

## **Joan Aragone: Santa Clara University professor understands Dream Act**

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### **Body**

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Francisco Jimenez, a **professor** of modern languages and literature at **Santa Clara University** and award-winning author of a series of books describing his life as an immigrant child in the United States, knows how education can change lives. It changed his.

The Mexican-born Jimenez came to California as a young child with his parents and older brother. Following the harvests along the far-flung circuit of California farms and migrant camps, the growing family lived in constant flux. Working long days besides their parents, the children changed schools frequently, struggling to learn English and rarely completing an academic year.

But in eighth grade, after authorities learned of the family's undocumented status and threatened deportation, Jimenez's father took them back to Mexico. Sponsored by a migrant worker friend who became a U.S. citizen, the family soon returned, and five years later, Jimenez, by now a high school student, became a naturalized citizen.

Jimenez recorded his experiences in a series of books, starting in 1997 with "The Circuit," which has been reprinted in several languages. "The Circuit" and its successors, "Breaking Through" and "Reaching Out," which takes the narrator through high school and finally to college, reveal how he found solace and purpose in learning.

"Growing up I had a sense of instability," Jimenez said in a recent interview. "Everything in life was uncertain. But I found a constant sense of permanence from education. No matter what happened, I knew I could take that with me wherever I went."

So when Gov. Jerry Brown signed the controversial California **Dream Act** earlier this month, Jimenez called it "an important first step." The bill allows qualified undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children and wish to pursue higher education the right to receive state-based financial aid for college.

So strong had been the stigma of undocumented status for Jimenez that he never admitted publicly that he had lived in the U.S. without papers until he was an established **professor**.

"I always felt I was a fugitive, always hiding, always fearful," he said. "The fear and sense of shame go deep."

Critics of the **Dream Act** claim it reduces funding available for legally documented students. But, according to Luis Quinonez, a legislative aide to the man who authored the bill, Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, the **Dream Act** focuses on Cal Grants, needs-based funding set aside for any low-income student who graduated from high school with an eligible GPA and has been admitted to an accredited college or **university**.

Competitive grants, awarded to students of various income levels, are separate. For competitive funding, **Dream Act** students are considered only after all legal residents have applied. Between 1,500 and 2,000 students will

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benefit from the California **Dream Act**, Quinonez estimated, since not all undocumented students meet the academic criteria.

Jimenez is a board member of Alearn, a nonprofit that helps underrepresented students get to and succeed in college. He also works with the Peninsula College Fund, which provides scholarships and mentors for children who are the first in their families to attend college. One of Jimenez's three sons, a **professor** at Stanford **University**, is a mentor for the fund.

"Education helps all of us," Jimenez said. "If a student benefits, we all benefit. We are all in this together."

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