

'Just Disappeared'

Trump's immigration crackdown is imperiling college access for undocumented students.

Diego Dulanto Falcon, a graduate student in public health at the University of South Florida at Tampa, doesn't feel comfortable spending a lot of time on campus anymore.

The 26-year-old from Peru, who came to the United States at age 4, said he will limit his movement this fall semester after USF's campus police department signed an [agreement](#) with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement that will enable the university's officers to enforce immigration laws. Dulanto Falcon, a recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the Obama-era status that temporarily prevents some young undocumented people from being deported, said he is planning to take online classes and attend fewer in-person events.

USF representatives say campus police are following a [directive](#) from Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, for all law-enforcement agencies to join a state partnership with ICE — a tool to advance the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, the governor said in February. University officials also say the agreement simply formalizes "clear lines of communication" and standards for how the agencies will interact, according to the [student newspaper](#).

Dulanto Falcon's experience is one example of how President Trump's campaign to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, over [70 percent](#) of whom are Hispanic or Latino, is rippling across college campuses — from an increased ICE presence to new limits on educational access.

The likelihood of immigration arrests on campuses has been low for the past decade, thanks to a [federal policy](#) that restricted enforcement in sensitive locations, but the Trump administration rescinded it. Trump and his allies argue that immigration laws haven't been adequately enforced for years and that their efforts will improve national security; Democratic lawmakers and other critics say mass deportations are an assault on human rights.

Roughly [400,000 undocumented students](#) are enrolled in American colleges. Thousands more are from mixed-status families, where at least one member doesn't have authorization. And some Hispanic students who are citizens or have legal status have also been caught up in the crackdown.

Anxiety is pervasive in the undocumented community, Dulanto Falcon said. The Trump administration has suggested that DACA recipients, known as [Dreamers](#), should self-deport.

“You cannot concentrate, you cannot think about anything else other than your safety,” Dulanto Falcon said. “How can we expect ourselves to focus on our classes when we’re constantly fearing for our safety, not knowing whether or not we’re going to be able to come back home at the end of the day?”

Some immigration experts and higher-ed advocates say the federal changes could more broadly hurt Hispanic students’ academic success and retention rates and, in some cases, whether they even choose to pursue college — where they have been the fastest-growing demographic group for years.

Daysi Diaz-Strong, who studies how immigration policy can impact educational trajectories, said detentions can create vulnerability for an entire family, not just a single individual.

“How are you going to make decisions about college when you have so much pressure coming from the removal of one parent and what that means financially? How are you going to be thinking about college when you’re thinking about your younger brother and who’s going to take care of them?” said Diaz-Strong, an assistant professor in the Jane Addams College of Social Work in the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Some colleges say they’re responding to students’ concerns by offering legal resources and flexibility to take classes online. But in many cases, colleges’ hands are tied — because not complying with government edicts would be too big of a risk.

For colleges in Florida and California, [two of the top three states](#) where the most undocumented students reside, the effects of Trump’s agenda look different.

Florida International University, the [second-largest Hispanic-serving institution in the country](#), recently finalized a partnership with ICE. Campus police officers at FIU will soon go through a [weeks-long training](#) to gain the authority to stop, detain, or arrest people they believe have violated immigration laws. (An FIU spokesperson wouldn’t answer questions about when the training will begin, but the [Miami Herald](#) reported in July that there was no set timeline.)

Police departments at at least [15 of Florida's public colleges](#) have signed up for the 287(g) task force training model, described as a ["force multiplier"](#) for federal immigration enforcement. FIU, the University of Central Florida, and Florida Atlantic University appear in an active list of 287(g) participating agencies. The program, which dates back to [1996](#), was discontinued by the Obama administration due to concerns over [racial profiling](#); [Trump restored the training this year](#).

I can't control what ICE does. But if I don't enter the agreement, I don't have the opportunity to say, 'Call us first, let us deal with our community.'

Tania Cepero López, president of FIU's chapter of the United Faculty of Florida, the state's faculty union, said the agreement goes against the university's own mission. "You know, we are Florida *International* University," she said.

López, an associate teaching professor in the English department, was herself undocumented when she first came to the United States from Cuba. López said many students, regardless of their immigration status, have asked her and other instructors if it's safe to come to campus. At the same time, trust in the campus police department is eroding, which could lead to underreporting of crime, she said.

