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# Becoming DACAmended: Assessing the Short-Term Benefits of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

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**Roberto G. Gonzales<sup>1</sup>, Veronica Terriquez<sup>2</sup>,  
and Stephen P. Ruszcyk<sup>3</sup>**

## Abstract

In response to political pressure, President Obama authorized the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012, giving qualified undocumented young people access to relief from deportation, renewable work permits, and temporary Social Security numbers. This policy opened up access to new jobs, higher earnings, driver's licenses, health care, and banking. Using data from a national sample of DACA beneficiaries ( $N = 2,381$ ), this article investigates variations in how undocumented young adults benefit from DACA. Our findings suggest that, at least in the short term, DACA has reduced some of the challenges that undocumented young adults must overcome to achieve economic and social incorporation. However, those with higher levels of education and access to greater family and community resources appear to have benefited the most. As such, our study provides new insights into how social policy interacts with other stratification processes to shape diverging pathways of incorporation among the general pool of undocumented immigrants.

## Keywords

undocumented young adults, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, immigration policy, illegality, policy implementation, inequality, stratification

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<sup>1</sup>Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

<sup>3</sup>City University of New York, New York, NY, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Roberto G. Gonzales, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.

Email: roberto\_gonzales@gse.harvard.edu

Changes in federal U.S. immigration policies in the 1980s and 1990s have produced a large, settled undocumented population. As a result of increased family settlement, an unprecedented number of children grow up without legal residency status. Policy makers have been slow to respond to their long-term presence. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) Act was first introduced in Congress in 2001 in order to provide a pathway to citizenship to certain undocumented immigrants who migrated as children. With legalization efforts stalled, mounting pressures pushed President Obama to initiate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program on June 15, 2012. This change in his administration's enforcement policy temporarily defers deportation from the United States for eligible undocumented youth and young adults, estimated at 1.9 million in 2013 (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, Bachmeier, & Cox, 2013). Furthermore, it offers these young people temporary Social Security numbers and 2-year work permits. Although DACA does not offer a pathway to legalization, it has the potential to improve the incorporation and mobility trajectories of eligible youth.

A burgeoning body of research over the past several years has sought to understand the untenable circumstances of undocumented immigrants who come to the United States as children (Abrego, 2006, 2008, 2011; Gonzales, 2010, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Greenman & Hall, 2013; Terriquez, 2014). However, to date, much of this research has consisted of studies with limited sample sizes (Abrego, 2006, 2008, 2011; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Terriquez, 2014). And although researchers have sought to understand how varying educational pathways differently structure undocumented life, systematic evidence exploring different types of stratification among this population has been limited. Meanwhile, a larger body of research studying the incorporation patterns of today's children of immigrants may provide some important clues (Alba & Nee, 2003; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In particular, this scholarship argues that today's immigrants and their children are following different pathways of incorporation, channeling them into various segments of the U.S. economy. These ideas provide some useful lenses through which to examine the interplay between undocumented youths' personal characteristics and their ability to take advantage of DACA's benefits.

How are some immigrant youth responding to their new "DACAdmented" status? And are there particular individual, family, and community factors that better position some of these young people to take advantage of the benefits? Drawing on national survey data collected from 2,381 DACA beneficiaries in 2013, the largest data collection effort to date on this population, this article investigates variations in economic and social incorporation among this generally disadvantaged population. In doing so, it explores how DACA's benefits vary based on the postsecondary, family, and community resources these young adults have at their disposal. Our findings suggest that, at least in the short term, DACA is reducing some of the challenges undocumented young adults must overcome to achieve economic and social incorporation. However, our findings also point to disparities in how this diverse population of young people is able to obtain new resources that advance their incorporation. Whereas young adult

DACA beneficiaries with significant educational and community resources appear best positioned to benefit from DACA, those with fewer resources appear to gain less.

## Strained and Segmented Pathways

Although immigration scholars often positively assess the incorporation prospects of many of today's children of immigrants (Bean & Stevens, 2003; Kasinitz et al., 2009), not all fare equally well. Researchers generally agree that a lack of legal status presents a formidable impediment to assimilation for undocumented youth (e.g., Alba, Jiménez, & Marrow, 2014; Alba & Nee, 2003; Kasinitz et al., 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou et al., 2008). Indeed, most children of immigrants are able to use the educational system, ethnic organizational resources, and work opportunities to build on their parents' resources. But for undocumented youth, their legal status constrains "virtually every aspect of [their] incorporation" (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010, p. 63), stagnating them in the lower class (Terriquez, 2014). As this scenario suggests, exclusion experienced by undocumented persons is multidimensional (see Abrego, 2011; Dreby, 2012; Menjivar & Abrego, 2012). It affects family life, health care (Castañeda & Melo, in press), housing conditions (Oliveri, 2009), and romantic relationships and fills everyday experiences with anxiety, fear, and stress (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013; Szkupinski Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2014). Legal exclusions also constrain many mundane, yet critical, aspects of adolescent and adult life.

