

In-state tuition helps 'dreamers,' some say not enough

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Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Arthur Anderson said DACA students will be allowed to pay lower tuition.



(Photo: Rachael Le Goubin/The Republic)

Liz Ricario will never forget May 7, the day the Arizona Board of Regents allowed in-state tuition for undocumented students who are approved for deferred action.

Her supervisor at the Center for Neighborhood Leadership, where Ricario organizes block watches, texted her: "You can now go to ASU."

"It was an overwhelming feeling ... I couldn't cry. It was more like, 'What do I need to do? What do I need to do before they block this or do anything to it? I need to sign up,'" Ricario said.

Three days later she enrolled for the fall semester at ASU as an education major.

So far, about 100 undocumented students have registered at Arizona's public universities, according to figures from the Board of Regents.

"Dreamers" — young undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children — and others in the Hispanic community have cheered the regents' decision, saying it brings the goal of a college education closer to reality. But even with that change, cost remains a greater obstacle for undocumented immigrants, they say, because unlike U.S. citizens they're not eligible for federal, state and university-based financial aid.

"It's definitely not everything we need," Erika Andiola, co-director of the advocacy group the Dream Action Coalition, said of the new tuition policy. "... It would help dreamers trying to get into college, but the fact that we don't qualify for loans doesn't help."

New student logistics

The regents' decision classifies undocumented students such as Ricario as state residents for tuition purposes.

To qualify, they must submit proof they've been approved for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which President Barack Obama implemented through an executive order in 2012 to temporarily shield young immigrants from deportation. The program doesn't grant them legal status but allows them to stay in the U.S., work legally and not be deported by registering with the government.

That status, however, still disqualifies them from federal, state or university financial aid, such as merit-based scholarships and Pell grants.

After Obama's executive order, [Maricopa County Community Colleges \(https://www2.maricopa.edu/residency/deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca\)](https://www2.maricopa.edu/residency/deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca) began charging DACA recipients in-state tuition.

But state officials fought that decision. Then-Attorney General Tom Horne filed a lawsuit against the community colleges, arguing they had violated the law since dreamers didn't have lawful immigration status. Under DACA, they had lawful presence since they could get work visas.

The courts ruled in May that students who qualified for deferred action are eligible for in-state tuition, prompting the regents to change their policy.

But Horne's successor, Attorney General Mark Brnovich, has appealed the ruling. Brnovich said last week that he is enforcing a law passed by Arizona voters in 2006 that denied undocumented immigrants in-state tuition and federal and state financial aid because they were not lawfully in the U.S.

"The president created a whole new class of immigrants. He created a whole new (immigration) status and that's the problem," Brnovich said, adding that Obama's order conflicts with federal and state law. "The law is what it is, and I have to enforce the law the way it is even if it's not what many people want it to be."

Alternate routes

In 2011, when out-of-state tuition rates neared \$20,000 at some Arizona universities, undocumented students looked elsewhere to get their education, including community colleges and private universities.

Among them was Norma Jimenez, who learned because of her undocumented status she couldn't be licensed as a registered nurse. She also couldn't afford out-of-state tuition at ASU.



Norma Jimenez graduated from Grand Canyon University with a degree in public health administration after being unable to provide the right documentation to become a nurse. Jimenez leads a neighborhood watch meeting on Thursday, August 7, 2015. (Photo: Rachael Le Goubin/The Republic)

“It was frustrating,” said Jimenez, 23. “You have your mind set on this and someone comes and washes it away. I was like I want to continue, and I want to go to school. I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but I’m going to do it.”

Jimenez used money she saved working at her family’s store to pay the \$300 per credit hour at Phoenix College.

After a year, she transferred to Grand Canyon University, enrolling as a public health administration major in 2012.

Her dad paid for her first three semesters at GCU. She paid for the last two semesters with a Cesar Chavez scholarship from Tostitos, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in health-care administration in December 2014.

Ricario also went the community-college route since classes were cheaper. Without a DACA card to work legally, she sold jewelry at swap meets and occasionally asked her parents for help if she couldn’t pay the bills.

Gilberto Sosa Mendoza mopped floors during a night shift at a Scottsdale golf club saving his \$7-per-hour wage to pay for two years at Phoenix College. With scholarship help from the Maricopa Community College Foundation, he graduated with an associate degree in May.



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Like Ricario, Mendoza will attend ASU this fall where he will pursue a bachelor’s degree in management and law.

