated on necessary policies as well as seek professional development opportunities to learn more about themselves as a member of a privileged or marginalized group. Additionally, school counselors can advocate for changes to policies and laws that will provide opportunities for undocumented students.

**Strategy 1: Educate self and school staff on policies.** School counselors should be aware and understand the laws and policies that support or hinder the college experience for students. Policies such as DACA allow students access, but they are temporary measures. Therefore, it is important that school counselors seek out additional professional development around working with undocumented students, for example, to acquire the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of these youths and their families. A workshop regarding the impact of residency status on college admission and financial aid or the social emotional development of undocumented students could be useful. The constant unknown of what change might bring can continue to create stress on the students, requiring that school counselors stay up to date of every changing policies and laws. In addition, it is important for school counselors to help school staff stay current on policies. School counselors can develop and facilitate professional development that informs stakeholders about the unique struggles of these students, including acculturation struggles. Students may choose to reveal their status to a teacher, principal, or another school staff member with whom they have a relationship. Therefore, school staff should be equipped to provide culturally responsive informative answers to questions about the policies that impact students. In addition, school counselors can make available resources about undocumented students to school professionals via email, handouts, and presentations.

**Strategy 2: Research and promote opportunities.** School counselors can seek out colleges that do and do not require DACA for entry. Thus, some state laws support undocumented college-bound students' entry into college and provide financial aid assistance, while others do not. School counselors should seek out schools that have

school climates that are supportive to undocumented student's experiences and understand the complexity of their status. For example, the City University of New York has the CUNY DREAMers Hub, which provides resources such as scholarships, legal services, and advocacy sources for undocumented college-bound students. In addition, school counselors can advocate for undocumented college-bound students with various undocumented-friendly institutions. In the case of the Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrant college-bound students, undocumented friendly institutions can be designated as Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), institutions that offer financial assistance to undocumented students, and institutions that offer legal and immigration support. School counselors can partner with HSI's by presenting information on the challenges and barriers of this population to school boards and other higher education professionals. Since many undocumented college-bound students keep their immigration status private, higher education partners has the potential to reach a significant number of undocumented students.

School counselors should show cultural empathy when communicating with undocumented college-bound students' families. For instance, school counselors can communicate, using an interpreter (if needed), the value of higher education when discussing benefits of opportunities such as dual enrollment courses to families. When encouraging students to complete dual enrollment courses, while in high school, discussion regarding lessening the cost of college could be positively received. In addition, school counselors can communicate about the many scholarships that do not require permanent status (e.g., Golden Door Scholars) and should be advertised in

school counseling offices, on the school websites, and in school newsletters, as well as discussed during individual planning meetings.

### **Client World View: Identifying and Providing Information to Invisible Students**

One of the major challenges for school counselors is related to the identification and invisible nature of undocumented youth. It is important that counselors take action by assessing their limitations and strengths when working with marginalized clients on a consistent basis. School counseling can support the strengthening of relationships between undocumented college-bound students and families with school personnel to establish trust. There are many assumptions about who is undocumented, and since schools are prohibited from inquiring about a student's status, strategies to support undocumented youth should be direct and indirect. For example, schools can start with identifying first-generation immigrant status. Through an assessment of which of their students might be first generation, school counselors can tailor the information and services provided. Both undocumented students and first-generation students are often less academically and psychologically prepared for college (Olson, 2014; Ayón et al., 2017). Reid and Moore (2008) recommended that school counselors have a system for providing first-generation college-bound students and families with information about the college process early on in high school. To maximize the benefits to undocumented college-bound students, information relevant to their specific needs can be included.

**Strategy 1: Develop culture of care and safety.** School counselors can conduct individual meetings with first-generation college-bound high school students to review post-secondary preparation, goals, questions, and plans. During these meetings with their school counselors, students can begin the process of having a reflective

discussion about themselves. Once a trusting and confidential relationship is established, any first-generation college-bound students who also share undocumented status will now know a safe place to go to discuss or ask questions about college and receive answers that are relevant to their situation. In addition, school counselors can begin to teach students how to seek resources and support in higher education institutions.

