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### "A Promise To Support Us:" Undocumented Experiences On A Sanctuary Campus

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## **“A Promise to Support Us:” Undocumented Experiences on a Sanctuary Campus**

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### **Abstract**

This exploratory study examines the experiences of undocumented students at Hawthorne College, an elite, liberal arts institution with sanctuary status. Drawing primarily on a questionnaire and qualitative interviews, it considers 1) whether undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students on a sanctuary campus experience the characteristic psychosocial difficulties that mark the lives of undocumented students elsewhere and 2) the extent to which institutional policies mitigate these challenges. The research reveals that sanctuary is neither a panacea for undocumented students' concerns nor is it a meaningless symbol. Students are protected from some typical barriers to college success, experience other barriers in classic ways, and face still other constraints quite differently in a privileged, high-pressure educational environment. The study adds to emerging research on the undocumented experience in higher education and offers preliminary insights into the promises and limits of the sanctuary campus movement.

*Key words:* Undocumented, Latinx/Chicanx, Identity, Sanctuary Campus

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## **Introduction**

For most undocumented youth in America, the path to a college degree is fraught with difficulty. While 94% of undocumented teenagers attend high school (Migration Policy Institute, 2014), only 5-10% enroll in college, and even fewer graduate (González, 2015). Financial, bureaucratic, legal, and psychosocial challenges, state-level barriers to admission, poor-quality secondary education, and lack of access to information all pose steep barriers to college access and completion (Abrego & González, 2010; Contreras, 2009; González, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Pérez, Cortes, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2015; Villarraga-Orjuela & Kerr, 2017). However, these difficulties are not evenly distributed. While many undocumented youth experience subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), some have access to college-access programs and advanced tracking that prepare them for post-secondary success (Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Similarly, whereas several states ban undocumented students from enrolling in state universities (Ruiz, 2014), others guarantee in-state tuition (López, 2018; Pérez, 2010). Undocumented youth's experiences vary widely because of an "uneven geography of local enforcement and educational access" (González & Ruiz, 2014, p. 195). This landscape has become even more variable in the Trump era, as local-level policies proliferate, either rebuffing or bolstering the administration's hardline stance toward undocumented immigrants. It is therefore increasingly important to examine the local and institutional conditions impacting undocumented students' educational trajectories.

Sanctuary campuses represent a promising new development in the landscape of higher education access. By promising to limit their scope of cooperation with federal immigration enforcement, sanctuary campus leaders have signaled support for undocumented students. Yet the full effects of the movement are still unknown (Kelderman, 2017). How, if at all, do sanctuary policies benefit undocumented students? Can they mitigate the challenges of living undocumented? The research we report here offers preliminary answers. Drawing on qualitative data collected at Hawthorne College (a pseudonym), our study examined whether and how institutional policies assuaged the psychosocial difficulties facing undocumented students. We found that sanctuary provided meaningful but limited benefits: Institutional policies protected undocumented students from some barriers, such as financial stress, but they had no impact on others, like post-graduate uncertainty. Our analysis highlights the

effectiveness of both rhetorical and material supports for undocumented students and calls for continued and expanded attention to this student population in institutions of higher education.

### **Barriers to College Completion**

For most undocumented students, material and psychological obstacles jeopardize college completion. In this section, we review scholarship on financial and bureaucratic hurdles that take valuable time away from collegiate life, anxieties related to undocumented status, and feelings of exclusion. As we discuss below, elite institutions have been successful at mitigating some of these challenges but are uniquely positioned to do more.

**Time.** Undocumented undergraduates face persistent and time-intensive financial and bureaucratic challenges. Ineligible for many forms of federal and state financial aid and lacking legal employment authorization, most work in the informal economy and commute to save money, thus spending valuable time working and commuting instead of studying or connecting with peers and professors (Abrego & Gonzáles, 2010; Contreras, 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Navigating institutional bureaucracy demands more time and brings undocumented students into contact with staff unfamiliar with status-related issues, thereby requiring repeated explanations and referrals to other offices. These experiences provoke anxiety since students must constantly evaluate whether it is safe to disclose their status (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

