William T. Grant FOUNDATION

RESEARCH GRANTS EXTERNAL REVIEW

Foundation Focus Area	Reducing Inequality

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RATIONALE

1. Fit with the Foundation's Interests

1a. Comment on the proposal's fit with the Foundation's interest in reducing inequality, defined as knowledge and approaches that will reduce inequality in youth outcomes. We focus on inequality by economic, race/ethnic, linguistic and immigrant origin status. We support research to: 1) describe what we need to know to inform strategies for responding to inequality; 2) test existing programs, policies, and practices to see whether and how they reduce inequality; and 3) improve measures of inequality that researchers, practitioners, or policymakers can use.

The project addresses economic, racial/ethnic, and immigrant inequalities and could be extended to address linguistic inequalities. The project examines the educational outcomes of undocumented immigrant youth, one of the most economically disadvantaged U.S. populations. A key strength of this project is that it will examine racial/ethnic variation among undocumented immigrant youth. Prior research has only examined Mexican Americans likely to be undocumented; thus, little is known about the challenges of other undocumented populations. This study will advance research by examining a wider range of racial/ethnic diversity among the undocumented population.

> Following a brief summary of the study's aims, the reviewer notes how the study will contribute to the broader field.

The one area that the study could use more attention to is potential issues of linguistic inequality. Even at college-age and even among U.S.-born children of immigrants academic English language fluency (as opposed to just conversational fluency) can be an issue. English language challenges, however, were not mentioned much in the proposal. How much is academic English language proficiency an issue for undocumented immigrant college students and do colleges recognize and address these challenges?

> The reviewer notes the primary limitation of the work and then supports their claim.

1b. Comment on how the project addresses questions central to policy and/or practice.

This study both informs strategies for policy development and examines the impacts of current policies and programs. To inform strategies the study identifies educational barriers and supports at the individual, family, institutional, and community level. With this multi-level approach the study will provide rich insights into potential policy solutions that address the wide variety of factors that contribute to undocumented immigrants' educational outcomes.

The study also examines the impact of current federal, state, and institutional policies that are aimed towards alleviating inequalities for undocumented youth. The strength of this study is the mixed method design. Thus, the authors can examine if the policies were effective but more importantly why or why not. This information can be used to strengthen current policies. The qualitative data will provide insights as to whether the policies are being implemented on the ground and/or if students are even aware of them.

> The reviewer states why and how the work is relevant. Further, the reviewer clarifies that the relevance pertains to policy (as opposed to practice).

2. Would the project significantly build on the existing evidence of inequality, and ways to reduce inequality? Comment on the mastery of relevant theory and empirical findings in the proposal.

This study provides a comprehensive assessment of the current state of the literature on undocumented immigrants' educational performance. The authors have a clear understanding of what is known and not known about this population. There are several main contribution of this study, each of which is well-developed. I highlight each below and note potential areas of improvement.

First, this study will advance our understanding of racial/ethnic variation among the undocumented population. The authors are correct that almost everything we know about undocumented college students is based on those of Mexican/Latino descent. The authors effectively describe why differences in migration trajectories, co-ethnic resources, and modes of incorporation may lead to racial/ethnic variation.

I encourage the authors to develop this framework more specifically to the racial/ethnic population they will observe at CUNY. Based on Table 1 and the text, for instance, a large portion is from South America, particularly Ecuador. The authors, however, do not highlight their migration trajectories, co-ethnic resources, and modes of incorporation. Instead, they discuss Africans but none of the countries in Table 1 are African. Additionally, in the data analysis the authors appear to clump all Hispanics into one category. This would mask important variation. I suggest the authors at least distinguish Mexicans from other Hispanic origins (I recognize small sample size challenges). That way the study can shed light on whether the current evidence on undocumented immigrants, which is based only on Mexicans, is applicable or not to other racial/ethnic groups.

Second, this study actually has legal status; most other studies use a proxy. This is a strong advancement over prior research. I encourage the authors to use this information to examine if and how studies that use a proxy are biased. The authors could do this by examining how their results differ if they use the typical Mexican non-citizen proxy vs. their measure of legal status.