“I’m very fortunate,” he said. “Neither my dad nor mom completed their education. That’s the reason why we moved to the U.S., so we could shape and obtain a better future ... we can still achieve the American dream.”

Finding way to pay

German Cadenas, a former undocumented student who now has citizenship, battled his way through Arizona’s public higher-education system. Finding money was just part of the fight.

After graduating from Tempe’s McClintock High School in 2005, he applied to ASU but was denied admission.

“At that time, they were treating undocumented students like international students,” said Cadenas, who moved to the U.S. from Venezuela with his mother when he was 15. “They wanted me to go get a visa, and I couldn’t go back.”

Since community colleges were more affordable, Cadenas attended Mesa Community College using donations from family friends.

After completing his first year of college, he again applied to ASU but couldn’t afford the out-of-state tuition rates.



German Cadenas is pursuing his doctorate in psychology while working at ASU's SkySong as a strategic initiatives fellow. Cadenas was denied from ASU three times for being undocumented and has been part of many undocumented student's rights protests. (Photo: Rachael Le Goubin/The Republic)

After earning an associate degree in business in 2007, he applied for a third time to ASU. This time, he got in and received a scholarship through the American Dream Fund, given to about 200 undocumented ASU students and administered through Chicanos Por La Causa. The scholarship covered his tuition.

He and the other undocumented scholarship recipients, tired of "living in the shadows," banded together and told their stories on campus and led rallies.

But the scholarship fund was soon depleted. Cadenas paid for a master's degree using private scholarships and donations.

In 2011, he was set to start a doctoral program in counseling and psychology but learned because of his immigration status he wasn't eligible to be a graduate assistant, a common source of income and tuition for graduate students.

"If I didn't raise the money, I wasn't going to be able to start this great opportunity," he said.

He started a GoFundMe online-fundraising campaign dubbed "[German. Chasing his DREAM!](http://www.gofundme.com/germansdream)" He raised \$25,000 in three months, enough to pay for his first year.

As a doctoral student, he became president of ASU's Graduate and Professional Students Association, and organized students from NAU and UA to bring undocumented students' stories to the Board of Regents.

When the Board of Regents changed its tuition policy, Cadenas cried.

"I was in disbelief," Cadenas said. "Hope now exists in our community."

It was an "injustice" for dreamers not to have the same access as other students, he said. He continues to fight to change that by organizing an entrepreneurship program for low-income Latino high school students through ASU.

"I think that's what drives me is trying to make the world a little more just because I've been on the receiving end of injustice," he said.

More to be done

Without access to financial aid or loans, undocumented students say they will continue to struggle to pay in-state tuition.

According to a Pew Research Center study, the 2007 median household income for undocumented immigrants was \$36,000. ASU's in-state tuition is around \$10,000 a year for students at the Tempe campus.

Carmen Cornejo, vice chair of Hispanic non-profit Chicanos Por la Causa and program manager at the Lacey and Larkin Frontera Fund, said many undocumented students come from poor families and support them since they can work legally.

She said donors, especially at the community college level, have helped by removing citizenship requirements for scholarships.

But Mendoza, who can now pay in-state tuition, said undocumented students are still left with few scholarship options and outlets for financial aid. "You can pretty much count the number of scholarships available on your hands," said Mendoza, founder of Voices United, a non-profit that helps find funds for undocumented students' education.

Andiola said the Dream Action Coalition is in talks with universities to see if undocumented students can access state financial aid. "There has not been any convincing argument that there is no way that that can't happen," she said.

Meanwhile, students like Ricario and Mendoza, who don't qualify for financial aid, will likely start at community college, get an associate degree and transfer to public universities to finish their bachelor's degree, Cornejo said. She said universities will see the number of undocumented students gradually rise.



Liz Ricario, a undocumented student with a DACA card, has enrolled for the fall semester at Arizona State University in Thunderbird Campus buys her books won Monday August 10, 2015. Ricario, can now afford the school's in-state tuition rates. She is one of 97 students registered with their DACA card at Arizona state universities this coming fall semester. (Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

Although she's applied for private scholarships for the fall semester, Ricario knows paying in-state tuition will still be a sacrifice. To pay for her first semester at ASU, she's using money she saved since receiving her DACA card, which allowed her to work legally.

"I have to shape the next two years on how I will pay for tuition," said Ricario, who plans to earn a bachelor's degree and become a teacher at Cartwright Elementary School, where she attended. "But education is the only thing that is going to get me somewhere."

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