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THE TRUE STORY OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS AT EC.

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I've got some bad news.

You know how you have worked day and night to study for tests, write essays and complete midterm projects? And how you have been working at that crappy, minimum-wage job getting barely enough just to scrape by and pay for your tuition? All of this actually depends on one thing. One simple thing that you don't even think about but certain students have based their entire educational lives upon and think about every day.

Your Social Security number.

When you have it, the possibilities are limitless in America. Without it, you are looking at a long life of missed opportunities, meaningless interviews and useless degrees.

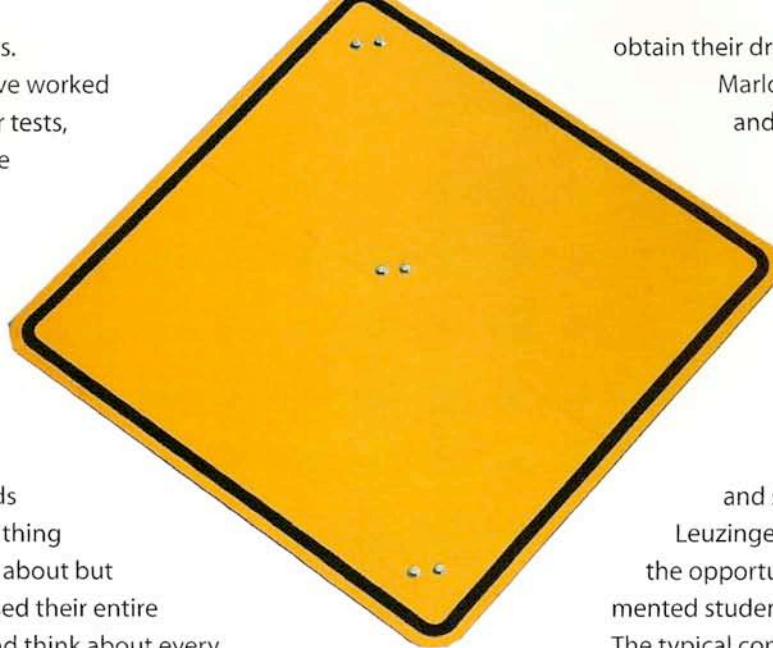
There are undocumented students who have struggled every day to get the degree to get the job that they have always wanted, but more likely will end up unsatisfied, unfulfilled and unemployed.

Undocumented students who earn high school degrees and are trying to earn college degrees hope that their efforts will not be in vain.

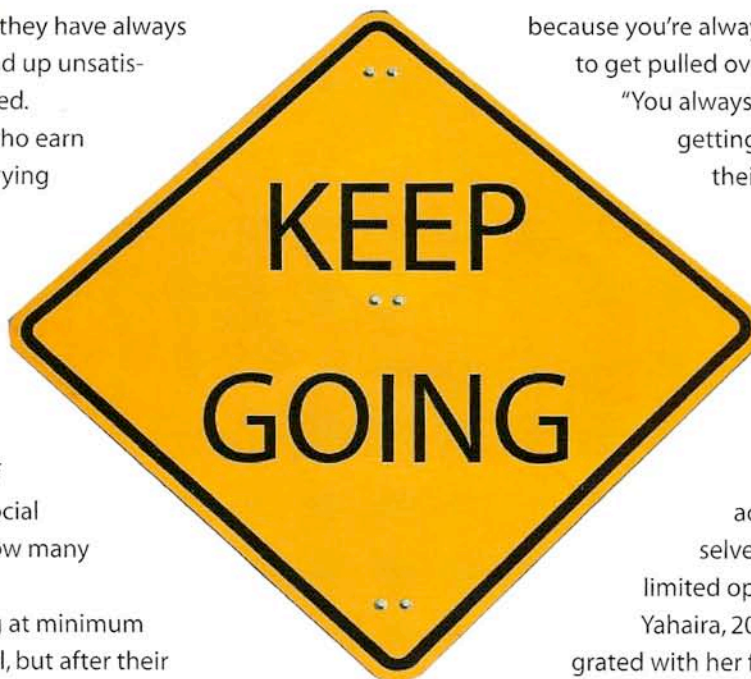
These students hope to be able to get a white-collar job and not be stuck in a rut.

Yet there is no possibility of getting a job if you have no Social Security number, no matter how many degrees you hold.

These students are working at minimum wage jobs and going to school, but after their degrees are tacked on the wall, their opportunity to



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obtain their dream job is next to impossible.

Marlon, 20, lives illegally in the U.S.; he and his family emigrated from Sinaloa, Mexico when he was 9. He may not miss the lack of opportunity in Mexico, but it is clear what he does miss.

