

Students Speak: Undocumented and Applying to College

Undocumented students in the U.S. often face additional challenges when applying to college, but as these students learned, it can be done. Find out how they did it and who helped them along the way.

Where can undocumented students find information about going to college?

The best thing to do is to find local student organizations that you can connect to — ones that have a network set up where you can find safe and reliable information, such as DreamActivist.

—Lizbeth, college graduate

I have been involved with SWER for the past four years. SWER stands for Students Working for Equal Rights and this organization advocates for immigrant rights, especially those of undocumented students, and the passage of the DREAM Act.

—Jose, college senior

What should an undocumented student look for in a college — what did you look for?

Try to determine how friendly each college is toward undocumented students. What makes a difference is if the colleges have resources for undocumented students — either financial or student-services focused.

—Lizbeth, college graduate

I chose to go to a community college for several reasons. It was cheap and I felt like I wasn't really prepared to go to a traditional, four-year college. The community college is really a stepping stone to higher education.

—Karla, college junior

Affordability. Federal financial aid and most scholarships weren't an option, so I had to choose an institution that was affordable.

—Esteban, college sophomore

Did you have to take any special steps when you applied to college because of your status?

[Due to residency requirements in my state] I had to provide [my college with] an affidavit that would show I've been here for ... a certain amount of time, whereas other students don't have to do that.

—Diana, college senior

Who helped you along the way and how did they help?

My parents, some family friends who gave me a job and were very flexible with my schedule, and my college adviser. ... They provided advice, support and — in some cases — financial resources.

—Lizbeth, college graduate

It wasn't really a public thing that I'm an undocumented student. ... I didn't exactly want to be questioned and have to explain myself... [I met] on a one-on-one level with my counselor and she was the one who would help me out as much as she could.

—Diana, college senior

[I got] a lot of support from my friends; they just kept saying, "Keep doing what you're doing. You'll find a way."

—Karla, college junior



It wasn't a public thing that I was undocumented
Diana, college senior

OTHER TOPICS IN GET STARTED

- Know Yourself
- Outside the Classroom
- Inside the Classroom
- Building a Support Network
- For Parents
- For Veterans

Start a college search: How close to home do you want to be?

Within miles of

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EXPERT Q&A

What do undocumented students need to know?



Mariella Lora, Admissions Counselor, Washington State University Tri-Cities

RELATED RESOURCES

- 6 Things Undocumented Students Need to Know About College
- For Undocumented Students: Questions and Answers About Paying for College
- The Scoop: What's a Mentor and How Do I Get One?
- Campus Services: There Is Support When You Need It

What would you tell other undocumented students about going to college?

It will take time, it will not be as easy as you hope, but it's worth it. ... I was very relieved when I found out that I was not the only one — if other undocumented students were able to attain a college education, I could do it, too.
—Lizbeth, college graduate

How to Find a College That Fits You

How do you feel about your college experience?

I was entirely unaware of all the opportunities I would be offered. It was my choice to take advantage of the doors opening to me, which has become one of the greater life lessons I've acquired while in college.
—Karla, college junior

My college experience has been a life-changing journey where I discovered much about myself. I learned about my passions, my commitment ... [to improving] my community, and developed more fulfilling career goals.
—Esteban, college sophomore

Recommended

STUDENT STORY

It was intimidating to apply since I was undocumented



Gabriela, college junior

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