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Date: _____

**Students Without Documentation:
Context and Solutions to Navigating Systemic Barriers in Higher Education**

By

Monica Jaqueline Cerda Ortiz

A professional project submitted to
Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Education

December 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I worked to complete this professional project during a tumultuous time in my life. I had to balance a full-time graduate program in the midst of a global pandemic while balancing a full-time job. I had the support and encouragement from my committee, Dr. Dantas-Whitney, Luanne Carrillo, and my committee chair, Dr. Schulze. My committee helped me with my professional development as a future leader and educator in my field. I would like to thank the tutors at the Writing Center, Rosario, Tarrah, and Morgan, who helped me craft a project I am proud of. I appreciate their guidance and endless support in this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Pratt for her endless support and all the knowledge she shared to help me with my professional project in its initial stages

My project focused on the undocu plus community, a community that did not receive federal relief or support throughout this global pandemic. Currently, the future of the DACA program continues to be in a state of limbo and there is currently no discourse for a broader immigration reform. The fight to advocate for the undocu plus community continues, and I hope my professional project can inspire allies of the undocu plus community to uplift and advocate for this community. This is a call to action for educational professionals to begin conversations to hold educational institutions accountable for the support students without documentation need to access and successfully graduate from post-secondary institutions.

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ABSTRACT

**Students Without Documentation:
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By

Monica Jaqueline Cerda Ortiz

Master of Science in Education

Western Oregon University

This professional project includes five chapters, with the fourth chapter being a draft of an article, which is the culmination of this professional project. This professional project identified gaps in past literature and examined institutional barriers that impact access to higher education institutions for students without documentation (SWD) at the state and federal levels. The draft of the article for this project will explore the policy and sociopolitical context that impacts SWD as they navigate higher education. Further, the article draft suggests ways to support SWD informed by past literature. The social factors that impact SWD and will be discussed are the following: social capital, mental health, misconceptions, and invisibility. Lastly, the draft of the article concludes with an action plan for educational professionals and relevant ways to advocate for SWD to help them thrive in higher education and life. The importance of a long-term solution at the federal level for immigration reform to increase access to higher education institutions for SWD will be emphasized.

Keywords: immigration, students without documentation, DACA, DREAMers, higher education.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

According to the Immigration Policy Center, about 65,000 children without documentation who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high school each year (Gonzales, 2007). Due to systemic barriers from federal, state, and institutional policies, only between 5 and 10 percent of high-school graduates without documentation go to college (Gonzales, 2007). For students without documentation (SWD) to have continued access and support from higher education institutions, federal, state, and educational institutions must commit to creating infrastructure and policies inclusive of SWD regardless of their immigration status. Zong and Batalova (2019) explain in an article for the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) that immigrants without documentation brought as children to the U.S. are considered DREAMers. Further, they explain that Democrats and Republicans have been working since 2001 to address their futures in bitter battles over other immigration-related issues (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

DREAMers have become central to conversations around immigration after the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program provided temporary relief from deportation; however, the Trump administration decided to rescind the program in 2017 (Zong & Batalova, 2019). The uncertainty of the DACA program and debates over immigration policy caused a lot of anxiety for DREAMers planning to attend higher education or join the workforce (Zong & Batalova, 2019). For the purposes of this professional project, I will be referring to students under the DACA program or other temporary protection, and students without DACA, or

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temporary protected status, as students without documentation (SWD). I will be referring to the community of people without documentation and with varying temporary immigration statuses as the undocu plus community, an umbrella term that allows anonymity to people who do not want to disclose their specific immigration status. It is important to note that there is not a lot of discourse around inclusive terminology in the existing literature. Although the term SWD is rooted in deficit language, it is a term that uses people-first language to validate identity. It is challenging to find a term that does away with deficit language because of immigration institutions. Further research should discuss the implications of terminology in this community and find terms that are affirming in nature.

I became a student at Western Oregon University (WOU) in the fall of 2016, and vividly recall the impact the changes in immigration policy had on SWD at WOU and the surrounding community. As a first-generation Latina college student and a person who cares deeply about people in this community, I decided to become involved in student-led leadership organizations on campus throughout my time as an undergraduate student. I then became involved in leadership roles that allowed me to advocate for SWD and the undocu plus community as a whole. I sought advocacy opportunities through different organizations and clubs at my college campus, such as the Unidos Club, a support system for DREAMers and allies of the undocu plus community; the Associated Students of Western Oregon University (ASWOU), the student government; the Multicultural Student Services and Programs Office (MSSP), a resource center for first-generation and culturally diverse students; the Multicultural Representatives (MCR), a student peer mentoring program; Kappa Delta Chi Incorporated, a multicultural sorority; and the Oregon Student Association (OSA), a non-profit organization to represent, serve and protect the collective interests of students in post-secondary educations.

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Throughout my involvement in all these organizations, I advocated for SWD at WOU, including fundraising for a scholarship open to students regardless of their immigration status on behalf of Unidos Club. I also attended a DREAMers Summit, a statewide event in Oregon that connects different higher education institutions across the state with resources to support SWD. There were sessions to network and strategize to find creative pathways to support SWD in higher education across the state of Oregon. Additionally, as Vice President of ASWOU, I worked on a project to open a Dream Center to support SWD at WOU. Lastly, I competed in the Maurice Undergraduate Initiative challenge. The challenge was to find a solution to a problem in your community. I won the contest by submitting a proposal with the rationale of creating a Dream Center at WOU.

After all these advocacy experiences during my time as an undergraduate, I recognize the need to create a draft of an article with an educational framework with literature and information about the experiences of SWD navigating higher education. There are a lot of systems SWD have to navigate at the federal, state, and institutional level that are important to explain in an article to inform educational professionals about barriers for SWD in higher education and learn steps to advocate for SWD. I will continue updating the draft of the article with existing literature, and I plan to submit a final draft of the article for publishing in a journal that focuses on educational professionals who support diverse learners, such as bilingual educators and other educational professionals who need resources and educational frameworks to better support SWD.

Impact of the Project

There are not a lot of open resources available to help SWD navigate higher education. Often, students do not feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status to their advisors or

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other school officials because of the legal vulnerability associated with disclosing that private information. Having an article with an educational framework as a resource will help educational professionals and students understand the different systems they must navigate to access and succeed in higher education. To provide an equitable education to all students, there must be resources available for SWD who face many federal, state, and institutional barriers. My project will have a tremendous impact on the undocu plus community and, more specifically, on SWD because my project will create awareness of a need for this community. Furthermore, this project will directly impact graduation outcomes for SWD and creates visibility to this critical issue.

In a time when DREAMers have become central to conversations around immigration, supporting SWD may be challenging because students often do not feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status to their advisors or other school officials because of the legal vulnerability associated with disclosing their immigration status. Providing the sociopolitical context necessary to understand the nuanced barriers for SWD is a critical step in beginning to find ways to support SWD in higher education institutions and high school students with the goal of improving graduation outcomes.

Purpose of the Project

My professional project aims to research existing literature and develop an educational framework for people to learn about SWD and better support them in their educational endeavors. It will explore and identify gaps in past literature regarding the federal, state, and institutional barriers that impact access to higher education institutions for SWD. The project will analyze previously conducted research and compile previous literature in order to provide the necessary context. This article draft will be based on other research in current literature rather than first-hand data collection.

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As a result of developing a draft of an article for my professional project, I hope to support, uplift and create visibility for the undocu plus community. This project seeks to find current research offering potential solutions to advocate for this group of students, including state and institutional policies to support SWD and social support. Essentially, the project will serve as an educational resource and a call to action for policymakers and educational professionals to provide more pathways for SWD by providing an educational framework. After finding relevant research about how SWD can access and navigate higher education and creating a draft of an article with an educational framework, I plan to submit a final draft of the article for publishing in a journal that focuses on diverse learners.

Research Interests

There has been a growing body of literature analyzing the barriers for SWD that are currently navigating higher education or aspiring to enroll in a higher education institution. More recently, research explains how federal, state, and institutional policy changes due to politics have impacted the education outcomes of SWD. It is essential to demystify the myths and common misconceptions about SWD because many people face nuanced barriers and face unique circumstances depending on their status. For this reason, people in educational institutions have a responsibility to be aware of the nuances of immigration policy and understand how it intersects with higher education policy to create the unique barriers SWD face. Understanding the policy context will allow educational professionals to be better equipped to support SWD with the resources and support they need to navigate higher education.

A topic I would like to research is social capital theory. Stuckey (n.d) explains how social capital theory analyzes access to resources. Essentially, when a group does not have access to resources, its social capital depends on how people in this group navigate relationships that

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connect them to the necessary capital (Stuckey, n.d). Further, the author explains relationships from social networks are built upon trust, information, and focus on the collective good over individual desires (Stuckey, n.d). The concept of social capital is critical to understanding how SWD can access higher education. Building social networks in school can help SWD feel a sense of belonging and help them find the information they need to continue their education. SWD often come from immigrant families, which may cause additional barriers to getting support outside of school. Further, Valdez (n.d) states that although high school graduation is a milestone, SWD are left out of options for their future as they search for work and educational opportunities after graduation. For this reason, social capital and finding a network in school are crucial to the success of SWD.

