

# College Help for Undocumented Students

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There are approximately 1.7 million undocumented students under the age of 18 in the United States, many of whom have spent most of their lives in the country after immigrating with their parents at an early age. Though they don't have a passport, these kids attend school, learned English as their primary language and consider themselves Americans. Each year, more than 65,000 undocumented immigrants graduate from high school and many hope to study at an American college or university.

Undocumented students are defined by the [National Immigration Law Center](#) as learners who:

1. Entered the United states without inspection or with fraudulent documents, or:
  2. Entered legally but subsequently violated the terms of their nonimmigrant status and remained in the country without authorization.
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In recent years, [new laws](#) have allowed more undocumented students to attend college than ever before. These measures make it easier for them to finance their education and to delay or avoid deportation. Below, we'll walk through some of the most important things undocumented students should know when they apply to school.

## DREAM Act

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Since 2001, Congress has worked to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (or DREAM Act), a piece of legislation that expands higher education opportunities for undocumented students. The DREAM Act has undergone several revisions, and while the House passed the bill in 2010, it has never escaped the Senate. Certain states, however, have taken components of the bill and used similar language to draft their own legislation. As of 2012, the Obama administration [announced](#) it would stop deporting young undocumented immigrants meeting the criteria in the DREAM Act.

At its core, [the DREAM Act](#) presents a path to residency for undocumented students (also referred to as Dreamers) who have completed high school or college, or served in a branch of the U.S.

Resource: <http://www.onlinecolleges.net/for-students/undocumented-student-college-guide/>

military. Rules within the bill are stringent, and applicants must meet several requirements to be eligible. These include:

- Being 35 or younger at the time of the bill's passing
- Being younger than 16 when first entering the United States
- Completing at least two years of a bachelor's degree or serving in a branch of the armed forces for at least two years.

After meeting all of these conditions, eligible immigrants then follow a scrupulous six-year process, first receiving conditional residency before being accepted as permanent residents.

Although states don't have the authority to give undocumented students resident status, many have enacted legislation allowing them to receive in-state tuition. Historically, this has been a major barrier for immigrants hoping to attend college, and the availability of in-state tuition is one of the most important factors behind the recent surge of Dreamers in American universities. According to the National Immigration Law Center, [18 states](#) currently have laws in place to help undocumented students afford college.

## DACA

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[Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) is another key piece of immigration policy for undocumented students who came to America at a young age. It allows certain undocumented immigrants who entered the country as children to receive a two-year work permit and a temporary deportation exemption. First introduced in 2012, DACA was updated in 2014. Eligible immigrants must have:

- Been under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012
- Came to America before their 16th birthday
- Continuously lived in the U.S. since June 15, 2007
- Had no lawful immigration status on June 15, 2012
- Graduated or obtained a certificate from school, or be enrolled in school currently
- Not been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor, and pose no threat to national security/public safety

Undocumented students meeting all of these requirements can apply for DACA via [Form I-821D](#) through U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services. The application fee is currently \$465 initially, and for each subsequent renewal. Because DACA doesn't have the power to provide a path to citizenship, immigration specialists note the importance of passing some version of the DREAM Act at the federal level.

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# College Opportunities for Undocumented Students

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For undocumented students hoping to attend college, it's important to make a good impression with college admissions panels. Here are three ways you can impress:

1. **Don't hide your heritage:** There are no federal laws prohibiting undocumented students from attending college. State laws vary though, so you'll need to make a list of states and schools that are friendly to immigrants. Once you've identified a few colleges you're interested in attending, be up-front about your immigration status. Schools without immigration restrictions will understand your situation, and value your perspective and worldview. Rather than being ashamed of your legal status, you can use the application as an opportunity to talk about your life in America and how you've contributed to your community.
  2. **Know your rights:** State laws regarding undocumented immigrants change frequently, and you should keep abreast of the latest political developments. Meanwhile, [federal mandates](#) such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) have significantly shifted the educational landscape for this population. The more you know, the more prepared you will be to apply to schools.
  3. **Ask questions:** Many universities have offices dedicated to serving the needs of undocumented students. One example is the [Undocumented Students Program](#) at UC Berkeley, which provides academic and legal support and serves as a clearinghouse for information pertaining to undocumented immigrants. Aside from providing helpful resources and advice, professionals in these departments guide students through every step of the application process. Whether you have questions about financial aid, options for working while in school or becoming a legal citizen, these departments can help. If a school doesn't have a specific office providing these services, prospective students can still voice their concerns to the university's student services center or admissions office.
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## APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Even though 18 states now provide in-state tuition for undocumented students, most never make it to college. In 2013, [just 5-10%](#) of undocumented students continued their education, compared to 66% of American high school graduates who began college that year.

