

Part I: Preliminary Information

Title: The Deportation Threat and Its Health Impact on Hispanic Immigrant College Students

Abstract: Annually, 65,000 undocumented high school graduates become eligible to attend universities and colleges within the United States (Lopez, 2010). Along with the provisional citizenship of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a new wave of temporarily secure young adults now seek higher education. Nevertheless, these students must still surmount a number of barriers before attaining this education (Colotl, 2017). The fear of deportation has perpetually shadowed their lives, but has recently increased since the new administration's prioritization of border security (Park, 2017). This fear, motivated by an uncertain future, renders students vulnerable to several damaging psychological phenomena like ambiguous loss and trauma. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of these students and identify their coping mechanisms. Additionally, we hope to create psychoeducational workshops and guides, for legal counsel or higher education professionals, to support immigrant mental health.

Part II: Problem Description and Personal Statement

A. Problem Description

Every year nearly 65,000 undocumented students, who have lived in the United States for five or more years, will graduate high school and become eligible to attend universities and colleges within the country (Lopez, 2010). This provision was made possible by a 1982 Supreme Court decision, *Phyllis vs. Doe* that made it illegal to deny free public education to school-aged undocumented students based on their immigration status. With the addition of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy enacted by the Obama administration in 2012, the Migration Policy Institute (2017) estimates that as of 2016, 1.9 million people were potentially eligible for renewable 2-year period deferred action from deportation and work permits. Since then, nearly 900,000 applications have been considered and around 750,000 have been accepted (Migration Policy Institute, 2017).

Despite the implementation of this new legislation, undocumented college students still encounter a number of barriers before reaching their ultimate goal of attaining this education (Colotl, 2017). Upon arrival to a college campus, undocumented or DACA students often feel the need to withhold information about their personal lives, refrain from using campus support services, or reject opportunities for involvement in fear of jeopardizing their reputation or academic placement (Price, 2010). This fear has proved increasingly formidable since the implementation of the current administration's approach to border security and enforcement towards at-risk immigrants (Park, 2017).

Nevertheless, seclusion and secrecy are familiar hurdles in the lives of these young adults. Many DACAmented immigrants recall living their childhood largely unaware of their undocumented statuses and are unable to comprehend what that would mean for the future (Colotl, 2017). Developmental milestones of young adulthood, like obtaining a driver's license and gaining scholarship or academic opportunities, instead, culminate in feelings of

incomprehensible rejection and unexplained anguish (Simon, 2017). This unpredictability, heightened by the publicly transparent Executive opposition towards immigration, renders students vulnerable to potentially traumatic and damaging psychological phenomena.

The experiences of the immigrant population can be better understood through the analysis of a psychological phenomenon called ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss, as defined by its discoverer Pauline Boss, is a particularly potent form of grief much different from common loss. Ambiguous loss manifests in environments of uncertainty, blocking cognition, freezing emotions and severely hampering individual and family functioning (Boss, 2009). The lack of information on the status of a particular individual, their location, or well-being, and the unfamiliarity of an unclear future traumatizes those closest to the person or entity in question (Boss, 2007). This trauma is magnified and compounded throughout the unspoken experiences of these immigrant students and their families. Professionals within higher education often notice that these students constantly find themselves grappling with “feelings of shame, trepidation, anger, despair, marginalization, and uncertainty” (Perez, Cortez, Ramos, and Coronado, 2010). These negative emotions frequently lead to depression, rejection, and insecurity making them vulnerable to high levels of fear and anxiety (2010). The evidence of this trauma is expressed through their academic insecurity and mistrust of authority figures preventing them from accessing mental health resources and campus services (2010).

The institutional service structures in place not only fail the immigrant students in need of emotional relief, but also the higher education service providers tasked with supporting them (Martinez, 2014). Those responsible for witnessing and advocating on behalf of these students frequently experience a secondary traumatic stress state called compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue develops as a result of helping someone experiencing a traumatic experience and can possibly lead to neglect in self-care and greater emotional sacrifices. A lack of training in the multiplicity of their responsibilities as advocates and the fact that these professionals often share the negative feelings of their students all contribute to the development of this disorder (2014).

