THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

"Chicago's Dreamers and Doers: Higher Education and Supporting the Needs of Undocumented Students"

By

Felix Gonzalez

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Faculty Adviser: Chad Broughton

Abstract

Nearly half a million undocumented students in the United States are enrolled in a university or college. This thesis investigates how Undocumented Student Liaisons created by Bill HB3438 and other advisers to undocumented students in Chicagoland colleges and universities develop their support, outreach, and advocacy of these students. The paper draws from existing literature on best practices to foster trust and create long-lasting support structures to create an equitable environment for undocumented students. The study presents findings from interviews with eight post-secondary staff members whose job descriptions explicitly include advising undocumented students. Analysis of the interviews reveals that liaisons struggle to efficiently account for the varied backgrounds of their students without proper institutional structures and a current lack of sufficient funding. Indeed, the thesis argues that the HB3438 Bill does not provide enough institutional structure and funds for liaisons to fulfill the bill's broad spirit of supporting undocumented students. The paper concludes with recommendations for how undocumented student liaisons can foreground the needs of undocumented students.

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Introduction

Graduating from high school is an achievement that pushes undocumented students into a phase of liminality (See Appendix A for a note on terminology). In contrast, K-12 schools provide undocumented students with access to a community, food, and opportunities to assimilate into new cultures. These temporary benefits fall away as undocumented students must contend with the reality that they are not able to work legally, access most federal welfare, or obtain in-state tuition and federal financial aid for post-secondary education. Undocumented students leave high school and transfer into being young adults excluded from these resources and sociocultural capital that their citizen peers have easier access to—indeed a "liminal" period of pronounced anxiety and hurdles (Moreno et al. 1). Various studies have found the harmful mental health effects this liminal status has on students (Benuto et al. 259). Nevertheless, thanks to efforts by undocumented students and their advocates, post-secondary education is increasingly a possibility for students. Currently, around 400,000 undocumented students are attending post-secondary institutions nationally (Presidents' Alliance 2023).

Research has frequently focused on understanding the experiences of these undocumented students that have garnered enough sociocultural capital to attend college and universities. These college students remain within the safe haven of education in which they can access peer networks, faculty support, and continued social capital to obtain employment beyond their degrees. Some research has also started to uncover how undocumented students engage with these specific resources. The work of Rachel E. Freeman-Wong and her colleagues is of particular interest as they outline the successes and limitations of Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) in California (2022). Their work underscores the importance of supporting undocumented students' advocacy and the funding of spaces directed toward these students.

Less studied is the experience of post-secondary institutions in other immigrant hubs of the United States. The Higher Ed Immigration Portal classifies Illinois as a state with "Comprehensive Access," meaning it provides access to state financial aid (President's Alliance 2023). Equitable financial aid is a step above the 23 states that allow undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition despite in other states' context not being able to prove residence for this tuition. Some of the legislation that has fostered this support of undocumented students in Illinois has passed only recently within the past five years. More specifically, the city of Chicago's socio-political context is ripe for further study of the experience of undocumented students. The present study adds to the body of research related to undocumented students in Chicago and nearby suburbs--Chicagoland--and the following research questions guide my interviews with advisers: How do Chicagoland undocumented student liaisons understand the liminal experience of their students, and how do they utilize this understanding in creating and sustaining undocumented student resources? Specifically, this study aims to provide an overview of how those creating resources for undocumented students put liberal policies into action, and to what extent there is a disconnect between policy and implementation. It looks to newer initiatives by the state of Illinois and the city of Chicago—mainly the HB3438 Bill—to create concrete support networks for undocumented students.

In this study, I argue that recent legislation aimed to better support undocumented students lacks the structural and financial backing to meet its intentions. I analyze existing research on undocumented students' experience and which methods work best to support students through their time in academia. Next, I broadly describe the history of undocumented student legislature and the Chicagoland context. After outlining my data collection methods, the rest of the study compiles findings from interviewing eight liaisons and advisers to undocumented students. The study finds

that the three main themes liaisons contend with when considering support are the background of their students and themselves, the structure of their institution and how it interacts with outside networks, and the lack of financial backing. In the final discussion, I note how the HB3438 Bill tries to account for the need for more direct support for undocumented students but fails to address the reality of liaisons to create resources that try to minimize the liminality of the undocumented students' experience.

Review of Research on Undocumented Students

Broader research focused on students of varying immigration status and what role support structures designed for these students may have in their educational outcomes informs this study. I draw on the findings of the numerous studies below to better understand the role that liminal immigrant statuses have on students, what schooling structures best facilitate support for these students, and how school counselors may operate as helpful allies throughout students' academic journeys.

(Un)documented Outcomes

To this end, "Leveraging Protections, Navigating Punishments: How Adult Children of Undocumented Immigrants Mediate Illegality" by Vanessa Delgado (2022) outlines the various typologies of Latino families that U.S. law creates and their socioeconomic outcomes. Her study argues that the less legal and civil capital a person has, the more likely it will result in negative outcomes for dependents in their family. Delgado works to prove that there are different configurations of legality within families, each of which poses different barriers to students and their families (1436). Moreover, her study finds that undocumented students without any form of

legal protection, such as DACA outlined later in this study, are least able to access and utilize legal or social networks to progress in academia. As undocumented students leverage their immigration, family, and schooling, Delgado's work with undocumented families provides a foundation for understanding the undocumented student experience. It also prompts further study of the specific ways undocumented students—and not always Latino—leverage their legal and civil capital to avoid negative life outcomes.

To minimize these negative outcomes, Shauna A. Morimoto and Kevin M. Fitzpatrick's "Civic Engagement and the Urban Student: What are Schools Doing and How are They Doing It," suggest that civic engagement programs yield positive experiences for most students–with notable differences along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic-status lines. Their study analyzes reports from the late 1990s and early 2000s to demonstrate that a curriculum containing instruction in political science, extracurricular volunteering and civic duties, and overall inclusion in the democratic process decreased the chances that students would engage in violent behavior, addictive substances, and suicidal tendencies (Lynch 150). However, and most relevant to the present study is that for lower-income, immigrant, and racial minority students, Morimoto and Fitzpatrick find that these positive outcomes are less prevalent (157). They do not make mention of undocumented students directly, but one could imagine how some other arguments map onto undocumented populations. For example, the authors note that much of the civic engagement programs' content is disconnected from the realities of urban youth that may be witness to or experience extreme poverty and violence (158). Distrust of the government makes students that experience poverty and/or violence less likely to engage in programs that seem distant from their realities. Thus, it would be useful to further consider how undocumented students may experience a similar rift

between the curriculum of civic engagement versus that which they find beneficial to increase their socioeconomic capital.

