

Advising Undocumented Students: FAQs For College Counselors

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Students who are not U.S. citizens or *permanent* legal residents, but who live in and attend high school in the United States face special challenges during the college admissions process. The questions and answers below may be useful if you encounter undocumented students seeking advice about their college options.

Who is an undocumented student? An undocumented student is a student who lives in the U.S. and has attended high school here, but who does **not** have official legal status as either a citizen, a *permanent* legal resident (“green card” holder), or a *temporary* legal resident (a visa allowing student to temporarily reside in the U.S. to study). Many undocumented students were brought to the U.S. by their parents when they were very young. They may consider themselves to be American because they have grown up here and attended U.S. schools. Some undocumented students may not even be aware of their legal status because some parents who are not here legally are afraid to tell their children of their status. While many undocumented students are from Mexico, it’s important for counselors to be aware that there are also undocumented students from many other countries as well.

How will I know if a student is undocumented? Many undocumented students and their parents are understandably cautious about revealing their status to school officials and independent consultants. They may deny being undocumented if you ask outright (and, of course, you should never make assumptions!). However, if you believe that a student may be undocumented, you can indicate that they can feel secure that any information they share with you will be kept confidential, and encourage them to share anything that they feel is important for you to know. School counselors may also find it useful to place information for undocumented students in a place where students and parents can pick it up without identifying themselves. Counselors and independent consultants should also cover basic information for undocumented students in college and financial aid presentations made to students and parents.

If a student has a social security number, does that mean he or she has legal status? Not necessarily. It’s important to note that some undocumented students believe that they have valid social security numbers, but really do not, as families sometimes obtain “social security numbers” from sources other than the Social Security Administration. Therefore, counselors should be careful not to assume that possession of a “social security number” indicates the student has legal status. Students who have been approved for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program may apply for a social security number, but they are not considered *permanent* legal residents eligible for Federal financial aid (see below for more information on DACA).

How does an undocumented student’s legal status affect his or her chances of admission to college in the U.S.? The majority of colleges and universities in the U.S. will consider undocumented students

for admission. However, college policies vary so students and counselors should discuss how their status may affect their admission with individual colleges before applying.

Will undocumented students be considered international students in admissions? Each college has its own policies on this. Some colleges treat undocumented students who have attended high school in the U.S. the same as any other U.S. student in making admissions decisions. Other colleges group undocumented students with the international student applicant pool when making admissions decisions.

Should undocumented students self-identify in the admissions process? In general, undocumented students can be assured that college admissions officers will keep their status confidential during the admissions process. FERPA regulations protect the privacy of student records, including admissions applications, at all colleges and universities. Therefore students and their parents should feel comfortable about contacting admissions offices with questions about admissions, enrollment, and financial assistance, and they should be encouraged to make these contacts. Undocumented students should also talk to the admissions offices of the colleges they are applying to about whether/how to self-identify on college applications, and follow the college's directions for identifying their status. Many college applications do ask about citizenship or require a social security number. Students should **always** answer application questions about their citizenship status honestly. Colleges reserve the right to rescind admissions offers for students who do not provide factual and truthful information on their applications.

It's best for students to discuss their situation with colleges early in the college planning process so an appropriate list of colleges can be developed. Certainly, students and their counselors should discuss their situation with colleges before applying in order to get important information about applying, financial aid, and scholarships. Undocumented students should **not** simply "hope for the best" and apply without talking to colleges first. The best plan is an *informed* plan that is based on research and direct contact with colleges *before* one applies.

What should counselors be aware of when reviewing essays written by undocumented students? Some students for whom English is not a native language may find it more challenging to write personal essays, and they may need additional help in order to identify and correct grammatical and structural errors in essays. Additionally, some undocumented students may feel uncomfortable with revealing personal details about their lives, and need extra encouragement from counselors as they write their personal statements.

Should undocumented students talk about being undocumented in their essays? This depends on the individual student, and what they feel is most important to convey about themselves to admissions officers.

What should school counselors be aware of when writing letters of recommendation for undocumented students? School counselors should not reveal a student's citizenship status in letters of recommendation without the student's permission. The same is true for teacher recommendations. In general, however, it is fine for counselors and teachers to address any family socio-economic challenges that provide needed context to a student's academic history, just as they would for other students.

Are undocumented students eligible for standardized test score and admission fee waivers? At the present time, undocumented students whose families meet the income requirements for fee waiver eligibility, may ask for and use fee waivers.