In these ways, time takes on socio-political dimensions, as their citizenship status “disciplines” (Auyero, 2011) undocumented students into spending time in ways that take a toll on their psychological well-being and threaten their academic progress. In his ethnography of an Argentine welfare office, Auyero (2011) described how welfare recipients waited hours to receive checks that sometimes never materialized. They had no other choice but to submit to extended waiting and the unpredictable whims of state agents because they needed benefits. Time itself was a means by which the state produced “subordinate subjects” (Auyero, 2011, pp. 25). As we discuss above, undocumented students’ temporal experiences are similarly constrained. Citizenship status can even impact the very ways in which undocumented people experience time. Because of the persistent threat of deportation, many suffer an “enforced orientation to the present” which prevents them from making many long-term plans, though it does “inspire various short- and medium-term precautions” (DeGenova, 2002, p. 427). By thus

impacting their time, the state and its institutions shape the everyday experiences of undocumented students.

**Uncertainty and limits on belonging.** Undocumented youth also report high levels of anxiety due to various status-related uncertainties and feelings of exclusion (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Many undocumented youth fear deportation and worry about post-graduate futures, given the legal obstacles to professional careers (Abrego & Gonzáles, 2010; Contreras, 2009; García & Tierney, 2011; Pérez et al., 2009; Suárez Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). These anxieties impede academic performance (Gonzáles et al., 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015) and prevent undocumented students from feeling fully integrated into college life.

Lack of belonging stems from additional sources, including liminal citizenship (Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014), racialization in predominantly white institutions (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012), nativist hostility (Gonzáles, 2011; Gonzáles, et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), and limited access to peer support networks (Garcia & Tierney, 2011). Students experience *liminal legality* (Menjivar, 2006) when their status offers certain rights but not others. For example, generation 1.5 students, both undocumented and with Temporary Protected Status, feel “caught between two worlds,” neither fully American nor of their birth- countries (Flores, 2016; Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014). Their entitlement to K-12 public education, American upbringing, and simultaneous ineligibility for certain higher education and employment opportunities create discouraging “in-between spaces” of belonging and exclusion (Abrego & Gonzáles, 2010; Flores, 2016; Gonzáles, 2011; Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014). Furthermore, “racist nativist” policies and discourses in the United States have long framed undocumented immigrants, and especially those from Latin America, as criminal outsiders, fundamentally less deserving of privileges than “native” white Americans. Institutional manifestations of racist nativism, such as exclusionary school language policies and immigration laws that frame and treat migrants as criminals, subordinate immigrants of color, threaten their access to national membership, and exact steep emotional costs (Pérez-Huber, 2009; Pérez-Huber, Benavides-López, Malagon, Velez, & Solórzano, 2008).

Together, these financial, temporal, socio-political, and psychological pressures shape undocumented young people’s collegiate experiences, making it difficult for them to keep up with coursework and persist through graduation. Of course, undocumented people also have

agency in pushing back against subordination and exclusion. Many have taken risks to advocate for immigration reform (González, 2008), and undocumented college students exhibit remarkable academic resilience (Pérez, 2010; Pérez-Huber, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Nevertheless, to increase the ranks of those who achieve educational success, understanding how individual institutions can provide supportive contexts remains crucial.

### **Institutional inclusion & elite colleges**

Educational institutions have an important role to play in shaping students' experiences of belonging and inclusion, both at the institutional and national levels (Abu El Haj, 2010; Flores, 2016). While they cannot change a student's immigration status, they can create institutional conditions for universal belonging and "citizenship rights"—the ability to express oneself freely, participate fully, and "maintain linguistic, cultural, and group affiliation" (Abu El Haj, 2010, p. 244). By implementing institutional policies and practices that support these rights, they also impact students' broader sense of national belonging, with significant emotional implications (Flores, 2016). Since students who live on-campus have ample opportunities to engage in experiences and form attachments that shape their sense of belonging and civic inclusion, residential colleges are especially well-positioned to help undocumented students "'feel at home' in the nation and its institutions" (Flores, 2016, p. 540).

Elite institutions have the resources to create environments offering full citizenship rights and to mitigate many student vulnerabilities. For example, well-endowed private universities dedicate funds to meet every family's financial need, thus greatly diminishing financial barriers to participation (Montiel, 2016). Many of these institutions also provide access to extensive institutional resources and networks and are geographically located where virulent anti-immigrant sentiment is uncommon (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015). Undocumented students in elite institutions nevertheless face status-related struggles, including social isolation, insufficient institutional emotional support systems (Montiel, 2016), and uncertain futures (Anguiano & Nájera, 2015). Knowing that continued enrollment and financial aid is contingent on academic excellence produces further anxiety among high-achieving students (Flores, 2016). Though some elite institutions do much to support undocumented students, introducing a more expansive set of protections is particularly important during the current period of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment, shifting immigration policies, and intensification of racist nativist policies and discourses.

