

**KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE:  
RESOURCE GUIDE FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

**NCLR**  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations (CBOs), NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has operations in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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# **KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE: RESOURCE GUIDE FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

This handbook is designed for school counselors, student advocates, and secondary students, in particular those who are undocumented. Although the legislative information provided varies by state, the generic academic, fundraising, and extracurricular tips are applicable to a typical high school audience. As a general rule, please verify all information provided with local high school, college, and financial counselors. It is the National Council of La Raza's (NCLR) hope that students find this handbook a helpful tool in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

## **ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS**

Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of undocumented students in the American public school system, the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) reports that an estimated 70,000 undocumented students graduate from American high schools each year.<sup>1</sup> This substantial number comprises Latino, Asian, and other students from diverse corners of the world. A great portion of this student population was brought to this country at a very early age without legal documentation or with a visa that has since expired.<sup>2</sup> Thus, these students' upbringings and cultural experiences are very much grounded in the United States—their assumed country of origin. Many undocumented students come from low-income, working families where parents often work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Students themselves often work extended hours after school and during the weekend to contribute to the household and finance their own education.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges and barriers confronted by these students are numerous. Undocumented students are not entitled to federal financial aid and state-level grants (except in Texas and New Mexico), they live in constant fear of deportation, lack the means to participate in extracurricular activities or tutorial services, and must often fulfill family and household obligations that inherently create added pressures.<sup>3,4</sup>

The experiences of undocumented students, however, help shape the character and strengthen the intrinsic motivation of these resilient and academically inclined students. In their quest for a better future, many undocumented students focus their energy and attention on pursuing higher education to gain social mobility and contribute positively to their community and the society at large.

## **IS COLLEGE A REALITY FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS?**

YES! According to the College Board, 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.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a student must meet the admission requirements (e.g. GPA, SAT/ACT scores) established by each institution of higher education.

It is important to note that only ten states offer in-state tuition to undocumented students (see Figure 1). These students, however, are not eligible for financial aid (except for students living in Texas and New Mexico). In addition, undocumented students residing in the remaining 40 states must pay out-of-state tuition, which can be nearly double the cost of in-state tuition.

### **CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, 2008–2009 TUITION FEES\***

**CA Resident Student Total Registration Fee: \$2,484**

**Nonresident Student Total Registration Fee: \$3,276**

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\* "Fees ('Tuition') Information," The California State University, <http://www.calstate.edu/admission/fee.shtml>.

Figure 1

STATE-LEVEL INITIATIVES		
STATES THAT OFFER IN-STATE TUITION TO UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS		
STATE	YEAR OF PASSAGE AND LAW NUMBER	FINANCIAL AID
California	2001–AB 540	No
Illinois	2003–HB 0060	No
Kansas	2004–HB 2145	No
Nebraska	2006–LB 239	No
New Mexico	2007–SB 582	Yes
New York	2002–SB 7784	No
Oklahoma	2003–HB 1559	No
Texas	2001–HB 1403 2005–SB 1528	Yes
Utah	2002–HB 144	No
Washington	2003–HB 1079	No

Source: Alex Delgadillo, Monica Galvan, and Alfred Herrera, “Assisting Undocumented Students in Higher Education” (PowerPoint, 2008 UC Counselor Conference, September 2008) [www.universityofcalifornia.edu/educators/counselors/resources/materials/CC\\_2008/CC08\\_UndocumentedStudents\\_Final.ppt](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/educators/counselors/resources/materials/CC_2008/CC08_UndocumentedStudents_Final.ppt) (accessed July 2009).

Undocumented students living in one of the ten states noted in Figure 1 must meet all of the following criteria points to qualify for in-state tuition:

- Attended high school in the state for three or more years
- Graduated from a high school in the state or received the equivalent of a high school diploma, such as the General Equivalency Diploma (GED), in the state
- Register as an entering student at an institution of higher education

In some states like California, Texas, and Utah, students must also meet a fourth criterion:

- File an affidavit with the institution of higher education stating that the student has filed an application to legalize his/her immigration status, or intends to file an application as soon as he/she is eligible to do so.<sup>6</sup>



**STUDENT NOTE:** Qualifying for in-state tuition does not change your legal status, nor does it make you eligible for federal financial aid.