**Strategy 2: Make information relevant to undocumented college-bound students readily available.** Providing information in the form of newsletters, posters, brochures, and websites that includes content relevant to undocumented college-bound students could be valuable. School counselors should be cognizant of the primary language spoken by families in their school and multilingual information should be included. Doing so allows the students to maintain their privacy while beginning the process of developing a college student identity, knowing that college is a possibility.

**Counseling Relationship: Prepare Students for Social/Emotional Factors**

Because of their status, undocumented college-bound students have many social/emotional needs. Strategies must revolve around preparing students to cope with internal and external factors while in college. School counselors should prepare students by encouraging group or individual counseling sessions about how culture, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, power, privilege, and oppression; however, school counselors must be aware of how these factors influence the counseling relationship with marginalized clients. Without sufficient coping mechanisms, the social/emotional barriers that students may face can be overwhelming. Undocumented college-bound students may contend with feelings of shame, discrimination, social

isolation, fear, anxiety, and rejection (DeAngelo et al., 2016). Additionally, since they share the first-generation status they are also impacted by lack of cultural capital (Jaquette, Curs, & Posselt, 2016), family support (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015), and challenges adapting to the college environment (Ayón et al., 2017).

**Strategy 1: Support positive identity development.** The social/emotional challenges undocumented college-bound youth experience may stem from the lack of self-esteem and believing in their ability to construct positive futures. Thus, school counselors can develop and implement activities that allow undocumented college-bound youths to build strong ties to and feel proud of the group with which they identify. For instance, although used with English language learners, Student Success Skills (Urbina, et al., 2017) and Strong Teen programs (Castro-Olivo, 2014) have shown promise with desired outcomes for culturally-supported programs. Additional strategies could involve having guest speakers of varying status speak about their college-going process, mentoring opportunities, and community resources.

**Strategy 2: Facilitate support groups.** The social/emotional struggles of undocumented college-bound students can be covert. The fear of deportation often isolates these students, leaving them alone to struggle with anxiety about their current situation and the future. Many are unprepared for the discrimination, racism, and bias they may encounter once entering college. School counselors can help students develop coping mechanisms and have a forum for discussing these experiences through small group counseling. The use of small groups provides a safe, supportive environment for students to practice new skills and process complex emotions. However, before recruiting group members, school counselors must address fears of

deportation empathically. Recruitment for these groups may be difficult, depending on the school culture and openness of undocumented students and their families.

### **Advocacy Interventions: Develop Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions**

Partnerships among high schools, colleges, and universities can be created to assist with college enrollment as well as college completion. Storlie and Jach (2012) recommended that K-12 public schools and higher education institutions collaborate in a systemic way to help undocumented college-bound students be successful from the time they enter pre-school through college completion. In their qualitative study of first-generation college-bound students, Reid and Moore (2008) found that the college process needs to begin early and include a system of delivering information throughout the K-12 years for students and families. These partnerships can be developed so that students receive information and knowledge that will help them to prepare for the challenges they may face in college. Additionally, the collaboration may demystify the college enrollment process, culture, and environment of which many undocumented and first-generation college-bound students are unfamiliar. School counselors could lead this initiative through collaboration with student affairs professionals. Although students will choose to go to college at various institutions, school counselors can focus on building partnerships with those their students frequently attend. Due to financial and family reasons, many undocumented college-bound students will often seek higher education close to home and at community colleges. Therefore, the following strategies are recommended for professional school counselors.

**Strategy 1: Identify feeder community colleges.** School counselors and other administrative staff could benefit undocumented college-bound students by identifying

the community colleges and/or colleges and universities in which they typically enroll. This could be accomplished through a survey of alumni and current seniors engaged in the college selection process. Undocumented college-bound students may be unwilling to identify status or are disinterested in the college selection process because of lack of information about their options. Therefore, it is important for school counselors to also reach out to admission offices at community colleges near or within their communities to find out how many students from their schools enroll each year.

