The journey of Texas community college DACA students through guts, resilience, initiative, tenacity

by

Carolina Redmond

B.S., Michigan State University, 2006
M.S., Michigan State University, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Undocumented children immigrants in the United States experience significant hurdles pursuing higher education due to their illegal status, resulting in lower rates of college attendance for children arriving before the age of 14 than U.S. born children. The 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program aims, in part, to remove these barriers. In Texas, DACA recipients still face significant financial and other challenges, and some research has examined the role of guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) in success for these students. However, it is not known which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students display or whether these characteristics influence access to community colleges or motivations to persist and complete college. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the GRIT characteristics displayed in DACA students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Eleven DACA recipients meeting inclusion criteria completed the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire and participated in interviews. Results revealed that all participants displayed all 4 elements of GRIT. Interviews yielded several themes: Participants displayed guts by declaring their immigration statuses, demonstrated resiliency by overcoming obstacles to college completion, used initiative to take advantage of opportunities, and remained tenacious in persevering despite financial and other challenges. Initiative was identified as the most influential characteristic created by participants' desire to achieve goals and motivation from friends and family. More research is needed to further understand the potential benefits of GRIT for students' success in higher education. However, the results indicate that GRIT can help DACA students be successful in higher education and may inform developing or improving programs to assist these students as they transition to community college.

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Approved by:

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George R. Boggs, Ph.D.

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Undocumented children immigrants in the United States experience significant hurdles pursuing higher education due to their illegal status, resulting in lower rates of college attendance for children arriving before the age of 14 than U.S. born children. The 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program aims, in part, to remove these barriers. In Texas, DACA recipients still face significant financial and other challenges, and some research has examined the role of guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) in success for these students. However, it is not known which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students display or whether these characteristics influence access to community colleges or motivations to persist and complete college. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the GRIT characteristics displayed in DACA students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Eleven DACA recipients meeting inclusion criteria completed the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire and participated in interviews. Results revealed that all participants displayed all 4 elements of GRIT. Interviews yielded several themes: Participants displayed guts by declaring their immigration statuses, demonstrated resiliency by overcoming obstacles to college completion, used initiative to take advantage of opportunities, and remained tenacious in persevering despite financial and other challenges. Initiative was identified as the most influential characteristic created by participants' desire to achieve goals and motivation from friends and family. More research is needed to understand further the potential benefits of GRIT for students' success in higher education. However, the results indicate that GRIT can help DACA students be successful in higher education and may inform developing or improving programs to assist these students as they transition to community college.

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This doctorate journey was not an easy task being a working mom, wife, and student. There were moments where I wanted to give up and times where I did give up because I felt like I didn't have the years of knowledge of community college experience, and balancing work and life was not as easy as it seemed. I am grateful for the support system of my family, friends, mentors, and various community college and university leaders for truly believing in me.

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Dedication

To the one true living God who has seen me through an imperfect path. This journey has been amazing yet humbling to know this goal has been your purpose for me since the beginning. You brought me to be a first-generation college graduate, immediately leading to my master's degree, and shortly after, bringing my path to the seasons that matured this growing desire. Your tests, even when I didn't know they were, fed that hunger to Rise Above and Reach Back. In James 1:2-4 (New International Version), it says the following: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." There were many times where I doubted my future due to such trials, but through faith, prayer, and your power, I persevered.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

"We have to be willing to fail, to be wrong, to start over again with lessons learned" (Duckworth, as cited in TED Talks, 2017).

There is a rise of undocumented children immigrants in the United States entering the country and acclimating to the American educational system as students (Yasuike, 2019a). Undocumented children immigrants under the age of 18 have become eligible to graduate from a state high school and/or receive their state General Education Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma. Roughly 65,000 undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States five years or longer have graduated from high school each year (Bjorklund, 2018; Yasuike, 2019b). These students dream of pursuing higher education, but they face significant hurdles due to their illegal statuses (Bjorklund, 2018; Yasuike, 2019b). According to the Educators for Fair Consideration (2013), about 61% of undocumented students who arrive in the United States before the age of 14 go onto college compared to the 76% legal permanent residents and 71% of U.S. born residents. These young children and young adults under the age of 18 reside in the United States as undocumented individuals, often because of a difficult decision a parent or guardian made years earlier to provide a better life.

Problem Statement

Undocumented children immigrants arrive in the United States with authorized visas provided by their foreign countries but do not return home in the specified allotted period, thus referred to as undocumented (Bjorklund, 2018). Other foreign-born immigrants traveled into the United States by crossing country border lines without the proper permission or legal documentation (Chavez Reyes, 2018). For these young undocumented immigrants, the United States is considered their home. Some share the same values and interests as U.S. born citizens and permanent residents (Enriquez et al., 2019). These individuals have lived in the United

States most of their lives, embracing the P-12 American education system at early ages (Dornhecker, 2016). As young undocumented children become adults in the United States, they dream of pursuing postsecondary educations to obtain a degree and develop a successful career while improving their livelihoods.

Although the Supreme Court Case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) allowed undocumented children to pursue a free primary and secondary education, the court did not address entrances and admissions to postsecondary educations (Enriquez et al., 2019; Yasuike, 2019a). Though the court decision stated that undocumented students deserved access to education and social mobility, the court did not address the lack of opportunities for students to go beyond their high school diplomas (Enriquez et al., 2019). According to the American Immigration Council (2010), undocumented students desire to attend college but get discouraged because of high tuition costs. Although undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid, some states assist with state-aid or in-state tuition to relieve some students' financial burdens (Chavez Reyes, 2018; A. Flores, 2016). In higher education, community colleges play a significant role in assisting minorities and low-income students to access a college education (Gámez et al., 2017; Yasuike, 2019a). For undocumented students, community colleges offer the first pathway towards education because of affordable tuition costs compared to that of 4-year universities (Andrade, 2019; Baker, 2016; Snider, 2019).

On June 15, 2012, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2017), under direction of Secretary Janet Napolitano and President Barack Obama, established a new federal policy: the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The leaders created a recognized group of undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children eligible to access and pursue postsecondary education (DHS, 2017). Any DACA-eligible

immigrant who met the established policy requirements was automatically granted protection from deportation (Muñoz et al., 2018). Those eligible for DACA were immigrants who arrived in the country at an early age with little or no knowledge that their parents or guardians were breaking the law.

The DACA policy inception in 2012 positively changed the lives of young adult immigrants by providing educational and workforce opportunities, obtaining driver's licenses, and opening bank accounts (Batalova et al., 2014; Enriquez et al., 2019; Gámez et al., 2017). On September 5, 2017, President Donald Trump issued an executive order to rescind the DACA program established by the Obama administration, negatively influencing over 800,000 DACA recipients (Giovagnoli, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2018). Marshall (2016) claimed that the Trump decision would negatively impact the U.S. gross domestic product by $433.4 billion over a 10-year period and decrease the Texas economy by an annual amount of $6.1 billion if it removed the DACA workforce. A year later, on June 18, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the DACA termination, vacating the memo rescinding the program (National Immigration Law Center, 2020). Currently, DACA-eligible students in Texas receive temporary work permits, in-state tuition, and state financial aid, depending on their states' policies and regulations on college funding (Bjorklund, 2018; Gámez et al., 2017). Despite these incentives, DACA students face unique financial obstacles while pursuing a college degree (Bjorklund, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; Katsiaficas et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2016; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Recently, researchers have showed interest in guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) as characteristics of DACA students that contribute to their academic successes (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2016). However, few studies were found in the literature regarding GRIT and students' academic successes that focused on DACA students and

showed mixed results. For example, O'Neal et al. (2016) found a relationship between non-citizen students' abilities to navigate barriers to academic success and GRIT, yet Credé et al. (2017) found that GRIT was an insignificant predictor of academic performance among U.S. citizen college students. Therefore, the specific problem was that it was not known which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students displayed or whether these characteristics influenced their access to community colleges or motivations to persist and complete college.

Recognizing what kind of GRIT that DACA students display when facing obstacles of failure, rejection, fear, and frustration may provide insights on what role GRIT plays in moving them forward toward achieving college success. According to Duckworth (2016, 2017, 2018), individuals who face physical, emotional, or economic challenges early in life are often more driven to succeed later in life as adults (Kaplan Thaler & Koval, 2015, p. 140). This researcher identified how DACA-eligible students attending a 2-year community college possessed GRIT to build a "never give up" attitude when overcoming life's setbacks while in college. Undocumented students often display the courage to take risks, have resilience when faced with adversity, take the initiative, and remain goal-focused while developing a "never give up" GRIT attitude (O'Neal et al., 2016, p. 20). By overcoming failures and challenges, they mature with a sense of purpose, hope, and inspiration to move toward their desired goals.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. This study examined whether DACA students used GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers related to higher education. The

researcher used the 8-Item GRIT Scale questionnaire designed by Angela Duckworth (Duckworth, 2018). The results of this study contribute to literature, supporting awareness of community college DACA students pursing a college education regarding access, success, and completion of that education.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is that it yielded information about the motivation and perseverance of a group that has not been studied to any significant extent, in this case DACA-eligible student experiences as they attend a 2-year community college in Texas. This phenomenological study showed the level of GRIT that these DACA college students evidenced as they overcame challenges as they pursued higher education. The researcher documented the students' higher education journeys as they recalled accessing college, defined student success, and stated their goals to completion through the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire and virtual interviews.

The study is important for bringing awareness to DACA college students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas and the challenges they faced to pursue a postsecondary education. This study is also important because for providing an understanding of DACA students' desires to overcome hardships and obtain success. The inception of the DACA federal policy improved undocumented students' lives, converting to a lawful DACA status by breaking down barriers and increasing eligibilities for recipients to obtain lawful work-permits, driver's licenses, and access to higher educations. According to Capps et al. (2015), Texas is the second largest immigrant hub in the United States and has seen a growing number of DACA applicants eligible to receive DACA benefits. With approximately 162,000 DACA applications submitted in the state, only 131,000 have gained approval. Within the Houston metropolitan area, roughly

60,000 young adults need assistance to apply, and 26,000 received approval, while the other 30,000 are eligible to apply but do not apply (Capps et al., 2015). Some students continue to live in fear because of their undocumented statuses.

According to the American Immigration Council (2010), undocumented students face barriers to their continued educations, face exclusion from the legal workforce, and face discouragement from applying to colleges. Between 5% and 10% of undocumented high-school graduates go to college—not because they do not want to go, but because they cannot afford it, or some schools will not allow them to enroll (American Immigration Council, 2010).

With the DACA policy opening the doors to higher education and employment opportunities, these students want to launch careers and provide for their families and communities. Undocumented students inspire a whole generation of students to do well in school; think positively about their communities and neighborhoods; and become engaged, informed members of society through their success and determination (Eusebio & Mendoza, n.d.). The role of the community college was important to this study for understanding the growing undocumented and DACA student population's access to postsecondary educations. Community college leaders should identify ways to serve and build resources to support college readiness and completion of DACA students. This researcher provided guidance to understand DACA students' challenges and motivations when attending a Texas community college and the influence of GRIT on achieving college success.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during

the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. This phenomenological qualitative researcher focused on DACA students' college experiences in a 2-year community college. The research strategies employed included personal interviews and an 8-Item Grit Scale assessment (Duckworth, 2018). The research participants completed the 8-Item Grit Scale survey before the virtual interview to determine their levels of GRIT. Each survey contained an assigned alphanumerical value to identify which student completed the survey. Undocumented students who gained DACA statuses were the student focus to narrow the scope of this study.

This researcher used a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences better of undocumented students classified as DACA-eligible. The researcher introduced the purpose of this study via their college emails to recruit student participants. The sample population included 2,253 students who completed their spring, summer, and fall 2017 to 2018 semesters at a 2-year community college. The researcher knew that each student participant would be at various stages of their educational journeys based on the numbers of credit hours attempted, completed, and semesters enrolled. Interested research participants were invited to attend a 1-hour virtual interview, occurring online through Zoom video conferencing during specific dates and times. The interviews occurred in a quiet setting to create an environment of security and trust. Each research participant had to complete a consent form to proceed with the study. All research participants were made aware of potential risks regarding the study, and the researcher affirmed that their participation in this study would remain confidential.

The researcher collected data from each virtual interview with each participant. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. The researcher remained willing to listen to student stories regarding their educational journeys to learn about any struggles or discomforts due to their immigration statuses and pathways to college.

The data included information on students' experiences, knowledge about colleges, and feelings about their immigration statuses. The appropriate method for analyzing data in this study was to review the audiotapes and have those tapes professionally transcribed to identify common themes and word choices from each interview using a qualitative data software program. Once the coding was identified, categories were evaluated in more detail. The researcher selected the qualitative methodology because it was the appropriate method to focus on DACA students' experiences using open-ended interviews and themes to address commonalities and differences through their lived experiences. The research questions showed possible behaviors, actions, feelings, knowledge, and details from past experiences to current experiences of being undocumented to DACA; thus, it was appropriate to follow the qualitative phenomenological approach to tell the stories of DACA students at a 2-year community college.

Research Questions

The author asked the following research questions to determine if GRIT played a role in student success among DACA students attending a 2-year community college:

RQ1: What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students?

RQ2: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college?

RQ3: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete?

Delimitations

For this study, only DACA-eligible students were considered and not the entire undocumented student population attending a 2-year community college. The focus remained on referencing one community college in the state of Texas. The researcher used data from spring,

summer, and fall 2017 to 2018. Students were likely to enroll in these semesters because community colleges offered accessibility as open-admissions institutions.

Limitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) defined limitations as external conditions that restricted or constrained the study's scope, possibly affecting outcomes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This study had several limitations. First, students had to self-identify as DACA-eligible students. Second, interviews with DACA students remained voluntary. Using the phenomenological approach, students had to remain willing to share their stories about being undocumented and describe their personal experiences regarding their immigration statuses. In addition, some DACA students attending a 2-year community college might have been hesitant to disclose their immigration statuses due to the political element regarding immigration policies. The researcher had experience working at the community college where she planned to do the study. The researcher worked with undocumented and DACA-eligible students in completing their admissions application, Senate Bill 1528 Affidavit, and Texas Application for State Financial Aid.

The DACA-eligible participants were selected purposefully because they enrolled at the college and identified as at least 18-years of age or older. The study was limited to DACA-eligible students at only one institution and one state; thus, the findings might not be generalizable. Also, the researcher focused on one Texas community college institution located in the Houston metropolitan area. The findings could not be generalized for all DACA students attending a 2-year community college as they might not experience the same higher education environment. Additionally, the laws in Texas vary from those in other states, and campus institutional policies also vary, making it difficult to generalize DACA students' experiences.

Assumptions

There was an assumption that DACA participants would respond to the 8-Item GRIT Scale and virtual interview truthfully and honestly. Another assumption was that DACA participants could remember their first time enrolling in a community college. Also, an assumption of this study was that the Analytics and Institutional Reporting (AIR) department at the college would provide the most up-to-date and accurate information on students classified as potential DACA students, according to their Texas Residency Questionnaire profiles. Finally, an assumption was that students completed their Texas Residency Questionnaire correctly during their initial admissions application to the 2-year college.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for use within the study.

Academic perseverance. This perseverance refers to a student's ability to remain focused and engaged in work despite distractions, setbacks, or obstacles (Nagoka et al., 2013).

Community college. A community college is an open enrollment institution that offers 2-year transfer degrees, such as Associate of Arts and Associate of Science. The Associate of Applied Science is a 2-year workforce degree with stackable credentials toward a certificate, preparing students to enter the workforce after graduation.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). On June 15, 2012, President Barack Obama introduced an executive order, announcing a new federal policy: DACA. The DACA policy allows undocumented youth who meet the eligibility requirements to reside in the United States with protection from deportation (Casner-Lotto, 2012).

Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The DREAM Act, which would provide eligible undocumented youth and adults a pathway to citizenship

through 2 years of college or a full term of service in the military, was introduced to U.S. Congress in 2001. In December 2010, the DREAM Act passed in the House but did not have enough votes to overcome a filibuster in the Senate (Casner-Lotto, 2012).

GRIT (Duckworth). Duckworth (2016) referred to grit as one having passion and perseverance in something of interest.

GRIT (Researcher). For this study, the researcher used the Kaplan Thaler and Koval's (2015) acronym definition of GRIT, described as guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity. Kaplan Thaler and Koval (2015) defined grit as occurring from one's hard-fought struggles, willingness to take risks, strong sense of determination, relentless work toward a goal, ability to take challenges in stride, and passion and perseverance to accomplish difficult things. Guts refer to the confidence to take calculated risks and be daring (without being reckless). Guts is about putting oneself out there while declaring an intention to triumph, even if victory appears difficult. Resilience refers to the capacity to respond constructively and ideally while making good use of adversity and staying focused and motivated despite any failures, obstacles, and adversities faced. Kaplan Thaler and Koval defined initiative as reflecting a person being a self-starter and tenacity, the quality that allows us to remain focused and avoid distraction to get the job done.

In-state resident tuition. In-state resident tuition refers to the discount to attend public colleges and universities at an in-state resident price—particularly significant to undocumented students because they do not qualify for federal aid to finance their postsecondary educations (S. M. Flores, 2007).

***Plyler v. Doe* (1982).** The U.S. Supreme Court determined that undocumented children of unauthorized immigrants had the right to free public primary and secondary educations. The case did not address access to postsecondary educations but demonstrates that residents of a state—

regardless of immigration status—could access free public educations in that state (A. T. Johnson & Janosik, 2008).

Student success. Student success refers to the completion of remedial coursework, college credits, and 2-year degree or certificates. Students who are successful can transfer to a 4-year university to earn a bachelor's degree.

Undocumented students. Parents bring these individuals to the United States without statuses of legal permanent resident. These students then enroll in an educational institution (Munsch, 2011).

Organization of the Study

In Chapter 1, the researcher introduced terminology and history regarding undocumented and DACA student immigrants' experiences of entering the American education system. Chapter 1 included a summary of the federal inception of the DACA program and introduction to the research questions of this study focused on what motivates DACA students to access a post-secondary education, succeed, and complete.

Chapter 2 features a review of numerous studies about (a) access to education as an undocumented student; (b) characteristics of growing-up undocumented; (b) federal and state policies for immigrant students; (c) financial challenges; (d) family involvement and support; and (e) an overview of the GRIT framework regarding student access, success, and completion. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Leaders can use this study's findings to understand how DACA students might use GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers relate to higher

education. This study is also important due to limited research being available regarding DACA-eligible students attending a Texas community college and their levels of GRIT to complete their college educations.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

"The literature review can be used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity toward concepts and relationships that prior literature has repeatedly identified and that therefore appear to be meaningful and significant" (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 89).

Historically, community colleges have acted as gateways of opportunity for minority, first-generation, and low-income students. Community colleges offer open admissions, which is well suited for immigrants' educational needs when wanting to obtain affordable postsecondary educations, learn English-language skills, and prepare for labor markets (Teranishi et al., 2015). This literature review includes several academic sources showing undocumented and DACA students experiences' of opportunities and challenges in pursuing a higher education. The literature review is divided into five sections: (a) access to education as an undocumented student, (b) legal barriers (c) financial barriers, (d) support systems, and (e) an overview of GRIT.

Problem Statement

The DACA policy inception in 2012 has positively changed the lives of young adult immigrants by providing educational and workforce opportunities, obtaining driver's licenses, and opening bank accounts (Batalova et al., 2014; Enriquez et al., 2019; Gámez et al., 2017). Currently, DACA-eligible students in Texas receive temporary work permits, in-state tuitions, and state financial aid (Bjorklund, 2018; Gámez et al., 2017). Despite these incentives, DACA students continue to face unique financial obstacles while pursuing college degrees (Bjorklund, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; Katsiaficas et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2016; Teranishi et al., 2015).

Researchers have studied GRIT as characteristics of DACA students that contribute to their academic success (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2016). A few researchers studied GRIT and students' academic success but did not focus on DACA students,

indicating mixed results. For example, O'Neal et al. (2016) found a relationship between non-citizen students' abilities to navigate barriers to academic success and GRIT, yet Credé et al. (2017) found that GRIT was an insignificant predictor of academic performances among U.S. citizen college students. Therefore, the specific problem was that it was not known which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students displayed or whether these characteristics influenced their access to community colleges or motivations to persist and complete college.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students in a 2-year community college in Texas who attended during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Leaders may use the study's findings to understand how DACA students might use GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers to higher education. The researcher used the 8-Item Grit Scale questionnaire by Duckworth (2018). The results of this study contribute to the literature, supporting awareness of community college DACA students pursing college educations and showing their stories of access, success, and completion.

Undocumented Immigrants

Undocumented immigrants have migrated to the United States for various reasons throughout the years. Gonzales (2015) documented that Mexicans were the largest immigrant group in the United States and made up the largest population among undocumented immigrants. The Pew Hispanic Center (2018) reported an estimated 10.7 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States in 2016 compared to the 12.2 million in 2007. California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas continue as the leading states where undocumented

immigrants reside (Passel & Cohn, 2018). According to another report from the Pew Hispanic Center (2009), 1.5 million immigrant children under the age of 18 resided in the United States in 2008.

