Serving Undocumented Students in a Time of Pandemic: Applying Anthropology for Improving Mentoring and Leaning in Virtual Spaces

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Serving Undocumented Students in a Time of Pandemic: Applying Anthropology for Improving Mentoring and Leaning in Virtual Spaces

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Abstract

Serving Undocumented Students in a Time of Pandemic: Applying Anthropology for Improving Mentoring and Leaning in Virtual Spaces

By Edher A. Zamudio

College campuses across the United States have created resource centers to provide students with the support needed to succeed in their academic trajectory. These resource centers develop programming aligned with the dissemination of information and specific student services playing a role in how students see themselves as part of the university. The programming in these institutionalized spaces does not necessarily include students' voices and operates according to a transactional model to provide student support and contributes to students' sense of dislocation in the university. I worked as a graduate student intern at UndocuSpartan Resource Center (USRC) at San Jose State University (SJSU) and interviewed self-identified undocumented students to gather data on students' needs and concerns. After an analysis of themes in these data, I drew on the results to design training modules and metrics for a mentoring program that would assist the transition of new students to SJSU. I also recommended to the USRC's director that it was important for USRC to gain visibility in the online world which led us to have YouTube and other live videos on social media. In addition to this, I reported on themes from the semi-structured interviews that revealed some of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' lives, and the students' ideas of relevant programming that USRC should provide which informed the type of programming that USRC should develop in the future. As a fairly new resource center, USRC's has the potential to continually adapt their programming based on their students' voices and create an inclusive institutionalized space for undocumented students.

Acknowledgments

The project is the result of the support from many people in the past few years. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Faas, Dr. Beresford, and Dr. Gonzalez. Dr. Faas thanks for your initial encouragement in pushing me to seek new research ideas and for your patience in listening to my many questions at the beginning of this journey. Dr. Beresford, thank you for being patient about my questions during your method's course and for managing the virtual shift in such a graceful manner that did not cause more hardships for us, graduate students. Dr. Gonzalez, you did not hesitate to become my committee chair and answered all my questions. Your easy-going personality and genuine support made all this process less stressful.

I want to thank USRC's director and student interns for allowing me to be part of the resource center and for sharing our experiences as students. Lastly, I want to also thank the people in my life. Thanks to my cohort for the emotional and academic support that they have given me in the past years. Ismael Illescas, thanks for giving me feedback on multiple drafts of my essays and encouragement. To my mother, thanks for your unconditional support. Talia, my future wife, only you know how hard this post-secondary journey has been for me and I am eternally grateful for having you on my side.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

In this project, I partnered with the Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) at San Jose State University (SJSU) to develop a student-peer mentoring program with the goal of fostering a sense of belonging among undergraduate undocumented students. Fostering belonging within the university context is part of a larger goal to promote student success, increase retention and graduation rates, provide relevant opportunities for professional development, and prepare students for their post-graduate experience.

This partnership emerged in my meetings with Ana Navarrete, USRC's director since 2018 and our conversations took place between 2019 and 2020. In our meetings, we reflected on some of the hardships we endured such as being barred from any federal and state aid which pushed us to rely on scholarships (Flores 2016), feeling frustrated at the inability to obtain a driver's license (Gonzales 2016), having very limited options regarding job opportunities (Gonzales 2016), and experiencing a consuming sense of deportation (Boehm 2009). The experience of being undocumented, for us, was a problem rooted in the construction of illegality around Latin American immigration, but also in labor relations of necessity and disposability between the United States and Mexico (De Genova 2005). Upon entering the university, Ana and I felt lost and confused as to where to go for assistance and our immigration status discouraged us from seeking help. This contributed to a sense of exclusion or dislocation from the university. At the same time, we also noticed the value in our positive experiences as previous undocumented undergraduate students. We found value in both our academic success and the significant role of the informal mentorship from peers, allied faculty, and administration in

helping us navigate the university. Their help allowed us to insert ourselves into the university campus.

Our self-reflective conversations led us to agree that USRC provided valuable resources for students such as free legal consultations or campus referrals, but its programming relied mostly on the dissemination of information and not student empowerment. I proposed to design student-driven programming to help undocumented students overcome their social and structural barriers when pursuing a college education and interrupt their sentiments of statelessness. Additionally, creating student-driven programming gained importance during the COVID-19 pandemic because it would be rooted in the complex college student experience.

This project report consists of three sections. The first section contains an introduction to the project, the background, and goals of the project, deliverables of the project, a literature review drawing on the upbringing of the author, and a methodology section. The second section, which is organized as an article for *Practicing Antropology*, presents the actual findings from students' understanding of mentoring, the impact of COVID-19, and students' voices regarding future USRC programming. The third and concluding section reflects on the research project and elaborates on its anthropological significance.

Project Background and Goals

I met with USRC's director Ana Navarrete during the 2019-2020 academic year to discuss how I could be of service to the resource center. We both expressed our concerns about the administration and faculty members' knowledge regarding working with undocumented students in different university settings. In our dialogs, we both recalled high school and college professors who would not consider how our immigration status would negatively affect completing certain assignments (e.g., voting as an assignment), while also having professors who

without hesitation would write recommendation letters for scholarships. Through our self-reflexive dialogs, we came to realize the importance of peers, allied faculty, and staff in accessing resources such as scholarships or undocufriendly resource centers on campus. In our undocumented journeys, our peers and allies became our informal mentors who shared the knowledge and tools necessary for us to navigate the university. They taught us "the ropes."

It was evident from our dialogues and conversations with her interns as well, that while USRC provided valuable resources to undocumented students contributing to retention (e.g., referrals to financial aid or financial assistance), it did not necessarily go beyond providing financial or legal assistance. USRC programming focused on the dissemination of information. URSC programming, in other words, needed to include a more empowering and engaging student center approach for undocumented students to begin fostering a sense of belonging to the university.

USRC's director, the student interns, and I agreed that the student resource center needed a type of mentoring program as a conduit for newcomers to become a part of the university. We thought that student-peer mentors would create a pathway for first-year students and transfers to transition to SJSU by guiding newcomers to the location of resources on campus or by pointing at allied professors. In simple words, student-peer mentors would teach newcomers "the ropes."

The three of us agreed that I would become the first graduate student intern at USRC for Spring 2021. My main purpose would be to pilot a mentoring program with the current student interns to continuously gather data to develop and create a student-driven program. In addition, I volunteered in outreach presentations in Spanish, translated documents, and attended monthly meetings with other student resource centers. As a graduate student intern, the main objective of my partnership or project was to create a student-peer mentoring program by; (1) mentoring

current USRC student interns to gather data about their ideas on relevant student programming; (2) interviewing other self-identified undocumented students on campus to understand their perceptions of USRC; (3) identifying common patterns of needs among students; and (4) creating guidelines and metrics for future peer-to-peer mentoring and providing recommendations for the center. However, I decided that my role as an intern should not be limited to mentoring. I searched for relevant resources and provided innovative ideas to develop USRC engagement with students during my internship. My secondary objectives included; (1) researching internships that do not require US citizenship or residency[1] to create a database; (2) translating and participating in Spanish-English outreach presentations to make information accessible to incoming students and their families; and (3) collaborating with student interns on new methods of engagement with the student body.

Project Deliverables

After discussing ideas with USRC's director, we agreed that by the end of the 2021 Spring semester, my main deliverable would be to create a student-peer mentoring program for the resource center to use in future programming. I informed Ana that I would conduct semi-structured interviews with self-identity undocumented students. At the same time, I would pilot a mentoring program with the current set of interns allowing me to gather more information on student ideas about relevant programming. These two sets of data would fuel my ideas and concepts to design a student-peer mentoring program that centers around students' voices. The programming consisted of two parts; (1) creating guidelines and metrics for the future implementation of peer-to-peer mentoring programming based on the current mentoring of USRC student interns; and (2) developing training workshops or modules to train future peer

[1] Internship, jobs, and other similar opportunities that do not require legal residency or US citizenship are also known as undocufriendly opportunities. They are opportunities accessible to undocumented students.

mentors on the social and structural obstacles that undocumented students face while in college to provide relevant mentoring.

