

## Lift Every Voice: Institutional Climate and the Experiences of Undocumented Students at Jesuit Universities

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### Abstract

In recent years, researchers have paid increased attention to the challenges undocumented students face in accessing higher education. However, within this growing field of inquiry, the unique experiences of undocumented students at Jesuit universities have been largely unexamined. Building on the groundbreaking study of the situation of undocumented students at the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, which was published as the Immigrant Student National Position Paper (ISNPP), this article presents findings collected at the University of San Francisco as a part of a university-wide effort to assess the needs of undocumented students on campus. Three key themes emerged from this mixed-method study: (1) social justice is a draw and an anchor for undocumented students, (2) an institutional culture of silence breeds silence as an individual navigational strategy among undocumented students, and (3) unique financial stresses shape feelings of belonging for undocumented students. These themes both corroborate the ISNPP report and build a more nuanced understanding of the undocumented student experience on Jesuit campuses by highlighting the influence of institutional climate on student voice and student experience at the University of San Francisco.

### Introduction

The University of San Francisco (USF) was Esperanza's<sup>1</sup> dream school, not because getting in was a long shot—her Los Angeles high school record was stellar—but because, as an undocumented student, she had grown accustomed to tempering her educational goals with reality. Reality is that she comes from a single-parent family. Reality is that it is a monthly stretch for her mom to afford rent and food, let alone college tuition. Reality is that sometimes, even though one has done everything right, things do not turn out the way they should because lacking a nine-digit number can prevent one from living a “normal” life. Esperanza is one of a generation of young people whose daily lives are constrained and policed by a set of institutional barriers that cast them as unworthy of full participation in the country they have grown up in because of their citizenship status.

For the past decade, researchers have begun to pay increased attention to the experiences of undocumented students in institutions of higher education. However, within this growing field of

inquiry, the unique experiences of undocumented students at Jesuit universities have been largely unexamined. Building on the groundbreaking study of the situation of undocumented students at the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, which was published as the Immigrant Student National Position Paper (ISNPP),<sup>2</sup> this article shares three themes that emerged from a mixed-methods study conducted at the University of San Francisco as part of a university-wide effort to assess the needs of undocumented students on campus. This article identifies and discusses three themes that emerged from this mixed-method study, which corroborate the findings presented in the ISNPP and builds a more nuanced understanding of the undocumented student experience on Jesuit campuses, by highlighting student voice and student experience. This study finds that (1) social justice is a draw and an anchor for undocumented students, (2) an institutional culture of silence breeds silence as an individual navigational strategy among undocumented students, and (3) unique financial stresses shape feelings of belonging for undocumented students. These themes both provide insight into the experience of

undocumented students on Jesuit campuses and highlight the ways in which institutional practices shape educational experiences and educational attainment.

Undocumented students at Jesuit universities are a unique and unstudied population. In some ways, the experiences and challenges of undocumented students on many of the nation's college campuses are generalizable to undocumented students at Jesuit universities. However, our students also navigate dynamics unique to their presence at Jesuit schools. This analysis attempts to build on the work of the ISNPP by taking a case-study approach focusing on one campus and illuminating the ways these dynamics manifest on the ground by centering the voices and experiences of undocumented students at USF. This is, in many ways, the story of a campus that made an institutional effort to listen to a population of students they did not know were calling out for support and the institutional response that emerged from that process.

### **Background and Context: Undocumented Students and Higher Education**

Of the estimated 12 million undocumented people living in the United States, 1 million are children younger than 18.<sup>3</sup> Despite growing up in this country, undocumented children are repeatedly faced with the constraints of their “tolerated illegality.”<sup>4</sup> Educated in the K-12 system, they are inculcated with ideas of meritocracy, free will, and individuality; yet, they simultaneously live under the constant threat of deportation to countries many of them know only through family stories. Every year, it is estimated that 65,000 of these young people graduate from high school<sup>5</sup> and stand on the precipice of an uncertain future.

High school graduation marks an important transitional moment for all students, but for undocumented students, this transition point is particularly significant. Undocumented young people move from the world of compulsory education they have a right to through the landmark *Plyer v. Doe*<sup>6</sup> case to the uncertain post-secondary context in which their access to mainstream institutions, including work and higher education, is mediated through their status. For many, this transitional moment marks the

shift between the tenuous categories of “undocumented student” to “undocumented worker”. This seam between undocumented childhood and undocumented adulthood carries with it an associative culpability and criminality that has emerged from a long-standing and historically rooted xenophobic and anti-immigrant national climate; one that has coalesced into new draconian forms of policy in recent years.