To understand institutions' potential to provide inclusive and welcoming environments, the present study explored 1) the impacts of immigration status on undocumented and DACA students' wellbeing and 2) how institutional policies mediated their experiences during a period of rapidly shifting immigration policy. Our study adds to emerging research on the experiences of undocumented students in higher education and in elite educational contexts (Anguiano and Nájera, 2015; Montiel, 2016; Pérez-Huber, 2009) and sheds light on the potential for sanctuary colleges and other institutions to mitigate status-related challenges.

## **Methods**

### **Research Setting**

**Hawthorne College.** A residential, liberal arts college, Hawthorne is located in a picturesque, East Coast hamlet. Its 1600 undergraduates are 42% white, 16% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 7% Black, and 8% multiracial. 12% are "international," including an undisclosed number of undocumented and DACA students. The full cost of attending Hawthorne in 2017-18 was over \$65,000, but Hawthorne has abundant resources and offers need-blind, loan-free admission. Most Hawthorne students receive financial aid, averaging over \$45,000 per student.

Hawthorne is well-known for its prestige and heavy academic workload. Professors expect students to spend ten hours or more per week preparing for each of their four or five courses. Most students also pursue multiple extra-curricular activities and work-study jobs. Marketing materials describe Hawthorne as a place where "intellectuals come to think and create together for the betterment of the world" and likewise promise bright futures. One pamphlet reads, "As Hawthorne students, the power to make meaningful choices is yours...Hawthorne prepares you for anything and everything" from careers as "biomedical researchers to software company presidents and founders of non-profits." Furthermore, students have "all they need for a rich social and intellectual experience." The institution attempts to make this all-inclusive experience possible by creating a "cash-free" campus (i.e. the cost of all events is included in annual fees). Admissions materials extend welcome specifically to undocumented applicants, who are eligible for the same financial aid as other domestic students.

**Hawthorne in the Trump Era.** Just over a week after the 2016 presidential election, 300 Hawthorne students, faculty, and staff staged a walkout and rally to protest the president-elect's political agenda. Campus community members were alarmed at the possible realization



of Trump's campaign promises (e.g. a Muslim ban, a border wall, a repeal of DACA) and the impact of his speech about immigrants (e.g. Mexicans as "bad hombres" and "rapists"), and two thousand had signed a petition to make Hawthorne a sanctuary campus. At the rally, a sea of protesters crowded the central campus thoroughfare to join in protest chants and listen to first-person accounts from undocumented students. A few students held handwritten signs: No Human Being is Illegal. No Borders. Stop the Deportations.

Less than a month later, Hawthorne's President and Board declared the College a sanctuary campus. They pledged that the College would do everything possible to ensure the security of any campus community member facing increased threat. This declaration included a series of promises to only minimally comply with immigration enforcement, pledging not to voluntarily share student information with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or grant them access to College property. It also affirmed existing policies: campus police would not inquire about citizenship; Hawthorne would not enroll in E-Verify, and it would not consider immigration status in housing decisions. Shortly thereafter, Hawthorne's faculty unanimously approved a resolution to support undocumented students and the administration convened a Sanctuary Campus Committee (SCC). In a written report, the SCC proposed expanding the notion of sanctuary beyond its limited legal parameters to signify a broader commitment to full inclusion in academic and social life for all students, regardless of status. It also recommended establishing a student emergency fund to cover unexpected expenses and providing pro-bono legal services for undocumented and DACA students as they navigated what everyone anticipated to be a challenging and uncertain era.

The expectation that these would be trying times for immigrants proved well-founded. In its first two years, the Trump administration pursued an aggressively anti-immigrant policy agenda including efforts to build a border wall, a travel ban on people from certain Muslim-majority countries, gradual chipping away at the Temporary Protected Status program, and a "zero tolerance" border policy that led to the separation of thousands of migrant parents and children. Most germane for Hawthorne's undocumented students was Trump's September 2017 order to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Established by President Obama in 2012, DACA temporarily protects approximately 800,000 undocumented young adults from deportation and provides renewable work permits. DACA

allowed undocumented students to work legally, study abroad, and pursue careers after graduation.