"It's better over here economically, but all of my relatives are over there, so that's all I miss," Marlon says.

Marlon learned English in the U.S. and studied alongside classmates at Leuzinger High School, but does not have the opportunities available to him as documented students do.

The typical community college student often takes on a job to pay for school, and Marlon is no exception.

"It's hard enough to get a job as it is, but it's harder for undocumented people because all that is available for us are minimum wage jobs," Marlon says.

Marlon works as a pizza delivery guy, struggling to get to a better place in life.

"It's difficult

because you're always worried that you're going to get pulled over by the police," Marlon says.

"You always hear stories about people getting their cars taken away, having their faces pushed down to the pavement, or spending time in jail just for not having a California driver's license or car registration."

Undocumented students live scary, apprehensive lives, though they often show true ambition to achieve a better life for themselves and their family, even with limited options.

Yahaira, 20, communications major, emigrated with her family from Guadalajara, Mexico when she was 12 years old, and had to adapt to the

U.S. and its culture.

"I had come here before for vacation so I had a passport, but we just never went back," Yahaira says. "I was in a private school in Mexico and we had a stable situation, so for me it was random. I didn't want to come. I was like, I don't want to go to the U.S.— they're crazy!"

Yahaira attended El Segundo High School and graduated with a 4.0 GPA.

She now works at a department store and attends EC by filling out a form called an AB540, which allows undocumented students to pay regular fees instead of international fees.

Though she continues to work hard and strive for the best, frustrations creep into her mind.

"Sometimes I personally feel like, 'Well, what's the point of me going to school and getting a degree? What's going to matter if I don't have a Social? Who's going to hire me?' It's discouraging and frustrating," Yahaira says.

The average student struggles with economic hardships like Marlon and Yahaira, but adjusting to the society of a new country may double the burden of being an undocumented student.

"This is a different culture, and a different language, especially for someone who might have come here within the last few years," Eduardo Muñoz, political science professor, says.

Muñoz came from Nicaragua as a refugee of war. He was 15 years old and got his citizenship three years ago.

"In my own case, I was not an undocumented student. I came to the United States on a student visa, and when my parents emigrated here a few years later, they filed paperwork as a family since I was a minor back then," Muñoz says.

Immigrants are struggling to get to this country for opportunity, but because it is necessary to have a Social Security number in order to work, these students need to find alternative ways to get a job.

"You basically go to somewhere in Huntington Park, and there's a place where there are guys hanging out in parking lots and you have to kind of just know who they are and just ask for a fake Social, fake ID, because you need it for the job you want," Yahaira says. "You apply for the job, and just pray that they don't check."

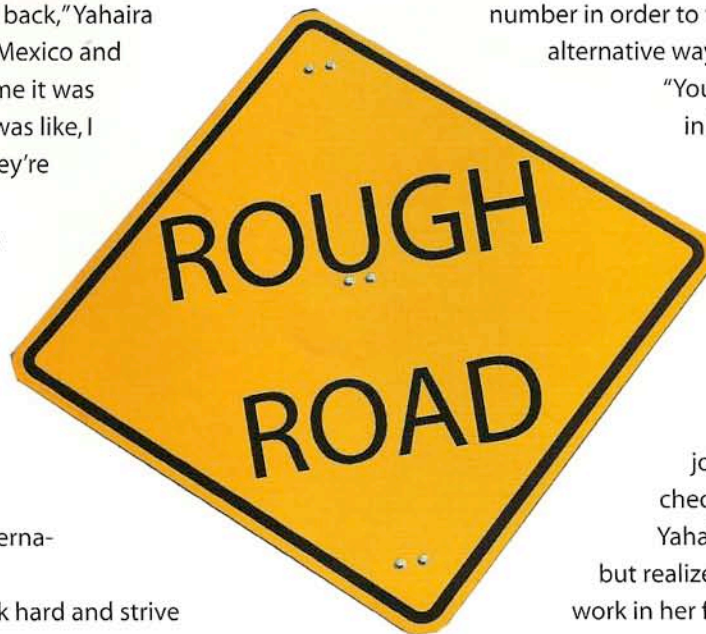
Yahaira says she hopes for her future, but realizes that life isn't always going to work in her favor. After applying to a law firm and losing the job due to her immigration status, Yahaira understands that this is the life of an undocumented student.