Importantly, because of federal inaction on comprehensive immigration reform since the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, the governing of immigrant bodies has been taken up by local, regional, state, and federal jurisdictions in complicated, overlapping, and often conflicting ways. The education of undocumented young people has occupied a focal point in these policy struggles, particularly in relation to accessing higher education. Policies regulating access to higher education for undocumented students vary state-by-state ranging from inclusive in-state tuition policies in California and Texas to states like Georgia which have banned undocumented students from attending the state's top five universities regardless of merit or income. In a critical intervention, Abrego<sup>7</sup> characterized the lives of undocumented youth as marked by a legal and social contradiction, noting that high school graduation is a particularly significant moment for undocumented youth:

Up until this point, their social and economic experiences...have been very similar to those of their documented peers both in their neighborhoods and their schools. Many have internalized the U.S. values and expectations that equate academic success to economic rewards and stability. Ironically, their social incorporation sensitizes them further to the contradiction that despite their academic success, they are barred from the opportunity to integrate legally, educationally, and economically in US society.<sup>8</sup>

Higher education is an arena of intense and ongoing contestation when it comes to questions of the rights of undocumented residents.

Lastly, an analysis of this contestation would be incomplete without a recognition of the

impressive youth movement that has emerged from this context. In recent years, undocumented young people have emerged as a potent political force.<sup>9</sup> Undocumented students and their allies have launched a national movement pushing for the rights of undocumented young people to access higher education. They have also joined with other sectors of the vibrant immigrant rights movement to resist draconian deportation policies and to fight for a new national conversation about immigrant rights rooted in broad-based immigration reform, family reunification, and human rights.<sup>10</sup> This movement, led by daring undocumented activists of all ages, has helped shift the national political terrain on this question.<sup>11</sup> Despite these openings, challenges facing undocumented young people in the realm of educational access remain significant.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Lineages**

In recent years, numerous scholars have analyzed the unique configuration of barriers and challenges faced by undocumented students.<sup>12</sup> These barriers include lack of access to financial aid, which often leaves higher education beyond their reach;<sup>13</sup> state-based legislation, which shapes access to institutions of higher education;<sup>14</sup> and state and legal violence enacted upon immigrant communities, such as family separation, deportation, and immigration detention.<sup>15</sup> Undocumented youth experience the duality of inclusion and exclusion as young people raised in a country that they feel connected to yet barred from fully participating in.<sup>16</sup> Thus, despite meaningful and promising gains for undocumented students in recent years, undocumented students continue to face myriad financial, social, personal, academic, and structural challenges in pursuit of higher education.

The Jesuit tradition has a long-standing connection to and involvement in issues of immigrant rights, including the role of U.S.-based Jesuit priests during the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s in which Jesuit priests provided safe harbor to immigrants fleeing US-engineered dictatorships in Latin America.<sup>17</sup> Evidenced by institutional configurations, such as the Jesuit Migration Academic Network and Jesuit Refugee Services, the international Jesuit community has been active on the issues related to the rights of

migrants for many decades. Despite this long tradition, a national institutional response to the question of how to support undocumented students at Jesuit universities is relatively new.<sup>18</sup>

Much of what is known about the experiences of undocumented students on Jesuit campuses comes from a groundbreaking study carried out between 2010 and 2012, titled “Immigration: Undocumented Students in Higher Education.” The findings from this study were published in the Immigrant Student National Position Paper (ISNPP). This study was historically significant in that it was the first multi-campus attempt to gain a picture of the presence and experiences of undocumented students on Jesuit campuses in this country; before the publication of the ISNPP, there had been very little empirical research on undocumented students and Jesuit universities in the United States. The study, supported by the Ford Foundation and led by a team of researchers at three prominent and respected Jesuit universities (Fairfield University in Connecticut, Loyola University Chicago, and Santa Clara University in California), sought to answer two pressing questions: (1) “What are the practices, attitudes, challenges, and opportunities in our current institutions [in regards to undocumented students]?” and (2) “How can we, as a morally-committed network of Jesuit higher education institutions, join together to collaboratively support the human dignity of undocumented students who find themselves adrift in a world hostile to their future?”<sup>19</sup> The study consisted of interviews with key staff members at six Jesuit colleges and universities, an online staff survey with 110 respondents, and interviews with twenty-six undocumented students enrolled at one of the nation’s twenty-eight Jesuit universities at the time of the study. The results of this study informed a series of recommendations which seeks to develop “a collaborative model of new practices among Jesuit colleges and universities that will support undocumented students in these unsettling and troubling times.”<sup>20</sup> This study is groundbreaking not only in that it captures the lives and educational experiences of a group of students that have not previously been examined, but also because it set the stage for a practical application that seeks to improve institutional practices in serving a marginalized student population.

