



Collaborative Networks to Support DREAMers' Career Advancement

*By Ed Kissam and JoAnn Intili
Werner-Kobnstamm Family Fund
June 2, 2013*

This short paper outlines and discusses a next stage in DREAMers' ongoing quest for educational equity and career advancement at a point when the United States is moving forward toward comprehensive immigration reform but where the slow, contentious, and uncertain trajectory of efforts to "fix a broken immigration system" makes it unclear what the outcomes will be.

CURRENT CAREER DREAMER STATUS

Early cohorts of courageous and persistent DREAMers who successfully managed to get into and graduate from college, are now faced with the need to explore the options available to them for ongoing educational and professional advancement. They need to find pathways leading into careers where they can put their hard-won education to use, realize their personal potential, and contribute fully to society.

Current law prohibits employers hiring persons lacking work authorization, but it does not prohibit those individuals from providing services, as consultants, as independent business entities, collectives, or as partnerships, and the Obama administration's creation of the DACA program has provided work authorization for many who fit the requirements of age at entry, years in country and educational attainment. This does not encompass all DREAMers - for example, youth who came to the U.S. when they were 16 years old, not 15 are left out. As a result of DREAMers own work, to a large extent, their predicament is much more widely recognized and deplored than it was even two years ago; and DREAMers are, to a certain extent, welcomed as de facto citizens. However the welcome is not necessarily a whole-hearted and generous one, and individuals who fall outside of the specific DACA program eligibility requirements are perhaps lost in the shuffle.

Thus, there are both a fairly diverse group of DREAMers and a variety of careers that are part of those dreams. There are many career pathways for DREAMers, but navigating them is challenging, more like following a faintly-blazed mountain trail than following a standard roadmap. Graduate school application and enrollment is not transparently open to DREAMers in practice. And, on the job front, while DACA offers work authorization, it is not always understood by human resource personnel. Independent consulting, often touted as a good strategy for moving forward, and both attractive to many individuals for the latitude it can offer and to organizations in part for their ability to customize the type and duration of professional services they wish to purchase, is not necessarily an easy strategy to pursue in a way which supports job continuity, career development, or to apply to

some professions, such as entry level medical professional and research settings. Creativity and problem-solving strategies informed by reliable information about organizational process, priorities, and idiosyncratic procedures are essential in order to navigate forward.

The ‘reliable information’ part is wherein lies the rub. Getting that information, with enough specificity to guide students’ strategic decisions – to help them understand the implications of various alternative pathways through the post-secondary educational system for career development and success - and disseminating that information requires an intentional collaborative network.

THE DREAM NETWORK OF GRADUATE FELLOWS IN HEALTH CAREERS

A group of graduate fellows interested in health careers experienced and saw this problem and, loosely linked with the Educators for Fair Consideration group (E4FC), launched the DREAM Network of Graduate Fellows in Health Careers. Their self-articulated mandate has evolved over the course of about a year to address three complementary needs – specifically, to work with concerned health professionals, institutions, and professional associations to create and/or broaden pathways for professional career advancement (for themselves and others), to listen to the experiences of DREAMers seeking to go into health careers, or who already have made it in, and to organize data about their experiences and what worked or hasn’t worked or hasn’t yet worked, specific to institution and career interest area; and to offer the information garnered in an organized way to help successive cohorts of DREAMers seeking to advance in health care professions move forward.

Work with Health Professionals and Institutions – While some medical schools have recognized that potential entrants with DACA eligibility have a future in health careers, some appear to not fully understand the students’ DACA status, and feel uncertain about the possible or likely trajectories of these students in their fields. Thus the Network finds they have had to help inform graduate schools and health organizations about DREAMers and how they can enroll and support them through the learning process. Some schools are actively reluctant to engage, perhaps fearing doing something illegal or some other reason. In these cases the Network is currently engaging in advocacy, helping these institutions learn about the talent they are missing, to understand what is available to DREAMer youth, and to nudge reluctant institutions of higher education toward more DREAMer-friendly policies. Ripe for focus is a broad range of professions requiring a graduate degree, certification, and/or state licensing, which are still hidden from DREAMers, even though those professions continue to experience shortages of potential talent, and may have to import workers from outside the US, with limited experience of US customs and level of educational standards.