Undocumented students typically go through the same entrance process as any other student, filling out applications, collecting letters of recommendation and writing essays for their target schools. But they may also run into a few administrative hurdles along the way, such as providing a social

security number or finding a college where having a driver's license isn't necessary. And, particularly in states without in-state tuition for undocumented students, Dreamers may face overwhelming financial barriers to attendance.

Still, students must not be afraid to go through the process. There is no law – state or federal – prohibiting undocumented students from attending college, so they should not fear deportation simply from applying to school. Admission decisions are not made on the basis of immigration status, race or nationality. Students should instead focus their energies on the things that will make a difference: good grades, impressive test scores, evidence of community involvement and leadership, strong application essays and evidence of academic potential.

Although undocumented students are unable to apply for federal work-study programs to help pay for their education, you may be able to find work through other means. Connect with the career placement office at your school: they can find you a job on-campus or refer to you employers throughout town.

## **FINANCING AID FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

All federal financial aid is disbursed on the basis of information students provide on the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). However, not all undocumented students are [eligible](#) to receive these funds. Those able to apply include students who:

- Are U.S. permanent residents with a green card
- Have an Arrival-Departure Record (I-94)
- Hold a T-visa
- Are “battered immigrant-qualified aliens”

Students who have been granted DACA are not eligible to receive federal aid, but they should still fill out the FAFSA to see if they qualify for state or individual college assistance. When completing the form, students will find a question asking, “Are you a U.S. Citizen?” to which they should select “No, I am not a citizen or eligible noncitizen.” This provides sufficient information for non-federal sources of funding, such as colleges, when selecting recipients.

Since there is no overarching federal law regarding tuition for undocumented immigrants, students in this category should research the options in their home state. While some allow these students to take advantage of in-state tuition – provided they attended high school there for at least two years – others have specific legislation prohibiting immigrants from receiving the reduced rate. As of late 2015, states allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition include:

- California
- Colorado

Resource: <http://www.onlinecolleges.net/for-students/undocumented-student-college-guide/>

- Connecticut
- Florida
- Illinois
- Kansas
- Maryland
- Minnesota
- Nebraska
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- Oklahoma\*
- Oregon
- Rhode Island\*
- Texas
- Utah
- Washington

*\*These states allow in-state tuition rates at the discretion of the Board of Regents*

Six states also allow undocumented students to receive state-level financial aid. These include:

- California
- Minnesota
- New Mexico
- Oregon
- Texas
- Washington

Source: [USDE's Resource Guide: Supporting Undocumented Youth](#)

Undocumented students living elsewhere are required to pay full tuition rates for state schools, and apply as either out-of-state or international students.

Aside from government money, many universities have also started providing aid packages for undocumented students, particularly in the states listed above. Although the Board of Regents ultimately controls the money available, schools with offices devoted exclusively to the needs of undocumented students are often best-positioned to help students financially.

Additionally, many private foundations help Dreamers pay for school with merit or demographic-based scholarships. Top awards for undocumented students include:

1. [The Hispanic Scholarship Fund](#): This organization provides a number of scholarships to students of Hispanic heritage, whether they're American citizens, green card holders, DACA or non-citizens.
2. [The Dream.Us Scholarship Program](#): Created specifically for DACA and Temporary Protection Status students, these awards provide funding to first-time college students. They may receive up to \$12,500 for an associate degree and \$25,000 for a bachelor's degree.
3. [The Point Foundation](#): Though not an award targeted towards undocumented students, the Point Foundation's scholarships go to LGBTQ students or their allies, regardless of citizenship status.