



NEWSLETTER

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IMMIGRANTS FIGHT FOR RIGHT TO HIGHER ED

- ANNE O'DELL

As protests swell across the country and the dialogue on immigration becomes more heated, the educational futures of the children of undocumented immigrants have become an important aspect of the national debate.

The House and Senate bills proposing immigration reform include what is known as the DREAM Act, or Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2005. It states that undocumented minors who have lived in the U.S. for five years, have no criminal record, and are admitted to a college or university would be granted legal status for a period of six years.

When these students complete two years of college or two years of military service, they would become eligible to apply for residency or even citizenship.

Schools and colleges would be able to offer in-state tuition to these students, who would also

be eligible to apply for federal financial aid.

Many feel that offering these benefits to undocumented immigrants gives them an unfair advantage and puts undue burden on taxpayers. Groups such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) have called the act "a massive illegal alien amnesty program disguised as an education initiative."

Currently, higher education institutions cannot offer in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants unless it is offered to all students. These students also are disqualified from state and federal financial aid programs, including scholarships, loans, and even work study.

An estimated 65,000 undocumented students graduate U.S. high schools each year. Many have live in the U.S. for most of their lives; for these minors, immigration was most likely not a personal choice. Many of them also hope to continue to college.

FINANCIAL AID FAVORS DIVERSITY

- CHARISSE DENGLER

In an effort to create more diversity on their campuses, many universities are implementing no-loan policies and other financial aid programs targeted at African-American, Latin-American, and Native American students

Due to disproportionate numbers of these student groups on Ivy League campuses across the nation, many school officials are stepping up, offering extremely generous financial aid packages in hopes of creating more of a balance.

In recent years, many strategies have been considered, including the common application and targeted recruitment, but it is financial aid policy changes that are really yielding results.

Amherst, the first college in the U.S. to present its students with a no-loan option, has been operating under the loan-free financial aid program since 1999. Under this program, students whose families earn less than \$40,000 annually are eligible for financial aid without student loans.

Within a year of Amherst's policy enactment, minority-student applications increased from 952 to 1,039.

Princeton reported a record number of undergraduate admissions this year; and officials attribute this to extensive advertisement of the school's no-loan policy.

Janet Rapelye, Dean of Admission at Princeton, told the *Daily Princetonian* that the school distributed more information on the no-loan program than ever before.

"We want the message to ring loud and clear that Princeton offers a no-loan, need-based policy that gives every student equal consideration for financial aid should he or she need it," Rapelye said in a *Daily Princetonian* interview. "I think that message can still be strengthened, and we will promote it even more over the next few years."

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FUNDING DIVERSITY

Robin Moscato, Senior Associate Director of Undergraduate Financial Aid at Princeton, told the *Daily Princetonian* that about 55 percent of the students who applied to the school would receive some sort of financial aid. This is a 7-percent increase from the graduating class of 2005, which was the first class to benefit from the loan-free aid.

Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, and the University of Pennsylvania also offer no-loan aid.

Penn implemented its loan-free aid policy last month. The terms of Penn's program state that families making less than \$50,000 a year have access to the aid.

The financial aid policy is "conducive to our attracting more students of color as applicants and recruiting more students of color," said Amy Gutmann, Penn President, in a *Daily Pennsylvanian* interview.

But Caesar Storlazzi, Yale Director of Student Financial Services, says that Yale's generous aid programs should attract students from low-income families, regardless of race.

"[The policy change] was not specifically for minority applicants as for low-income [applicants]," Storlazzi said in a *Daily Pennsylvanian* interview. "[We] cannot assume income is tied to race, although there are some correlations."

In March 2005, Yale also changed its financial aid program; students from families earning less than \$45,000 a year are now exempt from parental contributions. This year, Yale's application numbers rose by 7.5 percent, with a total of 20,903 students applying to the university.

In a statement on his institution's website, Dartmouth President James Wright said, "A campus that values difference is one that encourages its members to explore the complexities that are central to intellectual life...to understand the complicated richness of the world in which we live.."

IMMIGRANT STUDENT DREAM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In a press release on the act, FAIR stated, "It will place American citizens in direct competition with illegal aliens for scarce slots in freshmen classes at state colleges and universities while awarding the illegal alien students with an amnesty."

However, many current and aspiring students see the issue very differently.

The City University of New York's (CUNY) Student Senate has created a special committee in support of the act. According to a recent report in *The WORD*, a CUNY journalism periodical, the Immigrant Student Affairs Committee "aims to gather the support of Chancellor [Matthew] Goldstein and organize actions in support of the DREAM Act" and to sponsor an event this May "to push for the passage of the DREAM Act by showcasing the struggle of undocumented students who are graduating from CUNY and need this bill to pass in order to continue their careers and lives."