Will an undocumented student need a student visa to enroll in college? This policy also varies from college to college. Some colleges do require all students who are not U.S. citizens or legal residents to obtain a student (F-1) Visa before they enroll, but other colleges do not. Some colleges don't require a

student visa, but will ask undocumented students to provide other information about their status, such as a current passport from their home country. Therefore, as you and your students research colleges, it's important to ask each school what undocumented students will need to do or show in order to enroll once they are admitted.

Can undocumented students obtain a Student Visa to study at a U.S. college legally? U.S. Department of State regulations require applicants for Student Visas to provide evidence that they have a permanent residence abroad with no immediate intention of abandoning it, and that they intend to return to their residence abroad when they are no longer students. Additionally, in order to apply for a Student Visa, students must have an interview with the U.S. embassy counsel in their home country. Because of these requirements, many undocumented students will find it difficult to obtain a Student Visa.

Is need-based financial aid available for undocumented students? At present, financial aid for undocumented students is limited. Undocumented students are **not** currently eligible for any Federal Government financial aid programs (i.e., Pell Grants, student loans, Federal Work Study). The majority of colleges in the U.S. also do not offer institutional need-based aid or merit scholarships to undocumented students. However, a number of colleges and universities DO offer at least *some* institutional financial aid and/or make merit scholarships available to undocumented students. Some states have also passed laws allowing undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition and a small handful have also made some state-run financial aid programs available to undocumented students.

Which colleges and universities offer need-based aid and merit scholarships to undocumented students? See the list at the end of this document. The list is not all-inclusive, and since college policies often change, it should be considered as a *starting point* for further research and verification, not a final list. The Illinois Association for College Admissions Counseling (IACAC) also maintains a wonderful website with information for undocumented students that includes a database of admissions and financial aid policies of many colleges. The link to the site is in the resource section at the end of this document.

Can undocumented students with high need count on getting their full need met? Among the colleges that do offer financial aid and merit scholarships to undocumented students, **very few guarantee** to meet *full need* for undocumented students, even when they do guarantee to meet full need for U.S. born students. Additionally, the need-based aid and scholarships available to undocumented students are often awarded on a competitive basis. The more competitive a student's admissions profile, therefore, the greater the likelihood that they will be able to have all or most of their need met. Students with less competitive admissions profiles will often have greater difficulty having high need fully met by financial aid and merit scholarships.

At institutions that do offer need-based aid to undocumented students, what are the procedures for applying for it? Each college has its own policy. Some colleges will ask students to submit a paper copy of the FAFSA, others will ask for the College Board's international student financial aid form. Still other colleges have their own forms for undocumented students to use in applying for financial aid. Students (or counselors) need to contact each college that directly to inquire about their procedure for applying for need-based aid.

Can undocumented students use the online FAFSA? It depends. The student must have a U.S. social security number to use the online FAFSA. Unless a student is 100% certain that they have a valid social security number, submitting the FAFSA online may result in their undocumented status being identified in routine Department of Education audits. When a college requires the FAFSA, undocumented students should contact the individual colleges where they are applying and ask about submitting a paper FAFSA. Students who have DACA status may legally obtain social security numbers and may be instructed to

complete the FAFSA online by some colleges. DACA students should discuss this with all of the colleges they are applying to and follow the individual college's instructions.

Are undocumented students eligible for in-state tuition at public institutions? Policies vary by state. If you are working with an undocumented student, be sure to check directly with your state's public university system, as well as each individual public institution, to see what the policy is, and which steps the student needs to take in order to qualify for in-state tuition. However, like U.S. born students, undocumented students usually will **not** qualify for in-state tuition at public institutions in states *other* than the one in which they reside and have attended high school.

The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains a database of the policies for each state which can be accessed at this link:

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/in-state-tuition-and-unauthorized-immigrants.aspx>

Can undocumented students get student loans? Some banks will consider undocumented students and their parents for private student loans. In order to qualify, however, they generally will need to have a co-signer who is a U.S. citizen or permanent legal resident. Because the interest rates and fees associated with these loans can be very high, it is important to help students and their parents weigh whether a private student loan is realistic.

What about private scholarships? Many organizations offer merit scholarships, but many of these organizations require that applicants be either U.S. citizens or permanent legal residents. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the Latino Dollars for Scholars, as well as several other websites, maintain lists of scholarships that do not specify citizenship. However, students need to check the information for each scholarship carefully – these lists are often several years old, and many of their scholarships listed have changed their rules on citizenship.

