Considerations for Professional Staff Working with DACA Recipients
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POPULATION
Who are they?
- 2.1 million immigrants brought into the States and were out of status before the age of 16
- 800,000 accepted so far

What are its requirements?
- Prove you arrived in the US before the age of 16
- Were under the age of 31 in June 2012
- Have lived continuously in the US since June 15, 2007
- Are currently in school/graduated high school/obtained a GED
- No felony charge/no significant misdemeanors charge/no more than 3 lesser misdemeanor charges
- $465 fee to process application

What it offers?
- A path to citizenship
- Permanent residence
- Criminals a path into the country
- Legal status for adults older than 30 (at the inception of DACA)

What it does not offer?
- A path to citizenship
- Permanent residence
- Limited upward mobility
- Criminals a path into the country
- Legal status for adults older than 30 (at the inception of DACA)

Vocational outcomes
- Less likely to pursue a college degree than their peers
- Overrepresentation in “Blue Collar” jobs
- Less freedom with career choice

GUIDING THEORIES
Dual-Process
- Research suggests that there are two processes typically involved in our decision-making:
  - System 1
  - System 2
- These two systems are differentiated along four main categories: awareness, intentionality, energy consumption (relative to the task), and controllability.

Cognitive Load
- Research has established that individuals have a limited amount of cognitive resources
- We utilize this same resource to address tasks in various domains
- These resources are depleted during task completion
- Depletion of mental resources to complete a task in one domain will limit the available resources to complete a task in another domain

Intersection
- Placing an individual under cognitive stress increases the workload of the reasoning system (System 2) and limits the users ability to access it in completing tasks within other domains
- DACA-related concerns consume mental resources, leaving fewer resources to complete other tasks
- Preoccupations can be present even when not making a decision
- Hypothesis: The context of the minority DACA student induces cognitive load, which in turn impedes cognitive tasks in other domains (as evidenced by scores in cognitive reasoning tasks)

PROPOSED INTERVENTION
CARES Vocational Institute
C: Incorporate coping strategies
- These students are under a large amount of stress on a regular basis. Based on the theories we’ve detailed here, it would be difficult to engage in meaningful work while bombarded by consistent stress, therefore it remains the task of the professional staff to incorporate coping strategies in their work with these students.

A: Advocacy as a cornerstone
- We as counselors cannot continue to pretend as though disparities do not exist for this demographic. We must acknowledge (and continue to acknowledge) them before we can engage in meaningful work with these students.

R: Reach before Graduation
- Past High School, a large percentage of DACA recipients choose to work over going to college (it’s cheaper and a quicker access to funding). With this in mind interventions around work would be relevant before college.

E: Empower each student
- For so long, students who qualify for DACA status have felt victim to the system with very little agency over how they choose to live. We can empower these students by incorporating practical (transferable) skills into the CARES curriculum.

S: Provide support till graduation
- Support is often not readily available for this demographic as many are skeptical to disclose their circumstance. In fact, only 9% receive any semblance of support from their schools; they are often admitted and forgotten. The proposed program encourages each student to reach out to a role model they look up to and ask for their support. Students are also paired with faculty/staff mentors to remain with them for their final two years of High School.

Qualitative Measures
- Proposed qualitative measure to assess both how much students identify with their status as DACA recipients and which aspects of the proposed CARES initiative most closely resonates with their needs.

IMPLICATIONS
- Professionals working with DACA students need to institute interventions to address the persistent cognitive load before engaging in tasks requiring reasoning.
- Our negative attributions of DACA recipients would need to change (assigning the negative themes to the status rather than the person).
- DACA recipients have existed since 2012 and, as expected, research on best practices for this population is lacking. This population would be better served if we conducted more research about them.

REFERENCES