She also believes students and faculty might self-censor in academic discussions. "If I was a student who's on a green card or my immigration status was somewhat questionable, I probably wouldn't participate in class," López said. "I would try to make myself as invisible as I possibly can, which is the complete opposite of what education in the United States is supposed to help students do."

Alexander D. Casas, chief of the FIU Police Department [has responded](#) to some concerns about the agreement with ICE, emphasizing that he entered into it so his officers would be the ones responsible for interacting with FIU students. (Signing on is technically optional, but DeSantis's office and the state's attorney general have [pushed](#) agencies to do so, saying it is required under a state law that bans local governments from limiting cooperation with immigration-enforcement efforts.)

"I can't control what ICE does. But if I don't enter the agreement, I don't have the opportunity to say, 'Call us first, let us deal with our community,'" Casas said during an April meeting of FIU's Faculty Senate, according to the [Miami Herald](#).

That reasoning makes sense for Sebastián A. Arcos, the interim director of FIU's Cuban Research Institute. Arcos, who is also a Cuban immigrant, said he believes there's a lot of "exaggeration" over how the change will impact FIU's international community.

He thinks it's "commonsensical" for local law enforcement to cooperate with the federal government. "I see the signs around campuses, 'There's no ICE on campus,' and it always makes me laugh because it's really hot down here and ice is always good," he added.

The officers trained under the agreement will not be identifiable with special badges, Casas recently [confirmed](#), and details about the training are slim until it's underway. (Casas declined a request for an interview. A spokesperson for the department referred *The Chronicle* to FIU's media relations office, which did not answer a request for comment.)

In California, where raids have swept through Los Angeles and surrounding areas in recent months, colleges are also navigating ICE activity. But they're not facing the same political pressures.

At Compton College's commencement in May, college officials coordinated with local police to ensure students' safety and had protocols in place in case ICE officers were present. The college is also seeking to offer more online classes, mental-health support services, and legal resources, said its president, Keith Curry.

"It's about the students and making sure our students feel safe, supported, and have a sense of belonging," Curry said. "But then also the same thing for the employees as well. It's hard when you have employees — faculty, staff, and administrators — who have seen the struggle of our students."

California State University at Los Angeles has taken similar steps, allowing students to participate in classes online and giving excused absences to some who've voiced concerns regarding immigration raids. Erik Frost Hollins, a university spokesperson, told *The Chronicle* that this wasn't a change in policy, but rather a reminder of flexibility for students in "extraordinary circumstances."

"Recent events in the L.A. area — including the presence of heavily armed immigration agents in MacArthur Park earlier this week — have left many in our community concerned for their safety," Heather Lattimer, the university's provost and vice president for academic affairs, wrote in a July 10 letter to faculty, which was first reported by the [Los Angeles Times](#).

Miriam Feldblum, co-founder of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, said the actions of public universities reflect the political "state context" that they're in. But she recommends institutions take a step back and not act preemptively.

"What we see is institutions taking steps that they're not required to take, and by doing so, they're accelerating harm when I know they also are committed to support," she added. "There's no easy solution."

Other moves by the Trump administration have more directly targeted undocumented immigrants' ability to enroll in college.

In Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Minnesota, the U.S. Department of Justice has sued over laws that allow some undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition rates. In Florida, the State Legislature and DeSantis overturned a decade-old law with similar provisions.

Texas's attorney general quickly announced he would not oppose the Trump administration's legal challenge and filed a joint motion with the DOJ asking a federal judge to invalidate the state's law, which was granted. Oklahoma's attorney general similarly didn't challenge the DOJ's lawsuit, agreeing to end the in-state tuition policy [earlier this month](#).

A Texas higher-ed official then told public colleges that administrators should immediately [start identifying](#) which students were undocumented because they'd need to pay a higher tuition rate this fall. The agency declined to provide further guidance on how institutions should identify those students, according to *The Texas Tribune*.

Several parties [have sought to intervene](#) in the Texas case and defend the state's tuition-benefit law — including the Board of Trustees at Austin Community College and a former student at the University of North Texas.

The U.S. Department of Education is also [investigating](#) five universities for providing scholarships specifically for undocumented students and DACA recipients. The government suggested that such financial-aid offers violate Title VI, the civil-rights law barring discrimination based on race, color, and national origin, if American citizens are ineligible to apply.

The policy changes are adding financial barriers for undocumented students, said Gaby Pacheco, president and chief executive at TheDream.US, which offers scholarships for undocumented immigrants.