Growing-Up Undocumented

A high percentage of undocumented and DACA-eligible immigrants were brought to the United States at early ages by their parents or guardians, with little or no knowledge that any laws were broken. Some students consider the United States their home, while completing some levels of the P-12 American education system. Stacciarini et al. (2015) noted that growing up as an undocumented immigrant and transitioning to "illegal" adulthood could expose the person to adverse social determinants. These issues could detrimentally affect mental health by acting as chronic stressors. Some undocumented students growing up in the United States first learned about their illegal statuses in high school when they began to apply to colleges.

B. A. Roberts (2014) reported that students became aware of their undocumented statuses when applying for jobs, filling out college admission forms, applying for financial aid, and scheduling driver's tests. Additionally, Gonzales (2011) expressed that those participants who became aware of their undocumented statuses shared feelings of confusion, anger, frustration, despair, and shock. Respondents struggled to make sense of what had happened to them, feeling as though they had discovered lies about their lives (Gonzalez, 2011). Conversely, undocumented young adults cannot legally work, vote, receive financial aid, or drive in most states, while deportation remains a constant threat (Gonzales, 2011). Facing harsh realities that their undocumented immigration statuses could hinder various opportunities, they remain silent and fearful about disclosing their statuses. Undocumented immigrants continue to live in the

shadows because of a fear to disclose their immigration statuses or because their parents want to keep their statuses a secret.

Fear

Common characteristics among undocumented students include fear and anxiety. In a qualitative narrative study, Aguayo-Bryant (2016) found that the students shared fears and anxieties about finances, graduation, the future of DACA, and employment. Aguayo-Bryant found that 60% of the student participants expressed fear of not meeting colleges' financial demands. Approximately 50% of the participants had anxiety caused by uncertainty about whether they would secure employment after graduation (Aguayo-Bryant, 2016).

Aguayo-Bryant (2016) found that finances were a contributing factor among undocumented participants; however, others have identified the fear of deportation as a barrier to higher education (Halloran, 2015; Laurin, 2016; Mitchell, 2013; Nienhusser, 2014; Parisot, 2015). In a qualitative study exploring the experiences of DACA recipients by Parisot (2015), participants reported fear of law enforcement stopping them in their neighborhoods or while driving. College students in Texas reported this kind of immigration status-based fear when noting a fear caused by a lack of opportunities, such as in education or in potential careers, resulting from others knowing their statuses (Halloran, 2015).

Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) concluded that more than three-quarters (76%) of undocumented students reported worrying about being detained or deported themselves. Most (85%) reported worrying about the deportation or detainment of family members or friends (443). In addition, Eusebio and Mendoza (n.d.) noted that students lived in the shadows because of the fear of deportation and involuntary family separation.

Trust

Aguayo-Bryant (2016) also highlighted that students expressed their concerns, fears, and anxieties to family members, friends, faculty, and counselors. Perez et al. (2010) mentioned undocumented students experiencing overwhelming feelings of rejection, leading to insecurity. Thus, such students are likely to develop high levels of fear and anxiety over whom to trust. Undocumented immigrants may struggle to trust individuals and disclose immigration statuses without the thought of being judged or mistreated unfairly. Thus, feelings of isolation and secrecy could lead to depression or poor school performances.

Rodriguez (2016) conducted a qualitative study using an online survey to explore undocumented college students' life experiences in California relating to their identities, fears, stressors, motivations, and mental health statuses. The findings showed that undocumented students reported having the following five common stressors: family separation, the fear of not being able to provide for their family, their families' future in the United States, financial concerns, and their mental and physical health statuses. The researcher also found a participant whose biggest fear was not completing her dreams and how her immigration status made her feel powerless at the mercy of government and laws (Rodriguez, 2016). The students identified as Americans and called the United States their homes, even though they derived from another country. Despite obstacles faced by these students, they remained motivated academically to honor their parents' sacrifices of coming to the United States. However, such students continued to fear deportation and the uncertainty of their futures because of the federal and state policies (Rodriguez, 2016).

Federal Policy for Immigrant Students

Baker (2016) cited that 12.1 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States in 2014. Baker defined the *unauthorized immigrant population* as the remainder (or residual) after the legally resident foreign-born population—naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, asylees, refugees, and nonimmigrants—was subtracted from the total foreign-born population. Some unauthorized immigrants entered lawfully with valid visas and jeopardized their statuses by failing to report back to their countries. Other unauthorized immigrants entered the country without proper permission, documentation, and proof of entry into the United States. Baker reported 9.1 million unauthorized immigrants entered from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America, while the remainder were from South America and Asia. In 2014, Mexico reported to source 6.6 million of the unauthorized immigrants into the United States (Baker, 2016). In 2017, Mexico was the leading country to have 548,000 active DACA recipients.

From 2007 to 2014, DHS (2017) reported an increase in unauthorized residents living in the United States (Alulema, 2019). Approximately, 10 states led in the unauthorized resident population, but the top five included California (2.9 million), Texas (1.9 million), Florida (760,000), New York (640,000), and Illinois (550,000; Baker, 2016). The remaining five states still had a high population but did not compare to these five. Those states included New Jersey (480,000), Georgia (430,000), North Carolina (400,000), Arizona (370,000), and Washington (290,000; Baker, 2017). In 2014, approximately 1,060,000 unauthorized immigrants reported being young children and adults under 18-years-old (Baker, 2016, p. 6). Baker (2016) referred to age and gender, noting that in 2014, males accounted for 57% of the unauthorized population among the 18 to 34 age group, whereas 54% of the females reported ages of 45 or older.

The traditional college-age population is between the ages of 18- to-24-years-old. In the transition from childhood to adulthood as undocumented immigrants, they may encounter the urgency to grow up faster than their peers to support their families, siblings, and selves. Accessing a postsecondary education can be daunting because of federal policies affecting anyone lacking a legal immigration status. Snyder (2013) revealed that an undocumented participant described being treated differently because of the lack of "a single piece of paper" (p. 20). With the steady rise of U.S. children and young adults acclimating to the American P-12 educational system, the federal policy allows undocumented immigrants to pursue a primary and secondary education per the *Plyler v. Doe* 1982 case, but it lacks guidance on accessing postsecondary education. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) explained that the presence (and absence) of postsecondary federal, state, and institutional policies continued to impact college access and degree attainment of undocumented immigrants (p. 457). Diaz-Strong et al. (2010) also agreed that access for undocumented students was controlled by federal and state policies.

Access to Education for Immigrant Students Landmark Case: *Plyler v. Doe*

The American Immigration Council (2010) stated that in the case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could not deny the right to a free public education to students regardless of their immigration statuses. This ruling created legal protections for undocumented immigrant students, superseding a 1975 law passed by the Texas state legislature to allow independent school district officials to deny admissions to undocumented immigrant students if they were not U.S. law-abiding citizens. However, *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) did not address access to postsecondary educations. Because immigrants must disclose their illegal immigration statuses in college admissions applications, they take risks to access and pursue college educations. Wyttenbach (2015) found that regardless of challenges faced, undocumented

students remained optimistic about completing degrees to become professional lawyers, engineers, or businesspeople (p. 60). Undocumented students who gain postsecondary educations enrich their lives and create gain opportunities for the future. Wyttenbach's (2015) student testimonials showed a desire to contribute to their communities and impact others' lives. However, three decades later, legislature regarding undocumented immigrants pursuing a postsecondary education remains limited and restricted because of state variations in laws.

Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

One of the most iconic bills signed into law by President Bill Clinton was the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). This law focused on immigration enforcement to reduce undocumented immigrants entering the United States and provide for deportation back to their countries of origin (Klenowski, 2015). Before the IIRIRA bill being passed, it was initially separated into two areas: illegal-immigration and legal immigration. Instead, more of the focus was on illegal immigration to control undocumented immigrants entering the United States. According to Klenowski (2015), the IIRIRA bill passed to focus on the following six key areas:

- Title I: Improvements to border control, facilitation of legal entry, and interior enforcement;
- Title II: Enhanced enforcement and penalties against alien smuggling; document fraud;
- Title II: Inspection, apprehension, detention, adjudication, and removal of inadmissible and deportable aliens;
- Title IV: Enforcement of restrictions against employment;
- Title V: Restrictions on benefits of aliens; and

- Title VI: Miscellaneous provisions. (p. 20)

The IIRIRA was used to penalize immigrants who violated the U.S. law and or committed crimes while in the United States. The bill served as a reminder that deportation was becoming easier and that it was difficult for immigrants to apply for legal statuses. For example, once IIRIRA passed into law, those unauthorized immigrants who qualified for a green card through a relative or married U.S. citizen were ineligible to apply for legal statuses (Lind, 2016). IIRIRA's role was to hold more immigrants in detention before deporting them, making it difficult for immigrants to request legal aid. Lind (2016) referenced the implementation of rules regarding banishment based on the IIRIRA, reenforcing that immigrants would be banished for at least 3 years if they lived in the United States without papers for 6 months. The banishment lasted 10 years for those immigrants who had lived in the United States without papers for a year or more (Lind, 2016). Through the years, the immigration reform continues as a debatable topic through implemented changes during various presidencies. Under the IIRIRA Act of 1996, reference to higher education and immigration status was regulated by Title V – Restrictions of Benefits for Aliens.

According to the U.S. Citizenship for Immigration Services (2018), the rules to Section 505: Limitation on Eligibility for Preferential Treatment of Aliens Not Lawfully Present Basis of Residence for Higher Education Benefits and Section 507: Verification of Immigration Status for Purposes of Social Security and Higher Educational Assistance included the following:

> **Sec. 505** - (a) IN GENERAL.-Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State (or a political subdivision) for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit (in no less an

amount, duration, and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such a resident; (b) EFFECTIVE DATE. -This section shall apply to benefits provided on or after July 1, 1998;

Sec. 507 - (a) SOCIAL SECURITY ACT STATE INCOME AND ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION SYSTEMS. - Section 1137(d)(4)(B)(i) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320b- 7(d)(4)(B)(i) is amended to read as follows:

"(i) the State shall transmit to the Immigration and Naturalization Service either photostatic or other similar copies of such documents, or information from such documents, as specified by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, for official verification,";

(b) ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANCE UNDER HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF 1965.-Section 484(g)(4)(B)(i) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1091(g)(4)(B)(i) is amended to read as follows: "(i) the institution shall transmit to the Immigration and Naturalization Service either photostatic or other similar copies of such documents, or information from such documents, as specified by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, for official verification." (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1996, para. 4)

As a result, the IIRIRA law states that any postsecondary in-state residency benefit will not be granted to an unauthorized immigrant unless a citizen or national is also eligible for the benefit. Although unauthorized immigrants must provide official documentation to verify their immigration statuses, many remain ineligible for federally funded higher education grants and loans. Approximately, 50,000 to 65,000 unauthorized immigrant students annually have graduated from U.S. high schools and face federal and state policies relating to higher education

(National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003). According to Banks (2017), public colleges and universities are a public benefit; state leaders can decide if they wish to grant in-state tuition rates to unauthorized immigrants, according to the state requirements. Meanwhile, legislators have addressed several bills to repeal Section 505 to include undocumented immigrant minors to gain legal status toward a pathway to citizenship (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003). The DREAM Act policy was initially introduced to repeal restrictions of state residency requirements for higher education (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003).

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act Policy

On August 1, 2001, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, a republican from Utah, introduced Senate Bill 1291 to U.S. Congress to change the residency requirements from the IIRIRA. Senate Bill 1291, known as the DREAM Act, permits states to determine state residency for higher education purposes and to authorize the cancellation of removal and adjustment of status of certain aliens college-bound students who are long-term United States residents (S. 1291, 107d Congress, 2001). According to Hatch (2001), the DREAM Act would allow children brought into the United States, through no violation of their own, the opportunity to fulfill their dreams and secure college degrees and legal statuses (S. 1291, 107d Congress, 2001). The DREAM Act focused on undocumented children who met the eligibility residency requirement of living in the United States for 5 years or more with no criminal history. Although the DREAM Act proposes a partial solution for children, brought illegally by their parents to the United States, it still generated concern from various legislators and organized groups (Schmid, 2013). Senate Bill 1291 failed to pass into a law, leading to several other unsuccessful versions reintroduced throughout the years to find a solution for undocumented immigrant children.

In 2009, Senator Richard Durbin and Representative Howard Berman introduced a list of eligibility requirements, outlining the qualifications of eligible recipients of the DREAM Act:

- Must have entered the United States before the age of 16;
- Must be under age 30 at the time of the bill's enactment;
- Must have been present in the United States for at least five (5) consecutive years prior to enactment of the bill;
- Must have graduated from a United States high school, or have obtained a GED, or have been accepted into an institution of higher education;
- Must be between the ages of 12 and 35 at the time of application; [and]
- Must have good moral character. (Abaddon 2010, p. 10)

Senator Lindsey Graham Republican of South Carolina reintroduced another version of the DREAM Act on July 20, 2017, as Senate Bill 1615 or DREAM Act of 2017. Meanwhile, the bill has not made it into law, even though several immigrant children are counting on it to pass. After multiple attempts with the DREAM Act, a new bill known as the DACA was introduced into legislation, modeling some similar requirements as the DREAM Act and receiving media attention from President Barack Obama.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Policy

Approximately, 11 million of the U.S. foreign-born population are unauthorized immigrants, while most of the nation's immigrants are in the U.S. legally (Gustavo & Radford, 2017). When the DREAM Act and DACA were introduced, there was a growing need to educate and serve a large undocumented population in the United States. In 2012, the Migration Policy Institute (as cited in Gardezi 2012, p. 31) estimated 1.76 million undocumented students would benefit from the DACA policy and be exempted from deportation. The increased number of

undocumented immigrants received attention by President Barack Obama in his 2011 State of the Union Address (as cited in Travers, 2011):

> Today, there are hundreds of thousands of students excelling in our schools who are not American citizens. Some are the children of unauthorized workers who had nothing to do with the actions of their parents. They grew up as Americans and pledged allegiance to our flag and yet live everyday with the threat of deportation. Others come here from abroad to study in our colleges and universities. But as soon as they obtain advanced degrees, we send them back home to compete against us. It makes no sense. (para. 2)

The Obama administration created the DACA program to implement an executive order in August 2012, providing temporary relief from deportation and work permits for qualified unauthorized immigrants who entered in the United States as children (Batalova et al., 2014). According to Schmid (2013), undocumented students are at the mercy of the state where they graduated from high school. Through the enacted federal policy, eligible immigrant students can access a college education in their desired careers and obtain driver's licenses and work permits. The DACA policy creates an opportunity for immigrant students to feel like they belong.

As part of the DACA application process, first-time applicants pay a $465 application fee and must demonstrate they meet all the requirements established by the U.S. Citizenship Immigration Services (USCIS, 2014). The initial qualifications to apply for DACA individuals must meet the following guidelines:

- Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;
- Came to the United States before reaching one's sixteenth birthday;
- Have continuously resided in the United States since June 25, 2007, up to the present time;

- Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making one's request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
- Had no lawful status on June 15, 2012;
- Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
- Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety. (USCIS, 2014, para. 2)

Immigrants who satisfy the requirements are eligible for a 2-year renewable program benefit of temporary relief from deportation. In addition, DACA-approved recipients benefit from the program because of eligibility to obtain social security cards, valid driver's licenses, credit cards, and employment (United We Dream, n.d). Undocumented students who do not meet the above qualifications continue to live in the shadows. For many undocumented students, DACA provides short-term relief from deportation, even though they are not given a clear passage toward legal citizenship statuses. Due to the lack of federal guidance on immigration law, states have made decisions as they see fit; thus, each state interprets immigration law in so many ways that nothing remains consistent (Schmid, 2013).

Characteristics of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Approved Individuals

In 2012, when DACA was first implemented, the USCIS (2014) tracked the genders, races, and ages of first-time applicants during a 13.5-month period from August 2012 to September 2013. The USCIS identified commonalities and differences among applicants.

According to the USCIS, 514,000 individuals were DACA-approved, with 269,300 identifying as females and 245,300 identifying as males. The largest age group to apply was individuals 19 and under, with a total of 260,800 DACA approved recipients. The second leading age group was those between the ages of 20 to 24 (USCIS, 2014).

According to the USCIS (2014), the top leading countries of origin for DACA applicants included Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Republic of Korea. Mexico remains the leading country of origin for the 443,500 DACA applicants 20 years old or older requesting approval. During its inception, approximately five states led with high volumes of interested DACA applicants, which included California (165,400), Texas (95,300), Illinois, (32,100), New York (30,700) and Florida (24,500). USCIS (2014) reported that the states with the most DACA applications were those with leading metropolitan cities where DACA requests were accepted. For example, California metropolitan cities included Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Anaheim; in Texas, the leading metropolitan cities included Dallas, Fort Worth, Arlington, Houston, The Woodlands, and Sugarland (USCIS, 2014).

For some DACA students, community colleges are the only avenue to study in their desired career fields because of affordable tuitions. DACA has changed the lives of young adults by providing educational opportunities, access to jobs, driver's licenses, and bank accounts (Batalova et al., 2014). With increased numbers of undocumented students graduating from U.S. high schools, some states share the same higher education policy toward admissions and financial aid. For example, Texas, California, New Mexico, and Washington have passed laws to allow undocumented students access to public state education grants (Pérez, 2014). South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia are the first states to ban undocumented students from being admitted into public colleges or universities.

DACA students have dreams, hopes, and aspirations to contribute to society. Without DACA, these students would not be eligible to work, obtain a state identification or driver's license, and receive state-aid. In some states, DACA students are classified as international students who must pay out-of-state or international tuitions and fees, creating a financial burden for these students to afford college.

Trump Administration and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

On September 5, 2017, President Donald Trump issued an executive order to rescind the DACA program established by the Obama administration, impacting over 800,000 DACA recipients (Giovagnoli, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2018). Several federal lawsuits were filed in response to this executive order, stalling the rescinding of the DACA program (Mira, 2019). After January 13, 2018, and during the preliminary injunction, current DACA recipients could apply for renewal of their benefits (Muñoz et al., 2018). On June 28, 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court stated that they would hear three legal arguments against the executive order on November 12, 2019, including *Regents of the University of California* v. *DHS*, *Batalla Vidal v. Nielsen*, and *NAACP* v. *Trump* (Alulema, 2019). However, the U.S. Supreme Court did not decide until July 2020 to retain the DACA programs but with limitations. The program was no longer available to new applicants, including individuals who had submitted their applications before July 2020 but had not yet been fully processed (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2020). However, individuals who had received DACA in the past and were eligible for renewal could still receive DACA (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2020). Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling placed new restrictions on DACA recipients' abilities to travel internationally and reduced the timeframe of benefits from 2 to 1 years (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2020).

State Policies

Nearly all states have passed immigration-related bills because of a lack of guidance from the federal government. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2017), immigration bills have increased in the first half of 2017 by 90% to 133 laws compared with 70 laws in 2016. Lawmakers in 47 states enacted 133 laws and 195 resolutions related to immigration, equating to 328 laws (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). As a result, lawmakers created uncoordinated and confusing state policies related to undocumented students (Wyttenbach, 2015).

In response to the increased number of undocumented students, many states have established policies and access, including in-state resident tuition—a discount to attend public colleges and universities as an in-state resident. Undocumented students cannot apply for federal aid to finance a postsecondary education (S. M. Flores, 2007). The Educators for Fair Consideration (2013) identified states that had implemented policies for undocumented students. Several states have not considered undocumented individuals' influence on their local economies, either because they chose not to incorporate it into their policies or there was not a high need for immigrants in their states.

Although each state law varies in distinguishing tuition rates, enrollment, and state-based aid, 18 states allow undocumented students to receive in-state tuition. According to the American Immigration Council (2010), these states include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Washington. In addition, there is state-based aid offered through grants in California, Hawaii, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Washington State, and Texas (American Immigration Council, 2010). Illinois was the first and

only state to create a private scholarship fund for undocumented youth (Northeastern Illinois University, 2015). Meanwhile, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, and North Carolina ban undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition, while Alabama and South Carolina ban undocumented students from attending community colleges (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010).

According to Snyder (2013), the first state to pass a law regarding in-state residency for unauthorized students was Texas, which passed in 2001 as House Bill 1403 (HB 1403). The Texas law requires undocumented student graduates from a Texas high school or those with a Texas GED in who have lived in Texas for 3 years leading up to graduation to provide colleges and universities with signed affidavits indicating an intent to apply for permanent statuses as soon as they as possible (Schmid, 2013). The various state laws require undocumented students to attend a school in the state for a certain number of years and graduate from high school within that state (American Immigration Council, 2010). In the absence of federal guidelines for higher education, states have created rules to assist undocumented students who cannot afford or attend college. Meanwhile, leaders of colleges and universities also have their own policies about undocumented students and access to postsecondary educations.

Texas DREAM Act House Bill 1403

House Bill (HB) 1403, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2001, provides Texans, regardless of legal immigration statuses, eligibility to be classified as state residents for being charged in-state tuition rates at public Texas colleges and universities (Bailey, 2013; Dougherty, 2010). Without this eligibility, leaders of institutions of higher learning would charge the higher out-of-state or international tuition rates (Dougherty, 2010). Texas was the first state in the nation to pass this type of legislation, and approximately 20 states followed with similar bills (Bailey, 2013).

