

1. Advising Undocumented Students

Is College a reality for undocumented students?

YES! There is no federal or state law that prohibits admitting undocumented immigrants into American colleges and universities, public or private, nor does federal or state law require students to prove citizenship in order to enter U.S. institutions of higher education. However, institutional policies on admitting undocumented students vary. In addition, a student must meet admissions requirements (e.g. GPA, ACT scores) established by each institution.

How to Speak with and About Undocumented Students

Be aware of the language you are using because it sends a strong message to students.

- *“Illegal student” or “illegal alien”* -Is a term used to generate fear and it dehumanizes immigrants. The use of the term *“illegal”* brands them as criminals. The use of this term tells students that you condone the belief that they do not belong in the U.S. and should not have access to education and other resources.
- *Undocumented student* -A more accurate term to describe students that reside in the United States without proper documentation to demonstrate citizenship. It does not dehumanize a person with ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’.
- *No Visa student* -Some college applications will ask for citizenship status and if a student is not able to say they are a U.S. citizen, they are asked to identify as a permanent resident, asylee/refugee, or no visa student.

Talking to Undocumented Students about Sensitive Subjects

What NOT to Say	What to Say
Going to college isn't really an option for you.	Going to college is going to be difficult for you, but it is possible. Thousands of other talented, hard-working undocumented students are in college or have already graduated from college.
You're not going to be able to get any money for college.	You're not eligible for most forms of government financial aid, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, there are some private scholarships you can apply for and other ways you could fundraise.
Why aren't you legal?	Have you talked to an immigration attorney about your options to legalize? There may be immigration options that you and your family don't know about.
Even if you get a college degree, you're never going to be able to work legally.	Getting a college degree isn't going to change your immigration status, but it will open up many opportunities for you once you're able to legalize. The DREAM Act is a proposed federal bill that will give many undocumented students a path towards citizenship if they graduate from high school and go on to college. The new DEFERRED ACTION legislation may offer you an opportunity to get a work permit and other benefits. Please speak with a qualified attorney about DEFERRED ACTION.
Why don't you go back home and get a degree?	If you want to pursue an education in another country, please research the education system of that country thoroughly. Remember that leaving the U.S. could have other consequences for pursuing legal status. Speak with a qualified attorney before you do anything.
When or if you apply to college, you're going to put yourself and your family at risk for deportation.	When you apply to college, you are going to have to share personal information. This is scary to you and your family. Remember that your college information is going to the college, not to any federal or state agencies. Your information is protected by federal law.

Why College?

A college education facilitates new knowledge, exposure to diverse topics, broad experiences, and lifelong friendships. In addition, a college education has the potential to improve job opportunities (as advanced labor skills are gained), thus providing a higher income and making students more employable. The employability of students may encourage companies to sponsor an undocumented person for temporary legal visas. Investing in your college education will create positive returns in your life, so make higher education the ultimate goal to follow!

The college-going process begins in high school. Creating an educational plan early will better prepare you for the college of your choice.

- Inquire with your guidance counselor, college counselor or advisor about college-prep courses or other programs that will prepare you for admission to college.
- Develop a strong relationship with someone in your school who is aware of your status as an undocumented student and who is willing to help you get ready for college! They can be a college counselor, a teacher or mentor, and in Denver, the staff from the Future Center at your high school.
- Take Advanced Placement (AP) courses or concurrent enrollment classes that give you college credits as you pursue your high school degree.
- Focus on your grades. Your grade point average (GPA) will be heavily considered in the college admission process. Most scholarships or colleges recommend a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA (all 4 years of high school combined).
- Take all tests seriously. Establish study groups that focus on the college entrance exam such as the ACT. Take advantage of the free practice exams for the ACT at the College in Colorado website at www.collegeincolorado.org.
- Research your college/ universities of choice ahead of time and learn about your entrance requirements, available financial assistance, and scholarship opportunities.
- **Join a student organization that focuses on the political, social, academic and emotional needs of undocumented students.**
- Get involved! Colleges seek candidates who are well-rounded individuals. Internships, sports, extracurricular activities and volunteer opportunities give students leadership, problem-solving and networking skills.

Top 10 Ways College Counselors or Advisors Can Help Undocumented Students

1. Create a safe space in your school by making information and resources about undocumented students easily available to all students. Don't ask students to self-identify. Many students will be too scared to reveal their immigration status. Some students might not even know about their status. If families are present, make sure to have a student or staff person who can translate information.
2. Be open-minded. Don't make assumptions about which students may or may not be undocumented. Undocumented students aren't all Latino, Spanish-speaking or enrolled in ESL classes.
3. Be knowledgeable about specific government and college admission policies that affect undocumented students. Have basic knowledge about your state and federal legislation that affects undocumented students.
4. Be knowledgeable about the federal DREAM Act, DEFERRED ACTION, and Colorado ASSET legislation that supports undocumented students.
5. Identify scholarships that don't require citizenship/ residency.
6. Encourage scholarships and donors to allow undocumented student to apply.
7. Help undocumented students create lasting support networks that can offer ongoing mentoring and advice, even after the college admission process.
8. Identify older undocumented students to serve as role models.
9. Refer students to qualified legal counsel to investigate possible immigration remedies.
10. Be aware of opportunities students can access to obtain college credits such as concurrent enrollment, ASCENT program, International Baccalaureate, and others.
11. When presenting information about college options to large groups of students, always include options for undocumented students.