Already, this study—and the broader Jesuit commitment to immigrants and refugees it is rooted in—is shaping Jesuit higher education. In June 2013, twenty-five presidents from the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), signed on to a statement of support for undocumented students at Jesuit universities,<sup>21</sup> which read, in part,

...we continue to affirm that Jesuit colleges and universities are morally committed environments, where our students are inspired and encouraged to understand and address issues of justice, fairness, political involvement, and a preferential option for those whom society has marginalized. We recognize that in 2013, one group that fits this category are those living without authorization in the United States. We will continue to support our students—both documented citizens and not—as full members of our campus communities and of society at large, where their voices and personal narratives deserve to be acknowledged.

The following month, in July 2013, the presidents of several Jesuit universities signed on to a letter<sup>22</sup> of 100 Catholic university presidents calling for comprehensive immigration reform, which was sent to all Catholic members of the U.S. House of Representatives while they deliberated a comprehensive immigration reform bill. The ISNPP has set the stage for individual campuses to ascertain how they will answer this call and individually investigate undocumented students' personal experiences in the context of institutional climate and practices. The current study conducted at USF builds on the ISNPP and attempts to take up the mandate to consider the specific narratives and experiences of undocumented students on specific Jesuit campuses. With this in mind, the purpose of this exploratory mixed-methods study is to (1) investigate the experiences and challenges faced by undocumented college students at USF and (2) examine the influence of institutional practices and policies on the experiences of undocumented students at USF.

## Methods and Positionality

### Institutional Context

The University of San Francisco is a Jesuit university in the heart of California's San Francisco Bay Area; its location in a multi-racial urban center and global city is a key part of its identity. Twenty-six percent of undergraduate students at USF are Pell Grant-eligible signifying that they come from low-income families, and more than fifty percent of the undergraduates are students of color. The stated mission of the University of San Francisco reads, in part: "The University will distinguish itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice." Social justice as principle and practice is ingrained into the institutional identity of the University.

This research emerged from an ongoing collaboration with students, staff, and faculty at USF, who shared a similar interest in supporting undocumented students on campus. The development of this group included the following steps: (1) connecting with undocumented students on campus; (2) attempting to locate existing university data on undocumented students on campus; (3) building connections with students, faculty, and staff who were also concerned about undocumented students on campus; and (4) working in solidarity with the university to develop and institutionalize a university effort to support undocumented students. Through the support of USF's Office of Diversity Engagement and Community Outreach, a Task Force on Support and Services for Undocumented Students was formed with a charge to learn about the experiences of undocumented students at USF. The Task Force was a space for both new members of the University community, as well those who had been individually providing support to undocumented students on campus for several years and were anxious for a way to collectivize these efforts, find ways to move together in a collective manner, and institutionalize this support.

At its inception during the 2013-2014 school year, the Task Force was comprised of a group of twelve faculty, staff, and student members and specifically focused on the following questions

and concerns, which were also aligned with the main research questions of the study: (1) what are the challenges facing undocumented students, (2) how do undocumented students experience the climate of USF, and (3) how to better meet the unique needs of undocumented students? Its research was an exploratory mixed-method case study design conducted at USF in the Spring of 2014, consisting of (1) a quantitative survey and (2) follow-up qualitative interviews.<sup>23</sup>

### **Undocumented Student Experiences Survey**

The *Undocumented Student Experiences Survey* was specifically designed for the purposes of this study using a review of the relevant literature, expert researcher input and feedback, and undocumented student feedback. The *Undocumented Student Experiences Survey* was comprised of twenty-five questions including the three subscales: (1) challenges facing undocumented students, (2) undocumented students' experiences with university climate, and (3) the unique needs of undocumented students.

The survey was written on Google forms and sent out via e-mail to all currently enrolled students at the University. The Task Force opted for this form of dissemination to ensure that students could elect to participate in the survey, and so that no student would be required to fill it out nor be specifically targeted for it. This form of data collection is limited by its low response rate, but it protects students' confidentiality regarding their undocumented status. Moreover, the University did not have a method to identify students as undocumented in the internal coding system. Hence, the Task Force decided that an optional, anonymous survey would best yield results that would present a view of the pressing issues faced by undocumented students at USF. The survey had 16 respondents.<sup>24</sup> The last question of the survey instructed respondents to enter an e-mail address if they were interested in sharing more about their experiences through an interview.