Another body of research I would like to investigate for my project is the correlation between campus climate and the success of SWD in different campus climates. If a SWD attends a school where the school climate or campus environment is not inclusive of SWD, students are less likely to get support from their teachers and advisors. There is already some research assessing the campus environment's vital role in students' academic engagement (Valdez, n.d). Overall, researching how social capital and campus climate impact SWD will contribute to informing educational professionals about how to support this group of students.

Alignment with the MSED Program

My project will support the mission of creating more equitable access to higher education for students who come from marginalized communities. The mission of the Master of Education program at Western Oregon University is to “Empower educators to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to improve their professional practices, to enhance their leadership abilities, and to improve the quality of education using creativity, innovation, and research”

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(Catalog. Program: Education, n.d). My project aligns with the mission of the MSED program because my article will be an educational resource for educators that will equip them with the knowledge of SWD so they can best support them throughout their education. When educators understand the unique barriers SWD face, they can inform parents and students about their opportunities. Understanding the experiences of SWD can also allow educators to feel empowered to take on leadership roles related to advocating in their school or institution and help create support systems for SWD.

At a more general level, my project will also address the impact that immigration policy has on students and their families. Immigration and its impact on education are part of a larger national conversation around immigration reform and finding a permanent solution for Dreamers who are constantly in limbo with temporary policies. Educators may not be aware of the fear deportation can have on a student's life and education. Students who are aware of their family's immigration status or of their own status can worry about the stability of their lives and their ability to get the resources they need, such as food assistance, access to healthcare programs, and access to affordable higher education. The constant uncertainty of their immigration status and hearing their futures debated on national news may impact the mental health of SWD and their progress in school.

An educational article explaining how state or institutional policy could impact students will help schools guide SWD pursuing higher education. SWD would feel a sense of belonging and support if educational professionals were informed about their lived experiences and how their status impacts their education. Furthermore, the support for SWD could impact the campus climate by creating a welcoming environment with support systems to help students succeed.

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Lastly, this article could continue state or nationwide conversations about what institutions are doing to support SWD on higher education campuses.

Time Frame and Implementation

The first step to my project is finding literature explaining the systemic barriers for SWD. I plan to craft a draft of an article with an action plan that serves as an educational framework detailing the systemic barriers SWD face, including relevant statistics, terminology, and support systems. The action plan will be created for educational professionals and include relevant ways to advocate and communicate with SWD to help them thrive in higher education and life. The action plan will consist of three steps: Advocate, Communicate, and help students Thrive (ACT), which will be discussed in chapter four.

I will assess the success of my project by accomplishing the goal of getting my project, the draft of the article, published in an educational journal for educational professionals. In order to accomplish this, I will need to find and research relevant literature that will help me explain the barriers SWD face in the article. I will also seek information from organizations that will help me explain the sociopolitical context of the issue, such as national organizations (e.g., the Migration Policy Institute) to support SWD. Overall, I hope that by analyzing relevant literature, I can find gaps in knowledge to support my article draft addressing the systemic barriers for SWD.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

An estimated eleven million without documentation in the United States face various systemic and institutional barriers in their everyday lives (Hsin & Reed, 2019). These barriers, including not being able to work legally, vote, or benefit from social services and, in certain states, difficulties opening bank accounts or obtaining a driver's license, make it difficult for people to access the resources they need to access higher education (Hsin & Reed, 2019). According to the Immigration Policy Center, about 65,000 children without documentation who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high school each year (Gonzales, 2007). Every year about 98,000 high school SWD graduate (Zong & Batalova, 2019). SWD are guaranteed free public primary and secondary education due to the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*. Unfortunately, *Plyler v Doe* does not extend to higher education (Yates, n.d.). Due to barriers to higher education, only between 5 and 10 percent of high-school graduates without documentation go to college (Gonzales, 2007).

In 2012, former President Barack Obama signed an executive order known as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Benuto et al., 2018). DACA provided 2-year administrative relief from deportation and eligibility for a work permit to undocumented immigrants who met restrictions (Benuto et al., 2018). People without documentation need comprehensive immigration reform because DACA provides temporary relief from some restrictions, and beneficiaries are not eligible for important programs such as health insurance (Gámez et al., 2017). Beneficiaries of the DACA program are often referred to as DREAMers or as DACAmended, which is a phrase to describe people without documentation who benefit from

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the temporary protection of the DACA program. People who do not qualify for the DACA program do not receive temporary relief from the systemic barriers due to their immigration status.

For this article, I will be referring to students under the DACA program or other temporary protection and people without temporary protected status as students without documentation (SWD). I will be referring to the community of people without documentation with varying immigration statuses as the undocu plus community, which is an umbrella term that allows anonymity to people who do not want to disclose their specific immigration status. The term undocu plus is commonly used in spaces that support this group, but there is no information on who coined the term. People who identify as part of the undocu plus community may be associated with the following statuses: have temporary protected immigration status, may be without documentation, or may be in-between status. Additionally, they may have a parent/s or guardian/s who are without documentation or are DACAmented, which means they are under temporary protection and do not have documentation.

A growing body of literature highlights the barriers SWD face due to federal, state, and institutional policy. Still, more research is needed to identify how to best support SWD navigating higher education institutions. Further, Gámez et al. (2017) state that a growing body of literature illustrates the hardships students without documentation experience, such as severe stress from legal uncertainty and a lack of access to resources and employment. Overall, SWD face many institutional barriers, making it difficult to find support systems. My professional project will add to the body of literature, shedding light on the experience of postsecondary SWD. My professional project will outline how SWD can navigate higher education. By doing so, I can provide critical information for educational professionals, policymakers, and the

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community regarding students' experiences. In the article, I will offer more context surrounding this critical issue and offer some research-based solutions to best support students navigating a system with roadblocks due to their immigration status. This project aims to identify the federal, state, and institutional barriers SWD face to access and succeed in higher education institutions.

Additionally, this professional project aims to find current research that offers potential federal, state, and institutional solutions and social support for SWD. Finding relevant studies about students' experiences will provide a call to action for educational professionals, policymakers, and community organizations to actively support DREAMers in their academic endeavors. Further, this professional project aims to uplift the Undocu plus community and encourage people who can relate with the undocu plus community, to get involved in research to find solutions for SWD pursuing higher education.

Federal, State, and Institutional Barriers and Support

Federal Barriers

SWD have a right to free public and secondary education at the federal level due to the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (Yates, n.d.). However, although students without documentation have guaranteed free public primary and secondary education, these students have limited opportunities to obtain higher education (Yates, n.d.) due to a lack of financial support and federal, state, and institutional policy barriers (Gonzales, 2007).

About 11.3 million people without documentation have lived in the U.S since 2008 (Bjorklund, 2018). In 2012, former President Barack Obama signed an executive order known as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Benuto et al., 2018). DACA provided 2-year administrative relief from deportation and eligibility for a work permit to undocumented immigrants who met restrictions (Benuto et al., 2018). People without documentation need

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comprehensive immigration reform because DACA provides temporary relief from some restrictions, and beneficiaries are not eligible for important programs such as health insurance (Gómez et al., 2017). People who do not qualify for the DACA program do not receive temporary relief from the systemic barriers due to their status.

Although there is currently no single U.S. legislation that forbids the enrollment of SWD, there are laws that prevent students from accessing in-state tuition rates and remove access to federal financial aid (Stuckey, n.d). According to Yates (n.d), immigration status determines eligibility for federal financial aid because federal law authorizes postsecondary educational institutions to deny in-state tuition to SWD. For this reason, lack of legal status excludes them from most state and federal financial aid programs (Thangasamy & Horan, 2016).

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), states that democratic and republicans have been working to find a path for unauthorized immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2019). For SWD to have continued access and support from higher education institutions, federal, state, and educational institutions must commit to creating infrastructure and policies inclusive for students regardless of their immigration status (Zong & Batalova, 2019). A long-term solution at the federal level for SWD with or without DACA protection is comprehensive immigration reform (Gómez et al., 2017).

State Barriers

Policies at the state level can either actively support SWD to access higher education or create roadblocks to prevent access, such as excluding SWD from in-state tuition. According to Benuto et al. (2018), 21 states have passed in-state tuition policies for students without documentation, and at least six states allow students to receive state financial aid. Although many institutions do not allow in-state tuition for SWD, states have many incentives to allow in-

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state tuition, such as economic incentives (Benuto et al., 2018). Benuto et al. (2018) stated, "providing in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants includes increasing college enrollment, which may increase the state's wealth and increase high school graduation rates for minorities" (p. 272). In other words, allowing in-state tuition has many benefits for the economy and educational outcomes.

Additionally, Stuckey (n.d) states that "undocumented students are 49 percent less likely to graduate in states that deny them in-state rate tuition (IRT)" (p. 4). Furthermore, providing in-state resident tuition to SWD increases the completion of associate's degrees and higher enrollment in higher education institutions (Stuckey, n.d). Yates (n.d.) explains the impacts of denying access to in-state tuition:

Denying in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants, the United States government denies these young adults, some of whom have lived most of their lives in the United States and intend to remain in the United States, the opportunity to attend college and enjoy the upward mobility that higher education affords. (p. 586)

In other words, denying students who have lived here a major part of their lives the opportunity to pay in-state tuition is marginalizing this group because students denied in-state tuition rates would likely not be able to afford higher education since they are being priced out by being charged out-of-state tuition due to a policy. Overall, providing in-state tuition to SWD is a significant step.