Most young adults in the United States aspire to some type of postsecondary education. However, those who are undocumented must overcome multiple challenges to enroll in and persist in college (see Martinez, in press; Terriquez, in press). Without access to federal or most state financial aid, undocumented youth face heavy financial burdens. They are also excluded from work, study opportunities, and paid internships. Many majors and fields of study often require hands-on participation outside the classroom. Oftentimes, these internships require Social Security numbers to process hiring and background checks, thus excluding undocumented youth from gaining applied skills and expanding professional networks (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999). In these multiple ways, "illegality" has a particularly negative impact on the economic and social incorporation of undocumented youth.

A growing number of studies over the past few years have done significant work in uncovering the contextual factors most salient in framing and constraining everyday life for undocumented youth (Abrego, 2006, 2008, 2011; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2010, 2011; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Terriquez, in press). Although the popular media have focused on the disadvantages a lack of legal status poses to the pursuit of higher education, many undocumented youth face additional challenges. Employment options, for example, are generally limited to low-wage jobs that offer meager wages and few opportunities for job growth. Many undocumented youth are doubly disadvantaged in these situations, as employers frequently pass them over in favor of older migrants who are less likely to refuse tasks or to make worker rights claims (Gans, 1992; Gleeson, 2010; Gonzales, 2011).

A lack of legal status also limits spatial mobility. Without access to driver's licenses, undocumented youth risk apprehension, deportation, and accompanying family separation by driving to work or school (Stuesse & Coleman, 2014). These practices sow feelings of anxiety and stress, leading to challenged mental health and well-being (Gonzales et al., 2013). For those living outside of large metropolises with extensive public transportation systems, slower, less efficient transportation options limit their access to work and work schedule flexibility.

Undocumented immigrants are also vulnerable to robbery, in part because they tend to carry cash with them (Bellamy, 2007; Thornton, 2010). Although banking practices reduce this threat, the use of banks among undocumented immigrants remains low (Perry, 2008). Undocumented immigrants can be intimidated from applying for a bank account or credit card because financial institutions often request U.S. identification and a Social Security number (Coyle, 2007).

For socioeconomically disadvantaged immigrants, social networks play an all-important role in relaying key information about jobs, ethnic resources, and legalization opportunities (Hagan, 1998). Networks of family, friends, and acquaintances can lower the cost of legal and social incorporation by providing information, emotional and cultural support, and connection to local organizations. However, the social networks of undocumented immigrants may be weakened by a lack of material resources and the precariousness that accompanies legal status (Menjívar, 2000).

Although the effects of undocumented status are broad, the "condition of illegality" (De Genova, 2004) is not experienced uniformly. Differences in institutional experiences at different points along the life course, for example, instill different logics of inclusion. Whereas adult migrants tend to have limited access to mainstream American institutions, those who arrive in the United States as minors and enroll in the K–12 school system have greater levels of integration into public institutions than those who migrate primarily for the purpose of finding work (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). However, as these young people grow older, the thick sense of "illegality" produced by policies governing access to social institutions associated with adulthood—especially postsecondary education, work, banking, and driving—quickly replaces this relative inclusion as these young people experience an "awakening to a nightmare" (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). However, those connected to extrafamilial support can leverage local resources to delay the "transition to illegality" (Gonzales, 2010, 2011).

Immigrant incorporation varies according to the financial, human, and social capital immigrants possess (Alba & Nee, 2003). This important observation underscores the empirical reality that immigrants—legal and undocumented alike—vary along a number of dimensions, including income, skills, and access to resources (to name a few). But until now, studies of undocumented immigrant young people have been unable to assess the effects of human, financial, and social capital on their differential abilities to access resources. By providing forms of widened access, DACA has the potential to open up numerous possibilities to undocumented young adults. However, it may also expose layers of inequality that shape DACA recipients' ability to take advantage of these benefits. In this article, we provide new insights into stratification processes shaping diverging trajectories among an otherwise disadvantaged population.

## Scope of DACA

As an executive memorandum that shifts bureaucratic practice in U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, DACA has limited inclusionary power; it does not offer a pathway to citizenship or other legal status. It creates 2-year (renewable) prosecutorial discretion with regard to deportation. Its recipients can receive work authorization and apply for a Social Security card.

DACA's benefits derive from the legal distinction between *lawful presence* and *lawful status*. Normally when one has unlawful status, one accrues unlawful presence (USCIS to Field Leadership, 2009). Although DACA does *not* confer a lawful status, which would allow access to federal financial aid, DACA recipients have lawful presence, interpreted as a temporary authorization by the Department of Homeland Security to be in the United States. (USCIS, n.d.), which avails access to certain privileges. For example, 45 states have taken action to allow DACA recipients to apply for a driver's license (National Immigration Law Center, 2013).

