

## DREAMers' Stories

DREAM Act Class of 2010-2011:

<http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/DREAM/student-profiles-PP-2010-12-17.pdf>

DREAM Stories from Senator Durbin:

[http://durbin.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hot-topics?ContentRecord\\_id=40025f91-0f0f-450f-b5c0-a6196ff2c252](http://durbin.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hot-topics?ContentRecord_id=40025f91-0f0f-450f-b5c0-a6196ff2c252)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCpLyBf7NC4&feature=list\\_related&playnext=1&list=SPD C955D6693457B71](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCpLyBf7NC4&feature=list_related&playnext=1&list=SPD C955D6693457B71)



## **Peter**

Peter\* arrived in the United States with his parents and siblings when Peter was four. His parents were farmworkers. Peter studied hard in school and made a commitment to community service volunteering up to twenty hours a week in the community. During the summer Peter would work in a summer day camp for underserved children. Peter was also concerned about the plight of farmworkers, who worked so hard to provide food for the rest of society. He wanted them to be honored for their hard work, and treated with equality.

Meanwhile Peter kept studying hard. He was especially adept in science and math. He decided he wanted to go to college and eventually graduate school. Peter wanted to be researcher and an inventor of technology that would help eliminate cancer. He graduated from high school and got a full scholarship to college, where he majored in physics.

One day as Peter was walking down the street in his home-town, a car, filled with people, drove by. People within the car started shouting: “Go back to Mexico where you belong!”

Peter graduated from college with honors in Physics, in four years. His dream of graduate school and helping people with cancer is on hold. He cannot act on his dream as he hangs sheet rock, unable to get into graduate school because of his legal status.

Why do children have to bear the burden of a broken system that penalizes them for doing the right thing by working hard?

\* Not his real name

## **Herta Llusho**



Herta Llusho came to the United States from Albania when she was 11. She and her mother settled in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit.

Herta and her mother came to the United States legally. Shortly after arriving, Herta’s mother filed an application to stay in the United States.

Herta quickly learned English and became an academic star. She graduated from Grosse Pointe South High School with a 4.05 grade point average. In high school, she was a member of the varsity track team, won an Advanced Placement Scholar Award, and was a member of the National Honor Society.

Herta is currently a junior at the University of Detroit Mercy, where she is an honors student. Herta is studying to be an electrical engineer. She has a grade point average of 3.98 and has completed two internships at engineering companies.

Herta is also very involved in her community, volunteering at homeless shelters, tutoring programs, and her church. One of Herta’s friends said:

“I am humbled by Herta’s willingness and desire to serve. I have had the privilege of going to the same church at which she faithfully serves. She spends hours tutoring kids and volunteering

with the junior high Sunday school class. It's a joy to watch so many children run up to her at church because of the love they receive when they are with her."

In 2009, after nine years of legal proceedings, the government placed Herta and her mother in deportation proceedings. Herta said:

"I was shocked. My friends are here, my education is here, my community is here. All of a sudden, I was asked to leave behind everything I know and go back to a country I barely know. When I lived there, I was little, so I don't remember it much and I barely speak Albanian anymore."

Herta's community rose to her defense. Thousands of people signed an online petition to stop her deportation. Last year, the Department of Homeland Security granted Herta a one year stay of deportation.

Herta came to Capitol Hill to speak at a briefing on the DREAM Act. She said:

"I'm a typical story. There's thousands of stories out there just like mine. Please support the DREAM Act so students like me don't have to leave. We are worth it. This is the country we have come to love."

### **Tam Tran**



Tam Tran was born in Germany and came to the United States with her parents when she was six years old. Tam's parents are refugees who fled Vietnam to Germany as boat people at the end of the Vietnamese war. They could not return to Vietnam because they were persecuted by the Communist government in Vietnam and the German government refuses to accept them. Tam graduated from UCLA with honors with a degree in American Literature and Culture. She was studying for a Ph.D. at Brown University when she was tragically killed in a car accident. On May 18, 2007, Tam [testified](#) in the House Judiciary Committee:

"I was born in Germany, my parents are Vietnamese, but I have been American raised and educated for the past 18 years... Without the DREAM Act, I have no prospect of overcoming my state of immigration limbo; I'll forever be a perpetual foreigner in a country where I've always considered myself an American."