What if a student is a citizen, but their parents are not? Are they eligible for financial aid? Students who were born in the U.S. are eligible for **all** sources of financial aid – Federal, State, institutional. They should be encouraged to apply for it! When filling out the FAFSA, students should use their social security number, but enter 000's in the area for parent social security number. If asked to provide financial aid documentation (IDOC, W-2's, Tax documents, etc.), the student and parents need to discuss what will be acceptable directly with the school. Most financial aid offices are familiar with the needs of students who are citizens but whose parents are not, and they are the best source of information on both applying for aid, and providing financial documentation. Students and parents in this situation should be reassured that applying for financial aid is highly unlikely to endanger the family's residency here in the U.S.

How does having Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status affect a student's eligibility for financial aid? DACA status allows undocumented students to remain in the U.S. legally for up to two years. DACA status may be renewed. DACA students may work and apply for a social security number. However, because they are not legal *permanent* residents, DACA students are not eligible for Federal Financial aid programs and many colleges will thus not consider them for institutional aid. A few states have passed legislation allowing DACA students to pay in-state tuition at public universities and/or opened eligibility for state-run financial aid and scholarship programs to DACA students. The Department of Education has put together a booklet for DACA students and their counselors explaining their eligibility which can be downloaded here: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>

However, because DACA students are able to apply for a social security number, it *may* make it easier for them to use the FAFSA online to apply for need-based aid at some colleges offering institutional aid.

Again, students should discuss how to apply for any available financial aid directly with colleges. Two good resources for counselors advising DACA students are:

NASFAA Deferred Action for Dreamers: Advising DACA Students About Affording College
http://www.nasfaa.org/advocacy/perspectives/articles/Deferred_Action_for__Dreamers__Advising_DACA_Students_About_Affording_College.aspx

United We Dream – FAFSA Guide for DACA Students
http://unitedwedream.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/DACAStepsforFAFSA2014_Final.pdf

For information on applying for DACA, see:
<http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>

What else should undocumented students and counselors consider when planning for college? Just as you do with all students, the starting point for college planning should be the student's admissions profile and personal interests and needs. Once a list of possible college matches is developed, undocumented students and their counselors will need to allow extra time in order to contact colleges to inquire about admissions, financial aid, and Visa requirements *before they apply*. There is no sense in wasting time applying to colleges where the student is unlikely to receive needed financial aid, or be unable to meet institutional Visa requirements for enrollment.

Because financial aid and merit scholarships for undocumented students are limited, it is very important for undocumented students to have **a college backup plan**. This should include applying to at least one college that the student will be able to afford to attend even if they don't receive financial aid. This may be a local public university that they can commute to, or a community college that they can attend inexpensively for the first two years with the goal of transferring. Additionally, undocumented students should plan to apply to as many colleges and universities offering financial aid and merit scholarships for undocumented students as possible. This will increase their odds of being admitted to at least one college that can offer admission and financial aid.

Counselors should also discuss the logistics of attending college, and life at college with undocumented students and their parents. Undocumented students without passports may find it difficult to fly to distant colleges, for instance. Families that are used to hiding their legal status may also worry about students living far from home or on a campus where there aren't students from similar backgrounds. Undocumented students may face additional issues with adjusting to college that students with legal status do not. Counselors need to help students think through, and plan for, these issues so that they can have a successful college experience.

Finally, counselors working with undocumented students will find that they need to be strong advocates for their students. Contacting admissions and financial aid offices on the behalf of students to inquire about admissions and financial aid policies is often necessary. This effort is worthwhile, however, as it allows the counselor, school or organization to build a database of information that can be helpful to other undocumented students in the future.

What should undocumented students do to plan for life *after* college? If possible, counselors should discuss the student's long term goals as they plan for college. If they hope to go on to graduate or professional school, they need to be aware that even less financial help is available for undocumented graduate students than there is for undergraduate students. Additionally, some career choices may not be open to undocumented students. For example, in order to be licensed as a teacher, nurse, doctor, or lawyer, students will need to have legal residency status. Employment options for undocumented college graduates remain limited; even with a college degree, most employers will expect prospective employees

to present evidence of legal status, such as a “green card.” Counselors should discuss these issues with undocumented students and help them plan ahead for addressing these issues while they are attending college.

