

# IN THE SHADOWS: IMMIGRATION STORIES

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## Introduction

As a first-generation student continuing higher education with access to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA), it often feels like I am living in the shadows. As Williamson (2020) found, in a study about how immigrant histories can promote inclusion, "priming family history generates small but consistent inclusionary effects," proposing that "priming family experiences can indirectly stimulate perspective-taking and induce empathy toward the out-group." Thus, connecting through immigrant stories can build empathy. If people read others' stories, they may think about the variety of ways that their families may have come to be impacted by immigration policies. Through stories, it may be possible to begin "building relationships with folks from different oppressed nationalities" which may "foster understanding and unity" (Smith, 2018, p. 160). This project began as an online telling of stories, written by the children who came with their parents and are now DACA recipients. Building empathy has the power to impact policy (Adams, 2018).

## Project Goals

- (1) Provide an opportunity to engage with immigrant stories in a public art installation
- (2) Understand how specific stories might impact readers' beliefs or understandings about current immigration policies surrounding access to education.



## Methods

This project used both an online and in-person data collection site. Each site included six stories collected from DACA recipients about their parents' immigration journeys displayed on large poster boards for the in-person display with opportunities to hear or read the stories with an option of an online display of each poster through a site I created.

**Participants:** Self-selected US citizens or LPRs over the age of 18.

- 100+ in person at eight events

- 32 on initial online survey and 2 on current online survey

**Survey:** The survey consists of 8 yes/no policy questions, 2 open-ended response questions, and 3 like scale questions to elicit feedback regarding immigration policy knowledge and preferences. Participants were recruited through emails, publication in the Columbus Republic (2023, March 21) and through classroom distributions in English as a New Language teacher education courses.



## Findings

Preliminary findings show that the initial survey lead us to ask more about policies. 50% of recipients did not know DACA recipients were unable to apply for citizenship. For 80.6% the stories expanded their views about immigration and 71% had a change in perspective about undocumented families living in our community. Several themes emerged from qualitative responses from the in-person art installations:

### *Immigration Ignorance*

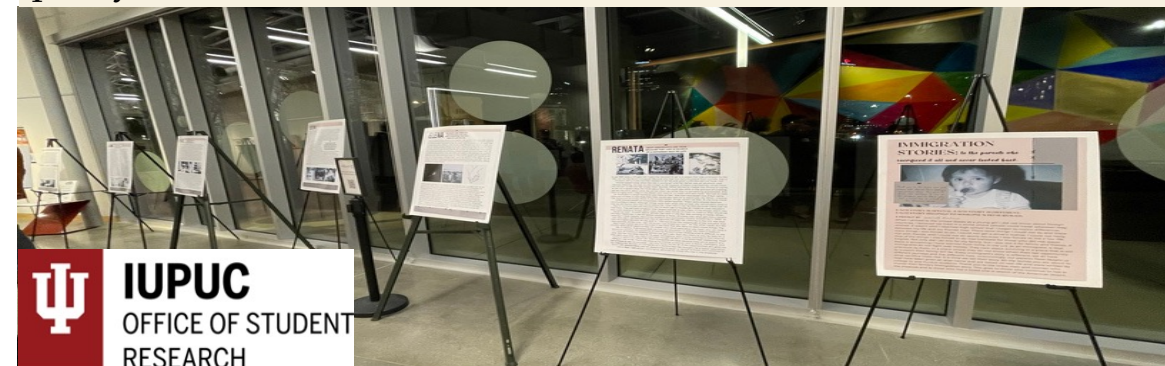
Several participants used the statement: "I never knew..." and asked questions about work permissions and schooling. "I did not realize the many limitations undocumented students face even when they have DACA."

### *Recalling Discrimination*

Immigrants (now residents) who attended the event recalled painful transitions, and the stories created visceral empathy as they viewed the posters and shared their own stories. "I felt so lonely."

### *Uncertainty and Empathy*

Some participants, walked away from the event with questions about their own leanings when it comes to immigration policy. Empathy for the children, the DACA recipients, was evident, however it is unclear if empathy for the parents resulted in a shift in policy decisions.



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## Limitations

Due to a glitch in the new survey, we were unable to obtain responses. Therefore, we were only able to capture the impact of the in-person display through observations and self-selected questions from participants. Another limitation is the lack of a pre-survey to gather empathy and policy knowledge in advance of the art installation. We also recognize that participation is self-selecting, therefore persons who are curious to learn more about immigrants and their stories would be more likely to attend an event like this or read the online stories. The stories take a long time to read and may have resulted in participants not making it to the end of the survey or even starting the survey.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study provided enough preliminary evidence to indicate that there is a lack of knowledge about immigration policies and how those policies impact access to education. Providing a pre-and post-survey after engaging with the stories and policies might identify empathy and knowledge-building through the art installation. Before sending out the survey, making these changes will contextualize and provide backgr-

## References

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ound to the participants. It is also evident from preliminary data that informing the public the specific policies attached to being a DACA recipient can support empathy-building and influence policy preferences in education.