### **Isabel Castillo**



Isabel Castillo graduated from high school with a 4.0 grade point average. She worked her way through college and, in three and a half years, graduated magna cum laude from Eastern Mennonite University with a degree in social work.

At a town hall meeting in her home state of Virginia last year, she recounted these facts to governor Bob McDonnell. The crowd applauded her success and the governor remarked that Virginia needed more people like her. Then, she said she was an undocumented immigrant. Though polite, the governor declined to support the DREAM Act. He went on to say that those in the country illegally should be arrested and deported.

Castillo's parents brought her to the U.S. when she was six years old. Without documentation, she is unable to work as a social worker. Now 26, Castillo knows the clock is ticking. Her chance to benefit from the DREAM Act will likely end when she turns 30.

A tireless advocate, Castillo started the Harrisonburg-based DREAM Activist-Virginia advocacy group. Though she used to keep her identity carefully guarded, last year, Castillo participated in a DREAM Act demonstration outside a U.S. Senate office. Castillo and four others were arrested.

A recent New York Times article (17 May 2011) described her process of coming out in the open:

“At first, I’d only allow the media to shoot my face turned away and only my first name. And then it just progressed. I said, ‘O.K., use my face and you can say I went to a local university.’ Then it was, ‘I graduated from Eastern Mennonite University and I’m Isabel Castillo.’ ”

### David Cho



David Cho’s parents came to the United States from South Korea when he was 9.

Since then, David has been a model American. He had a 3.9 GPA in high school. David is now a senior at UCLA, where he is majoring in International Finance and has a 3.6 GPA. David is also the leader of the UCLA marching band.

David wants to serve in the Air Force. If the DREAM Act doesn’t pass, David won’t be able to serve his country.

### Mayra Garcia



Mayra Garcia came to the U.S. from Mexico with her parents in 1994, when she was 2. Mayra, is now 18. She is a member of the National Honor Society and she graduated from high school in the Spring of 2010 with a 3.98 GPA. She is the President of the Cottonwood Youth Advisory Commission in her hometown of Cottonwood Arizona. Mayra was awarded a scholarship to attend a prestigious university in California. In an essay about the DREAM Act, Mayra wrote:

"From the time I was intellectually capable of understanding its significance, my dream was to be the first college graduate in my immediate and extended family. ... College means more to me than just a four-year degree. It means the breaking of a family cycle. It means progression and fulfillment of an obligation." "According to my mother, I cried every day in preschool because of the language barrier. By kindergarten, though, I was fluent in English. ... English became my way of understanding the world and myself. I used it to prove myself to a society that expected nothing more from me than a pregnant belly or a criminal record."

## Julieta Garibay



Julieta Garibay came to the United States in 1992, when she was 11. Julieta graduated from the University of Texas with a bachelor's degree in nursing. She was on the Dean's list and the President's Honor Roll and volunteered more than 500 hours at hospitals in Dallas and Austin. Julieta went on to earn a master's degree at the University of Texas in public health nursing. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau, the International Honor Society of Nursing.

Julieta has been a Registered Nurse since 2004, but she is undocumented, so she cannot work legally in America.

Julieta is married to Staff Sergeant Armen Weinrick, who serves in the U.S. Air Force Reserves. Staff Sergeant Weinrick is currently awaiting deployment. He will go overseas to defend our country, but his wife could be deported while he is gone.

In a letter to Senator Durbin, Julieta said:

"I desperately need the DREAM Act to pass so I can practice my beloved profession – Nursing. I have been dreaming of being a nurse for the past 7 years since I earned my nursing license. Once the DREAM Act passes, I will join the military in hopes of making up the lost time and serve the country I call home as a nurse."

The DREAM Act would give Julieta a chance to serve the country she loves.

## Yves Gomes



Yves Gomes came to the U.S. from India by his parents in 1994, when he was 14 months old. Yves is now 17. He is a member of the National Honor Society and he graduated from high school in the Spring of 2010 with a 3.8 GPA.

