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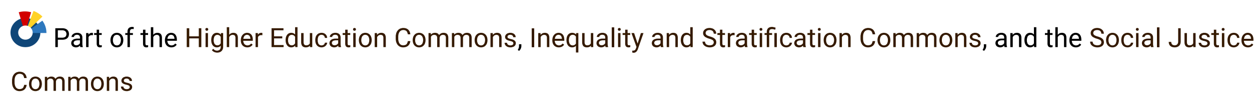
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Development of an Unorthodox Support Model to Mentor Undocumented Immigrant Students

Authored by
Keisha Chin Goosby (*Claremont Graduate University*)

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the need to better understand impactful mentoring models for undocumented immigrant students (UIS). Based on interviews of 18 mentors of UIS who were college graduates, findings include diverse effective mentoring models, specific mentoring styles and strategies, how mentors identified and leveraged the community cultural wealth of UIS, and the forms of support that mentors used which highlight an unorthodox approach to mentoring UIS. A new model for mentoring UIS is presented with a framework on how to engage in new research. Recommendations are provided for schools, districts, colleges, and universities.

Keywords: undocumented students, mentoring, immigrant, professors, educators, K-12, university, school counselors, mentoring programs, mentoring strategies, unorthodox support

Introduction

Okay, we're going to do something that will sound unorthodox. And it was unorthodox. I mean, that's the reality. When you're undocumented, you have to be unorthodox to get where everyone else gets to without having to be unorthodox, right? Because there's a straight path. And when you're undocumented, there's never a straight path. You have to take all kinds of deviations.
-Benjamin, mentor to Rachel

In the opening quote, Benjamin captured the essence of how mentors of undocumented immigrant students (UIS) often engaged in unorthodox strategies to meet the unique challenges that UIS face. In this paper, mentoring is defined as the formal and informal relationships between capable adults and youth, who receive guidance to gain access to college and in some cases, to graduate from college (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011). Mentoring includes a sharing of knowledge and time that leads youth to the resources, skills, and networks which allow them to achieve their personal and educational goals. Formal mentoring typically follows "a structured and intentional approach" to providing guidance as part of a program (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011, p.2). Informal mentoring exists outside, but not necessarily independent of, formal programs. This type of mentoring evolves from existing relationships that youth may have with educators, family members, community members, or other adults in leadership roles, such as coaches and religious leaders.

Prior research emphasizes the importance of "school-based supportive relationships" for students from immigrant backgrounds (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p.726). Clark-Ibañez (2015) found that undocumented students rely on support from teachers and counselors in high school in order to learn about ways to access higher education. Research on school counselors recommends ways for them to support undocumented students to pursue their goals of attending college or starting careers (Groce & Johnson, 2021). That support needs to continue at the college level since undocumented students' struggles do not end when they are accepted to college (Lauby & Heaney, 2020).

Challenges Faced by Undocumented Immigrant Students

UIS face multiple challenges when adjusting to life in a new country. Those who enter schools in the United States encounter specific difficulties related to education, including confusion about the pathway to college and lack of academic preparation for college coursework (Cebulko, 2014). During K-12, some UIS need more time to develop academic proficiency in English but may be limited due to the selection of classes available to students who are learning English. If they attend schools in underserved areas, many of the students, regardless of their immigration status, do not receive instruction that provides them with the academic skills to be successful in college (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Crawford, Aguayo, and Valle (2019) report that school counselors pointed out discriminatory practices targeted towards undocumented students and their families as another challenge that UIS face.

In addition, parents of undocumented students may not be familiar with college pathways and what their children need to do to prepare (Allen, Zhang, & Romo, 2020). The students sometimes feel conflicted about going to college if their families are encouraging them to focus on finding full-time work after high school (Valadez, 2008). Even when high schools provide extensive support and information about college, Murillo (2021) found that undocumented students still faced financial obstacles if their financial aid was not enough to cover the costs of college attendance. Programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have specific restrictions and are not available to all undocumented students. Even with DACA, undocumented students cannot access federal financial aid (Murillo, 2021).

As they transition to adulthood, UIS become more aware of how little they can participate in the typical rites of passage to adulthood, such as obtaining a driver license, holding a part-time job in high school, attending college, and gaining full-time employment in desirable jobs (Cebulko, 2014). UIS experience feelings of shame and lack of belonging among their peers due to their legal status, which prevents them from participating in

activities that their documented peers can explore, such as studying abroad (Suarez-Orozco & Lopez Hernandez, 2020).

When they are in college, UIS also worry about whether their family members and loved ones could be deported (Flores Morales & Garcia, 2021). Suarez-Orozco & Lopez Hernandez (2020) found that concerns about money continue to impact UIS who have fewer financial aid options and sometimes also need to provide financial support for their families.

Need for Mentoring of Undocumented Immigrant Students

Due to these diverse challenges, UIS often mention the importance of mentors and yet research also points to the lack of mentors who understand how to help their UIS mentee navigate college in a holistic way (Perez, 2014). Other scholars provide support for this idea in their findings that UIS, along with those who have DACA, succeed in college due to "mentors, individual resiliency, and the *ganas*" to achieve academic success (Gamez, Lopez, & Overton, 2017, p.144).

The report *Mentoring for First-Generation Immigrant and Refugee Youth* highlights the lack of extensive research on this topic and reinforces that immigrant students need academic guidance from adults and peers outside of their families (Oberoi & Garringer, 2016). However, the authors also note that these young people usually enter mentoring relationships by coincidence, rather than through a formal channel.

