UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION: A HOUSTON STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

Undocumented immigration has raised a series of social and legal issues in the United States. These issues have emerged in many spheres (economic, educational, health, etc.) of U.S. society (Chavez, 1992). One of the most recent issues to emerge concerns the involvement of undocumented immigrant students in institutions of higher education. The issue concerns the admission and higher tuition of undocumented students. In many universities, colleges and other institutions of higher education, immigrant students are not permitted to enroll because of their undocumented status; in some cases where they are allowed to enroll, undocumented students are charged higher tuition (out-of-state or international-student tuition) than resident students.

In the Houston area attempts by undocumented students to enroll in universities and colleges generally have one of two results: enrollment is denied when the student cannot proof U.S. citizenship or legal residency, or, in a smaller number of cases, the undocumented student is allowed to enroll but charged out of state tuition. The second outcome often prevents the undocumented student from enrolling given their usual low-low-income status and exclusion from collegiate financial assistance.

Apart from the legal dimension of undocumented status, the emerging issue of undocumented students in higher education represents a policy lag in universities, colleges and other institutions of higher education. Generally these institutions address the enrollment requests of undocumented immigrants through policies
adopted for foreign students. This determination is made through default: if you are not a U.S. citizen or legal-resident alien, then you are a foreign student. The failure of this policy approach is that it does not recognize the sociological reality of the emerging category of undocumented residents, a growing category that includes foreign-born students raised in the United States.

In this paper I report on the findings of a study of undocumented immigrants actively interested in entering institutions of higher education. The study was conducted in the summer of 1991 among undocumented residents and recent undocumented immigrants in the Houston area. The study's purpose was not to determine how many undocumented persons are interested in attending an institution of higher education, but rather what are the characteristics of undocumented immigrants actively interested in attending such institutions and what have been their experiences with colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education. In the section of this paper, I will outline the socio-historical development of I consider to be the emergence of an undocumented resident category. This is a social category which is significantly distinct from the conventional conceptualization of undocumented immigrants and which is a basis for the growing demand for higher education among undocumented persons in U.S. society.

The presentation of the study comprises the following sections: 1) an outline of the emergence of an undocumented-resident category, 2) a description of the research methods used in the study, 3) a statistical description of characteristics of the sample collected in the study, 4) a presentation of the different educational-
background groups found in the sample, 5) a description of the different involvements in higher education of the interviewees in the study, and 6) a brief description of higher-education administrators' responses to undocumented students.

THE EMERGING UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT POPULATION AND LATINO EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Large-scale undocumented immigration in the United States since the mid-1960s has created the new category of undocumented students, or more broadly of undocumented residents. As in other large urban centers in the United States, the Houston area experienced considerable undocumented immigration in the 1970s and 1980s. Given the undocumented status of the newcomers and other social conditions that precluded their enumeration by agencies, it is difficult to determine the exact size of Houston's undocumented population. In the early 1980s statistical estimates placed the Houston undocumented population at a range of 80,000 to 130,000 (Bean, 1982). However, with continuing massive undocumented immigration in the 1980s, including the influx of large numbers of Central Americans, it is likely that by 1985 the number of undocumented immigrants in the Houston area reached 200,000 (Shelton et al., 1989).

Undocumented Latino immigration has characterized Houston's Latino population growth since the early 1900s (De Leon, 1989). Since the 1960s, however, undocumented immigration has spurred the growth of the undocumented student category in ways that prior immigration did not. An evolving inter-
relationship of several social-demographic developments has promoted this growth. The social-demographic developments include the following: 1) large-scale, rapid Latino immigration, 2) accelerated growth of Latino undocumented family population, 3) development of Latino undocumented-immigrant communities, 4) greater Latino attachment to schools, 5) greater Latino involvement in educational development and issues, 6) greater Latino educational success, and 7) greater opportunity for Latino economic mobility.

**Large-scale Latino immigration.** Historically immigration has played a major role in the growth of Houston’s Latino population. For almost all of the decades in the present century, immigration has accounted for about one half of the area’s Latino population growth. Table 1 shows Latino population growth in the Houston area from 1970 to 1990. Between 1970 and 1980, the Latino population grew by 100.0 percent in the metropolitan, while the total population grew by 46.4 percent. Between 1980 and 1990 the Latino population grew by 66.5 percent in the metropolitan area, while the total population grew by only 13.6 percent. Large-scale Latino immigration accounts for a sizeable amount of the differences between the Latino and total growth rates.

Besides involving a large number of migrants, undocumented Latino immigration since the sixties enjoyed considerable acceleration. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) apprehensions of undocumented migrants increased dramatically from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s (see Table 297 in U.S.
Bureau of the Census, 1989). While declining economic conditions in Mexico helped spur this immigration, in Houston a robust economic growth helped to attract undocumented newcomers (Shelton et al., 1989). In some sectors of the area's economy growth became heavily dependent on undocumented labor. Heralded as "Houston's Golden Economic Age," the seventies and very early eighties also saw undocumented Latino labor take a central part in the development of Houston's built-environment (Feagin, 1988).

As Houston's vigorous economic growth ended with the start of a five-year downturn in 1982/1983, social and political instability in Central America produced a wave of undocumented Latino migrants and refugees to the Houston area, and to many other U.S. cities. From the early to the mid-1980s this migration added over 50,000 more Latinos to the Houston area (Rodriguez, 1987).

**Undocumented Latino family growth.** Unlike earlier undocumented immigration patterns that included large numbers of seasonal migrants, the post-1960s undocumented Latino immigration of Mexicans, Central Americans, and of smaller numbers of South Americans and Caribbean Islanders, included large numbers of families, i.e., families with school-age children (Chavez, 1992). Several factors are related to this development of greater undocumented, family migration. These factors include changes in the international labor system between the U.S. and Mexico in which the reproduction of (migrant) labor took place primarily in the sending communities (Buroway, 1976), changes in the destination of migrant
labor (from rural to urban settings), and a growing involvement of Latino women (many with children) in international labor migration to the United States.

While bracero-like undocumented migration tended to be heavily male, seasonal and rural-bound (Galazar, 1964), much of the undocumented migration in the 1960s and afterwards headed toward urban centers (Cornelius et al., 1982). To an extent, agricultural mechanization displaced migrant labor, but urban labor markets also acted on their own to help redirect undocumented-migrant streams into U.S. cities and towns. The institutional social infrastructure in urban areas presented greater opportunities for family survival than did the meager settings of rural employment. For immigrant women, city jobs such as domestic work presented greater opportunities for social, if not economic, survival. It is safe to hypothesize that the new urban destinations of undocumented Latino migrants, i.e., destinations like Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, presented favorable resources (social, economic and cultural) at sufficient enough levels to relocate migrant families into the United States. The supportive social actions of established Latino residents (e.g., Mexican Americans) also helped in this transition.

