



Guide for Parents and Family of Undocumented Students





Table of Contents

Applying to College	04
Financial Aid	05
Important Factors to Consider	06
DACA and the DREAM Act	08
Career Guidance	09
Supporting Your Student	10
Additional Resources	12
Frequently Asked Questions	13





Each year, undocumented students make significant contributions to higher education and, ultimately, the U.S. workforce. A 2020 report by the Migrant Policy Institute indicated undocumented students account for [2% of all college students in the U.S.](#), with enrollment increasing since 2017.

Undocumented students benefit from having a strong support system while pursuing a degree — especially first-generation college students. The following guide helps undocumented students and their families navigate the college selection and application process, including topics related to financial aid, scholarships, and career planning.

College Application Process

Applying to college can seem daunting for many students, including undocumented students and their families. Applicants must be diligent about following instructions and meeting deadlines for submitting materials.



Undocumented students should start researching schools early in high school. Many colleges and universities post information about resources and admission policies related to undocumented students online. Students can also reach out to a guidance counselor at their high school to get help with this.

There is currently no federal law that prevents colleges from admitting undocumented students; however, individual states set their own policies for considering a student's immigration status for enrollment and tuition purposes. Some states, including Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at public postsecondary institutions.

Undocumented students do not typically need to prove citizenship to attend college. When prompted to enter their "country of citizenship" and Social Security number on a college application, undocumented students can simply choose "no selection" and skip the question. In some cases, they can enter their Taxpayer Identification Number or Alien Number. Colleges cannot legally report undocumented students to federal immigration services.

Navigating Financial Aid

Prospective college students must navigate general application and [financial aid](#) processes at the same time. Undocumented students without a Social Security number cannot qualify for need-based federal aid like Pell Grants, but they can locate and apply for aid from other sources.



While undocumented students cannot receive federal financial aid, they may attend schools that offer state-funded grants and scholarships. Most states do not allow undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition rates. However, California, Minnesota, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington enable undocumented students to pursue in-state tuition rates and state-based funds.



Many [scholarships and grants](#) specifically serve undocumented students. Private scholarships offered by a variety of organizations, such as [TheDream.US](#) and the [Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#), evaluate candidates based on other criteria regardless of immigration status. Additionally, undocumented students may qualify for merit-based internships and fellowships.

Important Factors to Consider When Choosing a College



Specific Campus Policies for Undocumented Students:

Schools vary in their approach to accepting undocumented and DACA students. Some schools operate under restrictive state laws that limit support for DACA recipients, while others welcome DACA-eligible students and employ a dedicated staff to offer diverse support services. Students should research such policies at each school.



Bilingual and Culturally Diverse Staff and Advisors:

The [best schools for undocumented students](#) create an inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment on campus. Students should inquire about how each school works toward this goal. Benefits may include transitional or experiential courses and mentorship opportunities for Dreamers.

Student Organizations and Community-Building Opportunities:

Many schools that accept DACA students also foster safe spaces and oversee community-centered initiatives related to immigration. Prospective students should research DACA-focused student clubs, support groups, and advocacy organizations available at the schools on their list.



Traveling In State vs. Out of State:

While each school may implement its own acceptance policy regarding DACA students, state laws also vary. Many schools offer perks such as in-state tuition rates to U.S. citizens with a permanent local residence; however, they may impose out-of-state or international tuition rates on undocumented students.

Transparency and Open Access to Legal Services for DACA Students and Refugees:

A school should be transparent about its DACA student policies and how it upholds the rights of undocumented students, including immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Some schools even provide free immigration legal services to students and their immediate families. Take note of any schools that aren't forthright about discussing their services.



DACA and the DREAM Act

Two major federal policies affect undocumented college students: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the DREAM Act. Both were designed to protect immigrant children in the U.S. DACA was implemented by the Obama administration, but the DREAM Act has yet to pass into law.



Between 2012 and 2020, [DACA protections](#) remained in place for undocumented students who arrived to the U.S. as children under 16 years old; however, a federal judge ruled against allowing new DACA applications as of July 16, 2021. Applications approved before July 16, 2021 remain in effect, with protections that include unbiased college enrollment consideration.

The DREAM Act, originally introduced in Congress in 2001, proposed permanent protection for "Dreamers," or immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and young adults. Subsequent versions of the DREAM Act outlined various paths toward legal status for undocumented children in the United States. The American Dream and Promise Act of 2021 is currently under congressional review as of August 2021.

Career Guidance for Undocumented Students

Career guidance is critical for undocumented students in college programs. While many students select their college program based on their career goals, navigating the workforce as an undocumented citizen can bring a new set of challenges. Recent graduates and their families should understand immigrant rights in the workplace to determine when to disclose their status.