Third, this study examines a wider range of educational outcomes than just enrollment and attainment. By examining retention, academic performance, major, etc. the project identifies diverse areas of intervention that could reduce dropout and ensure success. Below are two recent publication that may be of use in this area.

Lastly, the study advances knowledge on federal, state, and institutional policies. Research on DACA, the federal policy, is limited but the authors advance this literature by examining multiple educational outcomes and unpacking the family dynamics that may lead to negative effects on educational attainment. In terms of institutional policies, this study is the first to examine quantitatively how institutional policies and climate impact academic performance. For state policies, the assessment of N.Y. state licensing is novel, though there are data challenges with this assessment since the proposed data only go until 2015 and the policy was adopted in 2016. I assume the authors can extend to include more post-data years?

One state policy area the authors do not examine specifically is in-state resident tuition policies. New York actually rescinded this for a short-time in the early 2000s. Do the authors plan to examine this policy shift with their quantitative data? Was it too short lived to have an effect?
What about qualitatively? Could this have led to the confusion over who qualifies for in-state tuition that the authors note?

In this section, the review provides a strong case for the project's significance and offers targeted and feasible suggestions for strengthening the work. Each point is clearly articulated in a lead sentence, and detailed evidence is then offered in support of the claim or recommendation. This information frequently references specific sections, arguments, and tables in the proposal.

Although not shown here, the reviewer offered a limited number of references to orient the team to another related area of work.

The reviewer poses a few focused questions to encourage deeper thinking about possible implications of the policy context for their data collection, analyses, and interpretation of findings.

3. Are the research questions and/or hypotheses clear and compelling? In what ways?

Yes, as noted above this study advances our current knowledge on undocumented immigrants in several important ways: examining racial/ethnic variation, examining more diverse educational outcomes, and providing a multi-layered policy assessment; i.e. federal, state and institutional. Each of these components is compelling as noted above.

Additionally, the strength of this study is the mixed methods approach which will enable to the authors to examine each of these research questions with quantitative and qualitative data. For example, prior studies have identified institutional barriers undocumented immigrants face in college but have not been able to connect these barriers to academic performance because the data have only been qualitative. This project can make those connections. The flip side, is that prior studies have examined the impacts of policies on undocumented immigrants' academic performance but cannot examine the why—why they worked or why they failed. This project will be able to do examine the why in addition to impact.

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND ANALYSES

1. Research Design and Methods

1a. Comment on the strength of the research design and sampling plan for addressing the research questions and/or hypotheses.

The quantitative data is administrative student record data from CUNY. The authors already have access to the data and there are several strengths to the data (e.g., large public university system with 2 and 4-years institutions, longitudinal data, identifies legal status, includes pre-enrollment background data). I have several questions though regarding data coverage/completeness:

1)   The data track "all degree seeking students"? Are most student's degree seeking and are they always degree seeking at point of enrollment?

2)   The data proposed are from Fall 1999 to Fall 2015 but the authors plan to examine a 2016 licensing policy. Can you add more post-policy years since the study extends to 2019?

3)   The data include pre-CUNY enrollment information from those who attend NY public schools. What is the match rate on this data? What about those who receive GEDs, are there data for them? How complete is the pre-CUNY data? Are there missing data challenges? Having worked with North Carolina data, I know that the test score data is mostly complete but the family background data is highly missing/problematic. Are there similar concerns with the NY data?

4)   The authors have good data on the characteristics of the high school attended. Can you also collect information about the neighborhood surrounding the high school? Do most students attend a neighborhood high school? If so, this might help you assess if students are choosing specific CUNY colleges for location reasons; i.e. the college is the closest college to their high school neighborhood. You could also examine neighborhood context issues noted in the literature review.

The qualitative data are multi-layered examining students, family members, CUNY staff, and campus/community leaders. The study will also gather context data from CUNY websites. The comprehensiveness of the qualitative data is a strength compared to prior studies, which usually focus on one or two areas.

The other strength of the qualitative study design is that for the student population, it is based on a random sample; most studies are based on convenience samples that are likely biased. CUNY administrative data serves as the sampling frame from which students will be randomly sampled. The authors should expand a bit on potential challenges though. For example, are these data going to be useful for finding former students whose contact information may not be up to date? For these students perhaps snowball sampling techniques will need to be incorporated.