Central American immigration in the 1980s also increased the amount of undocumented family immigration. If Mexican migrants could continue to maintain binational households that involved segmented residences in the United States and Mexico, many or most undocumented Central American newcomers could not. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and in areas of Honduras, civil
war and other political violence drove thousands of families from their homes. When families could not migrate together, the father or the mother migrated first and saved wage earnings to send for family members later. Among undocumented Central Americans the need for family migration was especially pressing as parents sought to prevent the forcible induction of their teenage children (some as young as thirteen years of age) into military or insurgent groups (Rodriguez, 1987).

Undocumented Latino communities. Large-scale immigration, involving substantial family migration, led to the growth of undocumented-immigrant neighborhoods and communities by the eighties in Houston (Shelton et al., 1989), as in many other urban areas in the United States. Houston barrios, e.g., Magnolia and the Second Ward (El Segundo Barrio), became heavily immigrant in identity as some barrio census tracts became 40 percent or more immigrant-origin by the 1980s and in some cases more than 50 percent by the 1990s (Rodriguez, forthcoming). At least until the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, large numbers of the new immigrant residents in the barrios were undocumented.

The neighborhood-building of Central Americans was conspicuous in Houston as these newcomers, who were overwhelmingly undocumented, created new Latino settlements in Anglo-dominant areas of the city. Immigrating in large numbers during the early- to the mid-1980s, undocumented Central Americans
developed Latino neighborhoods in many west-side apartment complexes that lost middle-income tenants with the coming of the area’s economic downturn (Rodriguez, 1987).

Undocumented Latino neighborhood growth became a basis for undocumented Latino community development. Many ethnic enterprises and activities arose from the residential areas of undocumented immigrants and helped form a community institutional infrastructure. This social formation was critical for the incorporation of undocumented immigrants as a social category into U.S. society. Here relations with the dominant society were no longer necessarily mediated through established Latino residents but directly in face-to-face encounters with dominant-group members. The undocumented had a home base in the United States, which helped their incorporation into U.S. society. With this new community homeland came a sense of social citizenship with ideas of legal entitlements that extended to children in the educational sector.

**Latino educational attachment.** The 1960s roughly mark a transition in the history of Latino involvement in education. Latino attachment to schools, measured in such terms as enrollment, high-school completion and attendance in colleges and universities, differed significantly in the late 1960s and afterwards from earlier decades. As many works have described (e.g., Acuna, 1981), in earlier decades a large part of the U.S.-Latino population existed in lower working-class status far removed from educational resources. In a condition described by some
as internal colonialism (see Blauner, 1972), the dominant institutional system gave little or no priority to Latino education, and many Latino families could survive extreme absolute poverty only if children left school to help generate family income. In many areas of the Southwest, Mexican-American migrant farmworkers were a prototype of this family situation. The Latino survival strategy requiring child labor became so institutionalized in some Texas rural communities that celebrations for completion of the eighth grade became part of the Mexican-American subculture, since Latino students rarely went on to attend high-school grades. In some cases, the schools themselves designed eighth-grade achievement certificates for the "graduating" Latino students.

Why did this pattern of low Latino school attachment change (though not dramatically) in the 1960s and later? The next section answers part of this question from the standpoint of Latino involvement in educational development and from the standpoint of Latino economic mobility. The expansion of welfare-state programs for family support, the growing urbanization of the Latino population, the enactment of educational-assistance programs (e.g., the G.I. Bill), the Civil Rights Movement, and even the U.S.-U.S.S.R. race in scientific were also developments which affected Latino educational change.

Greater Latino student attachment to schools did not necessarily parallel the dominant Anglo student pattern, however. In many cases, Latino students in high schools were tracked into vocational programs (auto-repair, wood work, welding, etc.) that mainly prepared them for blue-collar jobs, as was also done for
many African-American students. Nevertheless, it was in this transitional period that "high-school drop outs" became a Latino social issue, indicating the greater Latino attachment to education.

**Latino involvement in educational development.** While educational development and issues had been on the agendas of Latino civic and community organizations decades earlier (De Leon, 1989), it was in the 1960s that education came to the forefront as a central and often volatile Latino cause. To a considerable extent, this development overlapped with the broader civil-rights and Chicano movements. Frequently educational struggles and "el movimiento" coalesced among Latinos (see, Garcia, 1989).

Latino involvement in educational development and issues ranged from pedagogical research to legal work for educational equality (e.g., see San Miguel, 1987). The 1960s marked the beginning of extensive research on the educational conditions of Latino children. Several innovations emerged from this research (bilingual-bicultural programs, migrant education, etc.) to address problems facing Latino students. The new educational programs themselves created many niches for Latinos in schools and in other educational centers. This, in turn, led colleges and universities to create programs on Latino education. These programs ranged from undergraduate and graduate degrees in bilingual-bicultural education to curricula for Latino school administrators (Johnson and Hernandez, 1970).

Latino educational development, however, went beyond constructing Latino
pedagogical and administrative programs and entered the realm of educational politics. School walkouts and boycotts, "barrio schools," school-board "takeovers", lawsuits against school districts, etc.--all were (and continue to be) examples of Latino efforts to enhance educational equality through legal and political action. College and university student politics also became training experiences for many Latino women and men who returned to Latino communities as activists and organizers (Acuna, 1981).

In the 1980s Latino educators and university students were among the activists involved in dealing with the special problems of undocumented immigrant students. These educators and students helped formed pedagogical and political strategies to deal with barriers facing undocumented students (Flores, 1982; Rodriguez, 1988).

Latino educational success. In the 1900s Latino students continue to suffer a high dropout ("push-out") rate and other educational problems; yet, Latino education in the post-1960s is much improved from the very marginal condition of earlier days, i.e., days when in entire communities few Latinos attended or completed high school. This Latino relative success (relative to the pre-1960s) in the post-1960s can be measured along several dimensions. For example, the percentage of Latinos with four years of high school or more increased from 18.4 percent in 1960 to 51.3 percent in 1991 (Grebler et al., 1970; Bovee, 1991). Needless to say, Latino educational success varies considerably across the country.
and sometimes vacillates with shifting support from federal and other institutional sources. Nonetheless, there are clear indications that as a group Latinos have advanced beyond their earlier educational plight when dominant groups viewed them mainly as fodder for lower working-class occupations and unworthy of serious educational expenditures.

Latino educational success has raised expectations of additional educational success, the measure of which now includes all Latinos, not simply the U.S-born or the legally resident. That is to say, while in other sectors, e.g., the labor market, the legal/undocumented distinction matters (Rodriguez and Nunez, 1986), in primary- and secondary-education the distinction matters much less, if at all, from the standpoint of the emerging Latino core value of educational success. There are obvious demographic reasons for this perception. In many Texas public schools, for example, the Latino student is an immigrant and often undocumented, or recently undocumented in the case of students who legalized through IRCA (Noboa-Polanco, 1991). Creating a demand, these students have helped maintain the Latino educational programs developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Exceptions exists, and thus in some areas (e.g., the U.S.-Mexico border) some Latino educators view undocumented students as a hinderance for Latino educational success, as part of a broader anti-immigrant attitude (Rodriguez and Urrutia-Rojas, 1990).

To an extent, the efforts to help undocumented Latino students gain entry into colleges and universities represents the rising expectation of Latino
educational success beyond the primary- and secondary-grade levels.