Basic Guidelines for Undocumented Immigrant Students

While it is possible for undocumented students to attend post-secondary educational institutions, most of the higher education system was not designed with these student in mind; applications have dozens of questions that don't apply to these undocumented immigrant students.

Admissions officers will assume the student is a citizen, LPR (Legal Permanent Resident), legal foreign student, and so on. There are a couple of things undocumented immigrant student should keep in mind when applying for colleges:

- **Do not lie.** When in doubt, ask a knowledgeable counselor or advisor about how to answer application questions. Students feel confused when asked to list their immigration status on the application. None of the choices are “undocumented,” so they often choose “Permanent Resident” or “I am in the process of become a Permanent Resident.” Lying about immigration status could make the student deportable and may count against her / him if there is a future opportunity for legalization.
- Whenever possible, do not mention or show evidence that you are undocumented.
- Watch out for signs showing that the admissions office is categorizing the student as an “international (legal foreign student).” When this happens, try to rectify it. International students usually provide documentation that demonstrates they are legally permitted to study in the U.S. and their presence may be reported to various government agencies. To avoid this, the student may have to say that s/he is undocumented.
- If an admissions officer appears unfriendly, take the college's contact information. Call at a later time and ask to be connected to either a minority or an international student admissions counselor. They may be more willing to help.

How to file applications

Filing the college admissions application is similar to any other application. If an undocumented immigrant student is applying to a public university, s/he should file the domestic (U.S. Citizen) student application. For private colleges, ask the admissions office about how to fill out the forms.

On most applications, there will be handful of questions about the student's immigration status. Some examples are “What is your SSN?” and “What is your visa status?” Do not answer these questions: leave them empty.

Online applications are hard to complete because schools use an automated system that refuses blank answers. Use your best judgment in deciding which questions to skip. Ultimately, if the online application does not work, file the paper application or ask the admissions counselor for help.

Talking with admission officers

If an undocumented immigrant student applies to local colleges, the schools may require the student to appear in person at their offices to turn in the applications. When the student turns in the application, admission officers review the application to ensure that it is complete. If the student's application is not complete, admission officers may ask the student a lot of questions.

Also, an undocumented student should never show admission officers her/his original passport if he/she has one. Prepare a photocopy of the first page (the one with a picture) and present if it they request an ID. If the student has a student ID, they should bring that.

After you apply

Some admissions offices will send an undocumented student applicant mail or email asking her/him to complete the remaining information. Often they ask the student for proof that s/he has applied to become a permanent resident, along with other documents. However, failing to provide such proof should not affect admissions. The student should call and inform them that s/he does not have these documents.

Financial Aid

For most families in America, a college education is much more expensive than what they can afford. For this reason, many consider affordability factors when applying to colleges. Most financial aid available for college students is for U.S. citizens and LPRs (Legal Permanent Residents). Having a Social Security card does not automatically mean that you are a U.S. citizen or LPR. If the Social Security card is stamped with "For Work Purposes Only", the student may not be eligible for financial aid. In Colorado, if you are undocumented, you are not eligible to fill out the FAFSA. However if you are a U.S. citizen or LPR, but your parents are not, you can and should complete a FAFSA. If you have a work permit from the DEFERRED ACTION, it does not guarantee that you are eligible for FAFSA.

Merit-Based Scholarships

While schools cannot provide undocumented students with federal or Colorado financial aid because it's considered to be a government benefit, other scholarship providers are not bound by these restrictions. If a student finds a scholarship and if it requires a Social Security Number, the student should ask the scholarship provider if something else be submitted in lieu of the student's. If yes, it means that the social security is needed only for identification purposes. If not, it probably means that the scholarship is for U.S. citizens and permanent residents only. Never use a Social Security number that does not belong to the student- even if the owner of the Social Security number has said it is ok to do so! This is identity theft and will cause problems for the student.

Loans

Private banks may offer loans as long as there is a U.S. citizen or LPR co-signer. It is best to ask first. Make sure you ask about repayment terms. Be aware that private loans will generally have a higher interest rate than loans offered by the U.S. government.

Private Colleges

While no private college explicitly offers need-based financial aid to undocumented immigrant students, their funds are not bound by federal restrictions. Students may be able to request and obtain financial aid from the college's funds. Private colleges are generally extremely competitive and the student will have to put together a very strong application to be admitted. It is helpful to have a teacher or counselor who can help the student in the process.

Fundraising for a College Education

Undocumented students in Colorado are not eligible for in-state tuition or state and federal financial aid. This also applies to the College Opportunity Fund (COF) in Colorado.

Unless you have residency paperwork in process, do not submit the FAFSA. This information can be shared with immigration services and may harm future attempts to become legal.