### **Undocumented Student Experiences Interview**

The *Undocumented Student Experiences Interview* was included as part of an explanatory mixed-methods design. The interview protocol focused on the three areas articulated in the survey with opportunities for expansion, triangulation, and

explanation. Interviews were conducted in the Spring and Summer of 2014 with the six students who responded affirmatively to the initial request question; an additional two interviews were conducted with students who had not completed the survey, despite being eligible, as a cross check. These students heard about the Task Force's work and expressed an interest in participating, bringing the total to eight interviews.

The survey data was coded and analyzed. Three central themes emerged from the data, which are aligned with but also provide a further level of nuance to the findings presented in the ISNPP. The intention of this article, then, is not to illuminate every single finding but rather to draw out three key themes that both corroborate the finding of the ISNPP but also, because of the case-study methodology, allow for a more detailed understanding of how these broader practices and processes play out on the ground.

### **Undocumented Students in Jesuit Universities: Key Themes**

Three key themes emerged from the survey data and interviews with undocumented students at USF. The results from this study are consistent with the findings presented in the ISNPP. Though several findings merit examination, this article focuses on three findings, which relate to student experience on campus as shaped by institutional commitments and practices. This section discusses these three themes: (1) social justice is a draw and an anchor for undocumented students, (2) an institutional culture of silence breeds silence as an individual navigational strategy among undocumented students, and (3) unique financial stresses shape feelings of belonging for undocumented students.

#### **Social Justice is a Draw and an Anchor**

A central finding that emerged from student interviews is that the University's explicit commitment to social justice values shapes both recruitment and retention of undocumented students. Every respondent, except one, cited the University's social justice orientation as a significant reason for choosing to attend USF; the one student who did not cite this as a key factor in his decision was awarded an athletic scholarship, and the financial support trumped any other

factor in the decision-making process. However, it is important to note that after completing his undergraduate degree at USF, this student decided to return to USF to pursue a graduate degree; he cited the social justice orientation of the campus as a key reason for that decision. Many students expressed confidence that, because of this explicit commitment, they anticipated an institutional willingness to find a way to make USF financially feasible.

Raquel, a student from Southern California, discovered she was undocumented at the start of her senior year in high school when her parents disclosed the information to her as she began to prepare for college application season. Raquel, like many young people who find themselves in this situation, felt hopeless once she learned that the process of applying (and paying) for college would be exponentially more difficult given her status. She began to look at local, public universities within commuting distance, reasoning that if she had any chance at making it to college, she would need to cut costs wherever she could. Then, at her school's college fair, she learned of USF.

One of the representatives from USF came over and they were talking about social justice and like how they work with you, know different communities and different non-profit organizations in San Francisco, and I got really interested. I thought *that's what I want to do*. The whole point of me going to college is for me to get an education so that I can help my community. So that's the main reason...I applied to USF.

The University's commitment to social justice, and the ways in which it puts those commitments into practice, resonated with her goals in pursuing higher education. Raquel's realization that "college could be this way" served as a motivation to find a way to attend USF despite the financial challenges she knew would come with the decision.

Guadalupe, a sophomore, recalls the daunting task of navigating the college application process as an undocumented student with little support from her school counselor. Initially, she planned only to apply to public universities because of the cost, until her mom suggested she look into Catholic schools. "I mean, my mom doesn't know anything

about applying to college or anything. But she was thinking USF might be a little bit more inviting to the topic, you know, as a Jesuit college...I remember she said to me 'the whole idea, their whole purpose is to help, so there has to be a way they can help you.'" Her mother's confidence that there would be a way to "make it work" was echoed almost exactly in the story another student, David. "Well, when I first applied to USF, I think my mom just told herself they're going to help, she didn't know how, but she was like '*They have to help. Son padres. Tengo la confianza y la fe.*'"<sup>25</sup> She felt sure they would help, even though I tried to tell her it doesn't work that way." Jorge, the student who received the athletic scholarship to attend USF, had a similar conversation with his mother who encouraged him to write a letter to the then-president of the university, a Jesuit priest who would surely find a way to advise him. David, Guadalupe, and Jorge cite their mothers' confidence that a Jesuit university would have to find a way to help them as both a source of comfort in the midst of a stressful process already filled with such profound uncertainty but also as a key factor that led to their matriculation at USF.

The data also demonstrates that this stated commitment to social justice, and the ways students experience how the principles are put into action in the daily life of the campus, also serves to retain students when they hit a rough patch, which is nearly always associated with financial crisis. Esperanza was going through a difficult time when she attended orientation; a scholarship she had been awarded fell through, and her enrollment was up in the air until the very last minute. She struggled with constant, nagging doubt about her decision, wondering if she should return home to Los Angeles and attend community college. Still uncertain, she attended the University's new student orientation, and, inspired by the University's focus on social justice, she decided to stay. "I just remember that everything had to do with like, what we are trying to do here is about changing the world, that is what your education is about. They were talking about here, you will learn how to not judge, here you will learn like how to be socially accepting of others. We are here to make change, to create an atmosphere where people are accepted. And I was just like, that's so new to me. And I really liked that." Esperanza pushed aside the nagging

thought that she should pack up and return home and made an appointment to see a financial aid counselor. “I just felt like, if this is what this place is about, it is safe here. They will be willing to help me.”