**Latino economic mobility.** With increasing educational attainment and success, Latinos have enjoyed a measure of economic mobility since the years before the sixties. Large-scale immigration makes it difficult to gauge this mobility using census statistics, since the presence of large numbers of immigrants inflates the proportion of Latinos in lower-status jobs. Nonetheless, by the 1970s and 1980s a small proportion of Latino workers had clearly broken through the barrier between the secondary and primary labor-market sectors (Feagin, 1984). Once obtained, this mobility, like education, became a social value among many Latinos.

Among immigrant Latinos, including the undocumented, this economic mobility sometimes covered a greater span, such as from campesino in the country of origin to relatively stable, wage employment in the United States (Rodriguez, 1987). While some immigrant parents were satisfied when their immigrant children underwent horizontal mobility, other parents expected vertical mobility from their immigrant children. In some schools attended by undocumented Latino students, educators also helped established the value of economic mobility. The saying "Don’t drop out" was directed to undocumented students in many schools.

To a significant extent, I believe, the present interest and struggle of undocumented students to enter higher education is a result of the growth of undocumented communities and the increase of Latino involvement in educational
development. As I have pointed out, the two developments reinforced each other.

RESEARCH METHODS

The principal research task of the study was to locate and interview persons with undocumented status who were actively interested in higher education. In the study "undocumented status" was operationalized as being in the country without permission of the United States government. That is, the immigrant either entered the country "without papers" or stayed beyond the period allowed by his/her visa and resided in the country without legal resident status. We included a few individuals in the sample who obtained work-authorization permits under special INS provisions for Salvadorans and Guatemalans. This decision was based on our perception that some immigrants with work authorization still identified themselves as not having "papers." Work authorization placed the immigrants in a grey-area—it definitely did not bestow a full sense of legal-resident status, perhaps because of its temporary nature.

"Actively interested in higher education" was operationalized as having been enrolled, or having made an effort to enroll, or having obtained information on how to enroll at a public or private institution of higher education.

Several sources were used to locate undocumented persons interested in, or already enrolled in, institutions of higher education. These sources included the following: a) high-school teachers, counselors and administrators, b) college and university personnel (including Upward Bound staff), c) church groups, d) an
Hispanic community educational agency, e) neighborhood English classes, f) community meetings for undocumented students and parents, g) a sanctuary home for undocumented youth, h) a Spanish-language radio program, i) a Spanish-language newspaper, and j) immigrant social networks. With the exception of one college program, all sources approached for help in obtaining interviews cooperated with the study.

A research team of five bilingual Latinos (four males and one female) interviewed 80 undocumented persons during the period June 1-August 31, 1991. The interviews ranged from half an hour to two hours and were conducted in English and Spanish. Initially four different interview instruments were constructed to deal with interviewees in different residential and educational circumstances. As the study progressed, however, interviews were usually conducted with only two of the instruments. The instruments contained items concerning socio-demographic individual characteristics, family and parent educational characteristics, perceptions of the value of secondary education, aspirations for higher education, friends in higher education, involvement with higher education, responses to experiences with higher education, and alternative plans for higher education. Additional comments and information given by interviewees were also recorded. Only the first names of interviewees were used to identify interview cases. (All names used to describe cases in this paper have been changed to fictitious ones.)

The chief purpose of the interviews was to gain ethnographic insights to
describe the situations (problems, strategies, alternatives, etc.) of undocumented immigrants wanting to attend an institution of higher education. Thus the focus was more on sociological conditions than on legal ones, such as one that would involve a systematic determination of parents' legal status (though this information was often noted). To the extent possible, we wanted to look at "the problem" from the immigrants' perspective more than from institutional standpoints.

As a secondary research task, the study also contacted higher-education administrators and staff to discuss the issue of undocumented students and higher education. As with the undocumented interviewees, the higher-education personnel were promised that their identification would be protected. At the end of the study, administrators in twelve Houston-area public and private colleges and universities were contacted by telephone to determine if they accepted undocumented students at their schools.

Midway through the study some of researchers participated in a group that organized three meetings for undocumented students and parents. The group consisted of community leaders, educators and one elected official who discussed with undocumented students and parents the problem of entering institutions of higher education. With information gained in these meetings, a small group of undocumented students (whose parents had legalized) were able to enter a Houston university in the fall semester following the end of the study.

Since the sample of interviewees was not gathered through scientific
random sampling, we cannot generalize from the study's findings to the total population of undocumented Latinos in Houston who are actively interested in attending an institution of higher education. While our results are not quantitatively precise, nonetheless, we believe that they are qualitatively suggestive of patterns and conditions in Houston's undocumented Latino population. Besides focussing on Latinos, the study did not exclude subjects by any given characteristic. Instead, the study attempted to reach interviewees of various educational background experiences. As a result of this effort, for example, interviewees in the sample represent 15 high schools in the Houston area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

This section describes the sample of 80 interviews collected during the study. The description focuses on the interviewees' socio-demographic characteristics, family and educational characteristics, and attitudes and aspirations concerning higher education.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

**Age, gender, nationality and time in the United States.** The mean age of the interviewees was 21.1 years, with ages ranging from 16 to 46. About half (51.2 percent) of the sample was younger than 20 years of age and 90.0 percent were 26 years of age or younger. As table 2 shows, the age distributions by
gender in the sample were roughly similar. Males and females were similarly concentrated in the two age categories of 18 and younger and 19 and older.

Table 2 reflects issues concerning undocumented immigrants and higher education. Thirty percent of the sample consisted of persons older than 21 years of age. Considering that the research focused on youth settings and networks, this older age category is surely larger in the Houston undocumented immigrant population. The statement made by this finding is that the problem of undocumented immigrants and higher education is not solely one affecting youth, but a much broader age range of undocumented immigrants. In one instance, for example, the project located a large group of undocumented Mexican and Central American women who had trained as nurses in their home countries but were unable to enter a local community college to obtain certification as nurses in this country.

Without striving to locate interviewees of specific nationalities, the study's sample resulted in roughly similar numbers of Mexican and Central Americans (table 3). Women were found to be significantly represented in both national-origin categories. The former finding speaks to the transcendency and homogeneity of undocumented status. Even after many decades of settlement in the United States, undocumented Mexicans do not fare any better than the recently arrived undocumented Central Americans regarding access to higher education. The latter finding speaks to an apparent similar condition of Latino women across national categories. Among both Mexican and Central American
categories are found significant proportions of women, especially young women, who seek economic and professional achievement through higher education.

Not surprisingly, the mean time in the United States for the sample was 4.2 years. Given the legalization provisions of IRCA, many long-term undocumented residents, including children, acquired legal residency in the United States. Forty-two percent of the sample had been in the United States three years or less. Of those who reported being in the United States for more than three years, only two had been in the country for ten years or more. Six interviewees in the sample were Central Americans youth who had been in the United States for no more than a year and who attended high school and resided in a sanctuary home for undocumented youth.