Existing Mentoring Models

Informal mentors and role models have been found to have a positive impact on the lives of immigrant and subsequent generations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (Stanton-Salazar & Urso Spina, 2003). Spencer (2007) states that more than half of young people have a natural mentor, who may be a family member or a non-family member. She highlights the unique aspect of natural mentoring as a relationship that combines the best of what youth gain from interacting with peers, but also includes the guidance of a capable and knowledgeable adult. Sánchez, Esparza, Berardi, and Pryce (2011) focus on natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) which develop outside of a formal mentoring program. They found that students who had mentors during high school and college had extensive social connections, which are important for achieving college and career goals.

Although the existing research about mentoring for immigrant students and UIS focuses on less formal relationships, Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) studied a formal mentoring program that was established for migrant students, the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Migrant students worked with resource teachers on their school campus outside of the classroom. The authors concluded that the guidance of the teachers

was effective because they provided the social connections and "institutional resources" that the students needed to finish high school (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009, p. 702).

Another mentoring model, known as youth initiated mentoring (YIM) is based on relationships that begin when a mentee approaches a potential mentor for help. In a study about YIM, Schwartz, Kanchewa, Rhodes, Cutler, and Cunningham (2016) concluded that college-bound students from immigrant backgrounds need to initiate and develop nurturing relationships with knowledgeable adults, who help them to increase their knowledge of social capital as it relates to college-going.

While there are positive findings about the impact of mentoring, Goldner and Ben-Eliyahu (2021) reviewed 123 studies about formalized mentoring programs and found most mentoring models took a deficit approach to mentoring. In other words, models viewed mentees as lacking positive qualities and therefore needed mentors to help them correct any undesired qualities. Now, mentoring models are shifting towards a more asset-based approach, in which mentors recognize the positive qualities of mentees and help them leverage those qualities to achieve their goals. The authors found that scholars of mentoring need to develop the theories used in mentoring and in measuring outcomes. To do this, one of their recommendations is to gather information that provides viewpoints of "experts, parents, mentees, mentors, practitioners" and others (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2020, p.20). Jean Rhodes (2020), a leading scholar in the field of mentoring, published extensive findings on mentoring in the book *Older and Wiser*. She emphasizes that the mentoring data yields "decades of disappointing findings" and that there is a need for scholarly work that supports "targeted, evidence-based approaches" paired with "a caring relationship" (Rhodes, 2020, pp. 41-42).

The mentoring literature reveals an ongoing need for research-based information to improve mentoring practices. The scholarly work in the field focuses attention on formal mentoring programs and little is known about what is truly effective in the informal mentoring relationships, which UIS appear to engage in more frequently than formal programs. However, Rhodes (2020) confirms that schools provide the most opportunity for students from historically excluded backgrounds to have regular interaction with adults who are familiar with the college pathway. This connection is important: Hagler and Rhodes (2018) found that students who had a mentor at school or a mentor with ties to an educational institution had "higher educational attainment and higher household income" in the future (p. 182).

Purpose of the Present Study

There is a lack of research on the mentoring practices that are successful for UIS. As a result, there are no existing models in youth

mentoring which address this population of students. The lack of successful models makes it more challenging for high schools and colleges to launch support programs in the face of limited resources. The current study gathered detailed insights from the mentors of UIS with college degrees to learn how these mentoring relationships are initiated, nurtured, and sustained during high school and college. Mentors revealed the types of support and strategies they used, which will inform the development of a mentoring model for UIS that includes unorthodox approaches to supporting UIS.

Methods

The larger study on UIS mentoring began with identifying 12 adults who were or still are undocumented and who have graduated from a four-year university in the U.S. (Chin Goosby, 2020). At this stage of the study, UIS participants completed a demographic questionnaire which asked them to identify at least two mentors: one who helped them gain access to college and one who helped them to graduate from college. Mentors were defined as any adult who provided support that was critical for the student's transition from high school to college or for their completion of college. Most of the questionnaire participants listed more than two mentors in their responses, resulting in a total of 48 named mentors.

Interview Process

Of the 48, eighteen mentors agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview. Whenever possible, interviews took place in-person. Mentors who were unable to meet in-person due to geographic or time constraints, agreed to an online meeting via Zoom. Seventeen of the eighteen mentors gave permission to record the interviews. In-person interviews were recorded using the Rev app and online interviews were recorded on the Zoom platform. Most interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes.

The methods and data presented will focus on the semi-structured interviews with the mentors. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to ask open-ended questions that allow participants to respond freely and with as many details as they wish. This form of data collection allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe for more information about details that are intriguing and may help to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2015). The interview questions asked about mentors' backgrounds, mentoring they received, and specific kinds of mentoring, support, and practices that they used when guiding the students. Some of the interview questions included the following:

1. How did your relationship with (name of UIS) begin?
2. Did you share stories about your own experiences growing up, being in high school, and going to college?

3. What are some things you said or did to help them feel comfortable talking to you, asking for help, taking your advice, etc.?
4. What are their strengths?
5. What did they need help with?
6. What were some of the ways that you were most helpful to them?
7. How did you help them to identify their strengths?
8. How much did you learn about their prior experiences/background?
9. What do you know about their family? What do you know about their background?

Mentors provided in-depth answers to the interview questions. Additionally, it is important to highlight the intangible information that emerged from the interview experience. This data collection method incorporated the dynamics of human interaction that is really at the heart of mentoring. Each mentor shared information about their educational experiences and any mentoring that they received along the way. Many spoke in depth about the key people who helped *them* to navigate their education and career paths. They expressed deep gratitude for the investments that their mentors made in them and explained how that fostered their own desire to help others. The mentors in this study have been mentored and expressed an ethos of "paying it forward," which highlights a type of ripple effect of mentoring.