Listening to students' experiences at SJSU, allowed me to design a student peer mentor program divided into three areas of student support. community building, financial awareness, and professional development. Each area contained four to seven activities that student peer mentors would help their mentees accomplish. The activities in each area of support were achievable goals that could be accomplished in the span of a year or two academic terms (Fall and Spring). To prepare future peer mentors, I also designed four workshops that addressed mentoring practices, unpacking immigration status, intersectionality, and professional development to train future peer mentors. As my internship developed, I reported my updates to USRC's director and made observations about my relationship with the interns and my interviews. Consequently, a second deliverable emerged, namely I co-organized and participated in podcasts, Instagram, and YouTube live events to speak on the experience of being a first-generation undocumented college student and providing tips on professional development.

My graduate internship and the semi-structured interviews took place in the virtual format during the Spring 2021 academic term. Eleven months into the pandemic and it was unclear when life would return to normal. I perceived during my internship that USRC needed to become more visible in the virtual world and prepare for a hybrid future. I suggested to the director that we should hold Instagram Live sessions about being undocumented before the enactment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), to make a podcast about being undocumented while in college, and to engage virtually with other undocumented allies outside SJSU.

As an anthropologist, my semi-native influenced the approach to the project due to my former status as an undocumented student, my positionality as a student, my proximity in age, and my first-generation low-income (FGLI) background in relation to my interviews and student interns. In thinking of a peer mentoring program driven by students' voices, I relied on my anthropological approach to understand how anthropologists had delved into mentoring practices and unpacked the impact of immigration status on peoples' lives. At the same time, I also included some research done by non-anthropologist regarding mentoring practices and servicing college students. Besides academic considerations, I had influences from my previous teaching and mentoring experiences that exposed me to how students navigate different educational institutions and strive through social and structural barriers. My personal and professional trajectory completed my anthropological approach with real-life examples and ways to potentially materialize my ideas.

Making Sense of the Academic Through the Personal

The following sections frame the discussion from a personal narrative approach from a first-generation low-income immigrant undocumented background complemented by relevant anthropological literature on mentoring practices. The second section reflects on my journey to unpack ideas on immigration status. In the last section, I acknowledge the contributions of non-anthropological work to my project. Albeit my intention is not to argue which concepts are right or not, but how collective they have informed my project.

Mentoring Encounters

In my undergraduate trajectory, the indirect mentoring that I received from peers, allied faculty, and staff helped me strive in my college settings. Along with other undocumented peers at City College of San Francisco (CCSF), we often talked about our academic and personal

struggles, but also shared our positive encounters with the faculty. While some of us had supportive families, the majority understood that our families could not provide relevant help in college pushing students like us to seek support outside our family circles. Professors knowingly (or not) provided knowledge and support which was the gap we needed to strive in the college setting (Stanton-Salazar and Urso Spinas 2003). For First-generation low-income immigrant undocumented students like me, our professors' commitments and actions provided the emotional and academic support allowing us to think of them as mentor figures. I identified university professors who went beyond their duties and responsibilities by providing socio-emotional support and professional development opportunities (Mokhtar and Foley 2020). The support that I received from professors went beyond obtaining an A in their classes, and it focused more on guidance and encouragement in trying to complete a specific goal (Speizer 1981) such as completing my undergraduate education or pursuing a post-secondary degree.

On one occasion, for example, Professor Edward J. McCaughan from the Sociology Department at San Francisco State University (SFSU) invited me to collaborate with him on his research project regarding LGBTQ+ iconography in Mexico during the 1940s. I accepted the offer without knowing much about him. During our conversations about Mexican iconography, he not only asked me about my view on the imagery but also asked about my background. I noticed that we developed a more trusting relationship that not only advanced his research but a relationship that also provided me with guidance about applying to graduate school (Beaver and Schrift 1993).[2]

[2] Mentoring relationships during fieldwork can also emerge between the researchers and the community gatekeepers (Kistler 2015). This implies the potential of mentoring relationships appearing in research projects where undergraduate students shared the knowledge, learned from their professors, with their research participants (Pyne et al. 2014).

These informal mentoring experiences came from my encounters with professors at the university that lacked a formal agreement. The meaningful relationships with faculty emerged in an organic manner making the structure of the mentoring relationships unique with each faculty. My understanding of mentoring practices changed, however, when I worked as a graduate mentor at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). At UCSC, I learned of the different institutionalized mentoring programs between faculty and undergraduate students (Mammen 2012). [3] As a graduate student, I had to comply with a set of guidelines in mentoring a small cohort of undergraduate first-generation low-income students. Part of the guidelines inquired me to obtain student feedback. I realized that in institutionalized mentoring programs, student feedback becomes essential in redesigning or changing certain aspects of programs (Masehela et al. 2014) such as asking for more professional opportunities for students (Grigsby 2017).

Across all these situations informal mentoring was not a linear process, but it was a dynamic multidirectional process where both parties learned from each other as their relationship deepened. Considering the anthropological literature on mentoring, therefore, implies that any mentoring program, informal or formal, either begins with a set of guidelines and goals, or guidelines develop with the progression of the relationship. The structure of the mentoring relationship does not necessarily need to be fabricated before the matching of mentor and mentee. The architecture of the mentoring relationship can take shape as both individuals get to know each other.

Without Papers in The United States

After six months my visa expired in 2005 and I became an undocumented high school student in San Francisco. Attending Mission High School, I noticed the influence of different

[3] Other anthropological research has investigated mentoring institutionalized programs between students and alumni (Renuga and Ezhilan 2014).

support systems (allied teachers and organizations) or lack thereof among my undocumented peers. The presence (or not) of these support networks contributed to their academic, and professional aspirations and opportunities placing some on the college route while making others leave educational institutions at an early age (Gonzales 2016). I received support from administrators and teachers after sharing my goals to attend college. At the same time, like many undocumented students, I relied on scholarships that did not require US citizenship or legal residency (Flores 2016) to afford college.

In my first year, I had limited English proficiency. Through the media, however, I learned of the social imaginary of Latinx people in the United States produced by academics, public officials, and those individuals with socio-economic-political means to create and disseminate information (Chavez 2013).[4] Watching the news informed me not only of the identity of Latin American migrants in the US but also exposed me to news about immigration raids. As I began to understand what it meant to be undocumented in terms of access to higher education by not having access to federal and state aid, I also learned about the fear of removal. As undocumented migrants like myself entered and settled in different cities across the US, we learned to live under constant fear of deportation because our bodies could be unpredictably removed at any time in any given place (Boehm 2009). As undocumented migrants, our vulnerability hailed from our lack of US citizenship which not only constrained our employment opportunities, but it could also contribute to potential abuse from employers making our lives unsecure (Horton 2016). The vulnerability caused by our unlawful immigration status made me think, like many others, that we lived in the shadows or in this space of non-existence as we are neither temporarily nor permanently a part of the social contract embodied in the law (Coutin 2003).

[44] The x replaces the "o" in "Latino" or the "a" in "Latina" avoiding gender binaries and making it gender-neutral.

At CCSF and SFSU, I immersed myself in the history of Latinx people in the US. The United States orchestrated the economic and political destabilization of countries in Latin America during the 20th century by providing financial and military support to right-wing groups opposing left socially elected regimes (Gonzalez 2011). The US actions lay in their justification to protect democracy against communism resulting in hundreds of deaths across the region which left people no other choice but to migrate to the country that caused their migration (Gonzalez 2011). At the same time, the history of US and Mexico labor relations helped me comprehend US reliance on the work of undocumented migrants. This reliance would continue to racialize undocumented migrants as "illegal aliens" which renders their presence simultaneously necessary and deportable (De Genova 2002).

