

6 Things Undocumented Students Need to Know About College

If you're a high school student who's undocumented — that is, you were born outside the United States and you're not a U.S. citizen or legal resident — you probably have a lot of questions about going to college. Here are some important facts.

1. You Can Go to College

The first thing you should know is that no federal law prevents U.S. colleges from admitting undocumented students. And only a few states — including Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama — have placed any kind of restrictions on undocumented students attending public colleges and universities.* In most cases, colleges set their own rules on admitting undocumented students, so you should research the policies of colleges you are interested in attending.

You should also know that undocumented students cannot receive federal financial aid for college — the type of aid that many college students rely on. However, undocumented students can get financial aid or scholarships for college in other ways.

Your undocumented status might limit your choices — but college is still an option if you have a plan. Your best strategy is to start planning early, do a lot of research and ask a lot of questions.

2. You Are Not Alone

You're the one who will have to put in the work it takes to get to college — but building a support network is key.

Start with your family. Make sure they know you want to go to college. Talk with them about your options for choosing a college and paying for your education.

You can also seek advice from trusted teachers and counselors at your high school. Along with giving you guidance, they might be able to put you in touch with other undocumented students who have successfully enrolled in college or with college admission counselors who can help you.

If you're worried about telling teachers and counselors that you're undocumented, be aware that, by law, school officials cannot disclose personal information about students — including their immigration status. Find out more about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act at ab540.com.

3. You Can Find a College That Fits You

As you look for colleges that match your wants and needs, you might want to find out if the colleges you're interested in have programs, student organizations or centers that support first-generation immigrant students. Checking out college websites and publications is a good place to start.

Here are some things to remember when looking at colleges:

- Different colleges have different policies on admitting undocumented students.
- Different colleges have different policies on awarding nonfederal financial aid to undocumented students.

- Public colleges must follow their state’s laws on issues such as whether undocumented students who live in the state can pay in-state tuition or must pay out-of-state tuition. Download the Repository of Resources for Undocumented Students(.pdf/1MB) to see information and resources for several states.

4. You’ll Apply Like Any Other Student

The college application process is usually the same for all students. You’ll need to find out colleges’ admission requirements regarding testing, grades and the high school classes you need to take. Most likely, you’ll be asked to write a personal essay and get letters of recommendation, among other application requirements.

The best way for any student to prepare for college is to work hard in high school. Colleges look at your grades and the kinds of classes you take, so it’s a great idea to take college-level courses such as Advanced Placement® classes. Many colleges award credit based on scores on AP Exams, which can save students money on tuition.

5. Your Options May Change

U.S. laws regarding undocumented students may change. It’s important to keep up with the news about laws that could affect your college plans.

In June 2012, President Barack Obama announced that certain undocumented students who came to the U.S. as children are eligible for “deferred action,” or temporary permission to stay in the country. The two-year deferral is granted on a case-by-case basis and is up for renewal at the end of the two years.

The California Dream Act is the name given to Assembly Bills 130 & 131, which allow some undocumented students to apply for and receive state-based financial aid and institutional scholarships.

For more information on deferred action, the DREAM Act and other policies affecting undocumented students, visit the National Immigration Law Center website.

6. You Can Find Resources to Help You

Here are some websites and downloads with helpful information:

Immigration Equality's FAQ on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

<http://immigrationequality.org/issues/immigration-basics/daca/>

National Immigration Law Center

<http://nilc.org/>

Repository of Resources for Undocumented Students (.pdf/1MB)

http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/Repository-Resources-Undocumented-Students_2012.pdf

Scholarship Resources on the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund website

DreamActivist

<http://www.dreamactivist.org/>

National Immigrant Youth Alliance

<http://theniya.org/>

Information on California's AB 540 bill on ab540.com

*Based on information available in March 2013