Listen to and Organize the Experience of DREAMers trying to Start their Careers - Clearly, college graduation should not be the end of the road in the personal and professional development for DREAMers—whatever professional specialty they aspire to work in. That would be not only a waste of the educational resources to educate them to graduate level; but a serious detriment to the community at large which depends upon the cultivation of talent to meet crucial community health, education and social needs. Educational institutions which are seriously committed to the mission of learning (and, hopefully, lifelong learning) must commit themselves to facilitating DREAMers’ entry into career pathways that will allow them to fulfill their dreams of giving back to their communities in providing health care (while, at the same time, helping health care institutions improve communication with and service provided to ethnically diverse patient populations). The question remains how to foster these goals. The Network explores with DREAMers struggling to

move forward what their experience is and has been, and what they have done that has worked and what has not worked. It has begun to document these experiences and make the information gleaned available with respect to schools open to enhancing their success and ability to contribute to their communities, and others which are not open to this. Conference calls, webinars, information pamphlets, presentations at key student assemblies, work with counselors are all strategies the Network has embraced.

Disseminating Information on Strategies for Career Advancement - Increasing geographic diversity and applicability as well as career diversity and applicability are principles guiding the evolution of the data collection and organization; along with trying to figure out the best way to systematize the information to make it most useful. DREAMers in the network collaborate to understand the issues DREAMers need to know more about, and to secure, exchange, and organize information in a manner that makes it assistive to others interested and qualified to pursue careers in medicine, public health, biotechnology, nursing and other allied health professions.

CURRENT SITUATION (JUNE 2013) AND MOVING FORWARD

Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC) has nurtured, particularly in the San Francisco Bay area, a powerful network made up of a core group of DREAMers who, with the support of with concerned high school and college educators, are working collaboratively to help each other, as well as future cohorts of undocumented students seeking to attend college and move into professional careers.

These efforts have resulted in development of resources offering broad generic guidance about how to move into consulting work or establish collaboratives and, now some initial valuable insights about diverse institutions and shared intelligence about different graduate schools' openness to and willingness to welcome and provide support to DREAMers.

Now, a next phase of strategic efforts are needed. Students aspiring to many specialized careers must now develop detailed strategies for advancing in professional areas which typically require a graduate degree and/or state licensing.

Knowledge, insights, institutional maps, and strategies that have been developed for students pursuing health careers provide a prototype for analogous efforts in a broad range of other professional fields such as: accounting, architecture, engineering, educational administration, journalism, business management, public administration, applied social policy research, law, program evaluation.

In each of these professional realms, progress will require skillful advocacy to leverage institutional change, to refine and further elaborate promising strategies now in place to provide DREAMers internships, and community service opportunities as part of their personal and professional development. Experience to date suggests that a multitude of details will need to be addressed—as some, inadvertently, and some, quite deliberately, are exclusionary.

Efforts to help DREAMers move forward toward successful professional careers, even after the June, 2012 promulgation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program provided many undocumented youth an avenue to work authorization, are still greatly needed. Many educational institutions and even some of the employers who have been very active in advocating for improved education in STEM and admission of more foreign-born high-skill workers to the U.S. are only beginning to understand the implications of DACA. Efforts to facilitate DREAMers'

forward progress in pursuing professional careers, will continue to be needed as debate on comprehensive immigration reform moves forward, and after legislation is enacted (if it is).

If immigration reform legislation is enacted, it will yield benefits not only to these students who are so unfairly disadvantaged by immigration policy but, just as importantly, to their communities and the general public as these highly-qualified young adults move into the labor force. However, ongoing pressure is needed to assure that the ultimate immigration reform legislation makes it possible to pursue a professional career. Realistically, even if immigration reform legislation is enacted, it will fall short of expectations and that barriers to DREAMers' fulfillment of their full educational potential will remain. Thus it will be crucial to assure that, in the many areas where the legislation does fall short of expectations, it will be possible to find new and innovative ways for DREAMers to move forward.

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Activities to undertake in moving forward include:

- Broadening and deepening the network's initial efforts so as to continue expanding the nascent online network/support group for undocumented students in health-related areas of professional specialization (e.g. pre-med, medical school, biology, physiology, biochemistry, health care administration, health education, epidemiology, public health, biochemistry, clinical psychology, medical social work, medical interpretation)
- Developing educational materials for undocumented students interested in health careers (i.e. resource guides, contact lists of allies in medicine, application tips, etc.) and disseminating using various avenues (e.g. a website, personal presentations at high schools and colleges, broadcast and print media to build awareness)
- Planning and organizing educational events for undocumented students interested in or already embarked on careers in the field of health (i.e. conference, workshops, etc.) and providing peer counseling on a one-on-one and small group basis
- Collaborating with concerned administrators, faculty, and guidance counselors in events to share "best practices" of institutional support for professional advancement of undocumented students pursuing health-related careers.
- With support from E4FC's Legal Services team, building awareness and support for undocumented students at medical schools and graduate programs in allied health professions around the country (i.e. dispelling myths about undocumented students, discussing future employment and legalization options for undocumented students, etc)
- Recruiting an advisory group of medical and health care professionals to help undocumented pre-med/med students and students in other health-related careers (i.e. medical doctors, medical school professors, etc.)