The Seventy-seventh Texas Legislature passed HB 1403 with bipartisan support. Representative Rick Noriega (D–Houston) authored the measure, in collaboration with Domingo García (D¬–Dallas), Fred Hill (R–Richardson), Elvira Reyna (R–Mesquite), and Ismael Flores (D–Palmview). Leticia Van de Putte (D–San Antonio) sponsored the bill. An additional 19 co-authors signed the bill. Sixty-three House Republicans voted in favor of the bill. HB 1403 passed with 130 yeas, two nays, and two abstentions with an amendment from the Senate. Governor Rick Perry signed the bill into law on June 16, 2001, and the legislation became effective immediately for persons seeking college enrollment in the fall of 2001 (Sikes & Valenzuela, n.d.). Students had the meet the following criteria to obtain eligibility.

- They lived in Texas during the three years before graduating from high school or receiving a General Equivalency Diploma (GED);
- They lived in Texas the year before enrolling at a Texas public college or university; [and]
- They sign an affidavit declaring their intention to apply for Legal Permanent Resident status as soon as they are able. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2018, para. 2)

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2018), approximately 17,384 affidavit students qualified as Texas residents to receive in-state tuition during the 2015 fiscal year and reported attending public, community, technical, and state colleges.

Arizona Public Program Eligibility, Proposition 300

In 2006, Arizona passed a state electoral ballot for the Arizona Public Program Eligibility, Proposition 300 law, with a 72% passing rate (as cited in Goddard, 2007). The Proposition 300 law prohibits anyone who is not a lawful citizen to receive state funding, such as

financial aid and in-state tuition. In addition, Proposition 300 focuses on immigrant students and their illegal statuses to pursue adult education services, such as a postsecondary education (Goddard, 2007). The passing of the law affects undocumented students in Arizona looking to pursue higher educations. In addition, the following statement showed their ineligibility to receive financial assistance:

> A person who is not a citizen of the United States, who is without lawful immigration status and who is enrolled as a student at any university under the jurisdiction of the Arizona Board of Regents or at any community college under the jurisdiction of a community college district in this state is not entitled to tuition waivers, fee waivers, grants, scholarship assistance, financial aid, tuition assistance or any other type of financial assistance that is subsidized or paid in whole or in part with state monies. (Arizona Secretary of State, 2006, para. 2)

Before the election, arguments developed, with those interested in supporting Proposition 300 and those against it (Arizona Secretary of State, 2006). Arizonians for Proposition 300 believed that undocumented immigrants were not entitled to receive any state benefits based on taxpayer dollars. Taxpayers for Proposition 300 believe that undocumented immigrants do not qualify for state programs because they have taken opportunities from U.S. citizens. On the contrary, those against Proposition 300 believe that denying hardworking youth an opportunity for an education or a way to contribute to the overall economic development is damaging and not the best option (Arizona Secretary of State, 2006).

Due to the Proposition 300 (Arizona Secretary of State, 2006) election, any student interested in receiving financial state funding for college must provide proof of eligibility of U.S. passports, birth certificates, valid state driver's licenses, or naturalization documents showing

that they are lawful citizens of the United States (Laurin, 2013). Any individual who does not meet the requirement and cannot show proof of their citizenship statuses must pay out-of-state tuitions, a high cost for anyone desiring to attend college. Laurin (2013) conducted a qualitative study with high school graduates that showed state laws referencing residency requirements for tuition negatively affected students by denying them access to learning opportunities for educational or occupational advancements.

In a more recent study, Ruth (2018) found the before and aftereffects of Proposition 300 related to resources and access to a college education for first-generation undocumented students. Ruth noted that before Prop 300, undocumented students could receive in-state funding and private scholarships to fund their educations. Since its inception, opportunities for undocumented students began to diminish, as did the financial funding from in-state tuition, private, and state funded scholarships (Ruth, 2018). Before Prop 300, undocumented students were selective about with whom they disclosed their immigration statuses as related to school officials. Some school officials provided support or encouragement toward gaining a college education, but after Prop 300, many students saw a decline in school official support related to the law. Ruth (2019) found that Prop 300 affected first-generation undocumented students who had little or no knowledge of college processes. As access to an education continues to remain complicated under Prop 300, school officials, family, peers, and community members will need to support undocumented students.

California State Law AB 540

Governor Gray Davis signed the California AB 540 into law in 2001 to allow for in-state college tuitions to any California resident who met the following eligibility requirements for residency:

- must have attended high school in California for three or more years,
- must have graduated from a California high school or attained a GED,
- must register or currently be enrolled in one of the three state institutions of higher learning, [and]
- must file an affidavit with the college or university stating that one has filed an application to legalize their status or will do so as soon as they are eligible. (Got Papers? Got Dreams?, 2017, para. 2)

As part of the verification process, students must provide proof of high school transcripts indicating completion of three years or more or graduation from a state high school or GED before completing the AB 540 Affidavit and enrolling at college institutions (Got Papers? Got Dreams?, 2017).

California DREAM Act

Senator Gil Cedillo introduced the California DREAM Act of 2006 as Senate Bill 160 (SB 160). Senate Bill 160 would allow undocumented students to receive in-state residency tuition to any California State University or community college. However, students would have to provide proof that they meet the eligibility requirements of having attended a California high school 3 years or more leading up to their high school graduations or receiving their state GEDs while signing an affidavit at the institution (Gardezi, 2012).

A revision of the California Dream Act was introduced in 2011 as two separate bills: Assembly Bills 130 and 131. The goal of Assembly Bill 130 and 131 was to assist undocumented students to attend college with financial assistance. Limited access to financial assistance makes college unreachable for undocumented students. Table 1 shows the comparison Chart of DACA, California Dream Act, AB 540, and DREAM Act.

Table 1

Comparison Chart

	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	California Dream Act	AB 540 (California)	DREAM Act
Status of law or policy	Federal DHS policy (not law) announced by the Obama Administration	California state law	California state law	Proposed federal law
Date of Enactment	June 15, 2012	2011	2001	Not yet passed
Description	DHS program that will defer the removal of certain eligible undocumented youths and allow them to apply for work authorization if they are granted DACA.	It consists of two Assembly Bills, AB 130, and AB 131. Together, these bills allow undocumented students to apply for and receive private scholarships (AB 130) and state financial aid, university grants, and community college fee waivers (AB 131).	Allows eligible students to pay instate tuition at: - California Community Colleges - California State Universities (CSUs) - Universities of California (UCs)	Proposed law would legalize the status of undocumented youth. The DREAM Act stands for the Development Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act. The bill was first introduced in 2001.
	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	California Dream Act	AB 540 (California)	DREAM Act
Requirements	- Under 31 as of 6/15/12 - Entered the US before the age of 16 - Continuous residence in the US from 6/15/07 through 6/15/12 - Physical presence in the US on 6/15/12 - Entry without inspection or lawful immigration status expired as of 6/15/12 - In school, graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, obtained a GED certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Armed Forces/Coast Guard - Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do	Same as AB 540. For Cal Grant, student must also meet other Cal Grant eligibility criteria.	- Attended a California high school for a minimum of three years - Graduated from a California high school or attained the equivalent (GED or California High School Proficiency exam) - Student who is without lawful immigration status must file an affidavit with the college or university stating that he or she has filed an application to legalize his or her immigration status, or will file an	The requirements have changed with each introduction of the bill. Basic requirements are: - entered the US at the age of 15 or younger, - present in the US for 5 years - graduated from high school or obtained a GED, - under the age of 30 (or 35) at the time of the bill.

	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	California Dream Act	AB 540 (California)	DREAM Act
	not pose a threat to national security or public safety		application as soon as he or she is eligible to do so	
How to apply	Submit to USCIS: - Completed Forms I-821D, I765, and I-765WS - Supporting documents demonstrating you meet each of the eligibility requirements - Two identical passport-style photographs - Fee payment of $465 - G-1145 (optional)	Complete & submit the 2012-13 California Dream Act Application Starting Jan. 2013, the 2013-14 California Dream Act Application becomes available for AB 131 institutional grants, community college fee waivers, and Cal Grants for the 2013-14 school year.	- Fill out a "California Nonresident Tuition Exemption Request" - Submit proof of high school attendance and graduation (or its equivalent) - Turn in form and documents to the Admissions Office or Office of the Registrar at your college or university	The DREAM Act has not passed; thus, no one can apply
	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	California Dream Act	AB 540 (California)	DREAM Act
Benefits	- Protection from removal (deportation) for 2 years - work authorization document - Social security number	AB 130 allows students who meet AB 540 criteria to apply for and receive private scholarships for public colleges and universities. AB 131 allows students who meet AB 540 criteria to apply for and receive state-funded financial aid such as institutional grants, community college fee waivers, Cal Grant, and Chafee Grant.	Allows eligible students to pay instate tuition at all public colleges and universities in California.	Proposed benefits have included lawful conditional residency that may lead to lawful permanent residency and citizenship
Bars	Those convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety	None	None	Varies by bill, generally includes certain grounds of inadmissibility and criminal offenses

	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	California Dream Act	AB 540 (California)	DREAM Act
Risks	Temporary program that may be terminated at any time.	No known risks	No known risks	N/A

Note. Adapted from Immigrant Legal Resource Center (2012).

Success of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Students

According to Contreras (2009), undocumented Latino students in higher education represent a resilient, determined, and inspirational group of high achievers who persevere and serve as a model for success. In the case of undocumented students, gaining acceptance or attending college may be the first step toward achieving success. DACA students overcoming challenges portray similar characteristic found in GRIT, a well-established concept that stems from risk taking, determination, and working hard toward achieving a goal over a long period. However, there was a gap in the literature in understanding the GRIT characteristics found among successful DACA students enrolled at a community college. According to Banks (2017), undocumented students are talented high achievers who arrived in the U.S. as children because of choices their parents made (p. 1425).

Undocumented Students and College Enrollment

Undocumented students face a wide array of challenges in accessing a postsecondary education, such as changes in federal and states policies implemented throughout the years relating to eligible or ineligible access to a postsecondary education. The first of many challenges entails navigating the admissions process by disclosing their immigration statuses. Ruth (2018) found that undocumented students must risk disclosing their undocumented statuses to others to receive accurate admissions information and college support. Ruth stated that students who attempted to hide their undocumented statuses interfered with the type of help they

could access. Building relationships is key to information on scholarships, referral programs, and other campus resources.

Aguayo-Bryant (2016) stated that policymakers needed to remain consistent and create uniform guidelines to apply to all undocumented students navigating the admissions process. Aguayo-Bryant provided in-depth knowledge about the undocumented student experience accessing and applying to college. The students in the study found that applying to college was stressful because it occurred when they had to disclose their undocumented immigration statuses to others. Although each participant navigated the admissions process differently, some navigated the admissions process with little or no assistance from anyone but themselves. Other participants received assistance from close peers, who provided encouragement and motivation to attend college. Lastly, some participants gained assistance from school personnel or community organizations. The findings indicated that 30% of the participants had no support or did not receive assistance from family members, school officials, or individuals with the application process, while 70% of the participants did not receive any assistance (Aguayo-Bryant, 2016). The researcher revealed that 40% of the students began at a community college because of its tuition affordability. According to Nienhusser (2014), several factors may affect undocumented students' postsecondary education enrollment: limited information, high out-of-state tuition, complex residency requirements, limited or no financial aid, and fear of disclosing their immigration statuses.

Financial Issues: Paying for College

The cost of college attendance is expensive for U.S. citizens, residents, and undocumented students. Some undocumented students choose not to attend college because they cannot afford it. College affordability is an issue that campus all over the country should address

(Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Undocumented students rely on community colleges due to locations closer to home and more affordable prices than other places (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Bradley (2012) agreed that student immigrants could not afford elite universities or even state colleges, instead relying on community colleges for an education. Coughlin (2012) stated that the lack of funding was a true detriment to higher education enrollment for undocumented students. As a result, student immigrants take significantly longer to graduate because they take a few classes at a time (Bradley, 2012).

Undocumented students rely on their families for support. In most cases, families cannot afford to support their children's educations; oftentimes, families can only provide housing while other expenses fall on the children (Got Papers? Got Dreams?, 2017). Because undocumented students are ineligible for any federal financial aid, students must pay for college out of pocket. An inability to apply for financial aid prevents them from studying as an undocumented student (Wyttenbach, 2015). According to Degiuli (2011), the cost of college is high, and families often struggle to provide the same opportunities to all family members. Degiuli found that families with a dual household income had better chances to support a child at 4-year universities than those from single-parent families. According to Aboytes (2009), the average income of an undocumented immigrant family was 40% lower than native-born families or families with lawful immigration statuses. Although some states have provided equitable tuition policies, nine other states restrict undocumented students from accessing in-state tuitions (Nienhusser, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). The financial support from state and legislative policy will provide student access to an education.

According to Snyder (2013), unauthorized students, despite their high aspirations, face significant financial barriers when pursuing postsecondary educations and remain ineligible for

federal financial aid. In Aguayo-Bryant's (2016) study, most participants shared that it was more financially manageable to attend community colleges. Finally, 40% of the students started at community colleges after high school due to the higher cost of attending a university. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) investigated how to improve the undocumented undergraduate college experience across a variety of U.S. campuses. Carola Suarez-Orozco et al. found that college affordability, concerned about financing education, entailed buying books and tuition. Funding colleges from familial resources, personal resources, grants and scholarships, loans, and other sources were barriers to achieving their educational goals (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

According to the literature, most undocumented college students have limited access to financial aid; thus, they work multiple jobs to finance their college educations (Contreras, 2009; Perez et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). College affordability is an issue that school leaders must address all over the country (Goldrick-Rab & Kendall, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Additionally, federal grants and loans remain unavailable to these students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Teranishi et al., 2015). Researchers also found wide variability across states regarding access to financial aid, as well as differences in undocumented students' abilities to pay in-state, as opposed to out-of-state tuition (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Teranishi et al., 2015). Research has also shown that access to in-state tuition plays an important role in undocumented students' decisions to enroll in colleges and persist to earn degrees (A. Flores, 2016; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Because of a lack of access to in-state tuition and financial aid, undocumented college students are more likely to attend colleges closer to home and more affordable, such as community colleges, than other schools (A. Flores, 2016; Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Perez et al., 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Students at community colleges were most likely to report working off campus (70%) compared to 54% of students at 4-year public and private schools (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). The need to work appears as a major reason a substantial proportion of students in the sample (21%) is either studying part-time or currently taking a break from their studies. Students at community colleges were most likely to be enrolled part time (31%). Of the students enrolled part time, 58% reported that it was due to the need to work to support themselves, their families, or others (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

A major area of concern for undocumented students is community college affordability. Nearly all participants (95%) reported being concerned about financing their college education, and 90% of participants reported concerns about being able to buy textbooks and supplies, with 29% reporting being extremely concerned (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Community college students reported significantly higher levels of overall financial concern, compared to their peers at 4-year public and private institutions. The particularly high level of overall financial concerns at community colleges may be related to these students primarily using personal resources to finance their educations. Fifty-four percent of community college students reported paying at least half of their tuitions out of their own resources (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Perez et al. (2010) shared the following stated by Guillermo:

> Being an undocumented student in the United States is like being "cursed and blessed" at the same time. Cursed, in that you are marginalized by society, and you have to live in fear almost every day. Blessed, in the fact that you use the experience, and you become a much better person because of everything that you have struggled with. You work ten times as hard as, maybe, somebody who takes it for granted because they were born in

> this country, or somebody who is a legal resident and doesn't know exactly what that means and what power they have. (p. 40)

Perez et al. (2010) contended that students must put their dreams on hold because of the difficulty of procuring necessary funding and support to continue their educations at the postsecondary level. As undocumented students undergo extreme hardships, many rely on the emotional and financial support of their families and external social support networks (Perez et al., 2010). Also, one of the main difficulties that undocumented students face entails finding ways to pay for college tuition and other related expenses. Because most do not qualify for federal and state financial aid, they work as many hours as possible to cover school and personal expenses (Perez et al., 2010). Unable to afford elite universities or even state colleges, student immigrants should turn to community colleges (Bradley, 2012). Most undocumented immigrants who do go to college enroll in less-costly community colleges. However, they can take significantly longer to graduate because they may only afford one or two classes a semester (Bradley, 2012).

Improve Student Experience

In Snyder's (2013) study, one student believed that the undocumented status limited educational choices; the student would rather be attending a university than a 2-year community college. Undocumented students and the campuses they attend are embedded within a hostile, complicated, and constantly changing legal, political, and policy context (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Therefore, leaders of campuses need to become aware of this population, become respectfully informed, and receive training on how to best serve these students across a broad range of services (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Campus Personnel Limited Experience

Leaders of each campus can create further barriers for these students but may provide support and a positive environment (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). An overarching theme emerging from the data revealed the importance of administrators, faculty, and staff recognizing the presence of undocumented students and their issues, challenges, and needs when navigating higher educational pathways (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Participants recommended that administrators should learn about undocumented students and attend organization meetings, training, rallies, and workshops to understand undocumented students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Researchers also suggested listening to the student population: If there were students openly declaring their statuses, leaders should have a conversation with them (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). For instance, researchers urged college administrators, faculty, and staff should

> realize that [they] have a very important influence on students, especially undocumented students. So [they should] be sensitive, nonjudgmental, patient, motivating, and, above all, be a person that's approachable and trustworthy and to be aware of "what language to cut out of their vocabulary, i.e., "illegal." (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 20)

Additionally, the participants recommended that administrators should train faculty and staff about undocumented student population, as many undocumented students struggle with a sense of belonging on campus. About 24% of the responses indicated the need for administrators to recognize, embrace, and support undocumented students as part of the campus community (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Such students will likely enter their local community colleges with emotional setbacks that student affair professionals may need to address. Student affair professionals need to familiarize themselves with the struggles of this population, especially because the number of undocumented students attending community colleges and state

universities has increased due to legislatures allowing undocumented students to pay state tuition fees if they have met specified criteria (Perez et al., 2010). Before student affair professionals can serve undocumented students, such professionals should understand common problems and challenges of undocumented immigrant college students to develop efficient strategies and enhance their college experiences (Perez et al., 2010).

Institutional agents should also be trained to remain sensitive to the needs of this population (Perez et al., 2010). On occasion, undocumented students have been scrutinized and humiliated because they do not furnish a social security card number. Furthermore, students develop anxiety when they seek services in an admissions and records office because student affairs personnel lack adequate training to work with this population (Perez et al., 2010). The lack of awareness and transparency means that students handle navigating the system and locating the one or two knowledgeable advocates at high schools or college campuses (Diaz-Strong et al., 2010).

Family and Peer Support

Undocumented and DACA students are often the first in their families to attend college, and the support from family and peers is vital to college success. Perez et al. (2010) noted that undocumented students often attributed their motivations to their parents' sacrifices and struggles to provide extra opportunities unavailable in their native homelands (p. 41). J. Roberts (2016) revealed that students gave credit to their parents and siblings for providing the motivation necessary for them to pursue goals. Parents' expectations to continuing their studies were also factors.

According to J. Roberts (2016), participants credited parents and siblings with providing the support and motivation they needed to pursue their goals. Family was most often referred to

as a social support when asked about their parents' expectations for them, their greatest strengths in continuing their educations, how they were motivated, and who they turned to for information and answers. Students described how their parents had sacrificed for them to have a better life in the United States and how their families continue to support them, providing residences, meals, money, transportation, emotional support, and information when needed.

Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) researched academic peer, undocumented peer, and institutional agent support. Students in the study reported an overall high level of support from peers, although community college students reported lower levels of peer support than students at 4-year public and private colleges (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Community college students were more likely to work and travel long distances to campuses, thereby having fewer opportunities for engagement in college social life (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Students reported overall moderately high levels of support from faculty and staff (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Forty-seven percent of students reported that there were staff/instructors at their institution with whom they could talk openly about financial issues surrounding their legal statuses. Thus, more than half of all undocumented undergraduates who participated in this survey (53%) believed they did not have staff or faculty members with whom they could openly discuss financial issues related to their documentation statuses (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

According to J. Roberts (2016), students mentioned younger siblings as their motivation for success. Mentors provided up-to date and detailed information, time, and connections to other 69 resources designed to assist undocumented students, such as scholarships or school positions tailored for migrant families, undocumented students, and students on school visas. Mentors also provided a safe place to share fears and doubts regarding school, work, and the future. According to one participant,

> Education is that knowledge, I think education is important, because, I think, like, the more you know the more opportunities you do have, and then you have more access to opportunities . . . I think you can never have too much knowledge...Learning something that, you know, that you can have, and no matter how much they strip you down they cannot take that knowledge away from you. (J. Roberts, 2016, p. 20)

Undocumented college students rely on peers for social support, information, and advice about navigating the higher education system (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Typically, undocumented students attribute their strong will to achieve educational dreams to the sacrifices their parents have made to bring them to the United States (Cortes, 2008; Perez et al., 2010). Undocumented students often attribute their motivation to their parents' sacrifices and struggles to provide them with extra opportunities that they would not have in their native homelands (Perez et al., 2010). Peer groups play a significant role in these students' decisions related to college persistence. Associating with academically successful peers who themselves are or were undocumented can serve as motivating factors for those feeling alienated and frustrated (Perez et al., 2010).

