Access to in-state tuition for undocumented students has been on the docket of the Massachusetts legislature for the past several years. Following the failure of the DREAM Act to pass in both houses of Congress, Massachusetts policymakers reintroduced this contested topic to the Massachusetts legislature in a new bill that would ensure that any Massachusetts student who meets certain qualifications is eligible for in-state tuition rates.

### The Bill

Final Draft H02109: “Access to In-State Tuition for Undocumented Students”

### Elevator Speech

Hello Representative. I always thought that academic success was rewarded in our educational system, but that’s just not true. Renata Lopez and Deivid Ribeiro earned straight A’s in high school, but because they were brought to the United States when they were young children, are undocumented and required to pay out-of-state tuition rates in the only home they have ever known. As undocumented students, Devid and Renata have to work minimum-wage jobs to pay for every class they are able to take, and are often unable to take more than one or two classes each year. These students have potential, but it is being wasted over deep fryers. I don’t understand how our educational system is letting these students slip through, but I do understand the solution to this educational injustice. Bill H02109 will grant in-state tuition rates to deserving students like Renata and Deivid, and would bring in $2.5 million in new revenue for our state schools that we know are hurting financially.

If H02109 passes, students like Renata and Devid could afford college and, through the bill’s path to citizenship, acquire a high-wage job. They would benefit, and so would Massachusetts because each person who attends college and obtains a skilled job is one less drain on our social service budget. Not to mention the fact that immigrant college graduates in Massachusetts earn twice as much as immigrants with only a high school degree, which translates into $2.5 million dollars in new tax revenue for Massachusetts. Texas has already seen these benefits – do we really
want Massachusetts’ educational policy lagging behind? You can build a stronger educational system and economy for Massachusetts by supporting H02109.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Kate
From a general meeting for the Student Immigration Movement
This meeting was the most educational and emotional meeting I could have attended, and the most challenging personally. The Student Immigration Movement was started by a group of startlingly brave undocumented students who are talented, academically gifted, and completely unable to attend college because it is three times more expensive for them than it is for their classmates. They overcame their fears of being ousted as an undocumented immigrant and deported to help others in similar situations and challenge how the U.S. thinks about immigration. Their stories, and the stories of the people in the room who they were helping and the stories of their allies, were incredible. It was this meeting where Kayla and I met each of the individuals who would come to be represented in our storybook: Renata, Deivid, Vanessa and Cady. Their stories were incredible and moving and challenged how I think about immigration and immigrant students… I had always thought that it was their own fault for not trying hard enough to succeed, but this project forced me to reflect on the institutionalized discrimination against these students. I can’t know if I would have tried as hard as I did in high school had I been aware that there was no chance of me going to college, but I bet that I wouldn’t have felt quite the same encouragement to succeed.

Kayla
From a general meeting for the Student Immigration Movement
Some of these stories were heartbreaking and really affected me. In fact, this meeting is what inspired me to form BIEI (Brandeis Immigration Education Initiative). It also confirmed my feelings on this bill and solidified my position on it. The students were so articulate and really wanted to go to school, not just because they felt they should, or that it would help them get a job later, but because they truly wanted to learn. I could think of no group who deserves more to go to school. It made me reflect about the plenty of students I know in college who are wasting their time and not taking it seriously.

This was the first meeting of the year so first they recapped their previous campaign, the DREAM Act. They discussed what went well and what needs to be improved. People openly gave their thoughts and opinions as many had traveled to D.C. when the act went to vote. Secondly, they discussed what their goals for the upcoming year were. They were very organized and clearly outlined their goals. Guess what their main objective was? They wanted to advocate for the in-state tuition bill!

I made some meaningful connections that day. After the meeting was finished we had a social during which everyone could talk and get to know one another. It was here that Kate and I met Renata, one of the people featured in our storybook. We learned her story and actually interviewed her there. We met Cady that day too; she is also featured in our storybook. Through talking to other members we were told to get in contact with Deivid because he had an amazing story to tell. He just unfortunately couldn’t make that meeting. We got his contact information and later were able to interview him. His story was incredible and included in our storybook.

This meeting with SIM really inspired Kate, Vanessa, Molly, Morgan and I to start a similar group on the Brandeis campus. As a result, the Brandeis Immigration Education Initiative was born. The goal of this group is to raise the Brandeis community’s awareness on immigration issues, help SIM in their endeavors for immigrant rights, and to discover, and possibly change, Brandeis’s own policy when it comes to admitting undocumented students.

■ Update (June 2011)
The Joint Committee on Higher Education scheduled a July hearing for the bill.

For more information
Student Immigrant Movement
www.simforus.org