As explained earlier, since the sample was not drawn randomly, i.e., with a known probability for each selection, it is impossible to state with confidence that the sample’s proportions represent the actual proportions of the undocumented population. What the sample’s findings do suggest is that among undocumented residents seeking admission to institutions of higher education the length of residency in the United States ranges from a few to many years. Among undocumented immigrants, thus, the problem of access to higher education is not solely a problem of the newly arrived.

Table 4 shows that time in the United States did not differ significantly across the Mexican and Central American nationality categories. This table also reflects the continuation of undocumented immigration after the enactment of

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Family and Family Educational Background

Forty-four percent of the interviewees who were asked if they resided with both parents responded that they did. The remaining 56 percent of the interviewees lived mainly with a single parent or a relative; six interviewees were staying at a sanctuary home for undocumented youth. Table 5 shows that the majority of the interviewees in the age groups of 18 and younger and nineteen and older did not live with both parents. An analysis of the response regarding residency with both parents found no statistically significant difference according to the variables of gender and nationality. The finding that less than half of the respondents lived with both parents is consistent with the family dynamics involved in international migration. In conditions of family step migration, in which the father or mother migrates first, and of refugee movements, it is common for families to split up and for only one parent to be present at either end of the migration process (see, Suarez-Orozco, 1989).

Among recent high-school graduates interviewed, in several cases both parents expressed a major concern with their children's problem of gaining admission to a school of higher education. In some cases the father was the most vocal, and in the other cases the mother was the most vocal. In single-parent households undocumented youth also found substantial encouragement to seek access to a college, a university or some other institution of higher education. The
undocumented youth at the sanctuary house practically lived in an educational project, as the operators of the house emphasized school attendance (at a nearby high school), studying after school hours, and the idea of continuing into a university in the city. If the undocumented youth kept their grades up, the house staff promised to help the youth get into a university and raise the necessary monies for their tuition.

As table 6 shows, the interviewees generally have parents with a low educational background. The median schooling of fathers was 5.0 years, and the median schooling of mothers was 6.0 years. This is consistent with the educational background of working-class migrants from Latin America. In many Latin American areas compulsory education only extends to the sixth grade when educational resources are available. No more than 12.7 percent of the interviewees had fathers and/or mothers who had post-secondary schooling.

Needless to say, for a large majority of the interviewees attempts to enter an institution of higher education was a strategy to gain intergenerational vertical mobility. Failure to enter such an institution increased the interviewees’ likelihood of gaining only horizontal mobility. With U.S. schooling, their enhanced human capital (English reading and writing skills, etc.) might bring higher wages or better jobs but still in limited occupations. For some, the lack of work-authorization permit could diminish even this possibility, however.

Of the 55 interviewees who reported their oldest sibling’s educational level, one-half (50.9 percent) stated their oldest sibling had completed secondary school,
and twenty percent reported their oldest sibling had attended post-secondary schooling. These findings indicate that in a majority of the interviewees' families educational mobility had already started among siblings. Interviewees who reported having older siblings with post-secondary education remained trapped (at the time of the interview) between their parents' lower educational achievement and their oldest sibling's higher educational achievement.

Motivation for Higher Education

A large majority of the interviewees pursued educational values and interacted with friends who also aspired to achieve educational success. Over 90 percent of the interviewees saw a high-school education and a high-school diploma to be "important" or "very important," and 79.0 percent had friends who had graduated from high school. Over 60 percent of the interviewees who rated high-school success as "important" or "very important" had been in the United States for four or more years.

More than three-fourths (79.4 percent) of the interviewees stated that they sought higher education to have greater financial success and/or to further their studies. This high percentage of individual-centered goals contrasted with the remaining 20.6 percent who generally reported social-centered reasons for wanting to pursue higher education, e.g., to be better able to help one's family.

The finding among the interviewees, especially high school students and graduates, that two-thirds (66.0 percent) had "many" friends that planned to go to
college and that about half (52.8 percent) had friends who were already in college, suggests that in addition to personal reasons the interviewees' reference groups also motivated them to go college. Several undocumented, high-school students also stated they were motivated to go to college after talking with high-school counselors or with university recruiters.

High-school counselors sometimes were the first to inform the interviewees that undocumented status would prevent them from entering an institution of higher education. Over one-fifth (23.6 percent) of 55 interviewees reported that a high-school teacher or counselor had informed them that they were not going to be able to enter a college or university. The remainder of 55 interviewees reported that a staff person at a college, university or other institution of higher education had informed them that they could not be admitted because they did not have the proper documents (Social Security card and/or student visa).

About half (52.6 percent) of the interviewees reported that they attempted other means when they were initially informed that they would not be accepted for enrollment at an institution of higher education. The other means usually involved talking with a different counselor or trying to enter at another college, university, or other school of higher education. Of the 24 interviewees who did not try other means, 58.3 percent reported they had become discouraged, and the remainder stated that they did not try other means because they did not know what to do. Nevertheless, almost all of the interviewees who discussed future plans stated that they would seek enrollment again sometime in the future.
five of 60 interviewees who discussed future plans stated they would try again.

When asked if they ever thought of attending higher education in their country of origin, a majority (59.3 percent) of the interviewees answered "No." Some of the reasons that the interviewees gave for not thinking of returning to their home countries to seek higher education included the political violence in their countries, the relatively lower status of their country's higher education, and the fewer opportunities in their countries for university graduates. Concerning the second reason, one Salvadoran interviewee stated, "Why would I want to get a college degree in my country? I know a doctor who got his medical degree in El Salvador and now works [in Houston] in the produce section of a supermarket."

Discussion

The larger presence of females in the sample documents the significance of women in the undocumented resident population. As described above, women now number prominently in the undocumented migration to the United States and play crucial roles in the development of undocumented community structures. Like males, undocumented females in the sample were concerned with obtaining educational and occupational mobility and saw higher education as the means. This finding indicates a break with prior patterns where females were assumed to hold (or be held to) lower economic expectations than males.

The finding that women composed about half of the sample means that migration--undocumented migration--may serve as a means for enhancing gender
equality, if the women are able to enter higher-education. Facing a smaller employment opportunity structure than men, undocumented women who are unable to enter an institution of higher education face a greater economic risk than their male counterparts. In other words, the undocumented women’s exclusion from higher education maintains, if not enhances, their gender inequality. For example, many in the large group of undocumented women who trained as nurses in their home countries worked as office cleaners after not being accepted into nurse training programs in the Houston area.

The findings concerning family and family educational background also raise two significant issues concerning the relation of the undocumented-resident category and higher education. In contrast to current research on the urban "underclass," which associates single-parent families with community economic deterioration (Wilson, 1987), the finding that more than half of the interviewee lived in households without both parents and still aspired to higher education suggests a different relationship between family structures and aspirations for educational mobility among undocumented Latino residents. To be sure, the comparison is not completely valid. The single-parent family structure depicted in underclass research functions at a different sociological level than many immigrant families. In many cases single-parent immigrant families represent an international family strategy, a strategy in which one parent maximizes income-earning in the United States while the second parent stays with younger children in the country of origin (Massey et al., 1987).
The contrast between the reported educational levels of parents and the interviewees' higher-education aspirations, as well as their older siblings' higher educational attainment, indicates the movement towards educational mobility among the undocumented-resident population, particularly among the youth. This movement contradicts the image of undocumented immigrants as workers who mainly serve to reproduce the lower echelons of the U.S. labor market and who remain removed from mainstream educational values (Lamm and Imhoff, 1985).

