

We Truly Hope This Is The Last Time We Have To Do This!

Our team has a very special tradition. It started off as just a way to honor anybody who has meant a lot to the team or who has made a significant contribution. Some of the people have been Rose, Adam, Marcos, Karen, Jerry, Carmen and Heather. Over time we became strong supporters of the DREAM act. The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act. This act would create a pathway to citizenship for children who were brought to the United States illegally. Currently the act does not exist, so children who grew up in this country and that have been integrated into our society are being torn apart by deportations that are occurring at higher and higher rates.

We decided to name our robots after team members who have graduated from college that were undocumented. We added DREAM after their name to invoke a discussion about the DREAM Act when ask about the robot's name. These names were Virginia's DREAM, Dulce's DREAM, Angelica's DREAM and this year's Ingrid's DREAM. FIRST became just one way for us to show what we, as a team, believe in and to exemplify why undocumented students should be given a pathway to become citizens of the country we call home.

Not every member of the team is undocumented but we see ourselves as one and if we see a member of a team in struggle then we see ourselves in the struggle along with them. We also feel that we are on the right side of history and we must stand up for what we see as an injustice, even if it means that it may hurt us as a team in a country divided on this issue. Doing otherwise would be a facade that we could not and would not put up. We would be denying our condition just to be able to participate in something and that would not be true to ourselves.

Here is a little history of how we got into this situation. Our school's demographics about 40 years ago was primarily a white, middle class rural school. Over time, our school started shifting over to a predominantly low income, Hispanic inner city school. This change is attributed to a change over time in the economy and the workforce associated with it. Farmers, businesses and corporations found cheap labor in the form of immigrants from Mexico and at first it was equitable, to a certain degree. Later it became too difficult to be away from family and country as well as the U.S. government tightening the border without effective working programs that would allow for ease of border crossings. Immigrants started staying in the U.S. when their work visas expired and made the U.S. their home. Right or wrong this is what happened. The farmers, businesses and corporations along with the U.S. government did little to discourage this behavior, so the number of undocumented immigrants grew to 12 million. The economy in Mexico was terrible and families were willing to cross illegally so they could survive. The pressure was so great that they braved extreme conditions and risked their lives so they could feed themselves and their families.

About eight years ago the situation in the United States but primarily in Arizona reached critical mass. Children of immigrants were now graduating from high school and going to college in record numbers at a rate of 65 thousand graduates a year. Publicly-funded scholarships were denied and these kids and they also began standing up and demanding to be given a path to citizenship. Some states such as Arizona starting clamping down by passing laws that make it difficult to stay in the U.S. like raising tuition for students wanting to go to university, denying driver licenses and conducting raids on workplaces to round up and deport the undocumented. The number of deportations through out the United States increased annually. The plan seemed to be to make life impossible in the U.S. so that all undocumented people would then just leave the country. This is how we got here.

Despite the state of the status of education in the U.S., some of our undocumented students have excelled and have accomplished many things. The 1st on the list is Dulce Matuz who started on the team as a sophomore. She quickly learned English and became of the chief spokespersons for the team. She then attended ASU, about 8 years ago where she got her BA in Electrical Engineering. After graduating she became a strong advocate for the DREAM Act and started approaching senators and congressmen to try to convince them that the DREAM Act is the right thing to do. It seemed as though no one was out of reach for Dulce, not even President Obama who Dulce met in a greeting line in Arizona and held a 3 minute conversation about the DREAM Act. She started and is currently the president of the Arizona DREAM Act Coalition.

In 2004, four members of the robotics team entered an underwater robotics competition that had entries from universities and colleges, but allowed some high school entries as well. Lorenzo Santillan, Cristian Arcega, Luis Aranda and Oscar Vázquez beat out schools the likes of MIT and achieved worldwide recognition through an article by Josh Davis in Wired Magazine, followed by a story about them on ABC Nightline. The accomplishments of the four boys were even read into the U.S Congressional Record by Arizona congressman Ed Pastor. The one fact that got everyone's attention more than the fantastic accomplishment was that all four were undocumented. This all occurred right about when the immigration issue was hitting full steam in the U.S. with minute men on the border and Sheriff Joe Arpaio conducting neighborhood sweeps. People from all over the world donated money and we had to set up a fund at the district to collect and disburse these funds for the four boys to go to college. By this time all undocumented students were now paying out of state tuition at a rate three times higher than in state tuition despite the fact that they live in Arizona and have gone through the grade school and high school system.

Oscar Vazquez was in ROTC when he was on the team in high school. He showed great promise and leadership that would carry him on to and showed great leadership that carried him to success at ASU. He graduated with distinction in front of President Obama. One of only three students to be highlighted for their accomplishments. Oscar then proceeded to petition the U.S. government to grant him permission to stay in the U.S. legally. By this time Oscar had a wife and child who were U.S. citizens. The answer from Immigration was an emphatic NO! Oscar self deported to Mexico because he did all he could as an undocumented person in the U.S. Now he needed to take care of his family and he needed a job. He found one in a small town that makes car parts for GM in Mexico. His wife and child made bi monthly visits to stay connected while they continued to appeal to the U.S. government. After about 10 months a video of Oscar graduating in front of President Obama was posted on Youtube and it went viral. CNN then wanted an interview and promptly did so. Oscar's story was gaining momentum. His story was even told by Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois who explained Oscar's story on the senate floor demonstrating the character of the type of people that would benefit from the DREAM Act.

Another DREAMer that we want to tell you about is Angelica Hernandez. She started on the team as a sophomore and quickly became adept on the team. She was the Vice President her senior year and she was on the chairman's presentation team as well. Angelica went to ASU on private funding as other have done and became the Valedictorian for the College of Engineering. She then got a fellowship to Stanford University and is currently working on her masters. Angelica outed herself upon graduation and became a strong advocate of the DREAM Act with news outlets around the country.

Two more DREAMers made their mark at ASU, Mabel Munoz and Ingrid Tay. This dynamic duo were outstanding members of the Chairman's team in 2008 when we won. Mabel graduated with a 4.0 in Biomedical Engineering and Ingrid with a 4.3 in Mechanical Engineering. The two young women are currently organizing a small foundation to help elementary school students in undeserved areas get exposure to FIRST through the Lego robotics. This year's Robot is named after one of the women, it is Ingrid's DREAM.

At the 2011 championships, two former Falcon Robotics members were honored by being included in a FIRST Showcase called Then and Now, hosted by award winning journalist John Hockenberry. This event occurred at night for sponsors and prospective sponsors. They picked a dozen people to show what they did when they were on a FIRST team and then what they are doing now. It was to demonstrate how FIRST changes lives. The individuals chosen to represent us were Dulce Matuz and Oscar Vazquez. Because of all Dulce's work in the area promoting the DREAM Act and all the people she has met, Dulce was named one of Time Magazine's 100 top influential people in the world. About a year after Oscar self deported to Mexico, he received a letter immigration inviting him back to the U.S. where he then joined the U.S. Army, a childhood goal for him, and became a paratrooper. He is now a U.S. citizen has two kids and is currently stationed in Afghanistan.

We currently have undocumented students on our team now that have applied for deferred action, a measure that President Obama enacted to give undocumented students a waiver to go to school and

work in the U.S. We stand with them and hope that the U.S. government will finally pass the DREAM Act this year. It has been voted on three times in the last ten years. We have tried to raise awareness among the general public and legislatures over the years of why this is a good thing for the country. While we will continue to carry the dreams of the DREAMers in our robot's names and in our hearts we would like to not need to do it. We truly hope this is the last time we have to do this!