



THIS PROFESSOR STUDIED UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS. THEN HE STARTED A SCHOLARSHIP FOR THEM



This month and next month, the class of 2019 will graduate from high school. **Most** will head off to college. But there's one group of their peers that will overwhelmingly get left behind. They are the **65,000** or so students without documentation who graduate each year from American high schools. Just **5 to 10 percent** of these graduates will pursue higher education. A major reason is that undocumented students cannot access federal student grants and loans, which help fund the education of **85 percent** of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who enroll in four-year institutions. Further, most states prohibit undocumented students who are residents of those states to **qualify for** in-state tuition—even though undocumented immigrants pay over \$20 billion in local, **state and federal taxes** annually.

Ten years ago, National Education Policy Center Fellow **Jaime L. Del Razo** set out to help address this issue. That's when he founded the **Que Llave Café Scholarship** for undocumented students. Although undocumented immigrants may qualify for some non-government-sponsored scholarships, Que Llave Café is one of a very small handful of awards reserved exclusively for this population. The scholarship is open to graduating high school students, and GED graduates, living in the mainland U.S. and Puerto Rico.

“The scholarship was founded with the intent of providing a direct response to an immigration system that deprives aspiring new scholars from continuing their education in the only country and home that many have only known, the United States,” Del Razo said. “As such, we find it imperative to provide a scholarship that attempts to alleviate the enormous financial burden of going to college until comprehensive immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship is passed and implemented in this country.”

Que Llavea Café is sponsored by “Chicano Organizing & Research in Education” (CORE), which Del Razo directs.

“CORE is as grassroots as they come,” said Del Razo. “We’ve done fundraising events like poetry readings, Flor y Canto, comedy nights, Noche de Loteria, and collected pledges for races (e.g., runs and triathlons). Our typical donation is usually between \$10 to \$20.”

For this reason, just \$500 is currently available to each scholarship recipient. Yet the program is in such demand that CORE can only provide 1 to 5 percent of applicants each year with an award.

“My only hopes for a degree are private scholarships,” one recipient wrote in the personal statement submitted with her application. “Those funds from generous individuals provide a glimpse of light in my shadowy world.”

CORE has supported 188 students in the past decade, for a total of \$94,000 in awards.

“We wish it was more and hope more people will donate to our scholarship so we can increase that percentage,” Del Razo said.

An assistant professor of education at Vassar College, Del Razo wrote his doctoral dissertation on the college aspirations of undocumented students.

“The scholarship has been influenced by my research in that it has permitted me to design scholarship evaluation trainings that are both effective and sensitive to the issues facing undocumented students, which is helpful,” he said. “The Que Llavea Café scholarship has also influenced my research by keeping me in touch with some of the issues affecting undocumented students via the stories I read in our applications.”

However, Del Razo emphasized that any research benefits are secondary. Though the scholarship both influences his research and is, in turn, influenced by his research, its mission is to provide scholarship funds to college-bound, undocumented students.

“This mission supersedes all other tangential efforts,” he said.

For more information on the Que Llavea Café scholarship, click [HERE](#).

NEPC Resources on Higher Education

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