Immigrant students’ apprehension to use the university support systems compels them to employ additional means of coping with the impairing circumstances. These outlets will determine the depth of their resiliency or ability to rebound from adversity (Abrams, 2001). Abrams (2001) asserts that those subjected to situations of crisis or distress deal with its effects by making meaning of the given experience. Meaning can be extracted by creating a hopeful narrative of the future despite the presence of unanswered questions and ambiguity (Boss, 2007). In addition to creating a meaningful experience, scholars also consider empowerment (external or internal) a valuable aspect of resiliency in the face of unpredictable outcomes. Specifically, empowerment means attributing oneself social legitimacy within one’s proximate context and accrediting oneself personal rights and value (Abrams, 2001). This may materialize in the form of social support or access to a number of educational opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the fear of deportation on the livelihood and health of Hispanic immigrant college students while identifying the salient coping mechanisms engaged throughout. We expect to find that these reactions are highly influenced by the presence of the theoretical frameworks of ambiguous loss and trauma resulting in increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the fear of deportation

will act as a catalytic environment for these phenomena to persist. Additionally, the symptoms exhibited by the research participants will be distinct to their current situations as college students navigating life without a certain future. Consequently, we expect the common feelings of uncertainty and instability experienced by young adults during this stage of life to be amplified in immigrant students forcing them to utilize their unique coping mechanisms. Their ability to cope will be fully dependent on their previously developed resiliency strategies.

B. Personal Motivation

Transformative life experiences very rarely come at times we expect, and naturally, mine was no exception. It happened on a mission's trip to Ponce, Puerto Rico my junior year of high school. Within minutes of my arrival, I was quickly overtaken by a flood of hospitality and generosity unmitigated by the language barrier that so noticeably divided us. Equipped only with a vocabulary of broken Spanish, I hesitantly attempted to express the deep gratitude I felt towards them. Returning home, I carried with me a debt of love I didn't know if I could ever fully repay. With tears in my eyes and dozens of imprints left on my heart, I left that place totally captivated with the idea of one day giving back to the members of this community. Here, my curiosity for Hispanic culture was sparked inspiring me to focus my future career path on the study of Latinx culture.

As a First-Year at Elon fascinated by the complexity of Hispanic culture, I immediately began taking classes towards a Spanish minor. This academic curriculum allowed me to investigate the multifaceted identities of Hispanic people in the context of lifestyle, history, and development. However, the descriptions of the lives of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. drew my interest further. As I dove deeper into the personal stories of these immigrants and their families, I found myself submerged in a systematic, societal problem that transcended the political banter of mainstream media. Coming into college as a Political Science major, I quickly realized that policy discussions did not satisfy my desire, because I knew that real people with real problems existed behind the rules and procedures of governmental ideology. I was much more interested in how their lives as undocumented immigrants impacted their emotional well-being and eventually switched to Psychology. Nevertheless, the legal world still intrigued me, because I recognized the impact legal professionals had on the preservation of the immigrant family structure. Therefore, I decided to merge both psychology and law in my research efforts.

In the context of leadership, I prefer to employ the style of Transformational Leadership founded on communication and transparency. This approach proved especially important during my tenure as Worship Team Coordinator for Elon's chapter of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In this leadership role, I lead a group of student musicians in weekly practices and gatherings. While leading this cohort, I noticed that many of my peers periodically experienced times of immense fatigue or stress throughout the year and required time to rest. Instinctively, I initiated conversations with my team, taking the time to observe, listen, and inquire into the lives of these students with the hope of uncovering the underlying issues that affected their performance as musicians. My leadership style and focus on open conversations motivate me to address the issue of immigration from a qualitative perspective and focus on the narratives developed through the in-depth interview process.

Part III: Plan for Intellectual Inquiry

A. Research Plan

Concentrating our focus on mixed-status Latinx college students narrows the scope of our research slightly, but still requires a multitude of various perspectives and approaches. The barriers that many first-generation, immigrant students face restrict access to a variety of significant resources such as financial aid, health care, legal services, and social services. Each of these domains affect the lives of these young adults in distinct ways and simply solving one obstacle does not alleviate the burden of the whole. Nonetheless, due to the trauma and resilience expertise of my research mentor and my passion for mental health, we will focus on the issue of ambiguous loss and trauma experienced by undocumented students. Tentatively, we plan to begin our initial research inquiry with an in depth interview process and choose the most appropriate solution plan from the results. We also intend to review the current practices of legal clinics, higher education professionals, and mental health services in accommodating undocumented students and combating ambiguous loss.

To better understand the unique perspectives of these students, the research team will begin by completing 10-15 in-depth interviews with Hispanic students without permanent residency within the United States under the impending and tangible threat of future deportation. Using a case study approach for small-scale research with meaning (Tight, 2017), firsthand accounts of these students will be collected in order to establish a holistic and authentic understanding of the narratives existing within this population. The multiple ways in which these experiences interrelate with and confirm various theoretical frameworks will be explored, including the relationship of the fear of deportation to ambiguous loss and trauma. The interviews will last between 60 and 70 minutes and will be divided into five separate parts. Since research examining this population and topic is underdeveloped, a case study approach implementing a non-probabilistic sampling method (a combination of convenience and purposive sampling techniques) will be used (Etikan, 2016). Our goal is to interview students attending universities or colleges in North Carolina. For the purposes of confidentiality and to attend to potentially adverse legal consequences to the participants and the higher education institutions where they study, the research team will not disclose the names of the involved institutions.