Data Analysis

Transcripts with initial coding notes were uploaded to the Dedoose platform. Following qualitative analysis guidelines by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), the next step was to conduct a second reading of the transcripts. During the second reading of the transcripts, re-coding, combining, or eliminating codes guided the identification of findings. Summarizing the data using tables, charts, and lists provided a visual representation of answers in the form of a findings roadmap.

Analysis of the data included reviewing the findings roadmap for answers to the research questions, exploring possible explanations for the findings, and making connections to the literature. After drafting summaries of each interview, I sent the summaries to each mentor for review to ensure that the narratives captured their experiences accurately (Creswell, 2014).

Study Participants: Mentor Demographics and Backgrounds

Demographic information includes age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the mentors. Pseudonyms were used to replace the actual names of the mentors and the UIS. See Table 1 (on the next page) for a summary of demographic information about mentors. The median age of the mentors at the time of the interview was 47 years and the average age was 48.3 years. Eight mentors identified as males, nine mentors as females, and one mentor as queer.

Table 1.
Mentor Demographic Information.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Educational or Professional Role	Immigrant Background	First Generation College Graduate
Armond	55	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	Yes
Anna	51	Female	White	Scientist	No	No
Benjamin	44	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born*	Yes
Carla	33	Female	White	Lab assistant	No	No
Caroline	60+	Female	Latinx	Foundation president	Foreign born	Yes
Connie	39	Queer	White	High School Counselor	No	No
David	60+	Male	White	High School Counselor	No	Yes
Fernando	47	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	Yes
Diane	43	Female	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Child of immigrant	Yes
Dominic	40	Male	Black	High School Teacher	Foreign born	Yes
Ginger	47	Female	Latinx	Higher Ed Faculty	Foreign born	No
Jenny	68	Female	White	Higher Ed Faculty	No	No
Kevin	63	Male	Latinx	Higher Ed Staff	Foreign born	Yes
Kim	58	Female	White	High School Teacher	Child of immigrants	Yes
Levi	42	Male	Latinx	High School Counselor	Child of immigrants	Yes
Mariel	43	Female	API	High School Teacher	Foreign born*	Yes
Michelle	24	Female	Latinx	Undergraduate Student	Foreign Born*	Yes
Robert	52	Male	White	Higher Ed Faculty	No	Yes

* Denotes formerly undocumented immigrant or current DACA recipient.

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Nine mentors identified as Latinx, seven mentors as White, one mentor as Black, and one mentor as Asian/Pacific Islander. Eleven mentors identify as a non-white race or ethnicity, so the majority of mentors in this study are people of color.

Seven mentors were professors in higher education, three were high school counselors, and three were high school teachers at the time when they mentored a UIS. Three mentors held a professional role in a non-educational organization where they met the UIS. Of the remaining two mentors, one was a director of admissions at a university and one was an undergraduate peer. The majority of mentors held a professional role in education when they met and mentored a UIS.

Thirteen mentors are first-generation college graduates. Nine mentors are first-generation immigrants to the United States with three of them being formerly undocumented. Eight mentors are first-generation immigrants *and* first-generation college graduates. Of the 18 mentors, 14 were either first-generation immigrants and/or first-generation college graduates. The majority of mentors in this study shared some similar life experiences with the UIS they mentored.

Findings

The major findings in this study bring to light new approaches to mentoring. First, the mentors and the UIS mentees had diverse types of mentoring relationships and none began through formal mentoring programs. Second, mentors drew upon the community cultural wealth (CCW) of the UIS and their families as an asset-based source of mentoring. In addition to drawing upon Tara Yosso's (2006) CCW framework, the mentors also demonstrated leadership capital (Ulrich, 2015) and a form of capital that I have termed *persistence capital*. Third, mentors detailed specific and successful approaches for mentoring their UIS mentees, which included an approach that I call *unorthodox support*.

Mentoring Models

The findings indicate that some mentoring relationships involving UIS do not fall into the current categories defined by mentoring literature. Rather, the majority of mentoring relationships in this study developed between UIS and mentors as a result of the contact that they had with each other in an educational institution, not as part of a formalized mentoring program.

Institutionally-Mediated Encounter. Eleven mentors developed mentoring relationships with a UIS as a result of an institutionally-mediated encounter. In these cases, the mentor met the UIS in the context of their professional role in an educational institution. For example, mentors who worked as high school counselors met the UIS when they met to discuss progress towards graduation and post-high school plans. Mentors who worked as college professors met the UIS in a class that they taught or through student advising.

Peer Mentors. Two mentors were peer mentors. Carla met Kayla when they both worked at the same company after Kayla graduated from high school and had not yet started college. Michelle met Gina on the college campus that they both attended.

Peer-Mediated Encounter. Two relationships began as the result of a peer-mediated encounter. In these cases, the mentor and the UIS met when a peer introduced the UIS to the mentor. Benjamin met Rachel after her sister introduced him to her and asked if he could help her to apply to college. Caroline is the president of a foundation that raises money to provide scholarships to low-income students. The founder of the organization introduced Caroline and Erin to each other after Erin applied for one of the foundation's scholarships.

Mentor-Initiated Encounter. Two of the relationships were mentor-initiated. These relationships began when the mentor approached the UIS. Armond met Erin in his American Government class at the community college where he taught. He spoke to her about the Honors program at the school and encouraged her to join student government after she achieved the highest scores on the first two quizzes in the class. Fernando met Emma when she took one of his Economics classes. Due to her high academic performance in his class, he approached her with the idea of double majoring in Economics.