Following the September announcement, Hawthorne’s President sent an all-campus email promising to stand by undocumented students and affirming their well-deserved place on campus. Staff in student support services organized free sessions with immigration lawyers, support group meetings, and financed DACA renewals. Since then, the status of DACA has been in near constant flux, with hopes alternately raised and dashed by Presidential tweets, unfulfilled promises of bipartisan compromise, and court decisions (Wise, 2018). In 2018, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services began accepting DACA renewals but no new applications. DACA students can no longer study abroad.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

Our qualitative case study, conducted in spring 2018, comprised the research component of an honors-level course in Educational Studies. The course professor and five undergraduate students sought to understand the extent to which a well-resourced college could make undocumented students feel protected. Our IRB-approved project included two major strands. First, we investigated how Hawthorne faculty and staff worked toward providing sanctuary as defined by the SCC: full community inclusion. This article focuses on the second strand-- undocumented/DACA student experiences and institutional support.

Our study employed principles and practices of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009) and case study design (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) and included document analysis, interviews, and an open-ended, anonymous, 12-item questionnaire, distributed to undocumented students via Qualtrics (see Table I).

Table I. <i>Data Sources</i>		
<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Documents (web-pages, internal reports, and print materials)	18	1) Identify programming addressing barriers for undocumented students and gaps in support.

		2) Examine how Hawthorne describes its commitment to equality.
Questionnaire	10	1) Understand undocumented student experiences on a sanctuary campus. 2) Collect names of supportive departments/offices, faculty, and staff.
Interviews	10	
Faculty & staff	7	Understand pedagogical practices, institutional procedures, and material resources used to support undocumented students
Undocumented students	3	Understand undocumented students' experiences in more detail.

The questionnaire included open-ended questions about experiences of inclusion and exclusion (e.g. “Describe a time when you felt excluded academically because of your status”). Ten undocumented participants completed the questionnaire, including six with DACA and four without. Qualitative responses totaled 10.5 single-spaced pages. To maintain confidentiality, researchers had no access to student names or other identifying information. However, from details in their responses, we know participants included members of different class years, of Latin American and Asian origin.

We invited questionnaire respondents to contact us if interested in follow-up interviews, and three respondents contacted researchers they knew personally. Volunteers included one Latina and two Latino DACA recipients. These semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for researchers to hear in-depth, personal accounts and pose questions that had emerged during analysis. Below, we refer to the three students we interviewed by pseudonyms and the questionnaire respondents as DACA or undocumented students.

In our analysis, we used open and focused coding to delineate data that helped answer overarching research questions and to capture other recurring patterns. We grouped these into analytic themes, many of which led back to the research literature, thereby presenting revised questions and considerations (Emerson Fretz & Shaw, 2011; Merriam, 2009). The team used Google Docs to read and annotate the data set, and two or more researchers independently coded each transcript, questionnaire response, and document. We discussed emergent findings and extant literature during class meetings, refined our code list, and developed analytic memos.

### **Findings**

Undocumented and DACA students at Hawthorne experienced undocumented status in ways that reflected the unique affordances and constraints of their temporal-spatial location. At a moment in which political divisions ran high, anti-immigrant rhetoric was mainstream, and U.S. immigration policy was increasingly restrictive, students found a lot to worry about. However, the well-resourced and highly supportive context of an elite, residential, sanctuary college provided a buffer from many status-related concerns. Undocumented students at Hawthorne did not worry much about financial burdens, transportation, or overtly hostile peers and institutional agents—concerns that undocumented students face in less privileged contexts. Nonetheless, they did describe status-related stressors regarding future prospects, incomplete sense of belonging, and time pressures.

### **What Sanctuary Offered**

Participants perceived Hawthorne's commitment to sanctuary as largely symbolic. This was because, first, sanctuary status had minimal legal implications. Although the College pledged to refrain from voluntary information-sharing with ICE, technically, "colleges and universities have no authority to exempt any part of their campuses from the nation's immigration laws" (Kelderman, 2017). Unlike K-12 schools and churches, colleges have neither been categorized as "sensitive locations" where ICE enforcement has been prohibited (Morton, 2011) nor have sanctuary colleges promised protections parallel to those which religious communities provided during the 1980's sanctuary movement (McDaniel, 2017).