The interview will begin with the introduction of the informed consent form and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. For example, they will be advised to only use pseudonyms when signing the consent form and to refrain from using the specific names of family members or mentors during the interview. The first instrument will be a Fear of Deportation Scale (see Appendix 1) consisting of 7 items measuring how frequently one would avoid using commonly accessed resources to reduce the threat of deportation (Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Linares, and Wiesner, 2010). After the instrument is completed, additional questions will be asked verbally to further understand the participant's experiences with public avoidance and secrecy. The second instrument is the Coping Strategies Instrument (see Appendix 2), which identifies coping strategies pertinent to the immigrant population during situations of high stress (Mena, Padilla & Maldonado, 1987). Additional questions involving the accessibility and efficiency of legal, mental health, and academic services will be asked to allow these students suggest adjustments to these resources to fit their requirements. The final

psychoeducational component of the interview will expose research participants to the multiple immigrant-friendly resources available. Participants will also have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions about any part of the interview.

B. Discussion of Possible Solution Development

Future solutions will be entirely dependent upon the results of the interview process and therefore, cannot be fully developed until data analysis is completed. However, ambiguous loss researcher, Pauline Boss, asserts that the first step to recovery is labeling or acknowledging that the grief exists (Boss, 2000). Many suffering from an uncertain loss of identity or citizenship may never have true permission to grieve that loss or fully express that sadness (Boss, 2009). Recognition of its presence and the resulting permission to grieve are crucial elements of the interview process. Simply talking about their experiences in a protected environment can produce a number of possible psychological benefits as well. To broaden my grasp of loss and resiliency, I plan on attending the 4th International Conference on Mental Health & Human Resilience in Aurelia, Italy. Specifically, this conference highlights workshops on loss, trauma, and human resiliency which would expose me to research being conducted in this area and cultivate deeper examination into potential solution plans.

Consultations with immigrant community resources and continued investigation into the existing literature compel us to brainstorm several potential avenues of support for these students. We hypothesize that mental health education could be a valuable tool for anxiety and depression prevention. A potential medium for this information could be through a psychoeducational guide. The guide would be anchored in the narratives expressed by the interview participants and would display the common themes extracted from the data analysis. It could be paired with a guide already accessible to immigrant families like the family preparedness plan developed by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC). The supplemental guide could offer tips about mental health and therapy opportunities and provide these students and their families access to a range of resources.

Validated by the knowledge we will gain from the interview process, the research team also plans to research current programs designed for immigrant student support at the undergraduate level. We anticipate the interview will reveal the ways in which these programs succeed or fail in their purposes and provide us with areas of possible improvement. Premier initiatives, like the Haas Dreamer's Resource Center at UC Berkeley, feature professional, academic, and mental health counseling services specialized for undocumented students. Additionally, UC Berkeley has begun an unprecedented UndocuAlly program to train higher education professionals in supporting immigrant students on campus. Modeling the approach and practices of programs like this presents an especially intriguing action response, if the research results reflect such a need. Research into this program and similar ones would likely begin with Dr. Diana Peña who is the director of the mental health services portion of the USP.

Programming improvement could also apply to professionals directly involved in the lives of immigrant students. Dr. Monico and I have been in contact with immigrant service providers like Kathy Doan, the Executive Director of the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition. She has expressed interest in the completion of the research and could join us in the

production of undergraduate student programming. Heather Scavone, the director of the Humanitarian Immigration Law Clinic established by Elon's Law School, has also expressed willingness to integrate any of the research findings into the clinic. Research collaboration with these clinics and coalitions allow us to expand the utility of our future solution to legal aid and consultation. After discussing the role of higher education in undocumented student development with Katherine LaPlante, the Assistant Director of Counseling and Family Programs for the Elon Academy, we speculate that an educational training involving higher educational professional could also be a valuable program to pursue.

Part IV: Feasibility, Budget and Timeline

To properly introduce the feasibility of this project, I must first begin with an account of the completed work to ensure our future aspirations and goals are clearly understood. In December 2016, my research mentor, Dr. Carmen Monico, and I began our search for a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of deportation on immigrant families in the U.S. The following semester, Dr. Monico and I created a detailed research proposal designed to examine the experiences of "anchor babies" or children born in the United States but of immigrants without legal statuses. The initial research question was formulated with the intention of capturing the accounts of the parents of these children and their perspectives of their child's well-being. This structure came with a number of potential hurdles and difficulties that made its execution challenging. These problems included gaining access to this vulnerable population, finding translators for the interviews, and the lack of previously established rapport.

