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The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community Advocacy and Support from Nonprofits

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**The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community Advocacy and
Support from Nonprofits**

Olivia P. Rosa

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2022

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

CAPSTONE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CAPSTONE TITLE: The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community
Advocacy and Support from Nonprofits

AUTHOR: Olivia P. Rosa

THE CAPSTONE PAPER HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAM IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

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Acknowledgements

My embarking on this journey and completion of this program would not have been possible without the incredible network of support I am so fortunate to have.

Eddie, my partner in crime and fierce supporter: Your endless support, encouragement and patience are such a gift to me. All those late nights of studying or being in class while you cooked dinner and quietly played follow the leader or hide and seek with the kids before getting them ready for bed were made possible because of you, I hope you continue making delightful dinners beyond graduation. You have been and continue to be my rock and listening ears, your sweet words of encouragement and comedic relief have been my fuel. To my kids, thank you for your unconditional love and patience as you navigated this experience with me.

A mis padres: Yo literalmente no estaría aquí sin todos sus sacrificios y su apoyo incondicional que me han abierto tantas oportunidades. Gracias por apoyarme en cada nueva aventura que me he propuesto, sin importar que tan loca o difícil parezca. Mami, tu eres y siempre serás la luz de mi vida. tu amor incondicional, apoyo, sabiduría y presencia me ha moldeado en la mujer que soy, con la fortaleza para nunca dejar de luchar por alcanzar las estrellas.

Dr. Nemon, thank you for your patience with my endless questions and for talking me off the ledge at times. Your guidance and support on this project and beyond have been some of the greatest highlights of this program.

To my friends, community, and amazing network of support: I am blessed to be able to learn, work and grow alongside such incredible people.

To my amazing cohort I thank each of you for creating such a beautiful community and for allowing me to learn and grow with each of you.

Abstract

Unauthorized immigration has been at the forefront of national socio-political debates over the past decade. The prevailing approach to immigrant integration in the United States is for individuals to use their own networks, and community resources to assimilate in their new communities. Yet a framework of support for newcomer immigrant integration does not exist, which promotes vastly different experiences depending on the state individuals migrate to where differing local, state, and federal sociopolitical contexts that define these experiences, particularly for undocumented individuals. The lack of an intentional support for this population furthers the experience of discrimination, racial profiling, fear of immigration raids and deportation, family separation, etc. A curriculum was developed as a tool for nonprofits to improve their method of engaging and working with undocumented immigrants with particular emphasis on the culturally relevant aspects that affect these communities, historical context as it relates to US government's intervention in the socio-political stability of Central American countries, and the role of nonprofits when providing support for undocumented communities.

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The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community Advocacy and Support from Nonprofits

The United States -- the quintessential country of immigrants -- has been historically rooted in waves of migration. According to the PEW Research Center, the US has more immigrants than any other country in the world (2020). Unauthorized immigration has been at the forefront of national socio-political debates over the past decade. Currently the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States is estimated at 11 million individuals, with a recent increase in unauthorized immigration from Central American and Asian countries (Pew Research Center, 2020).

A framework of support for newcomer immigrant integration does not exist, much less for an undocumented immigrant, which promotes vastly different experiences depending on the state individuals migrate to since there are differing local, state, and federal sociopolitical contexts that define these experiences (Aguilar, Cannella & Huertas, 2019). The prevailing approach to immigrant integration in the United States is that individuals are expected to use their own resources, family, friendship networks, and the assistance of community-based institutions to survive and thrive in the United States. However, for the growing undocumented community in the country who regularly experience discrimination, racial profiling, fear of immigration raids, fear of deportation, family separation, etc., accessing support systems is often not an option.

In the absence of such frameworks of support, communities must turn to local stakeholders and institutions. Community-based organizations have the potential to help streamline the experiences of undocumented individuals across the country; to become a part of the crucial support to the lives of undocumented immigrants, their families, and communities.

They can provide not only social services but safe community spaces where individuals can be among others who speak their language and where they can learn to navigate life in their adopted country. The role of these institutions is particularly important in parts of the country that are not as welcoming, where individuals may not have access to health, education, and other social services. Furthermore, various organizations in a given community could partner to create networks that bolster and broaden the support system of individuals, thus fostering a sense of integration and fulfillment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

For the purpose of this project, the undocumented immigrant experience is situated in a theoretical foundation of Latina/o Critical Theory (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and Segmented Assimilation Theory (Zhou, 1997). In short, the experiences of assimilation among new waves of immigrants and their children are extremely diverse and segmented. Furthermore, multiple forms of oppression based on immigration status, language, culture, and ethnicity intersect to shape the identities and experiences of Latino/a individuals and their families (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

This project proposes the development of curricula that will serve as a guidance tool for agencies to understand how to better serve undocumented families. This will be carried out through a series of interviews with local and national organizations in order to identify best practices when serving undocumented communities across the country. Particular topics to be emphasized include how data can be used or weaponized to target undocumented individuals, how funding can be appropriated to help undocumented residents, and lastly a review of cultural and historical contexts that affect these communities.

Literature Review

The United States is a country historically rooted in various waves of migration dating back to the 1820's with the first wave of immigrants from the British Isles, and subsequent waves of Irish, German and European immigrants to the United States. The most recent wave of migration began in 1965, marked by rising numbers of immigrants from Latin America and Asia. The proportion of immigrants as a percentage of the U.S. population across the years has oscillated between a low of 4.7% during the 1970s and a high of 14.8% around 1890 (Migration Policy Institute, 2018).