“For a lot of these folks, there’s a lot of confusion,” she added. “There’s a lot of asking, ‘Why is this happening? What have I done that is wrong? I have done everything right. I have gotten good grades. I have been involved in school. I do community service.’”

Pacheco said it’s disappointing to see “the coordination to repeal” tuition-benefit policies for students without legal status in spite of how “popular and instrumental” they’ve been. The laws allowing access to in-state tuition often have enjoyed bipartisan support. “I think these students feel betrayed,” Pacheco added.

These policies create a chilling effect for accessing safety-net programs.

TheDream.US terminated the scholarships of [600-plus students](#) at eight Florida colleges earlier this year, citing campus police departments’ agreements with ICE and the state’s revocation of in-state tuition waivers for undocumented students.

Miguel B. Fernandez, a Cuban billionaire and philanthropist in Miami who lobbied for the original tuition-benefit law in Florida, pulled a \$10-million donation to Miami Dade College and \$1 million from FIU over the state’s decision to reverse course.

Like many of the students affected by the policy change, Fernandez came to the United States from Mexico as a child, after leaving Cuba with his family.

“I owe it to those people that are arriving now or who arrived in the last 20 years. I owe it to them to speak up for them,” said Fernandez, who is chairman of MBF Healthcare Partners, a private investment firm. “The state of Florida is punishing kids who had nothing to do with the situation that they’re in.”

One of the key [supporters](#) of the law before its reversal was Jeanette Núñez, a former Republican state legislator and lieutenant governor who is now FIU’s president. She backtracked earlier this year, [saying](#) the policy had “run its course.”

Diaz-Strong, the University of Illinois at Chicago professor, said students might also be hesitant to apply for other financial aid or resources as it may involve divulging information about one's immigration status or their immediate family members.

“These policies create a chilling effect for accessing safety-net programs. And so we see financial material hardships being created, both for people who are detained and then for those who are not,” Diaz-Strong added.

Long term, another potential barrier is the uncertain future of federal funding for Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), which educate over [60 percent](#) of the nation's Hispanic students. [Most HSIs](#) are located in [states](#) where the most undocumented immigrants reside.

The HSI program distributes billions of dollars each year to colleges whose student bodies are at least 25-percent Hispanic, mostly for projects focused on student success. But a new lawsuit filed by Students for Fair Admissions, the group that successfully sued to [end race-conscious admissions](#), argues that HSI funding [is unconstitutional](#), and HSI advocates say they're worried that the federal government isn't poised to defend the program.

The Trump administration's most explicit effort to restrict undocumented students' college access came in July, when the U.S. Department of Education issued a [memo](#) saying such students could no longer register for certain work force-focused and adult-education programs — including G.E.D. and English-language learner, or ELL, offerings. The programs, typically offered at community colleges, are federally funded.

The memo directed colleges to start checking students' immigration status, saying institutions must “verify the eligibility of participants to ensure that limited federal funding is not being improperly distributed to noneligible individuals.”

In late July, [20 states](#) — including [three](#) Trump won in the 2024 presidential election — [and the District of Columbia](#) sued over the policy, arguing that the states didn't have “fair notice” of the eligibility change and calling the new requirements “indefensible.” The government [agreed](#) not to enforce the rule until at least September 10.

Still, Johnson County Community College, in Kansas, recently began requiring students to show proof of citizenship or their legal standing — asking for documents like a Real ID,

birth certificate, American passport, or immigration documents — to register for adult-education programs. Around 13 percent of its [student body](#) is Hispanic.

Per the college's new policy, instructors are tasked with performing the checks. "That is not in the job description of a part-time English-language learning instructor at Johnson County Community College," said Daniel Tyx, who resigned his position at the college over the new requirement.

Chris Gray, a spokesperson for the college, said "noncompliance" with federal policy would risk around \$700,000 in federal funding. "JCCC's compliance with federal requirements in this matter allows us to continue to serve qualified individuals for our [Johnson County Adult Education] programs," he said in an email. As of Monday afternoon, almost all of the 1,000-plus students in adult education had completed the checks, Gray said.

Lane Glenn, president of Northern Essex Community College, in Massachusetts, one of the states that sued over the memo, said the college won't enforce the requirement for now. But he recognizes that being in a blue state gives the college some leeway. "Geography is destiny," he said. "If you're in a particularly conservative state, you may be urged to comply sooner rather than later."