In response, Dr. Monico and I altered the direction of the research to better address these potential issues. This past summer, we reframed the research question and its foundation to focus on Hispanic Immigrant College students without the security of confirmed citizenship. This adjustment addressed several previously identified complications by allowing us to utilize the structures of higher education to confidentially and effectively reach the population of interest, avoid the usage of translators by focusing on students studying in the U.S., and leverage the relationships of the guidance counselors and mentors who already interact with these students daily. With this in mind, we synthesized the research we found regarding these students, found survey instruments to use during the interviews, and submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board that was granted approval in September 2017.

An additional question that some may have about the feasibility of this project may reference the relatively low number of research participants that we intend to interview (10-15). Those with experience in quantitative methodology and who subscribe to a more positivist understanding of research in the social sciences may consider such a small number of participants ineffective in determining cause and effect or generalization. However, such an approach is inappropriate and potentially damaging to our current research strategy. The lens we intend to employ while examining this issue is one of an interpretivist. We believe that the immigrant experience is not monolithic, but is instead diverse and unique to each individual existing within those circumstances. The intention for this research is not to generalize the experiences of the research participants to a greater population. Instead, we hope to construct a coherent narrative of the lived experiences of these young adults with the objective of providing accessible resources through psychoeducation.

In addition to redirecting our research aspirations, we met with several community resources to help improve the research. In April, Dr. Monico and I met with the Center for New North Carolinians in Greensboro to help gather suggestions to help us improve. While there, I was introduced to Maura Nsonwu who is a Research Fellow with the CNNC and the President of the Association of Immigration and Refugee Service Professionals. She expressed immense support for the completion of the research and wrote a community support letter on our behalf (see appendix 3). In May, I attended a Community Data Skills Building Event hosted by the Social Science Research Institute at Duke University to better prepare myself for the data collection process. Throughout this process I took several courses and training modules to further advance my interview skills like Nonexperimental Research Methods and a program created by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Both of these curricula, especially the CITI program, focused on the importance of protecting the psychological well-being of the participants while conducting research that may be intrusive.

Looking forward to this semester and the following three, the research team plans to begin the interview process by disseminating recruitment information to our various contacts at colleges across North Carolina. Communication between the research participants and interviewers will be conducted through these gatekeepers to ensure that the identities and information of these students are kept secure. We aim to complete all of the interviews by the end of winter term 2018 and begin data analysis and theme identification during the spring. Concurrently, if the data analysis reveals that further educational programming is necessary, the research team and our various service provider partners would begin the process of collaboratively creating this educational module. At the end of April 2018, I plan on attending the 4th International Conference on Mental Health & Human Resilience in Aurelia, Italy to supplement the data analysis process.

The summer of 2018 could potentially unfold in two separate ways. First, I intend to apply for the SURE program and continue the progress of the project by finishing the data analysis portion of the research and creating preliminary poster presentations with the extracted themes. While at Elon, the research team would also begin creation of the psychoeducational guide and continue development of the educational programming. The second option for the summer of 2018 would be a collaborative learning experience at UC Berkeley working with their UPS program in the Haas Dreamer's Resource Center. I believe that my ability to create effective solutions could be substantially improved through my partnership with an institution that has started over 160 similar campus program nationwide. While there, I would work with USP professionals in creating a program tailored to the social climate at Elon based off of the results of the interview. By the end of the fall of 2018, we plan to finalize the psychoeducational guide and training programs to prepare for their full implementation in the spring. After the program's completion and guide's dispersal, the spring semester would then consist of poster presentations of the results at both SURF day and the National Conference for Undergraduate Research at Kennesaw State University.

Budget:

Description	Amount
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Conferences:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">4th International Conference on Mental Health & Human Resilience</p> <p style="text-align: center;">April 26-27, 2018 Holiday Inn Rome - Aurelia, Italy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Theme: Mental Health interventions to improve the quality of life</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Registration (Package B which includes hotel and food costs): \$1309</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Flight: \$816</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Conference Total: \$2,125</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">National Conference for Undergraduate Research: Kennesaw State University in 2019</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Registration: \$200</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hotel: \$500</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Flight to ATL: \$300</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Food and transportation: \$150</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NCUR 2019 Total: \$1,150</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaborative Learning Trip to UC Berkeley during summer of 2018</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Housing (Garden Village Apartments): \$1,550</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Food: \$750</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Flight: \$450</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Living expenses (laundry, transportation on campus, apartment items, etc.): \$1000</p>

