

July 30, 2013

As president of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), I am writing to urge swift and decisive action in passing immigration reform and, particularly, the Dream Act. While I have expressed my strong support for this legislation in the past, what prompts this letter to you now are the recent courageous acts by several young undocumented immigrants to bring attention to this issue. As you may know, earlier this week, several undocumented students – among them Lizbeth Mateo, a CSUN graduate – voluntarily returned to Mexico, risking the homes, futures and lives they have built in this country, to bring attention to the need for immigration reform and the situation of thousands of students and young people like them. Lizbeth's courage, and that of her fellow protesters, has put a human face on the need to give undocumented immigrants who were brought into the country as minors the opportunity to remain in the only place they have considered home and continue contributing productively to their communities in fulfillment of the promise our great country affords.

The higher education community has supported the Dream Act and the plight of Dreamers since the legislation was first introduced in 2001. At CSUN, this issue has been especially compelling. In the fall of 2012, 35% of our students identified as Latino, which likely includes many who are undocumented. Given the fear of deportation and other social stigmas that are often attached to citizenship status, many students feel pressure to not be open about their status. As the president of this vibrant, culturally-rich university, I will continue to strive to offer an educational experience of excellence, including providing the necessary resources for the most vulnerable of our student population.

I should add that Lizbeth's story is not unique at CSUN. Nancy Landa, the university's first Latina student body president, graduated with honors in 2004 and, following the start of a career in the non-profit sector, was deported in 2009. She remains engaged in urging immigration reform as well, and her story, along with Lizbeth's and many other affected students, demonstrate the kind of fine minds and contributions that will be lost, or which we will not fully benefit from, until immigration reform and the Dream Act are passed. I look forward to continued dialogue on how the higher education community can engage policy-makers and end the stalemate on this complex issue. My hope is that we can work together in some capacity to achieve compassionate immigration reform and protect the future of students who share Lizbeth Mateo's and Nancy Landa's story.

Sincerely,



Dianne F. Harrison
President