

DREAMER FUND

San Francisco, CA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

July 15, 2019

Dreamer Fund to Establish a Special Scholarship Benefiting Undocumented Students at the Graduate-Level at the University of San Francisco

San Francisco, CA – This summer, the Dreamer Fund has partnered with the Master’s in Migration Studies (MIMS) program at the University of San Francisco (USF), to establish a special scholarship dedicated to undocumented students admitted to their particular program.

The Dreamer Fund is a non-profit organization in San Francisco created in 2016, for the purpose of financially assisting undocumented law students in the Bay Area who struggled to pay for their tuition. The founder of the Dreamer Fund, Monica Valencia, advocated for undocumented students while she was a law student. She met with the financial aid officers at her university and spoke with other administrators about the university’s policy on assisting undocumented students with financial aid. After learning that no such specific assistance existed, she rallied her fellow students and faculty in order to establish the Dreamer Fund.

Since then, the Dreamer Fund has passionately created and developed events and community fundraisers to help raise funds for their scholarship program. Their spring signature event, “UndocuFest,” has garnered state-wide recognition for their one-of-a-kind artistic and cultural approach to celebrating the immigrant community through music, dance, art, poetry, and folklore through a lens of inclusion, advocacy, and rebellion. In creating safe spaces throughout the Bay Area and building social movements with grassroots organizations, the Dreamer Fund has broke-through the often stigmatized idea that advocacy groups in separate fields cannot work together. By engaging in collaborative partnerships, they expect to change the social and political landscape in a way that benefits and amplifies the immigrant voice.

USF’s Migration Studies Program was established in 2017 and it offers an interdisciplinary approach to helping students conduct research and start careers that help better the lives of migrants and refugees in the U.S. and throughout the world. With more than 230 million global citizens living outside their home countries, international migration is increasingly recognized as one of the most critical issues of our time. As a two-year program with immersion opportunities in Mexico, Italy, and the Bay Area, students work with an incredible group of faculty who combine academic excellence with grassroots knowledge and experience in the field.



“DACA students come to our program with a profound awareness of the injustices that mar immigration systems and exceptional personal histories of activism and community engagement,” remarked Aide Rodriguez, Program Manager for MIMS. “Unfortunately, without federal aid and limited scholarship opportunities, graduate school represents a daunting set of financial challenges for undocumented students. We are profoundly thankful to the Dreamer Fund for embarking on this partnership with us, and working to increase access to our program.”

In partnering with MIMS, the Dreamer Fund hopes to be able to assist by creating a special scholarship for graduate-level undocumented students entering their program. This scholarship will be used for tuition, housing, books, and any other school-related expenses.

“We are happy to be able to expand our area of reach when it comes to undocumented students and education. It had been our goal to develop our scholarship program in the future, but we are excited that this opportunity to help more students has presented itself sooner than we thought,” said Monica Valencia, founder & co-director of the Dreamer Fund. “When you are faced with institutional bureaucracies and barriers to education, it is imperative that you create your own platforms of success and that you do not take “No!” for an answer. My training in rebellious lawyering has taught me that and we are eager to partner with MIMS to foster education equity for undocumented graduate-level students.”

While USF has a designated Magis Scholarship that awards undergraduates with \$8,000 and graduates up to \$1,500, the tuition costs for graduate programs is upwards of a \$46,000. When you consider the high cost of living in the Bay Area, the incongruence of these numbers is hardly encouraging. Thus far, the School of Education at USF is the only program that has managed to develop its own line of funding for undocumented graduate students. Coincidentally, the Dreamer Fund got started because there was no separate funding for undocumented law students at USF, so students took it upon themselves to create their own funding.

“The partnership between the Dreamer Fund and MIMS program is very special. Dreamers seeking graduate degrees in law and other fields are often ignored,” explained Bill Ong Hing, Professor of Law and Migration Studies at the University of San Francisco. “This new effort symbolizes a commitment that we should all support because it will contribute to the academic achievement of special students and their communities.”

We are humbled and honored by the aptitude and resilience of undocumented students who are able to not only succeed academically, but continue to pursue professional degrees and careers in service of others. The Dreamer Fund looks forward to working in tandem with MIMS to increase funding opportunities for undocumented students to pursue their passion for law and migration studies. Together, our partnership looks to raise the profile of undocumented students who seek graduate-level education, along with other assistance that will propel undocumented students to achieve their dreams.