

## **SFCC students join national movement that puts immigrant youth in the spotlight**

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Luzhilda Campos, 3.8 grade-point average. Triple major in psychology, human services and Spanish language.

Jesús Chávez, 3.8 grade-point average. Psychology major.

Héctor Zambrano, 3.2 grade-point average. Architectural design major.

Campos, Chávez and Zambrano are all undocumented students who are enrolled at Santa Fe Community College. Along with high school student Udell Calzadillas -- 3.7 grade-point average -- they have joined a national movement dubbed "Coming Out of the Shadows."

They are asking the community to support comprehensive immigration reform and the federal Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, known as the Dream Act, which would provide a legal path to citizenship for youth who complete two years in the military or two years at an institution of higher learning, and fulfill certain other requirements.

In May 2011, the Dream Act was re-introduced to Congress by Democratic Sen. Richard Durbin of Illinois and Democratic Rep. Howard Berman of California. Although the legislation has failed to gain enough support in Congress, several states such as California allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and to qualify for some state financial aid.

In New Mexico, a student without a Social Security number also can pay in-state tuition.

"I have a dream of becoming somebody in the future, of being the example for my family," said Zambrano, 20. After working in the hospitality industry, he knew he didn't want a future there, he said. So he enrolled at the community college and plans to keep working toward a four-year degree.

"Sometimes I question myself. Should I keep studying? For what? I won't be able to work," Zambrano said. "But I'm still here."

Young adults like him have joined "Coming Out" campaigns in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York to push the campaign's slogan: "Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic."

According to the Immigration Policy Center, an estimated 2.1 million of nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants are children and young adults who would be eligible for the Dream Act.

The Immigration Policy Center's research also indicates that only between 5 percent and 10 percent of undocumented high school graduates attend college -- not because they are unmotivated, but because they either cannot afford the tuition or because some schools do not accept students without Social Security numbers.

"Because of the barriers to their continued education and their exclusion from the legal workforce, many undocumented students are discouraged from applying to college," the center's report states.

Juan Carlos Deoses, 22, New Mexico Dreamers in Action coordinator, said undocumented college students can't reach their full potential because the law prohibits them from getting the nine-digit Social Security number that employers ask for.

"We are empowering and inviting New Mexico students to share their stories," Deoses said. "We are

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tired of not being able to work in the careers we are trained for."

When Jesús Chávez realized that being a dishwasher and a waiter was not what he wanted to do for the rest of his life, he decided to enroll at the community college. He wants to become a psychologist to help people with alcohol and drug addictions.

Udell Calzadillas, 17, is currently a senior in the MASTER's Program, a local charter high school. After high school, he wants to have a career in international relations in order to influence the political system, he said.

Luzhilda Campos, 23, said she will keep sharing her story, full of triumphs and challenges. Her parents brought her to the U.S. when she was 4 years old, and since then, she's pushed herself to succeed. By the time she graduated from Pojoaque Valley High School, she had participated in school programs leading to national certifications as chef, translator and tutor.

But it wasn't until December 2010 when she finally realized how much her family's legal status affected their ability to access services. Her mother urgently needed bladder surgery but did not qualify for any financial assistance to cover the cost of the operation. So Campos, who was attending school full-time, found three jobs. Two weeks ago, she finished paying off the last of the \$26,000 in hospital fees accumulated from her mother's hospital stay.

Campos said she's proud of being a Mexican immigrant and is "thankful to this country for all I have." But, she added, "We're going to demonstrate that we can beat the odds, that we want to create a different future for us."

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