George I. Sánchez Memorial Award
A Dreamer Becomes a Leader

Daniel A. Rodriguez

Daniel Rodriguez was born in Monterrey, Mexico and came to Phoenix, Arizona with his mother when he was seven years old. He grew up in Phoenix “as normal as any other brown kid could.”

One high school counselor told Daniel he would not be able to attend college because he was undocumented. Fortunately, another counselor encouraged Daniel not to give up on college and to focus on his grades and school involvement. He did both. He excelled academically, and he joined school clubs, including becoming vice president of the Black Student Union (BSU).

At Arizona State University (ASU), Daniel Rodriguez continued to excel. In 2008, he founded what would become the Arizona Dream Act Coalition (ADAC). He understood the importance of organizing the undocumented community where so many live in the shadows. He organized leadership development trainings focusing on the power of shared stories. He came out publicly as an undocumented person. Later, he would also come out as a gay person.

By 2009, the undocumented in Arizona lived in fear because of the state’s anti-immigrant policies and the terrorizing tactics of people such as Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio. So Daniel Rodriguez organized “Coming Out of the Shadows” events in public forums to create a space for undocumented youth to confront their fears by sharing their stories publicly. In 2010, Daniel led a three-week action in which immigrant youth camped outside Senator John McCain’s office in Phoenix, asking the Senator to support the Dream Act.

Daniel graduated Magna Cum Laude from ASU with a B.A. Today he attends the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law. He is in his third year and is the only undocumented student in the law school. He is currently president of the Somos America/We Are America Coalition, the largest immigrant rights coalition in Arizona. He has also helped create the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project in Phoenix. Both the immigrant and the LGBT communities benefit from Daniel Rodriguez’s leadership.