The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag. The stars and stripes are visible, with a warm, golden light filtering through, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The text is overlaid on this background.

Dreamers Go to College

Keeping undocumented students motivated when DACA and other policies are in question.



By Eric Neutuch

Juan is an outstanding student, but he has a problem. He has a 4.0 GPA at a community college in suburban Chicago, 43 credits, and aspirations to earn a doctorate in psychology. His problem is that he is undocumented.

Enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, Juan (whose name has been changed) has a permit that shields him from deportation and allows him to work, but with the Trump administration's rescinding of the DACA program, Juan has anxieties about his and his family's future. "My family and I try to remain strong, and we try to tell ourselves that everything is going to be okay. My sister is the first one in the family whose DACA permit will expire. We don't know what's going to happen," he said.

DACA, which began in 2012 through an Obama executive order, provides individuals who entered the country illegally or overstayed visas as minors with work permits and protection from deportation. Of the approximately 11 million undocumented people in the United States, 690,000 hold DACA permits. They are known as Dreamers—a term derived from the name of the proposed DREAM Act, which was introduced in Congress in 2001 and aimed to create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the US as children.

On Sept. 5, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the DACA program's repeal, calling it "an unconstitutional exercise of authority by the Executive Branch." The repeal came with a six-month grace period for Congress to pass legislation on the issue. On March 5, the first DACA permits will expire. As of press time, a legislative solution has not been forged, leaving DACA Dreamers in anxious states of limbo.

NACAC is advocating for Congressional action to embed the DACA program's protections into law. Mike Rose, NACAC's director of government relations, said, "We want Congress to provide students with stability in their lives so that they can move forward and plan." NACAC has long advocated on behalf of undocumented students, including supporting the initial DREAM Act in 2001.

In the days after the September DACA repeal, numerous university leaders issued statements saying that they stand with the Dreamers. An October letter from the American Council on Education to President Trump, which was signed by 800 university leaders, asked for the immediate restoration of the DACA program by executive order, stating, "In order to lift this cloud of fear, we ask that you commit to allowing these productive and high-achieving individuals to continue to work and study while your administration and Congress arrive at a permanent solution."

TUITION EQUALITY AND FINANCIAL ANXIETIES

Within the 23-campus California State University (CSU) system, Chancellor Tim Warren reaffirmed the system's commitment to undocumented students. A statement from Chancellor Warren reads, "The university's enrollment and tuition policies are not based on DACA status, so enrollment, tuition, and financial aid for students is not impacted by the ending of the program. Additionally, state funding under the California Dream Act is not based on DACA status and will not change."

Since 2001, undocumented students in California have been charged in-state tuition rates at public institutions rather than out-of-state rates, which foreign students pay. As of now, 20 states and the District of Columbia grant in-state tuition rates to undocumented students attending

public institutions. Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid, including Pell grants, Stafford loans, and work-study.

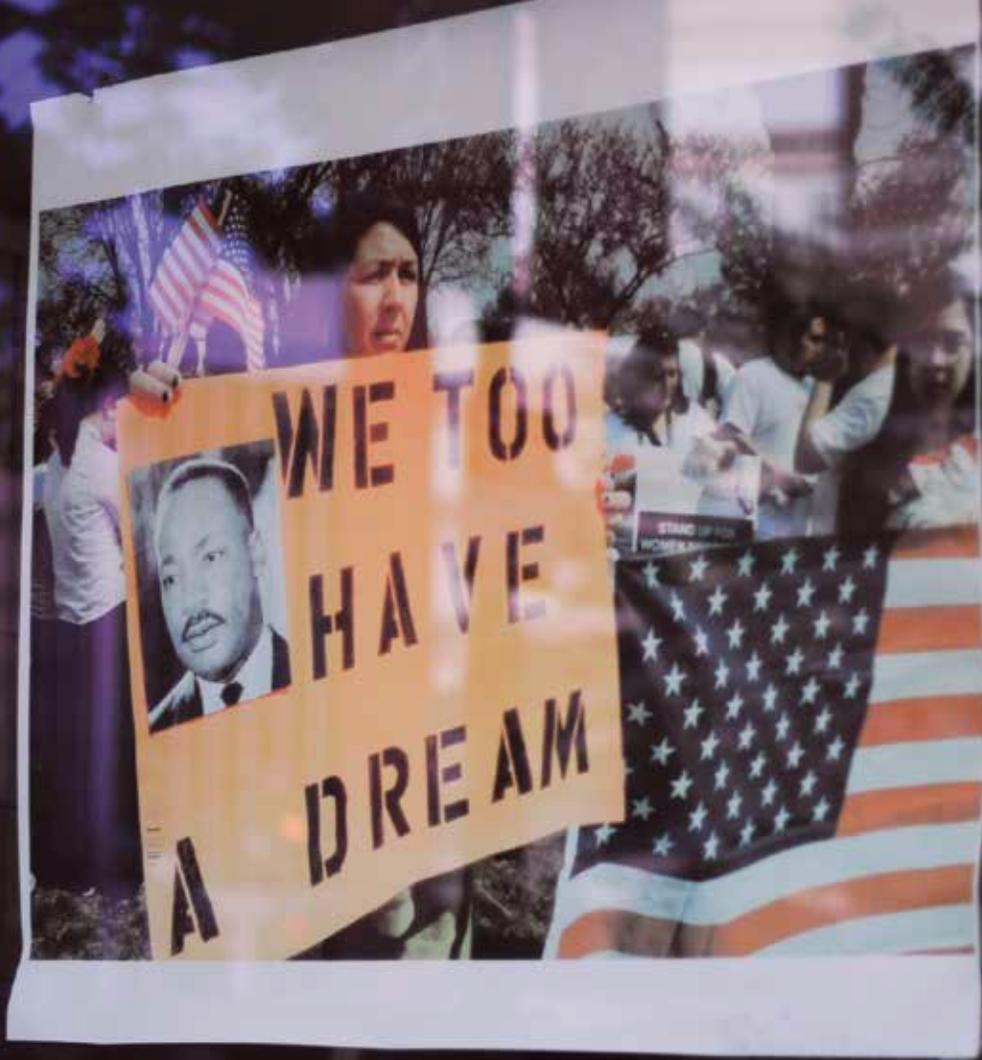
Policies that grant undocumented students eligibility for in-state tuition rates are an important part of NACAC's advocacy for undocumented students. NACAC's Rose said, "Providing undocumented students with legal standing to stay in the country is the first step. As the next step, we want states to recognize that students meet the criteria for in-state tuition."

In New Jersey, tuition rates for undocumented students were set at the in-state level in the spring of 2014, but even with tuition equality, Rutgers University–Newark's (RU-N) Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs and Strategic Partnerships John Gunkel said: "The biggest challenges for our undocumented students are financial." At the university, annual in-state tuition and fees are \$14,085 for in-state residents, which is not affordable for most undocumented families, he said, cautioning that "assumptions about wealth and income don't always hold place."

On the day after DACA was repealed, Juan's father texted him a message that Juan has saved in his phone and looks at frequently. The text message said, "A dreamer does not depend on Trump. A dreamer depends on his own dreams."

Providing financial support to undocumented students is a key lever in RU-N's efforts to increase undocumented student enrollment, said Gunkel. In 2015, RU-N launched a partnership with the non-profit college success organization TheDream.US, which provides scholarships to Dreamers. The partnership covers scholarships for 33 RU-N undocumented students. Institutional revenues, including endowment earnings, support full-tuition scholarships for another 71 students, and additional resources and gifts fund scholarships for 15 more students.

RU-N enrolls a little more than 200 undocumented students, and Gunkel wishes that more scholarship funds were available. He advocates for policies allowing state-funded financial aid to go to undocumented students. "It would be a remarkable benefit if the state steps up and puts measures in place that help address our undocumented students' financial anxieties," he said. Eight states, including California and



Texas, already offer some forms of state-based financial aid to eligible undocumented students.

Esder Chong is a RU-N DACA sophomore working hard to cobble together scholarships to finance her education. A scholarship from TheDream.US covers half her tuition. Fifteen to 20 smaller scholarships—so many that she’s lost track of the count—cover the remaining half of her tuition, including awards from The Donald and Itasker Thornton Memorial Foundation and the Educational Testing Service Employees’ Community Act Fund.

Scholarship hunting, she said, “is really like a part-time job. I have to submit 10 to 20 applications to just get one. It takes a long time and it’s time-consuming, but there’s no other choice. Without these organizations that support and sponsor me, I wouldn’t be in college.”

Esder recalls the uncertainty that she and her classmates felt after the DACA repeal. “For the first two weeks afterwards, I couldn’t really concentrate in class. DACA gave us hope to continue fighting and pursuing our educations,” she said. “Even if DACA recipients get protection again, what’s our future going to be like in this country?”

Together with 50 classmates, Esder founded the RU-N Dreamers Club last year to advocate for immigrant inclusive policies and to create a space for undocumented students to “have a social life with other undocumented students who understand what you’re going through.”

After the DACA repeal announcement, Gunkel said the RU-N campus community rallied around the campus’s undocumented students and

especially around the RU-N Dreamers Club. At a campus as diverse as RU-N. “Most students have friends or family who are undocumented,” he said. RU-N, in collaboration with the Rutgers campuses in New Brunswick and Camden, is presently hiring a program coordinator for undocumented student services to advise and advocate for undocumented students.

Esder has no plans to return to her native Korea. “I came here when I was 6 years old. My future is here. Me and my sisters don’t know Korean. All of our dreams are here,” she said. When contemplating the possibility of living in Korea, she added, “I’d rather go to Canada.”

HELP FROM COUNSELORS

Juan remembers when he told his school counselor junior year, “I’m undocumented, and I need your help.” The counselor referred Juan to a full-tuition scholarship at the College of Lake County (CLC), the nearby community college. Juan applied for and won the scholarship in his second semester at CLC. To pay for his first semester, he balanced his schoolwork with a job packing and shipping boxes at a distribution center. The scholarship is the lifeline that has allowed Juan to maintain full-time enrollment at CLC. He said, “The scholarship is the only reason that I can concentrate on my studies. Otherwise, I would have needed to work again to pay my tuition.” Divulging his status to his school counselor was tough, but he is grateful that he made that decision, considering himself “very fortunate” to have had that counselor to guide him.

Currently researching bachelor's programs, Juan said that another full scholarship would "mean the world to me. It would be my only shot." He is applying for a TheDream.US scholarship. Like Esder, Juan can't contemplate returning to his native Honduras, from which his family emigrated for greater safety and economic opportunities when he was eight.

On the day after DACA was repealed, Juan's father texted him a message that Juan has saved in his phone and looks at frequently. The text message said, "A dreamer does not depend on Trump. A dreamer depends on his own dreams." Juan repeats his father's message aloud, "We depend on our dreams."

If a DACA-type program isn't reinstated and Juan returns to the ranks of those at risk of deportation, he said that he will stay closer to his family for his baccalaureate years, assuming that he can raise funds to cover tuition—a big if. He said that he and his family would take more precautions than they currently do to limit deportation. "I want to remain optimistic," he said shakily.

Aliza Gilbert, a NACAC member and a college counselor at Highland Park High School (IL) where Juan went to school, advises counselors to be as proactive as ever in advising undocumented students to pursue

college-going. She said, "A whole lot of students went to college before DACA. For most of the students who I talk with, the elimination of DACA is not impacting whether they go to college. There's a lot of uncertainty, but most of my students are watching and moving ahead optimistically."

Gilbert advises counselors to build school environments in which undocumented students have access to resources specifically addressing their needs without having to reveal their status. "We need to normalize the conversation so that undocumented students don't have to self-disclose to get access to good information," she said.

Gilbert encourages college and school counselors to take these steps:

1. Post signage in support of undocumented and immigrant students in hallways, classrooms, and offices.
2. Talk about college access and financial aid resources for undocumented students during college nights and other large events.
3. Educate colleagues and teachers about college access resources for undocumented students.
4. Reach out to middle and junior high schools so that undocumented students know early on that college is possible.

Gilbert said that these strategies will create schools in which undocumented students feel comfortable disclosing undocumented status,

Cleveland, Ohio – July 18, 2016: Young Hispanics support the Dream Act at a march on the first day of the Republican National Convention. DACA (the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program defers immigration enforcement action against young people brought to the US illegally as children.



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as Juan eventually did. Her basic advice is "to make sure that information for undocumented students is part of everything you do."

Ultimately, Gilbert said that practices that support undocumented students will contribute to increasing the educational attainment of undocumented students, who presently enter college at rates well below those of non-undocumented students, and complete college at even lower rates.

In 2014, Gilbert and colleagues from the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling organized a "Sharing the Dream" conference on college access and success for undocumented students. They hoped that 100 counselors would attend, but instead, more than 300 counselors attended. The role that NACAC and its affiliates have played in the education of professionals and the public "makes me proud of our professional organizations," she said.

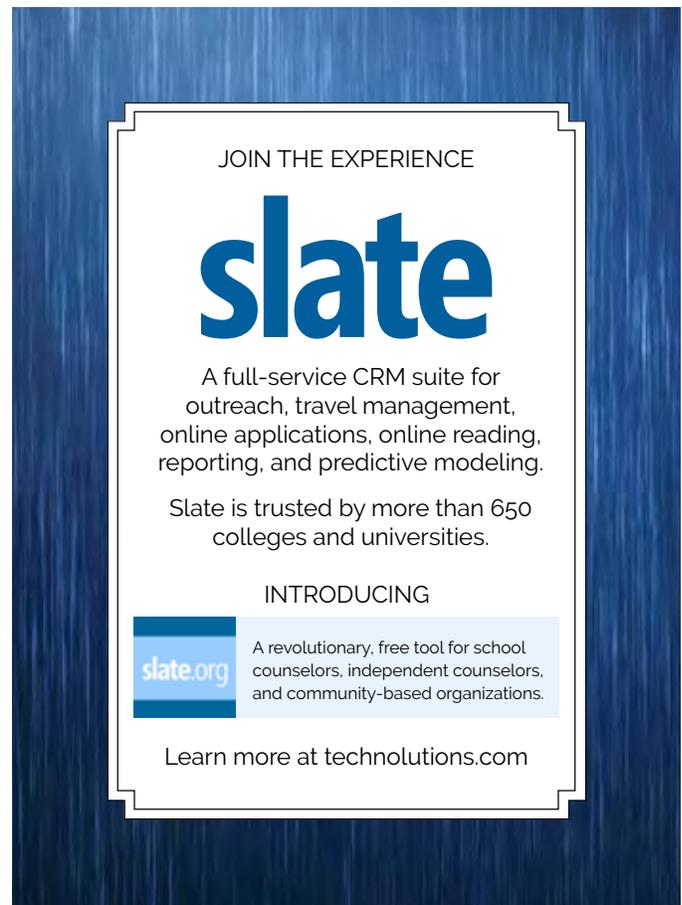
She also is proud of how the organization has advocated on behalf of undocumented students over the past year. "You talk about taking away peoples' rights and everyone rallies," she said. ▢

Eric Neutuch is a Northeastern University (MA) doctoral student.

Advertisements



The advertisement features a background image of hands typing on a laptop. The AACRAO logo is in the top right. A gold seal on the left reads "AACRAO SEM Endorsement Program". The main title is "AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Endorsement Program (SEM-EP)". Below it is a descriptive sentence: "A well-defined, self-paced professional development program and career advancement track for in-service enrollment service professionals." Under "Designed to:" are three bullet points: "Develop expertise and advance in the field of strategic enrollment management", "Promote industry competency and readiness", and "Offer flexibility to accommodate professionals with ideal completion between 12-18 months". To the right is a diagram of four hexagons: "ONLINE COURSE" (blue), "WEBINARS" (yellow), "FIELD VISITS" (green), and "CAPSTONE" (red). Below the diagram is the text "The Four Key Elements of SEM-EP". At the bottom is a green banner with the text "For more information, visit aacrao.org/semep".



The advertisement has a dark blue background with a white-bordered box. At the top, it says "JOIN THE EXPERIENCE". Below that is the word "slate" in a large, bold, blue font. Underneath is the text: "A full-service CRM suite for outreach, travel management, online applications, online reading, reporting, and predictive modeling." This is followed by: "Slate is trusted by more than 650 colleges and universities." Below that is the word "INTRODUCING" in all caps. To the left is a blue box with "slate.org" in white. To the right is the text: "A revolutionary, free tool for school counselors, independent counselors, and community-based organizations." At the bottom is the text: "Learn more at technolutions.com".