A similar line of work is William Pérez's *Americans By Heart* (2011) which documents his findings from surveys, interviews, and interactions with 110 undocumented Latino high school students. At the core of his study, Pérez traces the most important factors that get high-achieving undocumented students into college. Pérez provides a helpful conceptual framework to analyze the commitment, social support, and strength that undocumented high school students channel to obtain a post-secondary degree. Testimonial after testimonial reveals the various channels of support that undocumented students tap into in order to advance their goals, and underlying this study is the importance of "key mentors to help them access resources" (42). The design of Pérez's study does not allow for the analysis of the experience of undocumented students once they have not managed to get into a post-secondary track. In any case, the need for focused, sustained resources for undocumented students is at the core of continuing to build and maintain resources that benefit undocumented students to achieve their post-high school goals.

Relationships with Advisers, Others, and the State

In the effort to support undocumented students, studies underscore the importance of advisers being educated on immigration issues and building rapport with students as they self-identify as undocumented. Daniela Bravo's "Parents' Perspectives of Undocumented Students' Transition from High School" studies parents' understanding of their undocumented student's high school experience. Bravo emphasizes three points of improvement for advisers. First, be updated on existing laws and guidelines relevant to undocumented students. Second, understand the career and higher education resources possible for these students. Finally, consider their own level of

cultural competency (Bravo 23). There is a need to ensure that advisers understand not only what laws currently relate to undocumented students, but also the extent to which students may even be aware of these laws and their effect on their lives. In order to transform this education into support, it is also important for undocumented students to feel comfortable enough to share their immigrant status with their advisers. However, Bravo's work and the current body of research into undocumented students are unable to fully address how advisers can best forge rapport that prompts students to come to them when in need. A study like that of Daniela Bravo still shows that a key aspect in fostering a connection between students and their non-familial supports is having counselors who understand how immigrant students engage with the state and their relationship to it.

To this end, Schueths and Lawston's *Living Together, Living Apart* (2015) provides ethnographic data through several interviews of undocumented individuals and mixed-status families to demonstrate how the state becomes ingrained in the lives of these families. The study argues that mixed-status families are stuck in a paradox within the US immigration system that alters the socioeconomic outcomes of the family. The inclusion of personal essays and interviews also provides a layer of vulnerability and authenticity that is seldom present in studies on immigrant families, as research often flattens out the personal aspects of the law's effects on people's romantic and social lives. Similarly, Laura Enriquez's *Of Love and Papers: How Immigration Policy Affects Romance and Family* (2020) points to the deeply personal effects that immigration policy has on immigrant communities, with a specific focus on how romantic relationships and partnerships struggle under nebulous immigration policies. Aside from the valuable excerpts from interviews, Enriquez's study points to the lasting legacy of illegality that limits the socioeconomic upward mobility of undocumented immigrants and their social circles.

Her work also identifies the multi-generational challenge with immigration beyond naturalization. Schueths, Lawston, and Enriquez's collections of narratives highlight how despite the lack of legal protection that undocumented students have, the state ingrains itself in all aspects of their personal lives.

Creating Allies

To account for the effect immigration law has on undocumented students' lives, current literature leads advisers toward a few methods to be effective resources for undocumented students. How to become an "ally" is at the forefront of online results to resources for educators, and literature such as *Teachers As Allies: Transformative Practices For Teaching Dreamers & Undocumented Students* outlines the cornerstones to being a helpful mentor to undocumented students: 1) be knowledgeable 2) be compassionate, build rapport, and stay positive 3) advocate for your students, and promote a culture of advocacy in your school (Wong 89). In reading such a book, an educator is already well on their way to being a more proactive advocate for undocumented students—at least in comparison to negative experiences undocumented students describe as coming from faculty having little to no understanding of what the undocumented student experience can be. Ally training manuals such as this emphasize that without good rapport, undocumented students will be less keen to share their immigration status, rendering possible assistance moot. The importance of creating allies out of faculty is at the forefront of efforts to provide resources to students that form meaningful outcomes.

For the undocumented students that access these resources, Katsiaficas et al.'s "The Role of Campus Support, Undocumented Identity, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals on Civic Engagement for Latinx Undocumented Undergraduates" demonstrates the benefits that being open

about immigration status can be for undocumented students. Their study connects students sharing their undocumented identity to increased engagement with peer support, advisers, and civic resources. Their research points to the benefits that having allies and safe spaces for undocumented students has on fostering social networks within institutions. A key caveat that this study brings up is that there is minimal research on undocumented students that are "in the shadows" and have reservations to reach out to some of the support structures offered at post-secondary institutions and prior. Still, the study's survey main points of study—state climate, peer support, safe spaces, civic engagement, DACA status, and undocumented identity (Katsiaficas et al. 794)—can serve as parallel themes for an analysis of an institution's support structures.

All of the above studies show a deep need for further, focused study of undocumented students. Specifically, there is little distinction between different types of undocumented students' experiences—urban vs rural, mix-status experience, those never able to access college, etc. The following study presents insights into the reality of advisers of undocumented students in the city of Chicago. It builds on previous research by keeping at its core questions of accessibility, engagement, and trust between students and their advisers.