## DACA Qualification Criteria

To qualify, applicants must have arrived in the United States before the age of 16 years (and have proof) and must have been younger than 31 years when the program began on August 15, 2012. Eligible youth must have resided in the United States continuously for the past 5 consecutive years. Finally, applicants must attend high school or a GED program, or have a high school diploma or equivalent. Youth who meet those criteria must undergo a lengthy application process and pay \$465. Once approved, DACA recipients must apply separately for Social Security numbers, driver's licenses, and bank accounts.

These criteria and processes likely exclude certain undocumented young people (Batalova et al., 2013). Estimates by Wong et al. (2013) indicate that within the first year of implementation, approximately 61% of those immediately eligible for DACA had applied. Notably, USCIS approved over 98% of processed applications. The proportion of potential applicants that applied varied significantly by state, although state policy climates did not affect application rates. Legal clinics as well as religious, civic, immigrant, and educational organizations appeared to play an important role in helping some young people obtain DACA, and perhaps benefit from the limited rights it provides its beneficiaries (Wong et al., 2013).

## Diversity Among DACA Recipients

Having spent some portion of their childhood in the United States, DACA eligible youth have, to varying degrees, become integrated into this country's institutions. Therefore, their educational attainment—as well as demographic characteristics that typically structure immigrant incorporation, along with ties to community organizations—could generate group differences in how they use their DACAmented status to improve their employment options and obtain other resources in the short term.

DACA beneficiaries' educational attainment could play a particularly strong role in determining the types of opportunities they pursue in the short term. Given the importance of higher education in expanding job options, undocumented youth who have attended college, especially 4-year institutions, may be better positioned to leverage their education to pursue better jobs with higher earnings. Perhaps most notably, those with bachelor's degrees may apply for jobs commensurate with their credentials (Gonzales, 2011). Meanwhile, those with less education, while disadvantaged in the labor market relative to their more educated peers, may prioritize other financial or social benefits (i.e., bank accounts, credit cards, health care) that they may not have accessed prior to obtaining DACA.

Because family socioeconomic background tends to be a strong predictor of young people's outcomes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Terriquez, 2014), parents' educational, financial, and other resources may have an independent effect on how young immigrants can take advantage of DACA in the short term. As such, undocumented young adults with college-educated and higher income parents are likely to possess the networks to improve their employment options, but parental resources may provide them with other types of access as well.

A related factor may pertain to the social status of the coethnic community. Because Mexican migrants tend to possess fewer skills and arrive with limited resources (Feliciano, 2008), their communities may offer young adult members fewer mobility opportunities compared to other groups. Additionally, because of cultural or other reasons, Mexicans exhibit low uptake of government (Van Hook & Bean, 2009) and other institutional resources (Perry, 2008), including health care (Castañeda & Melo, *in press*). We therefore might expect that Mexican young adults will encounter greater obstacles to taking advantage of some DACA benefits when compared to other groups. Conversely, some Asian immigrant groups arrive with more resources that they sometimes pool together to further youths' social and economic incorporation (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Gender and age often structure young immigrants' incorporation patterns. For example, young men in immigrant families tend to experience greater pressures to provide economic or other social resources for their families, while women may be expected to provide direct care and assist with household chores (Smith, 2006). Meanwhile, age correlates with the assumption of adult responsibilities (Rumbaut, 2004), which may, in turn, determine the types of benefits young adults prioritize.

Because civic associations can facilitate immigrant incorporation (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2011; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), undocumented youth who are connected to immigrant organizations may be well-positioned to take advantage of some of the key benefits of DACA. As a result, members of immigrant organizations may have greater access to information and technical assistance to effectively and efficiently access some resources. Through these civic groups, such youth may also benefit from expanded social networks, including those that offer peer-to-peer support (Terriquez, Rivera, & Patler, 2013), as well as those that may connect them to labor market opportunities (Rosenbaum, DeLuca, Miller, & Roy, 1999).

## Our Study

This study builds on a growing body of research documenting the exclusions experienced by undocumented immigrants who arrive as children. Our investigation focuses on DACA-eligible young adults between 18 and 32 years who have transitioned to illegality and lack the educational and social protections that minors enjoy (Gonzales, 2011). These young adults, to varying degrees, have pursued employment, postsecondary education, or both, and are likely to differ in how they benefit from DACA.

We therefore examine the experiences of young people who received DACA within the first 16 months of implementation. We account for the community and family resources these young adults utilized in order to obtain assistance with the DACA application process, and we explore how they have benefited from this initiative in the short term. Furthermore, our investigation examines the ways in which young adults' postsecondary educational attainment, family socioeconomic background, coethnic community, gender, age, and ties to immigrant organizations correspond with the types of resources they obtain. This study breaks new ground by uncovering how social policy interacts with other stratification processes to shape diverging pathways of incorporation among undocumented young adults.

## The NURP Survey

Our investigation relies on survey data from the National UnDACAmented Research Project (NURP), the first national survey of DACA recipients. The NURP survey includes data from 2,684 undocumented young adults who received deferred action, as well as those who may have been eligible for DACA but did not apply or who applied and were still awaiting a response.<sup>1</sup> However, our analysis here focuses only on the 2,381 individuals who had received DACA by the time they took the survey.