Benuto et al. (2018) suggest reforms beyond providing in-state tuition, such as early educational interventions to prepare immigrant parents and children for the barriers to navigating higher education. In addition, faculty mentors, well-versed in immigration policy, help "minimize institutional barriers and facilitate connections to resources" (p. 273). In other words,

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educational interventions are an additional step besides in-state tuition that can support the educational outcomes of SWD. Summarizing these findings, it is evident that in-state tuition provides a greater opportunity for SWD to access more affordable higher education. However, additional support beyond state tuition, such as educational interventions, would greatly benefit SWD.

Institutional Barriers and Institutional Support

Valadez (2021) stated there is prior research that has established that students without documentation experience structural marginalization, which impacts their access, retention, and success in higher education. Valadez (2021) examined the academic engagement of students without documentation and the impact of legal vulnerability, campus climate, and resources on student success. Valadez (2021) collected survey data from 1,277 undergraduate students attending California 4-year public universities without documentation. The study found that SWD greatly benefit from services because access to support improves academic engagement (Valadez et al., 2012). Additionally, it is critical to have personnel who understand the challenges and needs of SWD to help them better navigate institutional obstacles, which will create opportunities for educational engagement (Valadez et al., 2021). Valadez et al. (2021) explain that the campus environment plays a vital role in fostering the academic engagement of students without documentation.

Another critical factor for SWD to successfully navigate higher education barriers is the support from educational professionals in their institutions. Higher education professionals are critical to the academic success of students without documentation, as their access to higher education is heavily dependent on interpreting and navigating policies (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Hoy and Nguyen (2021) stated:

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These professionals' accounts represent resilience, sacrifice, and selflessness to persist and seek resolution for their students despite the uncertainty. They embody their social justice mission by understanding their students' unique needs because of historical oppression. Their accounts provide perspectives and examples of daily challenges as professionals. (p. 1165)

More specifically, Hoy & Nguyen (2021) explain that educational professionals face many challenges in supporting SWD, such as difficulties with outreach to students and families. Especially because institutions often do not disclose their policy and do not provide flyers, pamphlets, or even websites to help direct DACA recipients to seek specific benefits, such as financial aid (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Students learn about the benefits they are eligible for in each institution through word of mouth, and for this reason, navigation from higher education professionals is critical (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Institutions can support SWD as they navigate federal, state, and institutional barriers by providing trained educational professionals who understand students' experiences and help them navigate resources and seek support.

Students who could access higher education had to find multiple ways to afford it by working, obtaining scholarships, and depending on family contributions, which presented students with many barriers and created anxiety for SWD (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d). Additionally, students used strategies to afford their education, such as taking fewer classes and opting for community colleges instead of 4-year universities (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d). Community colleges are the most accessible financially for SWD; even when students prefer to go and are accepted to a university Community college, unfortunately, they are priced out of that option (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d).

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SWD are constantly in limbo as they navigate higher education due to ever-changing policies that cause unprecedented barriers. For example, in 2011, in the state of Indiana 2011, the state legislature passed HB 1402. This anti-immigration legislation prevented SWD from benefiting from in-state resident tuition (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). This legislation further marginalized SWD from accessing affordable higher education. Hoy & Nguyen (2019) state that students' "tuition tripled to US\$30,200.00 from the then-in-state rate of US\$8,750.00" (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019, p. 6). Educational professionals must understand students' unique needs and experiences because of the historical oppression they have endured as they navigate policies that actively prevent them from accessing and thriving in higher education institutions (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). Further, the authors explain that there is not much research on the experiences of educational professionals who advocate for and support SWD as they navigate policies that continue to change (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021).

Gómez et al. (2017) suggest that higher education institutions must support and be inclusive of SWD by providing access to resources and opportunities that help them succeed in higher education. Furthermore, Valadez et al. (2021) suggest that institutions dedicate additional resources to expand student services since there continues to be an increase in the enrollment of students without documentation. Higher education institutions can support SWD by creating an inclusive campus climate and professional development for education professionals supporting SWD.

Social Factors

Social Capital

Stuckey (n.d) explains how social capital theory analyzes access to resources. When a group does not have access to resources, its social capital depends on how the individual

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navigates relationships that connect them to the necessary capital. Further, Stuckey (n.d) explains relationships from social networks are built upon trust, information, and focus on the collective good over individual desires. The concept of social capital is critical to understanding how SWD can access higher education.

Stuckey (n.d) describes an example of a way SWD can leverage their social capital by participating in informal financial systems because traditional systems of financial lending may be inaccessible. An example Stuckey (n.d) outlines of an informal financial source is a Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). Stuckey (n.d) states:

A successful ROSCA requires committed individuals who contribute monthly and are organized among friends, family, and trusted community members. In addition, all participants must be trustworthy and reliable (Macias, 2018). Funds are either distributed based on a rotation calendar or as a line of credit to be accessed when needed. By participating in ROSCAS, each member has access to more resources together than may be available individually. (p. 5)

Essentially, ROSCAs demonstrate one of the ways SWD can exemplify the ways in which SWD and their communities work together to leverage their social capital and responsibly help each other address financial barriers due to their status (Stuckey, n.d). Essentially, SWD greatly benefit from building social relationships and combining resources as needed.

Building social networks in school can also help SWD feel a sense of belonging and help them find the information they need to continue their education. DREAMers often come from mixed-status or undocumented immigrant families, which may cause additional barriers to getting support outside of school. For this reason, social capital and finding a network in school

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are crucial to the success of DREAMers. In addition to social capital, SWD are often first-generation students with forms of cultural capital (Gildersleeve et al., 2019).

According to Gildersleeve et al. (2019), cultural capital is the "knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages a person has that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar environment in which he or she can succeed easily" (p. 7). Although SWD can benefit from some forms of their cultural wealth, a lack of social capital or support to assist them in navigating educational pathways can cause them to face major barriers and difficulties negotiating their way through college (Gildersleeve et al., 2019). Leveraging their social capital is one of the critical ways SWD can try to navigate difficult situations, such as challenges to meet their financial, emotional, and educational needs. Seeking informal social networks and support is an important strategy SWD can use to navigate higher education institutions. Although Stuckey (n.d) explains that the literature surrounding SWD has focused largely on the financial, emotional, and legal barriers they face, there has been an increasing shift to addressing how social capital available to them has helped them overcome the financial, legal, and emotional barriers.

Misconceptions and Invisibility

According to Gámez et al. (2017), the DACA program increased access to colleges and universities. However, DACA fails to offer students access to necessary resources to successfully navigate higher education, such as permanent legal status and access to healthcare (Gámez et al., 2017). DACA is not sufficient to support SWD in postsecondary education, and it is a misconception that DACA is a solution to supporting SWD.

Another misconception is that SWD are Latino only because most studies discuss the experiences of Latino students. However, Chan (n.d) states that "countries with the highest

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number of undocumented immigrants are, not surprisingly, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Many undocumented immigrants also come from the Philippines, China, and Korea" (p. 1).

Although people without documentation come from many countries, Benuto et al. (2018) explain that in 2017 "immigrants from Mexico comprised the largest portion of both accepted initial and renewal DACA applications, with over 648,000 active DACA recipients from Mexico, compared with El Salvador, the second largest county source, with 25,900 active DACA recipients" (p. 273). In other words, immigrants from Mexico were the largest demographic to benefit from the DACA program initially.

Consequently, Chan (n.d) explains that there is a misconception that people without documentation are typically Latino; however, one in six Filipino immigrants and one in four Korean immigrants are undocumented. Non-Latino people face isolation due to the invisibility of their immigration status because of the idea that it is only a Latino issue (Chan, n.d, p.30). It is critical to be aware of misconceptions about SWD because these myths can further isolate and create invisibility.

Gildersleeve et al. (2010) explain how invisibility due to immigration status can impact people's everyday life:

National media and political discourse often characterize undocumented immigrants as living in the shadows or underground. Although these images may be accurate, they should be tempered by recognizing that although undocumented students' struggles to persist through higher education can often involve a shadowed or underground dimension, they have and continue to participate in the life of their campus. (p. 6)

Although SWD may be perceived as anonymous or students who are hiding due to their status, the reality is that they have been and continue to be part of campus communities. Further,

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Gildersleeve et al. (2019) urge educational professionals to be aware of the barriers SWD face in their everyday lives. The lack of varied access to necessary resources and social programs, such as healthcare, can impact their mental health and overall well-being.

Mental Health

A growing body of literature describes the social and emotional factors that impact the lives and well-being of people without documentation. Gámez et al. (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with former or current students without documentation that suggest mentors, individual resiliency, and the ganas, or the drive to succeed, impact students' navigation strategies in higher education. In other words, the ganas, or drive to overcome barriers that have marginalized SWD, can be stronger than resiliency and be a sense of determination despite the many obstacles they face.

Benuto et al. (2018) explain all the potential disadvantages that can occur from being undocumented such as "the risk of economic hardship and psychological distress, including chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and substance." (p.260).