- Contacting and making presentations to professional associations concerned about health and health workforce issues (e.g. American Public Health Association, American Medical Association, American Psychological Association)

Key groups collaborating in the initiative would include:

DREAMers—A core group of recently-graduated and currently enrolled undocumented students (some who have been granted DACA status, some who have not) who are currently pursuing health-related careers in the San Francisco Bay area would “map” the institutional landscape of graduate schools for a range of health-related professions, gathering detailed information on policies and administrative requirements which are barriers or which are supportive of career advancement. Having identified barriers, they would advocate and work with allies to remove them while, at the same time, disseminating information on “DREAMer-friendly” institutions and “best practices” for supporting career advancement.

Participating Educational Institutions—A number of higher education institutions—in California, New York, and other states—have shown leadership in seeking way to allow DREAMers full access to the same educational opportunities available to US-born students and legal permanent residents. Their collaboration in the initiative will involve linkages both to professional associations and to the core group of DREAMers based at E4FC.

Professional Associations—Professional associations include many professionals who are concerned about the need to remove barriers to educational equity and employment for talented young up-and-coming entrants into their fields. Yet, at the same time, these professional associations have been ambivalent supporting DREAMers and their potential role as pro-immigrant advocates have not yet been fully realized.

Service-Learning Organizations Community service has been an important part of the vision of various DREAM networks and projects. Another strand in the initiative will be exploring how to configure community service opportunities—internships, fellowships, research projects—to best support professional advancement of undocumented students

High Schools The network’s outreach efforts would not only give attention to the strategic challenges facing students who are already “in the system” and who will soon face institutional challenges in pursuing health-related careers, but, also, reach downward into high schools to spread the message that careers generally believed to be inaccessible to students without legal status may actually be feasible for them—although it is clear none of the currently available pathways is obstacle-free.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The tragedy of Congress’s long delays in passing the federal DREAM Act (after efforts for almost a decade now) so as to allow motivated and talented students access to higher education, and to careers where they can both find economic stability and contribute to society, is widely-recognized, even by groups which are not always favorably disposed toward immigrants or immigration policy reform.

Passage of comprehensive immigration reform holds out the promise of career advancement for DREAMers, but even in the context of the generally favorable legislative framework presented by

S. 744 which was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee in late May, students who seek to go on to graduate school will face huge financial challenges (since the current legislation, as a result of a key amendment by Senator Hirono and approved in the Senate Judiciary Committee provides students access to federally-subsidized loans and work-study funding but not to scholarships).

Because the DREAMer network's non-formal efforts have already begun and moved forward with some dramatic successes (e.g. a statement from the California Medical Board, that in their opinion, there should be no barriers to DACA recipients undertaking residencies as part of their medical training and, subsequently, being licensed if they met the prevailing requirements) the initiative could be very rapidly expanded and yield significant results by 2014.

It is likely that very modest investments would support the information-gathering and sharing, networking among DREAMers, professional institutions, and higher education institution that could make it feasible to develop the tangible resources envisioned for DREAMers, their families and the communities in which they live.

Efforts to support DREAMers continued educational and professional progress, given the still-hostile legal framework for still-undocumented immigrant youth, and the ambivalent institutional attitudes of many educational institutions, will continue to be essential, both as progress toward immigrant reform continues, and afterwards. These efforts have real potential as a means of conveying the message that efforts to exclude immigrants from U.S. life are dysfunctional, that welcoming immigrant students into professional careers, is a win-win proposition for immigrant youth and young adults and native-born Americans alike.

The promise of career advancement for DREAMers require them to confront huge barriers in acceptance. These barriers, if not overcome, may prevent full access to the talents of these individuals, but also hurt the families and communities who need their talents to be employed.

The fundamental policy message can and should be that, as the U.S. becomes an increasingly ethnically and linguistically diverse society, and as the global economy develops further, sound social policy requires nation-states to make full use of the human, social, and cultural capital available to them. The corollary is that the benefits of inclusion, of not simply allowing immigrants into the workforce, but fostering their professional careers, that federal policy (immigration legislation) and educational institutions' policy, must be helped along the way to fully understand how the benefits of investing in human capital development, accrue not simply to individuals, but to communities. Even with inaction or inadequate action by government entities, concerned individuals, associations, networks, and institutions can make things better. Particularly in the realm of providing quality health care to an increasingly diverse population, it will be crucial to make use of the skills of the DREAMers, immigrant youth who have grown up in the U.S. and can so masterfully bridge cultural divides.