Data were collected in 2013 through a web survey of young adults between 18 and 32 years who were eligible to receive DACA. Survey respondents were recruited through a multistage process. First, with the assistance of a team of research assistants and consultants with ties to community organizations across the country, we recruited potential participants through "gateway" points, including immigrant service agencies, law offices, churches, schools, universities, and local and national undocumented young adult organizations. To recruit harder-to-reach individuals, we supplemented these efforts by snowball sampling relatives, friends, and neighbors of initially recruited study subjects. To help ensure that survey participants were eligible to participate in the study, we required them to register for the study in advance of completing the survey. We then sent out survey links to eligible respondents. We also recruited a small proportion of individuals who met the study criteria in hard-to-reach communities directly through organizations without requiring advance registration.

It is difficult to obtain survey data from undocumented populations because of they comprise a fairly small proportion of the U.S. population, their legal vulnerability, and their low-income background (Bloch, 2006). Surveying them through random dialing methods, respondent driven sampling, or other types of probability sampling can be



quite costly, and sometimes cost-prohibitive, especially on a national scale. We therefore relied on a sample drawn through efforts described above to learn about the short-term benefits and limits of DACA on the lives of some beneficiaries. Our sample excludes individuals who do not have access to the Internet, and it likely contains limited representation of less educated individuals who are not savvy computer users (Schonlau, van Soest, Kapteyn, & Couper, 2009). Moreover, our sample is also less representative of individuals who lack connections to organizations used to recruit study participants. We therefore discuss how our sample compares to national samples of DACA applicants (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013; Wong et al. 2013) and to estimates regarding the population of undocumented young people more broadly (Batalova et al., 2013; Greenman & Hall, 2013).

## Our Plan of Analysis

Below we provide a geographic and demographic description of our sample. Then, we share results regarding DACA application assistance. Respondents were asked to list one or more sources of assistance with the application process. Response options included community-based organizations, legal clinics, schools or colleges, religious institutions, and “other” sources. (Most who marked “other” indicated that they had received help from private attorneys.) We also identify individuals who received help from family members or friends but did *not* receive assistance from other sources. Analyses provide insight into how young people use the civic and legal infrastructure, or simply turn to family and friends, in order to successfully navigate this bureaucratic process.

Next, we show descriptive statistics listing the types of economic and other social resources study participants accessed. Findings are based on NURP survey questions that ask respondents if they have, since receiving DACA (a) obtained a new job, (b) increased their job earnings, (c) obtained an internship, (d) opened their first bank account, (e) obtained their first credit card, (f) obtained a driver’s license, and (g) obtained health care. Recent research on undocumented young adults (see Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2013) identifies limited work experiences, limited access to driving, and limited institutional participation as important effects of “illegality.” Notably, we cannot be certain that respondents benefited from these new resources because of DACA; benefits could have been obtained simply as a result of the passage of time and expanded social networks since DACA was implemented. However, given the role of this policy in granting its beneficiaries Social Security numbers and work permits, we believe that DACA played a strong role in determining access to the resources examined in this study.

Finally, we present results of logistic regression analyses that investigate how factors traditionally correlated with stratification—young adults’ educational attainment, family socioeconomic background, demographic characteristics, and ties to immigrant organizations—shape their ability to access the above resources. We assess the role of educational attainment by comparing respondents who have *not* attended college to those with different levels of educational attainment. We account for DACA

recipients' family socioeconomic background using two measures that can predict the patterns of young adults' incorporation: (a) parent education, determined by whether or not the respondent had a parent with a bachelor's degree, and (b) low-income background, determined by whether the respondent was eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in high school (Terriquez, 2014). Because of differences in patterns of incorporation across ethnic groups (Feliciano, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006), we explore whether Mexicans differ from immigrants from other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific Islands, and other parts of the world (Europe, Africa, and Canada combined) in terms of obtaining benefits. We recognize that immigrants' experiences vary greatly within these broadly defined regions, but, with the exception of Mexico, the numbers of NURP study participants from all other countries are too small for meaningful analysis.<sup>2</sup> Regressions account for gender and age, key factors that shape transitions to adulthood (Feliciano, 2012; Rumbaut, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Last, because civic groups can facilitate incorporation (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2011; Terriquez & Kwon, 2014), we consider whether respondents' ties to immigrant organizations predict whether respondents access benefits. We do so by identifying individuals who reported volunteering for an immigrant organization within the last year.

## Becoming DACAdmented

### *Sample Characteristics*

As shown in Table 1, approximately 45% of our sample comes from the Western United States, 14% from the South, 16% from the Northeast, and 26% from the Midwest. In comparison, among applicants during the first year of DACA implementation, 42% came from the West, 35% from the South, 11% from the Northeast, and 12% from the Midwest (Wong et al. 2013).