How can I help an undocumented student gain legal status? Counselors should not provide legal advice. That is beyond our scope of knowledge and training. However, we *can* point students and their parents towards resources to help them learn more about the process of applying for legal status. Most communities have immigration attorneys and non-profit organizations that can assist students and their families; it is a good idea for counselors to maintain a list of these resources, but use caution about appearing to recommend a particular service or attorney. One organization assisting undocumented students with these issues is Educators for Fair Consideration (E4FC). E4FC offers free, confidential individual analysis of possible immigration remedies for qualifying undocumented youth living in the United States. Students must be under 35 years old and enrolled (or intending to enroll) in college to use the service. Students can find more information at www.E4FC.org

Where can I get more information about working with undocumented students?

NACAC and NACAC affiliates frequently include sessions for counselors on undocumented student counseling issues at their conferences. NACAC has several session handouts in the Knowledge Center of their website (log in required).

The Illinois Association for College Admissions Counseling, a regional NACAC affiliate, has put together an excellent site for undocumented students and their counselors. The site includes a database of colleges who have shared their policies on admissions and financial assistance for undocumented students. Since this information is provided by the colleges themselves, it is an excellent resource. At present, the database is focused primarily on Midwestern colleges but it does continue to expand.
<http://www.iacac.org/undocumented/>

Other sources of information:

National Immigration Law Center, www.nilc.org

Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, www.maldef.org

Coalition for Immigration Rights, www.chirla.org

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Tip Sheet for Undocumented Students
<http://www.purdue.edu/dfa/all/FAFSATipsUndocumentedStudents.pdf>

Guide to Financial Aid for Undocumented students (California focus)
www.usc.edu/dept/chepa.pdf/AB%20540%20final.pdf

Helping Undocumented Students Prepare for College in California, a Guide for Parents (in English, Educators for Fair Education):
http://lead.csusb.edu/documents/2011%20E4FC_ParentGuide%20English.pdf

Financial Aid Guide for Undocumented Students (Educators for Fair Education)
http://financialaid.ucsc.edu/forms-resources/brochures%20guides/E4FC_FinAidGuide.pdf

Guide for Undocumented Students Seeking to Attend College in New York State (prepared by NYU Steinhart Metropolitan Center for Urban Education)
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/004/486/access_to_postsecondary.pdf

Scholarship Opportunities for Undocumented Students (University of Washington):
http://depts.washington.edu/uwdmproj/highschoolers/resources/undocumented_scholarships.php

University of North Texas Guide to Financial Aid for Undocumented Students (Texas oriented)
<http://courses.unt.edu/nunezjanes/undocumented/undocumentedguide.pdf>

Hispanic Scholarship Fund, www.hispanicscholarships.com

Starter List of Colleges which may offer need-based aid or merit scholarships for undocumented students

The following colleges has been compiled by counselors and students as providing at least *some* form of need-based or merit-based financial assistance to undocumented students *in the past*. The list is not all-inclusive, nor can the information be guaranteed to be accurate. This list was last updated in the Spring of 2014 and college policies change frequently. Therefore, students and counselors should *always* contact each college directly to discuss their situation and what aid/scholarships are available before they apply.

Important: The policies of individual colleges can and do change, so students and counselors will need to verify directly with each college that money is still available at these schools, and the policies that govern it. This should be done as early as possible in the college planning process and certainly before applying to any college or university. All information is for freshman applicants; policies may be different for transfer students. Contact each school directly for the most current policies and availability for both freshmen and transfers.

In addition to the starter list below, counselors should check the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling's database of college policies on undocumented students, available at <http://www.iacac.org/undocumented/admission-policies/>. The IACAC list is updated regularly and is much more detailed than the simple list below.

Special thanks to Lorin Abarr, Los Angeles Unified School District for his contributions to this list.

Agnes Scott College (undocumented students will be considered for merit scholarships; no need-based aid)
Albright College (merit scholarships, need to be eligible for a student visa)
Amherst College (contact for details on need based aid)
Augustana College IL (some merit scholarships, will consider limited aid on a case by case basis)
Babson College (consider undocumented students for merit scholarships)
Berea College
Bryn Mawr College (contact for current information)
Belmont Abbey College (merit scholarships only)
Beloit College (undocumented students may apply for institutional need based aid and merit scholarships)
Bowdoin College
Brown University (limited)
California Lutheran (contact admissions, merit scholarships only, not a full ride)
Chapman University (merit scholarships and need-based aid – contact admissions for information)
Claremont McKenna (call for current policy)
Clarke University, Iowa (undocumented students will be considered for merit scholarships of \$1000 to \$10000; call admissions for details)
Columbia (? – call to verify current policy)
Cornell University