Guts, Resilience, Initiative, and Tenacity

Researchers have defined grit in a variety of ways. For example, Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges and maintaining effort and interest over years despite failures, adversities, and plateaus in progress. Kaplan Thaler and Koval (2015) defined grit as due to a hard-fought struggle, willingness to take risks, and strong sense of determination. Moreover, students with grit work relentlessly toward a goal, taking challenges in stride and having the passion and perseverance to accomplish difficult actions. Additionally, Kaplan Thaler and Koval separated

each letter in GRIT to represent the following: guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity. The researcher in this study used GRIT as an acronym composed of these traits.

12-Item Grit Scale: (Grit-O)

Duckworth et al. (2007) developed an instrument to measure grit called the 12-item Grit Scale used across several studies to predict the importance of effort and interest over a long period. Researchers of the Grit Scale began using 27 items, then reduced to 17 items, to a full 12-item Grit Scale. The 12-item Grit Scale consists of questions about perseverance and passion, where six factor items relate to consistency of interests (*passion*), and six factor items relate to perseverance of effort (*perseverance*). Items are ranked on a 5-point Likert-scale to describe 1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *very much like me*. The authors separated the items in the following order:

Consistency of Interest

1. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.
2. New ideas and new projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.
3. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.
4. My interests change from year to year.
5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.
6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete. (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 20)

Perseverance of Effort

1. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.
2. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.

3. I finish whatever I begin.
4. Setbacks don't discourage me.
5. I am a hard worker.
6. I am diligent. (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 20)

The resulting 12-item Grit Scale demonstrated high internal consistency (α = .85) for the overall scale and = each factor: Consistency of Interests, α = .84 and Perseverance of Effort, α = .78. Further review of some popular studies of Duckworth et al. (2007) are described later regarding the 12-item Grit Scale.

Ivy League Undergraduates

Duckworth et al. (2007) conducted a study in the fall 2002 at the University of Pennsylvania to examine 139 undergraduate students majoring in psychology. The researchers' sample consisted of 69% women and 31% men. Duckworth et al. explored whether grit was associated with high achieving students and cumulative GPAs among undergraduates at an elite university. The research participants were measured by their SAT scores and online Grit Scale results. The findings indicated that gritty students outperformed their less gritty peers: Grit scores were associated with higher GPAs ($r = .25$, $p = .01$)—a relationship even stronger when SAT scores were held constant ($r = .34$, $p = .001$). The researchers noted that grit was associated with lower SAT scores ($r = .20$, $p = .03$), indicating that among elite undergraduates, smarter students might be slightly less gritty than their peers.

U.S. Military Academy at West Point Class of 2008 Retention

Each year, approximately 14,000 applicants undergo a rigorous admissions process with the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, but only 1,200 are admitted and enrolled. Applicants who meet rigorous academic and physical performance requirements meet the Whole Candidate

Score. The Whole Candidate Score is a weighted average of SAT or ACT exam scores, high school ranks adjusted for the number of students in their graduating classes, expert appraisals of leadership potential, and performances on objective measures of physical fitness (Duckworth, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Duckworth (2004) conducted a study during a first-year summer training session at West Point, where 1,223 first-year cadets entered the academy. Participants included cadets in the class of 2008 (n = 1,218) surveyed using the 12-Item Grit Scale, also referred to as Grit-O (Duckworth, 2004). The participants consisted of 16% women and 84% men, with ethnicities of the following: 77% White, 8% Asian, 6% Hispanic, 6% Black, 1% Native American, and 2% other ethnicity. The participants ages included M = 19.05 years and SD = 1.1 (Duckworth, 2004). The GRIT Scale was used to determine the cadets' levels of grittiness based on those who succeeded and graduated the training program compared to those not so gritty who failed the rigorous training. As a result, 94.2% of cadets completed the summer training (n = 1,152), and 5.8% dropped out (n = 71; Duckworth, 2004).

Duckworth (2004) used the Grit Scale, Brief Self-Control Scale, Whole Candidate Score, Summer Retention, Academic GPA, and Military Performance Score. Based on this sample, the Grit Scale's internal reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .79$ (Duckworth, 2004, p. 1095). Duckworth (2004) found that grit was unrelated to Whole Candidate Score nor any of its following components: SAT score, high school class rank, Leadership Potential Score, and Physical Aptitude Exam. Although the military relied on the Whole Candidate Score, the score did not predict summer retention and completion of the cadets. In this study, grit was a reliable predictor of who would complete the training program to identify those who would drop out (Duckworth, 2004).

U.S. Military Academy at West Point Class of 2010 Retention

Duckworth et al. (2007) replicated the West Point study from 2004 with a new cohort of cadets. The participants in the new study included cadets from the class of 2010, consisting of 1,308 out of the 1,310 students. Cadets were measured by their Whole Candidate Scores, 12-item Grit Scale answers, and Big Five Personality Scale answers. The researchers found that the summer retention for the class of 2010 (95.3%) was higher than for the class of 2008 (94.2%), with differences in retention attributed to differences in Grit scores.

Scripps National Spelling Bee Finalist

In 2005, the Scripps National Spelling Bee hosted a 3-day annual competition in Washington, DC live on ESPN (Duckworth, 2016). Children participated from the United States, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, Guam, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, and American Samoa (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth (2016) worked with the executive director to study the participants who made it to the final round competition. Questionnaires were sent out to all participants (n = 273) sometime in April and May 2005, where 174 agreed to take part in the study. Participants ranged in ages as young as 7 to 15 years old (M = 13.20, SD = 1.23); 48% were girls, and 52% were boys (Duckworth, 2016, p. 1098). Duckworth (2016) used data from the Grit Scale, self-control, verbal IQs, study times, final rounds, and prior competitions to measure their levels of grit based on the number of hours they studied and how far they performed in the spelling bee rounds. The research findings indicated that gritty children worked harder and longer than their less gritty peers, thereby performing better.

Asian-American/Pacific Islander Study

According to Zentner et al. (2016), grit emerged in higher education as a positive correlation to student performance based on non-cognitive factors. Grit is about the drive to overcome adversity and achieve one's goals. The researchers examined the differences between grit scores of Asian-American Pacific Islander (AAPI) and general student population at a 2-year college system enrolled in the Fall 2016 term. Zentner et al. utilized Duckworth et al.'s (2007) 12-item Grit Scale instrument to measure the levels of grit among the AAPI students to non-AAPI students. The data collection consisted of electronic surveys sent out to 6,249 students enrolled in college-level courses. In their analysis, 1,231 student responses were collected, and 341 Asian American/Pacific Islanders were identified. The findings revealed the non-AAPI students had a higher grit score of a 3.804 mean compared to the 3.584 mean of AAPI students.

Zentner et al. (2016) found the following AAPI populations to have the highest level of grit: Filipino, Asian other, Korean, Pacific Islander, other, and Hawaiian. Due to the low response rate, it was difficult to make a final determination. The authors recommended future researchers should focus on AAPI populations, other ethnicities, and general populations to examine a student's academic performance, end-of-term retention, course success, and fall-to-spring persistence to measure the differences in grit among these populations.

8-Item Grit Scale

Duckworth and Quinn (2009) developed a shorter instrument of the 12-Item Grit Scale (Grit-O) and created the 8-Item Grit Scale, also known as the Short Grit Scale or Grit-S to measure Grit through perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. The authors separated the 12-Item Grit Scale by dividing four questions between consistency of interest and four questions for perseverance of effort. Items were ranked like the 12-Item Grit Scale using the 5-

point Likert-scale to describe 1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *very much like me*. The 8-Item Grit Scale questions are in the following order:

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.*
2. Setbacks don't discourage me
3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*
4. I am a hard worker.
5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.*
6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.*
7. I finish whatever I begin.
8. I am diligent.

The questions with the asterisk are defined as being part of the Consistency of Effort (passion) and those remaining are part of the Perseverance of Effort (perseverance) factors of the 8-item Grit Scale.

Duckworth and Quinn (2009) conducted a test-retest analysis using the Grit-S among a group of high achieving middle and high school students in seventh, eighth, 10th, and 11th grade attending a magnet school in the spring of 2006. The researchers predicted school grades and the number of hours per day of television watched during an academic school year. The sample population were students had a mean age of 13.94 years (SD = 1.59), with 59% identifying as female. The race/ethnicity of the participants consisted of 58% Whites, 20% Blacks, 16% Asians, 4% Hispanics, and 1% other ethnicities (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). In spring 2007, the researchers conducted a retest study using Grit-S and Grit-O and found that the correlation

between scores on the Grit-S from the spring of 2006 and Grit-S 1 year later was $r = .68$ and $p < .001$. The Grit-S showed good internal consistency at both the 2006 and 2007 assessments at αs = .82 and .84 (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Bowman et al. (2015) conducted two studies to examine the relationship of GRIT and student outcomes at two college universities: Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and University of Wisconsin at La Crosse (UWL). The outcomes variable included academic adjustment, college sense of belonging, college satisfaction, college GPA, persistence until graduation, and change of major or career. In Study 1, undergraduates from BGSU were asked to participate in an online survey. As part of their participation, they would receive partial course credits. The researchers obtained and examined the responses of 417 participants, which consisted of 76% females, 20% students of color, and 71% first-year students and sophomores.

As part of data collection, Bowman et al. (2015) used Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) 8-item Short Grit Scale to assess perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. The Likert scale used the ranges of 1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *very much like me*. Perseverance of effort resulted in the following: 3 items; α =.70; "I am a hard worker," "I am diligent," and "I finish whatever I begin." Consistency of interest was the following: 4 items; α = .73; "I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete," "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one," " I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest," and "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones" (Bowman et al., 2015, p. 20). All were reverse coded). Bowman et al. (2015) revealed that perseverance of effort was positively associated with academic adjustment, college GPA, college sense of belonging, college satisfaction, and intent to persist, whereas

consistency of interest did not predict any outcomes. The authors believed that students with low perseverance were more likely to drop-out of school than those with higher perseverance.

In Study 2, Bowman et al. (2015) asked BGSU and UWL undergraduates who lived on campus during spring 2013 term to participate in an online survey from the Office of Residence Life. The researchers collected responses from 1,089 participants at UWL, which consisted of 72% female, 8% students of color, 82% first-year student and sophomore and 938 participants at BGSU, which consisted of 76% female, 13% students of color, 86% first-year and second-year students. The data collected from BGSU for Study 1 were used for Study 2, but additional data for the term spring 2013 were collected. In addition to the outcome variables from Study 1, the researchers included parental educations, co-curricular engagement, faculty-student interactions, and college experiences. In their analysis, perseverance of effort resulted in $\alpha = .75$ at UWL and .73 at BGSU, and consistency of effort were closely related between both institutions ($\alpha = .70$ at UWL and .71 at BGSU).

Bowman et al.'s (2015) Study 2 revealed that consistency of interest was negatively related to intent to change careers at both institutions and intent to change majors at UWL. At BGSU, the variables of co-curricular engagement and college satisfaction were negatively related to consistency of interest. However, both institutions had the same negative consistency of interest of faculty-student interaction. Perseverance of effort was positively and significantly related to subsequent college GPA, whereas consistency of interest was insignificant.

Bowman et al. (2015) raised awareness that grit could predict both academic and nonacademic outcomes. The researchers utilized the 8-Item Grit Scale to identify grittier students, displaying those with a great sense of belonging on the college campus, interactions

with faculty, and involvement in co-curricular activities. The authors believed the results showed that perseverance had a stronger relationship than did consistency of interest in both studies.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Students

Only one study was found in the literature that focused on DACA students and academic outcomes related to GRIT. O'Neal et al. (2016) conducted this study; however, only 44 of 264 participants in the study reported receiving DACA and all participants were Latina/o first-generation students (FGCSs). The authors used a cross-sectional mixed-methods design in Maryland to investigate the relationships between depression, stress, grit, and grade point averages among 84 Latina/o non-citizen FGCSs; these relationships were then examined among 180 Latina/o citizen FGCSs and compared to the non-citizen group (O'Neal et al., 2016). The authors also conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 citizen and 21 non-citizen FGCSs following the survey (O'Neal et al., 2016). The results of the quantitative phase of the study revealed that citizenship types moderated the relationships between GPA, depression, grit, and depression (O'Neal et al., 2016). The results of the qualitative phase of the study revealed that an academic stressor for both citizen and non-citizen FGCSs entailed paying for college tuition (O'Neal et al., 2016). However, non-citizen FGCSs reported further stress related to immigration (O'Neal et al., 2016). Regarding GRIT, both non-citizens and citizens demonstrated grit in overcoming barriers to the academic success (O'Neal et al., 2016). For DACA students, grit was related to academic achievement and overcoming challenges related to immigration (O'Neal et al., 2016).

Summary

Recently, researchers have showed interest in GRIT as characteristics of DACA students that contribute to their academic success (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; O'Neal et al.,

2016). However, few studies were found in the literature regarding GRIT and students' academic success; these authors did not focus on DACA students and produced mixed results. For example, O'Neal et al. (2016) found a relationship between non-citizen students' abilities to navigate barriers to academic success and GRIT, yet Credé et al. (2017) found that grit was an insignificant predictor of academic performances among U.S. citizen college students. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students in a 2-year community college in Texas who attended during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Leaders may use the results of this study to gain a better understanding on whether DACA students use GRIT to overcome personal, financial, and legal challenges during the academic journey. Furthermore, the results of this study may contribute to the literature and promote an awareness of community college DACA students' obstacles in accessing education, succeeding in higher education, and completing college. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research methodology used to conduct this study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The qualitative research is based on the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which focuses on people's experience from their perspective. (C. M. Roberts, 2010, p. 143)

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Leaders can use the results of this study to understand whether DACA students use GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers related to higher education. The researcher used the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire by Duckworth (2016, 2017, 2018). The researcher explored the level of grittiness among community college DACA students to provide insights on the college experiences of access, success, and completion.

The methodology appropriate to conduct this study and answer the research questions was a qualitative phenomenological research design. Due to the limited literature, regarding DACA-eligible students attending a public 2-year community college who displayed GRIT characteristics, this methodology shows the lived experiences of DACA students and their personal hurdles to succeeding in higher education. In this chapter, the researcher included the research questions, approach to selecting participants, data collection, transcription, researcher's bias, and data analysis.

For many undocumented students, the path to a college education is challenging due to many being the first in their families to attend college or knowing little on how to navigate the American higher education system. Thus, community colleges play important roles in assisting undocumented students to pursue postsecondary educations. The DACA-eligible students, who

attempt to pursue a college education, experience a different pathway for access and completion partly due to their immigration statuses. This researcher measured how much GRIT these DACA students at a 2-year community had to achieve the goal of a higher education.

Research Questions

A qualitative research question is generally open-ended about a process, issue, or phenomenon of an overarching question that one wants to answer (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The author proposed the following research questions to determine if GRIT played a role in student success among DACA students attending a Texas community college:

RQ1: What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students?

RQ2: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college?

RQ3: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete?

The researcher identified whether DACA students displayed any GRIT characteristics for RQ1. The researcher identified which aspect of having GRIT contributed to students' decision-making to access a postsecondary education at a 2-year community college for RQ2. the researcher identified whether DACA students had GRIT and, if so, whether it motivated students to graduate and complete a 2-year degree from a community college for RQ3.

Rationale for the Methodology

This researcher used a phenomenological approach to understand better the lived experiences of DACA-eligible immigrant students. The method selected for this study was a qualitative design. The researcher was interested in DACA-eligible immigrant students; thus, the focus involved understanding the students attending a public 2-year community college in Texas to learn about their lived experiences in a state known as one of the largest immigrant hubs. The

researcher captured the participants' viewpoints through detailed interviews. Therefore, the qualitative phenomenological research approach was considered appropriate for this study. The researcher wanted to understand the lived experiences of immigrant students enrolled at the public 2-year community college from different phases of their postsecondary educational journeys, whether as a first-time or in-college student either in their first or second semesters or a returning student in their second years or approaching graduation.

Research Design

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) suggested choosing the research approach based on the research problem and purpose. The best research approach is the one that best fits with the research problem.

Qualitative

Qualitative researchers promote a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from research participants' perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 38). Qualitative researchers study things and people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena based on the applied meanings of people. Creswell (2014) further noted that qualitative researchers should rely on text and image data, following unique steps in data analysis.

Phenomenology

R. Johnson and Christensen (2014) described phenomenology as the description of one or more individuals' consciousness and experience of a phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers obtain a view into participants' life-worlds to understand their personal meanings constructed from their "lived experiences" (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 444). Using the phenomenological approach, the data include words that describe people's knowledge, opinions,

perceptions, and feelings (C. M. Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Data also include detailed descriptions of people's actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions (C. M. Roberts, 2010, p. 143).

Role of Researcher

For this qualitative study, the researcher had an active role during the entire process. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) defined the researcher's role as the ability to understand multiple realities from the perspectives of participants. The authors also stated that the only way to achieve this understanding was for a researcher to become involved in participants' realities, interacting with them in meaningful ways. In a qualitative research study, the researcher prevented any personal biases while collecting information and observation for this study. A researcher bias might occur when a researcher obtained results consistent with what the researcher wanted to find (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Thus, the researcher controlled for potential bias by remaining neutral during the interview process and refraining from expressing emotions when students shared their personal life stories. As part of the interview process, the researcher addressed each question using the same tone to prevent influencing any participant responses.

The researcher made accommodations to host personal virtual Zoom video-conferencing interviews with each participant. As part of the interview process, the researcher reviewed all consent forms, demographic surveys, and GRIT Scale responses as part of the data analysis. The researcher facilitated each personal interview, used Zoom video conferencing, and audio-taped recordings to assist with accuracy and information provided by each participant. The researcher took field notes to help with the data collection. The researcher used the information provided to analyze the data and draw conclusions. The researcher ensured participant confidentiality by

assigning alpha and numerical values to each participant based on their designations and home campuses.

In this study, the researcher disclosed the role as an employee and might have encountered employment biases due to working for a 2-year community college where the study occurred. The researcher worked for the community college for approximately eight years and worked closely with undocumented and DACA eligible students during that time at the institution.

Population and Sample

Population

Population refers to a large group in which a researcher wants to generalize the sample results (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 250). The population for this phenomenological study was immigrant students who met the requirements for the DACA policy, but only those who currently attended a 2-year community college.

Sample

For this study, participants were 18 years old or older, graduated from a Texas high school or received their Texas GEDs, and currently attend or attended one of the largest community colleges during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. The researcher invited DACA-eligible research participants from each college campus to participate in the study. These DACA-eligible students were enrolled in a wide range of academic programs and varied in number of semesters enrolled within their first- and second-year level coursework. DACA students attended school either full-time or part-time. They were eligible to find employment because they benefited from having a work authorization permit to pay for college and aid in supporting their families. The researcher limited the study to DACA-eligible students; these students could

benefit from the federal DREAM Act legislation and state policy in pursuing a postsecondary education in Texas. The researcher chose 11 as the appropriate number of research participants.

Because many students were low income, community colleges played an important role in servicing this population. Undocumented students may find it difficult to disclose their immigration statuses; thus, the researcher decided to identify DACA students currently enrolled at different educational levels within the Texas community college system. The researcher requested participation from DACA students who completed spring, summer, and fall 2017 to 2018 semester coursework. The DACA student participants were selected if they met all the institution's non-citizen residency requirements. Students identified as at least 18 years of age, graduated from a Texas high school or GED, provided proof they resided in the state 36 months leading to the their high school or GED graduations, completed the Texas Senate Bill 1528 affidavit, updated the Texas Residency questionnaire, provided a valid state photo identification or work authorization card, provided a copy of their high school/GED graduation and completion dates, and enrolled in classes at any of the college campuses to establish Texas residency as a non-citizen and receive in-state tuition at a 2-year community college. DACA-eligible students must be willing and comfortable enough to disclose their immigration statuses to campus admissions and records offices to confirm they were in the appropriate residency category to be considered a Texas resident and avoid paying international tuition fees. DACA students could be paying a high tuition cost due to their incorrect reporting of their residency. It is up to the institution to determine if the student qualifies for the Texas residency and International High School and/or GED in-state tuition cost.

Sampling Procedures

For this study, the researcher chose to conduct a purposeful sampling to assist in identifying the research participants. R. Johnson and Christensen (2014) defined *sampling* as a set of elements taken from a larger population. In a purposive sampling, the researcher specifies the characteristics of the population of interest and locates individuals with those characteristics (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The researcher completed the phenomenology study with a total of 11 DACA-eligible students. Creswell (2014) recommended a phenomenology sample should range from three to 10 participants.

The researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Kansas State University on December 9, 2019. The external request to conduct research at a 2-year community college was submitted on December 9, 2019, via email to the IRB and AIR department. The email to conduct research at a 2-year community college included the following submissions for review: evidence of Kansas State University IRB Approval, completion of CITI Training, the 2-year community college's AIR Dissertation Data Request Form, Interview Protocol, Zoho Survey, DACA Research Flyer, Debriefing Statement, Protecting Human Subject Research Participants Certificate, Kansas State University Informed Consent, the 2-year community college's IRB Research Application Form, and Notice of Intent from each college campus with presidents signatures.