Most recently an increase of unauthorized migration from Mexico and Central America in the past decade has brought the topic of the US immigration system to the forefront. In order to effectively examine the concept of undocumented migration in the United States it is critical to explore its origin dating back to 1965, when changes in U.S. immigration policy blocked avenues for legal entry from Mexico and imposed the first-ever numerical limitations on legal immigration from the Western Hemisphere (Massey & Pren, 2012). Prior to that year, legal permanent immigration was not restricted numerically. These policies, however, only caused the annual inflow of migrants to continue without authorization to jobs waiting for them north of the border (Massey, Durant & Penn, 2014). Similarly, undocumented migration from Central America began after 1979 as a direct result the U.S. government's intervention in the Nicaraguan Contra War and its support of right-wing regimes in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Violence grew and spread through Central America through the 1980s, which caused undocumented migration to the U.S. to increase accordingly, as unauthorized Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans increasingly joined Mexicans north of the border (Lundquist & Massey, 2005).

This work situates the definition of undocumented immigrants as “a foreign-born individual who has entered the United States without inspection (and not subsequently obtained any right to remain) or stayed in the United States beyond the expiration date of a visa or other status” (Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2017, p. 3). Although this definition includes unauthorized migration to the US from any country, the notion of illegality plays a large role in constructing, perpetuating, and solidifying whiteness. As philosopher and professor at the University of Oregon states, “Illegality, like race, has historically functioned as a signifier of non-whiteness and thereby marks entire communities such as Latinx communities as nonwhite” (Mendoza, 2010, p. 42).

For the purpose of this work, the concept of illegality of an individual is situated in framework of Latino/a Critical Race Theory, which supports the notion that immigration law and policies construct illegality of an individual, a concept that has a deep impact in their ability to assimilate and integrate into their communities (Garcia, 2017). Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) takes into consideration the role of race and racism in policy systems through theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical approaches (Garcia, 2017). Additionally, this framework shifts the focus to structural inequities that affect individuals as opposed to holding people of color responsible for the structural inequities that they face. Finally, a LatCrit framework also pushes migration researchers to embrace an intersectional approach to their analyses of race and ethnic relations. Mary Romero (2005), a LatCrit scholar and sociologist, points out that the maintenance of the status quo in policy recommendations has real-life consequences on immigrants and other people of color. She argues that the main focus of LatCrit offers vital and necessary models for “bridging the growing antagonism and increasing anti-

immigrant sentiment that impacts citizens and non-citizens in the global context” (Romero, 2005, p. 4)

The Undocumented Experience: Accessing Crucial Human and Social Services

The current immigration policies in the US not only prevent undocumented individuals from integrating in their communities but also perpetuate a climate of suspicion toward immigrants of color with crippling implications. Immigration policies currently in place are also inextricably linked to the trauma stemming from family separations, work site raids, or operations by local authorities, for children of undocumented parents (Chaudry et al., 2010). As Chaudry et al. point out in their study titled, “Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement,” children of undocumented families experience severe challenges including emotional and psychological trauma from separations from parents and economic hardships. The difficulties that Latinx undocumented immigrants must navigate through consists of a myriad of challenges including discrimination, fluency in the English language, and basic access to social and human services such as physical and mental healthcare, education and housing (Martinez et al., 2015). According to the Annual Review of Public Health, “Undocumented Latinx immigrants experience unique factors prior to migration, during migration, and after migration that shape their health” (Ornelas, Yamanis & Ruiz, 2020, paras. 10-11).

According to recent estimates, approximately 5.5 million children reside in the US with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent, of whom 4.5 million were born in the US (Yoshikawa & Suarez-Orozco, 2013). Thus, children with at least one undocumented parent make up nearly one-third of all children with immigrant parents and about 8 percent of all US children, their well-being holds important implications for US society. In other words, nearly 8

percent of all US children are being developmentally and socioeconomically affected by immigration enforcement policies that affect the security and stability of their home. This speaks to the crucial need for local agencies and stakeholders to provide better outreach and application support for undocumented parents to access public benefits for their children. Nonprofits and advocacy organizations can ease enrollment barriers by acting as intermediaries between immigrant communities and government agencies.

According to The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) major federal public benefits programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), nonemergency Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) have historically excluded undocumented immigrants from accessing them (NILC, 2021). Additionally, as Angela Chuan-Ru Chen and Robert A. Rhoads highlight, some existing laws are used to “criminalize those who hire, house, aid, transport, or educate undocumented immigrants” (Chen & Rhoads, 2016, p. 526). The lack of a national immigrant integration policy within the U.S. federal government has led to an inconsistent response to successful immigrant settlement in communities across the country, leaving undocumented immigrants most vulnerable to family and socio-economic instability (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2013).

Desire for Assimilation

Assimilation is popularly viewed as the linear process of progressive improvement and adjustment to American society (National Research Council, 1996). American sociologist Milton Gordon laid out the importance of distinguishing between cultural and structural assimilation. According to Milton, cultural assimilation refers to adopting the dominant population’s cultural

aspects such as language, behavior, and values, and structural assimilation refers to integrating into major social institutions such as, education, labor market, and civic/political (Gordon, 1964).

When frameworks exist to promote assimilation intentionally, it enables the engagement and transformation of all community members, reaping shared benefits and creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, it is crucial for undocumented immigrants to have access to the services and support networks that will enable successful assimilation and integration in their new communities. Community and cultural assimilation help to build the security and stability of communities, it improves overall health and wellbeing of community members and enhances economic vitality.

However, as studies aimed at informing the concept of civic engagement for community advancement state, legal status is a highly consequential factor for immigrant incorporation and political socialization (Lai, 2021). As sociology doctoral candidate Tianjian Lai asserts, “Undocumented immigrants are significantly less likely to participate in general civic organizations, such as community and ethnic organizations, relative to documented immigrants. Likewise, undocumented mothers with undocumented children are less likely to volunteer in schools or participate in parent-teacher associations” (2021, p. 197). Undocumented members of a community face significant barriers to their structural, political, and social integration in the United States (Lai, 2021). Thus, vulnerable legal status inhibits immigrants’ access to civic resources while fostering fear and stigma, thus depressing their engagement (Abrego, 2011). Likewise, civic sites vary in their openness toward immigrants, with significant implications for where and how immigrants’ legal status may affect civic engagement.