The socio-historical emergence of undocumented residents, especially youth pursuing higher education, represents a radical break from the conventional concept of the undocumented migrant. In my view, it is a fundamental shift, i.e., one that goes beyond gaining more educational training for professional jobs. It is a change involving developments in the interrelated social structures of the immigrant and host communities--developments which affect the very experience, role, and concept of what it means to be an immigrant.

DIVERSE GROUPS OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS SEEKING TO ENTER HIGHER EDUCATION

As table 7 shows, the sample of interviewees contained five groups with different educational backgrounds. The groups' major characteristics were as follows.

Currently in High School
Joel, Mexican, 20 years old, 5 years in the United States, a senior in a Houston suburban high school.

Joel feels that his high-school diploma will be one of the most important achievements in his life. His parents did not attend secondary school. At first he thought that a high-school diploma would be enough, but now he realizes he needs more education. He has demonstrated considerable painting talent, and with the encouragement of high-school teachers he wants to study art at a university or at an art institute. His high-school has already awarded him an art scholarship, but he cannot find a university or an art institute that will accept him because of his undocumented status. In desperation Joel tried to enlist with the Marines but was also rejected. He has contacted the INS to try to do something about his residential status but has not heard from them. In the summer he works at a furniture store and thinks of how to get into a higher-education art program.

Joel's case exemplifies the situation of many of the 13 interviewees who were still attending high school. Many in this group had parents who had never gone beyond primary school. Like Joel, another youth in the group had thought of joining the U.S. armed forces as a way of solving his residential and educational problems. Also like Joel, several high-school interviewees had contacted local colleges and universities to inquire about enrollment and financial aid. Several of the youth had actually visited university campuses, including Texas A&M, The
University of Texas at Austin, University of Houston, and St. Thomas. The students visited the campuses with other students on Career Days or on their own on weekends.

Perhaps the most disadvantaged in this group are the youth who live without their parents. Yet, even the youth who live with one or both parents report that while their parents give them moral support they do not really understand the problem they face. For some of the youth who migrated alone, their major concern is to get as much education as possible (Suarez-Orozco, 1989, makes a similar finding). While the youth know that they face serious residential and financial barriers, they continue to prepare for college, some studying for the SAT. Some of the youth feel they may have a good chance of being admitted to a college or university but will face steep out-of-state tuition, which could keep them out of college. The youth state they want to become engineers, computer scientists, teachers, and physicians.

Recent High School Graduates

Monica, Mexican, 18 years old, 3 years in the United States, a recent graduate from a Memorial area high school in Houston.

Monica lives with her mother and two younger siblings. Her mother, a business owner initially worked as a servant in Houston to raise money to send for Monica and her other children. Monica wants to become a medical doctor. While in high school, Monica volunteered to work in a hospital as a
member of the Health Occupational Student Association. In high school Monica felt that Latino immigrant students were not given sufficient information about higher education. She also felt that Mexican-American students and educational programs did not help Latino immigrant students, and so she made friends with Chinese and Vietnamese students who planned to go to college. A university outside Houston, with a medical school, responded to Monica’s inquiries and after learning of her high grades invited her to visit the campus; however, the university stopped corresponding with Monica after learning of her undocumented status. Two Houston universities also showed interest in her inquiries but stopped communicating with her after learning of her residential status. A recruiter at a local university is presently working with Monica to get her in at the university and perhaps even get her a scholarship. When Monica inquired about entering a Mexican university, she was told that she might have to pay an international-student tuition because she completed secondary school outside of the country. Monica is angry at both the U.S. and Mexican systems of higher education.

The group of recent high-school graduates in the sample were generally characterized by a significant amount of educational achievement. The group included a Valedictorian, as well as several other students who had graduated with honors and awards. Several had been awarded scholarships by schools or
community organizations. One student described his graduation as "the greatest accomplishment of my life." A student self-perception also characterized many in this group. That is, the recent graduates still identified themselves as students although most were no longer academically involved. Their desire and expectation to enroll in higher education undoubtedly affected this self-identity. Some in the group had already taken low-paying jobs, and a few remained unemployed.

Several of the recent high-school graduates had already had involvement with higher-education programs. This involvement ranged from receiving mentoring in university-based programs to being offered college scholarships (which were later withdrawn). In a few cases, the recent graduates had managed to be accepted into a university of college but now had to worry about paying the high out of state tuition fees.

As a group the recent high-school graduates were the hardest to interview because they generally were the most despondent over the problem of accessing higher education. They had just finished high school and, without a Social Security number or student visa, they were now being rejected by institutions of higher education. In several cases, parents also were frustrated and despondent over their children's predicament. Some students complained that were notified that would not be admitted after they had already registered, bought books and were "ready to go." A couple of students also complained of being embarrassed and humiliated by having to give back scholarships. With frustrated voices, the recent high-school graduates described the sacrifices they endured to prepare for
According to them, they did everything they were asked to do, sometimes more. One graduate explained,

Even when I was extremely sick, I did all the make-up work to be able to graduate on time. ... I've learned English and have educated myself here, and for what? I want to continue studying here. That is what I worked for.

A couple of graduates expressed that they had been misled by their high-school teachers and administrators. One graduate stated, "If they [teachers and counselors] had told me I could not go to college, I would have taken more vocational courses."

Another student lamented, "Being undocumented keeps you from obtaining many of the facilities and opportunities offered to those documented."

In several ways beyond their educational drive, the group of recent high-school graduates illustrated the emerging new category of undocumented residents. Several lived in mixed households of legalized and undocumented residents. Some also had siblings or other relatives that had attended higher-education programs, some in their home countries. But perhaps the most striking characteristic was their English and bicultural skills. Some had become so acculturated in U.S. culture that little remained of their national identity. They had become more American than Mexican, Salvadoran, etc. For them, returning to their home country to attend a university or other school of higher education was no longer be a practical alternative. As a group the recent high-school graduates were vastly removed from the conventional concept of the
undocumented immigrant.

GED Graduates

Edwin, Salvadoran, 23 years old, 4 years in the United States, obtained a GED at a local community college.

Edwin came to the United States to avoid the political and economic problems in his country. He left behind his parents, who did not go beyond a third grade education. While he has earned a GED he still wants to improve his English skills. He feels that the GED is the first step towards a career in electronics. Working at the time, he plans to get into a bilingual vocational program at a local community college. He knows it is hard to get into the college without legal papers, so he is thinking of applying for political asylum to get legal status. When asked if he has thought of returning to El Salvador to study electronics there, he responds that it is impossible because he would be inducted into the army.