Adult-education experience is central to their hopes and dreams in the United States. They want to be able to communicate with their neighbors, with their co-workers, with their bosses, with the schools that their children attend.

Glenn said he hadn't heard of other colleges requiring proof of citizenship or legal status, but he wouldn't be surprised if others complied "prematurely." Nationwide, he said the impact of the policy could be "tremendously harmful" for colleges and their budgets if it went into effect. "Politically, they're finding it less palatable right now, but economically, they know they need it," Glenn said of the states limiting undocumented students' access to education.

Tyx, who worked at Johnson County for just over a year, said he couldn't stay there in "good conscience." Tyx said his adult-education students came from 30 different countries, and about half were Spanish-speaking. "They bring so much in their life experience and their enthusiasm and their desire to work hard and learn from each other every day," he added.

On its [website](#), the college touts its immigrant community, saying “these students bring rich diversity to our college and a global perspective to our classrooms by facilitating the understanding of foreign cultures.”

While some might lose access because of their immigration status, Tyx said other students who are eligible to attend have said they might quit the program to support other classmates. “Pero mis compañeros,” Tyx said his students told him in Spanish (which translates to “but my classmates”), “I want to study with them.”

The classes weren’t just a place of learning. Many of Tyx’s students were new to the country, he said, and the classes became a place of social connection. The impact on the college’s enrollment could be “devastating,” he said.

“Adult-education experience is central to their hopes and dreams in the United States. They want to be able to communicate with their neighbors, with their co-workers, with their bosses, with the schools that their children attend,” he added.

We are the people who need to talk to the students. We are the people who are dealing with their pain.

Asked to assess how new immigration policies will affect class attendance or enrollment, some higher-ed experts said it’s too early to draw broad conclusions.

However, there’s a proven link between immigration raids and absenteeism in K-12 schools, and the trend could translate into attendance and enrollment for higher ed, said Thomas S. Dee, a professor of education at Stanford University. Dee published a [study](#) in June that found that student absences across five districts in California’s Central Valley increased by 22 percent at the same time as raids swept through the areas.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is working with local police to create “safe zones” in Latino neighborhoods and nearby high schools, and bringing on “scouts” who can warn schools about enforcement efforts, according to the [Los Angeles Times](#).

Adriana Novoa, a professor of history at South Florida, put it simply: Some of her students have “just disappeared.” Novoa doesn’t ask about anyone’s immigration status, but what’s happening is “clear to her” and her colleagues.

She understands that USF's leaders faced pressure to participate in the ICE agreement, but she believes faculty and staff members should've been consulted: "We are the people who need to talk to the students. We are the people who are dealing with their pain."

When asked how USF plans to support students who feel uncomfortable on campus, Althea Johnson, a spokesperson, said the Office of International Services provides information to the community through newsletters, advising hours, and "one-on-one" conversations.

Dulanto Falcon, the USF graduate student, said he's already felt a shift in the atmosphere. Some students say they're avoiding speaking their native languages, and other multicultural organizations plan to stay off campus when possible.

But Dulanto Falcon said he'll be "unapologetically" himself. "There's not really a lot we can do," he added. "It's kind of just a thing of now we have to adapt and prepare."

Trump Administration 'Chipping Away' at Undocumented Student Protections

Dreamers and their advocates say the Trump administration has launched a multifront attack on DACA and benefits historically extended to noncitizens.

Tricia McLaughlin, assistant press secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, recently [told](#) the undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children known as Dreamers, who have for years participated in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, to self-deport.

She insisted that the Obama-era program, which protects these individuals from deportation and gives them work authorization, "does not confer any form of legal status in this country."

"We encourage every person here illegally to take advantage of this offer and reserve the chance to come back to the U.S. the right, legal way," McLaughlin said in a statement to NPR.

Her comments contradict those made by President-elect Donald Trump in a December interview with [Meet the Press](#). He said then that he'd willingly work with Democrats on a plan to keep Dreamers in the country.

"They were brought into this country many years ago," he told Meet the Press. "Some of them are no longer young people, and in many cases they've become successful. They have great jobs ... We're going to have to do something with them."

This conflicting rhetoric is emblematic of the tenuous position Dreamers, including thousands of college students, have occupied for years, uncertain whether past protections and legal promises will hold. Today, most of the country's roughly 400,800 undocumented students don't have DACA status. But the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration [estimates](#) about 119,000 are eligible for the program based on 2022 data.