Although our samples of young immigrants from other parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and Canada generally correspond with the regional makeup of early DACA applicants (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013), Mexicans are somewhat underrepresented in our sample. Sixty-eight percent of NURP survey respondents hail from Mexico compared to more than three quarters of early DACA recipients. Meanwhile, Asian/Pacific Islanders make up 10% of our sample, but were only 4% of early recipients.

Our sample appears to exhibit high levels of educational attainment, compared to undocumented young adults at large (Passel & Cohn, 2009). A fifth of the sample has not attended college, while 32% have attended a community college, and 27% have attended a 4-year college or university but have not graduated. Twenty-two percent of our sample possesses a bachelor's degree. We cannot determine how our sample compares with the educational attainment of the pool of DACA applicants because USCIS does not collect data on educational attainment. However, as reflected in our broader NURP sample, which includes nonrecipients, we suspect that those who have received DACA are more educated than the total eligible population (Greenman & Hall, 2013).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for DACA Respondent Sample.

U.S. region of residence	
West	0.45
South	0.14
Northeast	0.16
Midwest	0.26
Region of origin	
Mexico	0.68
Other Latin America/Caribbean	0.19
Asia/Pacific Islands	0.10
Other <sup>a</sup>	0.03
Educational attainment	
No college	0.20
Attended community college	0.32
Attended 4-year college	0.27
Obtained bachelor's degree	0.22
Family socioeconomic background	
Has parents with a bachelor's degree	0.36
Low-income family	0.73
Gender	
Male	0.39
Female	0.61
Average age (minimum 18, maximum 32 years)	22.60
Member of immigrant organization	0.44
Received assistance with DACA application	0.89
Source of assistance with application <sup>b</sup>	
Community-based organization <sup>b</sup>	0.22
Legal clinic	0.28
School/college	0.09
Religious institution	0.07
Private attorney	0.15
Other	0.04
Family/friend (no support from any of the above sources)	0.23
Resources accessed since obtaining DACA	
Obtained new job	0.59
Increased job earnings	0.45
Obtained internship	0.21
Opened first bank account	0.49
Obtained first credit card	0.33
Obtained driver's license	0.57
Obtained health care	0.21

Note. DACA = Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.  $N = 2,381$ .

Source. National UnDACAmented Research Project 2013.

<sup>a</sup>Includes individuals from Canada, Europe, and Africa. <sup>b</sup>Respondents may have selected more than one source of support.

A significant portion of NURP survey respondents likely benefit from their parents' human capital, as 36% report having at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. At the same time, nearly three quarters of our sample come from low-income family backgrounds and were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch while they were still in high school. Although not noted in Table 1 because of space limitations, respondents' socioeconomic background varies significantly by region of origin. In line with prior research (Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), Mexicans come from the most disadvantaged background, whereas those from Asia/Pacific Islands and other regions (Canada, Europe, Africa) tend to come from relatively more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Other Latin Americans and Caribbean respondents fall somewhere in between.

Women comprise 61% of the sample. This can be attributed in part to higher response rates among women typical of survey-based studies (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). The representation of women in this sample may also result from their high levels of involvement in immigrant rights organizations (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012) and their greater representation among the college-going population (Feliciano, 2012). These two factors may contribute to women's greater likelihood of applying for DACA. The average age of the NURP sample is 22.6 years. This average age is higher than that of the larger pool of DACA recipients (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013), in large part because the sample excludes DACA-eligible recipients younger than 18.

Finally, 44% of our sample has participated in an immigrant organization. This percentage is high because we relied on such organizations to assist with recruitment of DACA recipients.

### *Assistance With DACA Application*

The middle panel of Table 1 provides information on the assistance survey respondents received with their DACA application. Importantly, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents received some assistance. This finding points to the importance of civic organizations, legal assistance, and other social networks in helping young people through the application process.

Among NURP respondents, a sizeable segment turned to a community organization (22%) for assistance. Perhaps not surprisingly, this option was most often pursued among members of immigrant civic groups who likely tapped into their organizations for assistance (results not shown). Notably, another 28% obtained assistance through legal clinics that were likely made available by advocacy groups. Respondents received assistance filling out their DACA applications from other institutions.

Whereas 9% reported that they received assistance from their school or college, another 7% did so through a religious institution. These findings shed light on how community institutions serve as spaces of information sharing and trust, supporting immigrant integration.

Notably, 15% of NURP survey respondents relied on private attorneys to assist with applications. Applicants likely had to pay for these services in addition to the application fee. Such professional assistance may be cost-prohibitive for some undocumented

immigrant young adults. Additional analysis not shown indicates that professional attorneys were most often used among young people who had not participated in immigrant organizations. The suggestion here is that young immigrants who did not have access to community-based organizations disproportionately turned to private attorneys for assistance.

It is worth noting that another 23% of respondents who did not receive assistance from neither a civic institution nor a private attorney turned to family members or friends to help them with applications. That is, a significant portion of DACA recipients in this sample relied on individuals in their social networks who had the appropriate information and capacities to assist with this process.