Legal, Chicago Context

Legislative of Students History

The Supreme Court's *Plyler v. Doe* decision of 1982 ensured the constitutional right for undocumented students to attend K-12 public schooling as with all other permanent residents and citizens. In 2014, a letter by the U.S. Department of Justice clarified that the *Plyer* decision prohibits schools from discouraging or misleading undocumented families into not registering their

students for K-12 schooling (Lhamon et al. 1). Both developments provide legal protection for undocumented students' journey to obtain a high school diploma. Beyond high school, on the other hand, undocumented students have few legal protections over their education. The shift in protection from K-12 education into the years after leaving high school leaves undocumented youth in a state of limbo as they struggle to enter post-secondary intuitions, work legally, and have increased chances of exploitation. Despite the initial benefits of the *Plyer* decision, undocumented students exist in a state of liminality that stalls their inclusion into educational and economic opportunities that are otherwise available to other students.

Undocumented youth have fought for decades for more post-secondary schooling options in response to this state of liminality. Lawmakers have worked with students and their parents to try and pass bills that authorize civil protections and work authorization for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. This includes various Republican legislators that have consistently backed progressive immigration bills intending to help undocumented students add to the U.S. economy. However, given many legislative failures of Congress, President Obama resorted to passing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order in 2012. Bypassing Congress through executive order enabled the legal protection of the over 600,000 Dreamers—the term has evolved from a political group of undocumented students into one used to simply describe college-destined undocumented students—who can continue living and working in the U.S with legal documentation. President Obama's use of an executive order has prompted various appeals by Republican lawmakers to revoke DACA's legal protections, including President Trump retracting the executive order in 2017. In June 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the Trump administration had not given adequate justification for ending the program, though the Court did not rule on DACA's legal legitimacy. By July 2021, the

Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on *Texas v. United States* arguing that DACAs were unlawful. The Texas judge's decision prompted the U.S. District Court Judge, Andrew Hane, to direct the Biden administration to stop granting new DACA requests. As of April 2023, the Supreme Court is slated to release its decision on the *Texas* ruling. The Court's decision is expected to be the most important factor in deciding DACA's future (Anderson 2022). Specifically, with DACA applications halted since 2021 and the lack of other legal avenues for young students, the number of high school students graduating without any legal protection is growing rapidly. The political organization FWD.us estimates that nearly 100,000 undocumented students will graduate from high school each spring for the foreseeable future ("The Post-DACA Generation Is Here"). What was for a time a source of legal stability has now returned DACA recipients to a state of liminality.

Chicago History

According to the Pew Research Center, the city of Chicago is the seventh most populated undocumented city. While there is constantly fluctuating data on the exact number of undocumented individuals just for the city of Chicago, the aforementioned Pew study estimates that there are around 400,000 undocumented people currently estimated to live in the city of Chicago. Moreover, other studies suggest that around 10% of Illinois immigrants are currently living under the poverty line. ("Profile of the Unauthorized Population - IL"). The significant size of this population—and the state's attempts to account for them—makes Chicago a salient site of research for how urban undocumented students navigate higher education institutions.

As a notable sign of the support, and in light of the Trump Administration's attempts to curb undocumented immigration, the Chicago Teachers Union has taken a firm stance in support of undocumented students in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). According to the Union, 40% of the

school system's population is immigrants. It is unclear what percentage of these students are not authorized to be in the country, much less how many of them have family members without legal status. In any case, CPS teachers have agreed to not cooperate with ICE—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—agents unless a judge has granted a warrant, and the general messaging from the union has been to not align themselves with anti-immigration rhetoric. This demonstrates a broad culture of support that undocumented high school students may have experienced in the past six years. These students would make up part of the population that the present study's interviewees discuss as their current students in college.

Additionally, the state of Illinois has significant training available to faculty and staff that wish to become more educated on resources available to undocumented students. The mayor's office notes that over 400 CPS staff have been trained to support undocumented students. In the context of the nearly 22,000 teachers, this is a significantly small percentage when put in this context ("Stats and Facts" 2022). Still, CPST high school counselors are versed in the college options available to undocumented students in the area and across the U.S. Further, the city of Chicago also grants scholarships specifically for undocumented students that graduate from Chicago Public Schools. In 2011, CPS Scholarship Manager Marcia Boyd started the CPS Dream Fund Scholarship with the expressed purpose of providing funds exclusively for undocumented students hoping to attend college. Within the last few years, the city has thus made strides to empower its undocumented student population to access the colleges and universities of the state.

Indeed, the state of Illinois also offers several non-federal scholarships with eligibility requirements that allow undocumented students to apply. The Illinois Dream Fund is a college scholarship fund for undocumented immigrants. Applicants must have attended school in Illinois for at least three years before graduating or receiving a GED, must have at least one parent who

immigrated to the United States and must have lived with a parent or guardian while going to school in Illinois. More recently, Illinois passed the RISE (Retaining Illinois Students and Equity) Act in 2019 to provide in-state funds for students that, due to their legal status, cannot fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). The act's main success is to expand the eligibility for proving residency to include non-authorized immigrants: it allows undocumented students to receive funds from the state of Illinois and its public higher education institutions. The act requires that students demonstrate their eligibility through proof of residency and graduation from a public high school in the state of Illinois. The ability to bypass FASFA is in part aimed to help transgender students who do not want to report their gender at birth, along with explicitly making the RISE Act another direct form of aid for undocumented students.

As beneficial as the RISE Act is, another key development in Illinois has been HB3438 which requires public colleges to support undocumented students once they are at their institutions through dedicated undocumented student liaisons. To provide direct support for undocumented students once they are in post-secondary institutions, the Illinois General Assembly passed bill HB3438. The bill amends other bills that govern public universities and community colleges in the state with a new requirement that each administration designates an employee to be a Dream Resource Liaison or undocumented student liaison. The amendment does not require but encourages the establishment of undocumented student centers in addition to the required new adviser. Effective July 2021, the bill provides guidelines for the support that undocumented liaisons must provide–financial aid assistance, academic counseling, peer support services, etc.–though it gives each institution flexibility on how to create the liaison position. Notably, the bill also does not apply to private institutions in the state. As this bill stands as a clear commitment to

undocumented student support, it serves to analyze what changes the bill HB3438 has had on intuitions and key actors entrusted to advise undocumented students.