Some colleges require undocumented students to submit a paper-based FAFSA or a form called the CSS profile for the sole purpose of determining their eligibility for scholarships. Make sure you submit these paper-based applications when asked as it may increase your scholarship opportunities. Some schools may ask the student and the student's family to provide documentation of family earnings. These can include pay stubs, or letters from employers with the amount of salary earned, or ITIN information. All of these records can be very helpful and families should be encouraged to keep this information handy.

- If you are in the process of obtaining legal residency, you may be eligible for financial assistance. Please check with the financial aid counselor at your college of choice.
- Scholarship funds are limited, so begin your scholarship search as early as possible. Get creative!
 - o Know the eligibility requirements of each scholarship. Contact the provider directly for the most recent information.
 - o Diversify your funding pool. Explore various funding sources beyond scholarship monies.
 - o Get a loan. As an undocumented student, you may be able to get a loan if a U.S. citizen co-signs for the loan.
 - o Hold a fundraiser (e.g. car wash, bake sale).
 - o Seek donations from family, neighbors, local businesses, and other possible donors.

Market Yourself!

- **Student Resume**

Prepare a resume that details your scholastic, extracurricular, work and volunteer activities.

- **Funding Request Letter**

Draft a letter to a potential donor explaining your desire to pursue higher education and the financial challenges to be encountered.

- **Letter of Support**

Ask a teacher, counselor, or other professional who knows you well to write a letter of support to the potential donor.

Sample Funding Request Letter

Date

Name of Potential Donor/ Company

Address

Dear:

I write this letter to respectfully request your financial assistance in support of my pursuit of a bachelor's degree in Education at the University of XXXX. My passion for education dates back to my early childhood years. As early as first grade, I enjoyed tutoring my classmates with homework assignments and assisting my teacher with classroom tasks. This interest and commitment to improving education continues to motivate and inspire me to pursue a teaching career. My goal is to teach in an urban setting and bring hope to students whose backgrounds reflect my own. I believe that XXXX is a great institution that will provide the training I will need to become an effective teacher.

Despite my determination, I have encountered major obstacles in terms of funding my education. The current tuition rate for XXXX is approximately \$xxxx annually and an additional \$xxxx for the cost of room and board. Given my parents' low-income status, I am unable to finance my education at this premier institution. Furthermore, I am ineligible for state and federal financial aid. Thus, I am seeking financial assistance from outside sources through private scholarships and prospective donors.

My parents immigrated to this country when I was only two months old. My entire life experience is grounded in the United States. In this country, my parents have raised a family of four, each working two jobs to make ends meet while actively participating in our education experience. The idea of higher education was always supported in our home. My parents' educational aspirations were followed by action. The ritual of checking homework, adjusting work schedules to better accommodate school-related events, and maintaining constant communication with teachers was one of their top priorities. In fact, their difficult migration process to California was driven by their dream to provide a better life and create ample opportunities for their children. I believe our American Dream will come true with my admission to XXXX and the completion of my bachelor's degree.

However, I need your help to arrive at this end. Please consider my request so my dreams will materialize into reality. As the oldest child in my family, I hope to pave the way for my siblings to they can pursue advanced degrees and break the cycle of poverty in our immediate family while contributing to our Latino community as professionals and active residents.

This information taken from Educators for Fair Consideration website at www.e4fc.org

I thank you for time and consideration. Any assistance you can provide to help me achieve my ultimate goal will be invaluable. Should you have questions regarding my educational or professional goals, please feel free to contact me at xxxx@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter of Support

Date

Dear Donor:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation on behalf of XXXX – a stellar high school student whom I had the pleasure of meeting three years ago. As a member of the XXXX program, Maria has been exposed to an array of leadership-related trainings aimed at strengthening academic performance, civic engagement, and leadership skills among Latino youth. Without doubt, her academic standing and active role in the community attest to the leadership qualities of this young lady.

In the course of her participation in the XXXX program, XXXX has demonstrated academic excellence in college-preparatory classes, as well as a wide range of skills including community organizing strategies, advocacy on issues affecting the Latino community, and diligent organization of student-led events.

Despite her humble roots and first generation status, XXXX has demonstrated an admirable commitment toward pursuing higher education. I believe she is a critical thinker, responsible, task-oriented, and a dedicated individual. She is motivated to make a difference and possesses a valuable combination of intellectual skills and social and moral inclinations that will enable her to make an outstanding contribution to XXXXXXXX.

In spite of her resilience and hard work, XXXX faces several obstacles in her pursuit of an advanced degree. Her family's low income prohibits them from financially assisting XXXXX with tuition fees and cost of living expenses. This financial situation is further exacerbated by XXXX's ineligibility to receive federal or state funding due to her immigration status in this county. Given her regrettable situation, your generous donation will ensure that XXXX's dreams to attain a higher education and become a productive member of society will remain alive. I am confident that your investment will prove worthy. If you have any question about my enthusiastic support of XXXXX, please feel free to contact me at XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,