

**“Campus Leadership”
Swarthmore College
March 26, 2022**

I want to thank Mariam Feldblum, Executive Director of the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and one of today’s hosts, for asking me to speak with you today. I am honored to be with this distinguished group of higher education leaders.

We are here because we believe in the power of education to change lives, and we share a deep concern that those most at risk in our society do not have equitable access to a college degree.

Let me share with you two examples of how Eastern Connecticut State University has met the challenge of enrolling and graduating undocumented students. I hope what we have learned on our campus can provide a few insights on what policy changes across our country and support systems on our campuses are needed to improve the success of undocumented students.

First of all, let me share the story of Eastern’s “Dual College Enrollment Program.” In 2007, I visited the guidance office at Hartford Public High School, a school where the enrollment is two thirds Latino, and one third African American.

Many students there are undocumented. Only five percent eventually graduate from college.

By the time I had finished speaking to the two guidance counselors that day, we had formulated an idea. What if we could bring 10-15 graduates from their high school each year to Eastern, house them on campus, give them campus jobs, and engage them in campus life and leadership opportunities, while supporting them with a strong system of academic services?

We used grant funding to create an Academic Success Center with peer tutors, professional advisors, and supplemental math and writing instruction.

We partnered with the local community college to offer students three developmental courses in the first semester, with them enrolling full time on our campus the second semester. We used funding from the U.S. Justice Department, the Walmart foundation, and other donors to ease the burden of paying for college.

We got the students involved in every aspect of campus life—student government, internships, community service.

Most importantly, we did not single out, brand or create a special cohort of these students. I think this is critically important for any program that colleges and universities develop for at-risk, underserved, and undocumented students. When you accept students into your campus family and support them, they truly feel they belong.

Many of the students in this program were first- and second-generation immigrants, and their graduation rate has been 8 times that of their high school peers.

My second story is an example of what happens when you share your story with others.

In 2016, Donald Graham, former publisher of the Washington Post and founder of TheDream.US — another of our hosts today — was seeking two schools to pilot his program for undocumented students.

He had heard of our work at Eastern, and we ended up being one of those pilot schools.

With our strong academic support systems, a welcoming campus that helps students “Fit In” so they can “Stand Out,” and the financial support of Mr. Graham’s foundation, the program has blossomed.

Our DACA students have become campus leaders, take some of our most difficult majors, and volunteer in our local community.

Our first class of graduates had an overall GPA of 3.5 and 46 of the 47 graduated on time — 98%!

With more than 200 DACA students having attended Eastern and a new cohort arriving this fall, Eastern is the largest TheDream.US partner.

I recently learned that one of our DACA graduates has just been accepted at Harvard Medical School. Others are enrolled at prestigious graduate programs and employed at Fortune 500 companies such as Travelers Insurance.

Another thing I am very proud of is being co-chair of the Steering Committee for the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. I hope my own experiences have **helped contribute to our discussions. The Alliance’s staff, led by Mariam Feldblum, inspire me.** My conversations with other Alliance members have also informed my work at Eastern and kept me up-to-date on the ever-changing immigration landscape.

I am very proud to be part of the Alliance’s latest initiative to support refugee students entering the United States from other countries.

I am referring to the RESPONSE campaign circulating among Congressional leaders and other policymakers in Washington, D.C. We hope to eventually enroll 500 refugee students annually on college campuses.

The initiative has the support of the U.S. State Department, and I am sure we will be talking about it more today.

We have much to do, and I urge each of you to advocate for this program.

If you lead a campus, find local sponsors who will commit to supporting several refugee students. If we all get involved, we can meet the goal.

Achieving educational equity is hard work. On a national scale, that means leveraging our numbers and unity to take action and change policies. On our campuses, it means creating an inclusive culture and strong support systems. If our campuses truly welcome students from diverse communities, if we can provide strong academic support for all students, including those most at-risk, and if our leaders act on their values and advocate for what they believe in, we will see results.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my experiences with you today.