The finding that only three in the sample had obtained a GED suggests that it has not become a major value among undocumented immigrants. A visit to a local community college found several undocumented immigrants enrolled in a program preparing students for the GED exam, however. While studying for the GED has not emerged as a major educational pattern among the area's undocumented immigrants, it certainly remains a potential option for
undocumented immigrants too old to enter high school. In one case, an undocumented immigrant who had completed secondary school in her home country thought of obtaining a GED as a way of strengthening her case as a resident of this country when applying at a local college. According to her plan, if she presented a GED certificate to college admissions officers they would be less likely to suspect that she was from another country and, thus, less likely to charge out-of-state tuition.

Completed Secondary Education in Home Country

Javier, Columbian, 22 years old, 2 years in the United States, completed secondary education in Colombia

Javier comes from a poor family. His parents have only a primary education. Javier wanted a better life and saw education is the way to get it. He studied hard, got good grades and played sports to win a scholarship. With the scholarship he attend a private school for his secondary education. After completing secondary education, Javier entered the army and became interested in chemistry and medicine. When he left the military, Javier made plans to enroll in a hometown university; his above average grades, he thought, would make it easy for him to be accepted by the university. Facing stiff competition from other applicants to the university, however, Javier decided to enter a university at another city in Columbia. He moved to a city where he did not have any relatives and had to take a job to
support himself. The job, however, did not pay enough for him to afford both living expenses and university studies. Seeing his friends succeeding in universities in Columbia and in Mexico, Javier decided to try to enter a university in the United States. His sister and her husband had already settled in Houston. After arriving in Houston without a visa, Javier inquired about enrolling in a university but found that without proper papers he would not be accepted. He asked his brother-in-law for permission to use his immigration papers and identification documents to apply for admission, but his brother-in-law declined at the last minute. Later, Javier found a household job in an affluent area in Houston. He works for the household during the day and studies English at night. He plans to take the GED exam before attempting again to enroll at a local university.

Like Javier, several other interviewees who had completed secondary education in their home country had relatives or close friends who were attending or had attended an institution of higher education either in the home country or in the United States. Given the higher-educational involvement of their reference groups, these interviewees saw themselves as college bound as well. That is to say, they saw themselves as part of a peer group that was advancing into higher education. Like the group of recent high-school graduates, some in this group still identified themselves as students even though they were no longer academically
involved.

A couple of interviewees in the group originally came to the United States to obtain resources that would help them pursue a career in their country. In one case, a Mexican woman initially had planned to work in the United States only long enough to save money to pay for her university tuition in Mexico. Family problems back home kept her in the United States, and now she planned to bring her mother and younger brother to Houston.

After arriving with a tourist visa, a second Mexican woman at first had plans to return to work in a Mexican tourist area after learning English in the United States. She now planned to study in a technical institute in Houston.

The case of a third Mexican woman in the group suggests that some Latin American women whose higher-education goals are blocked in their countries (sometimes by traditional culture) may emigrate to seek higher-education studies in the United States. Maria, who is 28 years old, migrated to the United States in 1985 after deciding to pursue university studies. In Mexico her friends had encouraged her to study at a university. When she told her parents about it, they opposed it. She then decided to migrate to the United States to learn English and to study at a university. Having no papers and having to work to support herself has kept her from enrolling at a university in Houston.

The belief that a secondary education is insufficient to find a good job characterizes several interviewees in this group. The interviewees have mainly low-paying service jobs. Discouraged, one interviewee has persuaded her brother
and sisters to remain in Mexico and attend universities there.

Higher Education Experience in the Home Country

Ana, Mexican, 24 years of age, 3 years in the United States, attended nursing school in Mexico.

Ana finished secondary education in Mexico because she wanted to become a nurse. After Ana enrolled in a nurse training program, however, her parents decided to migrate to the United States to look for work. Ana migrated with them. Still interested in becoming a nurse, she enrolled in English classes at a local higher-education program. When she also attempted to enroll in a nurse training program in a private vocational institute, she was rejected because she did not have a Social Security card. Ana remains determined to enroll in a nurse training program somewhere and is asking an administrator in her English classes for a letter of recommendation to see if it will help her. With both of her parents here, Ana will not consider returning to Mexico to study nursing there. Working part-time as an office employee, Ana hangs on to her dream of becoming a registered nurse--now in the United States.

The study found a large group of undocumented women who shared Ana's problem. They had studied nursing in their country but because of their undocumented status had been kept from continuing their nurse training in the
United States or had been kept from studying English to be certified as a nurse in the United States. For undocumented immigrants the problem of access to vocational schools appears to be especially tragic, since the undocumented persons who are seeking this training almost invariably are attempting intergenerational mobility out of absolute poverty. These persons usually come from parents with very little or no schooling. Many women in the study who had trained as nurses in their home countries held low-paying, service jobs or were unemployed.

Among the undocumented immigrants that had attended a university in their home countries the areas of concentration included accounting, architecture, math, physics and premed. The goal of some of the immigrants with university experience was to enroll in English or GED classes in order to prepare themselves for university classes in this country. For these immigrants, therefore, the initial problem of entering an institution of higher education did not necessarily involve attempts to enter a university or college credit-course curriculum.

The study located a Mexican and six Central Americans who had attended one or more years of college in their home countries. Without a random sample, it is impossible to generalize with statistical confidence from this ratio of Mexican to Central American immigrants who attend a university in their home country. Yet, this 1:6 ratio may be indicative of differential conditions affecting the (undocumented) migration of Mexican and Central American university students to the United States. Specifically, given the social conflict in their home countries, Central American students may be more likely than their Mexican counterparts
(excluding border-area commuters) to migrate to the United States, and to seek higher education in this country (border areas notwithstanding). This is a relative hypothesis and not meant to imply that the absolute number of Central American immigrants who attended a university in their home country and wish to finish their studies in the United States is greater than the absolute number of their Mexican counterparts. Since the population of university students in Mexico is several times greater than the total population of university students in Central America (Levy, 1986), it is possible that the absolute number of undocumented Mexicans who want to finish their university studies in the United States is larger than the absolute number of their Central American counterparts.

In several Central American countries, social conflict and political violence affect the environment of higher education. The death-squad assassinations of administrators, faculty and students, the exile of faculty members, the military occupation of campuses, the closing-down of schools, the forced induction of students, the militancy of student groups--all destabilize higher education in the troubled countries of Central America (Black et al., 1984; Montgomery, 1982). Yet, even these dramatic events are not enough to discourage some Central American immigrant youth from thinking of attending a university back home. While a Salvadoran and a Guatemalan interviewee stated they could not return because of political problems, another Salvadoran and Guatemalan interviewee stated they would return to study in their home countries if it were not for family
and financial situations which kept them in the United States.

Though differentiated by different educational experiences, the diverse groups of interviewees came to face similar situations when trying to enter higher education. Even if they managed to be accepted into a college or university, the interviewees felt that an out-of-state tuition would be prohibitive. For most of the interviewees private schools were not a viable alternative either. Private universities and vocational training schools, which relied on federal student loans, required proof of legal residency. Many of the interviewees expressed a sense of injustice. The recent high-school graduates also expressed a sense of betrayal—the educational system had built their hopes up and then denied them higher education.