Student or Youth-Initiated. One of the relationships was youth-initiated. The relationship began when the UIS approached the mentor. Kevin met Sophia when he was the Associate Director of Admissions at his current institution. She contacted his office after her acceptance had been rescinded due to falling grades. She revealed her status to him right away and he invited her to meet with him in-person to discuss a plan of action.

There were diverse ways that mentoring relationships were formed. Additionally, not all the mentoring relationships were established through the students' immigration status. Yet, immigration status become significant to the mentoring relationship due to the challenges experienced by the UIS.

Identifying and Leveraging of Community Cultural Wealth of UIS

Mentors identified and leveraged the CCW of their mentees. This study draws upon Yosso's (2006) theoretical framework of CCW, which describes the assets that exist in Chicano communities. She posits that the following capital are gained through community and family life: aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital. Yosso argues that while students come to school with these forms of CCW, educators often do not capitalize on them or see them as assets. The best mentoring programs and relationships – as the mentors in this study

attest – should utilize CCW in their mentoring practice.

Mentors named multiple forms of CCW that UIS possess. More than one mentor named the following qualities: gifted, dedicated, brave, hard-working, organized, mature, persistent, authentic, humble, respectful, ambitious, and determined. These descriptors were each named once across the 18 mentors in their descriptions of the 12 UIS: eager, empathetic, caring, resilient, accountable, well-composed, hungry, resourceful, appreciative, collaborative, adaptable, health-conscious, goal-oriented, outgoing, creative, proactive, responsible, patient, and helpful. Nineteen of the descriptors were unique to a single UIS while twelve of them were shared by two or more of the UIS. This extensive list of descriptors that mentors provided in describing twelve UIS confirms that UIS possess a great deal of CCW.

"Data analysis revealed that mentors identified and leveraged six forms of capital most frequently: familial, aspirational, navigational, resistant, persistence, and leadership."

Data analysis revealed that mentors identified and leveraged six forms of capital most frequently: familial, aspirational, navigational, resistant, persistence, and leadership. The first four forms of capital are derived from Yosso's (2006) community cultural wealth model. *Persistence capital* is what I describe as a form of capital emerging from the data that demonstrated how UIS continued to pursue their higher education goals in the face of adversity. *Leadership capital* describes a form of capital, also evident in the data, that UIS set examples for their younger peers through their persistence (Ulrich, 2015).

Familial capital. Seven of the mentors explicitly described the families of their UIS mentees and the ways in which they were a source of capital for them. Five of the mentors met with parents and other family members at some point during their mentorship of a UIS. David met Denise's parents and learned that they had trust in the education system. He also spoke about how proud her father was of Denise. Knowing these things about the family, David viewed her family as an asset and expressed how much he valued their impact on her.

Aspirational capital. Nine mentors discussed the aspirations that UIS and/or their families had for them and the ways in which those aspirations worked as a form of capital to help them achieve their educational goals. Levi was one of Emma's high school mentors and described her as someone who was eager to learn. He captured her thirst for learning as a desire to "make something of her life, something greater" and said that "she was very passionate about helping her family in any way that she could." He validated her aspirations and provided deadlines for her to prepare and

gather her college application materials. He noted it was a successful strategy because he began to notice she would meet the deadlines ahead of time.

Navigational capital. All the mentors acknowledged that their mentees (and their families) had developed navigational capital through the process of migration, learning educational systems and other social institutions in the United States. Seven mentors shared the direct ways that they helped UIS to navigate the world of higher education, thereby enhancing their mentees' navigational capital by providing their mentees with important "backstage" insights into college. For example, Benjamin mentioned that he spent time helping Rachel make sense of what she saw and heard in higher education spaces:

A lot of our conversations are almost always about that decoding. Right? Like this is what you saw, now let's actually look at the code. It's kind of like The Matrix, the film. You see reality, but the people that have been able to step out of that artificial reality can actually see the code that creates that reality. And so if you understand the code, then you understand why that reality means something to people because you know the code. Right? I mean, the elites, they know... I mean, the codes, they learn it from birth. Those of us who were not born into wealth, we have to learn how to decode that and keep up that decoding process because that's always evolving and changing.

Benjamin described the way he helped Rachel make sense of conversations between colleagues and peers on her college campus.

Resistant capital. Seven mentors described ways that UIS resisted the legal, educational, and financial barriers that they faced. Kevin highlighted Sophia's involvement in starting a group for undocumented students on her college campus during her first year there. Not only was she present on campus as an undocumented student, but she also worked to define an explicit space for undocumented students since the institution had not.

Carla described Kayla's explicit actions of resistance while she attended college. Kayla shared her undocumented experience publicly on her campus and became an "advocate of others" who was "vocal about her status and how she got to where she was". Carla described Kayla's actions saying that she used her voice and her passion for journalism to advocate for other UIS "in a more meaningful way" by participating in a TED Talk and writing articles for publication.

Leadership capital. Some of the examples of resistant capital also demonstrate ways that UIS emerged as leaders among their peers and/or on their campuses. Six mentors described examples of UIS leadership that are part of a form of capital that has not been previously used in the CCW framework: leadership capital. Leadership capital has been used to assess how well an individual is prepared to lead a company to meet their

goals (Ulrich, 2015). Ulrich proposed an index to determine leadership capital that is more complex than the scope of this study. Here, leadership capital refers simply to the individual characteristics which indicate leadership potential.

Mentors spoke about the example that UIS set for siblings and peers. Caroline said that Erin paved a way for her younger brother to go to college. She also commended Erin for writing a manual for future interns who would assume her position when she left her work at the foundation. Connie noticed that Stacy "was an influence on peers who maybe were less outgoing. She kind of brought them along with her and, um, was a branch to other students who could use that connection" to adults who could help them.