DACA students with a current EAD and [DACA-eligible employees](#) are protected under federal law. For example, DACA students are not required to disclose their status during a job interview. As employees, they are not required to disclose to employers that they are applying for DACA.

Employers should only hire documented workers; however, if hired without submitting an EAD or I-9 form, employees are not required to disclose their immigration status.



Many national, school-sponsored, and corporate programs offer [internships and fellowships for undocumented students](#), which can lead to employment in their field of choice. Many undocumented students enroll in two-year community college programs and vocational schools, which offer accelerated tracks that can lead to lucrative employment in various fields.

How You Can Support Your Undocumented Student



Offer Your Time and Assistance:

Let the undocumented student in your family know they are not alone by accompanying them at every step of the college selection and application process. Navigating the path to college enrollment can seem daunting, but knowing they have an ally can provide the moral support a student needs to stay organized and meet deadlines.



Conduct Preliminary Research:

Familiarize yourself with the process of researching schools and advocacy programs that provide comprehensive support to DACA students. This may include a crash course in the general [college application process](#), especially for families of aspiring first-generation college students.

Stay Current on Public Policy:

Understanding your rights as an undocumented family is a critical part of the college application process. Policies that affect Dreamers and undocumented college students change frequently, so stay vigilant.



Reach Out to College Advisors and Community Advocates:

Many organizations, including [Immigrants Rising](#) and [The Immigrant Learning Center](#), provide comprehensive support to families throughout the college application process. Additionally, many schools offer bilingual advisors who specialize in helping immigrant students apply and enroll in a college program.

Begin Identifying Financial Aid Opportunities:

While there are plenty of scholarships, fellowships, and paid internships for undocumented students, identifying them takes time and research. Families can help by pitching in to search for viable sources of financial aid early in the college selection process.





Additional Resources

[TheDream.US:](#) This organization offers educational and legal resources for undocumented students and higher learning administrators. It also offers one of the nation's largest scholarship funds for DACA recipients.

[Immigrants Rising:](#) Immigrants Rising provides financial and educational support and professional training for immigrant families, including mental health support services.

[Immigrant Legal Resource Center:](#) This resource helps undocumented students and their families stay current on the latest DACA policies. The center guides undocumented students through processes like applying for college, applying for DACA, and getting an employment authorization card.

[United We Dream:](#) United We Dream offers a variety of resources for immigrant students and their families, including a step-by-step guide for completing the FAFSA as a DACA recipient.

[The College Board:](#) The College Board offers resources for students and educators across K-12 and postsecondary schools, including tips for advising undocumented students.

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Families of Undocumented Students



Do DACA students qualify for federal financial aid? No. DACA students are ineligible for need-based federal financial aid, including Pell Grants and work-study jobs. However, many national and state organizations offer [scholarships and fellowships for undocumented students.](#)

What scholarships are available for undocumented students? Many national organizations, including TheDream.US, offer significant scholarships specifically for undocumented students. Others feature unique internships and fellowships for DACA recipients.

Can my student transfer colleges if they are undocumented? Yes, but not easily. Many schools treat undocumented students as international applicants, while others operate under state laws that may not recognize DACA-eligible college students. Students should confirm that their transfer school and current school offer the same benefits.

Can my undocumented student attend college online? It depends. Some schools that accept undocumented students without classifying them as "international" will let them study in person or online. However, other schools may limit undocumented students to in-person study and charge them higher out-of-state tuition rates.

Related Pages

[College Guide for Undocumented Students](#)

[Scholarships for Undocumented Students](#)

[College Application Guide for Undocumented Students](#)

Editor's Note: This article contains general information and is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice. Please consult a professional advisor before making decisions about legal issues.



Reviewed By



Susana Muñoz, Ph.D.

[Dr. Susana M. Muñoz](#) is Associate Professor of higher education, Program Coordinator of the [Higher Education Leadership \(HEL\) Program](#), and Co-Director of CSU initiatives for the [Race and Intersectional Studies for Educational Equity \(RISE\) Center](#) in the School of Education at Colorado State University (CSU).

Her scholarly interests center on the experiences of minoritized populations in higher education. Specifically, Dr. Muñoz focuses her research on issues of equity, identity, and campus climate for undocumented Latinx students, while employing perspectives such as legal violence, racist nativism, and Chicana feminist epistemology to identify and dismantle power, oppression, and inequities as experienced by these populations. She utilizes multiple research methods as mechanisms to examine these matters with the ultimate goal of informing immigration policy and higher education practices.

Dr. Muñoz has been honored by the [White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanics](#) for her teaching and research. She was also recognized as a [Salzburg Global Fellow](#) and named one of the [“top 25 most influential women in higher education”](#) by *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* magazine. She also brings 13 years of student affairs experience in multicultural affairs, Greek life, diversity and leadership training, TRIO programs, and residence life.