Second, fear of deportation or raids at Hawthorne had never been a major anxiety for most students we surveyed. Though many mentioned concerns about their family's safety, only two mentioned fear of deportation at Hawthorne. Marisol said, "I think I've always had a sense

of safety at Hawthorne because, realistically, why would immigration come on campus and target students?” Various features that predated the sanctuary designation created this sense: a majority left-leaning campus, a small and unidentifiable undocumented population,<sup>2</sup> and a location non-adjacent to concentrated immigrant communities. Nevertheless, undocumented and DACA students found meaning in the sanctuary declaration, even as they recognized its limited scope. Felipe explained,

Technically [sanctuary] doesn't mean literally anything. There's no special sanctions that come from being a sanctuary. . . it has very little legal basis, but I felt like it was a promise for Hawthorne to support us—undocumented and DACA students.

By making a public commitment to protect and support its undocumented students during a period of heightened uncertainty, the College contributed to students' wellbeing. Marisol offered a similar perspective.

As a symbolic thing, sanctuary does mean something. The fact that the school is committing itself, the fact that [Hawthorne's President] said, 'We have a commitment to these students and we will do whatever we can to protect them and to be on their side.' I think that that was a powerful message to give some sense of safety during such a difficult time of not knowing what was going to happen to us right after Trump got elected.

In addition to fostering feelings of protection, the announcement also led to increased awareness and concrete action. Felipe said, “Right after we got support from [Hawthorne's President] and their approval of being a sanctuary campus, Hawthorne became way more receptive. . . We actually got support from a college committee. . . Our voices started being heard.” The sanctuary announcement set in motion institutional action that resulted in concrete supports, such as the emergency fund and free consultations with immigration lawyers. In addition, the declaration inspired increased awareness and demonstrations of support for undocumented students among faculty and staff. Felipe continued,

[Before this] a lot of my educators and coaches, they didn't even know I was DACA and I remember when I shared my story with [my coach] . . . she cried. She was like, 'I had no idea. . . I heard about those people on the news, I've seen them, their stories on the

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<sup>2</sup> Felipe noted in his interview that he and his peers were all raised and schooled in the U.S. and therefore read as Americans in appearance, attitudes, and personalities.

news stations and newspaper, but I never thought that there was one of you so close to me'...[That] goes to show that people at Hawthorne, they want to [help] DACA students, and they want to...figure out [how] to make us feel comfortable.

In our interviews with professors, they described providing undocumented and DACA students assignment extensions, advice, and encouragement. Following the revocation of DACA, one professor projected a PowerPoint slide quoting Hawthorne's president's statement of support for DACA and undocumented students. He explained his rationale:

My hope was that, by presenting this message in written form at the start of class, but without saying anything verbally myself, students would see this as a sign that they were welcome to speak to me if they chose to. At the same time, I did not see the message as overtly political. Several students thanked me later...and said it meant a lot to them.

Most questionnaire respondents reported supportive gestures like these from institutional agents in various offices and academic disciplines across the College. The institutional declaration of sanctuary and the President's public affirmation of support for DACA thus not only led to official support policies but also to increased responsiveness from individual faculty and staff.

### **The Limits of Sanctuary**

While most of our participants expressed gratitude for Hawthorne's support, they all recognized that it would end once they graduated. Felipe explained that it was the prospect of life after Hawthorne that scared him most. Another student concurred, "I think the school has gone above and beyond my expectations in terms of support. However,. . . as protected as we are here, eventually we do have to leave, and life after leaving this sanctuary is absolutely terrifying." As this student suggests, sanctuary policies and practices were limited in how much they could ease the psychological toll that immigration law exerted on students' lives.

**Uncertainty.** Though students felt supported at Hawthorne, they still experienced high levels of uncertainty about the future. As in other settings, this anxiety manifested as fear of deportation and worry about post-graduate possibilities (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Contreras, 2009; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Pérez et al., 2009; Suárez Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Because only two of our participants discussed fears of deportation at Hawthorne, we focus principally on students' concerns about post-graduate futures.