### *Benefits of DACA*

The bottom panel of Table 1 lists some key economic and other resources that NURP study participants may have accessed since receiving DACA. Results demonstrate that many have taken steps toward becoming economically and socially integrated into U.S. institutions. Importantly, findings suggest that DACA has expanded and improved recipients' employment options. Over half (59%) of survey respondents obtained a new job, and a significant portion (45%) increased their job earnings.

Just over one fifth of NURP respondents obtained an internship, which likely provides some valuable career training not typically available in jobs for young adults with limited employment histories. Almost half of survey respondents obtained their first bank account since receiving DACA. Although undocumented immigrants are not necessarily prohibited from possessing a bank account, the receipt of a Social Security number through DACA allows young people to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and sometimes awkward or uncomfortable situations when trying to open a bank account. Similar hindrances apply to obtaining a credit card. A third of respondents acquired their first credit card. Just over half obtained a driver's license, which has likely widened educational, employment, and other options for these young adult immigrants. Twenty-one percent of those surveyed have obtained health care since receiving DACA, perhaps due to new employment-based plans or to greater facility in providing documentation to clinics and hospitals.

### *Stratification in the Uptake of DACA Benefits*

Table 2 shows logistic regressions that examine group variations in how NURP respondents benefit from DACA in the short term. Recipients' educational attainment correlated with the benefits they obtained. Notably, after accounting for other variables in the model, those who had already attained a bachelor's degree were significantly more likely to obtain a new job ( $p < .001$ ), increase their earnings ( $p < .001$ ), and secure an internship ( $p < .05$ ) when compared to those who never went to college. As such, findings suggest that those with college degrees were able to better use their credentials in the job market. Meanwhile, after controlling for other factors, 4-year college students enjoyed 1.8 ( $p < .001$ ) higher odds of obtaining an internship, relative to their peers

**Table 2.** Odds Ratios for Logistic Regression Models Predicting Access to New Resources Among DACA Recipients.

	New job	Earnings	Internship	Bank account	Credit Card	Driver's license	Health care
Educational attainment (reference high school degree or less)							
Community college	1.21 (0.15)	1.08 (0.13)	0.92 (0.15)	0.71** (0.09)	0.66** (0.09)	1.00 (0.12)	0.57*** (0.08)
4-year college	1.14 (0.15)	1.08 (0.14)	1.78*** (0.29)	0.52*** (0.07)	0.64** (0.09)	0.90 (0.12)	0.50*** (0.08)
Bachelor's degree	1.63*** (0.24)	1.64*** (0.23)	1.51* (0.27)	0.38*** (0.06)	0.92 (0.14)	1.20 (0.18)	1.07 (0.17)
Family socioeconomic background							
Parent with BA <sup>a</sup>	1.08 (0.11)	1.09 (0.11)	1.32* (0.16)	1.20 (0.12)	1.16 (0.12)	0.99 (0.10)	1.26 (0.15)
Low-income family <sup>b</sup>	0.83 (0.09)	0.76** (0.08)	0.65*** (0.08)	0.76** (0.08)	0.67*** (0.07)	0.65*** (0.07)	0.47*** (0.06)
Country of origin (reference Mexico)							
Other Latin American/ Caribbean	1.11 (0.13)	1.29* (0.15)	0.96 (0.14)	1.32* (0.16)	1.17 (0.14)	1.39** (0.17)	1.23 (0.17)
Asia/Pacific Islander	0.72* (0.11)	0.86 (0.14)	2.16*** (0.37)	1.45* (0.24)	1.46* (0.24)	0.82 (0.13)	1.14 (0.21)
Other	0.70 (0.16)	0.63 (0.16)	1.34 (0.37)	1.86* (0.48)	0.89 (0.22)	0.84 (0.20)	0.82 (0.23)
Demographics							
Female	0.92 (0.08)	0.99 (0.09)	0.85 (0.09)	0.89 (0.08)	0.81* (0.07)	0.72*** (0.06)	0.90 (0.10)
Age	0.96** (0.01)	1.02 (0.01)	0.97 (0.02)	0.89*** (0.01)	1.02 (0.02)	1.07*** (0.02)	1.05** (0.02)
Member of immigrant organization	1.20* (0.10)	1.17 (0.10)	2.19*** (0.23)	0.92 (0.08)	0.66*** (0.06)	0.89 (0.08)	1.00 (0.11)

Note. DACA = Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. *N* = 2,381.

Source. National UnDACAmented Research Project 2013.

<sup>a</sup>Reference: parent(s) has less than a bachelor's degree.

<sup>b</sup>Reference: from middle/upper income background.

\**p* < .10. \*\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\*\**p* < .001, two-tailed test.

without any college education. It is likely that these college students secured internships through their postsecondary institutions.