Theoretical Foundation: Segmented Assimilation as Immigrant Integration

Professor of Chicana and Chicano studies at the University of California, San Juanita Garcia explains, “immigrants and their children have experienced mobility across generations in terms of education and income but [...] their progress relative to whites has been slower than the progress achieved by southern and eastern European immigrants” (Garcia, 2017, pp. 2-3). Through her research she suggests, “new immigrants face incomplete assimilation, known as the ethnic disadvantage model” (Garcia, 2017, p. 11). She argues that “post - 1965 immigrants and their descendants experience a bumpier and fragmented assimilation” (pp. 3-4), also known as *Segmented Assimilation Theory*. Thus, to effectively examine the challenges to undocumented immigrants when it comes to assimilation, it is critical to explore the ideology of assimilation through the framework of segmented assimilation as the core to the process of immigrant integration. This perspective stresses that the United States is a stratified society, and thus when immigrants arrive in the U.S. there are different segments available to them, depending on things like socioeconomic or immigration status. Immigrants from Latin American countries have vast differences in language and culture than those of previous European immigrants, which has a significant impact on the degree to which they can socioeconomically assimilate. Furthermore, the availability of opportunities and accessibility to resources that would help immigrants successfully assimilate and integrate is largely determined by the level of wealth of that community.

Segmented assimilation theory puts forth that opportunity and access for immigrants and their children are dependent on three divergent paths. The first path follows the classical assimilation model, where immigrants and their children assimilate into the mainstream society, i.e., straight-line theory of assimilation, or Anglo-conformity (Garcia, 2017). The second path

results in downward assimilation where low-educational achievement and lack of opportunity lead to assimilation into an “underclass” community. The third path is selective integration where immigrants and their families may obtain a middle-class status through education and child-rearing practices that are reinforced by a sense of strong social and ethnic cohesion from their communities. In other words, the more obstacles, and challenges to accessing resources, the higher likelihood of downward assimilation. Thus, undocumented immigrants faced with additional challenges and stigma due to their status are very likely to assimilate into segments of society where they’ll experience chronic poverty, financial hardship and instability.

The Role of Nonprofits for a Thriving Community

Nonprofits and community institutions play an important role in supporting communities by providing critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for families and individuals. These entities are intended to not only strengthen communities by connecting individuals to services that promote access, stability and empowerment but also advocate for social change that catalyzes growth and opportunity. Nonprofits encourage the development of social capital in maintaining personal and community networks associated with the distribution of resources. Nonprofits help to build long term relationships of trust and reciprocity, shared visions, mutual interest, and economic opportunity that are necessary for the effectiveness of neighborhood revitalization (Jennings, 2005).

Although supporting the stability and successful integration of individuals and families in their communities is in line with their mission, the reality is that not all nonprofit organizations are well equipped with the necessary information to serve the undocumented segments of their communities. As Chen and Rhoads (2016) point out “the debate over immigrant rights has steadily shifted from federal lawmakers to state and local actors. The current federal framework

of immigration policies [...] often leaves local institutions to employ their own discretion when interpreting federal laws. The actions of leaders are often ambiguous as they juggle legal compliance, contradictory pressures from diverse constituencies, and attempts to meet the needs of undocumented individuals” (p. 515). The social safety nets that nonprofits are meant to create is often trifled by perceived risks such as jeopardizing their nonprofit status, the potential for loss of funding due to state and federal budget cuts for immigrant facing organizations, participant data being weaponized to target and identify undocumented families. In other words, if undocumented individuals happen to reside in a community where organizations are well informed and equipped with trusted networks of support then the better their chances at assimilating into a stable situation. However, the rest of undocumented individuals across the country will likely fare poorly and assimilate into a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement.

Tools and Guidance for Nonprofits

Nonprofit and civic institutions represent a great value to the fabric of a community. However, if they are not able to fully support all segments of their populations then they are falling short of truly accomplishing their mission. If community institutions can offer opportunities for civic engagement and support in the face of anti-immigrant hostility and lack of access to formal resources then undocumented immigrants may be more inclined to engage and participate more in their communities (Abrego, 2011). Thus, there is a real need for educating nonprofits on their ability to work with undocumented immigrants by providing cultural context to inform the type of support their communities will benefit from depending on their country of origin, reasons for migrating and current situation, and trusted information regarding the legality of their operations as it relates to their nonprofit status. Such guidance would encourage the creation of an intentional framework of support for undocumented families at a local level.

Nonprofits, social and human services institutions, and civic organizations can cross collaborate in ensuring that families are provided the support they need to successfully navigate and integrate into their communities to make a real impact, for the sake of supporting thriving individuals, families, and communities.

The purpose of this project is to offer a curriculum for nonprofits to improve their relationships and work in the undocumented immigrant communities with particular emphasis on the culturally relevant aspects that affect these communities, historical context as it relates to US government's intervention in the socio-political stability of Central American countries, as well as how data can be used or weaponized to target undocumented individuals and how funding can be appropriated to help undocumented residents.

Curriculum Plan

This curriculum will fulfill a two-pronged approach: 1) to support nonprofits and community institutions to be able to provide critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for undocumented immigrants; and 2) to combat the climate of oppression that undocumented individuals face in communities across the country based on the concept of "illegality."

Situation Statement

Supporting the successful integration for undocumented immigrants holds positive implications for communities across the US given that there are currently there are approximately 11 million people residing in the United States without immigration status and that children of undocumented parents make up approximately eight percent of all US children.

Goals

- Goal 1: Engage nonprofit organizations in discussions regarding the concept of illegality and its implications for the stability, wellbeing, and overall success of undocumented individuals
- Goal 2: Encourage dialogue that reframes the way nonprofits engage with undocumented individuals
- Goal 3: To equip nonprofits and community-based organizations with the knowledge and understanding to be able to better engage with and serve undocumented communities, particularly Central American.