Across the country, groups of high school students have organized walk-outs to protest current immigration reform legislation; provisions for higher education have been central themes for these protesters. Georgetown University's Youth Action Research Group has helped many students participate in demonstrations in the nation's capital.

One participant in a recent rally told reporters, "It was an amazing day... We felt like we really sent a message." Oscar Calix emigrated from Honduras five years ago and hoped that the demonstration would raise awareness about the act.

The current legislation before both houses of Congress marks the third time the DREAM Act has been presented. Activists and lawmakers suspect that this round of debates may be the most decisive and the best chance the act has had for passage.

FIVE THOUSAND FOR GRADS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

An amendment in a recently passed House bill would ease federal employees' student loan debt by up to \$5,000. The relief will be granted to individuals who have earned a bachelor's or advanced degree and have served in an area of public service for five consecutive years. The amendment was proposed by Rep. Jon Porter (R-NV), who is the chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform's Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce and Agency Organization. He feels that the move would encourage more highly trained individuals to work in the area of public service.

TOO MUCH DEBT FOR INDIANA TEACHERS, SOCIAL WORKERS

The Indiana Public Interest Research Group has released a study entitled "Paying Back, Not Giving Back: Student Debt's Negative Impact on Public Service Career Opportunities." The report examines the student debt of recent college graduates compared with starting salaries for two public service careers, teaching and social work. It suggests that people in these professions are highly underpaid, which makes dealing with monthly loan payments unmanageable. The study calls on the government to increase grants, generate more affordable repayment terms, promote consumer protection for student borrowers, and provide colleges incentives to control tuition costs.

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VIRGIN ISLANDS TEACHERS GET A BREAK

Favoring the Department of Education of the U.S. Virgin Islands, the U.S. Department of Education has approved cancellation of up to 100% of student debt incurred by teachers. The V.I. Education Department had submitted its proposal to be added to the Teacher Shortage Area Nationwide List. The loan cancellation applies retroactively to all teachers who have taught full time for two years in the U.S.V.I. The change will have a great effect on teacher recruitment and retention, as teachers will be able to realize these benefits for each year that they are employed.

KATRINA - AFFECTED SCHOOLS GET RELIEF

As postsecondary institutions in Mississippi and Louisiana reopen following the Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts, many of these schools received federal funding. Roughly \$200 million was allocated by the Department of Education to help reopen higher-education facilities that were forced to close and to compensate colleges that took in displaced students. In addition, the Department is distributing more than \$18 million of unused federal campus-based student aid to severely affected colleges.

So far, 24 of 30 institutions of higher education in Louisiana have now reopened. This figure includes 10 of the 15 that were closed in New Orleans. Two-thirds of postsecondary students in New Orleans have returned to class, and both of Mississippi's closed postsecondary institutions have reopened.

MISSOURI FACES LOAN SALE

Three months ago, Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt announced he would sell Missouri's student loan authority to the tune of \$450 million. Although the plan has not yet been confirmed to be either legal or practical, the Missouri General Assembly has been embroiled in debate on how the funds will be spent.

Although one state senator proposed that proceeds be used only for "student loans, scholarships, endowed professorships, and capital projects," most Missouri senators did seem to agree that the state shouldn't count on receiving the money any time in the near future.

SPOT LIGHT ON SCHOLARSHIPS

UND'S NEW ENGINEERING SCHOLARSHIP

This week, the University of North Dakota School of Engineering and Mines used an \$8,000 gift to start a new scholarship program for students majoring in electrical engineering. The scholarship will be worth up to \$1,000 per year.

The gift came from Otter Tail Power Company, an energy provider in North and South Dakota and Minnesota, which acknowledges the need to foster its potential workforce, especially electrical and mechanical engineers. Otter Tail also plans to endow scholarship funds at other institutions in the area.

UW LAW STUDENTS RECIEVE SHOWY GRANT

In December 2005, a \$33.3-million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation of Seattle was used to establish the William H. Gates Public Service Law Scholarship Program at the University of Washington.

The program has just announced its first five recipients, all of whom will benefit from a three-year full ride that includes room and board along with tuition. For the next 80 years, the money will grant full scholarships annually to five incoming law students who pledge to work in the public sector after graduating.

Officials hope to use some of the funds to beef up the law school's existing public interest efforts by improving the curriculum, expanding internship programs, and increasing recruitment efforts.