Many of the interviewees in the study are part of the emerging undocumented resident category. After being locked out of higher education, some, perhaps most, will take on work characteristics of common undocumented labor—yet their aspirations for higher education will set them apart.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Over one-third (35.0 percent) of the 80 interviewees reported some form of official involvement with an institution of higher education. Table 8 lists the types of involvement. Lacking a random sample we cannot generalize from table 8 to the population of undocumented Latinos in the Houston area. Table 8 does
suggest, however, that among undocumented persons in Houston actively interested in pursuing higher education a significant proportion have had official involvement with an institution of higher-education institution.

Table 9 suggests that the interviewee's distribution of involvement and no-involvement in higher education does not differ significantly by gender. The table suggests that the population of undocumented immigrants interested in higher education includes a significant proportion of women. This speaks to the emerging undocumented resident category; in its college-interested component there is a movement in the direction of gender equality.

Table 10 shows that among the interviewees higher-education involvement also did not differ significantly by Mexican or Central American origin. Among the two Latino categories a significant proportion of undocumented persons interested in higher education has had official involvement in higher education. The findings for the South American category undoubtedly will vary significantly in settings of greater South American immigration.

Involvement in Higher Education

In this section I will describe the different types of official involvement with higher education found among the interviewees in the study.

English, GED and wordprocessing classes. Six females and two males reported receiving English training in Houston-area colleges and universities. Six of these interviewees had attend an institution of higher education in their home
country, and the remaining two had completed secondary education in their home country. This finding suggests a relationship between higher-education training in the home country and seeking English training at an institution of higher education in this country. This is a logical expectation, since the immigrants usually are seeking English skills to continue higher-education in this country.

The interviewees reported a variety of ways of gaining entry into the English classes. In one case, an interviewee was rejected in one English program but gained entry in another school. Another interviewee used a "borrowed" identification card to enroll in two English courses. One interviewee reported being in an English program where "anyone can enroll." In two instances, interviewees found that they were not allowed to proceed into credit courses in the schools where they had finished English classes. (Needless to say, being excluded from English classes, as some interviewees were, is an irony when viewed against the background of present-day, language-assimilation concerns.)

Two Salvadoran males reported successfully completing GED training courses at a local higher-education program. Another Salvadoran male youth reported taking a wordprocessing course at a major university in Houston. The youth, who finished high school with awards and wanted to become an architect, worked in a catering company, hoping to find a way to enroll at a university.

*Enrolled in college/university credit courses.* Four Mexicans, three Salvadorans, and a Guatemalan in the sample reported being enrolled in, or
having attended, regular college or university courses. A second Guatemalan reported having completed a degree at a private technical institute. The nine interviewees demonstrated a variety of background experiences that eventually led to their enrollment.

The Salvadorans, a female and two males, demonstrated the varying value of having a work authorization permit. With the work permit, the 23 year-old female was accepted into a local university, but as an international student. When she could not afford the international-student tuition, she dropped out and later enrolled in GED classes at a local college. With a GED, she thought, she stood a chance of being accepted as a resident by university as a resident. One of the males, an 18 year-old, obtained a work authorization permit to change from non-resident status at one university to resident status at another university. He has inquired about legal status and hopes to eventually become a U.S. citizen; he has been in the United States since the 6th grade ("without leaving"). The second male, a 21 year-old, attended a Houston university in the 1990-1991 academic year but dropped out because he could no longer afford the out-of-state tuition. He hopes to return to the university some day as a legal Texas resident. His work authorization expires July 1992.

The two Guatemalans, both Mayan-origin males, have followed different paths through higher education. Tomas, 22 years old, enrolled at a private institute to study computer technology after being turned down at a public university. At the end of his training he found a job with a major computer
manufacturer in Houston. Juan, 19 years old, enrolled in a college after obtaining
a work authorization permit. He applied for political asylum after being rejected
by a major university in Houston. He hopes to transfer to the university when he
completes a year or two of courses at the college.

One interviewee's case demonstrates a complex maneuvering through
international systems and legal/undocumented status. Armando dropped out of
the 9th grade in Mexico to help his indigent parents. After attempting
unsuccessfully to enroll in a university in Guadalajara, he entered the United
States without a visa and in 1987 obtained a GED in Houston. After taking
intensive English training in a private institute, studying in a seminary program,
and sitting in classes at a local university without registering, he returned to
Mexico to obtain a student visa to enroll at a Houston college. Finding the
international-student tuition too high, he used a "counterfeit" resident alien
document to register as a resident student. He is about to finish a two-year
associate degree. To pay for school and living expenses, Armando works the night
shift at a convenience store where he studies between customers.

Three other Mexican students also demonstrate abnormal drive and
enthusiasm in their paths to reach higher education. Monica was eventually
admitted into a university after being involved in extensive volunteer work and
searching for admission at several Texas universities. Carmen won several talent
scholarships from community sources and also was eventually admitted in a
Houston university after several rejections. Her mother, who legalized through
IRCA, was not hesitant to confront the INS over her daughter's cause. The case of Enrique shows that for an undocumented student finishing at the top of the class does not lessen the barriers to higher education. Graduating as Valedictorian of his high-school class, after migrating from Mexico two years earlier, Enrique explored the possibility of enrolling in major Texas universities to study engineering but was not successful. With several scholarships, he finally entered a smaller Houston university.

**Upward Bound.** For two of the three females participating in Upward Bound the program offered an opportunity to become familiar with higher education while trying to enroll at a college or university. Olga, 19 years old and from El Salvador, applied to a university along with other students in her high school who were involved in Upward Bound. Having applied for legal status, she was accepted but as an international student. The high international-student tuition kept her out of the university. She was caught in a Catch-22 situation: she needed financial aid to pay the high tuition but to get the aid she needed to prove residency. Going back to El Salvador to get a student visa or to enter a university is almost impossible, since most of her family is in the United States. Moreover, having attended U.S. schools since she was 11 years old, she does not think she could survive in a Salvadoran university. While waiting for the results of her application for legal status (submitted two years ago) and seeing other Upward Bound students accepted in colleges and universities, she reflects on her
award-winning, high-school commitment: "I thought it [high school] would be my ticket to college."

Sonia, 18 years old and from Mexico, values the experience she has gained in Upward Bound. It is part of the academic training she expects will lift her from a poor, immigrant background and enable her to help her parents. While a few of her friends plan to find jobs after graduating from high school, she is following the advice of Upward Bound counselors and is determined to go to college. In fact, she almost made the transition from Upward Bound to college student along with several other friends. A week before she was to start summer classes at a Houston college, however, she was notified that she not be admitted after all because of her residential status. Through her Upward Bound connections, Sonia is taking TASP preparatory courses at the college.

Celia's story has turned out differently. After migrating from El Salvador with her parents six years ago, she has recently learned that she will receive legal status. She had worried that her status would not be changed before classes started at the college where she will enroll and is presently in an Upward Bound program.