DACA has suffered—and survived—attacks before, including from Trump during his first term, but immigrant advocates say this administration is launching precision strikes against Dreamers; instead of moving to end the DACA program wholesale, they're casting doubt on the program's legal power, and, one by one, targeting other benefits historically extended to Dreamers.

Gaby Pacheco, president and CEO of TheDream.US, a scholarship provider for undocumented students, said the federal government is “chipping away” at protections and public benefits for this population.

The administration is “coming at it from different angles in different ways and creating a lot of chaos,” Pacheco said. “A lot of people are confused and are trying to figure out what’s next and how to protect themselves,” including students and higher ed leaders.

A ‘Methodical, Surgical’ Attack

Legal challenges to DACA go back more than a decade. The U.S. Supreme Court prevented the program from expanding in 2016. Then, during Trump’s first term, he [ordered the end of DACA](#) under pressure from Republican lawmakers. When the Supreme Court [ruled against his plans](#) to immediately end the program, Trump tried to [curb DACA](#) in 2020 by rejecting new applications and limiting the renewal period.

Earlier this year, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit [unanimously affirmed](#) a 2023 [district court order](#) that deemed work authorization for DACA recipients unlawful, but the judges also preserved protection from removal for all DACA holders nationwide and limited the ruling on work authorization to the state of Texas alone. In addition, the panel issued a stay, leaving the status quo unchanged for now. After the time to appeal the decision passed with no appeal filed, Judge Andrew S. Hanen, the trial judge in the case, asked for additional written arguments from the parties involved.

Pacheco said that now the government is doing a “very methodical, surgical” unwinding of Dreamers’ rights.

For example, the administration revoked DACA recipients’ eligibility for Affordable Care Act health insurance. Some Dreamers [with DACA status](#), including [students](#), have been detained by law enforcement.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Justice sued four states for allowing local undocumented students, with and without DACA, to pay in-state tuition, successfully ending these policies in [Texas](#) and [Oklahoma](#) with support from state lawmakers. The Department of Education is also investigating five universities—the University of Louisville, the University of Nebraska, the University of Miami, the University of Michigan and Western Michigan University—alleging scholarships they provide for undocumented and DACA students violate civil rights law.

“There has been an escalating series of attacks and targeting of undocumented students, including those with DACA, and the institutions seeking to enroll and support them under this administration,” said Miriam Feldblum, president and CEO of the Presidents’ Alliance. “Over all, for students with and without DACA, this has become an increasingly anxious time” as well as for “campuses who are being targeted.”

A DACA recipient, who gained DACA status in 2014 and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2022, said the slew of new policies is “really affecting” day-to-day life for undocumented immigrants, including those in the program.

The recipient, who asked to remain anonymous, said the DACA program offered some sense of safety, but that protection now feels “very thin,” like a “Band-Aid on a wound.”

“I can’t imagine what it must feel like to be, especially a younger student or somebody who is currently in college,” they said. “You’re probably in the middle of your academic career and your state has now rescinded in-state tuition ... How do you finish your education? What are you supposed to do?”

‘Just the Beginning’

Diego Sánchez, director of policy and strategy at the Presidents’ Alliance, said in a [recent webinar](#) that he worries the administration’s coordinated attack on DACA, and Dreamers over all, could signal a larger-scale war on the policy. He believes it’s a “very real concern right now” that the Trump administration could try to end DACA through the formal rule-making process—posting a proposed rule for public feedback, then issuing a regulation to phase out the program.

“We haven’t seen a formal announcement, but the rhetoric coming out of DHS, along with the uptick in enforcement, the detention of Dreamers all over the country, some who’ve had DACA, some who have never benefited from DACA, suggests that this may be under serious consideration,” he said.

Pacheco also fears life for Dreamers in college is going to get worse. She noted that the One Big Beautiful Bill Act poured about \$170 billion into immigration enforcement. And while ICE doesn’t have access to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid database, a data-sharing agreement between the Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Homeland Security has students and their advocates worried about immigrant students’

data. Meanwhile, the federal government has plenty of data on DACA recipients, who have been dutifully filing their renewals every two years.

"I always try to be very careful how I say this to our students and to folks when I'm speaking, but this is really just the beginning," she said.

Higher Ed as 'Lines of Defense'

Immigrant advocates say colleges and universities have a vital role to play in making DACA and undocumented students safer.