Target Audience

Community based nonprofit organizations and stakeholders in the US who provide social and human services to individuals within their communities.

Crafting a Clear Message

How Do You Define American? According to the PEW Research Institute, an estimated 11 million undocumented people live, study, work and contribute to communities across the United States. Yet, undocumented individuals often face additional barriers and structural inequities that prevent them from successfully integrating into the American communities that they now call home. Nonprofit organizations can be a pivotal piece in supporting and empowering undocumented individuals with the human and social services they need to not just overcome these barriers but thrive in their communities.

Key Elements of the Curriculum

This curriculum will involve collaborations with local and national organizations in order to identify best practices when serving undocumented communities across the country. Activities

for this curriculum will involve allowing participants to experience the barriers that undocumented individuals in the United States face based on their immigration status. This activity will be followed by a discussion of the consequences of the concept of illegality and its implications for entire communities of US residents, in particular Latino communities.

This will be followed by a presentation that informs the historical background of immigration from central American countries and US involvement. Secondly, the presentation will involve a discussion of theoretical frameworks as a basis for why nonprofits should improve the way they engage with and serve undocumented communities. Topics to be emphasized include how data can be used or weaponized to target undocumented individuals, how funding can be appropriated to help undocumented residents, and lastly a review of cultural and historical contexts that affect these communities.

Responsibilities Chart

NAME	ORGANIZATION OR AFFILIATION	RESPONSIBILITIES	CONTACT INFORMATION
Olivia Rosa	Merrimack College	Will develop literature review, curricula activities and discussion prompts for workshop framework.	rosao@merrimack.edu
Dr. Melissa Nemon	Merrimack College	Capstone Advisor	nemonm@merrimack.edu
Faith Based Community Organizing Institution that serves the Merrimack Valley region.		Will attend curriculum presentation, participate in an evaluation interview and provide feedback.	Contact information redacted
Refugee and immigrant engagement program at a community organization based in Lowell, MA		Will attend curriculum presentation, participate in an evaluation interview and provide feedback	Contact information redacted
Direct Service organization that serves the Greater Lawrence area.		Will attend curriculum presentation, participate in an evaluation interview and provide feedback	Contact information redacted
Community Development Corporation based in Lawrence, MA		Will attend curriculum presentation, participate in an evaluation interview and provide feedback	Contact information redacted

Curriculum Review Plan

The curriculum will be assessed and reviewed by a panel of local public-facing community organizations in the Greater Lawrence community. The curriculum content and plan will be presented to the participating nonprofit organizations through a presentation followed by individual interviews with each organization in order to gather feedback.

Implementation Timeline

January 2022	Develop curriculum activities and discussion prompts
February 2022	Conduct curriculum presentations and interviews with local organizations
March 2022	Review and analyze data gathered from interviews with local organizations.
April 2022	4/6: Full capstone draft due 4/27: Submit final capstone paper for publication

Logical Framework

LEARNING GOAL	To support nonprofits and community institutions to provide critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for undocumented immigrants and to combat the climate of oppression that undocumented individuals face in communities across the country based on the concept of “illegality.”	
SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 1	SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 2	SHORT-TERM OUTCOME 3
Increase knowledge / awareness of how nonprofits can better serve and engage with undocumented communities	Increase access to social and human services, community resources and opportunities for engagement for undocumented immigrants	Increased networks of support for successful community integration for undocumented immigrants, improved attitudes for providing necessary support for striving undocumented individuals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase awareness about the implications of racialized illegality on the wellbeing and stability of undocumented individuals in communities across the United States. - Increase nonprofit knowledge for better engaging with and serving undocumented populations in the communities that they serve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better equipped and informed nonprofits and community institutions will be able to improve access to their services for undocumented individuals - Improved access to resources will enable undocumented immigrants to integrate into their communities and achieve stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nonprofits with improved access to resources work collaboratively to ensure the needs of undocumented individuals are being met - Undocumented immigrants who achieve stability are then able to participate and engage in their communities more

Methodology

The immigrant advocacy curriculum, *The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community Advocacy and Support from Nonprofits*, was presented to four community-based organizations focused on immigrant support in order to engage in a reflective, thoughtful assessment of the materials and potential community engagement impact. Using qualitative, thematic analysis, all interview data was examined for key patterns and themes that helped determine if curriculum tools such as this are useful to communities seeking to engage more meaningfully with immigrant and refugee groups.

Participants

This project engaged five individuals from four community-based organizations focused on immigrant advocacy and support in the Greater Lawrence and Merrimack Valley area of Massachusetts. The first organization was a grassroots group that has been established for over three decades and focused specifically on the issues of collective action and community organizing in order to strengthen communities. The second organization was a social services organization which specializes in promoting a strengths-based comprehensive support system for Lowell's immigrant, refugee and newcomer communities. and has been working in the area for over twenty years. Additionally, two Lawrence based Community Development Corporations (CDC) were also engaged in this review process. The first Lawrence-based CDC has been around for 35 years and has engaged with immigrant communities through their Community Resource Fund and Network Organizing programs which outreach with local residents and have been building efforts to reach undocumented communities specifically. The second Lawrence-based CDC has been around for over 50 years and has been focused on creating opportunities for programs in education, social services, childcare, health, housing, employment and immigration.

Table 1: Interviewee List

Interviewee #	Role
Interviewee # 1	Staff Director and Lead Community Organizer at a Faith Based Community Organizing Institution that serves the Merrimack Valley region.
Interviewee # 2	Community organizer from a refugee and immigrant engagement program at a community organization based in Lowell, MA
Interviewee # 3	Community organizer from a refugee and immigrant engagement program at a community organization based in Lowell, MA
Interviewee # 4	Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at a community organization that serves the Greater Lawrence area.
Interviewee # 5	Director of Community Organizing at a community development corporation based in Lawrence, MA

Materials

I utilized slide show presentation on a PowerPoint platform that outlined the proposed objectives, activities, and discussions of my project (see Appendix B). This slideshow presentation was complimented by a website developed on a Google Sites platform which served as the central hub of information and provided participants with access to a sample agenda as well as the social justice frameworks that support my project.

