Professor Olivas wrote an op-ed piece in today’s *Houston Chronicle* regarding the consequences of Congress’s failure to pass the DREAM Act last year.

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**Some DREAM students face nightmare scenarios**  
**Obama administration must honor commitment**  
By MICHAEL A. OLIVAS

Thanks to the shameful failure of Congress to pass the DREAM Act last year, an estimated 60,000 students in U.S. high schools and colleges lost their chance to come out of the shadows and regularize their immigration status.

The DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act would provide conditional permanent residency to some deportable alien students who graduate from U.S. high schools, are of good moral character, arrived in the U.S. illegally as minors and have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill’s enactment.

After the legislation was blocked by a Senate filibuster in December, the Obama administration announced it would not pursue removal actions against DREAM Act students, even if they were out of status or undocumented.

The last few months have painted a different picture. A number of DREAM Act students have been put into removal procedures and have been refused deferred action status, which would allow them to remain in the United States until we can engineer a solid (i.e., bipartisan) policy on immigration. Evidence is piling up that this administration has ratcheted up pursuit of undocumented DREAM Act students — including many from mixed-citizenship families. A recent congressional hearing even confirmed that deferred actions were more prevalent under President Bush than they have become under President Obama.

Who are these DREAM-ers? Nearly all of these young men and women were brought by their parents to this country and entered without inspections. Some of them have been here virtually all their lives and have never known any other society. For them to make it to college (often with honors, in the striving immigrant tradition) is nothing short of remarkable. Most colleges have accommodated these undocumented immigrants, and Texas is among 10 states that currently view them as in-state residents for purposes of reduced tuition.

Houston is home to hundreds of DREAM students, but in an environment where deferred actions are rare, every one of them is subject to the same fate that befell Mario Perez last month when a judge signed his removal order. The third-year student at Stephen F. Austin State University was
about to be escorted from Houston and deposited, alone, in a country that meant absolutely nothing to him. On Friday, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, intervened on his behalf and obtained a one-year deferred action in his case. But it is a temporary measure and does not resolve the underlying issue for Perez and countless others.

Perez arrived here at age 5, excelled in public schools and maintained a high grade point average in college while majoring in math and statistics. He was tracked toward his chosen career as a civil engineer until he rolled through a stop sign on his college campus — and watched his world collapse around him.

The minor traffic infraction put Perez into the legal system, which revealed he previously had failed to pay a fine for an expired inspection sticker. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was notified, and ICE immediately launched deportation proceedings, despite the fact that Perez had never been accused of a crime, much less arrested for one.

Perez is a perfect poster child for a DREAM gone awry. While Democrats and Republicans shadowboxed on Sunday talk shows about so-called "blanket amnesties" versus birthright citizenship, even the original co-author of the legislation — conservative Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah — disappeared when the DREAM Act failed its key test in December.

In the wake of this leadership failure, who loses under our prevailing system of immigration enforcement? Actually, we all do, because we share the burden of telling people like Perez that they are no longer welcome in our town.

The bleak landscape echoes the emptiness of the Jim Crow era, when our nation preferred the protection of the elite rather than any celebration of the diverse. But in Perez's case, we are not ridding ourselves of a troublemaker; instead, we are slamming our door to someone who devoted more than 1,400 hours of community service to his college fraternity, and who was poised to become a successful and contributing member of our society.

I call upon the Obama administration to honor its word that it would not remove these students, absent criminal records. I also call upon these DREAM students to stop self-disclosing or outing themselves to authorities. Some supporters believed the time to do that was last year, when Congress needed to be convinced of the merits of these kids. Today, that window for defining DREAMers has clearly closed, and anyone who steps out from the shadows now risks unwelcome public attention and exposure for themselves and their families. A simple traffic stop in Georgia recently outed an undocumented student there (as it did Perez), and the blowback led to stricter admissions practices at the state's colleges, even though Georgia was not among the 10 states that accord these students residency status. In San Francisco, it took special action by a
U.S. senator to freeze an order that otherwise would have deported a student leader; such private relief bills are not in the cards for these students.

Throughout our history, we have been unafraid to take stands on principle — especially when human rights and civil rights are involved. From Thoreau's protesting war to Cesar Chavez fasting for farm workers to Martin Luther King Jr. being arrested in a non-violent protest in Birmingham, we have a proud tradition of calling attention to injustices. But here's a distinction: None of these people of yesteryear risked being deported or repatriated upon release from prison. Today, when DREAM students such as Mario Perez are removed to a country they have never known, we reduce their powerful "letters from a Birmingham jail" to insignificant tweets from Mexico City or Lagos or Wuhan. In the face of grave threats to themselves, their families and their support systems, DREAMers who remain have little choice but to slink back into the shadows, reluctant to voice their anguish about a wrongful public policy.

Some day, when the grownups decide to take their legislative duties seriously, we may finally pursue a comprehensive immigration reform. Until that day, I beg these courageous if misguided DREAM students to stop making their undocumented presence known, and I urge the Obama administration to be true to its word and provide "deferred actions" for Mario Perez and other DREAM students to remain in this country.

Reforming our policies in a just and workable way will allow us to retain the talent so evident in this population of high-achieving immigrants. We deserve a better fate — and so do Mario Perez and other DREAM students.

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