This data suggests that a campus orientation towards and prioritization of social justice values can help serve as a retention practice for marginalized students. Even in moments marked by adversity, the explicit social justice orientation of the University provides some solace for undocumented students. That students who experience profound daily marginalization would seek out a campus environment that is oriented towards social justice is not a surprise, but it does position Jesuit universities uniquely in relation to recruitment of these students. It also signifies that having a mission that is actively manifested through campus life impacts the retention of marginalized students.

### **Silence Breeds Silence**

One of the most salient themes emerging from the interviews and echoed in various ways in the survey data is that of “silence”. Every student cited in the previous section who articulated that the social justice mission of the University shaped their experiences of inclusion in this university community also recalled moments in which they doubted their decision to attend USF because of the silence on the issues of undocumented students in campus life. Nearly every student interviewed expressed surprise that there was no acknowledgement of undocumented students on campus once they got settled in. Bianca, a transfer student from a nearby community college, reflects on the difference in institutional response.

Well, I was sure there would be an undocumented student group like there was at my community college. And then I got here, and there wasn't one. I was like, ok, that's ok, you know, maybe I can start one or something. And then the longer I was here, I like...I realized, there is nobody even talking about this. And that's when I realized, you know, that maybe there was not as much support here as I had assumed there would be.

Some students do find support on campus, but their experience reinforces the finding from the

ISNPP about that support being found by accident. “Informal, ad-hoc systems involving a small number of university staff are commonplace. The consequence of this wide array of informal procedures is inconsistent and a lingering perception among undocumented students that they are not fully supported.”<sup>26</sup> Adriana found an ally in a Spanish teacher who she developed a close mentorship relationship with. “So in office hours, I ended up telling her I was undocumented. Aside from you, she is the only person who knows. Nobody talked about it so I figured I shouldn't talk about it....And I'm just lucky, really, because it was just random that I ended up in her class.” The accidental accessing of support networks on campus is not only a consequence of a lack of dedicated space on campus for students to access support and information but also points to a broader culture of silence around this issue on campus.

A de facto culture of silence about the issues of undocumented students at Jesuit universities raises three important realities. First, when undocumented student issues are not put on the table, students have difficulty finding other undocumented students to connect to and, thus, are forced to navigate the university by themselves. Out of the sixteen respondents to the University survey, thirteen did not know any other undocumented student on campus. This is particularly troubling given that one of the greatest predictors of success for undocumented students—and marginalized more students more broadly—is participation in a supportive network of students with similar experiences.<sup>27</sup> Raquel, a junior, shares,

Yeah (pause) like I haven't been able to make connections with other undocumented people here 'cause well, I just don't know where we would find each other. Like, there is no space for us to go. No place where we would know to look for each other. So I can't just walk up to people and ask them, "hey, are you undocumented?" And the same goes for new students. I would like to be able to help them, but they wouldn't have any way to know how to find me.

Raquel's experience is echoed by many others. At the first meeting of a student support group, a

student-led organization growing out of the work of the Undocumented Student Task Force, nine students attended, and only two of them had previously met each other on a campus that is relatively small. Difficulty finding and building a supportive network of their peers is one of the clear byproducts of a culture of silence around undocumented student issues.

Second, interviews clearly revealed that students take cues from the institutional voice on this question. If undocumented student issues are not being talked about on an institutional level, then it may not be a safe place to speak up. Students who are unsure of the institutional stance on the issue often assume they should keep their status a secret, which can have detrimental effects on mental health issues, stress, and a sense of belonging. When asked if he shared his status with anyone on campus, David was clearly influenced by the silence on the campus around him. “No. Definitely not. I kinda like kept it to myself ‘cause I feel like (pause) it’s more personal, and like, well, I should just keep things academic. You know, like nobody else is talking about this. They act like there is nobody here undocumented so, I guess if it has nothing to do with what I’m learning, then maybe I shouldn’t say it. Just keep it academic.” David’s decision to not come out at USF was echoed by several other students, who also took the institutional silence on the issue as a sign that they should not disclose their status.