**Strategy 2: Collaborate with student affair professionals.** School counselors should collaborate with student affairs professionals in the identified higher education institutions on information, programs, and workshops that can be provided to students and families throughout the high school years. A key function of this partnership is to educate institutional agents at the college/university level on the needs of undocumented college-bound students in the community. In addition, school counselors could encourage representatives from these schools to have a physical presence in their schools and to include resources geared specifically for undocumented college-bound students in their materials and presentations. Once students are enrolled in the college/university, they will be able to identify these representatives as providers of information and resources.

### **Advocacy Interventions: Implement a Mentoring Program**

Mentoring programs for students can potentially increase social and cultural capital (Bloch, Kumarappan, & McKay, 2015) and foster college persistence (Sáenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del Real Viramontes, 2015). As their families often lack the information and knowledge to help them successfully navigate the college experience,

these relationships are valuable for students unfamiliar with the college environment. Since many undocumented students will also become first-generation college students, they need access to the type of social capital that will help them understand college culture. However, undocumented students will also face unique challenges, obstacles, and fears that are not shared by other first-generation college-bound students. Therefore, it is recommended that mentors who have graduated from college or are currently attending and have an undocumented status be recruited to help guide the next cohort of prospective students. Undocumented college-bound students could benefit from having access to others who have successfully overcome the barriers this status creates.

**Strategy 1: Identify and train mentors.** The school counselor can identify alumni from the school who have been enrolled in college at least two years or who have graduated from college and were considered undocumented at the time of college matriculation. The two-year time frame gives the alumni time to adjust to the college environment and makes the experiences they share more meaningful. School counselors may be able to contact alumni who meet these criteria. However, this strategy may best be employed when students are still in high school because school counselors can begin to coach them to be mentors once they have been in college for a minimum of two years.

**Strategy 2: Connect students with mentors.** School counselors can connect undocumented first-generation students with former alumni who also share the undocumented status. These connections can be made as early as possible, though the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade years would be ideal. School counselors can also create opportunities

for alumni to visit with high school students, share their own journey, and provide information and resources.

### **Implications**

School counselors can support undocumented students in fulfilling their college aspirations. Although the previously discussed recommendations provide a template for beginning this work, we recognize that school counselors face many limitations and obstacles in implementing these strategies. School counselors are limited by the demands on their time, lack of resources, and the invisibility of undocumented students in their schools. Reviewing the strategies may give school counselors ideas and methods for how they can adapt services that are relevant for their population.

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, based on current knowledge of the needs of undocumented students, and their first-generation status, frame the recommendations discussed above. Consequently, it is challenging to research effective practices due to the vulnerable nature of this population, the changing nature of policy, and the lack of institutional partnerships. This results in a paucity of evidence-based practices on working with undocumented college-bound high school students.

Researchers and school counselors can partner to consider methods for creating access to this population in a way that is not harmful to this population. Future studies can examine the effectiveness of the recommended strategies on the college completion rates of undocumented students. Additional studies focusing on the social/emotional aspects of college persistence may assist school counselors in developing programming to prepare undocumented students for the college experience.

Furthermore, evidence-based strategies that have been proven with diverse populations should be explored to determine their cultural efficacy with undocumented students.

### **Summary**

The route to college for undocumented college-bound students is a path filled with challenges and obstacles because of their dual status of being first-generation and undocumented. With the barriers, changes, confusion, and the paucity of research around educational policies/laws and interventions, school counselors are often confused as to how to help undocumented college-bound students move beyond college enrollment. It is essential that secondary schools prepare undocumented college-bound youths and their families to be resilient when facing post-secondary planning of college since the road they travel is difficult but not impossible. The strategies discussed in this article are ways in which school counselors can help undocumented college-bound youth move beyond college enrollment and focus on a future of opportunities, success, and pride.

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