The focus of data variables was to identify DACA-eligible students through the institution's AIR department and creating a query. The query included students who attended 2017 to 2018 academic semesters; it also included students' first and last names, residencies, college campus email addresses, telephone numbers, home campuses, majors, Texas high school

or GED completion, and ages. On January 21, 2020, a 2-year community college granted approval to be a research site.

The researcher stored the raw data in a password-protected digital file system on a personal laptop and stored the computer in a safe. The researcher began the study in March and sent an email introducing the study to each potential DACA-eligible student at each campus via their college email requesting their participation in this study (Appendix C). Student participants in the study were eligible for a $25 Amazon e-Gift Card to purchase any item of their choice upon completion of the 8-Item GRIT Scale Questionnaire and virtual video-conferencing interview.

Instrumentation

The process of data collection involves locating a site or an individual, gaining access and establishing rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information exploring field issues, and storing data (Creswell, 2013). Although the researcher received IRB approval in January, a delay occurred for obtaining the raw data variables from the AIR department. Data for the potential DACA students were not received until February 24, 2020.

Data Sources

The researcher used two instruments for this study: 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire and virtual video conferencing interviews that followed an interview protocol with questions related to GRIT and factors that motivate DACA students to persist and complete college. The researcher used the 8-Item Grit Scale—a closed-ended questionnaire developed by Duckworth (2016, 2017, 2018). Closed-ended questions required participants to choose their responses from a limited number predetermined by a researcher (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The researcher used data from the 8-Item Grit Scale to examine each statement and participants'

responses to measure their levels of grit. After each statement was answered, points were assigned to calculate a total grit score. Students who scored high were extremely gritty, and students who scored low were not at all gritty.

The researcher sent out consent forms to each interested participant to sign, complete, and return to the researcher from their college emails. After participant consent was given, the researcher sent out an email with instructions to the Zoho Survey link to their college campus email addresses to invite them to take part in the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire. The Zoho link was protected using an Alpha password and used CAPTCHA verification before introducing the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire to the participant. Once the participants completed the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire, they were instructed to answer demographic questions, providing their first and last names, genders, birth countries, ages, and Texas high school or GED graduate information. After each participant completed the 8-item Grit Scale Questionnaire, the researcher calculated the grit scores as part of the data analysis.

The second data source was virtual Zoom video conferencing interviews conducted with each DACA-eligible participant from each of the selected 2-year college campuses. R. Johnson and Christensen (2014) referred to interviews as a data-collection method in which an interviewer (the researcher or someone working for the researcher) asked questions of an interviewee (the research participant). For this study, DACA students were invited to attend a one-hour Zoom virtual video conferencing interview in the comfort of their homes on specified dates and times deemed convenient for the participant. Interviews were held in a secure Zoom video conferencing location where access into the site required an alpha numerical password. Before each interview, the researcher reviewed the Kansas State University IRB Informed Consent Template Form (Appendix A) and instructions regarding the interview process with

each participant. Participant consent must be given to proceed with the interview. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, reviewed any risks and benefits, and assured the participants that their information would remain kept confidential. Participants taking part in this study were volunteering information and their immigration statuses. The researcher requested that the entire interview be video-conferenced, and audio recorded to assist in getting accurate results and information. If several participants declined to participate in the interview or wished to withdraw during the interview, the researcher recruited additional participants.

Natural Setting

The site selection chosen for this study occurred at one of the largest 2-year community colleges in Texas. The researcher chose this college because leaders recognized DACA students on their college campuses. Leaders of the 2-year community college provided an opportunity for students to explore careers in certificate, workforce, or transfer degrees. The college leaders provided affordable access—a benefit for undocumented or DACA-eligible students beginning their first years of college close to home.

Validity and Reliability

Duckworth et al. (2007) created a 12-Item Grit Scale questionnaire to determine the level of grittiness among participants in their study. The initial study originally began with 27 items but was then reduced and divided into two areas: Consistency of Interests and Perseverance of Effort, measured by the 12-Item Grit Scale. "The resulting 12-Item Grit Scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$) for the overall scale and for each factor (Consistency of Interests, ($\alpha = .84$; Perseverance of Effort, $\alpha = .78$)" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1091). Duckworth et al.

(2007) introduced the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S; i.e., the 8-Item Grit Scale) to measure perseverance and passion, which were constructs of GRIT in other conceptualizations.

8-Item Grit Scale

The 8-Item Grit Scale instrument is often referred to as Grit-S and is used to identify the level of grit among individuals. The researcher used this scale to identify the level of grit among DACA-eligible students attending a 2-year community college. The 8-Item Short Grit Scale uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Not like me at all*, 2 = *Not much like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 4 = *Mostly like me*, and 5 = *Very much like me*. The DACA students completed the 8-Item Grit Scale using Zoho software online survey tool based on the following questions to determine their levels of GRIT:

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.*
2. Setbacks don't discourage me.
3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*
4. I am a hard worker.
5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.*
6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.*
7. I finish whatever I begin.
8. I am diligent.

After completing the 8-Item Grit Scale, the researcher collected each participant's responses and total points in the following order. For Questions 2, 4, 7, and 8, the following points were assigned: 5 = *Very much like me*, 4 = *Mostly like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 2 = *Not*

much like me, and 1 = *Not like me at all*. For Questions,1, 3, 5, and 6, the Likert scale is reversed with 1 = *Very much like me*, 2 = *Mostly like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 4 = *Not much like me*, and 5 = *Not like me at all*. The researcher calculated the total points and divided the total by 8. The maximum score on this scale was 5 (*extremely gritty*), and the lowest score on this scale was 1 (*not at all gritty*). From the 8-Item Grit Scale, the researcher identified the students who answered extremely gritty to not at all gritty.

Interview Protocol

This researcher conducted a virtual video-conferencing interview with each research participant in a secure Zoom session. Participants were in the comfort of their homes when answering each interview question. The virtual interview introduced the Kansas State University Informed Consent Template Form while reviewing the purpose of the study, benefits, and risks to each participant, allowing for questions to be asked. If a participant agreed to participate in the study, they signed the consent form (Appendix A). Participants were asked to respond to a semi-structured and open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews are used to explore a specific topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For this study, the researcher explored the DACA student experience in higher education. An open-ended question enables the participant to answer in any way that they please (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In this study, the researcher used the responses to gather information and insight about DACA-eligible students attending a community college.

Conducting Interviews

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) defined interviews as eliciting participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories, to gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social worlds

(p. 155). The researcher developed an interview protocol, which included the number of prepared questions used to guide the interview.

Researcher Timeline

During the fall 2019 semester, the researcher requested the 2-year community college's IRB to review, recommend, and approve the study. Upon the institutional approval, the researcher requested a query report from their AIR department on data that showed all potential DACA students who met the age and other eligibility requirements. The query report included the student's name, residency status, campus email, phone number, major, home campus, Texas high school or GED, and age. Once students were identified, a recruitment flyer and email invitation (Appendix C and D) was sent to them to participate in the study. Leaders of the 2-year community college did not request students to identify themselves as DACA; therefore, leaders did not have a definitive method to determine DACA students other than by self-reported residency statuses. The following residency status was used to identify potential DACA students: in District International High School/GED (IDHSG), Out of District International High School/GED (ODHSG), and International (INTL).

Respondent Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality means not revealing participants' identities to anyone other than the researcher and staff (R. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The researcher assured the participants that their identities would remain protected. Thus, the participant's legal name was removed from each data point and assigned an alphanumeric variable throughout the entire study. The audio recorded data were accessible to the researcher and transcription company of Rev.com. According to R. Johnson and Christensen (2014), *privacy* refers to controlling other people's access to information about a person (p. 141). The researcher ensured the privacy of the research

participants by protecting their immigration statuses and using alphanumerical values to decode their identities. The Zoom video-conferencing interview was in a secure virtual location with access using a password and meeting link specific to each participant. Virtual interviews provided a secure and safe environment in the privacy of their own homes. The researcher requested a meeting date and time convenient for the participant to attend the interview. A reminder email was sent to each participant regarding their scheduled virtual video-conferencing interviews.

Data Collection

The researcher first obtained permission from Kansas State University's IRB before beginning the research (Appendix F). Once approval was granted, the researcher submitted the IRB application to the 2-year community college for approval (Appendix E). After approval, the researcher gathered data from the AIR department to pull a query of data requested. The data variables included the following: name of student, residency, campus email, phone number, home campus, major, Texas high school or GED, age, and academic semesters for 2017 to 2018. According to leaders of the 2-year community college, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) list did not include students with limited disclosure of directory information under FERPA. Students' credit hours earned, credit hours attempted, genders, and country of birth were non-directory information protected under FERPA. Once students were identified, the researcher invited participants to take part in the study by sending them emails to their college campus emails. The email invitation included the purpose of the qualitative research study, a brief introduction to the demographic questionnaire, the GRIT survey, and a request for a video-conferencing interview via Zoom on a specified date and time.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them (p. 181). The researcher used MAXQDA 2020 software and followed the procedures for six-step thematic analysis by Braun et al. (2014). According to Braun et al., the six steps in thematic analysis included the following:

1. Preparing and becoming familiar with the data.
2. Developing initial codes.
3. Discovering themes through pattern coding.
4. Assessing the relevance of themes and eliminating themes that do not align with the research questions.
5. Classifying and defining themes.
6. Presenting themes in narrative form.

During the first step, the researcher transcribed the interview responses and conducted a descriptive analysis of grit scores and demographics using SPSS software. The descriptive analysis was used to construct participant profiles folded into the final narrative to provide a better understanding of their experiences and characteristics. During the first step, the researcher became familiar with the interview responses by reading and rereading transcriptions (see Braun et al., 2014). According to R. Johnson and Christensen (2014), qualitative data analysis requires coding and searching for relationships and patterns that emerge. Coding occurred in the second and third steps of thematic analysis. During the second step, initial coding was used to code words and phrases within the dataset relevant to answering the research questions (see Braun et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). During the third step, the researcher used pattern coding to combine

similar codes into themes based on content or context (see Braun et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). During the fourth step, the researcher assessed the relevance of themes, eliminated themes that did not align with the research questions, and combined smaller similar themes (Braun et al., 2014). During the fifth step, the researcher classified and defined the final themes (Braun et al., 2014). During the sixth step, the researcher constructed a narrative of final themes that incorporated supporting excerpts from participants' interview responses and GRIT profiles (see Braun et al., 2014). The narratives were contextualized in accordance with existing theory and research.

The virtual interviews consisted of audiotaped recordings transcribed by Rev.com, a professional transcribing company as another data source to assist with accurate data collection and analysis. As part of the data analysis process, participants received a copy of the transcribed interviews and provided feedback from the interview to confirm its accuracy according to their perspectives. The researcher accommodated any changes or concerns presented by the participants after their review of the transcriptions; thus, more changes and coding to themes occurred. Once the audio-recording transcriptions were finalized with edits, the researcher read, revised, and refined any words, phrases, and sentences to finalize the coding into categories or themes.

The researcher captured the data in various formats, such as paper, digital, and audio. The researcher created a password-protected digital filing system on a personal laptop to store participant responses of the signed consent forms, 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire, demographic survey, and Rev.com audio recording and word transcription documents. The researcher transferred and assigned a digital folder separate from the other data sources onto a personal laptop computer with a protected password to keep participants' identities protected. Each file

and folder related to the research study had an assigned password that could only be accessed by the researcher. Once the researcher reaches the fifth year after data collection, all data-related documents will be destroyed by deleting all files from personal devices and shredding any paper documents.

Validity of the Findings

According to R. Johnson and Christensen (2014), *validity* is defined as the accuracy of the inferences, interpretations, or actions made based on a test. First, the virtual video-conferencing interviews were used as instruments, which involved audio-taped recordings, professional transcriptions, and member checking. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), member checking involves taking data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participant so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account. Participants had 1-week to review the audio and Word document transcriptions for any corrections or feedback. The researcher used the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software program to assist with the raw data of information. MAXQDA was used to organize, store, and identify repeated and important themes to begin the coding process.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research questions of the phenomenological study of GRIT among DACA students attending the Texas community college were outlined. The process for site and participant selection was described. As part of the data collection, the researcher used the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire, demographic survey, and 1-hour virtual Zoom video-conferencing interview in a secure online location. In Chapter 4, the researcher completes a qualitative analysis process using the results from the 8-Item Grit Scale and virtual interviews by undergoing a review of the data, coding patterns, and themes from the study. In Chapter 5, the

researcher presents data from the study to address each research question and describe the significance of the research by comparing it to the current literature on DACA students. This chapter also presents recommendations for future research opportunities.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. Three research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students?

RQ2: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college?

RQ3: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete?

This chapter includes a description of the 11 participants in the sample, including their scores on the 8-Item Grit Scale by Duckworth et al. (2007). Next, the data analysis procedure is described. The chapter then proceeds with a presentation of the findings organized by research question. A summary concludes this chapter.

Participants

Eleven students participated in this study by completing the Kansas State University Informed Consent Form, DACA 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire, demographic survey, and face-to-face virtual video-conferencing interview through Zoom. Table 2 contains a summary of participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 2

Study Participants

Participant	Intended major	Country of origin	Gender	Age
UPP001	Associate of Science	El Salvador	Female	20
CFP002	Associate of Arts	Mexico	Female	19
KWP003	Associate of Arts	Mexico	Female	20
NHP004	Associate of Science	Mexico	Female	22
CFP005	Associate of Arts	Ecuador	Female	21
CFP006	Cybersecurity (AAS)	Mexico	Male	22
TCP007	Associate of Science	Mexico	Female	20
CFP008	Associate of Science	Honduras	Female	24
CFP009	Associate of Arts Field of Study Business	Mexico	Male	20
CFP010	Visual Communications (AAS)	Mexico	Female	24
CFP011	Associate of Science	Ecuador	Female	24

The participants completed the 8-Item Grit Scale by Duckworth et al. (2007). In each of the 5-level Likert items, participants were asked to indicate how accurately a statement described them, with the levels ranging from *very much like me* to *not at all like me*. Scores were calculated by assigning a score of 5 to the highest level of agreement and 1 to the lowest level on standard-scale items. On reverse-scale items, the researcher assigned a score of 1 to the highest level of agreement and 5 to the lowest level of agreement. A score of 5 indicated the highest level of grittiness, and a score of 1 indicated the lowest level. Final scores on the scale were the average of the scores across the eight items. The maximum final score on the scale was 5 (*extremely gritty*), and the lowest final score was 1 (*not at all gritty*). Table 3 indicates participants' scores on the scale.

Table 3

Participants' Scores on the 8-Item Grit Scale

	Self-reported score on item (ranging from 5 = highest grit to 1 = lowest grit)								
Participant	1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	2. Setbacks don't discourage me.	3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	4. I am a hard worker.	5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	7. I finish whatever I begin.	8. I am diligent.	Final score (average across 8 items)
UPP001	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.00
CFP002	3	2	3	4	4	3	3	4	3.25
KWP003	1	4	1	5	2	1	5	4	2.88
NHP004	3	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	3.88
CFP005	2	4	3	5	4	3	5	5	3.88
CFP006	3	3	1	4	1	2	3	4	2.63
TCP007	2	4	2	5	3	4	3	5	3.50
CFP008	2	4	3	5	4	3	4	5	3.75
CFP009	3	2	2	5	3	3	3	4	3.13
CFP010	3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5	4.13
CFP011	1	1	2	4	3	2	4	3	2.50
Average:	2.36	3.36	2.64	4.64	3.27	3.00	3.73	4.27	3.41

Note. Duckworth et al. (2007) introduced the 8-Item Grit Scale. Items 1, 3, 5, and 6 were reverse-scale items, in which a lower level of agreement corresponded to a higher grittiness score.

It was notable in the 8-Item Grit Scale results that the average final score across the study sample was 3.41, indicating an average level of grittiness about halfway between very gritty and somewhat gritty. The highest average score across the sample on a single item was 4.64 in Item 4, "I am a hard worker," with no participants scoring themselves below a level of 4 (very gritty), and with seven out of 11 participants rating their grittiness in hard work at the maximum level of 5. The lowest level of agreement was sample item one, "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones," which had an average score of 2.36. and indicated a higher level of grittiness. This question was a reverse item in which higher levels of agreement indicated lower levels of grittiness. The highest level any participant self-reported on this item was equivalent to a score of 3 (somewhat gritty; $n = 6$). The following subsections are narrative descriptions of the study participants.

UPP001

Participant UPP001 was a 20-year-old female from El Salvador. She was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Science degree. She started her educational journey in Spring 2017. She had no prior knowledge of community colleges. During her 11th grade year in high school, she felt unable to go to college because of her immigration status creating a barrier. UPP001 was inspired by her dad to go to college because she saw how hard he worked because of his immigration barrier. She did not want to come home tired by doing something that she had to do versus something she wanted. Her dad motivated her to pursue a college education. At the end of her 11th grade year, she applied to college to pursue a career in biology and the medical field as a neonatologist. This participant had the second-highest score in the sample on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her answers to the eight items averaging at a 4. She reported that her highest level of grittiness involved finishing

what she started and that her lowest level involved allowing new ideas and projects to distract her from previous ones.

CFP002

Participant CFP002 was a 19-year-old female from Mexico. She was a first-generation college student pursuing an Associate of Arts degree. She started in fall 2018. CFP002 always knew she would attend college because her parents wanted her to go, so it was something she considered. Accessing college was difficult for her because she had to navigate it on her own. She had little understanding of the application process, the meaning of college credits, and the differences between associate's and bachelor's degrees. Her parents and high school teachers inspired her to pursue a higher education. CFP002 desired to pursue a political science degree with a minor in philosophy because she believed a younger perspective and voice were important to understand during U.S. political situations. She rated herself as somewhat gritty (3.25) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest levels of grittiness being in hard work, diligence, and staying on task, all of which she rated at a 4. She indicated that her lowest level of grittiness involved not letting herself be discouraged by setbacks, which she rated at a level of 2.

KWP003

Participant KWP003 was a 20-year-old female from El Salvador. She was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Arts degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2018. KWP003 worried about accessing college and the financial burden around the ninth grade: "What can I afford with the income that my parents could bring into the house?" From the ninth grade to her high school graduation, she continued to worry about how her parents could help her or how she could make things work to balance work and school. With her initial aspirations to pursue a career in the medical field, she was

initially deterred because of the cost. She rated herself as a little below somewhat gritty (2.88) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest level of grittiness being in hard work, which she rated at a level of 5. She indicated that her lowest levels of grittiness involved not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones, being obsessed with a project without losing interest after a short time, and maintaining her focus on projects that would take more than a few months to complete, all of which she rated at a 1.

NHP004

Participant NHP004 was a 22-year-old female from Mexico. She was a first-generation college student taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Science degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2014. When NHP004 first enrolled in college, she did not know what she wanted to do; the only thing she knew was that she had to go and complete her basics. Accessing college for her was a bit difficult because she did not know where to start, and her mother could not help her because everything was in English. She rated herself as a little below very gritty (3.88) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest level of grittiness being in hard work, which she rated at a level of 5. She indicated that her lowest levels of grittiness were in letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones. She also struggled to finish any tasks, both of which she rated at a level of 3.

CFP005

Participant CFP005 was a 21-year-old female from Ecuador. She was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Arts degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2017. CFP005 knew that college was going to be a part of the plan since high school. Although she did not know where she wanted to go, she eventually started at the 2-year community college because of its affordability. Her parents' sacrifice for bringing the

family to the United States was for a better life and a quality education. She rated herself as a little below very gritty (3.88) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest levels of grittiness being in hard work, finishing what she began, and diligence, all of which she rated at 5. She indicated that her lowest level of grittiness entailed not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones, which she rated at 2.

CFP006

Participant CFP006 was a 22-year-old male from Mexico. He was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree in cybersecurity. He started his educational journey in fall 2015. CFP006 had a difficult time accessing college because he did not know anything about the college admissions process. It was confusing since nobody had done it before in his family. His parents inspired him to go to college. He rated himself as below somewhat gritty (2.63) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, giving himself the second-lowest score in the study sample, with his highest levels of grittiness being in hard work and diligence, both of which he rated at 4. His lowest levels of grittiness entailed being obsessed with a project without losing interest after a short time and setting a goal and then not choosing a different one, which he rated at 1.

TCP007

Participant TCP007 was a 20-year-old female from Mexico. She was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Science degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2018. TCP007 was inspired by her dad to go to college because he taught his children that the only way to get ahead in any career was to have financial stability and obtain a college degree. Her decision to attend was because of the 2-year community college' affordability and location close to home. She rated herself as between somewhat and very gritty

(3.5) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest levels of grittiness being in hard work and diligence, both of which she rated at 5. She indicated that her lowest levels of grittiness entailed not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones and being obsessed with a project without losing interest after a short time, both of which she rated at 2.