Methods

Positionality

I am a low-income, first-generation immigrant attending a private research university in Chicago. I have often needed and benefited from the resources and support structures that this study deals with. My social identities are at the heart of my interest in this research, as well as a valuable tool to foreground the voices of students of similar circumstances. As useful as it has been to share identities with this line of research, I write this thesis with a keen awareness of the possibility of "me-search" to question the trustworthiness and credibility of my methods and findings (Altenmüller et al.). Moreover, given that I have often been the target audience for programming that the following thesis highlights, many of my interview interviewees sought to ask me questions post-interview and to set up a network connection. My positionality to the subject of this study provides both an added layer of insight into the experience of undocumented students and also makes me a researcher personally benefiting from the improvement of the resources discussed below.

Data Collection

Out of the over 50 universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges in the Chicago metropolitan area (Chicagoland), I collected in-depth qualitative interviews of advisers, directors, and liaisons of undocumented student support in [amount] institutions. I considered prospective participants eligible if 1) their work title included the term "undocumented" 2) their job description

directly includes working with undocumented students and/or 3) they obtained their specific job positions as a response to the passing of the HB3438 bill. I used these criteria to ascertain their perspectives on the undocumented student experience and how they create programming for students based on the broad mandates from the state of Illinois and the city of Chicago.

I conducted all interviews during February of 2023. I initially formed a list of colleges and universities in the Chicagoland area and tried to find undocumented student resources for each institution through an online search. After receiving IRB approval (IRB22-1725), I contacted any staff member listed as a point of contact for inquiries regarding undocumented students. Two interviewees signed on to participate through this method. I contacted the other six through email after asking interviewees to share the study's information with any colleague they believe to be eligible for the study. Email outreach included language indicating that the main researcher is an undergraduate student of similar identities to those of the broader study's focus. I conducted a total of eight interviews, all over Zoom or the phone. All were individual interviews. Each interview lasted between 50 to 90 minutes. After briefly introducing my background and experience, each semi-structured interview followed a set of questions (see Appendix B). In addition to the standardized questions, the interviews were open for follow-up questions and opportunities for interviewees to lead the discussion in any direction. Two interviewees asked follow-up questions about my methodology and clarification about the project. Given that many of the interviewees have experience in conducting research themselves, it was important to maintain an added layer of transparency about the research conducted.

Table 1. Breakdown of interviewees

Institution	**Type of Institution**	***Undocumented* in their title**

Institution One Interviewees: Peyton	Private, 4-year University	No
Alex		No
Institution Two Interviewee: Taylor	Public, 4-year University	Yes
Institution Three Interviewee: Avery	Public, 4-year University	Yes
Institution Four Interviewee: Spencer	Public, 4-year University	No
Institution Five Interviewee: Addison	2-year community college	No
Institution Six Interviewee: Reece	2-year community college	No
Institution Seven Interviewee: Drew	2-year community college	Yes

Data Analysis

I wrote shorthand notes during and immediately following each interview. Shortly thereafter, I used Zoom's automatic transcription function or ATLAS.ti software to transcribe all the interviews. As themes began to emerge after early interviews, I made adjustments to follow-up questions, including aspects of the undocumented experience to expand further. Interviewees' consent forms asked for possible follow-up communication, so I was able to easily send clarification emails when there were any inconsistencies in the transcript. All proper names in this study of participants are pseudonyms given to protect their anonymity. I coded interview transcripts according to prominent subthemes that serve as the headings under the "Undocumented Liaisons' Reflections on HB3438 and Beyond" section below. Themes related to the undocumented liaison position and the visibility of undocumented students were more central in

the later interviews. After all interviews were done, I grouped all the subthemes into three broad themes: Foregrounding Their Backgrounds, Structural Friction, and (Lack of) Financial Backing.

Undocumented Liaisons' Reflections on HB3438 and Beyond

Foregrounding Their Backgrounds

Liaisons' Positionality

During introductions, half of the interviewees noted their history of working with undocumented students. This went along with some experiences of themselves undocumented, DACA recipients, or members of mixed-status households. Only one interviewee, Addison, stated that they had never knowingly worked with undocumented students, and to a certain extent, felt they had little to no knowledge of them before becoming an undocumented liaison. This liaison provided a lot of the most anxious and unsure responses of the sample group. Addison reflected on their lack of experience as a site of growth but also a large hurdle to their new job. The other interviewees either immigrated to the United States at some point in their lives or had undocumented family members. Two had also conducted formal research on the undocumented population—one as their dissertation and another as an undergraduate. In the interviews, advisers spoke about consciously utilizing their immigrant backgrounds and identities to create stronger bonds with the students that they serve. Those with experience in the immigration system also explained how their interactions with immigration services inform their approach to work. One interviewee, Reece—who has dual citizenship but undocumented family members—spoke of their interactions as a young child with immigration services:

> I'm familiar with the experience, even though I do not know what it means to be an undocumented immigrant. I did once come and visit a cousin who lives in [a

> southern U.S. state]. I had to go through immigration, and I was stopped because I didn't speak English. I was put in a room, and it was a very scary experience for a 15-year-old who even had a U.S. certificate. I try to look back on that experience and not forget what it felt like. I'm sure for someone that doesn't have documents, that feeling is accelerated to unimaginable amounts.

It is these kinds of anecdotes, either second-hand or experienced by the liaison that fuel their desire to ensure undocumented students do support through negative experiences with immigration services.

Moreover, all interviews except with Addison resulted in a discussion about dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of resources available when interviewees were themselves in college. For the three participants that got their bachelor's degree from a Chicagoland institution and two others who got advanced degrees in Chicago institutions, this dissatisfaction and their noted positionality frame how they conceive of the evolution of resources now available to undocumented students. These liaisons and advisers empathize with students and understand that resources are more available than ever.

Chicago Context

Throughout our conversations, there was an initial acknowledgment from all interviewees that the city of Chicago provides distinct resources to the undocumented students they work with. However, my analysis of their responses reveals a more ambivalent relationship with the city of Chicago. Liaisons that work in institutions within the city do speak about the urban space as having more resources than they would otherwise have available, but according to two liaisons, the quality of services varies by neighborhood and center. Taylor explained that advisers must be aware of their students' past experiences with legal and community resources in their neighborhoods.