**STUDENT NOTE:** Several bills have been introduced to the Texas legislature to repeal SB 1528, which grants immigrant students in-state tuition rates. Similarly, California is facing a legal battle to repeal Assembly Bill (AB) 540. However, until a final decision is made, both SB 1528 and AB 540 continue to be law. Therefore, undocumented students are still eligible for in-state tuition.

## **ABOUT THE “DREAM ACT”**

Federal legislation does not explicitly prohibit undocumented students from attending U.S. colleges and universities. However, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) contains a provision which prohibits states from providing postsecondary benefits to undocumented immigrants unless such benefits are provided to U.S. citizens. Because of IIRIRA, undocumented immigrants must pay international or out-of-state tuition rates at colleges and universities, which has the effect of making postsecondary education unattainable for many students. As a result, thousands of otherwise eligible students are denied access to college.

Federal legislation was introduced earlier in early 2009 to address this issue. The “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act” (S. 729) was introduced on March 26, 2009 by Senators Richard Durbin (D–IL) and Richard Lugar (R–IN). The “American Dream Act” (H.R. 1751) was introduced the same day in the House of Representatives by Representatives Howard Berman (D–CA), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R–FL), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D–CA). This legislation would:

- Repeal the provision in IIRIRA that denies states the option to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates if they meet their state’s criteria for residency.
- Provide a path to legal residency for students who came to the U.S. at age 15 or younger at least five years before the date of the bill’s enactment. These students would qualify for conditional permanent resident status if, among other things, they graduate from a U.S. high school, are awarded a GED in the U.S., or are admitted into college. Students would be disqualified from receiving this conditional status if they commit crimes or become a security risk.
- The conditional permanent resident status is similar to lawful permanent residency, but would be limited to six years. Some of these students will have the opportunity to adjust their status to lawful permanent resident under the “DREAM Act.”

The “Dream Act” and the “American Dream Act” are expected to be considered either as part of a larger comprehensive immigration reform legislative proposal or separately on their own accord in 2009.

## 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.<sup>7</sup> Investing in your college education will create positive returns in your life, so make higher education the ultimate goal to follow!



**TIP:** The college-going process begins in high school. Creating an educational plan early will better prepare you for the college of your choice. Please consider the following points:

- Inquire with your guidance or college counselor about college-prep courses which will make you eligible for admission to a four-year university.
- Take Advanced Placement (AP) courses or dual-enrollment classes which 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.
- Take all tests seriously. Establish study groups that focus on the high school exit exam (if required by your state) and the college entrance exam such as SAT and ACT.<sup>8</sup>
- Research your college/universities of choice ahead of time and learn about their entrance requirements, available financial assistance, and scholarship opportunities.
- Join or establish a student organization that focuses on the political, social, academic, and emotional needs of undocumented students.
- Get involved! Universities seek candidates who are well-rounded individuals. Internships, sports, extracurricular activities (e.g. school clubs), and volunteer opportunities give students leadership, problem-solving, and networking skills.

## HEADING TO COLLEGE

Know the college requirements. Each college system has its own requirements, such as the following:

- College-prep, high school course sequence
- Entrance exams (e.g. SAT, ACT)
- GPA
- Personal statement
- Letters of recommendation



**TIP:** The personal statement provides students an opportunity to share a little bit about themselves with the university's admissions committee. This statement should reflect personal information like your family background, goals in life, interests, challenges encountered, and qualities that you possess to overcome barriers. Stay focused on a topic. Write several versions of your statement and have a teacher or counselor review them before selecting and submitting the final copy.<sup>9</sup>



**TIP:** The recommendation letters are typically provided by teachers or counselors who know your academic background, personal and professional goals, interests, and overall qualities. Give people enough notice to write a letter and return it to you or the college/university directly.