CFP008

Participant CFP008 was a 24-year-old female from Honduras. She was a first-generation college student taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Science degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2014. CFP008 was inspired by her parents to attend college because they gave up everything in their home country just to give her a better future in the United States. She viewed education to advance her future in case the federal policy changed. She rated herself overall as a little below very gritty (3.75) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, with her highest levels of grittiness being in hard work and diligence, both of which she rated at 5. She indicated that her lowest level of grittiness entailed not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones, which she rated at 2.

CFP009

Participant CFP009 was a 20-year-old male from Mexico. He was a first-generation college student currently taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Arts Field of Study in Business degree. He started his educational journey in fall 2018. CFP009 did not really have plans to go to college. He originally thought that he would join the Marines, but when he could not do that, he was uncertain of his next steps. His counselor inspired him to go to a community college, but he was more inspired to go to school because of the sacrifices of his parents. He did not want to live his life in vain. He rated himself as a little above somewhat gritty (3.13) on the

8-Item Grit Scale, with his highest level of grittiness being in hard work, which he rated at 5. His lowest level of grittiness entailed not being discouraged by setbacks, which he rated at 2.

CFP010

Participant CFP010 was a 24-year-old female from Mexico. She was a first-generation college student taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree in visual communications. She started her educational journey in fall 2014. CFP010 initially discussed college plans in high school. CFP010 stated a major challenge as the following: "What can I afford with income that my parents could bring into the house?" Thus, once graduated, the participant asked, "Okay, what can my parents help me out with? And how can I help them in order to be able to succeed in school as I went to school?" CFP010 was inspired by her parents to go to school because neither of them had a college education. She rated herself as a little above very gritty (4.13) on the 8-Item Grit Scale, the highest score in the study sample, with her highest levels of grittiness entailing not getting discouraged by setbacks, hard work, and diligence, all of which she rated at 5. She indicated that her lowest level of grittiness entailed not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones, which she rated at 3.

CFP011

Participant CFP011 was a 24-year-old female from Ecuador. She was a first-generation college student taking classes and pursuing an Associate of Science degree. She started her educational journey in fall 2014. CFP011 dreamed about going to school. However, before high school, she had a terrible car accident that required her to have multiple surgeries. She was left with no transportation and money for school. CFP011 finally attended school and enjoyed studying with the thought of one day completing a mechanical design degree from a 4-year institution. She rated herself as between somewhat and not very gritty (2.5) on the 8-Item Grit

Scale, the lowest score in the study sample, with her highest levels of grittiness being in hard work and diligence, both of which she rated at 4. She indicated that her lowest levels of grittiness entailed not letting new ideas and projects distract her from previous ones and not getting discouraged by setbacks, both of which she rated at 1.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis was conducted using the inductive procedures of Braun et al. (2014). The data was read and reread to identify points of potential interest. The second step of the analysis involved open coding, in which 198 excerpts from the transcripts relevant to answering a research question were assigned to 21 codes. Each code was labeled with a brief descriptive phrase. Different transcript excerpts that expressed similar meanings were assigned to the same code during this step. Table 4 provides a list of the descriptive, initial codes.

Table 4

Data Analysis Codes

Code (listed alphabetically)	*n* of participants contributing ($N = 11$)	*n* of transcript excerpts included
College as different learning environment	5	7
Decision to be open about DACA-student status	7	7
Declaring status to educate peers about DACA	5	6
Determination and focusing on goals	4	7
Disclosing immigration status to peers	11	19
Easing the transition into higher education	5	6
Enabling the pursuit of ambitions	7	12
Expanding knowledge and skills	6	14
Finding supportive community	6	10
Foresight regarding the financial demands of college	9	11
Learning from mistakes	10	14
Navigating higher education	5	10
Overcoming financial barriers	7	9
Paying for educational opportunities	10	13
Persevering through academic struggles	11	14
Persevering with the help of social supports	4	7
Positive perceptions of DACA	4	6
Preparing for employment and advancement	4	9
Reticence about DACA-student status	2	2
Sense of obligation to family	5	7
Taking advantage of student life opportunities	4	8

The third step of the analysis involved pattern coding, in which the initial codes were grouped into a smaller number of more comprehensive themes to indicate overarching patterns of meaning in the data (see Braun et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2009). Pattern coding consisted of clustering similar or related initial codes. The 21 initial codes were grouped into seven themes during this step. Table 5 indicates how the initial codes were grouped to form the themes.

Table 5

Grouping of Initial Codes Into Themes During Pattern Coding

Theme Code grouped to form theme (listed alphabetically)	*n* of participants contributing ($N = 11$)	*n* of transcript excerpts included
Theme 1. Displaying guts by declaring immigration status	11	40
Declaring status to educate peers about DACA		
Disclosing immigration status to peers		
Decision to be open about DACA-student status		
Reticence about DACA-student status		
Positive perceptions of DACA		
Theme 2. Displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion	8	14
Persevering with the help of social supports		
Determination and focusing on goals		
Theme 3. Displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities	11	21
Paying for educational opportunities		
Taking advantage of student life opportunities		
Theme 4. Displaying tenacity by persevering despite financial and knowledge barriers	11	54
Learning from mistakes		
Navigating higher education		
College as different learning environment		
Overcoming financial barriers		
Persevering through academic struggles		
Theme 5. Having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges	11	17
Foresight regarding the financial demands of college		
Easing the transition into higher education		
Theme 6. Progressing toward valued, long-term goals	11	35
Enabling the pursuit of ambitions		
Expanding knowledge and skills		
Preparing for employment and advancement		
Theme 7. Effects on friendships and family	11	17
Finding supportive community		
Sense of obligation to family		

The fourth step of the analysis consisted of reviewing and refining the themes (see Braun et al., 2014). The final steps involved a detailed analysis of the data to refine categories within themes to identify and clarify the significance of the themes as answers to the research questions. Table 6 indicates how the themes were aligned with the research questions.

Table 6

Theme and Research Question Alignment

Research question Theme used to answer research question	*n* of participants contributing ($N = 11$)	*n* of transcript excerpts included
RQ1. What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students?	11	129
Theme 1. Displaying guts by declaring immigration status		
Theme 2. Displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion		
Theme 3. Displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities		
Theme 4. Displaying tenacity by persevering in college despite financial and knowledge barriers		
RQ2. What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college?	11	17
Theme 5. Having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges		
RQ3. What motivates DACA students to persist and complete?	11	52
Theme 6. Progressing toward valued, long-term goals		
Theme 7. Effects on friendships and family		

Findings

This presentation of the findings is organized by research question. Within the discussion related to each research question, the findings are organized by theme. The discussion of each theme includes evidence for the findings in the form of direct quotations from the data.

Research Question 1

RQ1 was the following: What Characteristics of GRIT Are Displayed by DACA Students? The acronym GRIT is used to refer to the characteristics Guts, Resilience, Initiative, and Tenacity (Kaplan Thaler & Koval, 2015). Four subthemes emerged during data analysis to answer the first research question, including (a) displaying guts by declaring immigration status,

(b) displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion, (d) displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities, and (d) displaying tenacity by persevering in college despite financial and knowledge barriers. The following subsections are discussions of these themes.

Theme 1. Displaying Guts by Declaring Immigration Status

The GRIT characteristic of guts consists of having the confidence to take calculated risks and to be daring without being reckless (Kaplan Thaler & Koval, 2015). Guts involve having the courage and determination to risk personal stakes when the outcome is uncertain. All 11 participants stated that they displayed guts when they declared their immigration statuses despite the risks that the people they told would shame them or express disapproval. For example, CFP009 stated the following of his college classmates: “A lot of them aren't really educated on what DACA is.” CFP009 declared his status as a DACA recipient to provide information about it during a presidential election: “The topic of DACA came up because it was the presidential elections. And I told [peers], ‘Hey, I'm a DACA recipient,’ and . . . I told them what it was because I don't want them to be misinformed.” The risk of declaring his DACA status was worthwhile for him personally, as CFP009 stated he was prepared to offer himself as an example of the executive order’s benefits: “I want [people] to know what [DACA] is and how it helped me.”

For most participants, having the guts to declare their immigration statuses was worth the risks that they would incur stigma themselves because offering themselves as a humanizing example was perceived to reduce the stigma for other DACA recipients. As CFP002 stated, “[DACA is] something that not a lot of people know about firsthand. If I can educate other people about it, I feel like I'm doing my part to take away some of the stigma.” Even with this

important goal, participants experienced a sense of risk when they declared their statuses. TCP007 described her anxiety when she first declared her status as a DACA recipient:

> A summer ago, with my new friends I've made in college, I hadn't talked about my immigration status, but we were talking . . . [and] I told them. I remember my voice was shaky and I was really nervous, and I was like, "Yeah, I have DACA status."

Like CFP002, TCP007 described herself as wanting to declare her DACA-recipient status to dispel any stigma and offer herself as a humanizing example of other individuals with that status: "Right now, I am more comfortable talking about my immigration status because I think it's important for my peers to know, 'Hey, any DACA student could be one of your friends or somebody you already go to college with.'"

CFP010 shared a similar experience where she displayed guts in declaring her DACA student status to contribute to destigmatizing and demystifying it: "It's difficult to actually share with people. I have to know that I can trust them very well even though I kind of like throw it out that I'm a DACA student or like a DACA person." Declaring her status involved the risk and vulnerability of a personal disclosure, as CFP010 stated, It's kind of like you're opening up a little more than you normally to them." CFP010 reported that people she declared her DACA-student status to were often surprised: "They're like, 'What is that?' Because a lot of people have ignorance . . . then they ask so many questions." The outcome of CFP010's disclosure was to make the status of DACA recipients personal and relevant to the people she told: "Now they know, they have somebody personal, it's like, 'Oh. Let me take a moment and now realize, okay, so how does this affect you?'"

Participants' motivations in declaring their immigration statuses were not always political. KWP003 reported the following about when she was growing up: "When I would make

friends that were white, I was always very nervous to tell them my immigration status because I felt their parents might have a problem with it, or if something personal happened, they might report it." An additional barrier was that the people around KWP003 were often uninformed about the DACA program: "It's just a very difficult thing to discuss because they're not familiar with the concept or the whole program." KWP003 experienced her childhood fear of disclosing her immigration status as part of a barrier to forming intimacies with people that resulted from a fear that her parents' undocumented status would be discovered: "I couldn't really socialize with [people in my neighborhood] and especially not tell them about my immigration status because I was scared." When KWP003 found a trusted friend with whom she felt comfortable taking the risk of declaring her immigration status, the result was a strengthening of their friendship:

> [My disclosing] helped her understand why I never wanted to go certain places or sign up for things like voting. I was just comfortable with her, and I could tell I could trust her . . . to this day, we're still friends.

Theme 2. Displaying Resiliency by Overcoming Setbacks to College Completion

Eight out of 11 participants described obstacles that made their educations more difficult to continue, including health and financial barriers. By focusing their determination and overcoming those obstacles, these eight participants displayed resiliency, which Kaplan Thaler and Koval (2015) defined as the ability to stay focused and motivated, no matter what failures, obstacles, or adversities.

KWP003 reported the obstacle of flagging motivation and loss of drive: "I think my biggest breaking point was in the spring whenever I just got in this funk because I couldn't figure out my major and I felt like I was just throwing my money away." As KWP003's doubts about remaining in college grew worse, her diligence and academic performance declined: "With that

kind of mindset, I started to fail my classes, I started dropping my classes and didn't really show up to class, and overall, I just lost my motivation." KWP003 made progress in resolving her doubts by renewing an interest in the program of study in which she later decided to major and discussing the program with an advisor: "I ended up finding out about the program again, and when I spoke with the advisor about it, she said I would be fine in that program, and I could actually do it." A renewed interest in her studies allowed KWP003 to reengage with college and succeed academically: "I was able to get back on my feet and then have a fresh start in the fall, and with that goal in mind, I was able to be more successful in my classes."

CFP008 encountered an obstacle in the highly competitive nature of her associate degree program, and the resulting stress put her completion of the degree at risk: "The program I was in was really competitive . . . Through that, I experienced a lot of health issues, my mental health, because it was so much different and so much pressure that I was not used to." Determination to earn her degree prevented CFP008 from giving up: "It's just definitely that drive that I have, that no matter what happens, I needed to go through this and just be fully into it until I reached my goal because I worked so hard for it." Recognizing that she needed to reach out for supports if she was going to complete her program, CFP008 sought the resources she needed to sustain her resiliency:

> [Through] my willingness to reach out to people and tell them what was going on with me, and how they could help me better, I was lucky that I had a lot of mentors and a lot of people who were looking out for me.

CFP011 experienced an interruption of her education because of financial barriers and the need to work two jobs: "I stopped going for a year or year and a half, and when I stopped, I wanted to come back next semester. That didn't happen." Recognizing the inevitability of

obstacles and focusing on her determination to succeed allowed CFP011 to display resiliency. CFP011 expressed the need for resiliency: “We're going to have hard times . . . But if you're willing to get your degree, you will, you'll do it.” Of sustaining resiliency through determination and a focus on goals, CFP011 said, “I was really determined. When I went back [to college], that was because I knew I wanted to, I had started something for a reason, and I wasn't going to stop until it was done.”

Theme 3. Displaying Initiative by Taking Advantage of Opportunities

Kaplan Thaler and Koval (2015) defined initiative as the trait of being a self-starter. Participants in this study reported that they displayed their initiatives by taking advantage of opportunities available to them as DACA recipients and students. As DACA recipients, participants could pursue their educations, and they displayed initiatives by seizing on that opportunity and further opportunities that their statuses as students opened.

CFP008 reported that her undocumented parents did not have the means to pay for her college tuitions, expenses, and fees. Thus, CFP008 displayed initiative by seeking the financial support she needed: “I had to find a way to fund my own education. So, I just looked through a lot of scholarships, and luckily, I was placed in a scholarship program at [the college].” CFP009 described his determination to make the most of his opportunity to earn a degree: “I want to be someone that came to this country and went and got their education and then pursued more.” Like CFP008, CFP009 needed to find ways to pay for college, which his parents could not afford. CFP009’s independence allowed him to display initiative in earning the money he needed and applying it to his education: “I'm really independent. My parents, they didn't pay for my DACA stuff. It was all me. And when I do that, I feel more independent, and I feel like I can do things by myself.” KWP003 also took the initiative to make the most of her educational

opportunities by earning money to make earning her degree financially feasible: “I work a lot, and because I pay for my own classes and there isn't really a lot of financial aid for, at least that I know of, for DACA students.” Investing her own money in her education enhanced KWP003’s determination to succeed: “I definitely do tell myself that I already paid this much money, there's no way I can just bum this class and forget about it.”

Participants also displayed initiative by taking advantage of the opportunities that being a student opened to them. KWP003, who joined student clubs and participated in fundraisers, described taking the initiative to connect to student groups as advantageous to DACA students: “It's really good to attend events and get involved with organizations because you make connections or you meet people that want to help, and they do.” Connecting with student groups could also build morale and contribute to feelings of belonging for DACA students, as KWP003 said, “It really improves your way of feeling about your situation. If you feel intimidated or just maybe vulnerable with your status, reaching out to people or organizations and getting involved really has really benefited me.” CFP002 joined psychology, sociology, women-in-biology, and community-outreach student clubs, and she said the experience pleasantly surprised her: “I wasn't expecting there to be such a strong student life kind of community.” The effects of joining student clubs were partly to broaden her perspective, as CFP002 said, “I think it really helped me meet a lot of different people that I wouldn't have gotten to meet otherwise, and just being exposed to different cultures and different perspectives was really good for me.”

Theme 4. Displaying Tenacity by Persevering in College Despite Financial and Knowledge Barriers

Kaplan Thaler and Koval (2015) defined tenacity as the ability to maintain focus on a goal and be relentless in pursuing it. Participants in this study displayed their tenacity by

persevering in college despite financial and knowledge barriers to their success. Financial barriers were associated with the challenge of paying for college. CFP005 displayed her tenacity by persevering despite the obstacles encountered when trying to pay for her education, taking the initiative to seek guidance and find a solution:

> As a DACA student, I would say my obstacle was financial aid. I needed some sort of help. And in my high school at least, they only really talked about FAFSA, which I am not eligible for. So, I had to go talk to my counselor personally. And I was like, "What can I do to get help?" And she recommended to go to the college . . . . then they helped me fill out the TAFSA [not to apply for federal aid, but to receive a State Aid, which must be submitted when applying for many scholarships and grants].

Participants who displayed tenacity in overcoming knowledge barriers reported that as first-generation U.S. college students, they were not initially familiar with college procedures and practices, and their knowledge gap presented them with obstacles other students might not have faced. CFP009 described the challenges he met with as a first-generation student: "The process of going to college is kind of difficult because I'm first-generation . . . Even talking to my counselor, he didn't really help out a lot . . . no one was there to help me." As examples of specific knowledge gaps, CFP009 displayed tenacity: "I was coming in fresh. I didn't know a lot . . . It was really hard to understand how you have to do your classes, how you have to do financial aid, you need to get your shots." CFP009 saw the rewards for his tenacity after seeking peers' advice on how to navigate the college bureaucracy: "It was kind of hard at the beginning, but as soon as I started developing, like knowing what to do, it became easier."

CFP002's knowledge gaps became barriers as soon as she applied for college admission: "The application process, I didn't fully know what I was doing when I first applied, and I had to

go it alone. Like my family didn't know how to help me, so they couldn't, really." Thus, CFP002 displayed tenacity in seeking help from counselors and advisors. CFP002 reported that when entering college, the challenges of finding the correct channels for seeking advice in the complex bureaucracy required tenacity:

> I don't love having to ask other people for help, but it's also that I'm not fully aware of who to go to. In school, there's advisors and there's different offices and there's different levels of advisors, and it takes a while to get in touch with anybody, and it takes a while to really know who you should be talking to about what.

UPP001 found entrance into college disorienting because higher levels of self-reliance and initiative in seeking information were expected than had been the case during high school: "Definitely my first year, I was expecting to depend on somebody to guide me, but it was more you guide yourself and you just kind of ask questions and go from there." UPP001 displayed tenacity in overcoming her barrier through personal growth: "In college, you're more guiding yourself, rather than having somebody guide you, so it's a lot more personal growth, a lot more investigating by yourself."

NHP004 encountered a knowledge barrier related to the math curriculum, resulting in a need to take a remedial class. Being placed in a course that she perceived as the "dumber class" hurt NHP004's pride: "I thought I was good at math, and I loved math, but I had no idea what math was. That was probably the hardest hit." NHP004 needed to display tenacity by persevering in the class despite her embarrassment to continue her education: "I really had to humble myself down, pay attention to all the homework, give it 100%. I was able to pass the class with an A."

Research Question 2

RQ2 was the following: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college? The theme that emerged during data analysis was the following: having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges. The following subsection is a discussion of this theme. Evidence for the finding from the data is presented.

Theme 5. Having the Initiative to Prepare in Advance for College Challenges

All 11 participants provided responses indicating that having the initiative to prepare in advance for the challenges of college was the GRIT characteristic that influenced them to access a community college. Before they entered college, participants foresaw that they would encounter challenges related to paying for their education and navigating an unfamiliar institution. The participants reported that their preferences during high school were to attend a 4-year university, but they chose to attend a community college because it was within their financial means. They perceived it as an opportunity to learn about the unfamiliar expectations and procedures of college before entering a potentially larger, more complex, and more competitive institution.

TCP007 reported that in high school, she aimed to attend a nationally prestigious university, but she was unprepared to meet the high admission standards or bear the expense. TCP007 took the initiative of attending a community college, where she could improve her academic record and increase her loan eligibility by building a credit record:

> I wanted to go to University of Texas at Austin. I knew that was really expensive, and I knew it was really hard to get into. And my grades weren't that well after freshman year of high school, so I knew I wouldn't make it. Plus, even if I made it, there's still the

financial situation of, “How would I get a loan, because I don't have a credit [history]? I'm just starting out.”

An additional way in which initiative influenced TCP007 to access a community college was the prospect of a tuition waiver and debt avoidance: “Because of the Honors College, I was able to have my first two years of college paid. So, I didn't have to pay anything. I thought that was really smart because I don't like debt.” TCP007 also accessed a community college to take the initiative to remain with her family and meet her obligations to them while staying close to a support system where she could make decisions about her future: “I was going to stay with my family, and I would be able to support them financially, and then staying with them to think about what I wanted to major in and everything.”

KWP003 reported that her ambition was “to go to a 4-year university, just because you hear most of your friends, your peers, are always going to dorms, and moving in or moving out, and going to different cities or even states.” However, KWP003 knew that money would be a barrier to attending a 4-year university: “I didn't have any savings . . . I couldn't really afford it, or it just felt very farfetched for me.” Taking the initiative to access a community college allowed KWP003 to circumvent her anticipated financial barriers and continue her education. KWP003 said that her determination to earn a degree impelled her to take this initiative because “I didn't want to not end up going to college.”