	Total: \$3,750
<p>Program Development and Implementation</p> <p>Tentative Costs</p>	<p>Gas money for transportation to and from Elon Immigration Law Clinic: \$250</p> <p>Guide pamphlet prints: \$200</p> <p>Flyers/Outreach: \$500</p> <p>Presentation poster prints: \$150</p> <p>Any additional program expenses: \$425</p> <p>Total: \$1,525</p>
<p>Incentives for Interview Participants</p> <p>(15 Amazon Gift Cards)</p>	\$450
Tuition	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$10,000

Timeline:

Semester	Proposed Experiences
Fall 2017	499 Research Credits: 1 credit Leadership Prize Application Finalized and Submitted SURE Application Developed and Submitted Recruitment Flyers Dispersed to Community Partners Potential Research Participants Identified Interviews Administered and Field Notes Created
Winter Term 2018	Potential Research Participants Identified Interviews Administered and Field Notes Created
Spring 2018	LED 498: 2 Credits Data Analysis Contact with established immigration clinics, higher education contact, and undocumented student programs begins
Summer 2018	SURE Program: Finish data analysis & interpretation, preparation of poster or Collaborative learning experience at UC Berkeley

	<p>Supplemental education guide creation begins</p> <p>Training modules or Education session development continues</p>
Fall 2018	<p>LED 298: 2 credits</p> <p>Supplemental education guide finalized</p> <p>Training modules or Education session finalized and piloted</p>
Winter 2019	<p>Study Abroad</p>
Spring 2019	<p>LED 498: 2 Credits</p> <p>SURF day presentation of results</p> <p>NCUR presentation at Kennesaw State University</p> <p>Training modules or Education sessions are implemented</p> <p>Psychoeducational guide disseminated to various immigrant resource outlets and community partners</p>

Part V: List of sources

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Appendix Key

Appendix 1	Survey Instrument #1
Appendix 2	Survey Instrument #2
Appendix 3	Community Support Letter
Appendix 4	Unofficial Transcript

Appendix 1: INSTRUMENT 1
Fear of Deportation Instrument

The following questions will consist of 7 activities that you may or may not have avoided recently due to a fear or concern that you may be at risk of being deported. If you have avoided the activity listed please mark the box under the no column with a check or an X. If you do participate in the activity please mark the box under the yes column with a check or an X and explain in keywords why you may or may not avoid the described activity.

List of 7 activities you have avoided recently (within the past 12 months)	Yes	No	Under which circumstances did you participate or not participate in the listed activity?
Walk in the streets			
Ask for help from government agencies			
Report an infraction to the police [against others]			
Report to the police an infraction committed against one's person			
Attend court if requested to do so			
Apply for a driver's license			
Wait in the street corner to get work			

Adapted from:

Arbona, C., Olvera, N., Rodriguez, N., Hagan, J., Linares, A., & Wiesner, M. (2010). Fear of Deportation Instrument. *PsycTests*, doi:10.1037/t15404-000

Appendix 2: INSTRUMENT 2
List of Coping Strategies Instrument

The following questions inquire about how you frequently cope with anxiety during times of high stress and emotional pressure. We ask that you answer these questions with your current citizenship status in your place of higher education in mind. If the listed activity describes your behavior, please check the box under the yes column. If not, please mark the box under the no column. Please provide an example of the activity if you have done it before.

List of 9 common coping strategies	Yes	No	Provide an example
I try to actively find out more about the situation and I take some positive, planned action.			
I talk with others about the problem (friends, relatives).			
I don't worry about it. Everything will probably work out fine.			
I become involved in other activities in order to keep my mind off the problem.			
I pray and/or consult a priest or a minister.			
I seek professional advice (physician, psychologist, or counselor).			
I draw upon my past experiences; perhaps similar situations might help.			
I seek support from members of my cultural group.			
I try to reduce tension (e.g., drink, eat, drugs, smoke, more exercise).			

Adapted From:

Mena, F. J., Padilla, A. M., & Maldonado, M. (1987). List of Coping Strategies. *Psychtests*, doi:10.1037/t06522-000

**Appendix 3
Community Support Letter**

Letter to Stephen Bailey, Physical Therapy, Elon University

From:

Maura Busch Nsonwu, PhD, MSW, LCSW

Associate Professor

Interim BSW Program Director

Department of Social Work and Sociology

Institutional Review Board Chairperson

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Research Fellow • Center for New North Carolinians

**Appendix 4
Unofficial Transcript**