## Juan Gomez



Juan Gomez came to the United States from Colombia in 1990, when he was 2. Juan is an academic star. At Killian Senior High School in Miami, he earned close to two years of college credit with high scores on 13 Advanced Placement exams. He scored a 1410 out of 1600 on the SAT, and he finished in the top 20 of his class. His economics teacher nicknamed him “President Gomez” and said he is “one of the best students ever to graduate from Killian.”

In 2007, during Juan’s senior year in high school, he was placed in deportation proceedings. What happened next was American democracy at work. Scott Elfenbein was the student body president at Juan’s high school. He was also Juan’s best friend. Scott started a Facebook page devoted to stopping Juan’s deportation. On the Facebook page, he wrote, “We need your help in saving Juan from being sent to Colombia – a country he doesn’t even remember. For those of you who know Juan, he is the smartest and most dedicated kid you ever met. He deserves more than to just be deported. Many of us owe him. I know he helped everyone one way or another in school. It’s the least we can do for him.”

Within one week, over 2000 people joined Juan’s Facebook page. Then, Juan’s friends came to Capitol Hill to lobby on his behalf. They persuaded Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and then Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) to introduce a bill to stop Juan’s deportation. Rep. Diaz Balart is a Republican and he is a lead cosponsor of the DREAM Act in the House of Representatives. Former Senator Chris Dodd is a Democrat.

After his deportation was stayed, Juan was admitted to Georgetown University on a full scholarship. Juan is going to graduate from Georgetown in May. He has been offered a job at a top financial services firm in New York City. The DREAM Act would give Juan, and thousands like him, a chance to contribute their skills to the country they love.

## Marie Gonzalez-Deel



Marie Gonzalez came to the U.S. from Costa Rica with her parents when she was 5. In 2008, she graduated from Westminster College in Missouri with a double major in political science and international business. Marie, one of the first Dreamers to speak out about her situation, [testified](#) in the House Judiciary Committee on May 18, 2007:

"No matter what, I will always consider the United States of America my home. I love this country. Only in America would a person like me have the opportunity to tell my story to people like you. Many may argue that because I have a Costa Rican birth certificate I am Costa Rican and should be sent back to that country. If I am sent back there, sure I'd be with my Mom and Dad, but I'd be torn away from loved ones that are my family here, and from everything I have known since I was a child."

## Ola Kaso



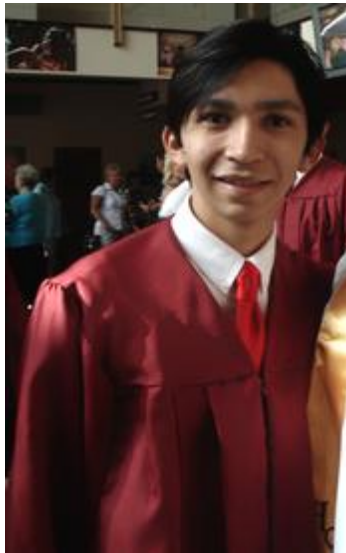
Ola Kaso came to the United States from Albania in 1998, when she was 5.

Ola recently graduated from a high school in Warren, Michigan. She was a valedictorian of her class. She took every Advanced Placement class offered by her school and has a 4.4 grade point average. Ola is on the varsity cross country and tennis teams. She was treasurer of the student council and treasurer of the National Honor Society at her school. She tutors students who are learning English.

Ola was accepted into the honors program at the University of Michigan, where she will be a pre-med student. In a letter to Senator Durbin, Ola wrote, "I aspire to ultimately become a surgical oncologist, but more importantly, I intend to work for patients that cannot afford the astronomical fees accompanying life saving surgeries, patients that are denied the medical treatment they deserve. My goal is not to increase my bank account; my goal is to decrease preventable deaths. I wish to remain in this country to make a difference."

The Department of Homeland Security granted a stay of deportation to Ola, to give her a chance to continue her education. That was the right thing to do. It makes no sense to send someone like Ola, who has so much to contribute, to a country she barely remembers.

## Elier Lara



Elier Lara's parents came to the United States in 1994, when he was four.