CFP009 knew there would be financial barriers to attending a 4-year university, and he perceived accessing a community college as an opportunity to save money: “I really just want to save money, and, at the same time, be able to take the classes [more affordably] that I know I can take at a 4-year university.” Taking the initiative to access a community college was also a means of preparing to navigate the anticipated academic and other demands of college, as

CFP009 stated, “I see it as a steppingstone. Obviously, I didn't go to a 4-year school right away, but in going to the community college, I feel like it's preparing me for what's coming [4-year university].” Remaining geographically close to the area where he had grown up was also an expression of initiative. In staying there, CFP009 kept himself in a position to draw on familiar peers’ experiences to address his knowledge gaps: “I know a lot of people that have gone to [the college], and . . . I had an inside view because I knew people who went to that school.”

For UPP001, having the initiative to prepare herself for a 4-year university influenced her to access a community college: “What made me go to [the college] at first is I definitely went in with the mentality that my first two years were going to be hard on me. I didn't know what to expect in college.” UPP001 expressed that she lacked adequate preparation for a 4-year university: “I was fresh out of high school . . . That, for me, was like I was a baby in my college classes . . . I wasn't ready for a 4-year school.” UPP001 said the following of the initiative that influenced her to access a community college: “I needed smaller classrooms, just to see how I fit in, how I made myself fit in, and how everything worked. I'm grateful I chose a 2-year instead of going straight to a 4-year.”

Research Question 3

RQ3 was the following: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete? Two themes emerged during data analysis to answer this research question. The relevant themes were the following: progressing toward valued, long-term goals and effects on friendships and family. The following subsections contain discussions of these themes.

Theme 6. Progressing Toward Valued, Long-Term Goals

All 11 participants reported that perceiving themselves as advancing toward valued, personal goals through their community college successes motivated them to persist and

complete. For example, TCP007 perceived herself as advancing toward career goals, such as leadership development through her community college experiences: “Through my journey through college, I hope to acquire the skillset to help me start my career and cope with difficult situations. An example would be becoming more of a leader.” CFP011 was motivated to persist and complete because of the knowledge gained in college by “going to classes and getting the most of it, maybe not just in class, but from the teachers, how they communicate, and to have other skills, [like] they're showing you how to look for [information] online.”

UPP001 also highly valued the advances made toward her long-term goal of becoming a doctor, so she was motivated to persist and complete because she was gaining “preparedness for my 4-year college and for medical school . . . I just mean growth, learning as much as I can there [in community college], and just taking advantage of all the opportunities that it provides us.” CFP009 was motivated to persist and complete because community college contributed to the knowledge of business and finances that he needed to advance toward his long-term goals: “A big goal for me is I want to invest money, like flipping houses, real estate . . . to own land . . . to know how to use my money, to invest in a retirement fund.” CFP009 clarified that his ambitions were still general, but he wanted to surpass the expectations his parents had for themselves: “I don't know exactly where I want to go with a career, but I want to be a lot more than what my parents imagined.” CFP006 was motivated to persist and complete by the goal of advancing in his current field of employment: “I've been looking for jobs that I could qualify for. I know they have to be entry-level jobs that don't pay that well, but it could go up later on after getting my degree.”

The valued long-term goal that motivated NHP004 to persist and complete was to gain the knowledge and skills she needed to earn an income that would ensure security for herself and

her young son: “A long-term goal, I want to have a stable income, to have a stable house . . . Not jump to a house, because that's a little hard, but have a stable home for [my son].” CFP005 was motivated to persist and continue by the long-term goal of helping children with experiences like hers: “Long-term, I want to be a social worker. Specifically, I want to work with children. I just want to be out helping children, possibly who are in the same situation that I am, undocumented parents. That really motivates me.”

Theme 7. Effects of Friendships and Family

All 11 participants reported that effects of their community college attendance on their relationships with other people motivated them to persist and complete. Two types of relationships were relevant. Within the context of their families, participants were influenced to make their parents proud, provide financial assistance to family, and set examples for siblings. Within the context of college-based relationships, participants were motivated by the stimulating and encouraging friendships that they formed with faculty and peers.

CFP008 was motivated to persist and complete by her supportive relationships with college faculty, from which she derived “a sense of family and community, because I felt like I was really supported.” CFP008 elaborated on the nature of her relationships with faculty in referring to their personal and supportive nature: “I really felt like professors had my back and I was not just a number, but they really knew who I was, and they wanted to help me to the best in my power to be.” CFP010 was motivated to persist and complete by the “friendship and mentors” in community college. She said the following of the mentors she found among her instructors: “The teachers, we kind of bonded. We had that teacher-student thing where I could talk about, ‘This is what's going on,’ and they will give you feedback.”

CFP010 said the following of the friends she made in college and their effect on motivating her to persist and complete: “The friendship with people that you were surrounded by, the other students, the classmates, because you had teamwork and because you're learning something.” CFP011 was also motivated to persist and complete by the friends she made in community college: “I've met a lot of friends . . . it is a positive thing because I was able to share my time with my classmates. It helped me develop more social skills.”

In the context of their family relationships, participants were motivated by the influence their persistence and completion exerted in making their parents proud and inspiring their younger siblings. CFP005 said her parents were proud of her success as a first-generation college student: “My parents are very proud of me, being the first one to go into college in my family . . . they've just finished until high school in Mexico.” CFP005 added the following about setting an example: “I am the oldest, and I'm just setting an example for my brother because he's younger than me. He's 10. So yeah, that makes me proud.” TCP007 said the following about the motivating influence of making her father proud: “My dad always wanted us to finish college. That's a motivator to be like, ‘Hey, dad, I made it.’” TCP007 was motivated to persist and complete by “being an example to my siblings, like, ‘Hey, we can actually do this.’ They can actually have hope for a higher education.” TCP007 looked forward to the positive example she would set for her brother: “If I finish through my four years and I'm able to help my brother whenever he's going to try to go to college or graduate high school. That definitely encourages me.”

Summary

Three research questions were used to guide this study. RQ1 was the following: What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students? Four themes emerged during data

analysis indicating that participants displayed all four elements of GRIT: displaying guts by declaring immigration status, displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion, displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities, and displaying tenacity by persevering in college despite financial and knowledge. RQ2 was the following: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college? The following theme that emerged during data analysis to answer this question: having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges. This theme indicated that initiative was the most influential characteristic of GRIT in DACA students' decisions to access community college. RQ3 was the following: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete? Two themes emerged during data analysis to answer this research question: progressing toward valued, long-term goals and effects on friendships and family. Chapter 5 includes discussions and implications based on these findings.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Summary of the Study

This chapter summary of the study presents a detailed discussion of results. Specifically, this chapter provides a summary and discussion of the results of the study, as well as a review of the methodology, major findings, relating the findings to the literature. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion to summarize this chapter.

Overview of the Problem

A preponderant number of DACA students face financial obstacles while pursuing a college degree (Bjorklund, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; Katsiaficas et al., 2019; O'Neal et al., 2016; Teranishi et al., 2015). Researchers have outlined guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) as characteristics of DACA students that contribute to their overall academic success (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2016). However, there is a gap in current literature regarding the impact of GRIT on DACA students' academic success (Credé et al., 2017; O'Neal et al., 2016). It is not known which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students display or whether these characteristics influence their access to community colleges or motivation to persist and complete college.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. As aligned with the literature found on this topic, the

following research questions were used to determine if GRIT plays a role in student success among DACA students attending a 2-year community college:

RQ1: What characteristics of GRIT are displayed by DACA students?

RQ2: What characteristics of GRIT influence DACA students to access a community college?

RQ3: What motivates DACA students to persist and complete?

Review of the Methodology

The methodology used to conduct this study and answer the research questions is a qualitative phenomenological research design. The overall objective of this study is to investigate the level of grittiness among community college DACA students to provide insight on the college experience regarding access, success, and completion. According to Patton (2015), a qualitative phenomenological research approach is best suited in cases where the researcher aims to gather a variety of perspectives through participants' lived experiences. Thus, through a phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to gather insights on the focused topic through the lived experiences of immigrant students classified as DACA-eligible. Phenomenology research commonly utilizes in-depth interviews of a relatively small number of people (Patton, 2015), like the current study (the participants for this study was 11 students). Using a series of open-ended questions for each interview, the researcher attempted to explore how DACA-eligible students attending a 2-year community college possess GRIT to help build a resilient attitude during a time they are overcoming setbacks while in college. Through this qualitative phenomenological research, the findings may provide significant insights on the lived experiences of DACA-eligible students and their personal hurdles to succeed in higher education.

Major Findings

Three research questions were used to guide this study. In relation to the first research question, there were four major sub-themes found in the data analysis process: (a) displaying guts by declaring immigration status, (b) displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion, (c) displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities, and (d) displaying tenacity by persevering in college despite financial and knowledge barriers. Most participants concurred that having the guts by declaring their immigration statuses was worth the risk that they would incur stigma themselves. Additionally, most participants reported displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion, as they reported various health and financial obstacles in achieving their education goals. Another major finding in relation to the first research question is that most of the participants displayed their initiatives by taking advantage of the opportunities available to them as a DACA recipient and as a student. Thus, participants could pursue their educations despite their faced obstacles, both financially and physically. Another significant finding was that all participants reported displaying tenacity by persevering in college despite financial and knowledge barriers—a significant finding as the participants were first-generation U.S. college students without adequate knowledge and resources for navigating through college.

In relation to the second research question, there was one major subtheme found in the data analysis process. All participants noted that having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges was the primary GRIT characteristic that influenced them to access a community college. This finding underscores the importance of foresight and advance planning, which are crucial aspects of students taking initiative to plan and prepare for foreseen challenges in college, such as navigating unfamiliar institutions or paying their tuitions. Most responses in

relation to the second research question were related to having the initiative to prepare for a 4-year university by first enrolling to a community college identified as a way of preparation for enrolling at a 4-year university.

In relation to the third research question, there were two major subthemes found in the data analysis process: progressing toward valued, long-term goals and effects on friendships and family. All participants reported that they perceived themselves as progressing toward valued, long-term goals, which ultimately enabled and motivated them to persist and pursue college completion. Overall, all participants noted and acknowledged that they could learn the necessary knowledge in college that helps them to achieve their respective long-term goals; ultimately, all participants reported that progressing toward valued, long-term goals enabled them to achieve stability and financial security in the long run. Another significant finding in relation to the third research question was that all the participants reported that the impact of their community college attendance of their relationships with other people motivated them to persist and complete. College-based relationships or friendships and family relationships motivated all participants to persist in achieving their academic goal, enabling them to persist through their faced hurdles in community college.

Overall, the results of this study showed that all four elements of GRIT were significant and relevant to DACA students in persisting through their academic goals. Among the four elements of GRIT, initiative was identified as the most influential characteristic in DACA students' decision to access community college. However, regarding persisting through community college; completing their academic goals, relationships (e.g., friendships and family); and progressing toward valued, long-term goals were reported as the most significant factors that motivated DACA students.

Findings Related to the Literature

The major findings of this study fit within the GRIT framework. Identifying key components of the theory within the context of GRIT characteristics provides application into the lived experiences of the DACA students in a 2-year community college in Texas in this study. Various researchers suggested the value of focusing on GRIT as characteristics of students who face unique financial obstacles while pursuing a college degree such as DACA students in this study (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Dornhecker, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2016). The GRIT framework helps explain the thoughts and characteristics of DACA students regarding their perspectives and lived experiences of persisting and completing community college. This theory was confirmed in the data gathered and analyzed for this study. Bjorklund (2018), Katsiaficas et al. (2019), and O'Neal et al. (2016) asserted how DACA students continue to face unique financial obstacles while pursuing a college degree, impacting the educational and financial effects that afflict this susceptible population. The GRIT framework explains how developed GRIT allow individuals to persist and overcome personal, financial, and legal challenges, such as those faced by DACA students, relating to higher education (Credé et al., 2017). Including the GRIT perspective in the context of higher education for DACA students provides an extensive view of the significant impact that GRIT has on the lives of DACA students who experience significant personal, financial, and legal barriers as they pursue higher education in a 2-year community college.

The major themes found in this study are aligned to previous literature on GRIT. Characteristics of GRIT were applied by DACA students, which helped them persist and overcome setbacks to college completion. This finding was in line with other studies that showed the benefits of GRIT and its impact on students' academic success (Kaplan Thaler & Koval, 2015; O'Neal et al., 2016). Findings by Duckworth (2004) and Zentner et al. (2016) showed that

individuals with higher levels of grittiness are more likely to succeed and persist through rigorous trainings and challenges. GRIT is identified as a significant non-cognitive factor that impacts student performance, as well as their drive to overcome challenges in education settings (Bowman et al., 2015; Zentner et al., 2016). As such, the findings of this study on GRIT aligned with past literature, underscoring the value of grit in higher education among DACA students (Duckworth, 2004; Zentner et al., 2016). However, this study was one of the first studies to focus on DACA students and the importance of using characteristics of GRIT among this cohort. The first study was conducted by O'Neal et al. (2016); however, only 44 of 264 participants in the study were DACA students, and this group was not separated for analysis from the other participants all of whom were Latina/o and first-generation students. This finding shows that there remains a lack of research on this topic, focusing on wider student groups. Nonetheless, this information provides empirical data regarding the need to focus on more DACA students given the significance of GRIT in helping students succeed and persist in higher education.

Findings that underscored the impact of relationships in school and families on DACA students are also aligned with past literature. In the current study, one of the major themes was that relationships, such as friendships and family, were the most significant factors that motivated DACA students in persisting and completing community college. J. Roberts (2016) reported that students gave credit to their parents and siblings for providing the motivation necessary for them to pursue their goals, while Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) and Perez et al. (200) identified peer support as significantly impactful on helping students persist in public and private colleges. Thus, the current study's findings on DACA students and GRIT expands the current body of literature on the impact of relationships such as friendships and family on students' motivation to succeed and persist in higher education.

Other major themes found in this study are among the first findings and conclusions on GRIT among DACA students. For example, one major theme found in this study entailed progressing toward valued, long-term goals; other major themes found included having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges and displaying tenacity by persevering despite financial and knowledge barriers. These findings contribute to the existing body of literature, as no previous studies have focused on these aspects and perceptions among DACA students in higher education (Chavez Reyes, 2018; Credé et al., 2017; O'Neal et al., 2016). The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the most significant factors that motivate DACA students in community college, overcoming challenges related to finances and knowledge. These findings add to the body knowledge, noting the importance of DACA students' GRIT to overcome personal, financial, and legal challenges during their academic journey.

Furthermore, all the participants reported financial issues such as paying for college. This finding is consistent with past literature, noting how DACA students often rely on community colleges because they are more affordable (Bradley, 2012; Got Papers? Got Dreams?, 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). This factor of financial constraints is detrimental and acts as barriers to achieving DACA students' educational goals. Adding to this literature and current findings, the respondents in this study reported that having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges such as having foresight regarding the financial demands of college is impactful and significant in helping them transition and persist into higher education. As such, this finding adds to existing literature, specifically for DACA students, noting how having the initiative to prepare in advance for college fosters access and persistence in community college. Through the initiative characteristic, DACA students can gain a sense of preparedness and determination to

earn their degree. This is significant as financial barriers to attending a 4-year university is common among DACA students, which easily discourages them from pursuing a degree in higher education (Bradley, 2012; Got Papers? Got Dreams?, 2017). This major theme emerged in every interview.

The major findings from the 8-Item Grit Scale showed that the average final score across the study sample was 3.41. This finding means that eight out of eleven participants in the study had an average level of grittiness between very gritty and somewhat gritty (having a mid to high level of grit ranging from 3.00 to 5.00). The interview findings showed that all participants were first-generation college students. The study also revealed that the 8-Item Grit Scale perseverance of effort was positively associated among all 11 participants in the following items: “I am a hard worker,” “I finish whatever I begin,” and “I am diligent.” These GRIT scores are in line with the responses to the interview questions among those who scored high. For example, one participant reported that the determination to earn a degree prevented her from giving up: “It's just definitely that drive that I have, that no matter what happens, I needed to through this and just be fully into it until I reached my goal because I worked so hard for it.” Furthermore, the interview responses indicated how ambitious the participants who scored between very gritty and somewhat gritty were, setting their sights on a higher goal, noting: “A big goal for me is I want to invest money, like flipping houses, real estate . . . to own land . . . to know how to use my money, to invest in a retirement fund,” and “A long-term goal, I want to have a stable income, to have a stable house . . . Not jump to a house, because that's a little hard, but have a stable home for [my son].” The high ratings of grit were also explained by motivations to persist and complete what they have begun, specifically due to supportive relationships with the faculty members: “I really felt like professors had my back and I was not just a number, but they really knew who I was and they

wanted to help me to the best in my power to be," and "The teachers, we kind of bonded. We had that teacher-student thing where I could talk about, 'This is what's going on,' and they will give you feedback."

On the other hand, three out of eleven participants in the study scored low in terms of grittiness. Their low levels of self-reported grittiness were further examined and explained during the interviews. For instance, one of the participants scored low in setting a goal and then not choosing a different one, with a rating of 1. This finding was explained during the interview regarding progressing toward valued, long-term goals, to which he answered specifically in relation to his qualifications and the desired employment: "I've been looking for jobs that I could qualify for. I know they have to be entry-level jobs that don't pay that well, but it could go up later on after getting my degree." Another participant rated lowest (rating of 1) in not getting discouraged by setbacks. This finding was explained by the participant in her interview:

> I think my biggest breaking point was in the spring whenever I just got in this funk because I couldn't figure out my major and I felt like I was just throwing my money away…. I started to fail my classes, I started dropping my classes and didn't really show up to class, and overall I just lost my motivation.

In addition, two other participants rated lowest in not letting new ideas and projects distract them from previous ones. One participant explained that this distraction was mostly because of financial barriers and the need to work two jobs: "I stopped going for a year or year and a half, and when I stopped, I wanted to come back next semester. That didn't happen." The other participant who rated lowest in not letting new ideas and projects distract them from previous ones also noted similarly during the interview, explaining that the challenge of financial

barriers requires the need to work more: “I work a lot … there isn't really a lot of financial aid for, at least that I know of, for DACA students.”

However, all three participants had their highest level of grittiness on being a diligent worker, with a self-reported level of 4 to 5. The three participants were also first-generation students. Their self-reported high scores in hard work were in line with their interview responses, indicating hard work as key to their success in higher education. Some of the interview responses from these three participants regarding their grittiness being in hard work include: “I work a lot…because I pay for my own classes,” and “We're going to have hard times . . . But if you're willing to get your degree, you will, you'll do it.”

Overall, the self-reported GRIT scores are in line with the responses to the interview questions, as indicated and explained within the quotes above. This qualitative phenomenological study of DACA students and their characteristics of GRIT in community college serves to support and extend the limited studies conducted on the characteristics of GRIT, as well as its impacts, specifically among DACA students in a 2-year community college (see O’Neal et al., 2016).

Implications

This study of the experiences of DACA students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas who attended during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters showed several implications for theory, and the knowledge base for student counselors, educators, and related professionals in the field. The level of understanding of the application of the GRIT framework will be beneficial to others seeking to identify the GRIT characteristics displayed in DACA students (O’Neal et al., 2016). The research conducted using the GRIT framework suggests that DACA students who apply GRIT characteristics and attend a community college can achieve

success in higher education (Duckworth, 2004; O'Neal et al., 2016; Zentner et al., 2016). The findings of this research could also help DACA students, particularly as they face unique and multiple barriers to academic success (Credé et al., 2017). Also, the results of this study could help DACA students develop their GRIT characteristics (O'Neal et al., 2016). By developing GRIT characteristics, DACA students are more capable and equipped in overcoming failures and challenges, helping propel them towards their career objectives and personal goals.

With the number of DACA individuals increasing, there will be a continuing need among counselor educators and teachers in the field of education to understand DACA students and the impact GRIT has on their success in higher education (Capps et al., 2015). Their experiences are unique, as DACA students face unique complexities related to documentation and their continued education (American Immigration Council, 2010). With the knowledge of GRIT characteristics and their impact on DACA students in higher education, counselors and teachers who work with DACA students should consider using GRIT to help such students succeed better. There is lack of information regarding which GRIT characteristics, if any, DACA students display or whether these characteristics influence their access to community colleges or motivation to persist and complete college, which results in insufficient knowledge available to counselors and educators who work with this population (Credé et al., 2017; O'Neal et al., 2016). As such, it appears the educational professionals and counselors have not had sufficient information to properly help DACA students who are working to access community colleges and to persist and complete college. Therefore, it is imperative to train teachers and counselors who work with DACA students to use GRIT information to help DACA students succeed. Any additional resources and programs administered by teachers and counselors who work with

DACA students may develop DACA students' GRIT characteristics, providing significant help for this unique cohort.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative phenomenological research study provided 11 DACA students who attended a 2-year community college in Texas who attended during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters the opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions regarding GRIT characteristics and how these have helped in their academic journey in community college. The six-step thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data and the resulting information will contribute to expanding the knowledge and level of understanding through the GRIT framework. Seven key themes emerged that provide specific experiences that were common among the participants. Counseling professionals and professionals in the field of education working with the DACA student population are provided with more in-depth knowledge of the specific benefits of GRIT characteristics in terms of persistence and determination to complete their higher education goals, propelling the way for improved academic outcomes, as well as implementation of programs and approaches to develop GRIT, specifically to assist this cohort.