An interview protocol was developed on a Word document for feedback after the presentation. The protocol contained an introduction script that explained the nature of the presentation along with an opportunity for participants to ask any clarifying questions. This was followed by a total of six primary questions and several follow-up and prompting questions (see Appendix A). The first question focused on initial reactions and responses to the presentation, with a specific focus on relevancy. The second and third questions centered on community interest, community response and community participation. The fourth question asked the

interview groups to consider experiences they have had working with immigrant and undocumented groups that might need to be included in the curriculum. The fifth question reflected on the role of community organizations with regards to immigrant issues in the community. The final question was an opportunity for interview groups to provide a summative reflection or offer additional advice on the topic, the curriculum, or how to engage community partners in this discussion. Lastly, the interview protocol contained a closing statement and a request to follow-up later with questions if needed.

After the presentations were completed, all data collected was transferred into Microsoft Excel for coding, categorizations, and thematic analysis. Microsoft Excel is another Office product that is primary used for its computation capabilities.

Procedure

Participants were initially approached via email to gauge interest and availability to participate in the interview. Once interest was established, I coordinated a meeting time and followed up with a meeting invite which included a Zoom link, a brief overview of my presentation, and a link to the project's website. On the day of the interview, I prepared for the meeting fifteen minutes prior and logged on to the Zoom meeting a few minutes early. When the participant arrived, I greeted them and asked permission to record the Zoom, I then introduced myself, my personal and professional background for context and rationale behind this project. I presented my proposed curricula for workshop through a PowerPoint platform that described the intended audience, objectives and activities involved in the project.

For the second portion of this interview, I welcomed their overall initial reactions and proceeded to conduct my interview protocol in order to receive feedback. At the conclusion of

the call, I thanked the participants for their time and encouraged them to contact me via email should they think of additional feedback or comments after the meeting.

After each interview I transcribed the notes from the interview dialogue and included any email exchanges with the participant for the file. All notes were then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. First, all content by each question were broken into categories to better synthesize the responses. These categories included positive and negative, as well as potential barriers and potential partnership opportunities. Once the categories were established and split by question, key themes across each of the questions started to emerge which were then assessed for frequency, description, and patterns.

Results

The concept for the project was well received and feedback gathered from the interview process was overall positive. The feedback was categorized into positive comments, concerns, potential barriers, avenues of engagement, similar projects and partnership ideas.

Positive Comments

The feedback to the project was overall positive. The most common feedback was that there is real need for this type of workshop to help improve the way nonprofits engage with undocumented immigrants. All four participants felt that their organization could benefit from a training like this. Interviewee 1 said, “I have been working in this field for over 20 years and one thing I have noticed is the need for cultural competency training among different Latino communities, and this project hits that mark.” He pointed out that in his experience Central American immigrants may struggle to make connections and build social capital even when the dominant population is Latino. One staff member from Interviewee 2 said, “I think the concept is great, I think that whenever working to support undocumented families, the fact that they are

undocumented should be front and center to then identify how to better support them.”

Interviewee 3 said “In all my years working with refugees in Lowell I have seen many trainings for cultural competencies but never from immigrants from Latin America specifically, I would definitely be interested in something like that.” Interviewee 4 said “we’re constantly trying to come up with ways to reach undocumented families in Lawrence, this would be super useful.”

All four interviewees said they would be interested in taking a workshop of this nature, and all agreed that the one-day format would lend itself to better discussions. One interviewee suggested providing a certificate of completion at the end of the workshop as an incentive for Community Development Corporations and local nonprofits to provide this workshop as part of their professional development offerings. Interviewee 3 stated that they particularly liked the incorporation of the historical context in undocumented waves of migration in this context and added “this has potential to work with organizations in other states where the experience of undocumented families may differ greatly from the experience of families in Massachusetts.”

Concerns

The interviewees had a number of concerns about the project. One interviewee pointed out, “I believe that in both Lawrence and Lowell, nonprofits operate under the belief that we do not ask about immigration status when providing direct service” and added that some organizations might question the need for participating in this training. All four interviewees expressed concern about the incorporation of the film as part of the curricula. Interviewee 2 said, “I personally can sometimes shy away from training workshops that include sitting through a film.” Interviewee 3 said the length of the film might deter some folks from participating in the training. On that same subject, another interviewee expressed concerns about the content of the film and stated, “adding historical context to the workshop through film is great but be mindful

of striking a nerve with white fragility,” and they expressed concern that “the film seemingly shows Latin American experiences from the perspective of white males.”

Interviewee 2 expressed concern that there would not be enough time in the workshop to “unpack themes that develop from this film.” Additionally, interviewee 5 said that the language of the workshop should utilize inclusive language and added that “the facilitation of this workshop should be done by two people who have either experienced being undocumented or extensive experience working with undocumented families in addition to cultural inclusivity skills.”

Potential Barriers

Interviewees offered many potential barriers for training regarding engagement with undocumented families. Interviewee 3 mentioned the bureaucracy of working with municipalities, “sometimes there are simply limitations you cannot get around when it comes to some forms of public assistance...and it shouldn’t be that way, but some institutions are simply restricted to how much assistance they can provide undocumented folks.” Additionally, one interviewee said that nonprofit employees, “in particular those who provide direct services, hardly have the time to set aside an entire day for a training,” speaking to the time limitations and the amount of time that staff might be able to lend to this training.

Potential Engagement Opportunities

The overall feedback from the interviews was very receptive and interviewees identified various opportunities for engagement with nonprofit institutions and CDC’s. Interviewee 1 said “I have no doubt that there will be interest in the community, particularly in Lawrence... or all of the Merrimack Valley for that matter, for such a training, there is momentum building around

DEI initiatives and you could take advantage of that momentum,” and also added that he’d be happy to help with hosting a pilot of this workshop through his organization.