Cornell College, Iowa (merit scholarship consideration only; maximum amount is full tuition)
Illinois Institute of Technology (merit scholarships only, competitive)
Dartmouth (excellent aid if admitted)
DePaul University (merit scholarship consideration only)
Dominican University, California (considers undocumented students for merit scholarships)
Eastern Washington University (will consider undoc. students for merit scholarships, no need-based aid)
Harvard University (excellent aid, if admitted)
Harvey Mudd (need based aid)
George Washington University (previously considered undoc students for scholarships but policy may have changed; contact admissions for current policy)
Kenyon College
Lake Forest College (merit scholarships only)
Lafayette College
Lawrence University (undocumented students are considered for international students scholarships which are partially based on need; contact admissions for details on how to apply)
Lehigh University
Loyola Marymount (merit scholarships only, no full rides)
Long Island University (merit scholarships only)
Loyola University New Orleans (merit scholarships)
University of Pennsylvania (very limited need based aid)
Mills College (some merit scholarships may be available, policies are confusing, confirm w/admissions)
New York University (financial aid only available to New York state residents – see NYU website for further details)
New York Institute of Technology (merit scholarships only)
Notre Dame De Namur (merit scholarship consideration - competitive)
North Central College, IL (merit scholarships and some need based; contact Martha Stolze, Director of Information for current policies)
North Park University, IL (undocumented students considered for merit scholarships)
Stanford (contact for current policies)
Mount Holyoke (contact for current policies)
Mount Olive College
Oglethorpe University (need based aid and merit scholarships – contact international admissions officer for details on how to apply)
Mount St. Mary's College
Oberlin (students put in international pile, aid availability competitive)
Occidental College (give need based aid to 2-3 students a year)
Princeton
Pomona
Providence College (some need based aid may be available, call to verify)
Ripon College (merit scholarships available)
Robertson Scholars Program (can be used at Duke and UNC Chapel Hill)
Rockford College (undocumented students will be considered for merit scholarships ranging up to \$20,000; cannot apply for need based aid)
Saint Mary's University, Minnesota (will consider undocumented students for merit scholarships and talent scholarships)
Santa Clara University (has a scholarship specifically for undoc students, must self-identify on the application, not a full ride, only a couple given each year)
Stanford (need based; contact for current policies)
Swarthmore (need based; contact for current policies.
Texas Southern University (limited, apply as international)

Trinity University, Texas (meets 100% of demonstrated need for undocumented students, need sensitive admissions)

Sacred Heart University (limited, apply as international; call for current policy)

University of Chicago (need based aid available; contact admissions for information on how to apply)

University of California and California State University – California Dream Act, passed October 2011, will make State and institutional financial aid and merit programs available to California undocumented students. Check with UC and Cal State for details.

University of Miami (merit scholarships only)

University of Minnesota (very limited scholarships, mainly awarded to instate)

University of Michigan (very limited scholarships, mainly awarded to instate)

University of Notre Dame (call to confirm current policy)

University of Puget Sound (limited scholarship money, no full rides)

University of Rochester (need-based and merit scholarships available)

University of San Diego (merit scholarships, small number of full tuition, no need-based aid available)

University of Southern California (merit scholarships, some full tuition)

University of Tulsa (undocumented students are considered for all merit scholarships, including some up to full tuition.)

Vassar College (need based aid available if admitted)

Washington U in St. Louis (merit scholarships available, but few available)

Wesleyan University (need-based aid available but does not meet full need)

Wheaton College, Illinois (undocumented students will be considered for merit scholarships; no need based aid)

Whitman College (competitive, need-based aid and scholarships available)

Whittier College (merit scholarships only)

Williams College (need based aid available; contact admissions for current policies)

Xavier University, Ohio (merit scholarship consideration only)

Canadian Universities –Some Canadian Universities offer merit scholarships to well-qualified international students. These usually aren't sufficient to cover full cost of attendance. Need-based aid for international students is limited to non-existent at most Canadian Universities. Students who plan to apply for permanent legal residency in the U.S. should consult with an immigration attorney about how attending college outside of the U.S. may affect their chances of receiving permanent U.S. residency.

Financial aid and scholarships in the student's home country – Financial aid and scholarships may be available at universities in the student's home country. Most students and parents will be reluctant to consider this option, however. Students who plan to apply for permanent legal residency in the U.S. should consult with an immigration attorney about how attending college outside of the U.S. may affect their chances of receiving permanent U.S. residency.