> The reviewer's feedback is especially helpful because the questions are specific and itemized. Without additional direction, however, such lists can make it challenging for applicants to prioritize the biggest threats to the work.

Other clarifications/suggestions regarding the qualitative data are:

1)   Is there time/budget to interview faculty members? I would think that students may have more frequent contact with them than administrators/staff (may be not). Could you snowball sample to get "friendly" and "unfriendly" faculty context?

2)   The web-scraping idea for context is great! Could this be done for twitter and other newsfeeds of student organizations on campus? The one perspective missing are the student peers of undocumented immigrants. Given the political climate and racial/ethnic divisions on U.S. campuses this could be informative. I don't know the practicality/time intensity though.

1b. Comment on the data collection plan, including the strength of the data collection tools (i.e., interview or observation protocols, coding schemes, measures, etc.) and the plans to field those tools.

See 1a for my comments regarding the completeness/coverage of the quantitative data.

For the qualitative data the authors have general interview guides developed for each set of interviews that will be conducted. The guides are general but highlight key themes to be covered. The authors do not note, however, that they will pre-test the interviews, which could be of value. Other questions I had were:

1)   English language issues—do you envision any of these for the family members and how will you get around them?

2)   Will the web-based content analysis be used to inform questions for the qualitative interviews? The timeline does not suggest this, but this would be useful.

1c. If the applicant proposes measurement development work, comment on (i) the importance of the construct, (ii) the utility of the measure for the field, (iii) the rigor of the measurement work, and (iv) the team's measurement expertise.

The authors are not proposing measurement development work.

1d. Comment on the feasibility of the methods and data collection plan. Are you persuaded that the team can successfully collect that data? Do they have convincing strategies for maximizing response rates and gaining access to sites and respondents?

The authors already have access to the quantitative data and thus presumably should be able to get more data years (e.g., 2016+) as they are released. These additional data years are needed for their assessment of the state licensing policy. They also have worked with the data and given preliminary results. Thus, they appear to have the data skills required to integrate and manage the different administrative data they receive.

In terms of qualitative data, the one main concern is that the authors do not note how they will address low response rate challenges. OIRA has agreed to assist the authors with recruitment and will actually oversee recruitment to ensure student confidentiality. The authors themselves cannot contact students. The authors do not clarify, however, what type of rapport OIRA has with students. Given the sensitive nature of documentation status, how responsive are these students likely to be to OIRA? What measures could be taken to alleviate any concerns?

> The review noted the data in hand and the data required to carry out the work. The review could have pushed further and requested assurances about the research team's access to future data or an explanation of how the team will assess the state policy effects without new data.

2. Data Analysis and Interpretation

2a. Comment on the sophistication and rigor of the analysis plan. Consider whether the team demonstrates an understanding of the strengths and limits of various analytic techniques.

For the quantitative assessment, the authors understand the fundamental selection challenges that can bias their results. They try to minimize these by including pre-CUNY controls for student and

school background characteristics and using principal score matching and a regression discontinuity design (RDD). I suggest some additional analyses and question whether RDD should be used.

To assess academic performance, the authors propose to use principal score matching and sensitivity analysis. PSM is a valid method but only addresses observable differences, which the authors note. In addition to the PSM method, I suggest taking greater advantage of those observable differences. The pre-student achievement characteristics in addition to family background characteristics are a significant advancement of prior studies, but would get hidden in a PSM design. I encourage the authors to use this information more and develop models to show how these factors contribute to college performance. The recent study below does a nice job of this qualitatively; this project could model some of these factors quantitatively (e.g., examine interactive effects—how do low vs. high SES undocumented immigrants perform?).

Enriquez, L. E. (2016). A 'master status' or the 'final straw'? Assessing the role of immigration status in Latino undocumented youths' pathways out of school. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 1-18.

For the policy analysis, the authors propose a regression discontinuity design (RDD) but it sounds more like an interrupted time series design and the authors could use the stronger difference-in- difference (DD) design. Most of the in-state resident tuition studies the authors cite use a DD type of design comparing undocumented students before and after a policy and netting out general trends using a comparison group (e.g., citizens/LPRs).