Recommendations for further research include studying the ways in which GRIT characteristics (guts, resilience, initiative, and tenacity) of DACA students may be developed, as well as identifying what skills are most needed by DACA students in improving their access to community colleges and motivation to persist and complete college. The number of undocumented students attending community colleges and state universities is increasing in the United States (Perez et al., 2010), and an exploration into the specific skills and needed programs that could benefit this population group would be valuable. This serves as a means of broadening

the current understanding of how DACA students can be helped as they face unique challenges and specific barriers in pursuing higher education.

Another area for consideration for further research would be more research studies focusing on the DACA student population, as only one study has been found that focuses on DACA students and academic outcomes related to GRIT (O'Neal et al., 2016). However, O'Neal et al. (2016) focused on only the Latina/o first-generation student population. Exploring this topic among various, mixed races as part of the overall student population in higher education could provide beneficial information. Expanding the student population group to other colleges and other non-citizen first-generation students could provide more empirical information and knowledge on DACA students and the academic outcomes related to GRIT as they persist and complete their academic objectives in higher education.

Conclusion

Current literature on DACA students and the GRIT phenomenon is scarce, especially related to personal, financial, and legal barriers as it relates to higher education (Credé et al., 2017; O'Neal et al., 2016). There is very little available in past research and academic literature regarding this topic. This qualitative phenomenological study was developed to explore the GRIT characteristics displayed in DACA students in a 2-year community college in Texas who attended during the 2017 to 2018 academic semesters. A total of 11 interviews were conducted wherein there were seven major themes found: displaying guts by declaring immigration status; displaying resiliency by overcoming setbacks to college completion; displaying initiative by taking advantage of opportunities; displaying tenacity by persevering despite financial- and knowledge barriers; having the initiative to prepare in advance for college challenges; progressing toward valued, long-term goals, and effects on friendships and family. These seven

major themes persisted with examples and insights offered to explain them in further detail. These seven themes support the original assumption that online GRIT characteristics are useful for DACA students in persisting through and completing their higher education goals.

As previously noted, this study provides only a preview of understanding the experiences of DACA students, employing GRIT characteristics, as they persist throughout community college. There is much more to learn regarding other DACA students at other areas around the United States, as well as learning how GRIT characteristics benefit DACA students. There is a substantial amount of information regarding the experiences of DACA students and the impact of GRIT characteristics regarding their access to, persistence, and completion of community college within this study. One should first understand more about which characteristics of GRIT were displayed by DACA students, which characteristics of GRIT influenced DACA students to access a community college, and what motivates DACA students to persist and complete. Moving forward as this population of DACA students increases, it will be more and more valuable for those in the education and counseling professions to be more aware of these experiences to help DACA students persist and complete their goals in higher education.

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Appendix A - Informed Consent Template Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
University Research Compliance Office

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Informed Consent Template Form
comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

If you are performing research involving human subjects, it is your responsibility to address the issue of informed consent. This template is intended to provide guidance for crafting an informed consent document. The Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) *strongly* recommends that you model your consent form on this template. However, if you choose a different approach, it must contain at a minimum the same elements as this standard version. Language and terminology used in the consent form must be written at no more than the 8th grade level, so that the potential participant can clearly understand the project, how it is going to be conducted, and all issues that may affect his or her participation. In addition, please write the consent form in a manner that addresses your subjects directly instead of writing it in a manner that addresses the University Research Compliance Office directly. *Information on the important issue of informed consent can be found in 45 CRF 46 at* http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.116.
Federal law mandates that all signed and dated informed consent forms be retained by the P.I. for at least three years following completion of the study.

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT: *There are limited instances where the requirement for a formal informed consent document may be waived or altered by the IRB.*
45 CFR 46 states that "An IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it

finds either:
1) *That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or*
2) *That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context."*

If a study employs only questionnaires and surveys as the source of their data, it may generally be assumed that to answer and return the questionnaire is an appropriate and sufficient expression of free consent. However, there are circumstances that might call this assumption into question - e.g., teacher-student relationship between the investigator and the subject, etc. However, a statement should be included on the questionnaire or survey form indicating that participation of the subject is strictly voluntary, the length of time reasonably expected to complete the questionnaire or survey form, and that questions that make the participant uncomfortable may be skipped.

Form Content
PROJECT TITLE: Full title of project. If possible, the title should be identical to that used in any funding/contract proposal.
PROJECT APPROVAL DATE/ EXPIRATION DATE: provided in the approval letter, must be in place before distributing to subjects.
LENGTH OF STUDY: Estimate the length of time the subject will be expected to participate.
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Must be a regular member of the faculty.
CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Name, phone number and/or email address of the P.I.
IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: *For the subject should he/she have questions or wish to discuss on any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB. These are:* Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
PROJECT SPONSOR: Funding/contract entity.
PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: Explain in lay terms that this is a research project, and why the research is being done.
PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Explain in lay terms and in language understandable at the 8th grade level how the study is going to be conducted and what will be expected of participants. Tell participants if they will be audio or videotaped, if they will be paid, etc.
ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: Explain any alternative procedures or treatments if applicable.
RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Describe any foreseeable risks or discomforts from the study. If there are no known risks, make a statement to that effect.
BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Describe any *reasonably expected* benefits from the research to the participant or others from the research.
EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Explain how you plan to protect confidentiality.
IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: *In cases where more than minimal risk is involved.*
PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: If minors or those who require the approval of a parent or guardian are participants, you should include a space for their consenting signature.
PARTICIPANT NAME/SIGNAUTRE: Name of research participant and signature.
WITNESS TO SIGNATURE (PROJECT STAFF): Staff signature.

If any of the following content sections do not apply to your research, feel free to delete from the consent form.

PROJECT TITLE:

The Journey of Texas Community College DACA Students Through Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT)

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE:	1/19/20	**PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:**	6/2020	**LENGTH OF STUDY:**	3 Months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Margaretta Mathis
Senior Center Director

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Carolina Redmond, 517-402-6848
Caredmond14@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: Dr. Margaretta Mathis, 602-743-9258
Mbmathis1@ksu.edu

PROJECT SPONSOR:

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT) characteristics displayed in DACA students in a two-year community college in Texas, within the Lone Star College System who attended during the 2017-2018 academic semesters. This study will help to understand whether DACA students develop GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers as it relates to higher education. The study will use the 8-Item Grit Scale questionnaire designed by Angela Duckworth.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

This qualitive research study will use two methods to acquire data using the 8-Item Grit Scale Questionnaire and virtual interviews. The 8-Item Grit Scale will collect data electronically using the Zoho survey tool and the interview will collect data through video audio-recordings.

The study will include a sample population of students from Lone Star College System, who are between the ages of 18 and 64, graduated from a Texas High School or completed the Texas General Education Development assessment test, and who have been approved and granted DACA status.

As a DACA student participant you will be eligible for a $25 Amazon Gift Card to purchase any item of your choice upon completion of the 8-Item Grit Scale and the virtual interview.

Consent must be given to proceed with the any parts of the interview. At the beginning of each interview the researcher will explain the purpose of the study, review any risks and benefits, and assure you any information will be kept confidential. By taking part in this study you are volunteering information and disclosing your immigration status. I as the researcher will request for the entire interview to be audio recorded to assist in getting accurate results and information.

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED (Describe procedure, storage, etc.):

Whole genome sequencing will not be included as part of the research

Not Applicable.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

Participating in this research you will be compensated with a $25.00 Amazon Gift Card after a successful completion of all phases of the study.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

The level of risk is minimal. Potential risks may include use of confidential records, examining for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews, and invasion of privacy. To minimize risks the researcher will assign alphanumerical values to any documents and audio related items to the study. All documents and audio recordings will be stored in a password protected digital file. For the virtual interview you will meet in a secure online environment to protect you from any fears and anxieties you may encounter.

BENEFITS ANTICPATED:

The benefits of the study will provide awareness of how DACA students experience a community college education and understand any challenges and successes they encounter along the way. This information could benefit community colleges and current/future DACA students on how to better serve and support them during their educational journey.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

The methods to be used to collect data will be with the electronic 8-Item Grit Scale questionnaire to determine your level of grittiness. The second, will be a virtual interview which will be audio-recorded, then transcribed by a third-party agency. The interview will be held at online in a secure location. No identifiable information will be used, and all data will be decoded. All files will be password protected in a digital filing system to store your responses. Data and research will be kept for the 5-year time frame recommended by the university. Once the researcher approaches the 5-year mark all data will be destroyed and removed from the digital filing system on the device and any notes will be shredded and destroyed.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

The researcher has no intention to use the data from this study to be published or presented outside of the graduation requirements.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS:

PARENT/GUARDIAN APPROVAL SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:			
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:		**DATE:**	
WITNESS TO SIGNATURE: (PROJECT STAFF)		**DATE:**	

Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Access

- Describe the time when you decided to attend college.
    - Who inspired you to attend? What initial obstacles did you face enrolling as a DACA student?
    - Describe what influenced you to attend [the college] versus a 4-year university.
    - What motivates you to go to college and achieve a degree?
- Prior to coming college, what knowledge did you have about a community college?
    - What do you wish you had known before attending [the college]?

Immigration Status

- Tell me about the time when you built enough guts (courage) to share with someone about your immigration status.
    - What was it about the individual that made you want to share your immigration status with them?
    - How comfortable are you now about sharing your DACA status with others?

College

- What are the three most important skills needed to succeed at [the college]?
    - What has helped you succeed while in college?
    - How has college positively impacted your life?
- What do you want to get out of your community college experience?
- What have you done so far to make the most out of your community college student experience i.e. student life clubs, on-campus employment, sports, other?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your DACA student experience attending a community college?

Goals

- What are your long-term goals?
    - What steps are you currently taking to achieve them?
- Please share with me some of your proudest accomplishments while in college.

- What attributed to your success?

Obstacles/Challenges

- How resilient are you in the face of obstacles and challenges? Please share with me a situation when you failed at something.
    - What was the outcome?
    - How did you overcome failure?
    - What would you have done differently?
- What has been your biggest challenge in your college experience so far?

Appendix C - Introduction Email

Dear [College] Student,

My name is Carolina Redmond, and I am a doctoral student in the Adult Learning & Leadership Program at Kansas State University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study titled The Journey of Texas Community College DACA Students Through Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT).

As part of my final dissertation research, I am conducting a qualitative phenomenological research study. The purpose of this study is help understand whether DACA students use GRIT to overcome any personal, financial, and legal barriers as it relates to higher education. The overall aim of this study is to explore the level of grittiness among community college DACA students to provide insight on the college experience regarding access, success, and completion.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an online 8-Item GRIT questionnaire and a 1-hour virtual video conference interview. Attached you will find the debriefing statement as it relates to the study. For your participation in study, you will receive a $25 Amazon Gift Card after completing the questionnaire and interview. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Attached you will see a flyer for the research study qualifications and the debriefing statement to explain the process. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at [redacted]. If you agree to participate in the study, please email me so I can forward you the Kansas State University Consent Form.

Sincerely,

Carolina Redmond

Appendix D - Recruitment Flyer

Participate in a doctoral research study that will explore your depth of Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT).

Your testimony will be an inspiration to other DACA students looking to pursue a post-secondary education at a two-year community college and beyond. Your story will help others understand the challenges and success stories of DACA students. By participating in this study, you will receive a $25 Amazon Gift Card.

Are you a DACA recipient?
Do you currently attend Lone Star College?
Are you between the ages of 18 and 64?
Did you graduate from a Texas public high school or receive your Texas GED?

To participate in the study, please contact:
Carolina Redmond, Graduate Student
[redacted]

Appendix E - Study Site Approval Research Site

[redacted]

Carolina Redmond
IRB Protocol 2020023

Dear Mrs. Redmond:

The research project application for your protocol titled, *"The Journey of Texas Community College DACA Students Through Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT),"* has been reviewed by the [redacted] Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). The outcome of the review is as indicated below.

Approved: Expedited 45 CFR 46.102 (2)(i)

This approval will be valid for 12 months after the date of this letter. If the study extends beyond this period, it will be subject to continuing review and will require the submission of a supplemental application at that time.

Please note that any changes to the protocol or procedures for this project after the initial review must be promptly submitted to the LSC IRB for review. Also, any adverse events should be reported to the [redacted] IRB Office as soon as possible.

The [redacted] IRB requests that you share the results of this research project with the IRB office when you have completed it. The data from your study could be beneficial to grant writers and others in the LSC System. You will be given full credit for its authorship.

This letter constitutes the official written response of the [redacted] Institutional Review Board.
Thank you and best of luck in your study!

[redacted]
Administrator, Institutional Review Board

[redacted]

Appendix F - Kansas State Approval Research Institution

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | University Research Compliance Office

TO: Dr. Margaretta Mathis
Adult Education and Leadership
369 Bluemont Hall

Proposal Number: 9967

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/09/2019

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "The Journey of Texas Community College DACA Students Through Guts, Resilience, Initiative, Tenacity (GRIT)."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 12/09/2019

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/09/2022

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

☒ There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
☐ There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

203 Fairchild Hall, Lower Mezzanine, 1601 Vattier St., Manhattan, KS 66506-1103 | 785-532-3224 | fax: 785-532-3278
comply@k-state.edu | k-state.edu/comply

Appendix G - 8-Item Guts, Resilience, Initiative, and Tenacity Scale Questionnaire Email

Dear Student,

I have attached the link to the 8-Item GRIT Scale Questionnaire for the research study titled ***The Journey of Community College DACA Students Through Guts***, ***Resilience***, ***Initiative***, ***Tenacity (GRIT)***. If you have any technical difficulties with the link, please let me know. The questionnaire should be less than 20-minutes. Once you complete the questionnaire send me an email with your availability for the week of March 30th - April 3, 2020, and we will schedule a virtual interview.

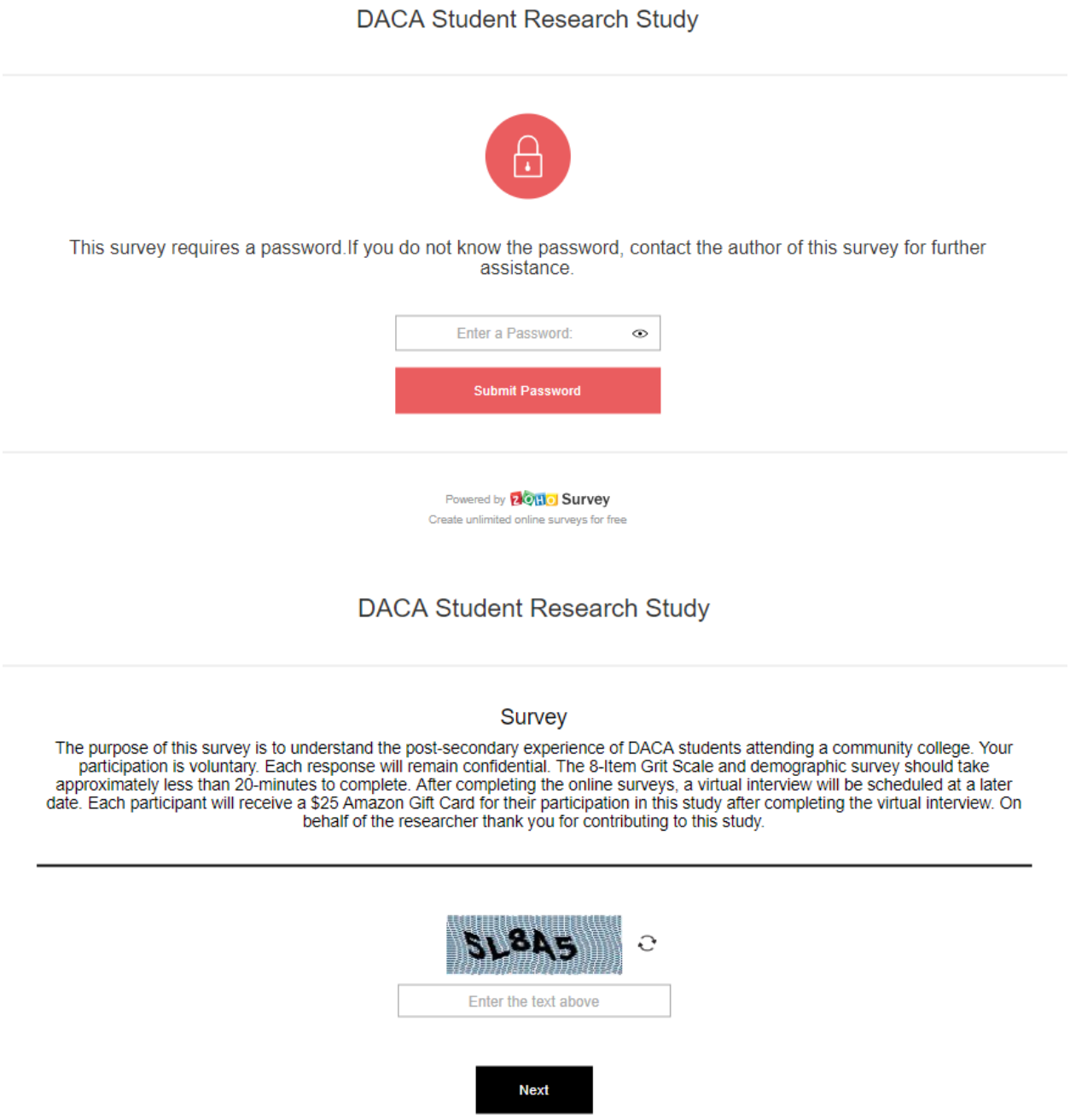
Thank you again for your participation in this research study!

Research Link https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/APB3JF
Password: LSCDACA

Sincerely,

Carolina Redmond
[redacted]
[redacted]

Appendix H - Zoho Survey Tool 8-Item Guts, Resilience, Initiative, and Tenacity Scale



DACA Student Research Study

8-Item Grit Scale

Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to you. For the most accurate score, when responding, think of how you compare to most people --not just the people you know well, but most people in the world. There are no right or wrong answers, so just answer honestly!

* 1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

* 2. Setbacks don't discourage me.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

* 3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

* 4. I am a hard worker.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me

* 5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

* 6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

* 7. I finish whatever I begin.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me

* 8. I am diligent.

- Very much like me
- Mostly like me
- Somewhat like me
- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

Grit Scale Citation

Duckworth, A.L, & Quinn, P.D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). Journal of Personality Assessment, 91, 166-174.

https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/validation_grit_scale_duckworth_jpa_m._figueroa-2.pdf

Previous Next

DACA Student Research Study

Demographic Survey

* First & Last Name

* Gender

- ○ Female
- ○ Male

Birth Country

* Age Group

- ○ 18-19
- ○ 20-24
- ○ 25-29
- ○ 30-39
- ○ 40-49
- ○ 50-64

* Did you graduate with a Texas high school diploma or Texas GED?

- ☐ Yes, Texas high school
- ☐ Yes, Texas GED
- ☐ No, high school dipoma or GED

* Home Campus

- LSC-Cyfair
- LSC-Kingwood
- LSC-Montgomery
- LSC-North Harris
- LSC-Tomball
- LSC-University Park
- LSC-Houston North

Face-to-Face Interview

To schedule your virtual interview please contact Carolina Redmond at Caredmond14@ksu.edu or call at 517-402-6848 with your preferred dates and times of your availability. The virtual interview should be approximately one-hour in length.

Previous Next

Thank you again for your participation in this survey. Please contact the following individuals for any questions you may have concerning the survey:

Carolina Redmond, Graduate Student Researcher
Caredmond14@ksu.edu
517.402.6848

Dr. George Boggs, Committee Chair
grboggs@ksu.edu
760.846.4454

Dr. Margaretta Mathis, Co-Chair
mbmathis1@ksu.edu
602.743.9258

Dr. Cassandra Rincones, Committee Member
Cassandra.Rincones@lonestar.edu
281.312.1670

Drag and drop a question here

Appendix I - Zoom Virtual Interview Email

Student Name,

This email is to confirm our Zoom Virtual Meeting scheduled on **Date & Time** via video conferencing.

As the researcher I will review with you the items outlined in the **KSU Informed Consent Form** such as the purpose of the study, benefits, risks, and compensation. The virtual interview will be recorded for accuracy purposes. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

If you don't have Zoom on your computer or mobile device, it can be downloaded for free in the App Store.

If at any time you need to reschedule your virtual meeting, please email me at your earliest convenience.

Your Scheduled Zoom Meeting Details

Topic: Virtual Meeting-Participant ID#
Time: Date & Time
Join Zoom Meeting Link
Meeting ID #
Password #

I look forward to our scheduled meeting!

Sincerely,

Carolina Redmond

Appendix J - Transcript Email and Amazon e-Gift Card

Student Name,

Thank you again for completing the research study! I am in the process of completing the transcripts for the interview for your review. You should have received a link to review the documents. Please review the transcripts and provide your feedback. Your $25 Amazon e-gift card will be delivered via your **email address** so please make sure to check your spam email by **date specified**. Please let me know that you have received it.

If I have any further questions, I will keep you posted!

Thanks,

Carolina Redmond