Pacheco believes higher ed institutions over all are "one of the biggest lines of defense for students." College officials can have plans in place for potential ICE visits and insist that law enforcement show warrants if they come looking for undocumented students, she said, and the fact of being a student, if they're detained, can elicit public sympathy. And campuses have networks of alumni who can "rally around" them.

"One of the safest places where they can be is in a classroom, in an institution of higher learning," Pacheco said.

Feldblum said higher ed institutions can also support Dreamers by not complying pre-emptively with the Trump administration's legal challenges to benefits. For example, scholarships based on immigration status are "permissible," she said, provided they don't discriminate based on race, ethnicity, national origin or shared ancestry.

"The key here is to be clear that these programs, this status, is lawful," Feldblum said. "And while the federal government may be attempting to threaten different regulations or programs ... states and colleges and universities need to make sure they are not pre-emptively changing policy or regulation when the law does not require them to do so."

Pacheco said she empathizes with [higher ed leaders who are nervous](#) to put their federal funds at risk by showing public support for their undocumented students. But she believes, at some point, higher ed is going to need to push back.

"When is it going to be enough?" she said. "And when are we going to draw a line and fight back and stand up for academic freedom and stand up for what these institutions have pledged, which is to educate everyone and to ensure that everyone has access to an equitable education?"

(This story has been updated to clarify the legal history of DACA recipients.)

Florida 'Dreamers' lose in-state tuition — but not their college dreams

This past spring, Faten was on the brink of achieving her lifelong dreams: graduating from college.

Then a junior at Florida Atlantic University, she was on track to graduate in December and was just 10 credits away from a bachelor's degree. She was also exploring her longtime passion for writing as a reporter for University Press, her school's student-run magazine, where she had also been offered an editorial position for the fall semester.

Then, Faten became ensnared in Florida's crackdown on illegal immigration.

But it was not the threat of deportation that thwarted her graduation plans at FAU. It was the GOP-dominated Florida Legislature's decision in January to repeal a decade-old state law allowing "Dreamers," non-citizen students who have lived in the United States since they were very young, the ability to pay in-state tuition rates.

The change has derailed many of those students' graduation plans and, for some, made higher education completely inaccessible. The now-repealed 2014 state law allowed undocumented students to seek a waiver to pay in-state tuition rates if they had gone to high school in Florida for at least three consecutive years and enrolled in college within two years of graduating from high school.

Faten, a Palestinian immigrant whose family arrived in Florida from Ramallah when she was five, is one of an estimated 6,500 students at Florida's public universities and colleges who lost access to in-state tuition July 1. Faten asked that her last name be withheld for fear of retaliation.

The repeal was part of a [sweeping immigration reform package](#) pushed by the DeSantis administration for the purpose of preemptively supporting President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. Those efforts have been accompanied by controversial [formal agreements between state school police departments and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#), which effectively deputize campus police officers to act as immigration agents, allowing them to question, detain and transport suspected undocumented immigrants to ICE facilities.

[Read more: FIU police sign on to help DeSantis and Trump with immigration enforcement](#)

Undocumented students now must pay out-of-state tuition rates, which can be triple that of in-state rates and are now slated to be raised [by up to 10% at some schools](#). At FIU, for instance, in-state students pay \$205.57 per credit hour, or \$3,084 per semester; out-of-state rates now sit at \$618.87 per credit hour, or more than \$9,283 per semester.

Supporters of the repeal argued that taxpayers shouldn't foot the bill for students who aren't U.S. citizens and that universities were losing out on millions of dollars by not charging out-of-state rates. But critics counter that it's unlikely undocumented students can afford out-of-state tuition fees and emphasize that these are students who came to the U.S. as children, brought here by their parents and raised in Florida, where they went to school, graduated and worked hard to pursue a degree.

Dreamers and undocumented students cannot receive state or federal financial aid — including money from the Bright Futures Scholarship Program, a Florida Lottery-funded program providing full rides to high-achieving students — and must pay out of pocket or secure private scholarships or loans.

'I don't want to leave'

For Faten, navigating the changes was confusing. Because of her immigration status, Faten is not eligible for any state or federal financial aid. That left her with few options. At first, she planned on taking out student loans and working a summer job in order to afford her last semester at FAU. But in mid-April, she discovered it would cost her family \$21,000 to complete her degree at FAU. They couldn't afford it. With just one semester left, she had to drop out of FAU.