Elier is a computer whiz. In high school, he won awards for outstanding achievement in science and information technology. He graduated in the top 5% of his high school class and was named Tech Prep Student of the Year in Cincinnati. He even started a computer repair business.

Now, Elier is a 19-year-old honors student at the University of Cincinnati. He is majoring in Information Technology and has a 3.8 GPA. One of his professors said, "I have worked with thousands of students over the past 30 years, and Elier Lara is that student who comes along every 10 years or so who makes your heart sing."

In a letter to Senator Durbin, Elier wrote, "Technology and computers is where I want to spend the rest of my life. I'm sure I'll find my place on the forefront of the technological frontier, implementing and discovering the new technologies of the future. I am dreaming big and will continue to do so."

America would benefit from someone with Elier's talents. Immigrants founded leading American technology companies like Google, Yahoo, Intel, and E-Bay. That could be Elier's and America's future.

## Steve Li



Steve Li's parents brought him to the United States when he was 11. Steve is a student at the City College of San Francisco, where he is majoring in nursing and is a leader in student government.

In a letter to Senator Durbin, Steve wrote:

“My dream is to become a registered nurse at San Francisco General Hospital and to be a public health advocate. I want to be able to give back to my community by raising awareness about preventive care and other healthcare issues. I'm well on my way to achieving my dream. By passing the DREAM Act, I will be able to achieve these goals and contribute to the growing health care industry.”

America needs more nurses with the talent of Steve Li. In fact, the United States imports thousands of foreign nurses every year because we have such a large nursing shortage.

Unfortunately, Steve is in deportation proceedings. His case is especially complicated because – while his parents are Chinese – he was born in Peru. So he would be deported back to Peru, where he knows no one and has no family members.

## Magdaleno Brothers



Nelson and Jhon Magdaleno came to the United States from Venezuela when Nelson was 11 and Jhon was 9.

They were both honors students at Lakeside High School in Atlanta, Georgia. Jhon served with distinction in the Air Force Junior Officer Reserve Corps. He was the 4th highest ranking officer in a 175 officer cadet unit and Commander of the Air Honor Society in his unit.

They are now honors students at Georgia Tech University, one of the most selective engineering schools in America. Nelson, who is now 21, is a junior. He is a computer engineering major with a 3.6 GPA. Jhon, who is now 18, is a freshman. He is a biomedical engineering major with a 4.0 GPA.

America needs more talented young engineers like Nelson and Jhon but, unfortunately, they were placed in deportation proceedings and could be sent back to Venezuela, a country where they have not lived since they were children.



In a letter to Senator Durbin, John David Bunting, Nelson and Jhon's uncle, said:

“They will be able to give back so much to our country if allowed to stay. I am overwhelmed by my pride in them, and how they have managed to persevere and even flourish under their circumstances. ... I also have two young sons and I teach them about the incredible history of the United States, and the way that our country can address wrongs committed in its name, and come out of the process even stronger. Please help us.”

### **Gaby Pacheco**



Gaby Pacheco's parents came to this country from Ecuador when she was 7.

Gaby was the highest ranked Junior R.O.T.C. student in her high school, and she received the highest score on the military's aptitude test. The Air Force tried to recruit Gaby but she was unable to enlist because she did not have legal status.

Since then, Gaby has earned two associates degrees in education and a BA in special education. Gaby has also served as the president of her student government and the president of Florida's Junior Community College Student Government Association. Gaby's dream is to teach autistic children.

Gaby is one of four students who walked all the way from Miami, Florida, to Washington, D.C. – 1,500 miles – in order to build support for the DREAM Act. Along the way, these four students were joined by hundreds of supporters. They called their trip the Trail of Dreams.

### **Pedro Pedroza**



Pedro Pedroza came to Chicago from Mexico when he was 5.

Pedro graduated from St. Agnes Catholic School in Little Village and was an honors student at St. Ignatius College Prep.

He is now a student at Cornell University, a prestigious college in Ithaca, New York. Pedro wants to be a teacher.

America needs more teachers with the talent of Pedro Pedroza.

Unfortunately, Pedro is in deportation proceedings. He was riding a bus from Chicago back to school in Ithaca New York when immigration agents arrested him. It makes no sense to send someone like Pedro, who has so much to contribute, to a country he barely remembers.