Interviewee 2 offered to continue providing feedback as the curricula is developed and finalized and said, “if there is any way I can support this project I’ll make myself available, I like the concept.” Additionally, interviewee 4 offered the opportunity to present this curriculum at one of the staff retreats for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion being launched by their organization this summer.

All four interviews produced several suggestions of potential opportunities for future engagement through this curriculum. The partnerships mentioned fit in categories including non-profits, government agencies and public organizations, educational institutions, and businesses. One of the most frequently suggested was with regional and national networks of organizations such as the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, Community Health Network Association Chapters and NeighborWorks America. Interviewee 5 suggested partnering with local community taskforces such as the Mayors Health Taskforce and the Greater Lawrence Community Working Group and presenting the concept at one of their quarterly meetings. Additionally, other suggested organizations include Greater Lawrence Emergency Response Group, The Boys and Girls Club of both Lawrence and Lowell, The YMCA and YWCA of Lawrence and the Merrimack Valley, Lawrence Public Schools, Local Neighborhood Associations - particularly those with concentrations of undocumented families, The Lawrence Family Resource Center, The Lawrence Council on Aging, and the Lawrence-Methuen Community Coalition.

Discussion

The purpose of this project is to offer a curriculum for nonprofits to improve their method of engaging and working with undocumented immigrant communities with particular emphasis on the culturally relevant aspects that affect these communities, historical context of the US government's intervention in the socio-political stability of Central American countries, the role of nonprofits when working with undocumented communities and how funding can be appropriated to better support these individuals. This project engaged five community leaders from four different community organizations, one that is focused on immigrant, refugee, and newcomer individual and family initiatives in the Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts, one that is focused on engagement, advocacy and support for refugees and immigrants in the Greater Lowell region and two Lawrence based organizations whose main focus is resident engagement, support and empowerment through social services and programming. Some of the emerging themes include the need for cultural inclusion and competencies training for community organizations, nonprofits and government agencies focused on engaging with newcomer families and undocumented communities, the importance of raising awareness of the historical context of US government involvement in Latin American countries and the resulting recent waves of migration to the United States, and, the importance of the utilization of inclusive language and the prevalent notion that nonprofits should not ask questions regarding immigration status. All in all, the interviewees gave considerable feedback and suggestions regarding the format of the workshop, the content, and the preparation for facilitation.

By and large, all five community leaders engaged for this project agreed that there is a clear need for culturally inclusive training that reframes the way institutions engage with undocumented individuals as a way to better support the communities they work in. There was

some divergence, however, in how nonprofits are or should be engaging with undocumented individuals. Some of the interview participants supported the notion that nonprofit practitioners should refrain from engaging in questions about immigration status whenever working with immigrant individuals and families. The reason for this is the perceived barrier that this could pose for undocumented individuals who may be fearful of institutions disclosing their status to authorities and therefore become a deterrent. By contrast, the other interview participants asserted the notion that the topic of immigration status should be an intentional piece of engaging with immigrant families, as this may determine the level and type of guidance and support that the individual and/or family will need in order to achieve stability.

This was further underscored during the second presentation with interviewee 2 and interviewee 3, where one community leader stated that, “nonprofits in Lowell and Lawrence operate under the notion that you should not need to ask questions about immigration status,” the participant then continued “like if a family needs diapers, I’m not going to ask about status in order to provide what they need, it’s simply none of my business.” In other words, providing direct support to vulnerable communities should not require personally identifiable information. However, their colleague differed in that the question of immigration status should be a priority whenever working with vulnerable populations as it will not only inform the way support is provided and type of support needed, but also create an opportunity to develop a further connection with the individual, interviewee 3 stated, “I prefer to be intentional about this topic, if they tell me they have papers I say great, moving on to the next thing. But if they tell me they do not or prefer not to answer then I know this is something I need to address differently in order to get them where they need to be.” This difference in opinion further emphasizes the need to engage in discussions that delve into the way institutions engage with and support different

segments of the communities they serve. The encouragement of further dialogue in nonprofit engagement practices could help improve the way that vulnerable residents are being supported across different institutions, different cities and even regions by raising awareness about the varying levels of need of undocumented individuals.

Furthermore, it is clear that a workshop of this nature would spur the types of conversations with organizations and community stakeholders that, at a minimum, can shed light to the feelings of fear, isolation and discrimination that undocumented individuals experience. However, a dialogue at a national level could also raise awareness of the vast difference in dynamics and experience that undocumented families are having depending on where in the United States they migrate to or the color of their skin. For example, interviewee 3's experience as a once undocumented Latino immigrant who is tall, fair skinned and blonde. He acknowledges that his experience in attempting to assimilate was quite different from that of the majority of individuals and families that he now works with in the Lowell community. In other words, the experience of an undocumented individual is very dependent on their current circumstances, their environment, and their physical appearance. Therefore, when providing support to this segment of the population it is important to remain sensible to their individual circumstances as they relate to their overall mental and physical health and overall wellbeing.

Moreover, some of the concerns and suggestions from interviewees were centered around the use of a film as part of the workshop. At least half of the interviewees had reservations about participating in a workshop that involved a film as context setting. While providing historical context that has impacted waves of migration to the United States remains a central piece of the curriculum, some of the limitations mentioned were time, availability, and concerns for socio-political considerations and white fragility. In terms of time constraints and availability, it seems

the film may still be a viable option for the curriculum as long as it is adapted for the workshop. As one interviewee suggested, segmenting the film into key video clips that are followed by discussion prompts, would provide the opportunity for further discussion to unpack the subject on a deeper level while utilizing the film as supplemental material. Alternatively, the film can be made available in advance to registered participants so that they have the option of watching at their own convenience in preparation for the workshop. Perhaps a best-case scenario is one where the workshop provides access to the film as optional preparation for the workshop, yet the workshop still incorporates video segments as a context setting prior to each discussion.

