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Student newspaper of Illinois Institute of Technology since 1928

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Undocumented students come out of 'Shadows'

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Part of an incredibly important and attention-grabbing movement happening across Illinois and around the country left its mark on the IIT campus this past week in the midst of a busy Wednesday afternoon, as students and staff gathered at the MTCC Welcome Center. Some students were wearing black t-shirts and holding a banner; a crowd was gathering and there was some strong media presence in the area too. This was the first "Coming Out of the Shadows at IIT" event, as the Undocumented Students and Allies (USA) at IIT went on to share their stories of struggle and persistence as they navigated their personal and academic lives amidst a culture that was inherently unsupportive of them, in a space where they felt constantly reminded to stay silent about a part of their identity.

Daniel Garcia, a recent graduate from the MMAE Department, was the first to share his story. He referenced the founders of IIT and how they would have liked IIT to have student representation from all backgrounds. He spoke of the two years he spent here in the shadows, fearful of revealing his true identity, navigating unaffordable tuition increases amidst commuting five hours daily and surviving on \$1 hot dogs. He also spoke of his struggles post-graduation, wherein even a prestigious engineering degree from a four-year college as well as work and research experience at other institutions like Harvard has not led to much professional advancement. You can read about his story in greater detail at <http://app.fwd.us/stories/394>

Another student to share her story was 1st year BME major Egle Malinauskaite, who spoke of her journey from Lithuania, via Canada, into the US, and what the "old American dream" really means to her now; how she was strongly patriotic for the star-spangled banner and the Pledge of Allegiance and would like to claim her unalienable right to pursue her dreams of becoming a volunteer, a leader, a doctor. Does a lack of an SSN make her any less of an American? She loves the same music, the same movies, the same TV shows that anyone else does—so she asks, why do we have these borders? Education has been her solace, her escape, her way of getting to where she wants to be. As a Camras and Leadership Academy scholar, as an undergraduate research participant, commuter and quite frankly one of the most genuinely involved freshmen students IIT has seen in recent times, Malinauskaite left the audience with a sterling reminder of how a steadfast vision and unwavering dedication can get you across even the most insurmountable obstacles. You can read more about her story at <http://app.fwd.us/stories/391>.

Sunny Patel, 4th year Aerospace Engineering student, originally from India has moved across the United States since the age of three. He credited much of his safety and sanity to his parents, and how they kept their children out of any uncomfortable situations. Today, Patel is grateful that his status of "deferred action" allows him to stay actively involved on campus. He is an employee of the Office of Sustainability, board member of the Indian Students Association and the President of the Armour College of Engineering Student Council, among other commitments. He said that his immigration status is a major hurdle



towards his dream job of being able to take others into space, as jobs within his field of aerospace engineering require at least a permanent residency. You can read more about his story at <http://app.fwd.us/stories/392>

Antonio Gutierrez (<http://www.iyjl.org/antoniocomingout/>), said, "One of the biggest challenges came 6 months after graduating from IIT in 2012 with an Architecture degree. I found myself in a nightmare. I had been working in an architecture firm for more than a year with a great salary. I was living on my own in one of the best neighborhoods for a young, gay

professional in the city," when suddenly his life changed because of his immigration status. Today, he is actively involved with the Immigrant Youth Justice League, and hopes that IIT as an institution can provide more support for individuals like him.

The stories shared were of high-impact, brave, passionate, eye opening and called out to be heard. One wishes that administration will take note and respond to their pleas for institutional support.

National Coming Out of the Shadows started in Chicago, Illinois on March 10,

2010 (iyjl.org/comingout) when undocumented youth declared they were "undocumented and unafraid" at Federal Plaza, opposite the Immigration Services building. Around the country, other undocumented youth did the same, sometimes escalating to civil disobedience in support of immigrant rights. Support them as they declare, "#weareIIT", that they are no longer in the shadows, and that they are no longer afraid! Support their efforts by making a donation at <http://bit.do/supportusa>. Also, check out the website created especially for this event at <http://comingoutiit.splashthat.com/>.