All these historical lessons and concepts gave me an idea of the presence of Latinx people in the US and presented me with historical knowledge about being undocumented. For my undocumented peers who only knew the US as their only home being undocumented, however, was a contradictory experience and an ambiguous state of being located at the intersection of their socio-political and juridical status (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). For them, their lives were simultaneously rooted in the US and cast away due to their lack of formal citizenship, placing them at the bottom of the social hierarchy and constructing them as stateless and deportable subjects. Nonetheless, many of us organized and used media platforms to form a counter-discourse centered on our accomplishments and contributions to the US. We used our narratives as vehicles to convey the obstacles to pursuing higher education demonstrating our desire to be part of the US (Johnson and Castagno 2017).

Making the Formula for Mentoring: Considerations and Influences

At SFSU, I came across Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) work on decolonizing western research epistemologies and methodologies when collaborating with Indigenous people. Smith's work decentered these Western approaches of understanding and collecting knowledge and centered research on Indigenous peoples' cosmologies. She proposed twenty-five indigenous projects, and in them, I perceived the overlap with using testimonies and storytelling as methods to provide oral and historical evidence to claim rights. Like Indigenous peoples, the stories and narratives of undocumented students formed a counter-discourse that centered them as part of the US. Furthermore, this counter-discourse represented their dreams and frustrations constituting the collective sensibilities as part of a bigger group of undocumented students around the US (Ortner 2005). The voices of the interns and my interviews, therefore, became the compass for framing a peer mentoring program.

In centering the voices of undocumented students in the mentoring programming, however, I also engaged in the process of reframing traditional mentoring practices. Reframing is also one of Smith's (2012) Indigenous projects by which Indigenous people take ownership in managing, addressing, and understanding issues. At the same time, reframing traditional mentoring practices constituted part of Tori Weiston-Serdan's (2017) work regarding critical mentoring. In her work, Weiston-Serdan (2017) critiqued traditional mentoring practices rooted in deficit and top to bottom approaches to mentoring practices. The deficit approach treats students from historically marginalized communities as subjects who lack different forms of capital and knowledge while ignoring the systemic issues of poverty or discrimination that continuously shape their lives. The top to bottom approach, like the deficit approach, assumes that students from underrepresented communities are empty vessels who lack the skills and

knowledge and need guidance and salvation. In both cases, the exclusion of students' voices and ignoring the impact of systemic issues are common.

Weiston-Serdan (2017) proposed the term critical mentoring to reframe traditional mentoring practices to be centered on students' voices leading to meaningful relationships and student empowerment. In this critical view, the students' voices lead the program guidelines and how mentors should engage with their students. Mentors needed to understand the role of informality when meeting and addressing students (Weiston-Serdan and Sánchez 2017). Informality aims at shortening the distance between mentors and their students by creating a more flexible relationship. At the same time, mentors had to be authentic about their interest in working with students which would help build trusting relationships (Fries-Britt and Snider 2015).

A student peer mentor working with undocumented students should be aware that students' lives are partially a product of historical constructions of race, gender, class, and immigration status affecting the students' perception of their positionality within the university and the US (Delgado and Stefancic 2020). Therefore, peer mentors should understand that undocumented students' lives are located at the intersection of many political regimes or structural forces (Crenshaw 1989). Being aware of these ideas allowed me to conceptualize empowerment, for undocumented students at SJSU, in terms of practices that would help them to immerse themselves into the campus community to interrupt their exclusion and statelessness. Practices, therefore, become forms of engagement that would enable undocumented students to define their own notions of belonging to educational spaces and building their own communities (Rosaldo 1997; Benmayor 2002).

Going About the Project

To collect information for the project, I used two sets of data. The first set of data came from piloting a mentoring program with the four current student interns for the entire Spring 2022 term. Through individual meetings with the students, we engaged in diverse types of conversations from their backgrounds to their opinions about what student peer mentors should know about working with undocumented students. The meetings enable me to continuously gather data from the interns' perspective regarding programming that USRC should (or not) deploy. I took notes from our meetings to detect common themes and patterns in their overall experience at SJSU. The second set of data came from purposively interviewing self-identify undocumented students at SJSU.

My purposive sampling relied on seeking undocumented students at SJSU. However, identifying and recruiting interviewees represented a challenge because undocumented students are a hidden population who experience stigmatization and who might be reclusive or invisible (Russell 2018). Because this all took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual physical distance and isolation among students made finding volunteers an arduous task. To recruit volunteers for my interviews, I used a chain referral strategy by which I asked current volunteers and USRC staff to help me recruit or identify eligible participants. Chain referral sampling helped me connect with hidden populations who experience stigmatization and who might be reclusive or invisible (Russell 2018). Using chain referral permitted me to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of my volunteers. I decided to ask the director and her interns to refer individuals who they thought would not be afraid to speak of their experience with a graduate student. Besides chain referrals, I created a flyer to advertise my project on USRC's Instagram account and in the mass emails that USRC sent to their students to increase my volunteer pool.

My recruitment strategy allowed me to interview eight students from different majors and academic years. Six of them resided in the Bay Area and the two in Southern California. Two of them self-identified as straight males and the other six self-identified as straight females. Their ages ranged between 20 and 30 years old. All of them self-identified as Latinx. Through Zoom, I conducted semi-structured interviews that allowed me to ask students the same set of questions in the same order highlighting similar (or not) responses informing my project of similar patterns among students. The interview questions were divided into three themes: students' perceptions of USRC, mentoring, and ideas on student programming. During my interviews, I also asked volunteers which language they would prefer to speak. While the majority said English, the conversations ended up being bilingual Spanish and English or sometimes Spanglish. The linguistic flexibility in our dialogue, and occasional code-switching, created a comfortable space for the students to express themselves freely. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes and at the end of each interview, I gave a space for the volunteers to ask me any questions relevant (or not) to the project.

Conclusion

This first chapter provided the reader with an overview of the structure of the project report. The first installment presented a road map that began with an introduction of the project asserting the importance and necessity of the partnership with USRC. Chapter one also addressed the project background to present relevant information as to how the project and partnership emerged. At the same time, chapter one informed the readers of the goals, and deliverables focusing not just on duties and responsibilities, but on tangible action items that I performed as a graduate student and their relation to the partnership with USRC. The next sections in the first chapter addressed my methodological approach for the project during COVID-19 and some of

the challenges in conducting online research. The last part combined my personal life history and academic influences to illustrate the political, academic, and personal endeavors of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE SERVICE OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract:

This account reflects my partnership with the Undocumented Resource Center at San Jose State University. As an Applied Anthropology graduate student, my partnership with the Undocumented Resource Center focused on developing a student-driven mentoring program to create a pathway to foster a sense of belonging for undocumented students. Through the mentorship of the student interns and interviews with a small sample of self-identify undocumented during the 2021 Spring term, I present students' perceptions of the Undocumented Resource Center, their understandings of mentoring, and their ideas regarding the programing that the resource center should provide. I conclude by sharing some of the outcomes of my internship with USRC and the current state of the mentoring program.

Keywords: Student-Driven Programming, Undocumented Student, Mentor

Beginnings and Reencounters: Introduction and Problem Statement

While walking to my graduate anthropology theory course in Fall 2019 at San Jose State University (SJSU) and thinking of different partnerships with organizations in the local area, I bumped into a former coworker Ana Navarrete. Working on a graduate degree at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) in 2014, Ana worked as the Academic Advisor and Coordinator for Undocumented Student Services. Ana knew of my reputation through her students as a graduate teaching assistant (TA) who advocated on behalf of students, gave all kinds of advice, and as the TA who "kept it real." As a TA at UCSC, I placed attention on my pedagogical approach to delivering class material by making the content relevant to students' lives and creating trusting relationships with students distancing myself from lecture-based

teaching. Soon, I realized that the students' questions were not limited to academics, but they also delved into conversations on personal matters and advice on professional aspirations. Without knowing it, I was giving the same support or service that I had previously received from professors at my former university. Ana and I collaborated on a few presentations throughout2014, but she soon moved on to another position. Now, Ana is the Director of the Undocumented Resource Center (USRC) at SJSU. While catching up with Ana, I shared with her that I was a graduate student in Applied Anthropology and looking to partner with an organization to produce relevant and applicable student programming. Ana informed me that she wanted to expand and create new student programming to cater to the needs of undocumented students at SJSU.