College attendance is widely understood as career preparation, and Hawthorne promised fulfilling, well-paid careers upon graduation. For undocumented students, however, such futures were tenuous, at best. One DACA student described the emotional toll of this dissonance:

I feel limited in my future prospects. I can graduate from Hawthorne but if DACA is removed or anything else happens then I would not be able to legally work within the United States. This would significantly limit my future prospects. I also feel limited in the degrees I can pursue. I cannot get teacher certification, it is harder for me to pay for graduate school, it is a little harder to find scholarships and access to funding. I used to manage this stress through drinking and overworking, but since I got to Hawthorne I have sought mental health professionals and tried to stay entirely sober.

Without major immigration reform, undocumented students without DACA will be unable to work in the professional careers for which they prepared during college. Until recently, students with DACA had a better chance of fulfilling professional aspirations, but since September 2017, these hopes have been subject to a dizzying swing of the political pendulum. As evident here, the resulting insecurity could lead to unmanageable levels of stress and unhealthy coping behaviors.

The futures of both DACA and undocumented students are inextricably linked to immigration policies. As Marisol explained, this reality made planning ahead impossible:

[S]omething that we always talk about is how we're never able to plan for our futures...It's better that you don't even try it. Because... something will suddenly change and then you have to change your plans. So, you have to learn to live like this in this moment and plan only so many months ahead...I can't think, oh, two years from now, I'm gonna try to work here because...I don't know where I'll be.

Marisol's statement reflects a habitual way of living in response to immigration policies and their restrictions on migrants' lives, consonant with DeGenova's (2002) reflection on undocumented migrants' "enforced orientation to the present" (pp. 427). In his interview, Marcelo, who had canceled his study abroad plans after DACA was revoked, discussed how he coped with status-related uncertainties:

For every possible scenario, I was trying to make a plan for it. It was incredibly exhausting because it was so much anxiety and so much fear, and it got to the point

where all of those things were just making me feel really hopeless and depressed because here I am working as hard as I can to achieve my dreams and work for a future and here [are] Trump and his administration... completely undermining all of my efforts and I have no control over any of that.

The instability of immigration policy forced Marcelo to map out different plans of action “for every possible scenario,” requiring tremendous time and energy. Additionally, it put him in direct confrontation with the possibility that all of his work thus far would fail to result in the prosperous future offered by Hawthorne. Unfortunately, Marcelo’s predictions were not exaggerated. Even high-achieving, undocumented college graduates are likely to end up in the same low-wage jobs held by their counterparts without high school diplomas (González, 2015). Marcelo was aware that no matter how hard he studied, he had no control over federal policy. The future was out of his hands.

**Incomplete belonging.** The inability to confidently plan for future careers was just one reason undocumented and DACA students at Hawthorne felt disconnected from their peers. Marisol lamented, “Knowing that my peers don’t necessarily know how this is impacting me makes me feel like I can’t share this part of myself. That often leads to me feeling disconnected from others.” Though active members of the college community, feeling that they had to hide their immigration status eroded students’ sense of community membership.

Many undocumented students avoided disclosing their status because they were worried about it defining them. One student explained, “Being undocumented. . . I just don’t bring it up. I wouldn’t say this is because I fear judgment, I just want to be just another person and not have people’s idea of me constricted by the undocumented label.” Another student worried that undocumented status could bring on an onslaught of stereotypes and “someone will judge me or think that I use my status as an excuse or complaint.” A third student wrote:

It’s not like I fear demonization or exclusion but there’s a lot of other things that come with discussing my status. I don’t really want to deal with the pity or well-meaning but cliché words of consolation. There’s also the fact that most people don’t really know what being undocumented entails so I don’t want to end up answering countless questions of what I can and cannot do.

These students wanted to avoid their immigration status becoming a “master status”—the most salient aspect of their identity, shaping decision-making and opportunities (González, 2015) as



well as others' perceptions of them. Wary of how these perceptions could manifest in a high-pressure academic environment, our participants avoided disclosure.

More acute disruptions to their sense of belonging occurred in both interpersonal and institutional encounters, as the legal limitations they faced imbued conversations about study abroad, internships, or careers with anxiety. One DACA recipient explained, "I can't really give my opinions or experiences because of my status. . . I usually just try to change the conversation so that I don't have to explain why I'm not doing one thing or another." Another admitted, "Since I have to hide my status, I have to avoid so many conversations about campus jobs and opportunities. I often find myself lying about my ability to do certain activities on campus." This problem also extended to public and institutional encounters. One student described a recurring affront during election season:

Whenever people from the political clubs on campus are making efforts to get more students to vote, they can be a little persistent. I don't feel comfortable having to explain to people I'm undocumented every time I walk into [the dining hall]. Lately, what I do is either ignore them completely or just say 'I can't vote' without giving explanation. I'm sure those two responses seem unduly rude, and the thought that I'm being rude to people on a weekly basis also makes me uncomfortable, but it is the way I dealt with my discomfort.

