

ABSTRACT

UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN STUDENTS—STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEGAL STATUS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine undocumented Mexican students’ experiences at California State University, Fresno in relation to their legal status. Critical Race Theory is used to explore discrimination and racism in higher education. CRT also allows for a focus on students’ narratives as a way to learn from their perspective. The main research questions leading this study follow: What are undocumented Mexican students’ perceptions of their legal status? In what ways are undocumented Mexican students’ legal status linked to experiences of racism and discrimination in their journey through postsecondary education? How do undocumented students’ perceptions of their legal status impact their educational persistence? Semistructured interviews were conducted on six undocumented Mexican students attending CSUF. Findings reflect four major themes: citizenship rights, hidden legal status, support in the presence of adversity, and motivation. Findings suggest that students view their legal status in terms of not having rights. In addition, students’ experiences with discrimination and racism are not directly linked to their legal status as all students reported that they conceal their status from most people. In general, findings revealed that even though undocumented Mexican students are faced with various obstacles related to their legal status, they have been persistent with their education.

María Barragán
May 2009