Ana and I met during the 2019-2020 academic year to share ideas about potential projects that I could do as a graduate student intern with USRC. In our conversations, we recalled high school and college professors who lacked an awareness of how our immigration status prevented us from completing assignments (e.g., voting or getting a driver's permit) and excluded us from the classroom. We also encountered financial aid officers who lacked the knowledge in helping undocumented students complete the AB540 form which allowed us to pay in-state tuition. At the same time, we also had professors who without hesitation wrote us recommendation letters for scholarships, or we had college administrators that helped us find the few scholarships for which we were eligible. Ana and I realized that, as former undocumented undergraduate students, our success lay not only in academics but also in large part in the alternatively direct and indirect mentorship from allied admiration, faculty, and peers. Indirect mentorship materialized itself when peers shared tips on how to navigate college settings or introduce us to allied administration or when faculty provided guidance on professional aspirations and wrote

letters of recommendation. In our undocumented journeys, our peers and allies became our informal mentors who shared the knowledge and tools necessary for us to navigate the university. They taught us "the ropes."

In our conversations, Ana informed me that USRC opened its doors in Fall 2018, making it a new resource center. It was thanks to Professor Julia Curry from the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, community members, and the work of allied administration that the USRC emerged as an institutional space to serve undocumented students. While there is no official method to track current undocumented students at SJSU, Ana receives information from the Financial Aid Office regarding students who have asked for more information about undocumented student services when completing their enrollment. SJSU estimates that in 2016, there were over 600 undocumented undergraduate and graduate students.[5] While USRC has been providing valuable resources to undocumented students contributing to retention (e.g., referrals to financial aid or financial assistance to cover renewal fees for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA program), it did not go beyond student transactions regarding financial or legal assistance.

I suggested to Ana that the UCRC could use more empowering programming driven by students' ideas and concerns about their personal, academic, and professional lives at SJSU. Consequently, I proposed to Ana that I could develop a student-peer mentoring program to foster a sense of belonging among undergraduate undocumented students. Fostering belonging within the university context is part of a larger goal to promote student success, increase retention and graduation rates, provide relevant opportunities for professional development, and prepare

[5]For more information visit https://www.sjsu.edu/people/julia.curry/AB540

students for their post-graduate experience. After Ana approved my proposal, I reflected on my anthropological knowledge and my background influencing this project.

Reflecting on Undocumented and Migrants Upbringings: Moral Compass for Relevant Knowledge

In our conversations, Ana inquired about my approach to the project. From my personal experience and professional background, my approach relied on considering mentoring practices that support first-generation low-income students and how immigration status affects students. The reflections of our undocumented journeys served as a compass for the literature review. In our dialogs, I shared with Ana that we were part of a bigger group of college students known as first-generation low-income students (FGLI).[6] The term first-generation encapsulates those students who will be the first ones in their families to attend a college institution in the United States while low-income highlights their socio-economic backgrounds. I have worked in the field of education since 2014 with FLGI students who came from mixed-status families (e.g., being undocumented or having undocumented family members), and precarious economic situations (e.g., parents not working or working long hours on minimum wage or below). Because of the lack of support, FGLI students often identify mentors, outside the family circles, as caring adults who provide a degree of socio-emotional support in their communities (Stanton-Salazar and Urso Spinas 2003) or in their school settings (Abi-Nader 1990).

Ana and I agreed that any individual that works with undocumented students' needs awareness of the discourse of immigration in the US (Chavez 2001; 2013) and understands how immigration policies create vulnerability for students (De Genova 2002; Horton 2016) because the policies contribute to a sentiment of imminent deportation (Boehm 2009) and affects the

[6] The term first-generation low-income student is upon interpretation based on the organizations' mission statement. A student might not be first-generation, but the student might come from a low-income background and a student might be first-generation but is not low-income. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in such debates, but it only presents a general explanation.

student's holistic wellbeing. At the same time, growing up undocumented indirectly helped Ana and I developed our translation skills (e.g., translation of documents from English to Spanish for our parents) or budgeting practices (e.g., carefully accounting for money to pay for tuition). As undocumented students enter the university setting, they do not come empty-handed. Instead, students already come with different forms of capital (social, cultural, familial, etc.) to the university which is the aggregation of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts among students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Yosso 2005). Listening to students' experiences of being undocumented and in college could guide the creation of a mentoring program that would distance itself from deficit approaches to a more-empowering approach (Weiston-Serdan and Sánchez 2017).

However, Ana and I avoided disclosing our undocumented status right away to professors and administrators. We knew that they could not understand what it meant to be undocumented. It took time to share our status and *confianza* (trust" or "confidence") with mentor figures who followed through with their commitments building trusting relationships and camaraderie (McLaughlin and Bryan 2003). While we had a productive dialog about what would influence the mentoring program, I knew the challenge of seeking student volunteers during the pandemic.

Approach to the Project during COVID-19

To gather data to construct a mentoring program guided by student voices, I suggested to the USRC director that I should pilot a mentoring program with the four current student interns for the entire Spring 2021 term. In individual meetings with the students, I engaged in different types of conversations from their backgrounds to their opinions about what student peer mentors should know about working with undocumented students. These meetings enabled me to continuously gather data from the interns' perspective regarding programming that USRC should

(or not) deploy. To complement this data, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with self-identity undocumented students at SJSU. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask students the same set of questions in the same order highlighting similar (or not) responses informing my project of similar patterns among students. The interview questions are divided into three themes: students' perceptions of USRC, mentoring, and ideas on student programming. However, identifying and recruiting interviewees represented a challenge because undocumented students are a hidden population who experience stigmatization and/or who might be reclusive or invisible (Russell 2018). Because this all took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, students experienced exhaustion and disengagement which made finding student volunteers a difficult task.

I deployed a chain referral strategy by which asked USRC staff to refer to other self-identify undocumented students. This sampling strategy helped me connect with hidden populations. Using chain referral permitted me to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of my volunteers. I decided to ask the USRC's director and her interns to refer individuals who they thought would not be afraid to speak about their experiences at SJSU with a graduate student. Besides chain referrals, I created a flyer to advertise my project on USRC's Instagram account. I also asked USRC to send my flier in their mass emails sent to their students to increase my volunteer pool. During my interviews, I also asked volunteers which language they would prefer to speak. While the majority said English, the conversations ended up being bilingual Spanish and English or sometimes Spanglish. The linguistic flexibility in our dialogue, and occasional code-switching, created a comfortable space for the students to express themselves freely. At the end of each interview, I gave space for volunteers to ask me any questions relevant (or not) to the project. My recruitment strategy allowed me to interview eight students from different majors

and academic years. Six of them resided in the Bay Area and the two in Southern California. Two of them self-identified as straight males and the other six self-identified as straight females. Their ages ranged between 20 and 30 years old.

Findings in the Virtual Setting: Perceptions, Trust, and Belonging

The interviews and the data from mentoring the interns showed a difference in students' experiences regarding USRC services. For students who had started attending SJSU and visited it before the pandemic, the resource center represented a safe institutional space where they could ask questions and obtain resources. Luis, a senior majoring in Business Administration, said that USRC represented, "Us and our students struggling at SJSU. The center makes me feel that we matter. A specific place that we can rely on, get legal services, and that has compelling resources for students. Especially at the beginning because we can ask questions to Ana and get direction and guidance. The staff might lack knowledge." Students who began their academic journey before COVID-19 had the opportunity to become personally acquainted with SJSU. The physical engagement with USRC from asking for legal assistance to meeting with the director for academic guidance facilitated the creation of trusting relationships. However, for students who started SJSU in the virtual format, their experience with USRC was more related to the dissemination of information.