Third, it is clear that undocumented students yearn for the university to come out publically in their support. This echoes the ISNPP recommendation that Jesuit Universities “articulate clearly and publically... that the university’s mission includes providing access to higher education for *all* students, including the undocumented.”<sup>28</sup> Interview respondents consistently stated that public support by the university for undocumented students would not only create a more welcoming environment on campus but also allow them the space to disclose their status more freely and with less shame. Bianca shares,

I thought coming here, there has to be more undocumented students here. And the fact that it just wasn’t brought up, that no one said anything or spoke up, I felt like I was in the

shadows, I guess you can say. I just wish that there was a talk or a workshop or something that says *oh if you’re undocumented or if you’re an AB540 student then there’s this and this and that and this information*. You know something just so that students can know you’re welcome and you’re not alone in this.

As a result of this institutional silence, many respondents assumed they were the only undocumented student at USF. When she learned that the survey had sixteen respondents, Guadalupe lamented, “It would have been so helpful to me, you know, if I knew that other students were struggling with the same issue I was struggling with.” The one student who did know other undocumented students—connections that were facilitated through a supportive administrator—cited this connection as one of the most important parts of his life on campus and one of the main support systems that got him through to graduation.

### **Unique Financial Stresses Shape Feelings of Belonging**

Because undocumented students are ineligible for the federal financial aid many students rely on to finance their education, it is no surprise that financial concerns are paramount for these students. This is true at public and private universities across the nation.<sup>29</sup> At USF, fifteen of sixteen survey respondents state that they are worried that financial constraints will get in the way of them being able to finish their degrees at USF (the one student who did not answer affirmatively to that question is on full athletic scholarship). However, something that interviews revealed that was not discernable in the survey data alone is that the financial concerns of undocumented students are not simply about having enough money to be able to complete their degrees. Financial concerns are also deeply tied to feelings of belonging, experiences of otherness, and disconnection from the campus community. The ISNPP reports that “Usually first-generation college students from families with limited financial means have difficulty adjusting to college life among affluent fellow students.”<sup>30</sup> This was certainly born out in the data collected among undocumented students at USF. Students clearly articulated financial hardships as a main source of stress that effected their mental and physical well-

being as well as contributed to feelings of alienation that were then amplified because they could not rely on some of the supports other low-income students do, such as loans and scholarships. Thus, undocumented students faced a sort of compounded alienation—clearly distinct from their upper- and middle-class peers—because of their class background but also different from other low-income students who navigate school through federal loans, legal work, and scholarships that undocumented students are often ineligible for.

Esperanza, like many undocumented students at USF, had to take a job off campus to offset the high costs of tuition and living in an expensive city like San Francisco. Her eligibility under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy passed by the Obama administration in 2012 enabled her to secure a legal work permit that allowed her to legally work. Esperanza took a job at the neighborhood coffee shop because of the flexibility of work hours and its proximity to campus. However, distinct from her citizen friends from low-income families who worked to supplement the other support they received, Esperanza worked to be able to afford basic necessities as well as to send money back home. The stress of finances—both her and her family’s—was always hanging over her head, however, and her grades began to suffer because of the hours she was working and the fact that she had to get up at 5 A.M. each day. “It was so difficult, but what other choice did I have? The whole point was for me to be able to go to school, so you know, you do what you need to do to make that possible.” Additionally, long hours at work meant time spent away from campus. “Many times, I felt like I could not have the ‘college experience’ that others were having because they would want to stay up late, or you know, do other stuff, and I was like...I had to remind myself, I am not one of them. I have to go to work at 5 in the morning.” Like so many undocumented young people who are balancing heavy work commitments with full-time school in order to afford their education, Esperanza began to feel the effects of her financial situation physically—she began struggling with anxiety, was exhausted and sick all the time, and began falling behind in her classes—which only augmented her anxiety and stress. In the little free time she had, she

would furiously investigate scholarship opportunities that she knew were key to many of her classmates who came from low-income families. However, she found that citizenship requirements for most scholarships prohibited her being able to access this sort of support. Another student, Bianca, faced unexpected difficulty when her DACA renewal did not come on time as a result of a slow-moving bureaucracy resulting from a federal processing backlog. Without her DACA renewal, she was not cleared to legally work, and she was forced to take a leave from her job resulting in unanticipated stress and loss of wages.