Similarly, another student described her attempt to volunteer with a popular community service program, "I wanted to participate [but] I found out that they have an extensive background and fingerprinting process that needs to be completed before starting. I had to, unfortunately, lie my way out of the program, using random excuses." Hawthorne's public commitment to undocumented students, then, did not always translate into everyday policy and practice. These encounters demonstrate that undocumented students still lacked the full "citizenship rights" (Abu El Haj, 2010) that Hawthorne's leaders aspired to create.

Importantly, most of these disruptions to belonging were unrelated to hostility or anti-immigrant sentiment (c.f. Gonzáles, 2015; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009). Even within a national context of growing xenophobia, on this sanctuary campus, only one of our participants described unsympathetic peers. Despite the challenges they faced, like Anguiano and Nájera's Ivy league participants (2015), Hawthorne's undocumented and DACA students occupied a considerably protected position.

**Time.** A final limit of the sanctuary designation was its inability to protect students from the disciplining function of time (Auyero, 2011) that their immigration status imposed. Students cited status-related time constraints as among their greatest challenges. Navigating bureaucratic processes, educating others in the basics of immigration policy, and worrying about the future all took up valuable time needed for their studies.

DACA students complete a multi-step process to apply for and renew their status, which entails completing various forms, paying an application fee, and attending a “biometrics” appointment to submit fingerprints, photos, and a signature to be checked against FBI records. After the September 2017 DACA announcement, Hawthorne’s undocumented student coordinator encouraged students to renew their DACA status immediately, regardless of its expiration date. Though Hawthorne covered the application fees and arranged legal counsel, the process took time away from students’ academic responsibilities. One respondent reported,

There have been times when I have had to skip class to get my biometrics done. While professors were understanding, I did feel like I was missing class material. I have had to spend time filling out my immigration forms when I could have been making progress on an assignment.

Within Hawthorne’s high-pressure academic environment, missing even a single class session could impact any student’s ability to keep up. Undocumented students are more likely to come from under-resourced secondary schools and many are first in their families to attend college (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Already at an academic disadvantage, small setbacks like these were especially significant.

The internship application process provides another example of the temporal toll paid by undocumented and DACA students. In the spring semester, Hawthorne students take considerable time from their academic work to apply for multiple internships, hoping to secure at least one coveted position. Since few postings list residency or citizenship requirements, undocumented and DACA students had to call multiple employers to find out if they were eligible for these positions. Students described this process as “exhausting” and “draining.” Felipe explained why, “It’s people asking, ‘What is DACA?’ and it’s people asking. . . textbook questions.” Like the student above who did not share his status because he loathed answering, “countless questions,” Felipe found educating others about his status not only time-consuming

but demoralizing. Repeatedly answering basic queries about DACA also meant having to articulate personal limitations and vulnerabilities again and again.

Coping with fear, liminality, and uncertainty was also emotionally draining and time-consuming. In a context where thinking was students' central occupation, status-related worries occupied valuable head-space. One student wrote, "It's hard to focus on assignments when I'm worried about immigration politics and the negative implications it has on my life." Those students who pushed through their worries to keep up with schoolwork likewise suffered. Explaining how her status had affected her emotionally, Marisol explained:

It brings a mix of different feelings: being sad, and also really angry at the fact that other students at Hawthorne get to just go through their time here and do their work. And it's already stressful enough. People know that it's stressful to be here. But to also be thinking about your parents back home, thinking about your status... You don't have time to think about those emotions, but they're still really heavy. But you don't have time to really sit with them... I guess it's hard to not be jealous... It's like, oh, they just get to go through their school thing.