In addition, Benuto et al. (2018) explain:

Stress imposed by immigration status (i.e., depression, anxiety), intervention efforts should also include culturally relevant assessment...so that those in need of behavioral health services can obtain them as adolescence represents a critical time in a person's life highlighting the needs for reforms for ethnic minorities. (p.273)

In other words, SWD need culturally relevant assessments for intervention efforts that will support them with the stressors caused by their immigration status. To summarize these findings, emerging research has explored the psychological and emotional challenges while accessing higher education, yet few studies have specifically investigated the factors that facilitate success

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once admitted (Gómez et al., 2017). For this reason, it is essential to acknowledge how the everyday stress of navigating life as a SWD can impact their well-being and affect their academic outcomes.

Gaps in Knowledge

The assumption of most researchers documenting the experiences of SWD is that these students are often marginalized and excluded from access to higher education and critical resources. Further, the state-federal and state policies keep changing, making it difficult to support SWD as educational professionals. DACA has allowed for the visibility of students pursuing higher education, but there is not enough research addressing the needs of this group of students. It is challenging to research SWD due to difficulties in identifying people's immigration status. Further, because SWD are vulnerable when stating their immigration status, many decide not to disclose this information due to fear of deportation. Another challenge is that when research is conducted, it is done by people who do not relate to the topic under investigation.

A breakthrough research study (Salazar, 2021) explores Participatory Action Research (PAR), including people directly affected by the phenomenon under investigation. Salazar (2021) identifies the need for participatory action research and research focused on undocumented communities conducted by inside researchers who can relate to the topic under investigation. Salazar (2021) states

Only a few higher education scholars have conducted PAR studies and worked closely with members of the community they are investigating as co-researchers in all aspects of the research process. Within the higher education field, community-based research projects are more common than PAR, and while both methodologies are critical and

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transformative, the main difference is the role that inside researchers assume throughout the investigation. (p. 4)

Although PAR is a significant first step to gaining more insight into the experiences of SWD, it does not fully address other ways to support SWD.

The literature about SWD acknowledges the social, legal, and institutional barriers. Still, there is not enough qualitative research to offer concrete solutions or feasible suggestions and recommendations that can be implemented to create a direct impact. Most recommendations in the current literature are too abstract and do not provide a roadmap on how to support SWD navigating higher education institutions. Overall, there is limited research on how institutions can support SWD.

Salazar (2021) explains that research can profoundly impact identifying ways to support SWD and suggests Participatory Action Research because this type of research brings together theory and practice and seeks to find practical and evidence-based solutions to inequalities and problems faced by marginalized communities. Researchers should consider PAR to find practical solutions for SWD (Salazar, 2021). Even though there is a growing body of literature describing students' experiences, it is limited due to the nature of researching a group that is difficult to identify. Additionally, many articles available provide vague solutions and do not provide a strong plan going forward to fix the problem.

Although there is a growing body of literature describing people's experiences of SWD navigating barriers to access and successfully navigate higher education, there are not a lot of open state-wide resources available to help DREAMers navigate higher education. Often, students do not feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status to their advisors or other school officials because of the legal vulnerability associated with disclosing that private

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information. DACA provides temporary relief from some restrictions, but beneficiaries of the program are not eligible for essential programs such as health insurance (Gómez et al., 2017). On the other hand, students who did not qualify for the DACA program do not receive temporary relief from institutional barriers due to their status. For this reason, state-wide action-oriented resources that describe the problem and clear pathways for SWD to navigate higher education are critical. Finally, a long-term solution at the federal level for SWD to access and navigate higher education successfully with or without DACA protection is comprehensive immigration reform (Gómez et al., 2017).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In recent years, the undocumented community has been at the forefront of political debates due to federal court rulings and efforts to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, an executive order intended to protect undocumented youth from deportation and mitigate the negative impact of their undocumented status (Benuto et al., 2018). About 11.3 million undocumented people have lived in the U.S since 2008 (Bjorklund, 2018), and according to Benuto et al. (2018), about 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants live in the United States with a growing median length of residence that continues to grow, which suggests that many undocumented immigrants consider immigrating to the United States a long-term decision. Unfortunately, undocumented legal status can impact the education and all aspects of the well-being of a person without documentation (Benuto et al., 2018). Furthermore, Benuto et al. (2018) explain that undocumented youth are affected by their legal status in their ability and their decision to finish high school or to apply to college (Benuto et al., 2018).

Every year about 98,000 high school SWD graduate (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Although SWDes are guaranteed free public primary and secondary education due to the Supreme Court decision Plyler v. Doe (Yates, n.d.), unfortunately, many will not have access to higher education due to a lack of financial support and federal, state, and institutional policy barriers (Gonzales, 2007). According to the Immigration Policy Center, about 65,000 undocumented children who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high school each year (Gonzales 2007). Due to barriers to accessing higher education, only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high-school graduates go to college (Gonzales, 2007).

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The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) explains that democratic and republicans have been working to find a path for unauthorized immigrants the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) enacted in 2009 by the Obama Administration is a temporary solution that provides relief from deportation and work authorization to about 680,000 eligible DREAMers (Zong and Batalova, 2019). However, the Trump Administration did not accept any new applications for DREAMers who would have qualified for the program, making many of the 98,000 DREAMers graduating high school ineligible for temporary relief from deportation and work authorization after graduation (Zong and Batalova, 2019).

In order for SWD to have continued access and support from higher education institutions, federal, state, and educational institutions must commit to creating infrastructure and policies inclusive of students regardless of their immigration status (Zong and Batalova, 2019). There is a growing body of literature highlighting the barriers SWD face due to federal, state, and institutional policy, but more research is needed to identify how to best support SWD navigating higher education institutions. Further, Gámez et al. (2017) state there is a growing body of literature that illustrates the hardships students without documentation experience, such as severe stress from legal uncertainty and a lack of access to resources and employment. According to Hoy et al. (2021), there is little research on the experiences of educational professionals advocating for SWD as they navigate policy barriers. Overall, SWD face a wider variety of systemic and institutional barriers, which make it difficult to find support systems while navigating higher education.

My Professional Project

My professional project aims to conduct research and develop an educational framework for people to learn about SWD and better support them in their educational endeavors. It will

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explore and identify gaps in past literature regarding the federal, state, and institutional barriers that impact access to higher education institutions for SWD. The project will analyze previously conducted research and compiled previous literature in order to provide the necessary context. This article draft is based on other research in current literature rather than first-hand data collection.

As a result of developing a draft of an article for my professional project, I hope to support, uplift and create visibility for the undocu plus community. Additionally, I hope to encourage people who do identify with this community to get involved in research to find solutions for people without documentation seeking higher education. This is a call to action for policymakers and educational professionals to provide more pathways for SWD by providing an educational framework. In order to do this, the current project will identify the federal, state, and institutional barriers SWD face to access and succeed in higher education institutions. The draft of the article will include an action plan on ways to support SWD.

Lastly, this project will contribute to the second InTASC standard by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2013), “The teacher uses understanding of learners’ commonalities and individual differences within and across diverse communities to design inclusive learning experiences that enable each learner to meet high standards” (p.19). Essentially, educational professionals can support SWD by acknowledging the diverse experiences of these students and taking steps to address their educational needs.

The Significance of the Professional Project

In a time when DREAMers have become central to conversations around immigration after the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was rescinded, the uncertainty of the program has caused and continues to cause a lot of anxiety for DREAMers planning to attend

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higher education or join the workforce (Zong & Batalova, 2019). This project will have a tremendous emotional impact for me and so many others in our community because this research directly impacts graduation outcomes and creates visibility to this critical issue.

Often, students do not feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status to their advisors or other school officials because of the legal vulnerability associated with disclosing their immigration status. This article will serve as a resource for DREAMers and outline best practices to best support students for people dedicated to supporting SWD, such as educational professionals and other stakeholders. Providing the sociopolitical context necessary to understand the nuanced barriers for SWD is a critical step in beginning to find ways to support SWD in higher education institutions and high school students with the goal of improving graduation outcomes.

Methodology

Phase I

For this professional project, I sought to research and find relevant information about the obstacles SWD face in accessing and navigating higher education institutions. To find relevant literature, I used two different search engines to find fourteen academic articles discussing the barriers students without documentation face in higher education. First, I accessed the Wayne & Lynn Hamersly Library database through my student portal. I then selected the Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) database through Wayne & Lynn Hamersly Library website to find relevant literature. The first search phrase was undocumented students in higher education, which resulted in seventy-two results. I then added the word barriers to the search engine, and I received zero results.

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I emailed a person who had created a resource project for the undocu plus community, about the lack of scholarly articles in the EBSCO database. This person recommended I use the google scholar search engine. I then searched academic articles using the google scholar search engine. I searched the phrase undocumented students in higher education, resulting in one hundred and five thousand results. The articles I found in the google scholar search engine discussed barriers for undocumented students, and I saved many articles from this search engine. Further, the articles I found addressed the lack of empirical research and scholarly articles about the experiences of SWD. Overall, I used thirteen articles discussing obstacles students without documentation face in higher education from the EBSCO database and google scholar search engine.

Phase II

I found some literature that addressed the experiences of students without documentation navigating higher education. I then began documenting emerging themes in literature. The emerging themes were mental health, social factors, immigration policy, and federal, state, and institutional policies. I began focusing on these themes as I continued searching for relevant literature.