"My family was consoling me, because I was just crying the whole day," Faten said. "It's not fair. I don't want to leave."

TheDream.US, an immigrant advocacy organization that provides scholarships to undocumented students, ended its scholarship program with eight of Florida's public universities in April, citing the in-state tuition revocation as well as the alarming number of schools with police forces that have enrolled in the 287(g) program with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Read more: [A scholarship program for undocumented students will end at eight Florida universities](#)

"People are completely devastated, and the questions that we're getting mostly are just 'why?'" said Gaby Pacheco, the CEO of TheDream.US. "These are young people that are trying to understand the world and trying to accomplish their dreams and are being told by the leaders that are supposed to be protecting them and helping them that, 'No, sorry, because you are not born in this country, your dreams are not worthy.'"

Losing the students has financial consequences for Florida schools. TheDream.US has channeled nearly \$27 million in scholarship funds to its eight partner schools in Florida. The nonprofit was FIU's largest private scholarship provider, according to Pacheco, giving \$9.5 million since the partnership began.

But it's not just TheDream.US pulling funding from Florida schools. Mike Fernandez, a Cuban-born businessman who lobbied hard to pass the 2014 waiver law, has suspended a combined \$11 million in pledges toward [FIU](#) and [Miami-Dade College](#), and is channeling some of those funds toward TheDream.US scholarships.

"The state is shooting themselves in the foot," Pacheco said.

Now, TheDream.US is partnering with private and online universities to provide replacement scholarships. Pacheco said her organization is in the process of transferring scholars to private schools like Lynn University and Barry University, which are now supporting scholarships for undocumented students.

In early April, Pacheco, along with a handful of Dreamers, met with state lawmakers in hopes of passing an amendment that grandfathered in students currently using the waiver. It didn't work.

"What we're asking is not big," Pacheco said in an interview at the State Capitol building that day. "What we're asking is fair, and it's within the hands of the body that is here. It is just to allow for the young people who are in college right now to have the opportunity to finish their education."

There's nothing we can do about it'

One of those students at the Capitol that day was Carlie, then a University of Central Florida student who was two semesters away from graduation.

“What I gathered from the conversation is that they know that what they’re doing is not okay, they know how it’s affecting us, but no one is willing to take a stand and do something about it,” she said. “They’re all saying, ‘Oh, I understand where you’re coming from. I sympathize with you, but there’s nothing I can do.’”

Carlie, a Haitian-born student whose asylum application is still pending, had worked 20 to 36 hours per week at Publix to pay for basic living expenses, while TheDream.US covered her tuition. Carlie is not eligible for financial aid and does not receive support from her family. She also requested to withhold her last name for fear of retribution.

Now, she is on track to resume her studies online with the Indiana-based Purdue University, which accepts scholarships from TheDream.US. Carlie, who lives in Orlando, said she did not feel safe transferring to another Florida school because of the school police’s agreements with ICE.

She said the transfer wouldn’t impact her financial situation, but it has the potential to delay her expected graduation date by up to three semesters. Carlie had 32 credits left in UCF’s 120-credit bachelor’s program; Purdue’s program requires 180 credits, and not all of Carlie’s UCF credits are accepted.

At first, the tuition turmoil left Carlie “overwhelmed and depressed.”

“Because of the fact that this even happened, I kind of lost faith in this country, because it kind of feels like what I’m doing doesn’t matter, because everything might be taken away from me, and there’s nothing I can do about it,” she said. “I’m still feeling powerless, but I’m trying to just push through, because I got this far on my own.”

Carlie is not alone in the turmoil. She started volunteering with Florida Student Power, a statewide network of student activists supporting undocumented immigrants, among other causes. Carlie also runs her own advocacy platform on her Instagram page, “dreamersuccess2026,” where she shares her experiences with other undocumented students, as well as job and scholarship opportunities.

"What happened to me wasn't fair, and if I can help other people get through their challenges, that's something I want to do," she said.

Like Carlie, Faten has found a way to finish her studies despite the roadblocks.

With the support of a scholarship from TheDream.US, she is now enrolled at Lynn University, a private school in Boca Raton. Her first semester starts Aug. 17, and she expects to graduate by the end of next semester.

"I always had to pick myself back up on my own and remember that inner child dream that I had, which was 'I'm gonna graduate, I'm gonna walk the stage, I'm going to achieve what I want,'" Faten said. "I'm still going for that end goal, and nothing and no one can ever stop me."