Victoria, a transfer student majoring in Liberal Studies-Elementary Education stated that "I get information through the USRC Instagram page about scholarships, deadlines, projects like yours, and events that are happening. I can see and read them instantly." Students like Victoria began their academic journey at SJSU during the lockdown which limited their experience to the sharing of information through virtual meetings or obtaining information through social media outlets. While having knowledge of important deadlines is relevant for students' retention and

success, it still lacked an in-person or face-to-face approach that served to make students feel welcome and safe at USRC resulting in students building a superficial relationship with the resource center.

When I inquired about students' ideas of what constitutes a mentor or about mentoring practices, it was clear that they understood mentoring in terms of the function and degree of commitment from mentors. The word *confianza* emerged as a key word during the interviews and meetings with the student interns. For students, *confianza* meant "trust" or "confidence" in English, but within the context of the conversations, *confianza* referred to the commitments that mentors accept and follow through on which results in a relationship built not only on trust but camaraderie as well. Alicia, a sophomore majoring in Child Development said that a mentor is, "A person who you have *confianza* that keeps you on track, who 'keeps it real'. A person who is always there for the academic and personal." Alicia understood mentoring practices along the lines of guidance and accountability. At the same time, the word *confianza* referred to the quality of such mentorship based on time and dedication to building trust. The idea of a mentor or mentoring practices, for students, are constructed as the product of successful commitments between students and their social networks such as peers, families, and others that provide a sense of security and holistic support. For first-generation, low-income college students whose lives experience precarity, having an individual available to provide support and that recognizes the importance of listening becomes essential in their college journey.

My last set of questions tried to obtain some ideas from students about potential programming that USRC could have in the future to engage with students. Students answering the questions reflected on various ideas important to them and their understandings of what USRC could do for them. Victoria, for example, said "I am not too sure. I have not been there

(USRC). I only see it in posts and do not really know much of it. Maybe, every month or a monthly meeting, where people can go and bring food to get to know others. I want to meet students that are DACA and not, that are in school and make new contacts."

Victoria's answer pointed to her lack of opportunity in accessing USRC due to the pandemic. However, her answer expressed a desire to build a sense of community with other undocumented students through social gatherings. Building a sense of community emerged as a common sentiment among the volunteers and the student interns. However other students like Karla, a transfer student majoring in Marketing, expressed a more complex answer regarding USRC programming, "Help with jobs, connecting with internships, jobs in the area for transfers, helping hand, scholarships, and need a guide to find resources. I think this information should be the first thing we are given, or it should be. As the year progresses, students' mental health changes. I want to belong somewhere and feel familiar with it because I would know where I belong."

Karla understood building a sense of community or belonging to the university in terms of professional development, job opportunities, and the dissemination of information. Having access to these resources would allow students to root themselves within a new context. Overall, the findings demonstrated that undocumented students at SJSU had different experiences regarding their engagement with USRC. Those who interacted in person with USRC had a closer relationship with the resource center, but the pandemic decreased or eliminated the in-person interaction for those who began online which shaped how students perceived USRC. At the same time, students had a concise understanding of a mentor or mentoring practices as their understanding was rooted in the capacity of mentors in building trusting relationships by following up on their commitments. Lastly, students would want USRC to provide programming

that would build a sense of community in terms of professional development opportunities, social gatherings, and access to resources.

The Process of Making the Mentoring Program

The pilot mentoring program exposed me to the different activities that student interns had engaged in to insert themselves into the campus community. They had joined clubs, developed some relationships with professors, and gained familiarity with campus resources. The information from the interviews showed that students who began SJSU previously the pandemic conceptualized belonging to SJSU in similar terms. Those who began SJSU virtually, however, lacked this sense of belonging. Outside the project, my professional trajectory with servicing FGLI college students had already exposed me to students' unique approaches to seeking community in their universities. In many cases, students sought guidance and accountability partners to discuss their ideas or concerns. The data and my experience in supporting students allowed me to reflect on a year-long (Fall and Spring terms) mentoring program based on the pairing of an upperclassman (the peer mentor) with a small group of five to seven incoming students (mentees). I conceptualized mentoring program divided into three areas each with specific activities or tasks for peer mentors to help their mentees accomplish during the first year to facilitate their transition and belonging to SJSU.

The first area, community building, focused on guiding the mentee in building campus connections and becoming familiar with the campus itself. The peer mentor would help the mentee, for example, in scheduling appointments with an advisor to obtain an academic plan, motivate the mentee to explore or join student organizations or help the mentee identify other on-campus relevant resources. Financial awareness, the second area, centered on the peer mentor assisting the mentee with identifying scholarship opportunities or visiting the financial aid office

to become acquainted with allied administration. The last part, professional development, had activities that will help the mentee prepare for a post-graduate experience. The peer mentor would help the mentee, for example, in starting a LinkedIn profile or motivating the mentee to visit the career center at SJSU.

Each area of support contained four to seven activities that peer mentors can help and guide their mentees to accomplish in their first year. However, peer mentors are not required to complete all activities with their mentees in all areas of support. Drawing from my experience working with FGLI college students, I recognized the potential stress and burnout that peer mentors might encounter when asked to complete all activities. I recall from my experiences that sometimes a meeting with a student could last 15 minutes and other times 1.5 hours depending on the students' questions. Being a mentor causes socio-emotional stress which could jeopardize students' academic standing and personal lives. I also thought that requiring the competition of all activities by peer mentors might require extra engagement with the mentees potentially causing burnout and damaging the mentee-mentor relationship. To avoid burnout, I suggested to the USRC's director that peer mentors should help their mentees complete two to four activities in each area per academic term. This would allow for a degree of flexibility for the peer mentor in getting to know their mentees and selecting the activities that would best benefit their mentees. With a small cohort, peer mentors would also have enough time to prepare for their meetings with their mentees. The flexibility would allow peer mentors to focus on building meaningful relationships and becoming aware as to support the student how best.

I proposed to Ana that the pairing of student mentors and their mentees needed to consider their majors, type of personalities, and availability. These variables should be considered by her (or the USRC director) when pairing up students and their mentees when

matching students. From previous experience managing mentors and their college students, if both parties lack similarities, the mentoring relationship was not successful. In the mentors' and mentees' first meeting, I suggested to Ana that USRC should have a contract laying out the details of the mentoring program and the responsibilities of each party. The first day of the mentoring program should be a time for student mentors and mentees to set up boundaries, communication styles, and other relevant information. I recommended to Ana that to support the growing relationship between students and their mentees, USRC should host events for students to strengthen their relationships with USRC and meet other undocumented students. In addition, I recommended to Ana that during the semester she should have individual and group meetings with the peer mentor to check on the progress of their mentees and for peer mentors to share their experiences to learn from each other. At the end of the academic year, I shared with Ana that she should create a survey to distribute to the peer mentor and their mentee to obtain feedback on the mentoring program.

Conclusion

I presented the list of activities and the areas of support to Ana and the student interns. After adding their feedback, I transferred all the files to USRC's shared google drive toward the end of May 2021. Ana asked if it would be possible for me to deliver the mentoring training modules since I created them for future peer mentors. I agreed to this, however, Ana also shared with me that most of her funding and time was being geared towards the 2021 Summer welcome program for new undocumented students who would start at SJSU in Fall 2021. She did not have clarity on her budget for the 2021-2022 academic year. USRC's budget only permitted Ana to hire three or four student interns per year and each intern had their responsibilities leaving no space for student interns to become peer mentors. Toward the middle of June 2021, Ana

confirmed that it would not be possible to implement the mentoring program for the 2021-2022 academic year due to her budget being the same as the previous year. During the 2021 Summer, my communication with Ana decreased as she was occupied with her programming. We reconnected again in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, and she was working on a new project with other on-campus resource centers to create jobs and fellowships for undocumented students.