Marisol and her peers did not have the time to process and cope with the emotional strain of status-related concerns within Hawthorne's pressure-cooker environment, a drawback that not only took up valuable thinking time but also inspired resentment and feelings of difference.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

In this study, we explored the experiences of undocumented students attending an elite, sanctuary college at a paradoxical historical moment in which undocumented students faced both overt anti-immigrant policies nationally and pockets of unprecedented institutional support. By examining status-related challenges and institutional policies in one unexplored nook in "the uneven geography" of undocumented experiences (González and Ruiz, 2014), our findings highlight ways in which institutions can serve as welcoming spaces for undocumented students, at a time when national policy is especially inimical to their inclusion. In this final section, we overview and compare our findings to previous research and offer suggestions for increasing undocumented student inclusion at Hawthorne and beyond.

Our findings suggest that sanctuary at Hawthorne was neither a meaningless symbol nor a panacea for undocumented students' concerns. Students found reassurance in the sanctuary declaration, which galvanized institutional and individual supports such as financial, legal, and

socioemotional assistance. Hawthorne's resource-intensive commitment to inclusion also protected undocumented and DACA students from many challenges their counterparts face elsewhere. Need-based, loan-free financial aid meant that they did not need to work long hours to finance their studies (c.f. Contreras, 2009; Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Likewise, on a politically left-leaning, residential campus, they neither lost time commuting nor had to tolerate anti-immigrant peers (c.f. Gonzáles, 2011; Gonzáles, et al., 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Our data accordingly suggest that they did not experience the same fear of deportation as their counterparts in more exposed and hostile settings (Abrego & Gonzáles, 2010; Contreras, 2009; García & Tierney, 2011; Pérez et al., 2009; Suárez Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). We therefore recommend that Hawthorne continue to provide both rhetorical and material assistance to undocumented students, and where possible, other institutions follow suit.

In spite of Hawthorne's many benefits, undocumented and DACA students still coped with status-related distress that mirrored those reported in other contexts. Some barriers presented themselves in classic ways. For instance, like other holders of provisional legal status, DACA students had their time held hostage by paperwork and appointments (Menjivar, 2006; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Also, like most undocumented college-goers, our participants felt profound and at times debilitating uncertainty about post-college prospects (Gonzáles et al., 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). They inhabited a liminal space simultaneously defined by privilege and disadvantage, inclusion and exclusion (Menjivar, 2006; Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014), as they wrestled with the juxtaposition of Hawthorne's promises of "meaningful choices" and preparation "for anything and everything" with the tangible constraints immigration law exerted on their futures.

Other barriers manifested themselves in ways particular to Hawthorne's privileged context. Like other undocumented college goers, our participants felt that they did not entirely belong (García & Tierney, 2011; Gonzáles, 2011; Gonzáles et al., 2013; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). However, these feelings of otherness were not instigated by interactions with nativist peers but when talking with friends planning trips or looking for summer jobs. Similarly, they experienced the disciplining function of time (Auyero, 2011), not through long hours working or commuting (c.f. Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), but while navigating high-status opportunities, such as prestigious internship

applications. Such disappointments and inconveniences may seem insignificant when compared to experiences of more severe marginalization, but they are nevertheless important since by eroding students' sense of institutional citizenship, they also threatened their sense of national belonging and civic participation (Abu El Haj, 2010; Flores, 2016).

The limits of Hawthorne's institutional policies and rhetoric call for continued institutional action and alternate strategies. To bolster undocumented students' sense of community membership, student organizations need guidance to craft and adopt inclusive policies and practices that do not marginalize undocumented or DACA students. Community members unfamiliar with the limitations of undocumented status would also benefit from educational opportunities. Institutional programming for staff and students could increase sensitivity while saving undocumented students from having to repeatedly educate others about their vulnerabilities. Similarly, Hawthorne could save undocumented and DACA students time and frustration by developing or updating existing guides to internships, graduate programs, and scholarships with status-related eligibility criteria.

To mitigate students' anxiety over uncertain futures, Hawthorne needs to build increased capacity. Establishing mechanisms for faculty to share socio-emotional and other support practices with one another; providing students access to group and individual therapy with psychologists trained in immigration-related issues and establishing an alumni network to support students in navigating precarious post-graduate futures are all attainable additions to Hawthorne's collection of sanctuary-related policies and practices. However, it is also crucial that institutional leaders recognize that without major shifts in immigration policy, undocumented and DACA students face bleak prospects after graduation, regardless of how well they are cared for at Hawthorne. Accordingly, in addition to their commitment to individual institutional improvement, colleges truly committed to supporting undocumented students must also engage in ongoing, collaborative, and outward-facing advocacy to leverage their institutional influence and significant resources toward meaningful immigration reform.

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