Persistence capital. Six mentors shared stories and examples that are characterized in a new form of capital that has not yet been explored in the literature: persistence capital. This form of capital emerged from the data and describes the ways in which UIS persevered on their educational pathways in the face of numerous obstacles. UIS develop persistence capital over time in direct response to systemic barriers by creating strategies to navigate and resist those barriers. Some UIS demonstrated persistence capital independent of their mentors, while others needed encouragement from their mentors to develop this form of capital.

Armond helped Erin to develop persistence capital by pushing her to continue pursuing higher education. He emphasized the way that her individual success can lead to success for other undocumented students. He said to her, "What's the best thing you can do? You can succeed as an individual. You can get the diploma. You can do what you can." Armond encouraged her to achieve her educational goals by affirming her persistence.

Kevin recalled that because Sophia didn't qualify for DACA, she had fewer financial resources than the students who did. Yet she finished her undergraduate degree and earned a graduate degree immediately after that. He described her persistence by saying, "She could have given up at any time but chose not to." Even in graduate school when she didn't qualify to receive graduate assistantships, which many graduate students depend on for funding, she found funding through a non-profit organization.

Diane shared that Stacy would think about leaving college multiple times each time her family faced a new challenge. There were several times when she had to encourage her to stay in college and finish her undergraduate degree. In one case, Diane told her, "You will be able to do more for your family with a college degree than without." She helped her understand that it was important "to think more long term right now" even though it was hard for her not to leave school considering significant challenges at that time. This is an example of

how mentors help UIS develop persistence capital.

Forms of Support

The following discussion addresses the ways that mentors transform the CCW of UIS to capital through specific forms of support. The data revealed five forms of support used most frequently by the mentors: academic, encouragement, affirmation, professional, and unorthodox. *Academic support* includes teaching and providing feedback or other resources to improve grades. *Encouragement* took the form of reminding UIS that they can accomplish their goals. *Affirmation* means reinforcing the abilities of the UIS. *Professional support* means giving advice regarding career and work options. Finally, *unorthodox support* refers to the use of methods and strategies that are atypical for the mentor's professional role or used in response to a unique challenge.

Academic support

Eleven mentors shared examples of the academic support that they provided to UIS. Kim supported Emma in high school and remembers that they had conversations about the classes that she should take in high school in order to be prepared for college. Benjamin, who supported Rachel during pre-college and college years, chose her to be his research assistant during the year that passed between her high school graduation and acceptance to college. He provided this form of support as a way to boost her academic profile since some of her high school grades suffered due to an ongoing health condition. Similarly, Armond recommended that Erin join the community college honors program at her two-year college in order to increase her chance of acceptance to a four-year college. He told her that she would also learn about additional opportunities, such as scholarships, that may not be shared widely with students who were not part of the honors program.

Encouragement support

Twelve mentors described the encouragement they gave to UIS throughout their educational journeys. During Emma's high school years, Kim spoke to her about the college experience. Emma would ask her to describe college and what to expect. She told her that college is "what you make of it" and that it would be necessary for her to "seek out things that will help you" achieve goals. Kim now realizes that sharing her viewpoint about college encouraged Emma to take the college pathway.

Ginger and Grace spoke about the value of a college degree. Ginger emphasized the permanence of the degree and the fact that it cannot be taken away once it is granted. She told Grace, "No one can take it away from you. It's yours…and it might intersect with possible pathways you know, to residency, citizenship…". When Grace received initial rejections from graduate school, Ginger encouraged her to continue pursuing the path to a Ph.D. by getting a Master's degree first. This paid off when Grace was accepted to

several prestigious doctoral programs upon completion of her Master's program.

Affirmation support

Eleven mentors provided specific examples of the affirmation support that they gave to UIS. Affirmation refers to the confirmation of one's strengths, ability to overcome challenges, and worthiness of academic achievement. Mentors encouraged UIS as they worked to overcome obstacles in pursuit of higher education. However, they also found it necessary to remind UIS that they were making good decisions and could achieve their goals.

Armond was one of Erin's professors at the two-year college that she attended following high school graduation. Prior to meeting him, she declined an offer of admission to a public four-year university because she didn't have enough funding to cover the costs. Knowing this, he continuously reminded her that she should transfer to a four-year college. He suggested that she apply to competitive four-year schools and to consider some of the private institutions near her home. By doing this, he affirmed that she was a competitive candidate and taught her that her outstanding profile could lead to a generous financial aid award from a private institution. Erin applied, was accepted to, and attended one of the highly selective institutions that Armond recommended.

Professional support

Ten mentors spoke about the professional guidance that they gave to UIS. Benjamin spoke to Rachel about some of her specific strengths and interests and how they aligned with academic and administrative careers. Armond and Erin discussed her interest in psychology and family therapy. He helped her understand the ways in which the fields overlapped and diverged. Ginger drew upon her experience as a college professor when she and Grace talked about the professoriate as a career option for her.
Kevin's professional support of Sophia focused on entrepreneurial paths. Without DACA benefits, she had fewer career options than some of her peers and he told her to consider business opportunities as an independent contractor or by forming a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC). Caroline also exposed Erin to alternative career options by giving her the chance to work on various projects for her foundation. This gave Erin professional experience that she could draw upon in the event that she did not transfer to a four-year college.