Indeed, "sometimes it is better to send them to another neighborhood if they have lived in one their whole lives and have had…bad experiences with the services there." Additionally, even advisers in colleges near the downtown suggest that they first try to find help within their campus before referring students to external resources. The resources of an institution are seldom created in isolation, however. For all interviewees, the importance of working with nearby organizations was either a top priority or an already successful strategy. Bringing in guest speakers, legal advocates, or political organizers is reoccurring programming of undocumented liaisons. I will discuss local connections in more detail later. For now, it is important to emphasize that liaisons did not immediately speak of the urban context for city colleges as an inherent benefit.

Advisers in schools farther from the center of the city similarly spoke about local organizations and the possibility of Chicago's downtown center being a resource. Likewise, one interviewee noted that they were far enough away from the core of the urban center that it rarely made sense to send students for anything other than large networking events or conventions. This again brings up the importance of internal support structures that liaisons can first refer students to. Additionally, the more interviewees invoked the idea of "the City of Chicago," the more it became clear that they identified the city of Chicago as a symbol of political activism and liberal legislation that favors undocumented students. Rather than necessarily having students access the city, the overall ethos of the urban context is seen in itself as a more positive setting for undocumented students' experience. Urban spaces like Chicago may not only have a larger number of resources but more specifically this culminates into an equally powerful spirit of support that undocumented students tap into. The background these liaisons gave to their relationship with the city of Chicago underscores how they conceive of their ability to carry out the broad goals of bill HB3438.

Before and After Trump

Throughout framing the implementation of HB3438, liaisons created a clear distinction between the experience of their work before and after the election and the presidency of Donald Trump. When discussing the general opportunity for undocumented students to share their immigration status and, in turn, create community, all interviewees spoke of President Trump's election in 2016 having a stunting effect on the willingness of students to share their experiences. Prior to this, liaisons noted how students in the late 2000s and early 2010s created momentum in expanding student clubs and advocacy organizations around DACA and undocumented visibility. The Immigrant Youth Justice League, a group of young Chicago students, organized the first Coming Out of the Shadows on March 10th, 2010. LGBTQ+ community's National Coming Out Day inspired the league of students to encourage their institutions to foster a culture of openness ("NIU Today" 2023). Furthermore, this study's sample of interviewees also indicated that the passing of DACA in 20212 fueled discussions around undocumented immigration that enabled their students–and at times themselves–to further their socio-political aims.

By 2016, on the other hand, Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric–and the vigor with which it disseminated among his supporters—planted seeds of fear across immigrant communities, especially those from Latin American and Caribbean countries that President Trump targeted most strongly. There was enough administrative support from most interviewees' institutions that universities and colleges were willing to publicly denounce Trump's anti-immigrant sentiment. However, the fear many students felt still managed to slow the frequency of students sharing their immigration status. According to Peyton, this fear combined with the COVID-19 pandemic stalled community gatherings which, as stated above, were crucial to the work of undocumented students' efforts.

Most noteworthy is the difference between newer and veteran liaisons' perceptions of the Trump administration. Although all interviewees identified Donald Trump's presidency as a direct cause in *impeding* their efficiency as community builders, interviewees that have been advocates of undocumented students for years framed this period as a generally fruitful stress test of their longstanding efforts. The difficulty advisers faced was a chance to test what networks and resources were working well and which need further strengthening. The introduction of bill HB3438 added an additional push to aid students amidst a period that challenged pre-existing support structures.

Visibility

In contrast, interviewees that identified their campus as having a well-supported undocumented student population also spoke of a culture in which undocumented students feel empowered to share their immigration status more broadly despite apparent safety risks. This is not to say that the safety of students is irrelevant when creating programming. Even the most open of advocates remarked that undocumented social events are not exclusively for undocumented students—allies and anyone is welcome so as to not single out the specific group. Students that are comfortable being open about their undocumented experience can create social events privately. Otherwise, public events like Coming Out of the Shadows have pulled large crowds in the years outside of the Trump presidency.

In any era, interviewees consistently seek to increase the visibility of their work to make undocumented students *feel* more comfortable accessing institutional support and consequently create more interpersonal networks. Alex, an adviser at a private four-year institution, finds that this is one of their biggest hurdles since "you don't know who is undocumented here. You assume the undocumented student population is super, super small. Or you just don't know because it's

not that kind of campus where you have student organizations repping for students. This [lack of visibility] impacts campus culture." The extent to which their students feel comfortable sharing their immigration status became an anchor to understanding the liaisons' success and limitations as advisers.

Mix-status

Despite the HB3438 bill focusing its advocacy efforts specifically on undocumented and DACA students, various interviewees also brought up the spectrum of immigration circumstances students face that require their assistance. Indeed, liaisons' responses show that they are conscious of U.S. citizen students with undocumented parents or international students with anxiety about their fragile visa authorization. These are students whom the bill does not explicitly cover but that are still under the purview of liaisons' work in practice. However, only one interviewee explicitly spoke about the need to increase the awareness of mixed-status students and direct more resources to their support. Spencer expressed their hope that future legislation related to undocumented students will also directly acknowledge the intersections between the life of those students and their mix-status experiences. Even at institutions that are creating undocumented student programming with minimal previous foundations, such as Addison's, there is an awareness of the importance of listening to each student's needs. Along with the fact that being an undocumented advocate can take many shapes. Still, the extent to which liaisons brought up mix-status as a key issue can serve as critical information about their institutional priorities informed by bill HB3438.

High School Experience

When reflecting on the different levels of support undocumented students receive, interviews consistently pivoted to the importance of students' experience in high school as crucial

to their engagement in a post-secondary institution's programming. Especially the interviewees at public institutions clarified that many of their students come from Chicago Public Schools. Their undocumented students more willing to be open about their immigration status had experienced high school environments that did not antagonize—and even supported—the undocumented student experience. Indeed, CPS in recent years has expanded the mandated resources for undocumented students in their schools. This study's interviews provide some evidence that advisers consider the background of students quite heavily when evaluating why they may or may not be accessing the programming they are creating. Additionally, interviewees spoke of the importance of whether their students were Illinois residents, even if not from Chicago. Alex, Taylor, Reece, and Drew identified that the state has multiple resources for undocumented students that have attended school in Illinois. In contrast, Reece and Spence pointed out that the experience of their out-of-state, asylum, and refugee students has been consistently strenuous. It is also important to liaisons whether students are going through a shift in the number of resources, wherein some students may be going from a high number to a low number or vice versa.