**TIP:** Do your homework! It is important to research information on your universities of choice so that you find the best fit.

- Learn about the student support services (e.g. tutoring centers, mentoring programs, health centers) available at each campus.
- Diversify your college pool and apply to a host of colleges, including public and private universities.
- Organize so that you can meet all of your application deadlines.

## FUNDRAISING FOR A COLLEGE EDUCATION

The majority of undocumented students, including those who live in states with in-state tuition legislation, are not eligible for financial aid.

Unless you have residency paperwork in process, do not submit an electronic Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application to the U.S. Department of Education. This information can be shared with immigration services and thus, may lead to deportation.<sup>10</sup>

However, some schools require undocumented students to submit a paper-based, FAFSA application for the sole purpose of determining their eligibility for scholarships. Make sure you submit this paper-based application as it may increase your funding pool.



**STUDENT NOTE:** 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 school of choice.<sup>11</sup>



**TIP:** Do not get discouraged! There are many avenues to take to finance your college education. Apply for multiple scholarships from various private organizations and foundations, some resources for which are:

- [www.latinocollegedollars.org](http://www.latinocollegedollars.org)
- [www.maldef.org](http://www.maldef.org)
- [www.scholarshipforhispanics.com](http://www.scholarshipforhispanics.com)
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)



**STUDENT NOTE:** Scholarship funds are limited, so begin your scholarship search as early as possible. Get creative with your search!

- Know the eligibility requirements of each scholarship. Contact the provider directly for the most recent information.
- Diversify your funding pool. Explore various funding sources beyond scholarship monies.
- Get a loan! As an undocumented student, you may be able to get a traditional student loan if a U.S. citizens co-signs for the loan.<sup>12</sup>
- Hold a fundraiser (e.g. car wash, bake sale, barbeque).
- Seek donations from family, neighbors, local businesses, and other possible donors.

### **GREENNOTE PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION LOANS**

This innovative lending company enables students to obtain loans through family, friends, and community networks. It should be noted that these alternative loans offer a fixed interest rate at “6.8% (6.0% in Pennsylvania and Washington, DC) with up to a five-year deferment, a six-month grace period following separation from school, and a ten-year repayment term.”<sup>13</sup> For more information, go to <http://www.finaid.org/loans/p2p-greennote.phml>.

### **MARKET YOURSELF!**

- **Student Résumé**  
Prepare a résumé that details your scholastic, extracurricular, work, and volunteer activities (see Appendix I).
- **Funding Request Letter**  
Draft a letter to a potential donor explaining your desire to pursue higher education and the financial challenges to be encountered (see Appendix II).
- **Letter of Support**  
Ask a teacher, counselor, or other professional who knows you well to write a letter of support to the potential donor (see Appendix III).

### **TRANSITION TO COLLEGE**

The college environment is significantly different than high school. You may find that college courses are more rigorous, the students more racially diverse, class sizes bigger, and professors a little more distant. Don't get discouraged! Most students experience a sense of culture shock during their first year of college.<sup>14</sup> Here are some things you may want to consider upon enrolling in college:

- Attend the orientation sessions offered by your college.
- Invite family members to college-sponsored events so they can share in your educational experience.
- Budget appropriately for the expenses you will incur during your entire first year of college.
- Inquire with a financial aid counselor about merit-based, need-based, and alumni association scholarships.

- Network! Identify and join student groups with a shared focus (e.g. Latino organizations, support groups for undocumented students).
- Seek support services such as on-site tutorials, peer counseling, mentorship programs, and so on.
- Learn about paid and unpaid internship positions which closely align to your major or area of interest.

## **CONCLUSION**

The tips in this guide encourage foresight and responsibility. They are intended to cast light on the college-going process and make college a viable choice for you, the high school student, and for your family. NCLR wishes you the best as you engage in the journey toward attaining a higher education. Our community needs you in college.

