

# Campus Protest, DACA and the Age of Constant Crisis

This is the second piece in a series about activism in higher education. College campuses have always been a place of activism in its many forms. In this series, I ask: Who can participate in activism, and how, as well as what dangers are there to us who do, and what can we accomplish? In each piece, I look closely at an issue that is affecting college campuses right now. Last month, that issue was Confederate monuments. This month, the issue is the striking-down of DACA—the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program—by the Trump administration.

## Constant Crisis and How We Think

It's hard to write this column—or any thoughtful journalism these days—when the news cycle moves so quickly. That doesn't mean that journalists aren't doing a great job; it just means that it is that much harder for journalists to do a great job. Indeed, it is hard for any of us to slow down and focus on the many issues around us. In times of seemingly constant crisis, letting the crises drive our focus means that we can lose focus altogether.

Right now, I'm thinking in particular about DACA, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. [Back on Sept. 5, 2017](#), President Donald Trump and his administration ended a program that President Obama established back in 2012 that deferred deportation of children who were brought to the United States as children—called “Dreamers.” As a consequence of the administration's actions, nearly 800,000 legal immigrants living in the United States have had their immigration status thrown into uncertainty. The government accepted no more DACA applications after Sept. 5, and those who are part of the program now will be phased out completely by March 5, 2018.

While the DACA rescission seems like old news now, Sept. 5 just isn't that long ago. And the renewal date for the DACA recipients whose permits were set to immediately expire was Oct. 5, 2017. These are *recent* events, but they are buried because of our dizzying news cycle.

## The Purpose of Protest

One of the purposes of protest is to call attention to social problems that might otherwise be overlooked. And then, after attention is called to a social problem—one hopes—change can happen. In the age of constant crisis, protest becomes even more crucial.

Identifying problems and putting them in the public eye is a crucial part of living in a democratic society. Indeed, if you take a gander at our First Amendment, you will find the following: the rights to assemble (e.g., protest), speak freely, publish, and “petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” These rights to protest were so important to our nation's founders, whatever their flaws, that they put them *first*.

## DACA and Campus Protests

The DACA strike-down sparked many protests, especially on school campuses. DACA's influence on cam-

puses arises, in part, because DACA was a program that affected young people (who attend school), and because one of the requirements of DACA was that its participants be in school, be enrolling in school or have completed school. Many DACA participants go to college. Student (and Dreamer)-led walkouts happened in many states, as documented students showed solidarity with their Dreamer friends.

Similarly, because of the close connection between college and DACA, many higher education workers have protested the strike-down, including, notably, a group of higher education faculty in Boston. [As the Harvard Crimson reported](#), on Sept. 7, 2017, “Thirty-one professors from Harvard and other Boston-area universities were arrested for blocking traffic along Massachusetts Ave.,” protesting the rescission of DACA. Harvard University African and African American Studies professor Walter Johnson, who was among those arrested, spoke of a “moral responsibility” to stand with undocumented college students. Harvard professor Kirsten Weld was also arrested, saying that she and other professors “wanted to do more than sign a petition.”

## Higher Ed and Its Role in Activism

When you examine [the full list of those arrested](#) in Boston and their university affiliations, something striking emerges: just like the rest of academia, most of these professors are members of the academic precariat. They are lecturers, professors of the practice, visiting professors, research professors and post-docs.

They do not have tenure. Some do, sure—but most do not. These higher ed workers put their low-paying precarious livelihoods on the line to protest—draw attention to—the plight of some of the most disadvantaged members of our society. Who knows how their future employment might be affected by an arrest record?

But we can't ask only the vulnerable to protect the vulnerable. And the lecturer on a year-to-year employment contract or the graduate student who can be dropped by an advisor for no reason at all—they are vulnerable.

No. That Boston street, and streets across the country, should have been packed with tenured professors proclaiming that Dreamers are #HeretoStay—[they signed a petition, after all](#)—packed with those who have the job security to weather an arrest and some attacks on social media and by the right-wing press.

In our age of constant crisis, we need campus protests, and those who can weather such protests. 

—KRGP

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