Admission/scholarship offered but unable to attend. Of the five interviewees who were either accepted or offered a scholarship by a school of higher education, two were Salvadoran youth who were offered soccer scholarships by a Kansas college. After being notified of their athletic scholarships, the two
youth drove to Kansas to meet with the athletic director and the coaches. During the meeting the youth explained that they were not U.S. citizens but expected to be legal residents soon. The athletic officials responded that the scholarships could only be offered to U.S. citizens and that under the circumstances the scholarship offers had to be withdrawn. Both of the youth resent the trip and the whole incident. They wonder why they were offered the scholarships in the first place and why "this country has laws that stop education."

Two other youth in this subcategory were accepted by public institutions of higher education in the Houston area but were unable to attend because they were charged international-student tuition. A third youth was accepted by a private technical school but also could not attend because he need papers to obtain financial aid at the school.

These descriptions of higher education involvement suggest a diversity of higher education needs among undocumented Latinos in the Houston area. The findings also indicate that acceptance by an institute of higher education is sometimes an empty victory when the undocumented student is charged out-of-state tuition.

RESPONSES OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Contacts were made with Houston-area institutions of higher education during the study to understand how administrators respond to undocumented
persons seeking admission to their schools. The study found different responses, sometimes in the same institution. Perhaps the most salient finding, however, was that many administrators, especially upper-level administrators, were ignorant of the existence and problem of undocumented students. Several administrators asked "What's an undocumented student?" None of the administrators contacted in twelve different public and private colleges and universities acknowledged having a written policy on undocumented students. Only one administrator stated that undocumented students would be accepted at the administrator's school, but as out-of-state students.

**Keeping the undocumented out.** One set of responses detected in the queries of administrators was the concern to keep undocumented students out. Six administrators specifically stated that they would not accepted undocumented students or that no undocumented students were present in their campuses. Four other administrators stressed that applicants for admission had to present documents indicating their (legal) status. One administrator stated that applicants had to have legal status, but if the applicants lied it was possible that they could gain admission, since documents were not scrutinized at the administrator's school.

Interestingly, in two universities where upper- and mid-level administrators had indicated earlier that they would be receptive to undocumented students, lower-level staff contacted by the study responded they would exclude
undocumented students. The lower-level staff were ignorant of upper-level decisions. In one of the two cases, an admissions-office worker indicated that his response to applicants seeking admission varied by the characteristics of the applicants. The office worker simply directed applicants who "look immigrant" or spoke with a marked accent to the admissions office for international students. Hispanics and Asians were usually the applicants sent by the office worker to the international-student admissions office.

The obvious reason given or implied by administrator for keeping undocumented student out of their institutions is that these students simply do not meet the entrance requirements given in their school catalogues. Specifically, undocumented students are not legal residents (U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens) or do not have a student visa. Yet, the reason for excluding undocumented students may vary. In one college, for example, the source of program funding and administration determines whether or not an undocumented student is accepted into English and GED classes. At the college undocumented students are accepted into English and GED classes administratively linked to the Texas Education Agency, but are excluded from ESL, ABE and GED classes connected to other federal programs, such as JPTA. Therefore, as the college shifts through funding sources and programs, undocumented students may be admitted during one period of the year and excluded at another period.

**Helping the undocumented.** A second set of responses detected in the
contacts with higher-education administrators, consisted of a willingness to help undocumented students gain admission. As mentioned above, one administrator stated a willingness to accept undocumented students, but as out-of-state residents. The school’s high out-of-state tuition and relatively high academic entrance standards did not make the offer practical for many undocumented students, however. In a second case, an admissions counselor worked with undocumented students to explore ways through which they might be admitted at the counselor’s university, but as out-of-state residents. The counselor admitted undocumented students if the students had at least one parent who was legally resident in the United States. After admitting students under this condition, the counselor then worked to find financial assistance for the students to cope with the high out-of-state tuition.

According to one Hispanic administrator, Hispanic staff in higher education are more likely to help undocumented students because they are the ones more likely to be approached by undocumented immigrants seeking help to enter higher-education programs. Moreover, according to the administrator, in some instances, the undocumented-student issue created divisions between Hispanic and non-Hispanic administrators who were less understanding of the problems faced by undocumented students. In the Hispanic administrator’s view, college programs would become more accepting of undocumented students when it would become profitable to do so. The administrator cited the rush to offer classes to thousands of immigrants in Houston during the INS amnesty program.
CONCLUSION

Given the important social role of large bureaucracies in modern society, the response of institutions of higher education to undocumented students has a significance beyond education. As major social actors, colleges and universities play a critical function in the construction of society. Their sanctions, expressed through such things as degrees, titles, and recognition of groups (honor students, disabled, minorities, etc.), are a major source for validating social roles and social acceptability. Colleges and universities collectively help to legitimize and regulate societal standards. Their institutional approval, or disapproval, reverberates throughout society. For these reasons the acceptance or non-acceptance of undocumented residents by institutions of higher education affects more than the educational opportunity of individual undocumented residents--it affects the societal lot of the whole, emerging category of undocumented residents.

In many cases the acceptance of undocumented residents by institutions of higher education is warranted. It is clear that in U.S. society there exists a large population of people who, while not having legal status, have become social citizens of our society. Their social citizenship is as real as our legal citizenship. Our society has become their society too. Many of these social citizens have grown up in this country and graduated from our high schools, a significant number with honorable distinctions. Many of these residents remain barred from higher education. Since many of these undocumented residents will not (cannot) return to their countries of origin, their loss is society's loss too, as their talents and
skills stay undeveloped.

To be sure, undocumented residents have not remained spectators in their desire for higher education. As this paper has described, a significant number undertake attempts to enter higher education. In a number of cases during the research parents expressed anguish and helped organize meetings to deal with the problem faced by their children. Through their actions the parents vividly demonstrated that they viewed themselves as insiders, not outsiders, as residents whose (undocumented) children are entitled to higher education like other children.

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Table 1

Latino Population Growth in Houston

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<td>450,483</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Age by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28.9%)</td>
<td>(23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19+</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.1%)</td>
<td>(76.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Gender by Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Central American</th>
<th>South American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.6%)</td>
<td>(64.1%)</td>
<td>(40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(69.5%)</td>
<td>(35.9%)</td>
<td>(60.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Time in the United States by Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Central American</th>
<th>South American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.7%)</td>
<td>(43.6%)</td>
<td>(60.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.3%)</td>
<td>(56.4%)</td>
<td>(40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

**Living with Both Parents by Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living with both parents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(35.3%)</td>
<td>(47.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not living with both parents</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(64.7%)</td>
<td>(52.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of schooling</td>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>Mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or less</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.4%)</td>
<td>(65.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28.6)</td>
<td>(34.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Educational Background of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Still in high school</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent high-school graduate</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in home country</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in home country</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8
Involvement in Higher Education in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English, GED, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wordprocessing classes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in credit courses,</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Bound</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(% of total sample=35.0%)
Table 9
Higher Education Involvement by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(39.5%)</td>
<td>(31.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(60.5%)</td>
<td>(69.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10

Higher Education Involvement by Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement:</th>
<th>Mexican</th>
<th>Central American</th>
<th>South American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.6%)</td>
<td>(38.5%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(69.4%)</td>
<td>(61.5%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>