

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. To find out more, read [For Undocumented Students: Questions and Answers About Paying for College](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org) at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>.

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](https://www.ab540.com) at [ab540.com](https://www.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. Read [For Undocumented Students: Questions and Answers About Paying for College](#) for more information.
- 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) by College Board 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.

Learn more by reading [Quick Guide: The Anatomy of the College Application](#).

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.

For more information on deferred action, 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:

- National Immigration Law Center (www.nilc.org)
- Scholarship Resources on the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund website (www.maldef.org)
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (www.hacu.net)

Here are Michigan Colleges who have specific web-pages and contacts for Undocumented Student Resources. This is not a complete list of Michigan Colleges that support undocumented students; there are representatives at many institutions that can help answer questions concerning documentation status. To Apply to these 4 universities, leave the social security number blank or add 000-00-0000

- Grand Valley State University - <https://www.gvsu.edu/admissions/undocumented-students-67.htm>
- Western Michigan University - <http://www.wmich.edu/finaid/scholarships-grants/undocumented>
- Ferris State University
<https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/administration/academicaffairs/latinostudies/english/resources.htm>
- University of Michigan - <https://undocumented.umich.edu/>
- West Shore Community College – To apply use the following code in the social security number section 000-00-1967.

FAFSA Completion Guide for US Citizen Students with Undocumented Parents

1. When the FAFSA asks for parent SSN's, enter 000-00-0000 for the parent(s) who are not documented. The Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN or TIN) that parents often have won't work here as an alternative—that's a common question.
2. For question 81 ("What type of income tax return did your parents file or will they file for 2017?"), the parent(s) will need to select "A foreign tax return". We know this is not accurate and so does the Department of Education, but this selection allows the application to move forward and that's intentional. The FAFSA won't accept a 1040 because it doesn't think that matches up with the 000-00-0000 SSN that was entered previously.
3. Lastly, when the student and family get to the "Sign & Submit" section of the FAFSA, the student should be able to sign with their FSA ID (probably created before filling out the FAFSA, at fsaid.ed.gov). One parent will need sign a printed signature page and mail this to the U.S. Dept. of Education. They can find the option to print this page under "Other options to sign and submit". This should be a clickable link that brings up the signature page option. The printed signature page shows the address that it needs to be mailed to with the parent signature.
4. Timeline - We've found that the Dept. of Education usually takes four to six weeks to process a FAFSA that has a paper signature. Because of that delay we recommend that the student contact the Financial Aid offices of the schools they've chosen to receive their FAFSA to give them a heads up and make sure the delay won't affect eligibility for institutional or state aid. Schools are generally happy to work with the student.