

OPINION



Michael Macor / The Chronicle 2013

UC Merced, surrounded by farmland, is home to nearly 600 undocumented students, a quarter of whom came from Los Angeles in pursuit of an education.

OPEN FORUM *On Immigration*

Congress must do its part

By Dorothy Leland

A young girl was brought to this country by parents who sought a better life, who instilled her with their work ethic, and who raised her with the desire to contribute in a meaningful way to her family and her society.

She came to UC Merced and joined a research lab, where she studied the human heart's electrical system in an effort to better predict and prevent its failure. Last year that student, Yuriana Aguilar, filled us all with pride when she earned her Ph.D., and her potentially life-saving research has only just begun.

Without protection from deportation, the promising career of one of the brightest young people our university has so proudly sent out into the world would have foundered. The same is true for the nearly 600 undocumented students enrolled on our campus, and the thousands of undocumented students on

Extend protections for undocumented students, including 600 at UC Merced

campuses throughout the UC system.

These students are the very embodiment of the American dream, and their presence here is unquestionably beneficial to our state. The prospect of life without the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program is one of their worst nightmares. It should be ours as well.

Undocumented students come to UC Merced from all over California. Nearly 1 in 4 of them arrived here from Los Angeles — nearly five hours away from home — in pursuit of a first-rate education and the chance to build a better future. Nearly 1 in 6 of all undocumented students in the UC system are at UC Merced.

I have seen firsthand the positive impact these young students have had on our university, our campus com-

munity, our region and the state.

These are hardworking, law-abiding, taxpaying young people who enrich our campus and our community. They are setting a positive example for their younger siblings, their peers and even their mentors, and they are making the lives of their families and communities better. They are not a drain on our economy, and they provide no threat to those of us lucky enough to have been born here.

Removing these students from our county would unnecessarily disrupt our neighborhoods and communities, and it would ruin lives in ways that are simply unconscionable — and it would have a disproportionate effect on the state of California and in communities like ours.

Instead, we should use our

collective energy and creativity to develop ways to keep them here and encourage their successes.

College is difficult even for students who come from affluent backgrounds with highly educated parents who can help guide them through this labyrinth. It's more difficult for first-generation students, whose parents are supportive but lack the educational background to give the timely advice they need. And it's more difficult for students who come from low-income families, who often must work one or more jobs to support themselves and their loved ones.

Undocumented students share all of these burdens and more, and what they accomplish in the face of these challenges is truly remarkable. Imagine their desire to make

the world a better place — imagine a student working with drones to improve water use in agriculture, while his parents spend their days picking crops just to afford the barest essentials in life.

Bipartisan groups across the country are urging a legislative solution — laws enacted by Congress that would extend DACA protections to students who grew up here and call this country home through new legislation.

We as a campus will continue to do our part.

Many members of Congress have made a similar pledge, and now is the time to follow through. They have the opportunity to prove they value humanity over party politics, and to move us toward a society in which all who embody the American ideals of hard work and ingenuity are rewarded with rich opportunities to build their own futures.

Dorothy Leland is the chancellor of UC Merced.

Dreams deferred with end of DACA

Young immigrants fear they must return to living 'in the shadows'

By Jefferson Leiva

For more than five long, anxious years, we believed that it wasn't over. In our own echo chambers of social media, we saw and heard the passionate support of #DefendDACA. Hashtags and filters spread like wildfire, sparking hope among our immigrant community.

But with President Trump's decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, I realize that we Dreamers have been waging a fight that we lost from the beginning.

From the time we arrived as children in America, we understood this fight was necessary. We were encouraged to find comfort in the shadows. There, we moved, whispered, protected and comforted each other. We agreed to forget faces and names. We normalized single-parent families, sweatshops and threats from our employers to turn us in.

Then, in 2012, President Barack Obama invited us to come out.

It was a black man who urged us brown Dreamers to explore life, liberty and happiness. For his trouble, he was attacked by a storm of criticism and lawsuits. Uneasily, yet trusting in the long shot of citizenship, we forfeited the comforts of the shadows —

we took the gamble.

Obama's invitation came with strict requirements, including giving up information that made us exceptionally vulnerable. We filed our form I-821s, asking for consideration of deferred action; with our form I-765s, we requested the right to work. We handed over every report card and transcript. Every vaccine, medical record and bank statement became part of an official story that summarized our existence as aliens. We didn't know five years later they would become our suicide notes.

Dreamers and their advocates are waging a war against the Trump administration. But it's merely an extinction burst: This is our last outburst of survival before we retreat into the shadows. These are our final sweat- and blood-laden efforts to tear down the impenetrable wall of xenophobia with our bare hands.

Javier Palomarez, president and chief executive of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, told CNN Monday that he would work "to the bloody end to try and convince this president to do the right thing by these 800,000 Dreamers who reside in this country." Unfortunately, that will prove hard. (Palomarez resigned Tuesday from the White House



Kevin Gutierrez / Stagg High School Stagline

Jefferson Leiva, an immigration and video editor for Global Student Square, recounts the challenges that faced Dreamers before Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was established.

Diversity Council after the DACA announcement.)

Trump has promised to build a tall wall between Mexico and the United States. To a president whose experience is in the world of real estate and construction, perhaps this will be his one true accomplishment. Metaphorically but also literally, Trump plans to use brick and mortar to lay down the foundation of division. This wall is not yet fully cemented, but already there are figures on top of the wall that look down on at our irrational attempts to remain here.

Documented Americans say they love us and perhaps some

do. They love the 250 Dreamers who work at Apple. They love the doctors and paramedics who work on a daily basis to save lives.

They love Alonso Guillen, 31, the DACA student who drowned while trying to rescue survivors of Hurricane Harvey. His body was recovered Sunday, just hours before news that President Trump might end DACA.

But told of the vulnerable 16-year-old who hasn't found a foothold — the unemployed student, the working-class immigrant still trying to reach his or her American Dream — they'll laugh.

With President Obama's invitation five years ago, we hoped xenophobia, racism and discrimination would end. But we will forever be criminals, rapists and drug dealers in the eyes of an administration with xenophobic acolytes.

Sadly, it turns out the best thing a Dreamer could do is dream.

Jefferson Leiva is an immigration and video editor for Global Student Square, an international student journalism network that works to bring youth voices into global news. He recently graduated from Stagg High School in Stockton.