My anthropological approach to the development of the mentoring program was a personal and political endeavor. Trying to develop student-driven programming was political because it sought to interrupt the social and structural barriers that undocumented college students experience while they navigate their university. At the same time, the project was personal as it reflected part of my success in my undergraduate years. While I shared a degree of cultural similarities with my student volunteers and all the staff at USRC, I also differed in the age of migration to the US and current immigration status. I was unclear sometimes as to what constituted a native and non-native anthropologist due to similarities and differences with my volunteers.

I learned from this partnership that producing student programming during the pandemic and within a short timeframe is possible, but funding availability and clarity played a key role in deterring the implementation of the mentoring program. The last time I talked to Ana, she was still not sure when the mentoring program would be implemented due to budgetary reasons, and she did request an increase for it. Despite not being implemented, I observed an increase in USRC's online presence on their social media platforms. Colleges across the US should be more open to creating student-driven programming to serve students and help them understand how resource centers are institutional spaces for them. At the same time, resource centers in colleges need to start thinking about engagement strategies for the virtual and in-person experience as we

are moving to a hybrid future. As practitioners invested in social change, helping develop student-driven programming in university settings can be part of our agenda and at the same time we must acknowledge that our partner organizations might have some constraints that limit how they applied our suggestions and projects.

CHAPTER THREE

REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT EXPERIENCE AND OTHER NOTES

In this chapter, I review the final outcomes of the partnership with USRC. At the same time, I include a section on the impact of COVID-19 on undocumented students at SJSU. The third section in this installment also presents a list of suggestions for the programing at USRC. Lastly, I conclude this chapter by reflecting on how anthropology can contribute to the formation of relevant student programming to foster student success within the university and presenting the anthropological significance of the project.

Outcomes of the Project

With the information collected from the meetings with the student interns and the semi-structured interviews, I developed a peer mentoring program focused on three pillars of student support 1) community building, 2) financial awareness, and 3) professional development. Each pillar contained between four and seven activities that future student peer mentors could support their mentees to accomplish in one academic year (Fall and Spring). In this process of defining the support pillars and their respective activities, I had to be sensitive toward both the student mentees' and the student mentors' variable schedules. Immigrant undocumented first-generation low-income students hold, in addition to their academic responsibilities, financial and emotional duties to their families while confronting the larger issue of their immigration status. Taking these variables into consideration, I decided to focus on creating a small number of flexible activities that would help undocumented students become connected to SJSU in the spam of an academic year.

The pillars and their activities were a product of the students' voices regarding their perceptions of USRC, understanding of mentoring practices, and ideas on USRC programming.

After this section of the project was completed, another project emerged in relation to the position of a student peer mentor. While a future student mentor, consciously or unconsciously, could have developed some general understanding of mentoring practices, the student mentor would have to be knowledgeable on some of the issues affecting undocumented students. Ana and I agreed that future peer mentors would have to undergo some training or take some workshops before working with undocumented students. From our conversations before and during the internships, we concluded that developing a four-part workshop series or training modules that would constitute a good base.

The first module, titled "Approaching Mentoring," centers on addressing the significance of mentors for first-generation low-income youth during their college journeys. It briefly unpacks the structure of higher education and shares ideas about some of the barriers that undocumented students encounter in their educational trajectory. The workshop, when addressing the topic of mentoring, compares traditional mentoring and contrasts the idea of critical mentoring (Weiston-Serdan and Sánchez 2017) which focuses on creating a mentoring relationship from the student's voice distancing mentoring practices from deficit approaches. Furthermore, it also presents the concept that students already come with different forms of capital (social, cultural, familial, etc.) to the university leading to a conversation of a cultural wealth model which focuses on the aggregation of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts within students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Yosso 2005). The workshop ends by touching upon trust, dependability, open-mindedness, mentee-centered, and authenticity as characteristics that mentors should develop to best support students).

The second workshop, titled "Speaking about Immigration Status," focuses on giving an introduction on how discourses about of Latinx people have been present in the US media, and

how these discourses are affecting how students see themselves within the US. Furthermore, the topic goes into unpacking the concept of illegality, how students understand its meaning, and how being undocumented is not limited to only Latinas/os but is also present among other ethno-racial groups. The workshop ends with sharing the best practices to support undocumented students.

The third installment, titled "Intersectionality," draws from the previous one by expanding the conversation of the diversity within undocumented students and how each student might experience barriers according to their race, immigration status, and gender. Furthermore, the workshop has an exercise called "The Matrix Opportunity" from the Denver Public Schools which allows participants to reflect on how their identity plays a role in their lives in terms of race, such as comparing how different groups have been historically marginalized.

The last workshop, named "A Glance at Professional Development," provides a degree of guidance into how student-peer mentors can provide feedback to mentees on building resumes and cover letters. The workshop also reminds peer mentors about the resources already available to them such as LinkedIn or Handshake to assist students in finding potential professional opportunities. The last section of the workshop focuses on graduate school and ways in which DACA and non-DACA students can finance it.

The workshop series to train future student peer mentors can be modified to cater to the needs of different demographics. For example, an extra module can be created to address mentoring for students who self-identify as LGBTIQA+ or the content within the workshop can be adapted to address other topics. Additionally, all workshops come with supporting documents from the Denver Public Schools that provide new mentors with tools to develop their mentoring practices.

The mentor responsibilities rubric is divided into three key areas that student peer mentors can help incoming students with their transition into SJSU to foster a sense of belonging and prepare students to look for relevant professional opportunities: Community Building, Financial, and Professional Development. Each area of support contains specific duties and a suggested time frame for accomplishing the goals during the academic term. I suggested to the director that future student-peer mentors should take no more than six student mentees to protect their well-being by preventing emotional and academic burnout. At the training workshops, student interns and the director can adapt the list of activities and outcomes for the student-peer mentor responsibilities according to their needs (See Appendix B).

During my internship, I proposed to the USRC's director that the resource center should increase its online presence during the pandemic. My suggestion materialized in us having conversations through media platforms. We had an online dialog among USRC members, and with other resource campus and off-campus allies in regard to unpacking being undocumented. We were also able to collaborate in producing a virtual space that resulted in the following online events:

Instagram Live – On March 19th, 2021, USRC's director and the graduate student engaged with the topic of being undocumented pre-DACA which touched upon the topics of creating community, disclosing immigration status, the role of networks, the discourse of immigration in the US, and mental health. They both shared their immigration stories, and their college experiences as undocumented students. The purpose of Instagram Live was to create an online approach to the USRC presence and have an open dialogue about being undocumented before DACA.

YouTube Live - First Generation & Undocumented - SJSU Podcast. on April 14, 2021, USRC's director, the student interns, and the graduate student produced a dialogue regarding the experience of being first-generation low-income and undocumented. The dialogue created a safe space to share how each navigated the different educational spheres and to learn from each other. The YouTube Live had the purpose of having a more student-driven dialogue and to explore how coming from historically marginalized communities and not having legal residency impacts the access to and attainment of higher education. It was posted online on May 14, 2021.

YouTube Live - Professional Development Resources for Undocumented Students Info Session. On April 15, 2021, Sharet Garcia, the founder of Undocuprofessionals, Jorge Espinoza Rivera, USRC's student intern, and Edher Zamudio, Graduate Student Intern, had a conversation regarding professional development. The dialogue focused on unpacking the meaning of professional development for first-generation low-income and undocumented students, how interviewees got into their current professions, and a reflection on their journeys.