## APPENDIX I

### SAMPLE STUDENT RÉSUMÉ

Your Name  
Address  
Phone Number  
Email Address

#### EDUCATION

**Graduate**, Cesar Chavez High School  
09/05–06/09  
GPA: 3.6

#### ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

**Escalera Program**, Cesar Chavez High School  
09/07–Present

The Escalera Program promotes economic mobility for Latino youth by increasing educational attainment, career planning, and access to information about advanced careers.

**Talent Search**, Cesar Chavez High School (TELACU Program)  
09/05–07/07

Talent Search provides students with the comprehensive academic support and guidance they need to succeed in high school and pursue postsecondary/college education by introducing students to academic and financial counseling, SAT preparation classes, and assistance with the college-going process.

**Líderes Initiative**, Cesar Chavez High School (NCLR Program)  
09/05–06/06

The NCLR *Líderes* Initiative supports local and community-based programs and campus-based student organizations that build skills of Latino youth and increase their leadership capacity.

#### EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

**Latinos Unidos, President**  
09/08–Present

Responsibilities: To organize meetings, set the weekly agenda, and coordinate fundraisers for merit-based scholarships.

**Webster Elementary School, Tutor**

07/06–09/08

Responsibilities: To help elementary school students with homework assignments and school projects.

**Cesar Chavez Prep High School, Newspaper Editor**

09/07–06/08

Responsibilities: To propose creative story ideas, draft articles, edit submitted stories, and organize the newspaper's final layout.

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

**Honor Roll**, Cesar Chavez High School, *Fall semester of 2008*

**Scholars Honor**, Rotary Club, *January 2009*

**Líderes** Scholarship, NCLR, *March 2008*

**LULAC Youth of the Year Award**, LULAC, *June 2007*

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Babysitting**

05/07–Present

Responsibilities: To care for two elementary-aged students three times a week and assist them with homework assignments.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **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 California, Los Angeles (UCLA). 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 UCLA 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 UCLA is approximately \$7,000 annually and an additional \$6,000 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 educational experiences. 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 UCLA and the completion of my bachelor's degree.

However, I need your help to arrive at this end. Please consider my request so my goals and dreams will materialize into reality. As the oldest child in my family, I hope to pave the way for my siblings so they too 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.

I thank you for your time and consideration. Any assistance you can provide to help me achieve my ultimate aim will be invaluable. Should you have questions regarding my educational or professional goals, please feel free to contact me at [maria.robles@cesarchavezacademy.edu](mailto:maria.robles@cesarchavezacademy.edu).

Sincerely,

Maria Robles  
Student

## **APPENDIX III**

### **SAMPLE LETTER OF SUPPORT**

Date

Dear Donor:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation on behalf of Maria Robles—a stellar high school student whom I had the pleasure of meeting three years ago at a *Líderes* Youth Summit sponsored by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S. As a member of the *Líderes* 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.

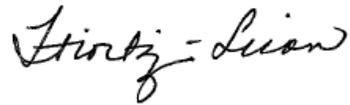
In the course of her participation in the *Líderes* program, Maria has demonstrated academic excellence in college-preparatory classes, as well as a wide range of skills including community organizing strategies, advocacy on issues affecting the Latino community, and diligent organization of student-led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

Despite her humble roots and first generation status, Maria 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 the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

In spite of her resilience and hard work, Maria faces several obstacles in her pursuit of an advanced degree. Her family's low income prohibits them from financially assisting Maria with tuition fees and cost of living expenses. This financial situation is further exacerbated by Maria's ineligibility to receive federal or state funding due to her immigration status in this country. Given her regrettable situation, your generous donation will ensure that Maria'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 questions about my enthusiastic support of Maria Robles, please free to contact me to (213) 490-5679.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Feliza I. Ortiz-Licon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line through the middle of the name.

Feliza I. Ortiz-Licon, Ed.D.  
Director of Education, CA and Far West  
National Council of La Raza

## ENDNOTES

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