With students' high school backgrounds being so important, many interviewees conveyed the importance of maintaining engagement with local high schools through direct educational outreach. Liaisons with years of experience as undocumented advisers mentioned anecdotes of high school counselors referring their students to these college-level advisers for support. Being an undocumented liaison at a postsecondary institution thus requires significant time working with undocumented high school students and their families. Indeed, the ways undocumented liaisons understand the background of their students is at the core of how they calibrate how they will interact with undocumented students at varying high school experiences.

Student Advocacy

Across all interviews, liaisons phrased their institutions' experience with undocumented resources in terms of the ability–and need–for undocumented students to be the leading voice in discussions for more resources. When asked to describe the history of undocumented student support at their institutions, liaisons like Spencer and Drew framed their respective narratives in terms of what students have fought to gain. According to both of these advisers, students rallying and demanding more administrations are the main reason resources have increased. Political and social developments have *informed* student advocacy rather than *directly affecting* positive change for undocumented support. Some responses pointed to students' work in establishing events such as Coming Out of the Shadows, undocumented centers separate from other offices, and exact recognition from their institution's administration. According to my discussion with Drew, creating a culture of visibility enables the creation of undocumented student leaders, which in turn can lead to more student-led activism. It is through providing this type of background that liaisons demonstrated how deeply they valued centering their work as advisers to students on magnifying the voice of students rather than their own.

Structural Friction

Faculty

Liaisons characterize the success of implementing ally training as quite varied, but across institutions, there appears to be a similar messaging for informed support. Alex, an adviser that hosts the presentation described ally training as, "a chance to educate faculty on appropriate language around immigration, how to create meaningful relationships with undocumented students, and what is reasonable for them to assist students with before referring them to us."

Beyond creating safe spaces, responses concerning ally training suggested they are invaluable and relatively easy to put on. Quite starkly, however, liaisons that have held ally training throughout several years admit that attendance levels are often "lower than desired." The low turnout is in spite of the fact that the same interviewees describe their interactions with faculty as supportive of undocumented students.

Further, ally training is most often used as a proactive action to minimize undocumented students coming across unsupportive or offensive faculty. It might be the case that it is unrealistic to expect even the most supportive institutions to require ally training, according to responses by Alex and Drew. Nevertheless, liaison Taylor explained that their office can sometimes prompt training for a specific faculty member when a student files a complaint of misconduct with the faculty's division or unit. Crucially, as another interviewee noted, the faculty that would benefit from the training are not those attending. In turn, a self-selecting group of faculty with previous experience assisting undocumented students tend to be the instructors that generally attend. More direct guidelines for training faculty into undocumented allies could expand what liaisons consider to be a valuable but currently-limited resource.

Employment Turnover

Seven out of eight interviewees have been in their current position for less than two years, and two are in interim positions. Drew recognized that institutions across Illinois have had trouble finding people to fill the new liaison position required by the HB3438 bill. Institutions had a few months to prepare before the bill went into effect, but interviewees still described their respective administrations rushing to comply. For institutions currently with few undocumented resources, their liaisons expressed a lack of education about the undocumented experience and having been overwhelmed as higher-ups tasked them with entirely new programming. Being an interim liaison

also adds significant obstacles for these advisers to set clear goals for their tenure. Across all interviews, responses expressed anxiety over unfilled staff positions in liaisons respective. Liaisons spoke of feeling unable to fully create effective resources when they are unable to spread the labor with coworkers. Three interviewees repeatedly shared their sentiments about their job duties which one described as "impossible for one person." Stress over being burdened with too many tasks is not unique to the work of undocumented liaisons, but it does appear specifically relevant to the structure of HB3438's goals. Luckily, it is the hope of several interviewees that their offices will become a well-established part of their campuses and prompt their institutions to prioritize minimizing employment turnover for offices dealing with populations such as undocumented students.

Institutional Structure

More broadly, the office or center an undocumented liaison works under consistently came up as an important factor for the efficiency of their work. Three interviewees work directly under the main Dean of college students. Interviewees character this Dean structure as giving them a clear avenue for discussions and advocacy around undocumented students. Moreover, two interviewees described the restructurings their offices and centers have made within their institutions. For one it was a positive experience that has since expanded their undocumented student resources. However, for the others, having their administration move their office from under the Dean's auspices to a different unit of student services has decreased the possibility for their office to enact change. Alex described their center's role as now creating social events rather than having a seat at the table of decision-making:

> It's been an initiative within the past three or four years to say each [division of the university] is going to have a [newly designated staff member] devoted to

> [diversity and inclusion]. It kind of makes my job difficult because [this center] used to be that for the university, but now there are other people doing similar pieces–but just divisionally. Which is great because they can have that one-on-one connection with students or they can do things specific to that community. But what it does is…prevent students from thinking that there are campus-wide initiatives that they can be a part of.

A bill like HB3438 could not create a blanket standard to force institutions to put undocumented liaisons at the highest levels of administration, but responses like the one above demonstrate that the current diversity in institutional structures is proving difficult for the efforts of advisers to undocumented students.

Cross-Department Outreach

Creating multi-department and office connections is another top priority for undocumented liaisons across all institutions. All interviewees identified financial aid, career support, admissions, and health services as offices they are in consistent communication with to aid the experience of undocumented students. The coordination between these offices varies significantly depending on the undocumented liaison. Advisers that had been at the institution provided a more thorough reflection on their ability to advocate for students and ultimately connect them to assistance. Newly established undocumented centers spoke generally about the needs of undocumented students, but they seemed to have minimal experience as the main facilitator for these interactions. Instead, they described their role as an overseer so that other offices are aware of undocumented students. The expectation is that students are accessing these spaces on their own. Interviewees at institutions that have had undocumented liaisons before HB3438 described their role in undocumented students' lives as more well-established and serving as mediators. Interviewees noted that the

networks established with other offices and centers across their institution bolstered their support. However, shifting structures and unclear placement of liaisons within offices actively hinder the ability of liaisons to effectively create cross-departmental networks that lead to support of undocumented students.

One Man Show

Almost all interviewees expressed a need to grow their office or department to better assist undocumented students. Responses explained this need comes from an issue with the broad nature of the term "undocumented", as many interviewees discussed the wide range of experiences that come under the umbrella of this identity. The number of circumstances advisers must prepare for makes liaisons question who to tailor their programming towards and at what other students' expense. A lack of a focused target population makes their already-difficult job all the more impractical. To this end, advocates spoke of the hope that the work they are currently doing will demonstrate 1) the value of their undocumented liaison work and 2) the need for more staff devoted to various academic fields and issues associated with assisting non-citizen students and their families. As Spencer described:

> It's going to be a lot of work to show our administrators that there's a student-facing side and a behind-the-scenes aspect of having to stay updated on legislation, political situations of many different countries with TSP and political asylum, and other parts that impact our daily responsibility.

With a more specified staff structure, it might be possible to institutionalize the work these advocates are doing into long-term programming rather than simply creating short-term solutions.

Interviewees that have professional relationships with other liaisons of undocumented students—even at other institutions and states—reflected more positively about their ability to

engage with students. Interviewees' general disposition when discussing this assistance with their work reveals that their center or office can connect with students more efficiently when given even small assistance than the liaisons who described juggling various administrative, advising, and logistical challenges on their own.

Institutionalizing

Drew, a liaison at a 2-year community college pointed out that undocumented student liaisons tend to have concentrated forms of social and structural power that do not always integrate into their institutions independent of the specific liaison. Their own work as an advocate of undocumented students suggested that Drew felt other institutions and advisers tap them for advice and resources, rather than looking to the interviewee's institution as an exemplary space for undocumented students. Advocates emphasize the influence that individual actors possess, which they may not be able to infuse into their school's setting.

Other interviews reveal that this is true of institutions still beginning their efforts to assist students. Community colleges with limited support structures are spaces where interviewees spoke of other undocumented liaisons not just as inspiration but also as possible mentors. The pioneers of undocumented student support in Chicago are still active, and their success is a source of potential benefit to institutions that have yet to reach the same level of success. What was apparent when I spoke to these specific pioneers is that they have been able to establish a legacy that is beyond them. However, more novice advocates of undocumented students reflect on their success as being temporary and dependent on their pretense at their institution. When they leave, it is unlikely that the same level of support will be available to students without another committed adviser taking their place. There is a strong need for undocumented student liaisons to build their work with institutional endurance in mind. This study's previous sections focused on

administrative buy-in and broader institutional measures are necessary to ensure the work of a single advocate does not dim once they leave the institution. HB3438 does not provide the framework for liaisons to build long-lasting support for students. Ultimately, this undermines the current progress liaisons are making and is troublesome for the growing undocumented student populations.

(Lack of) Financial Backing

Position Title

Two interviewees pointed out that their institution created their position specifically due to the HB3438 bill rather than resulting from an organic desire to assist undocumented students. Crucially, the advisers that expressed this sense of disconnect also did not have previous experience working with or for undocumented students. Many interviewees mentioned the bill's general directive was a barrier to creating an effective liaison position. "Right from the beginning it was spelled out for us when the mandate passed," said Avery, that the bill would not achieve its mission without a direct requirement for a full-time position. That is why other liaisons described their position as either tentative or veering towards unmanageable with the amount of responsibility required of them. What liaisons' responses also spell out, according to the cumulative analysis of this study, is institutions are not allocating signification funds towards HB3438's mandates to create a new position.

In the case of institutions that are not under the purview of HB3438—such as private universities—an interviewee noted that there was less of a financial incentive for the administration to push for a specific undocumented liaison position. This did not mean there was

not a desire to assist undocumented students directly, but such work falls under broader diversity and inclusion initiatives rather than a specified undocumented liaison position or center.

Others who felt their work was better funded by their institution had been involved in immigration advocacy work for years or were impacted by DACA themselves rather. Their positive responses indicate that institutions were either already providing increased funding given the interviewee's reputation, or the liaison had empathy and a desire to pass on the favor of support to other undocumented students.

High School Outreach

Unprompted, all interviewees linked the previously-discussed need to increase communication channels between their institution and high schools to a lack of funding. For the most involved liaisons, their work consistently engages local high school students but they note that this requires increased funding for trips and materials. Their descriptions of this work did not suggest that they aim to recruit prospective students to their institution. Instead, several interviewees conveyed an interest in educating high schools—including their faculty, administrations, students, and family—about the undocumented resources available to them as Illinois residents. The move to online programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic made this outreach easier for advocates such as Peyton and Reece. This cut some of the costs of travel and time spent at specific schools and increased the number of students and families that liaisons could reach. In contrast, liaisons recently starting at their intuition had significantly more trouble convincing their administrators to allocate funding for programming aimed at high schools.

Networking and Tracking

When asked about professional networks that help interviewees be better prepared to advise undocumented students, responses were largely positive and often voiced the name of other interviewees interviewed. This is in large part due to the snowballing sampling method used, as Alex's professional networks in particular facilitated my contact with various other interviewees. More than convenience, the narrative interviewees constructed about their involvement with other undocumented liaisons helped identify which members they felt were key mentors to their work. The nature of their narratives also pointed to advocates of undocumented immigrants that have been in the field for a significant amount of time and made strides in establishing resources for students. Interviewees identified the political pull as an admirable aspect of their work and one of the reasons they seek out senior advisers for support. Advisers described the political capital of other undocumented advisers as having helped the liaison aspect of HB3438.

Equally as admirable to some interviewees are the centers and offices fully designated for undocumented students that some institutions. One student liaison, Taylor, spoke of another institution with an undocumented center: "Thinking for example of [institution] and their [name of center], they recently opened it up as their office. And I see their programming–but they have a big undocumented student population. Here we don't track. Unless a student discloses to us or their division, or they disclose to the admissions office, we don't know. It's for safety purposes." This response is both admiring the comparably large amount of funding the undocumented student office receives and the ability of the referenced institution to track students' immigration status. A designated center is a goal of other liaisons to reach a similar standard to others in their support network.

When comparing each other in a professional network, undocumented liaisons value the method of tracking as crucial to their work. One undocumented liaison discussed their efforts in the past year to find ways to track how many undocumented students are on their campus without compromising the security of students. The issue of knowing the population size of undocumented students frequently came up in large part due to conversations with peers at other institutions that are trying different methods with various success rates. This study will not outline the specific forms of tracking, as various interviewees noted that even the vaguest of tracking methods should still be kept out of broad discussions of the issue. Ensuring that immigration services and actors with ill will have minimal understanding of how to find undocumented students is a top priority even for the colleges and universities that do track. However, airing on the side of precaution also makes it difficult for other institutions to evaluate what is working and what is not. Without having personal connections to other liaisons, newer advisers find themselves unsure of how to find helpful practices that track students but protect their privacy. Above a lacking consensus on best practices, interviewees also linked the issue of tracking to financial restraints on their offices. Without adequate funding, liaisons' ability to test out new tracking methods is pushed lower and lower on their list of priorities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Implications for Research

The interviews of this study provide insight into the successes and limitations of the HB3438 bill and advising of undocumented students more broadly. Presently, however, this project is only a narrow pool of interviewees, with not all of the most notable universities and colleges in the Chicagoland area, included. The study did not seek to have a small sample size but

rather is a result of many failed outreach attempts. The inability or unwillingness to participate in this form of research is of particular interest given that the prospective interviewees were exclusively counselors, advisers, and staff members devoted to assisting students. Email outreach included language indicating that the main researcher is an undergraduate student. The disclosure of the type of project may help explain the high number of no-replies, as there may have been an unwillingness to engage with undergraduate research or even a lack of bandwidth to reply to students outside of their institution. For the former, one department at a private research university communicated that they do not allow their employees to participate in research studies. There are various ethical and policy concerns to excluding staff members from engaging in research (Resnik 15), but future research should continue to work with IRBs and administrators to foster ethical research methods that enable the study of student support structures across university settings. In any case, improving support structures for undocumented students requires a study with a more extensive population of advisers and liaisons to further the findings of this comparative study of Chicagoland institutions.

The administrative structure of institutions and their undocumented support structures also bear further study. At the time of interviewing, almost all undocumented advisers were in a center or office that had recently shifted its place within the broader institution. There will likely continue to be significant changes to these structures as the need for undocumented student support increases and changes. Detailing the benefits and pitfalls of standalone undocumented student centers is needed. Moreover, studies that combine research on the staff and student experience will provide a better understanding of best practices to support undocumented students.

Lastly, from these interviews with undocumented student liaisons, it is apparent that there is still little to no consensus on what programming or contexts best foster a culture of openness for

undocumented students. More focused research on what enables students to feel comfortable sharing their immigration status is fundamental to relieve more undocumented students from having to be the first student on their campus to come out of the shadows.

Implications for Undocumented Student Liaisons

Whether long-time advisers or first-time undocumented student liaisons, those creating programming for these students must continue their efforts to educate as much of their institution as possible about the distinct struggles brought on by tenuous immigration statuses. Faculty ally trainings are a crucial first step to help undocumented students know they are at an institution with people educated and concerned with their circumstances. Most important to this training is ensuring that staff knows who to redirect students to when there is a question. It is imperative to keep in mind an institution's departmental divisions to minimze the extent that undocumented students are bounced around between staff members that may know as much or even less than these students do about what their immigration status means for their post-secondary education.

It is also fundamental that undocumented advisers try to foster student-led initiatives. Interviewing student liaisons whose work has had the most impact across Chicagoland reveals that their work is most effective as a result of students' efforts. Liaisons continuing to listen to students and supporting students' distinct needs is fundamental as different sociocultural phases of undocumented support come and go. As the Supreme Court and Congress decide DACA's future, understanding how students want to proceed must come from their advocacy.

Lastly, institutions must go beyond the broad mandate of the HB3438 bill and create full-time, standalone undocumented student liaison positions. Permanent and specialized funding for the work of undocumented advisers is necessary to carry out the job that the bill imagined for these

staff members. The above interviews indicate that the current arrangement is unsustainable for both students and staff members. Barring significant changes, there will continue to be limited programming that neither reaches the students that need it the most nor fractures the outreach for undocumented advisers across various student groups.

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Appendix A

Note on Terminology: Throughout this study, I use the term “undocumented” immigrant to encompass the experiences of people living in the United States without authorization. The use of this term comes with an awareness that other scholars may opt to use various other meaningful terms such as clandestine, illegal, unauthorized, or DACAmented. Terms including DACA must be reserved for students that have obtained authorization to work in the U.S. through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy. Moreover, a significant amount of undocumented immigration begins as authorized, legal, and visa-sponsored, and/or the documents immigrants do possess may be informally purchased (Spencer XI-XII). Nevertheless, I opt for the use of *undocumented*, as I believe that it captures the reality of many immigrants' realities in which they are not able to easily access bureaucratic structures such as health care, federal financial support, and citizenship. The term does not frame their immigration status as inherently dangerous as the term “illegal” often does, while also being well known amongst the general public.

Appendix B

General Interview Guide:

1. What role do you have in advocating for undocumented students’ support and resources at the [institution]?
2. In what ways does [institution] evaluate its proximity to Chicago when thinking of programming and its resources?
3. How does [institution] coordinate with other Illinois university offices/departments concerning undocumented students?

4. To what extent does [institution] consider its outreach and online presence as resources for non-[institution] students?
5. When a student reaches out to inquire about undocumented-related inquiries, what are the main goals for that interaction?
6. In your training and onboarding process, do you recall undocumented students being brought up?
7. More broad scope–How does the [institution] attempt to maintain engagement for its undocumented programming?