Podcast with El Centro SJSU. Season 2, Episode 1: The Future of Immigration Under a New Administration. On February 23, 2021, in collaboration with Ana Navarrete, Director of the UndocuSpartan Resource Center, Edher Zamudio, Graduate Assistant at the UndocuSpartan Resource Center, and Barbara Pinto, attorney at the Immigrant Legal Defense, the podcast explored the topics the future of immigration in the U.S. under the contemporaneous presidential administration. The podcast had the purpose of providing information about USRC resources and presenting different perspectives regarding the current state of immigration. The podcast was posted on October 22, 2021.

Impact of COVID-19

The partnership and the project took place during the lockdown in Spring 2021. While my project did not directly address the impact of COVID-19 on students' lives, I asked a few questions to include how the pandemic had affected the students' college experience. Before the pandemic, universities worldwide offered online instruction for their students. The difference during the pandemic was the sudden and forceful shift to online learning and the disruption of the lives of students. Overnight, professors encountered a lack of preparedness for virtual learning while along general lines college students faced uncertainty about their academic schedules, evaluation, and testing modes (Agarwal and Khara 2021). Before the pandemic, first-generation low-income youth heavily depended on on-campus resources, in-person teaching, and networking with peers. During the pandemic, students coming from the lower end in economic terms faced issues with technology (or had no access to it), unfamiliarity with the online learning system, lack of accessibility to professors and peers, and job precarity. Natalia, a senior majoring in Business Management and Information Systems, said, "I feel robbed of experience and time, the most fun time is grocery shopping. My graduation process has been taken away, and it's been hard on my family…online learning makes me feel disconnected, and it does not feel real. I lack motivation…and it is another layer of hardships."

For students like Natalia, the pandemic took away the feeling of accumulation of their hard work towards graduation embedded in the fulfillment of their undergraduate journey. At the same time, the virtual format only increased their disengagement and lack of motivation. For undocumented students at SJSU, the pandemic only heightened the pre-existent social inequalities. Students experienced the pandemic relative to their socioeconomic status (Neupane 2021). On the other hand, students who began their college journey during the pandemic felt a

delay in their journey. Traditionally, the college experience is marked by the physical relocation of students to the university and going to new spaces for instruction. The pandemic, however, prevented all these processes from happening and blurred the boundaries between high school seniors and first-year university students. To only mention the negative aspects of the pandemic for students, would deny students' capacity to learn and strived during uncertainty.

Karla, a transfer student majoring in Marketing stated that "It's so bad. It made me more bitter, but I have learned how to be more determined, stick to my guts, face struggles when moving, and get better at communicating with university departments. It made me value boundaries. It helped me realize that leaving a job because of internal problems is okay. There is some hope in realizing your options, it helps you grow up, and I am doing this for me, and working for my future." Karla's comments on how the pandemic changed her reflected how undocumented students encountered new obstacles producing in some cases holistic growth changing their lives.

The pandemic disrupted the students' lives by blurring the lines of their school, work, and home and ending any form of in-person learning and interaction, for well over a year. In addition to this, students had to obtain jobs to help their families and had to accustom themselves to virtual modes of learning. The drastic shift in the lives of students caused frustration, confusion, and anxiety, a novel obstacle for students. Nonetheless, it also generated an opportunity for students to reflect on the aspects of their lives they had taken for granted and made them aware of their own abilities. It demonstrated the capacity of students to self-reflect and be critical of their persona to foster personal growth.

Recommendations for USRC

The data gathered from mentoring the student interns and from interviewing students suggests that USRC should consider the following ideas in the future as we move to an in-person or hybrid interface with the purpose of engaging self-identified undocumented students:

1. Create monthly or bi-monthly gatherings for students to connect with similar peers.
2. Maintain a database of undocufriendly internships and scholarships for students to apply to.
3. Design a panel comprised of undocumented professionals in different career fields for students to attend.
4. Connect with other organizations that help undocumented students during and after college (Undocuprofessionals and Dreamers in Tech).
5. Continue engaging students virtually through Instagram and other media platforms.
6. Develop working relationships with other resource centers on campus to provide employment opportunities for undocumented students (DACA and Non-DACA).
7. Consider forming a student group for undocumented students.
8. Maintain a concrete list of allied professors and administrators on campus.

Anthropology for the Service of Student Success and Reflection on the Anthropological significance

An anthropological approach to creating student-driven programming for USRC delved into understanding the priorities of each stakeholder in this partnership. For student interns and interviewees, their priorities lay in managing an ambiguous online academic environment, precarious economic situations, and unstable living situations. The priorities of the USRC's director, on the other hand, consisted of providing student support in legal and financial terms. My anthropological approach allowed me to create relevant interview questions from my conversations with the director. Most importantly, however, my anthropological approach

allowed me to build rapport with all stakeholders which allowed me to obtain unique pieces of information inaccessible to others. While I was unable to conduct traditional ethnographic work, the continuous mentorship of the student interns, meetings with the director, and events that I lead or supported helped me understand that ethnography could also be conducted in the virtual setting. My positionality, as a somewhat native anthropologist, and my informal approach made students and the director feel comfortable around me. This gave me a glance at staff and undergraduate students' uncensored feelings and experiences during the pandemic informing my thought process regarding a mentoring program for the service of students.

The idea to create a peer-to-peer student mentoring program to support undocumented students at SJSU was an intricate process of active listening, acknowledging different lived experiences, and asking questions. These characteristics were embedded in my anthropological approach. However, the online nature of the pandemic helped me polish these skills as I placed emphasis on them during my meetings with USRC staff and student interviews to capture as much information as possible. At the same time, my professional experience within the field of college access and college education exposed me to the similar and different stories of undocumented students pursuing a college education. Different in terms of their home cities or majors and similar regarding their desires to acquire a college education and how their immigration status shaped access to opportunities. In hearing their stories, I began to comprehend students' understanding (or not) of their subjectivity (Ortner 2005) through their collective sensibilities rooted in their undocumented college journeys.

The processes by which student interns and my interviewees navigated their life obstacles is part of Henry Giroux's (1997) concept of cultural logic which centers on how students practice counter-hegemonic actions, reaffirm distinct epistemologies, have diverse historical perspectives,

and develop cultural standpoints. Simply put, each student understood and confronted their life situations in unique ways reaffirming their existence regardless of how others perceived them. The student-peer mentoring program, therefore, is a representation of students' experiences and how they have made sense of their world, centering themselves as invaluable experts in the formation of this program.

At the beginning of the SJSU Applied Anthropology program, I was uncertain of my research topic. A year before, I left a doctoral program on bad terms due to the unstable funding, lack of mentorship, microaggressions, internal politics, and nepotism. While I enjoyed teaching and mentoring, the degree remained theoretical with zero real-life applicability, and it carried an emptiness, a sentiment of unfulfillment. Graduate education had left me with a bitter taste in my mouth, but I still wanted to produce research with real-life applications. It was not until I serendipitously met USRC's director that my new project emerged. My project was approved by faculty members and going through the curriculum gave my life a renewed sense of academic curiosity and a pathway to applied research.

Working to improve and create practices for the college completion of undocumented students is a form to give back to my community and to remain true to my roots in the US. After acquiring a US passport, my memories and feelings of growing up undocumented in San Francisco have not vanished. How could one forget about being undocumented? Rather, my experiences, my different jobs, and my academic positions have become my conduit to understanding the needs of other undocumented students and first-generation low-income students in college (See Index 4 for Navigating the Pandemic as a Graduate Student Intern).

As an applied anthropologist, I am deeply influenced by my background. My role, my approach to solving issues, my methodology, and my framework are a reference to my social

position in terms of class, race, gender, and immigration status (Jones 1970). I never had the intention to follow the steps of traditional anthropology to travel to another country to work in a small village and produce theoretical analysis. As an applied anthropologist, I see myself as a mediator between the institution and students. Collecting data to produce systematic changes is a form of applied research and knowledge (Jones 1976; Kozaitis 2000) which makes me an advocate for student success. In the broader topic of anthropology, in addition to my project contributing to both applied research and online research, it also expands our understanding of the impact of online learning on students.