I am unclear why a RDD is applicable in this case since the discontinuity is time. I've usually seen RDDs used for discontinuity on eligibility criteria (e.g., just below vs. just above the poverty line). With a DD type of design the authors could take advantage of time and use a comparison group to net out potential pre-post general trends (e.g., economic shifts) that could bias their results. The authors could also take advantage of the fact that some individuals (in addition to cohorts) are observed pre-post. For seniors a policy change may have no difference since they're near graduation, but for freshman a policy change could lead them to change majors and other educational investments.

The DD vs. RDD distinction may be due to differences in discipline terminology, but justification for the RDD design needs to be strengthened.

The reviewer notes a significant concern about the design of the study and offers constructive feedback for strengthening the work. Further the reviewer requests more details about how the team will implement a difference in difference design. Alternatively, if the initial design will be used, the reviewer requests that the PI explain and defend why the approach noted in the proposal is preferred.

For qualitative analysis, the authors note the main themes that will be assessed and that RAs will be used to collect, transcribe, and analyze data. There is not much detail on data analysis otherwise. One point of clarification I had:

1)   In the interviews with CUNY staff, the authors note they will interview 4-year campuses with low % undocumented vs. 4-year campus with high % undocumented (and the same comparison with 2-year universities). I see the value in this but wondered if it would be more informative to compare campuses with high vs. low performance among the undocumented population?

2b. If the applicant proposes mixed methods work, comment on the strength of the plan to integrate data from various methods. Does the plan deepen understanding or validate findings across methods?

The mixed method data serve as compliments. The authors note that for ethical reasons they cannot directly connect the quantitative and qualitative student data. Instead, the data are complimentary; the quantitative data provides overall patterns in academic performance and qualitative data provides in-depth context from multiple perspectives that helps explains why these patterns exist.

This is an advancement of prior research because most studies have only done one of these things and then used evidence from other studies, with a different

The reviewer continues to build a case for how and why the project advances prior empirical work.

sampling frame/data, to speculate about the other. This study addresses this limitation by using both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the same population of interest.

3. Does the project demonstrate adequate consideration of the gender, ethnic, and cultural appropriateness of concepts, methods, and measures? In what ways?

The authors are sensitive to this in the literature review and address this in the data collection/analysis section. These issues are less relevant for the quantitative data but could arise with the qualitative data. The interview guide details general themes, which includes gender roles and culturally sensitive questions for undocumented immigrants. Given the authors background with ethnographic research and literature summary, I am re-assured that the specific questions they ask will be gender/ethnically/culturally appropriate.

> The reviewer's confidence in the work is based on the quality of the proposal's literature review and the team's training and expertise with ethnographic work.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Is the budget appropriate? Does it reflect a cost-effective use of the Foundation's limited resources? Describe any concerns.

Admittedly, I am less versed in this area but did not see any major red flags.

2. Is the project team adequately staffed to successfully carry out the project? If not, what staffing or expertise is needed? (Please note that the Foundation discourages large advisory committees. Each proposed advisor should serve a specific and significant need for the project.)

Yes, the project includes individuals with extensive knowledge in relevant theoretical areas (e.g., education, immigration, race/ethnicity, and policy), a broad range of expertise in qualitative and quantitative data, and prior grant experience. The project will also include an RA for which the team has a working relationship and knows that he/she has the necessary skills for data collection and analysis.

3. Would the project generate data useful to other researchers? If so, will the data be made available in public use files?

This is not mentioned and I don't believe feasible with this data. The data are highly sensitive and given to the researchers based on agreements with CUNY. Public use files do not seem practical.

> The reviewer provides a direct response to the question and offers support for their suggestion.

"BOTTOM LINE" RECOMMENDATION

Is this project worth funding? Why or why not? Consider the questions or hypotheses addressed, quality of the proposed work, and the likely contribution to our interest in reducing inequality.

> Although not displayed, this final section included a clear recommendation about funding and a strong rationale. They also summarized the one or two most critical concerns.