

WRITE AN OP-ED



When it comes to starting a conversation around how your school or alma mater can better support undocumented students, there's no better way to catch the attention of your community than with an op-ed in your college newspaper or a local paper. We know writing an op-ed can sound intimidating, which is why we've come up with two sample op-eds for you to use and modify to make specific to your school — whether you're a current student or an alumnus.

Inspired by the op-eds below? Contact Generation Progress' Press Associate, Giovanni Rocco, at grocco@americanprogress.org, to learn how to place your op-ed with your college or local paper.

STUDENT OP-ED

IF YOU'RE A STUDENT:

For the past five years the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has shielded approximately 800,000 young people, brought to the United States as children, from deportations. DACA has allowed these young people to safely contribute in the communities they grew up in— by working, attending school, or serving in the military. This summer the Trump administration decided to do away with this program, effectively jeopardizing the lives of 800,000 people, and leaving their futures in limbo. As a university with students affected by this decision, we have a responsibility to protect and advocate for our undocumented peers.

Right now, **[insert university name]** can go much further in protecting our fellow undocumented students. **[Insert rough time period] [President name/university administration]** announced their support for undocumented students stating that **["quote"]**. **[President whatever/university]** can, and must go beyond rhetoric to protect and advocate for our undocumented peers, whose lives are now in limbo.

According to a 2015 report by UCLA, 35.4 percent of DACA beneficiaries reported rates of anxiety above the clinical cut-off point. Mental health issues like anxiety and depression have adverse effects on the academic success of a student, therefore, **[insert university name]** must provide resources like mental health counseling to our peers so that they continue to be part of our community without the severe mental health problems brought on by an administration that has turned their backs on them.

The uncertainty of navigating a complex immigration system creates an opportunity for our university to provide confidential, pro-bono, legal advice and services to our peers and their families. In **[insert state]** alone there are many organizations that provide legal and consulting services to immigrant communities. If **[insert university name]** can't provide the services themselves, the university can host these organizations on campus, or direct our peers and their families to the appropriate organizations to get the legal advice and services that they require.

Currently, the University of Miami covers 100 percent of a DACA student's financial need through their U Dreamers Program. This program covers tuition, on-campus room and board, meal plans, and health insurance. This program, and similar programs found at other institutions, provide necessary relief to students who are shut out of federal financial assistance and often barred from private scholarships. If our university is committed to protecting and supporting our undocumented peers, it can implement a similar program, providing necessary relief to those that need it the most.

To ensure a safe learning environment, school administration must prohibit police and immigration agents from entering our campus, including residence halls. University police must reject any use of their time and resources on enforcing federal immigration law. Further, our administration must refrain from releasing personal information on a student's documentation status. This simple act alone can go a long way in creating a campus climate that is welcoming, safe, and supportive for our undocumented peers.

But simply ensuring our school provides safe harbor to its undocumented student population is not enough. At a time when our federal government seeks to marginalize undocumented youth, President **[university president name]** and **[school name's]** administrators have a responsibility to speak up on a broader plane on behalf of our undocumented peers and advocate for a clean passage of the DREAM Act. Releasing a press release is not enough, President **[name]** and administrators must add their voices to the national discourse surrounding the DREAM Act, uplifting the voices of those set to be impacted by the legislation, offering testimony, and meeting with members of Congress to urge them to vote for the DREAM Act.

The time for rhetoric is over—it is now time for action. A speech will not grant a bright student a scholarship, and a press release will not protect a young person from deportation. For decades our leaders have failed to act on this issue, and now there is a unique opportunity to get something done. As students we have the power to demand our administration act, and act in substantial ways. Right now, we must demand a safer, more welcoming campus, and our campus leaders must ensure our undocumented peers that they are there to support them.

IF YOU'RE AN ALUMNUS:

[Insert university name] was founded on the ideas/values of **[insert motto or core values of the university]**. These ideas/values were what led me to enroll at **[school name]** in the [term and year of when started college], graduating in **[year of graduation]**. Over the xxx years since its founding **[university name]** has sought to uphold these ideas/values by recruiting a strong and diverse student body. Right now, the core principles that **[university name]** was founded on are being put to the test thanks to President Trump rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Because the end of this program has put the lives of nearly 800,000 young people at risk, I demand that our university do more to expand access to resources for undocumented students and advocate for the clean passage of the DREAM Act.

The nearly 800,000 young people who have benefited from the DACA program are some of the brightest and hardest-working people in our nation. Among other requirements, DACA recipients, also known as “Dreamers,” must have arrived to the United States before the age of 16, passed a background check, and be enrolled in school or be an honorably discharged veteran of the Armed Forces. These are our co-workers, our neighbors, and our peers.

One of the largest barriers that undocumented students face in their pursuit of higher education is financial. A DACA recipient, for example, cannot receive a federal Pell grant. Pell grants help those with financial need pay for the exorbitant cost of college, in 2016 they covered an average of \$3,724 of college expenses per recipient, according to College Board. DACA recipients are also ineligible for federal loans, which are a substantial part of how the average college student pays for college. **[If it applies]** Pell grants and loans are how I paid for the majority of the cost of my four-year degree at **[school name]**, without this aid I would not have been able to afford school. **[School name]** should follow the lead of schools like Emory University that have offered to pay 100 percent of demonstrated financial need for undocumented students.

The school also has a responsibility to maintain a safe campus for all students—including undocumented students. Generation Progress has outlined a great way to create a safe learning environment. The most potent way is to protect students from immigration enforcement. School administration must prohibit police and immigration agents from entering our campus, including residence halls. Our University Police must not use their time and resources to enforce immigration law that targets some of the most vulnerable students. **[School name]** must also protect the privacy of students’ documentation status by not requesting their documentation status unless necessary.

While our federal government has turned its back on these promising minds, our school must do everything possible to protect and advocate for them. With the vast economic and intellectual resources available at **[school name]**, the university could provide crucial confidential legal advice and services to the undocumented students who need it the most. Offering this resource can help the students who might be caught up in the uncertainty and complexity of America's immigration system. The university can also assist with free mental health counseling to students who may be suffering from mental health issues brought on by the uncertainty in their personal and academic futures.

One of the most powerful and meaningful ways in which **[school name]** can advocate for undocumented students is calling for the passage of a clean DREAM Act. President Trump has given Congress six months to find a permanent fix to DACA—that fix is the DREAM Act, a bill with generally the same stringent requirements as the DACA program. A clean passage of the DREAM Act would bring relief to hundreds of thousands of undocumented people who only have America to call home. I call on our university president and top university administrators to use their unique power and influence to call for a clean passage of the DREAM Act, and once and for all honor the lives of America's undocumented youth.

As an alumnus/alumna of **[school name]** I demand that our university do everything in its power to secure a safe and prosperous future for all. **[School name]** has a responsibility to protect and support all its students, and at this moment in time our undocumented peers are in need. I joined **[school name]** because I believed in **[insert motto or core values of the university]**. I still believe in them. But for me to continue to believe in **[insert motto or core values of the university]** and **[school name]** as an institution, **[school name]** must show our undocumented students that we stand with them, and will fight for them.