Technological advancements and their circulation are part of what Arjun Appadurai (1990) refers to as technoscape referring to global cultural flows regarding the movement and arrangement of technology worldwide affecting human culture. The pandemic accelerated the growth of this cultural flow by making access to and operational ability of technology central to human life. Human interaction greatly diminished and interaction with technology became intimate. One of my interviewees referred to her college experience as "Zoom University" implying a new form of not just learning but of human interaction. Students' college experience previously rooted in a physical landscape that divided home, school, and work shifted to a virtual sphere that blurred the boundaries of their college experience.

Unable to leave their own living quarters, the virtual world, through access to technology, became necessary for human interaction and a new way of being during the pandemic. The forceful shift into virtual living (or being) positioned access to technology and its operation not simply as a cultural tool, but as functional to living. Albeit the pandemic and virtual shift did not affect all students equally. For undocumented students, the pandemic delayed the beginning of their academic and personal growth by preventing them from being physically on campus and

making connections. At the same time, the pandemic added another layer of financial responsibility as students had to search for new jobs to increase their financial support towards their families. In addition to this, the Trump administration threatened the DACA program, adding stress to students' lives by making their immigration status even more precarious than before.

My project contributes to the intersection of anthropology, education, and mentoring studies by exploring the impact of the pandemic with virtual learning and students' understanding of mentoring practices. At the same time, it also glimpsed over the aggravation of social inequalities, and the effects of online learning for undocumented college students. Before the pandemic, anthropology had embarked on researching the internet as media, online community, identity formations, communication, power, and ideology (Wilson and Peterson 2002). After the pandemic anthropologists can perhaps expand their research into examining the consequences of the forceful shift to a virtual world, the labyrinth of online learning, the blurred boundaries of daily life, technology as necessary for human interaction, the aggravation of social inequalities, and the decrease in mental health among people. My hope with this project was to create student-driven programming for USRC with the intention of fostering a sense of belonging among undocumented students while at the same time exploring the frictions and tension of individuals transitioning into virtual living or online experiences.

Appendix A: Background on Student Interns

Monica, for example, grew up in Gilroy Area and she had family members of different immigration statuses giving her an understanding of what being undocumented meant. Her high school had other Mexican and US-born Mexican, whites, and a few Asian students. She was able to participate in a few enrichment programs during her high school helping her understand the value of a college education regardless of immigration status. She was able to get enough financial aid to afford San Jose State and pursue a major in psychology and child development. Like her, Natalia attended a somewhat similar school in Los Angeles and took advantage of similar enrichment opportunities during the summers. She had also had mixed-status families and understood the struggle of not having legal residency. With the help of friendly high school staff, she was able to apply and attend San Jose State University. Since her early days, she always perceived how students encountered segregation informing her decision to major in Sociology with an emphasis on race relations.

Alicia, a bit like the previous, migrated at a very young age and grew up in Vacaville among other Mexican, US-born Mexicans, and white students. She had difficulty disclosing her immigration status with some teachers, but she found a supportive group in her Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. Students in AVID programs are exposed to college eligibility and application processes which helped her get accepted into San Jose State University. She, sometimes, had to help some counselors explain what it means to be AB540 and how the CA Dream Works. During her high school, she did not encounter racist remarks but clearly understood how she was different than her peers. She is majoring in Child Development and considering other majors as well.

On the other hand, Luis migrated to California at a young age and lived for most of his life in Watsonville. Throughout his middle school and high school trajectory, Luis grew up around other Mexican migrants and US-born Mexicans while working different jobs and trying to avoid problems with gangs. He encountered racism from the different Anglo-Saxon residents which shaped his understanding of community and made him aware of race relations. After graduating from high school, he decided to take some classes at Cabrillo College with no intention to pursue a four-year degree, and with no legal residency, he was not interested in pursuing a college education. It was not until he met a professor at Cabrillo College who explained to him the ways in which undocumented students could afford college. He was able to get his DACA and applied for the California Dream which allowed him to afford SJSU where is majoring in Business and has a photography business on the side.

Appendix B: Metrics for Peer Mentoring Program

	Activities	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Objectives: Student immersion into campus culture
Area: Community Building - Complete 2-4 activities per semester	Join or explore student organizations (e.g., professional, cultural, or recreational).					
	Visit professor's office hours (and/or teaching assistant) to obtain academic support.					
	Visit tutoring center to obtain extra support for academic classes when needed or at least 2 times per academic term.					
	Visit department or general college advisor at the beginning (and the end) of the semester to have a list of classes to take for the incoming terms (based on general education or specific major).					
	Become familiar with the different buildings on campus (e.g., office of financial aid or student union).					
	Identify particular services to students such as the psychological services, the food pantry, or student support services on campus.					
	Attend on-campus free events or workshops that speak of the student experience and how to navigate college.					

	Activities	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Objectives: Navigating financial aid
Area: Financial Awareness Complete between 2-4 activities times per semester	Research scholarships within the SJSU database (e.g., major, GPA, ethnicity, etc.).					
	Research scholarships outside SJSU (e.g., major, GPA, ethnicity, etc.).					
	Identify and visit the financial aid office.					
	Apply to at least one on-campus scholarship					
	Apply to at least one off-campus scholarship					

	Activities	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Date and Notes	Objectives: Post graduate pathways/preparation
Area: Professional Development - Complete at least 2 activities per semester	Visit the professional career center to work on resumes, cover letters, and others.					
	Start creating a LinkedIn account.					
	Get to know a teacher(s) and ask about career pathways or aspirations.					
	Attend any free event on campus that is about professional development.					
	Apply to relevant internships or job opportunities.					

Appendix C: Links

Instagram Live: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CMnPZnjDTsc/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

YouTube Live - First Generation & Undocumented - SJSU Podcast: https://youtu.be/y4Ed8UBZzVM

YouTube Live - Professional Development Resources for Undocumented Students Info Session: https://youtu.be/DW_kvyAG7bs

Podcast with El Centro SJSU. Season 2, Episode 1: The Future of Immigration Under a New Administration: https://www.sjsu.edu/chicanxlatinxssc/resources/podcast/index.php

Appendix D: Navigating the Pandemic as a Graduate Student Intern

In Spring 2021, I had a full-time job position as a Program Coordinator with the Peninsula College Fund, was a full-time graduate student and was a graduate intern. First-generation low-income struggles do not necessarily vanish after acquiring a college education. In fact, becoming the major financial pillar in the family might increase stress and anxiety for young professionals.

I empathized with the student interns and my interviewees regarding caring for their families even more during the pandemic. Like them, my mother's main income, cleaning houses, significantly decreased since the beginning of the pandemic and I drastically began financially and emotionally supporting her. Unable to visit her and being confined to a small apartment where boundaries of work and home began were confusing and exhausting. I felt annoyed and frustrated as if part of my learning experience was interrupted and taken away.

After some months, I relocated to Colfax, CA with my future family-in-law and while the house provided more space and rent was affordable allowing me to help my mother with her financial transnational responsibilities, I was still confined to the house. I did not leave the house or had no social life as residents in the small town are from a very different political party. I saw this as necessary or as a sacrifice to continue providing support to my mother. How could I not be empathetic to students' feelings of frustration or uncertainty about their college experience during the pandemic?

Like the student interns and the interviewees, I was tired but this sudden shift to a virtual format became a learning experience. I had to keep in mind the main goal-I began this program and I need to finish it and this I shared with all with the intention to empathize and motivate them to finish the year strong. Furthermore, when student interns rescheduled meeting appointments, I understood that they were tired of staring at the screen and needed a break. I shared with them to prioritize their mental health in any way they could. I shared the same with interviewees who reschedule. Those who did not show up or lost contact, I assumed, just needed a break from being on the computer and had other things going on in their lives.

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