Unorthodox support

Not previously identified in the literature on mentoring, unorthodox support refers to the actions that mentors took that were outside the scope of their professional roles or actions that are not typical of the way to guide someone to and through college. This form of support emerged from mentors' willingness to find solutions to challenges that UIS faced. Some of those challenges, such as inability to access federal financial aid, had no clear solutions. Current mentoring research has not explored the unique strategies that mentors

use to support mentees who face such challenges. Most of the mentors provided examples of support that would be considered unorthodox. In his interview, Benjamin used the term "unorthodox" to describe the kind of support that he provided to Rachel. Benjamin described his thoughts and what he said to Rachel at the start of their relationship:

Okay, we're going to do something that will sound unorthodox. And it was unorthodox. I mean, that's the reality. When you're undocumented, you have to be unorthodox to get where everyone else gets to without having to be unorthodox, right? Because there's a straight path. And when you're undocumented, there's never a straight path. You have to take all kinds of deviations.

In Rachel's case, the unorthodox action came in the form of her deciding to take a gap year after high school to take specific steps to increase the likelihood that a college would accept her with full financial funding.

Some UIS lacked other resources needed to attend college. Mariel recalled lending a tablet to Lisa so that she could work on her college applications at home. Caroline's foundation gave Erin a computer that she used to complete her college and financial aid applications. In addition, they created a paid internship so that she could earn money for the work that she did for the organization. Caroline said that they "incorporated her into the foundation work" since she was the kind of young person they sought to support.

When the Obama administration announced the DACA program, Anna drove Kayla to complete the fingerprinting step. Then, she went with Kayla to visit the college that she wanted to attend. After she was accepted to that college, Anna drove Kayla to college to help her move into the dorms. Robert is another mentor who provided unorthodox support to Kayla. He was her initial academic advisor but when she declared a major outside of his field, she was supposed to select a new advisor. However, she asked Robert to continue to advise her and he agreed to learn her program requirements in order to fulfill that role.

Kevin was another mentor who played an instrumental role even before Sophia began attending the college where he worked. She contacted him after her offer of admission was rescinded due to a decline in her grades. He met with her and her family members and designed a plan for her to regain admission. When she began attending the college, he continued to support her. He described his role as one of a "father figure" because he knew that her father wasn't involved in her life and she sometimes sought from him the kind of advice that other students would have sought from their fathers.

Diane also offered gestures that were familial in nature. She lived near the college campus where she taught and invited students, including UIS friends Rachel and Stacy, to her home. She interacted with UIS in spaces outside of the institution so that their

relationship grew in multi-dimensional ways. She gave Stacy advice when she faced family struggles and spoke about rising tension between her and Rachel when they had a difficult conversation about a project that Rachel wanted to end. During that difficult conversation, Rachel wanted to leave but Diane encouraged her to stay with it until they reached a solution.
Connie supported Stacy by stepping outside of her traditional role as a high school teacher. She noticed that written notices for families were only available in English, and she advocated for them to be translated into Spanish for Spanish-speaking families. She also pushed her high school to have additional translators available for meetings with parents so that they could have better access to the information shared in those meetings.

Levi provided unorthodox support in the way he included the family as well. He took Emma and her mother to visit a college campus and explained to her mother the ways that higher education would provide additional opportunities for Emma's future. He described the targeted search he made for a college that would provide full financial support for Emma. Once he identified that campus, he contacted several people in his professional network to help ensure her admission and full funding. He described his persistence in that process by saying, "I was fortunate enough to, to just have open and honest conversation with some of my colleagues at State University at the time. So they guided me to the right people. It took two conversations and then it took a visit."

These examples of support are atypical because they do not fall into the job descriptions and duties of the mentors in the study. Most of them were faculty or staff in a high school or college. Several were co-workers and/or peers to the UIS who identified them for this study. Their examples of unorthodox support occurred in response to the unique challenges that UIS face and in the absence of defined solutions for them. In summary, the mentors of UIS engaged in high quality allyship for undocumented students, where they leveraged their privilege, status, and position in diverse, creative ways (Clark-Ibáñez & Swan, 2019).

Discussion

There are three categories of findings presented from this study: mentoring models, mentors' identification and leveraging of CCW of UIS, and forms of support. While no two mentors engaged in identical practices, one-half of the mentors in the study used strategies that can be described as three specific styles: intentional mentoring, proactive mentoring, and/or use of an informal mentoring team (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Intentional mentoring refers to the conscious decision to offer ongoing support to the UIS. Proactive mentoring describes the mentors' anticipation of challenges and pre-planned strategies for coping with those challenges. Some mentors

developed an informal mentoring team when they reached out to their professional networks to gather additional resources and assistance for the UIS. Two of the mentoring models, institutionally-mediated and peer-mediated have not been explicitly named as mentoring models in prior research. The institutionally-mediated mentoring model applies to most of the relationships in this study. This suggests that UIS who pursue college rely on education professionals for support.

Mentors used styles and strategies described as intentional and proactive, and made use of an informal team. Previous studies examined intentional mentoring and support the explicit decision that mentors make to provide support for students (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). They also encourage mentors to use proactive measures (Espinoza, 2011). This was a useful strategy for mentors in this study as they could anticipate future challenges that UIS would face and help them to prepare solutions or alternate plans. The use of an informal team aligns with current research which shows that mentees benefit from having more than one mentor (Christensen, Raposa, Hagler, Erickson, & Rhodes, 2021). What is unique about the team mentoring effort in this study is that mentors used their professional networks to support their mentoring efforts, not for those individuals to become direct mentors to the UIS.

In this study, mentors recognized and nurtured UIS' CCW which led to the growth of multiple forms of capital. Previous studies indicate that natural mentors increase the social capital of young people (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Mentors identified more than 30 CCW descriptors of UIS. Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2009) emphasize the importance of educators who "continuously strive to know their students, their families, and their communities well" (p.542). Mentors were able to identify these assets because they actively built relationships with UIS and sustained those relationships for one or more years.