The concern for social and political considerations and white fragility reveals an interesting theme, which is how to approach the subject of historic US influence over other countries and its repercussions from an educational standpoint without provoking feelings of racial discomfort in folks, particularly given the fact that nonprofit organizations are primarily composed of white individuals. However, one could argue that neglecting to address the systemic involvement of the United States in other countries would only further a complicity to the damage those systems created. In order to truly begin to combat the effects of systemic oppression in undocumented communities, then a critical consciousness of its historical origins must be encouraged in order to create a sense of empathy and greater understanding of the reasons that lead to undocumented migration in the first place. The concept of white fragility is often used to describe the phenomenon of hypersensitivity that prevents white individuals from engaging in difficult conversations about race. One suggestion presented to avoid racial discomfort was to incorporate a white co-facilitator. A suggestion that could become potentially problematic, on the one hand, presenting information from a white perspective to accommodate the audience and avoid discomfort could perpetuate white fragility and hinder the opportunity to

combat racist practices. On the other hand, the incorporation of affinity groups could potentially enable nonprofit workers and other stakeholders to come together in productive discussions for a common goal. All in all, this discussion highlighted the fact that further consideration of white fragility and perhaps also white saviorism is necessary for the implementation of this curriculum.

Moreover, another theme identified was the need for nonprofit workers and community stakeholders to utilize more inclusive language and awareness of historical connotations with certain words, in particular whenever working with such a long-stigmatized community. In other words, even though there has been growing momentum to move away from the use of divisive terms such as “illegals” or “aliens” for over a decade, some nonprofit practitioners are still not aware of the damage and oppressive environment that this type of rhetoric promotes. This concept was further exemplified by the second presentation with interviewee 2, when it became apparent that they were unaware of the negative implications of the use of such divisive words. Interviewee 2 was not aware of the distinction when utilizing inclusive language, yet they presented a very much open disposition to a new perspective. Although the actions of a community worker may be well-intentioned, if they fail to be acutely aware of the importance of word choice and language when communicating, they not only perpetuate the power of divisive language but also jeopardize the opportunity to develop a genuine connection to their community. This further highlighted the need for a workshop that provides guidance and raises awareness of how the use of more inclusive language is essential to help people who have been historically marginalized.

Overall, the introduction of this curriculum seems to be a successful way to start the discussion about providing and encouraging community-based workshops on the undocumented experience. This process allowed various groups in the community to consider the positives and

negatives about different approaches to the topic as well as challenge their own institutional biases and assumptions, essential tools for moving this discussion forward. Further, it is clear that presenting *The Undocumented Experience: Best Practices Tool for Community Advocacy and Support from Nonprofits* allowed for community organization to envision the workshops, which brought about a richer conversation about how opportunities for community and social justice education can manifest.

Limitations of the Project

The main objective of this project is to reframe the way that organizations engage with undocumented individuals, naturally suggesting a change in existing practices, particularly at established institutions that have been working in the community for decades can often encounter pushback. Therefore, outreach could pose a limitation in persuading engagement and participation in the project. Similarly, community leaders would have invest a considerable amount of their time to this project which could pose another limitation. Adjustments in the duration of the workshop may need to be made in order to appeal to a wider audience of institutions and community partners.

Due to time constraints within the timeline of this project, another limitation highlighted by this study was the lack of participation and input from members of the undocumented community. As part of the communities in question and an important focus of the curricula, their opinions, needs and concerns would be extremely valuable to the formation of this curricula. This is a missed opportunity that could further inform the content of the workshop, in particular, the question-and-answer portion of the project.

Lastly, another limitation for this project would be the cultural context in relation to where the workshop is being conducted. As aforementioned, the cultural nuances that exist

between Latinx communities both highlight the need for guidance and training but also pose the limitation the cultural competencies in relation to the highest concentration of immigrants in a particular region. Content adjustments would need to be made in order to better reflect the communities where this workshop is being provided.

Implications for Future Projects

The process used in this capstone project could be replicated to evaluate other workshops that address a particular need before implementing them in communities. This project provided an opportunity to learn about the aspects that must be considered whenever exploring the wide ranges of the undocumented experience, such as the importance of language choice, cultural competence, historical awareness and critical consciousness. Additionally, this project has created a pathway for further discussion on how to better serve and support undocumented immigrants from the perspectives of the Latino/a Critical Race and Segmented Assimilation Theory. Given the growing number of newcomer and undocumented individuals in communities across the United States, the project holds significant implications for future community engagement practices that are truly inclusive.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Organization name: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

1. Any immediate thoughts or reactions? (If all positive, ask if they see anything concerning about the curriculum? If all negative, ask is they see anything that might work in a different way?)
2. What are your thoughts about the pacing for this project? Are there any concerns about engagement or the structure of the workshop? Do you think a full-length film might be an issue (if so, any ideas about that)? Any thoughts about the panel of experts?
3. Are there any historical or political issues in the community you think I should be aware or account for in this curriculum (specifically around undocumented families)?
4. Has anything been done like this in the past? If no, why do you think that is? If yes, what worked?
5. Any thought on the types of partners that would be good for a workshop like this? Why?
6. Do you think there is a desire for a workshop like this? Why or why not?
7. The goal of this workshop is to encourage human and social services organizations to provide critical services to undocumented families. Any thoughts on that aspect? What more – beyond this workshop – might help with that?
8. Any final thoughts about this workshop idea and curriculum?

Post Interview notes:

Appendix B

The Undocumented Experience

11,000,000

Undocumented individuals are estimated to live, study, work and contribute to communities across the United States.

8%

Of all US children come live in a household with at least one undocumented parent

Yet, undocumented individuals often face additional barriers and structural inequities that prevent them from successfully integrating into the American communities that they now call home.

Given the the growing number of undocumented immigrants in the US, supporting the successful integration for undocumented immigrants holds significant, positive implications for communities across the US.