Phase III

After reviewing the literature, I visited the Oregon Department of Education website for information about undocumented students. I searched the term undocumented students in the Oregon Department of Education main page and received seven hundred and forty-four results. The first result was a toolkit titled DACAdmented/Undocumented Toolkit. The toolkit had six tabs with relevant information. The first tab lists background information on DACA. The focus of this page is on the DACA program and does not mention students without documentation

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outside of the DACA program. The draft of the article will include an action plan because the Oregon Department of Education has an action plan tab, but when selected, it says coming soon. Furthermore, two out of the six tabs titled Action Guide and Civil Rights/First Amendment Educator Resources have no information and have a coming soon statement. For this reason, I would like to provide an action plan that is relevant and informed by existing research.

The tab titled Policy and Best Practice Considerations, however, does mention DACA and undocumented students. This tab has six articles and four Supporting Resources in English and Spanish. After navigating this site, I realized it does not provide a wider sociopolitical context and the information is brief and the site does not seem to be routinely updated as policies change. After reviewing the literature to understand the nuances and complexities of students' status and how that impacts their access to higher education, the toolkit by ODE does not provide a more general context regarding SWD. Additionally, many of the responses appear to be due to the DACA program being rescinded by the Trump Administration, and the information has not been updated since.

Finally, there is relevant information in the resource links about students without documentation and access to higher education. However, the information is more general and does not explain the impacts these policies can have on students as people and as students pursuing or navigating higher education. I then reviewed the site once again, this time from the perspective of an educational professional. Navigating the site for people who do not already understand the policies impacting students without documentation can be confusing and overwhelming because there is a focus on one group, students who are DACAmented

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Phase IV

Keeping in mind MSED goals, relevant literature, and ODE's resources, I began brainstorming ideas for an article that can serve as a broader context for educational professionals. Before I began crafting the article, I searched for different journals that would have articles that focus on supporting diverse students in Oregon. The ORTESOL journal was the best journal in the state of Oregon that would address my intended audience.

Phase X

My goal is to publish the article in the ORTESOL journal. My first step in creating my article is to create an outline of the article. After creating the outline for my article, I added relevant literature and statistics from the literature review. I also included information from the Oregon Department of Education. I received initial support from the writing center to craft my articles. My committee provided and will continue to provide suggestions for my article throughout the project implementation process.

CHAPTER 4: ARTICLE DRAFT

Chapter 4 contains a draft of an article, which became my professional project. While still in draft form, I plan to submit the article for publication as I polish and update it with relevant policy changes and literature in order to continue creating frameworks for working with SWD.

**STUDENTS WITHOUT DOCUMENTATION:
CONTEXT AND SOLUTIONS TO NAVIGATING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Abstract

About 11.5 million people without documentation live in the United States, and immigration status can greatly impact the educational outcomes and the well-being of a student without documentation (SWD) (Benuto et al., 2018). According to the Immigration Policy Center, about 65,000 children without documentation who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high school each year (Gonzales, 2007). Due to barriers, only between 5 and 10 percent of high school graduates without documentation go to college (Gonzales, 2007). This paper will explore and identify gaps in past literature regarding the federal, state, and institutional barriers that impact access to higher education institutions for SWD. By exploring the benefits of social capital and other factors, such as systemic barriers, mental health, misconceptions, and invisibility, the importance of a long-term solution at the federal level for immigration reform to increase access to higher education institutions for students without documentation will be emphasized. This article is a call to action for policymakers and educational professionals to provide more pathways for students without documentation. It also provides the necessary context and information to understand the needs of SWD as they navigate ever-changing policies in educational institutions.

Keywords: immigration, students without documentation, DACA, DREAMers, higher education.

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Students Without Documentation: Context and Solutions to Navigating Systemic Barriers in Higher Education

In recent years, the undocumented community has been at the forefront of political debates due to federal court rulings and efforts to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, an executive order intended to protect undocumented youth from deportation and the negative impacts due to their immigration status (Benuto et al., 2018). About 11.3 million undocumented people have lived in the U.S since 2008 (Bjorklund, 2018), and according to Benuto et al. (2018), about 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants live in the United States with a growing length of residence, which means there is an increase in immigration to the United States as a long-term decision. Unfortunately, undocumented legal status can impact the education and all aspects of the well-being of a person without documentation (Benuto et al., 2018).

In 2012, former President Barack Obama signed an executive order known as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Benuto et al., 2018). Undocumented students need comprehensive immigration reform because DACA is not a long-term solution; it is a temporary relief from some restrictions. However, beneficiaries are not eligible for important programs such as health insurance (Gámez et al., 2017). Beneficiaries of the DACA program are often referred to as DREAMers or as DACAmented, which is a phrase to describe people with the temporary protection of the DACA program. People who do not qualify for the DACA program do not receive temporary relief from the systemic barriers due to their immigration status. This article aims to provide information about barriers for SWD navigating higher education. Further, the article suggests ways to support SWD informed by past literature. Lastly,

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this article concludes with an action plan for educational professionals and relevant ways to advocate and communicate with SWD to help them thrive in higher education and life.

Terminology

The terminology to refer to students without documentation has shifted throughout time. Students without documentation have been referred to with terms such as undocumented, DREAMers, DACAmented, if they qualify for the program, and undocu plus. There is terminology that is harmful to the undocu plus community, such as the term illegal. Other terms that do not use people-first language may also be harmful, such as undocumented student versus student without documentation. Using person-first language is important to validate identity and is affirming in nature.

For this article, I will be referring to students under the DACA program or other temporary protection and people without temporary protected status as students without documentation (SWD). I will be referring to the community of people without documentation with varying immigration statuses as the undocu plus community, which is an umbrella term that allows anonymity to people who do not want to disclose their specific immigration status. The term undocu plus is commonly used in spaces that support this group, but there is no information on who coined the term. People who identify as part of the undocu plus community may be associated with the following statuses: have temporary protected immigration status, may be without documentation, or may be in-between status. Additionally, they may have a parent/s or guardian/s who are without documentation or are DACAmented, which means they are under temporary protection and do not have documentation.

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Immigration and Policy Context

About 11.3 million people without documentation have lived in the U.S. since 2008 (Bjorklund, 2018). The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) explains that Democrats and Republicans have been working to find a path for people without documentation. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) enacted in 2012 by the Obama Administration is a temporary solution that provides relief from deportation and work authorization to about 680,000 people without documentation (Zong & Batalova, 2019). The DACA program was broadly modeled on DREAM legislation, which was not enacted into law (Zong & Batalova, 2019). According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), Democrats and Republicans have been working to find a path for unauthorized immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

More recently, the Trump administration rescinded the DACA program and did not accept any new applications for people without documentation who would have qualified for the program, making many of the 98,000 students without documentation graduating high school ineligible for DACA and consequently did not benefit from temporary relief from deportation and a work authorization after graduation (Zong & Batalova, 2019). According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), Democrats and Republicans have been working to find a path for unauthorized immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2019). There has not been a long-term solution for people without documentation, and the ongoing legal battles over the existence of the DACA program causing stress and anxiety for those who have benefitted from the temporary relief of the program

Furthermore, people who do not benefit from the DACA program due to not meeting all eligibility requirements are referred to as DREAMers. Without temporary protection from the DACA program, they are vulnerable to arrest and removal (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Alarming,

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for years, there has not been a fresh estimate for people without documentation without DACA protections who graduate high school (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

In order for SWD to have continued access and support from higher education institutions, federal, state, and educational institutions must commit to creating infrastructure and policies inclusive of students regardless of their immigration status (Zong & Batalova, 2019). There is a growing body of literature highlighting the barriers SWD face due to federal, state, and institutional policy, but more research is needed to identify how to best support SWD navigating higher education institutions. SWD face a wider variety of systemic and institutional barriers, which make it difficult to find support systems while navigating higher education.

How Immigration Status Impacts Educational Outcomes

Federal Barriers

Students without status are guaranteed free public primary and secondary education due to the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (Yates, n.d.). Unfortunately, many will not have access to higher education due to a lack of financial support and federal, state, and institutional policy barriers (Gonzales, 2007). Due to barriers to accessing higher education, only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high-school graduates go to college (Gonzales, 2007). Furthermore, youth without documentation are affected by their legal status in their ability and their decision to finish high school or to apply to college (Benuto et al., 2018). SWD have limited opportunities to obtain higher education (Yates, n.d.) due to a lack of financial support and federal, state, and institutional policy barriers (Gonzales, 2007). A long-term solution at the federal level for students in the undocu plus community would be comprehensive immigration reform (Gámez et al., 2017). SWD need comprehensive immigration reform because DACA provides temporary relief from some restrictions, and beneficiaries are not eligible for important

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programs such as health insurance (Gómez et al., 2017). Students who do not qualify for the DACA program do not receive temporary relief from the systemic barriers due to their status.

Although there is currently no single U.S. legislation that forbids the enrollment of SWD, there are laws that prevent students from accessing in-state tuition rates and remove access to federal financial aid (Stuckey, n.d). According to Yates (n.d), immigration status determines eligibility for federal financial aid because federal law authorizes postsecondary educational institutions to deny in-state tuition to SWD. For this reason, lack of legal status excludes them from most state and federal financial aid programs (Thangasamy & Horan, 2016).

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) states that democrats and republicans have been working to find a path for unauthorized immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2019). A long-term solution at the federal level for SWD with or without DACA protection is comprehensive immigration reform (Gómez et al., 2017). Continued access to higher education for people regardless of status requires collaborative efforts from higher education institutions, federal, state, and educational institutions to commit to creating infrastructure and policies inclusive of students regardless of their immigration status (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

State Barriers

Policies at the state level can either actively support SWD to be able to access higher education or create roadblocks to prevent access, such as excluding them from in-state tuition. According to Benuto et al. (2018), 21 states have passed in-state tuition policies for SWD, and at least six states allow students to receive state financial aid. Although many institutions do not allow in-state tuition for people without documentation, states have many incentives to allow in-state tuition, such as economic incentives (Benuto et al., 2018). Benuto et al. (2018) stated, "providing in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants includes increasing college enrollment,

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which may increase the state's wealth and increase high school graduation rates for minorities" (p. 272). In other words, allowing in-state tuition has many benefits for the economy and educational outcomes.

Additionally, students who lack documentation are denied in-state tuition and often do not graduate (Stuckey, n.d). In contrast, providing in-state resident tuition to SWD increases the completion of associate's degrees and higher enrollment in higher education institutions (Stuckey, n.d). Yates (n.d.) explains the impacts of denying SWD access to in-state tuition:

Denying in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants, the United States government denies these young adults, some of whom have lived most of their lives in the United States and intend to remain in the United States, the opportunity to attend college and enjoy the upward mobility that higher education affords. (p. 586).

In other words, denying students who have lived here a major part of their lives the opportunity to pay in-state tuition is marginalizing this group because students denied in-state tuition rates would likely not be able to afford higher education since they are being priced out by being charged out-of-state tuition due to a policy.

Institutional Barriers and Institutional Support

Valadez (2021) stated there is prior research that has established that SWD experience structural marginalization, which impacts their access, retention, and success in higher education. A critical factor for SWD to successfully navigate higher education barriers is the support from educational professionals in their institutions. Higher education professionals are key to the academic success of SWD, as their access to higher education is heavily dependent on interpreting and navigating policies (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Hoy and Nguyen (2021) stated:

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These professionals' accounts represent resilience, sacrifice, and selflessness to persist and seek resolution for their students despite the uncertainty. They embody their social justice mission by understanding their students' unique needs because of historical oppression. Their accounts provide perspectives and examples of daily challenges as professionals. (p. 1165)

Essentially, there are not enough trained personnel at higher education institutions, and when there are folks who are passionate about supporting SWD, they get overloaded and overwhelmed with questions from their colleagues and become the point person, which can become burdensome. More specifically, Hoy and Nguyen (2021) explain that educational professionals face many challenges in supporting SWD, such as difficulties with outreach to students and families. Especially because institutions often do not disclose their policy and do not provide flyers, pamphlets, or even websites to help direct DACA recipients to seek specific benefits, such as financial aid (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Students learn about the benefits they are eligible for in each institution through word of mouth, and for this reason, navigation from higher education professionals is critical (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021).

SWD are constantly in limbo as they navigate higher education due to ever-changing policies that cause unprecedented barriers. For example, in 2011, in the state of Indiana, the state legislature passed HB 1402. This anti-immigration legislation prevented SWD from benefiting from in-state resident tuition (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). This legislation further marginalized people without documentation from accessing affordable higher education. Hoy and Nguyen (2019) state that students' tuition tripled to slightly more than thirty thousand dollars from the then-in-state rate of eight thousand (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019).

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SWD who could access higher education had to find multiple ways to afford it by working, obtaining scholarships, and depending on family contributions, which presented students with many barriers and created anxiety for students (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d). Additionally, students used strategies to afford their education, such as taking fewer classes and opting for community colleges instead of 4-year universities (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d). Community colleges are the most accessible financially for SWD; even when students prefer to go and are accepted to a university, unfortunately, they are priced out of that option (Diaz-Strong et al., n.d).

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Social Capital

Stuckey (n.d) explains how social capital theory analyzes access to resources. When a group does not have access to resources, its social capital depends on how the individual navigates relationships that connect them to the necessary capital. Further, Stuckey (n.d) explains that relationships from social networks are built upon trust, information, and focus on the collective good over individual desires. The concept of social capital is critical to understanding how SWD can access higher education.

Stuckey (n.d) describes an example of a way SWD can leverage their social capital by participating in informal financial systems because traditional systems of financial lending may be inaccessible. An example Stuckey (n.d) outlines of an informal financial source is a Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). Stuckey (n.d) states:

A successful ROSCA requires committed individuals who contribute monthly and are organized among friends, family, and trusted community members...a line of credit to be accessed when needed” (p. 5). Essentially, ROSCAs demonstrate one of the ways SWD

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can exemplify the ways in which SWD and their communities work together to leverage their social capital and responsibly help each other address financial barriers due to their status (Stuckey, n.d).

Essentially, SWD greatly benefit from building social relationships and combining resources as needed. Building social networks in school can also help SWD feel a sense of belonging and help them find the information they need to continue their education. SWD often come from mixed-status or undocumented immigrant families, which may cause additional barriers to getting support outside of school. For this reason, social capital and finding a network in school are crucial to the success of SWD. In addition to social capital, SWD are often first-generation students with forms of cultural capital (Gildersleeve et al., 2019).

According to Gildersleeve et al. (2019), cultural capital is the "knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages a person has that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar environment in which he or she can succeed easily" (p. 7). Although SWD can benefit from some forms of their cultural wealth, a lack of social capital or support to assist them in navigating educational pathways can cause them to face major barriers and difficulties negotiating their way through college (Gildersleeve et al., 2019). Leveraging their social capital is one of the critical ways SWD can try to navigate difficult situations, such as challenges to meet their financial, emotional, and educational needs. Seeking informal social networks and support is an important strategy SWD can use to navigate higher education institutions. Although Stuckey (n.d) explains that the literature surrounding SWD has focused largely on the financial, emotional, and legal barriers they face, there has been an increasing shift to addressing how social capital available to them has helped them overcome the financial, legal, and emotional barriers.

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Misconceptions and Invisibility

According to Gámez et al. (2017), the DACA program increased access to colleges and universities. However, DACA fails to offer students access to necessary resources to successfully navigate higher education, such as permanent legal status and access to healthcare (Gámez et al., 2017). DACA is not sufficient to support SWD in postsecondary education, and it is a misconception that DACA is a solution to supporting SWD.

Another misconception is that SWD are Latino only because most studies discuss the experiences of Latino students. However, Chan (n.d) states that although "countries with the highest number of undocumented immigrants are, not surprisingly, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Many undocumented immigrants also come from the Philippines, China, and Korea" (p. 1). In other words, people without documentation come from many countries. However, Latinos are overrepresented in studies and are the largest demographic that were accepted in the DACA program, which creates the misconception that people without status are only Latino.

Benuto et al. (2018) explain that in 2017 "immigrants from Mexico comprised the largest portion of both accepted initial and renewal DACA applications, with over 648,000 active DACA recipients from Mexico, compared with El Salvador, the second largest county source, with 25,900 active DACA recipients" (p. 273). In other words, immigrants from Mexico were the largest demographic to benefit from the DACA program initially, but there are DACA recipients from other countries as well.

Consequently, Chan (n.d) explains that there is a misconception that SWD are typically Latino; however, one in six Filipino immigrants and one in four Korean immigrants are undocumented. Non-Latinx people without documentation face isolation due to the invisibility of their immigration status because of the idea that it is only a Latino issue (Chan, n.d, p.30). It is

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critical to be aware of misconceptions about SWD and the undocu plus community because these myths can further isolate and create invisibility.

Frequently, the media depicts people without documentation as living hidden away from society. The risks and legal vulnerabilities that come with disclosing their immigration status and lack of documentation fuels the perception that people without documentation want to remain anonymous, but this can become a misconception that fuels the perception of invisibility for the undocu plus community. Here is a piece of evidence from Gildersleeve et al. (2010) explaining how invisibility due to immigration status can impact the everyday life of SWD:

National media and political discourse often characterize undocumented immigrants as living in the shadows or underground. Although these images may be accurate, they should be tempered by recognizing that although undocumented students' struggles to persist through higher education can often involve a shadowed or underground dimension, they have and continue to participate in the life of their campus. (p. 6)

Although SWD may be perceived as anonymous or students who are hiding due to their status, the reality is that they have been and continue to be part of campus communities. Further, Gildersleeve et al. (2019) urge educational professionals to be aware of the barriers SWD face in their everyday lives. The lack of, or varied access to necessary resources and social programs, such as healthcare, can impact their mental health and overall well-being.

Mental Health

There are social and emotional factors that impact the lives and well-being of SWD. Gámez et al. conducted a semi-structured interview with former and current SWD that suggests mentors, individual resiliency, and the ganas, or the drive to succeed, impact students' navigation strategies in higher education (Gámez et al., 2017). In other words, the ganas, or drive to

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overcome barriers that have marginalized SWD can be stronger than resiliency and be a sense of determination despite the obstacles they face.

SWD face many roadblocks and disadvantages due to their status, ranging from economic hardships and mental health issues, which frequently include substance abuse, chronic stress, depression, and anxiety. (Benuto et al., 2018). Although research has explored the psychological and emotional challenges for SWD while accessing higher education, few studies have specifically investigated the factors that facilitate success once admitted (Gámez et al., 2017). For this reason, it is essential to acknowledge how the everyday stress of navigating life as a person SWD can impact the well-being of students enrolled in higher education institutions and impact their academic achievement.

Gaps in Knowledge

The assumption of most researchers documenting the experiences of SWD is that these students are often marginalized and excluded from access to higher education and critical resources. Further, the state-federal and state policies keep changing, making it difficult for educational professionals to support SWD students. DACA has allowed for the visibility of students pursuing higher education, but there is not enough research addressing the needs of this group of students. It is challenging to research SWD due to difficulties identifying their immigration status because of the legal vulnerability of disclosing their status, including fear of deportation. Another challenge is that when research is conducted, it is done by people who have not experienced living without documentation and, therefore, may not relate to the topic under investigation.

A breakthrough research study by Salazar (2021) explores Participatory Action Research (PAR), including people directly affected by the phenomenon under investigation. Salazar

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(2021) identifies the need for PAR and research focused on undocumented communities conducted by inside researchers who can relate to the topic under investigation. Although PAR is a significant first step to gaining more insight into the experiences of SWD, it does not fully address other ways to support these students.

The literature about SWD acknowledges the social, legal, and institutional barriers. Still, there is not enough qualitative research to offer concrete solutions or feasible suggestions and recommendations that can be implemented to create a direct impact. Most recommendations in the current literature are too abstract and do not provide a roadmap on how to support SWD navigating higher education institutions. Overall, there is limited research on how institutions can support SWD.

There is a growing body of literature describing students' experiences, but it is limited due to the nature of researching a group that is difficult to identify. This is because students do not feel comfortable disclosing their immigration status to their advisors or other school officials because of the legal vulnerability associated with disclosing that private information. Many articles available provide vague solutions and do not provide a strong plan going forward to fix the problem. There is also a gap in the literature since it does not address the barriers to accessing and successfully navigating higher education. Further, there are not a lot of open state-wide resources available to help SWD navigate higher education.

Further, the authors explain that there is not much research on the experiences of educational professionals who advocate for and support SWD as they navigate policies that continue to change (Hoy & Nguyen, 2021). Salazar (2021) explains that research can profoundly impact identifying ways to support SWD and suggests Participatory Action Research because this type of research brings together theory and practice and seeks to find practical and evidence-

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based solutions to inequalities and problems faced by marginalized communities. Researchers should consider PAR to find practical solutions for SWD (Salazar, 2021).

Action Plan

According to the Oregon Department of Education, “Many educators, counselors, and school leaders have expressed interest in learning how to better support all children so that they can achieve educational and economic success – regardless of actual or perceived immigration status” (n.d.). Although many have expressed an interest — it should be a commitment, a requirement. Educational professionals must understand students' unique needs and experiences because of the historical oppression they have endured as they navigate ever-changing policies that actively prevent them from accessing and thriving in higher education institutions (Hoy & Nguyen, 2019). A way educational professionals can support the educational success of SWD is by remembering the phrase: Advocate and Communicate to help students Thrive (ACT).

Advocate

As an educational professional, it is critical to advocate for SWD. An important step is to be a voice for SWD when making school-wide decisions and policies. Talk to SWD about how they are impacted by new or existing systems and advocate for initiatives that would be supportive and inclusive of them. Due to the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe*, which guaranteed free public primary and secondary education (Yates, n.d.), it is against the constitution to discriminate against students based on their immigration status. For this reason, schools should not require SWD to provide proof of status. However, at the postsecondary level, students may be required to include their social security number to enroll in the institution but states that offer tuition equity, which grants in-state tuition rates, typically allow SWD to enroll in their institution. Educational professionals should be knowledgeable on whether or not state

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law and the institution allow SWD to apply for their institution. One of the ways colleges and universities can estimate the number of SWD in their institution to assess resource needs, is to count students who applied for tuition equity, that is when a state provides in-state tuition.

Schools can create a more inclusive environment for students by creating resource centers to help them navigate higher education institution processes, such as enrolling in the institution or learning about how to receive financial aid or benefit from state support. The resource centers in higher education institutions can be housed under student services, multicultural centers, or academic support resource centers. It is important for people who work in the resource center to be educated about the barriers SWD face.

Oregon State University created a Dream Center to provide resources specific to SWD navigating higher education. Another step is to create a club for the undocu plus community. A club can create a sense of solidarity and community as well as a place to inform students on issues impacting the undocu plus community. Finally, schools can create undocu plus ally trainings for the school community to increase awareness of how to best support and create a welcoming and inclusive space for students in the classroom and on the school campus.

Advocacy at the state level to ensure in-state tuition is granted to SWD is a significant step. Additionally, Benuto et al. (2018) suggest reforms beyond providing in-state tuition, such as early educational interventions to prepare immigrant parents and children for the barriers to navigating higher education. In addition, ensuring faculty mentors are aware of immigration policy may help "minimize institutional barriers and facilitate connections to resources" (Benuto et al., 2018, p. 273). In other words, educational interventions are an additional step besides in-state tuition that may improve the educational outcomes for SWD.

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Communicate

The Oregon Department of Education has great resources for students and educational professionals in the state of Oregon, such as media materials to show solidarity with the undocu plus community and information on policy changes and their impact on students in the Undocu plus community. However, this is not updated on a regular basis, and you should seek other resources to ensure up-to-date information and solutions. Valadez et al. (2021) examined the academic engagement of SWD and the impact of legal vulnerability, campus climate, and resources on student success. Valadez et al. (2021) collected survey data from undergraduate SWD who were attending California 4-year public universities, and the study found that SWD greatly benefit from services because access to support improves academic engagement. Valdez et al. (2021) suggest the following steps to increase communication between SWD, educational professionals, and institutions:

1. Trained personnel who understand the challenges and needs of SWD to help them better navigate institutional obstacles, which will create opportunities for educational engagement (Valadez et al., 2021).
2. Valadez et al. (2021) explain that the campus environment plays a vital role in fostering the academic engagement of SWD.
3. Institutions can support SWD as they navigate federal, state, and institutional barriers by providing trained educational professionals who understand students' experiences and help them navigate resources and seek support.

Thrive

Supporting SWD increases educational outcomes, such as increasing high school graduation rates for minorities and increasing college enrollment; improving educational

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outcomes improves civic engagement and the economy (Benuto et al., 2018). Creating a campus climate impacts the success and sense of belonging for students to thrive in. Benuto et al. indicate there should be intervention efforts for SWD due to the stress they have endured because of their status. This could include culturally relevant assessment for SWD in need of behavioral health services (Benuto et al., 2018). SWD need culturally relevant assessments and intervention efforts that will support them with the stressors caused by their immigration status.

A critical stressor to consider is the national media and political discourse that perceives the undocu plus community as living in the shadows (Gildersleeve et al., 2010), which is a misconception as they actively form a part of their communities and everyday life. It is time to recognize the endless social, emotional, psychological, and economic struggles of the undocu plus community.

Overall, supporting SWD is about human rights; it is the responsibility of all educational professionals committed to supporting all students equitably. Gámez et al. (2017) suggest that higher education institutions must support and be inclusive of SWD by providing access to resources and opportunities that help them succeed in higher education. Moreover, Valadez et al. (2021) suggest that institutions dedicate additional resources to expand student services since there continues to be an increase in the enrollment of SWD. Higher education institutions can support SWD by creating an inclusive campus climate and professional development for education professionals supporting SWD.

Conclusion

This article aims to provide information about barriers for SWD navigating higher education. It's an educational framework for educational professionals to understand the socio-political context that creates barriers for SWD in higher education. Its aim is to make explicit the

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understanding of the complex sociopolitical climate that SWD face in education. It serves as an actionable plan for educational professionals. Further, the article suggests ways to support SWD informed by past literature. Means of support include but are not limited to advocacy at the institutional level, professional development to understand barriers SWD face, support understanding and navigating potential barriers, inclusivity, and awareness of the undocu plus community, including the great sociopolitical context and historic marginalization of the undocu plus community.

Future research on the experiences of SWD is a critical step to begin to understand the lived experiences of SWD at a larger scale. Although researching SWD may be difficult due to the legal vulnerabilities associated with disclosing information regarding their immigration status, it is imperative that more studies offer solutions for SWD navigating the higher education system. Additionally, PAR research can offer a clearer understanding of the experiences of SWD because the researcher will be able to identify with the unique experiences of SWD.

Lastly, this article concludes with an action plan for educational professionals along with relevant ways to advocate and communicate with SWD to help them thrive in higher education and in life. It is time to create equitable solutions for SWD who are in the constant limbo of immigration policy and form part of a community that has tirelessly advocated for comprehensible immigration reform. Creating a supportive environment in school is the first step in providing a safe space for SWD. Overall, increasing support systems and leveraging social capital is the key to helping SWD thrive in any educational endeavor they choose to embark on.

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION

My literature review focused on understanding the systemic barriers students without status (SWD) face in higher education. Through my investigation of existing literature that discusses the impact immigration status has on SWD, I learned about the policy and systemic barriers that make it difficult for SWD to pursue higher education. I am passionate about learning more about ways to support SWD in higher education because, through my involvement in advocacy for this community, I have seen the positive impacts of social and institutional support for SWD. The advocacy experiences that allowed me to get involved with the undocu plus community allowed me to have a clear perspective on issues and some of the solutions for SWD. My professional project is a draft of an article that I plan to publish as I continue my higher education journey. This article aims to provide information about barriers for SWD navigating higher education. Further, the article suggests ways to support SWD informed by past literature. Lastly, this article concludes with an action plan for educational professionals and relevant ways to advocate and communicate with SWD to help them thrive in higher education and life.

Connections With Literature Reviewed

Through the process of reading through existing literature, I learned more about the nuances and barriers that have impacted SWD from accessing or navigating higher education. Through my research, I learned more about the initiatives the state of Oregon has taken to support SWD. My article connected directly with the literature I reviewed because my article was informed by the literature I had reviewed. Importantly, my professional project added ideas beyond the literature I reviewed. One example is deciding what terminology to use on the draft of my article. I had to consider terminology in the existing literature. I made the decision to

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include a term that used people-first language to humanize the group I was discussing. The decision to use inclusive terminology is a way I am using my own voice to add to current literature and expand the conversation about SWD.

My project is similar to others because I am advocating for an underrepresented and underserved group of students. However, my project is unique in that I created a resource that also serves as a call to action for educational professionals and other stakeholders to actively support SWD. Providing the sociopolitical context necessary to understand the nuanced barriers for SWD is a critical step to begin to find ways to support SWD in higher education institutions and high school students with the goal of improving graduation outcomes.

Findings

As I navigated the Oregon Department of Education's webpage about SWD, I was surprised there was no information on two out of the six tabs available. I was also surprised that the background section has not been updated in recent years. It is concerning that the statewide resource to support DREAMers has not been updated and still has sections that need to be created. This finding aligns with the literature I reviewed because the literature highlights the lack of resources to support DREAMers.

A key finding is that although SWD are guaranteed free public primary and secondary education due to the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (Yates, n.d.), only between 5 and 10 percent of high-school graduates without documentation go to college (Gonzales, 2007). Furthermore, youth without documentation are affected by their legal status in their ability and their decision to finish high school or to apply to college (Benuto et al., 2018). SWD have limited opportunities to obtain higher education (Yates, n.d.) due to a lack of financial support and federal, state, and institutional policy barriers (Gonzales, 2007). A long-term solution at the

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federal level for students in the undocu plus community would be comprehensive immigration reform (Gámez et al., 2017).

Finding My Voice and Identity

One of the successes of my project is that I found a relevant audience and outlet for my article. The ORTESOL journal is one of the journals in the state of Oregon that is most suitable for the audience for my professional project. Another success with my professional development was learning the balance between using my authentic voice and including relevant academic sources. Lastly, my personal experiences advocating for SWD allowed me to have insight into issues for the unocu plus community and gave me the necessary context as I documented key themes that impact SWD ranging from policy to institutional support. After researching the barriers SWD face in higher education, it is clear that this group of students are marginalized, underserved, and under-researched. In the draft of my article, I proposed an action plan to support SWD in school as well as a call to action for researchers and policymakers to advocate for long-term support for SWD.

Gaps in Knowledge

Some challenges I encountered initially were a lack of empirical research and relevant literature about SWD in higher education. It is challenging to research SWD due to difficulties identifying their immigration status because of the legal vulnerability of disclosing their status, including fear of deportation. Furthermore, due to the lack of research, there were gaps in the literature. The assumption of most researchers documenting the experiences of SWD is that these students are often marginalized and excluded from access to higher education and critical resources.

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Another challenge with the literature I reviewed is that when research is conducted, it is done by people who have not experienced living without documentation and, therefore, may not relate to the topic under investigation. The existing literature about SWD acknowledges the social, legal, and institutional barriers. Still, there is not enough qualitative research to offer concrete solutions or feasible suggestions and recommendations that can be implemented to create a direct impact. Most recommendations in the current literature are too abstract and do not provide a roadmap on how to support SWD navigating higher education institutions. Overall, there is limited research on how institutions can support SWD.

Lastly, there are not a lot of open state-wide resources available to help SWD navigate higher education. For example, the Oregon Department of Education website does not provide critical information to understand the challenges of SWD. Many of the sections are not updated, and with the ever-changing policies that impact SWD, the nuances and updated policies are critical information.

My Experience

A challenge I did not anticipate when completing my professional project was the emotional challenge of reading about the experiences and hardships SWD face in academic literature. It was challenging because I connected the information to the countless stories of people in the undocu plus community I care deeply about. It was surprising to find that a lot of the literature I reviewed was too abstract and did not provide a roadmap on how to support SWD navigating higher education institutions. It was a frustrating experience when the literature provided vague solutions without a strong plan going forward to fix the problem while knowing the real implications of a lack of action steps to support SWD.

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I am proud that I crafted a draft of an article that humanizes the experiences of SWD. I attended many sessions at the writing center, which allowed me to identify the themes I discussed in the draft of the article. My project required me to make decisions on what narrative I would choose to explain the context of my topic. One of the most notable moments while working on this professional project was selecting the term students without documentation (SWD) because it honors people-first language. As of now, SWD best describes the group. However, it is important to note that future research should explore other terms that may be more affirming in nature.

Professional Development

My professional project influenced my professional development in many ways. First, I evolved my understanding of the undocu plus community by reviewing relevant literature. The literature I reviewed gave me a new lens to critically analyze gaps in knowledge. Second, I evolved my identity as a writer. Finally, this project helped me with my professional development and leadership attributes as a future educator and future leader in my field. I applied academic knowledge to support educators of diverse learners and used research to effectively discuss the importance of understanding the experiences of SWD.

My professional project aligns with the mission and outcomes of the MSED program because my article will be an educational resource for educators that will equip them with the knowledge to understand the experiences of SWD so they can best support them throughout their education and as they pursue or navigate higher education. When educators understand the unique barriers SWD face, they can inform parents and students about their opportunities. Understanding the experiences of SWD can also allow educators to feel empowered to take on

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leadership roles related to advocating in their school or institution and help create support systems for DREAMers.

Lastly, this project will contribute to the second InTASC standard by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2013), “The teacher uses understanding of learners’ commonalities and individual differences within and across diverse communities to design inclusive learning experiences that enable each learner to meet high standards” (p.19). Essentially, educational professionals can support SWD by acknowledging the diverse experiences of these students and take steps to address their educational needs. The second standard by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2013), also includes the following:

The teacher promotes an understanding of inter and intra-group diversity to facilitate learners’ development of cultural competence and build respect across communities. (2j; 2k; 2n; 9e). The teacher collaborates with learners, families, and school colleagues to expand the range of resources that address exceptional learning needs and enable learners to meet and exceed high standards. (p.19).

In other words, cultural competence is a standard that allows educational professionals to build respect, collaborate, and expand resources to address the needs of diverse students. Developing cultural competence is critical to the understanding of the experiences of SWD because these experiences are oppressive in nature. An understanding of the demographics of SWD is critical because it reduces misconceptions and invisibility that impact the educational outcomes of SWD if not addressed. One of the ways to create visibility, support, and community is by including messaging in the classroom. An example can be found on the Oregon Department of Education’s website, where they share messaging and graphics to support the undocu plus

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community, such as an image stating Dreamers are welcome that could be posted at the classroom's door (Dacamented/Undocumented Toolkit, n.d).

If I could do something differently, I would add journal entries documenting my research experience. As a person who identifies with the undocu plus community, I had a unique experience processing the information I reviewed in academic articles and literature. My journal entries could have allowed me to have more internal reflections on my experiences developing this professional project. Additionally, I could have added more depth to my project by interviewing SWD and adding testimonies of their personal experiences navigating higher education. The literature reviewed revealed that it is difficult to interview SWD due to the difficulties and legal vulnerabilities associated with disclosing their status. For this reason, participatory action research (PAR), which includes researchers who self-identify with this group, would be beneficial in future research studies about the experiences of SWD. I hope to engage with PAR in my future post-secondary educational endeavors to continue creating literature that fills the gaps in current literature and creates a new paradigm for research concerning SWD.

Implications and Revisions

My goal after submitting the draft of my article for this project is to continue updating the article with relevant research and submit it for publishing so I can present it at conferences in the state of Oregon that focus on supporting diverse learners, such as the Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ORTESOL). I plan to submit the draft of the article for publishing in the ORTESOL journal. I plan to continue updating the article as new policies or practices are implemented. Based on my review of the literature, a major theme is the ever-changing policies that have major implications for access to higher education for SWD.

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As I continue my educational journey in higher education, I hope to continue adding to the educational framework in the draft of the article. Overall, I learned that SWD are an underserved and under-researched group. By continuing to update and eventually publish the draft of an article, I will be adding new information and ideas to the conversation in the existing literature. Metaphorically, I have identified the current literature as a foundation. As of now, due to the lack of research, the foundation is not strong and requires further research to begin building a structure or education framework on top of that foundation. The framework is what will then be assessed in future literature to find the best practices to support SWD. This work is critical and requires ongoing conversations in the education field. Our collective mission should be to create equitable solutions for SWD by increasing support systems, advocacy, and leveraging social capital is the key to helping SWD thrive in any educational endeavor they choose to embark on.

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