Interestingly, when compared to those without any college education, those who have attended or graduated from college were less likely to open a bank account, perhaps because some already had accounts prior to receiving DACA. Enrollment in community and 4-year colleges similarly corresponded with lower likelihoods of obtaining a first credit card and health services. Perhaps these students accessed a bank account prior to receiving DACA, and some may have obtained health care through their college or university.

Young people from higher socioeconomic statuses were more likely to access some benefits when compared to peers who grew up with fewer socioeconomic resources. Specifically, having a parent with a bachelor's degree was positively associated with obtaining an internship (*p* < .05). Perhaps college-educated parents, understanding the

value of an internship and not dependent on their children's earnings, may have encouraged their young adult children to obtain such a position, even if unpaid. Meanwhile, with the exception of obtaining a new job, those from low-income backgrounds were notably less likely than their peers from middle/higher income backgrounds to access all other resources. As such, this finding suggests that family economic disadvantage hampered young people's abilities to use DACA for their own benefit in the short term.

Regressions explore whether Mexicans (our reference group) differed from DACA recipients hailing from other parts of the world in terms of whether they obtained benefits. Perhaps because of the average higher socioeconomic statuses of their co-ethnics (Feliciano, 2008), other groups found themselves in better positions to gain from DACA. For example, when compared to Mexicans, other Latinos/Caribbeans were more likely to increase their earnings, open a bank account, and obtain a driver's license, after controlling for other correlates. Asian/Pacific Islanders were particularly likely to obtain an internship, open a bank account, and acquire a credit card when compared to Mexicans. Individuals from other parts of the world (Canada, Europe, and Africa) were also more likely than Mexicans to open a bank account. It is possible that Mexicans disproportionately distrusted banks or lived in communities that lack access to banking institutions.

Results show only a couple of gender differences in how survey respondents benefited from DACA in the short term. Specifically, men were more likely than women to obtain credit cards and driver's licenses, after controlling for other factors. Social expectations for men to be providers and to offer transportation to women partners and family members may have contributed to these patterns (Dreby, 2010; Smith, 2006). Additionally, age negatively correlated with obtaining a new job and opening a first bank account, so that younger DACA recipients were more likely to obtain such benefits. Older recipients may have figured out how to open a bank account prior to receiving DACA or have learned how to adjust without one (Gonzales, 2011). Age was positively associated with obtaining a driver's license and health care, patterns that likely parallel those of nonimmigrant young adults.

As might be expected, young adults who participated in immigrant organizations were particularly likely to reap some of the job-related benefits of DACA. Specifically, when compared to nonparticipants, those involved in immigrant organizations were 1.2 ( $p < .05$ ) times more likely to obtain a new job and 2.2 ( $p < .001$ ) times more likely to obtain an internship, after accounting for other covariates. Active in immigrant civic groups, these young people likely possessed the social networks and information on how to access job-related opportunities. Relatedly, these respondents may have also been highly motivated individuals who have learned how to advocate for themselves. Interestingly, those involved in immigrant organizations were less likely than others to apply for their first credit card ( $p < .001$ ), after controlling for other variables in the model. As potentially well-networked individuals, some of these youth may have enjoyed such financial resource prior to receiving DACA or may have accessed alternative forms of credit through their social ties.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In the absence of a pathway to citizenship, hundreds of thousands of undocumented youth have made difficult “transitions to illegality” (Gonzales, 2011) as they have reached adulthood. Although DACA does not address many of the problems these young people confront, such as blocked access to financial aid for college, it does allow scholars, policy makers, and community members the opportunity to better understand the effects of policies that aim to widen access for undocumented populations and how that access is differently shaped. Immigration scholars studying the incorporation patterns of the children of immigrants have noted that modes of incorporation vary according to material and social networks. The experiences of our DACAmented respondents shed some needed light on the important role played by immigration policy in shaping incorporation patterns, particularly for those who already benefit from postsecondary, family, or community resources.

Immigration scholars have long touted the relationship between acculturation and structural assimilation. However, for undocumented youth, as Leo Chavez (1994) previously pointed out, incorporation often depends on society’s willingness to include them. DACA represents a potential turn in that direction. Beginning with the introduction of the DREAM Act in 2001, a narrative of “wasted talent” has been a consistent thread in the policy discussions pertaining to these young men and women. A compelling talking point in support of more inclusive policy is the claim that high-achieving “DREAMers” would, if given the right opportunities, maximize their potential and see great returns on their education.

In line with this assumption, our findings suggest that after DACA’s first 16 months, its beneficiaries experienced greater access to U.S. institutions, enabling them to better achieve their potential. The DACAmented young adults we surveyed have overcome several of the elements of exclusion they previously faced in their “transition to illegality.” Since receiving DACA, many have obtained new jobs and internships. Some have also opened bank accounts and obtained credit cards. Additionally, because of new state measures reconfiguring eligibility, many have also obtained driver’s licenses—which has likely widened educational, employment, and other options for these young adult immigrants. And although the Affordable Care Act does not guarantee health insurance to DACA recipients, a significant share of our respondents have reported obtaining health care since receiving their DACA paperwork. We suspect this may be the result of recent state health care efforts and increased access to postsecondary institutions and the formal labor market. Taken together, these nontrivial points of access have importantly opened up a range of opportunities for DACA beneficiaries.