There is another dimension to these financial hardships. Several students in the study cited their class background as something significant that they needed to negotiate in their interactions with their peers. Social events that were a site for connection and relaxation for other students were a site of stress for Bianca. “It was the first weeks of school, you know, and everyone was going out to eat and you know I would go and get myself a little appetizer and stuff even though they were ordering full meals. And I was hungry too, but I just can’t. I can’t spend that kind of money. And the things that they talked about—things that they’ve done—are way different compared to somebody that’s lower income and went to public school and stuff. It just really reminds you that we come from different places.” Bianca does not have DACA clearance and, therefore, cannot legally work, which makes her financial struggles even more acute. Raquel echoes this sentiment, “You already feel a little like an outsider because of the background they come from and how much money they have. And then it’s like you add on top of that that I don’t have papers and then it’s like you’re not sure if you can talk to them about it because you’re not sure how they’re going to react. It is just really hard.” Thus, being a low-income student is not only the site of emotional strain and stress, it is also the axis upon which many undocumented students are made to feel their outsidership on a campus full of people who are not like them.

### **Ignatian Spirituality, Undocumented Students, and the Jesuit Call**

Esperanza was able to attend her dream school after all. Before the end of her first year, despite the difficult balancing act between school, work, and familial duties to her family in Southern California, she has come to be a recognized advocate for undocumented students on campus. Her busy schedule could be an excuse to not get involved, but Esperanza has been a leading force in creating an organization on campus for undocumented students to come together, share support, and act collectively to bring about change. Esperanza's work, and the work of other daring and insightful students, faculty and staff on this campus, is encouraging a spotlight on immigration issues as a central part of the University's mission. Esperanza's story is not simply an example of the undocumented students at USF, it is the story of what these students are capable of and who they can become with help.

This paper has identified some of the key themes that emerged from the study conducted at USF. Students are drawn to USF because of its social justice mission, students take their cues about disclosure on immigration status from the institution, and financial aid is not the only issue of importance in understanding the experience of undocumented students on private, Jesuit campuses; financial alienation and financial stress also shapes their experiences as college students and effects their success. Jesuit universities across the nation are answering the call put forth by the ISNPP; some are building on long-standing successful models for supporting undocumented students and others are building new models, establishing new programs, and breaking new ground. Santa Clara University in California has long been a model with their need-based scholarship for undocumented students, sponsored by Santa Clara's Jesuit Community. Saint Peter's University in New Jersey recently opened The Center for Undocumented Students, whose mission is to "to support the academic work of undocumented students at the University, to shed intellectual light on the political and economic realities of immigration in our world today and to create a community where undocumented students feel welcome."<sup>31</sup> Earlier this year, the students at Loyola University

Chicago overwhelmingly voted in favor of dedicating a portion of their student fees to endow a scholarship for undocumented students. USF is beginning the process of considering how to move from a decentralized set of support that has existed informally for many years to a strong, institutional show of support that is woven into the fabric of university life and has a space in the institutional identity of the University. The convening of faculty, staff, and students into a Task Force on Undocumented Students is the first step in this direction, and there is still a much longer journey to travel. Despite being in different places on this trajectory of becoming institutions that support the educational, academic, social, and spiritual needs of undocumented students, there is now an emerging awareness of the institutional imperative to do something to meet the needs of this marginalized student population.

In an article discussing the findings from the ISNPP, Rick Ryscavage, S.J. reminds Jesuit universities that "The majority of Jesuit schools in this country were established to serve poor immigrants, and they were tremendously successful. ... [Jesuit] schools have an opportunity to recapture a mission rooted in the past but capable of energizing the entire future of Jesuit education in the United States."<sup>32</sup> The question that is centrally concerned with the Jesuit call to educate and serve undocumented students is also rooted in a much broader call around the creation of a more just, equitable university environment as is consistent with the Jesuit mission. This is what is at stake in this moment, marked by hostile anti-immigrant policies and a climate in which the rights of these students and their families are being called into question. As the ISNPP finds, the real solution is for comprehensive immigration reform that would institutionally address fixing the broken immigration system and provide real relief to undocumented young people and their families. Those who are located in Jesuit universities have a responsibility to find their place in that fight. They have a simultaneous ethical obligation to the young people who find themselves drawn to a Jesuit education, and ensure that they are doing all we can to help these students develop into the leaders they are capable of becoming, and that in doing so they are clearing the path for others to follow. HJE

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> All student names are pseudonyms. Additionally, students identified are actually composite sketches of students blending identifying details about their lives, in an effort to further maintain anonymity of research subjects/participants.

<sup>2</sup> Fairfield University, Loyola University Chicago, and Santa Clara University Legal and Social Research Teams, "Immigrant Student National Position Paper Report on Findings," (January 2013), accessed April 16, 2015, [http://www.stitch.luc.edu/sites/default/files/site\\_hsd\\_sso\\_m/isnpp-report.pdf](http://www.stitch.luc.edu/sites/default/files/site_hsd_sso_m/isnpp-report.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Oboler, "Redefining Citizenship as a Lived Experience," in *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging*, ed. Suzanne Oboler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 3-30.