In a letter to Senator Durbin, Pedro wrote:

“Mexico is not only unfamiliar to me, but leaving the U.S. means leaving everything and

everyone I know. ... I only hope I can earn a future in the U.S. for as long as I am here. Even if I am left no choice but to leave for Mexico, I would still strive to adjust my status and return to the place I consider home – the United States of America.”

### **Dan-el Padilla Peralta**



Dan-el Padilla Peralta came to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic at the age of 4. He rose from homelessness to become the salutatorian of his class at Princeton University, where his professors hailed him as the likely "classicist of his generation."

Dan-el is currently in graduate student at Stanford University.

### **Minchul Suk**



Minchul Suk came to the U.S. from South Korea with his parents in 1991, when he was 9. Minchul graduated from high school with a 4.2 GPA. He graduated from UCLA with a degree in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics. With the support of the Korean-American community, Minchul was able to graduate from dental school. He has passed the national boards and licensure exam but cannot obtain a license and fulfill his dream of becoming a dentist because he is undocumented. In a letter to Senator Durbin, Minchul wrote:

"After spending the majority of my life here, with all my friends and family here, and with my college acceptance at UCLA, I could not simply pack my things and go to a country I barely remember. I am willing to accept whatever punishment is deemed fitting for that crime; let me just stay and pay for it. People say that everyone deserves a second

chance. I am just asking for that one. I am begging for a chance to prove to everyone that I am not a waste of a human being, that I am not a criminal set on leeching off taxpayers' money. Please give me the chance to serve my community as a dentist, to be a giver rather than a receiver, to be able to become someone who would be able to shine light and help those around me like people have done for me when I was down in my darkest hours."

## Cesar Vargas



Cesar Vargas came to the U.S. from Mexico with his parents when he was 5. He recently graduated from the City University of New York School of Law, where he founded the Prosecutor Law Students Association. Cesar recently interned at the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office. Cesar's dream is to serve as a military lawyer in the Judge Advocate General's Corp, and, following his military service, to become a prosecutor.

## Oscar Vazquez



Oscar Vazquez was brought to Phoenix, Arizona, by his parents when he was a child.

He spent his high school years in Junior R.O.T.C. He dreamed of enlisting in the military. However, at the end of his junior year, a recruiting officer told Oscar that he was ineligible for military service because he was undocumented.

Oscar found another outlet for his talent. He entered a college-level robot competition sponsored by NASA. Oscar and three other DREAM Act students worked for months in a storage room in their high school. They were competing against students from MIT and other top universities, but Oscar's team won first place.

In 2009, Oscar graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He was one of the top three students in his class.

Following his graduation, Oscar took a brave step. He voluntarily returned to Mexico, a country where he hadn't lived since he was a child. Oscar said, "I decided to take a gamble and do the right thing."

Last year, the Obama Administration granted Oscar a waiver to reenter the United States. Without this waiver, Oscar would have been barred from returning to the United States for at least ten years. He would have been separated from his wife Karla and their two-year-old daughter Samantha, who are both American citizens.

When Oscar returned to the United States last year, he did two things. First, he applied for citizenship. Then, he enlisted in the Army. Oscar is in basic training now. His goal is to pilot an Apache helicopter. In June, Oscar will complete basic training, and he will be sworn in as an American citizen.

## Benita Veliz



Benita Veliz came to the U.S. from Mexico with her parents in 1993, when she was 8. Benita graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class at the age of 16. She received a full scholarship to St. Mary's University, where she graduated from the Honors program with a double major in biology and sociology. Benita's honors thesis was on the DREAM Act. She dreams of becoming an attorney. In a letter to Senator Durbin, Benita wrote:

"I can't wait to be able to give back to the community that has given me so much. I was recently asked to sign the national anthems for both the U.S. and Mexico at a Cinco de Mayo community assembly. Without missing a beat, I quickly belted out the Star Spangled Banner. To my embarrassment, I then realized that I had no idea how to sing the Mexican national anthem. I am American. My dream is American. It's time to make our dreams a reality. It's time to pass the DREAM Act."