"I don't know what I was thinking, but I went to the interview and they liked me and gave me the job. The lady then said, 'Oh, your name doesn't match with the number on your Social Security card, do you have a middle name?' When she said it didn't match, my

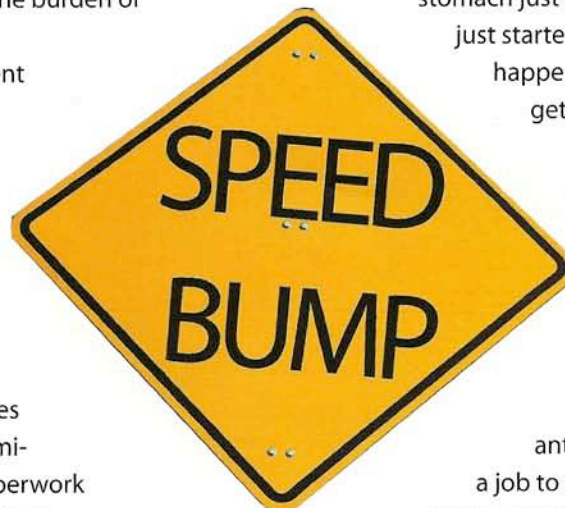
stomach just dropped and I was like, 'damn it!' I just started crying and figured this is going to happen to me very often, and I'd better just get used to it," Yahaira says.

Marlon and Yahaira both say that they think that most Americans don't desire the low-wage jobs that illegal immigrants possess.

"We're pretty much the backbone of the economy," Marlon says. "I could understand anti-immigrant sentiment if you lost a job to an illegal, but that doesn't happen. We have hard jobs like working in farms, or for



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Even if you have a higher education degree, you will never get a job without your Social Security card in hand, and those facts terrify Yahaira.

"There are so many jobs out there and if you're smart they offer so much more, but if you're undocumented, you have to settle for less," Yahaira says. "I really want to go to a university and it really scares me, but I think that I am in denial. Every day I try not to think about the future because it's discouraging. Time is going by so fast—what's going to happen in five years? What am I going to do? Am I wasting my time here?"

Marlon is also trying to better his situation by continuing his scholastic career beyond EC.

"I'm trying to transfer, because I don't want to be stuck here forever," Marlon says.

There is some legislation in place, such as the DREAM ACT, which enables students with high school diplomas to earn financial aid and possibly citizenship.

However, with the anti-immigration outlook lately, it seems as though this is a concept that will never see the light of day.

"I hope it passes, but that legislation has been there for a while, and I think it's just stuck in the Senate," Marlon says.

President George Bush's guest worker program proposal going through Congress is helpful legislation as well, allowing Americans to have the first poke at a job, and if they don't want it, a guest worker gets it.

However, Bush's proposal puts undocumented persons on a ticking clock, which means that they must return home after their years of service are up.

"I think it's a good proposal because there are a lot of people who come here who are hard workers and deserve it," Marlon says.

Yahaira says that she feels differently about anything that Bush is supporting.

"I don't really believe in what Bush comes up with because, first of all, he has the majority of Congress against him, and I tend to lose hope. If this passes, we're going to stay here for four or five

years and go back once our shift in the U.S. is done? We're not trying to go back," Yahaira says.

People have rallied on either side of the immigration debate, stating different opinions—some positive; others negative.

"To see all the hatred on the news is crazy," Marlon says.

Marlon and Yahaira have both experienced discrimination in their personal lives, too.

"One time I was delivering a pizza to a customer and didn't answer the door, so I had to call. The connection was bad, and I couldn't hear what he was saying. He then said, 'Do you even speak fucking English?'" Marlon says. "I snapped and said, 'Fuck you.'"

Though Marlon has been in situations like this, he doesn't feel resentment.

"I don't try to judge people, but I see myself and I have to work hard for everything I get," Marlon says.

Yahaira has experienced similar scenarios and rather than feeling anger, she continues to be optimistic.

"I have thought about it, and I try to put myself in their shoes. The news only tells you the negative stuff,"

Yahaira says. "But sometimes you want to slap people and say, 'Let me tell you the reality of the situation.'"

Even though many people consider immigrants to be imposers of the land that is not their own, Muñoz wishes to convey a message that all Americans should hear.

"I think that people perhaps need to be reminded that this was a nation of immigrants and that many of them have made great contributions to what America has become," Muñoz says.

The possibilities for young people should be limitless, no matter where you are from. Unless legislation passes for these undocumented students, life may turn out to be one giant disappointment.

"There are some days when you don't even want to get out of bed. It's hard to live a normal life, but I try not to have moments of weakness. What if I just gave up and something were to happen like a bill passing and all this time was wasted because I wasn't going to school?" Yahaira says.

****The last names of the students in this story have been withheld, due to the serious nature of immigration relations today.**

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