<sup>5</sup> Roberto G. Gonzales, "Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students." (New York: College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> *Plyler v. Doe* was a 1982 landmark Supreme Court case that secured the right of children in the United States a right to K-12 public education, regardless of citizenship status.

<sup>7</sup> Leisy Janet Abrego, "I Can't Go to College Because I Don't Have Papers: Incorporation Patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth," *Latino Studies* 4, no. 3 (2006): 212-231.

<sup>8</sup> Abrego, "I Can't Go to College," 212-231.

<sup>9</sup> Roberto G. Gonzales, "Left Out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Student Movement," *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 3 (2008): 219.

<sup>10</sup> Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales, "Undocumented Youth Activism as Counter-Spectacle: Civil Disobedience and Testimonio in the Battle around Immigration Reform," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 1 (2015): 87-112.

<sup>11</sup> Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales, "Undocumented, Unafraid and Unapologetic: Re-articulatory Practices and Migrant Youth 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 12, no. 2 (2014): 259-278.

<sup>12</sup> Daysi Diaz-Strong and Erica Meiners, "Residents, Alien Policies, and Resistances: Experiences of Undocumented Latina/o Students in Chicago's Colleges and Universities," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007): 1-20; William Perez, *We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2009); Paz Maya Oliverrez, "Ready but Restricted: An Examination of the Challenges of College Access and Financial Aid for College-Ready Undocumented Students in the USPM" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Daysi Diaz-Strong, Christina Gomez, Maria E. Luna-Duarte, and Erica R. Meiners, "Purged: Undocumented Students, Financial Aid Policies, and Access to Higher Education," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 10, no. 2 (2011): 107-119; David HK Nguyen and Gabriel R. Serna, "Access or Barrier? Tuition and Fee Legislation for Undocumented Students across the States," *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 87, no. 3 (2014): 124-129.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer L. Frum, "Postsecondary Educational Access for Undocumented Students: Opportunities and Constraints," *American Academic* 3, no. 1 (2007): 81-108.

<sup>15</sup> Cecilia Menjivar and Leisy Abrego, "Legal Violence: Immigration Law and the Lives of Central American Immigrants," *American Journal of Sociology* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1380-1421; Martha Maria Ortega, "Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love across Borders by Leisy Abrego," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 11, no. 1 (2015); Nicholas De Genova, and Nathalie Peutz, eds., *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Negrón-Gonzales, "Undocumented, Unafraid and Unapologetic," 259-278.

<sup>17</sup> Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 101-126.

<sup>18</sup> Here, I am speaking about the national context. This is not to obscure the work that has been in place for years at a

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couple of key Jesuit universities including Santa Clara University and Loyola University Chicago.

<sup>19</sup> Fairfield University, "Immigrant Student National Position Paper," 1

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "AJCU President's Statement," January 2013.

<sup>22</sup> "U.S. Jesuit Network Welcomes Bi-Partisan Action for Immigration Reform," 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Though the study was designed in order to meet a very practical need for information, I decided to seek Institutional Review Board approval early on in the process because I suspected that what we learned from this inquiry might be useful to faculty and staff on other Jesuit campuses.

<sup>24</sup> Though there were only sixteen respondents, we are confident that these respondents represent only a percentage of undocumented students currently enrolled at the University. This assumption is both based on the obvious limitations of optional surveying (not everyone who meets the criteria will submit a survey for various reasons) and also on the fact that several currently-enrolled undocumented students who had not filled out the survey came to me after the survey was closed.

<sup>25</sup> Translation: "They are priests. I have trust and faith."

<sup>26</sup> Fairfield University, "Immigrant Student National Position Paper," 2.

<sup>27</sup> Robert B. Davis, "Social Support Networks and Undergraduate Student Academic-Success-Related Outcomes: A Comparison of Black Students on Black and White Campuses," in *College in Black and White: African American Students in Predominantly White and in Historically Black Public Universities*, eds. Walter R. Allen, Edgar G. Epps, and Nesha Z. Haniff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991): 147-153.

<sup>28</sup> Fairfield University, "Immigrant Student National Position Paper." 4.

<sup>29</sup> Paz Maya Olivérez, "Ready but Restricted:"

<sup>30</sup> Fairfield University, "Immigrant Student National Position Paper."

<sup>31</sup> "University Opens the Center for Undocumented Students," Saint Peter's University, accessed April 16, 2015, <http://www.saintpeters.edu/news/2014/11/10/university-opens-the-center-for-undocumented-students/>.

<sup>32</sup> Rick Ryscavag S.J., "Undocumented Students: Immigration Issues on Campus," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 44, no. 1 (2013): 22-24.