Most mentors of UIS in this study provided academic, affirmation, and encouragement support. Mentors tailored support based on the strengths and the needs of the UIS who they mentored. Since the majority of mentors held a professional role in education, they had the capacity to give UIS academic support through tutoring, feedback, and counseling. However, mentors in this study did more than just perform the normal duties expected for their professional roles.

Mentors recognized the need for affirmation and encouragement support at various times in their relationship with UIS. By paying attention to what UIS shared, they reminded UIS that they were worthy of being in the educational space and that they could reach their academic goals. Mentors offered affirmation support to reinforce their belief in the UIS's ability to go to college and graduate from college.

Encouragement support was related to affirmation support, but went beyond the academic realm. Mentors recalled challenges that UIS had related to finances, family, health, relationships, peers, and career choices. They encouraged UIS by helping them to put their challenges in perspective and to develop concrete solutions to some problems. If some challenges could not be resolved, the mentor's encouragement was still necessary to help the UIS persist in spite of the challenges. These findings contrast with a prior study of documented and undocumented students who hid their concerns and often relied upon themselves to cope with stressful situations (O'Neal, Espino, Goldthrite, Morin, Weston, Hernandez & Fuhrmann, 2016). Socio-emotional support that mentors provide is both valuable and necessary. In this study, mentors knew about the stressors that UIS had and provided support to help them manage their stress.

When the UIS transitioned to college, mentors provided professional support as part of preparation for life after college. Six out of eight mentors gave UIS professional support. This finding is not surprising due to a greater focus on career planning at the college level for all college students. It is even more critical for UIS who have fewer career options due to legal barriers that prevent them from working in some fields (Suárez-Orozco & López Hernández, 2020). In addition to finding innovative ways to understand how mentors support UIS, this study also revealed a new type of mentoring approach which will be theorized in the next section.

Toward a Mentoring Model Based on Unorthodox Support

Unorthodox support emerged as a form of support that best describes the atypical but necessary strategies that mentors of UIS use. Some form of unorthodox support was mentioned in every interview.

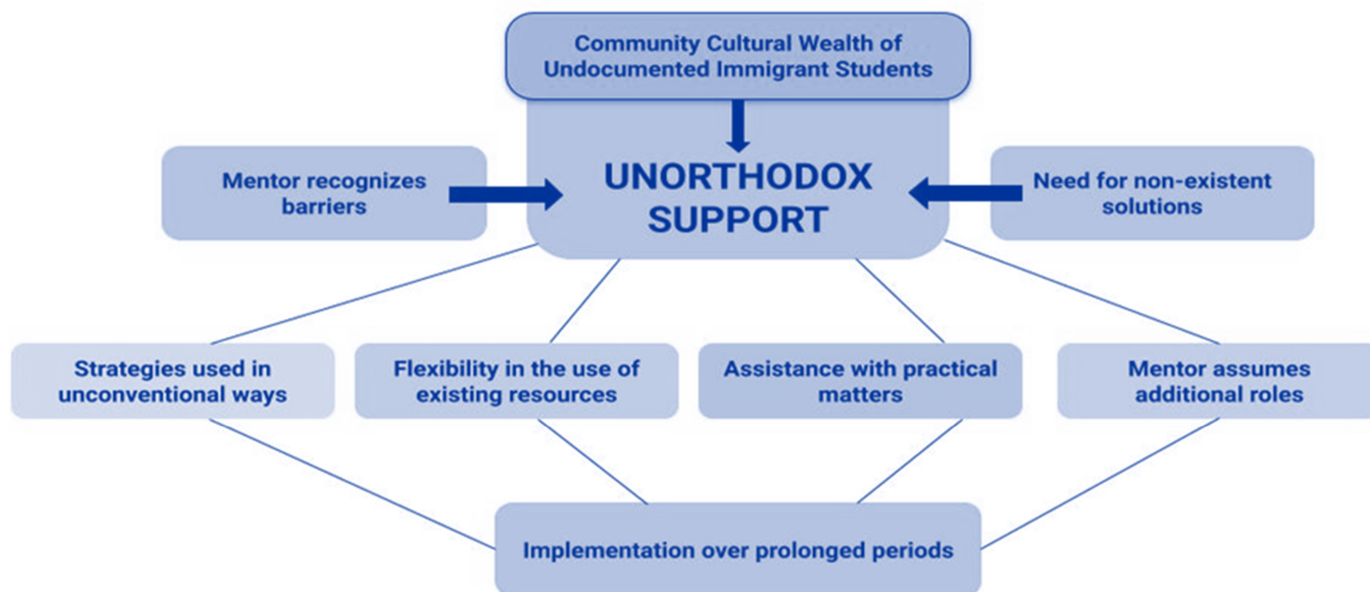
The data revealed seven components of unorthodox support:

- Emerges when mentors recognize barriers and seek ways to overcome or confront them
- Derives from the need to develop solutions that do not exist
- Incorporates existing strategies in ways, contexts, or with intentions that are different from the ones for which the strategies were designed
- Requires mentors to identify flexibility in the use of resources
- Includes mentor assistance with practical matters that may be routine matters for others
- Leads mentors to assume informal roles and duties that are outside the scope of their formal roles
- Takes longer to implement than "orthodox" forms of support

The idea of persisting in the face of problems that had no apparent solutions influenced the support category that mentor Benjamin termed, "unorthodox." The examples of

unorthodox support in this study emerged from the need to respond to unique challenges, such as the inability to access federal financial aid. In addition, each mentor developed unorthodox methods based on two factors: the specific needs of the UIS and the resources that the mentor could access. Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2017) point to the importance of "high-stakes information networks" comprised of "knowing adults who are effective in mentoring students and provide them with" information that leads to college attendance (p.550). Mentors in this study had access to a range of resources which they used to develop unorthodox methods to support UIS.