HOW NONPROFITS CAN HELP:

Nonprofit organizations can be a pivotal piece in supporting and empowering undocumented individuals with the human and social services they need to not just overcome these barriers but thrive in their communities.

How Do You Define American?

This curricula is intended to encourage nonprofit organizations and local institutions think differently about the way they interact with and serve undocumented populations. The context of this workshop can either be conducted during a day-long retreat or divided up into 2 half-day sections. This project intends to fulfill a two-pronged approach:

1. To support nonprofits and community institutions to provide critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for undocumented immigrants.
2. To combat the climate of oppression that undocumented individuals face in communities across the country based on the concept of "illegality."

The following film serves as a historical overview and examination of the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the immigration crisis we face today.

The following film serves as a historical overview and examination of the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the immigration crisis we face today.



Facilitated Discussion: Reactions, Barriers, Opportunities and Challenges:

The film will then be followed by a guided discussion to gather reactions and dive into the topic of the barriers opportunities and challenges -perceived and real-encountered whenever working with undocumented families. Prompts will involve the consequences of the concept of legality and its implications for entire communities of US residents, in particular Latino communities.

Panel of Immigration Experts Q & A:

- An expert from the nonprofit sector
- A social justice practitioner/ immigrant rights advocate
- An immigration attorney
- A representative from a public institution

Topics to be emphasized include how data can be used or weaponized to target undocumented individuals, how funding can be appropriated to help undocumented residents, and lastly a review of cultural and historical contexts that affect these communities.

[Sample Agenda](#)

Appendix C



Olivia Rosa

Master in Education and Social Policy Candidate
She/Her

- Immigrant
- Mother
- Activist
- Leader
- Advocate
- Lifelong learner

The Undocumented Experience

11,000,000

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The Undocumented Experience Project:

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1. To support nonprofits and community institutions to provide critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for undocumented immigrants.
 - 2. To combat the climate of oppression that undocumented individuals face in communities across the country based on the concept of “illegality.”**
-

Social and political roots that have driven migration from Latin America



*Facilitated Discussion:
Reactions, Barriers,
Opportunities and Challenges:*

The film will then be followed by a guided discussion to gather reactions and dive into the topic of the barriers opportunities and challenges -perceived and real-encountered whenever working with undocumented families.

Prompts will involve the consequences of the concept of illegality and its implications for entire communities of US residents, in particular Latino communities.



Panel of Immigration Experts Q & A:

- An expert from the nonprofit sector
- A social justice practitioner/ immigrant rights advocate
- An immigration attorney
- A representative from a public institution
- Community member



<https://sites.google.com/merrimack.edu/the-undocumented-experience/home>
rosao@merrimack.edu

Appendix D

The Undocumented Experience: An Overview of Latin American Migration in the US and the Role of Nonprofits in the Assimilation of Undocumented Families

<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This curriculum will fulfill a two-pronged approach: 1) to support nonprofits and community institutions to be able to provide critical services that contribute to economic stability and mobility for undocumented immigrants; and 2) to combat the climate of oppression that undocumented individuals face in communities across the country based on the concept of “illegality.” 	
<p>Nonprofit / Community Org Prep Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three months prior to the event: Choose a date (dates if electing to do a 2-day workshop), secure location, and ensure you have obtained the rights or ability to view film • 2 months prior to the event: Reach out to and secure potential panelists. This panel should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An expert from the nonprofit sector, specifically an immigrant facing organization to speak to their experience in working with undocumented families - A social justice practitioner/ immigrant advocate who can speak to the concept of illegality and its harmful repercussions - An immigration attorney who can speak to the rights of undocumented immigrants as they try to assimilate - A representative from a public institution to describe the types of resources available to constituents from the undocumented community • 1 month prior to event: Begin communications and marketing, some suggestions are: social media engagement, reach out to local cross collaborative partnerships for outreach, and nonprofit training networks such as The Mel King Institute, Mass Nonprofit Network, etc. 	
<p>Content A: The Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America (2012 Film)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This content will serve as an overview of the history of US government involvement in Latin American countries and its inextricable link to the massive waves of migration that have surged from those actions. This will create awareness and increased understanding as to why so many millions have had to immigrate to the US. • The film examines the role of the US government and economic interests in Latin American countries. It documents the relationship between United States' intervention in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and the surge of migration from those nations. Also discussed are the wars fought by United States resulting in colonial expansion into Puerto Rico, Cuba, and over 	<p>Materials List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Film - Projector - Projector Screen - Tablets - Evaluation forms for observation - Refreshments

<p>half of Mexico. It documents the covert actions by the United States to install dictatorships in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An observation tool will be employed during the film to ascertain the level of engagement • Following the film organizations should lead a facilitated discussion with the group to evaluate growth in understanding, empathy, and a desire to take action. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questions can include: - Is there a common “immigration experience” shared by all or is each experience unique? - What commonalities can we find between why people immigrate, what issues they face upon arrival, and what contributions they add to the United States? - How has the government responded to increased immigration? - How can nonprofits organizations and local institutions help 	
<p>Panel of Immigration experts composed of professionals from the nonprofit sector, legal counsel, and public institutions and Facilitated Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The portion of the workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to engage in a question-and-answer session and discussion that will further expand on the topic of undocumented migration, its history, current state and the need for pathways for integration and assimilation as a means to improve community vitality and economic enhancement for communities across the country • This portion of the workshop will be evaluated via a survey administered to participants in order to gather attribute information and evaluate the level of knowledge growth and what changes (if any) in attitudes, opinion and behaviors. • An online tool (such as Mentimeter) so audience participants can ask anonymous questions to the panel of experts 	<p>Materials List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement to participate from expert panel - Easel for note taking during discussion - Markers - Online tool for Q&A (such as Mentimeter)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing and Evaluation 	<p>Materials List:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post event evaluation survey (sample attached) - Pen and printed surveys OR - Tablets if utilizing a digital surveying platform such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms