

Some Biology Majors are Left in Limbo

Jaime Perez

Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045



Jaime Perez '10 (left) at an immigrant rights march held in 2010 in Washington D.C.

Although the U.S. government classifies us as “illegal aliens,” many of us prefer the term “undocumented immigrants.” I, along with an estimated 2 million other individuals, are categorized even more specifically—we are also students. We are high school students, college or university students, and even graduate school students. Yes, Lake Forest College, like many other colleges and universities nation-wide, accepts undocumented students! In fact, a handful of undocumented students have been directly involved in the sciences at LFC and have been extremely successful in their career here. During our time at LFC, we have received high grades, honors for community participation, scholarships, and even completed senior theses with distinctions. Furthermore, many of us are taking risks in sharing our stories and “coming out” as undocumented, but we see this as the only way to show the rest of the U.S. that we are normal, high-achieving Americans.

Lets start at the beginning, because my story is very similar to thousands of other undocumented immigrant students. I was born in the city of eternal spring, Medellin, Colombia. My parents decided to leave the country in 1999, when I was 10 years old, and move to Chicago for a better life with more opportunities, the typical immigration story. We came with tourist visas and simply overstayed. I didn't understand the severity of my situation until I encountered things I could not do or have, like an ID, driver's license, job, airplane flights, and study abroad opportunities. These are normal day-to-day activities that most individuals take for granted. The worst of this is we live in a world of silence, secrets, and lies and no one can know about our status.

Undocumented college graduates like myself, have to live by the unfortunate reality that our career possibilities have been diminished due to our current immigration status. We will not be able to enter the work force and utilize the degrees we so passionately worked for. I feel prepared to face challenging jobs or even post-graduate study, as do my documented peers, but I am not even allowed to enter the playing game. I graduated magna cum laude in May 2010 with a Biology and Studio Art double

major. I'd like to now pursue a graduate degree in Prosthetics, a field where I will be confronted with patient care along with providing artificial limbs to those who need them. Unfortunately, these graduate programs make it difficult for individuals with unresolved immigration statuses to enroll.

Situations like these leave our stories at a standstill and our dreams left in limbo. Many of us undocumented students came here as children, having no recollection of our native land and have come to consider ourselves American. Deportation is not an option for me, my career goals would vanish, I would be restricted by language, and I would come “home” to a strange land without my loved ones.

We need to be recognized for our academic and community merits and be given the opportunity to be part of this country so that we can too give back to the community that has given us so much. This is the reason why I, along with hundreds of other undocumented students, are “coming out” as undocumented, and pushing for a piece of legislation that will validate our efforts and provide us with a pathway to citizenship. The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) would provide undocumented students the opportunity to earn conditional permanent residency. This opportunity would be open to students who graduated from U.S. high schools, who are of good moral character, arrived in the U.S. as minors, and have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment. Without the DREAM Act, our futures are stagnant and we continue to live in fear. Although on the outside we appear to be woven into our nation's fabric, we continue to feel like outsiders without this important 9-digit number.

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