Figure 1.
Unorthodox Support Model.



The literature review established the lack of a mentoring model that addresses the needs of UIS and data analysis revealed the need to develop additional frameworks for studying this type of mentoring. The emergence of unorthodox support as the primary form of support in this study provides a potential new framework, depicted in Figure 1, to examine mentoring of UIS.

The mentor must first recognize the barrier(s) their mentee is facing and understand there could be no clear existing solutions to overcome those challenges. They must also view their mentees from a CCW framework, identifying experiences and skills that could be part of a creative solution. There are four essential elements found in unorthodox

support: mentors using existing strategies in unconventional ways, mentors using existing resources in a flexible manner, mentors assisting mentees with practical matters, and mentors assuming additional informal roles that are outside the defined scope of their official duties. Finally, the unorthodox support model recognizes that this form of support is likely to occur over a prolonged period. Creating a survey scale or set of qualitative interview questions will be the next step in developing this model. Researchers deploying this model will be able to focus on the strategies and supports that are most effective in the mentoring of UIS and other youth who face unique challenges brought about by the current systems that are not designed for their success.

Recommendations

To better support UIS, educators can create a network of allies who provide needed resources and services for undocumented students. UIS and mentors in this study often had to spend time searching for resources. This is time-consuming and can lead to missed opportunities and/or extended timelines to accomplish academic goals. Establishing a network that includes sources of financial aid, extraneous funding, legal services, mental health services, and a family liaison will relieve the burden on a single mentor to try to provide multiple resources. To enhance campus climate, there is a need to increase visible signs of support for UIS on campuses and in community spaces. Signs of support include messages to the campus community about the legal rights of undocumented students, resources available for them, and a way for them to request assistance while maintaining privacy. Sharing messages in community spaces ensures that family members also have access to information.

Institutions also need to implement physical space for UIS. It is in those spaces that students should be able to access resources. One resource should be the ability to initiate a mentoring relationship with teachers, counselors, staff, and community members who agree to provide support. This would provide an entry point for mentoring relationships to begin. If UIS have already established a mentoring relationship with a teacher or other school staff member on their own, they can use the space as a place to create networks of support with other campus allies. Networks of support are important for both UIS and their mentors, who often hold other professional roles and mentor UIS in addition to fulfilling their typical duties. Increasing institutional support will remove some of the burden on individual mentors, like those in this study, who often worked alone to support UIS. Indeed, the lack of institutional support affects mentors, who develop intentional, proactive, and mentoring team approaches and use unorthodox methods in response to the lack of structural supports. Institutions can contribute to effective mentoring for UIS by providing clear resources and strategies that mentors can

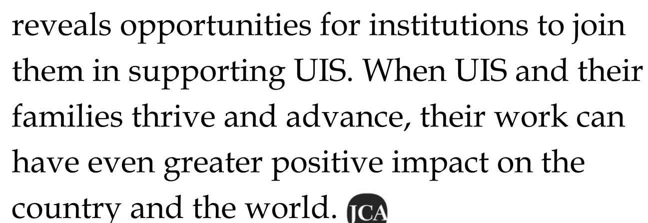
access and use to guide UIS. When there is an established structure of support, mentors will also be able to connect with each other and form a network of allies beyond their personal networks.
Multiple high schools and college campuses have established student groups or centers to support UIS. This is another way that schools can create symbolic and physical spaces where UIS can request help and form a supportive community on their terms. Mentors who join these established groups will be able to focus their efforts on building relationships and supporting UIS rather than having to create solutions for institutional gaps.

According to the participants in this study, formal mentoring organizations and programs did not provide mentoring that is specifically tailored to the needs of UIS. While informal and natural mentoring relationships will continue to benefit UIS, formal programs can provide needed support as well. Based on insights shared by informal mentors in this study, there are several points that formal programs can consider. The work of mentoring UIS is political in nature and changes rapidly based on lived experiences and legislative policies. Since policies and policy changes are unpredictable, it is necessary to implement new solutions at the micro level.

The first step in doing this is to identify the needs of UIS by inviting them to play an active role in the development of any type of support system. Weiston-Serdan (2017) calls upon mentoring programs to broaden their ideas about youth participation. Mentoring programs need to recognize that they are not currently serving the needs of UIS and invite them to provide input and leadership in the development of programming. When programs have established support based on the input of UIS, they can begin to offer an entry point in the form of explicit invitations for UIS to find mentors who are qualified to support them.

Since UIS and their mentors in this study developed relationships outside of a formalized program, it will be helpful for structured mentoring programs to provide additional entry points into the program for mentors and UIS who have established a relationship but need structural support. This would need to occur after programs have increased their capacity to support UIS. In addition, programs will need to share this opportunity within schools and communities so that UIS and their mentors know that they can seek formal support with specific organizations.

UIS continue to live in uncertainty regardless of the political party of the current administration. Tens of thousands of UIS struggle to move forward in their education in the face of continued uncertainty for themselves and their families. Mentors like those who participated in this study are instrumental in helping UIS, who are active participants in our society. Mentor insight

reveals opportunities for institutions to join them in supporting UIS. When UIS and their families thrive and advance, their work can have even greater positive impact on the country and the world. 

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