Our data come from a sample of young people who are disproportionately connected to immigrant organizations and are highly educated. As such, our findings should be interpreted with caution. However, even though our study may not draw from a representative sample of DACAmented youth, it does allow us to pursue previous lines of inquiry, not before captured in studies with smaller samples. Although DACA recipients share a common immigration status that has excluded them from full membership in U.S. society, our findings contribute to a broader body of literature that identifies factors



that generate unequal incorporation pathways among the young adult children of immigrants (Kasinitz et al., 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Terriquez, 2014; Zhou et al., 2008). Having enjoyed some portion of their childhood in the United States, these young people, to varying degrees, have become integrated into an array of U.S. institutions. It comes as little surprise that their ties to community and education institutions—as well as demographic characteristics that typically structure immigrant incorporation—are generating differences in how they leverage their temporary status to improve their employment options and obtain other resources in the short term.

Our findings suggest that the ability to take advantage of DACA, to some degree, is based on the interplay between a DACAmented status and resources our respondents have previously accessed through their postsecondary educational institutions, families, ethnic communities, or community organizations. To be sure, those with fewer advantages benefited from DACA more than others in accessing some new resources. However, our analyses point to some potential patterns of persisting inequality, particularly for Mexican beneficiaries. Yet DACA is still a relatively new program, and our respondents have only recently started to experience lives of widened access. With time, this broader access may have diminished these inequalities, but the effects of uneven social networks may have also increased them.

The newfound legitimacy and security offered through DACA may positively affect emotional well-being. For many of these young people, this policy represents an affirmation of legitimacy, and the 2-year stays of deportation can ease some of their fears of apprehension, detention, and deportation. Taken together, the relief from enforcement and the powerful symbolic function of DACA should mitigate some anxieties and fears about deportation, thus lessening the negative aspects of the condition of illegality.

As a result of DACA, some previously out-of-reach work sectors may open up to this group. With new work opportunities and driver's licenses we might expect, for example, to see a boost in college access, retention, and completion along with a reactivation of educational dreams and aspirations as DACAmented young adults learn to be *legal*. Certainly, DACA provides important opportunities for its beneficiaries to take jobs and paid internships, allowing them the legal means through which to advance their career aspirations. This sense of inclusion may also expand their claims making—they may trade the label *undocumented* for *DACAmented* (see Abrego, 2008). Alternatively, increased opportunities may have demobilized many of those formerly fighting for the DREAM Act.

DACA is not a permanent solution. And it raises additional questions regarding its future as a policy and its potential to shape liminal lives for those who may fall out of status, even briefly, during renewal periods. Presently, some of the limitations of this program are clear. DACA is, at best, a second-class status. It does not offer its beneficiaries any form of legal status nor a pathway toward legality. It also does not reconcile the steepest barriers to postsecondary education; federal aid is off-limits to all undocumented immigrant students, including those with DACA. Although a handful of states have passed legislation in recent years to provide access to in-state tuition and state financial aid, the majority of states have no such policies. Access to jobs may alleviate

some of the difficulty associated with financing college. However, completing college may be difficult for many because of rising tuition costs and limited means to supplement earnings.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that previous research analyzing USCIS DACA applications has shown that a large segment of the DACA-eligible population did not apply (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013). In light of our findings, it will be important to keep track of this population as they risk becoming part of an “unDACAmented” underclass (being undocumented and also lacking DACA), composed of the most disadvantaged young adults, particularly those of Mexican origin, who will continue to encounter significant barriers to their social and economic incorporation. Although many may use their DACA status to obtain better jobs, increase earnings, and legally access driver’s licenses and health care, those lacking DACA may experience greater legal, educational, and social exclusion.

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### **Notes**

1. Those who had not received DACA tended to have somewhat lower levels of educational attainment than DACA recipients.
2. It should be noted that beside Mexicans, no other country makes up a double-digit share of the undocumented population (Passel & Cohn, 2009).
3. Age was missing and imputed for 0.5% of cases. Imputations do not change results presented here.

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### **Author Biographies**

**Roberto G. Gonzales** is Assistant Professor of Education at Harvard University. His research focuses on the ways in which legal and educational institutions shape the everyday experiences of poor, minority, and immigrant youth along the life course. For more than a decade he has been engaged in critical inquiry regarding what happens to undocumented immigrant youth as they make transitions to adolescence and young adulthood.

**Veronica Terriquez** is Assistant Professor in Sociology at the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on youth transitions to adulthood, civic engagement, educational inequality, and immigrant incorporation. Terriquez is affiliated to the USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration.

**Stephen P. Ruszczyk** is a PhD candidate in the Sociology Department of the City University of New York. His research examines undocumented youth, citizenship, the transition to adulthood, local governance, and qualitative methods.