

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS APPLYING TO COLLEGE

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide (short link: bit.ly/unafraidcollegeguide) is meant to help undocumented students with the college and financial aid application process. It focuses on Boston Public Schools (BPS) students and those in Massachusetts. You can also find a two-page version of this guide at bit.ly/unafraidcollegehandout. Please contact your guidance counselor if you have questions that are not covered here. If you're unsure who to ask, email us at unafraideducators@gmail.com, and we'll help you find the right resources!

This guide defines "undocumented" as anyone living in the U.S. without lawful permanent residence (a green card) or U.S. citizenship. This includes students who are asylum applicants, have Temporary Protected Status (TPS), are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), or those who may or may not have temporary legal status. We understand that undocumented students often face higher tuition costs with fewer resources offered. Our goal is to give these students, their families, and support networks a clearer idea of navigating the college and financial aid process.

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To learn more about whether you can apply for federal student aid, visit the Federal Student Aid's Eligibility for Non-U.S. Citizens page [here](#).

[Unafraid Educators](#) and the Boston Teachers Union's Immigrant Rights Organizing Committee created this guide for 2025.

Are you an educator interested in joining this work? Please email unafraideducators@gmail.com to be added to our email list. If you have any additional information you think should be included or if you spot any mistakes, please email us at unafraideducators@gmail.com.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

This section has been adapted from the following sites:

- [Federal Student Aid Office of the Department of Education](#)
- [National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators](#)
- [United We Dream](#)

General Questions About College Access

1. *I am undocumented, and I want to go to college. Can I attend college?*

The short answer is YES! Your immigration status will NOT stop you from being admitted to college, a vocational program, or enrolling in classes. However, your status may affect the type of financial aid you can receive and could change how much you pay for tuition. Some colleges charge undocumented students the “international student” tuition rate, even though many undocumented students have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives. This rate is usually higher than the in-state tuition rate that U.S. citizens and legal residents pay. In the [Financial Aid FAQs](#) section, we explain how to talk to schools about not being labeled as an international student so you don't have to pay those higher fees.

In Massachusetts, there are different ways that some immigrant students can qualify for in-state tuition rates and fees at public colleges and universities. The [traditional pathway](#) is for the student to establish that they are a U.S. citizen, lawful immigrant, or permanent resident of the United States. The Massachusetts [Tuition Equity Law](#)

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offers another option for some undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and increases financial aid opportunities.

2. **How is applying to college DIFFERENT for undocumented students?**

It's important to know that applying to college as an undocumented student can be more complicated than for other students. In addition to researching schools, writing essays, and asking for recommendation letters, you must figure out how your immigration status affects your application. But don't worry – it's possible, and we're here to help! Here's a step-by-step guide for students in the college application process (typically juniors and seniors in high school):

- 1) **Research colleges you're interested in to determine if they're “friendly” to undocumented students. (This generally occurs during junior year and the beginning of senior year, but we recommend starting earlier.)**

“Friendly” schools are helpful for three reasons:

- They are likely to give scholarship money to undocumented students.
- They often have programs in place to help undocumented students at the university.
- Many have committed to keeping student immigration information PRIVATE (meaning they won't share it with ICE). Learn more in our [section about colleges](#).

Note: [This list](#) is constantly changing, and one thing to look at is whether a school mentions support for undocumented students on their website. If you have any schools to add to our list, please email unafraideducators@gmail.com!

- 2) **Decide on the schools you want to apply to and research their application processes. This generally occurs in the first half of senior year. Start in the fall!)**

You do NOT need to apply as an international student. Schools may put you into the “international student” category, but you can challenge this by talking with them directly. We'll explain how to handle this conversation in the [Financial Aid FAQs](#) section.

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Submit your Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid (MASFA). If you can't complete the FAFSA because of your citizenship status, you can submit the MASFA instead.

The MASFA is the state-approved form that works like the FAFSA and is used by schools to determine your eligibility for need-based financial aid. You can find more details about Massachusetts-specific aid [in this section](#).

- 3) **Send your FAFSA or MASFA documents to the Admissions and Financial Aid Offices of the schools you're applying to.** (This happens in the fall and the spring of your senior year.) It could be helpful to ask for a meeting to explain your situation to your institution. Please see below for more on how to do this.
- 4) **Once you've sent your documents to the schools, you still need to follow up.**

Here's what to do:

- Make sure the schools receive your financial aid information. This is important so they know how much help you need.
- Check that you were NOT listed as an international student. Some schools might put you in the "international student" category if you don't have a Social Security Number. This can be a problem because international student tuition is usually more expensive. You can use our email samples below to ask about this.
- Ask about scholarships for undocumented students. Also, ask which other scholarships are available to all students, no matter their immigration status.

Examples of how to communicate with schools can be found in the [Financial Aid section](#).

- 5) **Keep advocating for more money! Do this by applying to as many private scholarships as you can! (See the [Scholarships](#) section below.)**

Even more important, keep contacting the schools to convince them to give you more money. Advocate for yourself!

The [Financial Aid](#) section has guidance on how to do this.

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Financial Aid FAQs

1. Am I eligible for federal student aid as an undocumented student (or a student with DACA, TPS, or other temporary status)?

Generally, no. Undocumented students, including those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), or other temporary immigration statuses, cannot get federal student aid. This is because the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) asks for a Social Security Number (SSN), which most undocumented students do not have. However, DACA recipients with an SSN can fill out the FAFSA to apply for state aid and other financial help. To learn more about how to get a Social Security Number, visit ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10009.pdf.

You cannot receive Federal Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, or Federal District Student Loans. But you might still qualify for state financial aid (depending on where you live), financial assistance from your school, and/or private scholarships (For more information about scholarships, check out the Scholarships section of this guide.)

For more information about whether completing the FAFSA is a good option, visit the Eligibility for Non-U.S. Citizens Federal Financial Aid page. Since some immigrant students, including asylees, refugees, parolees, victims of certain crimes, and Cuban-Haitian entrants, do qualify for federal financial aid, you must do your research to verify whether you are eligible to fill out the FAFSA based on your immigration status before looking at other options.

Note for Haitian Students: Some Haitian students may be eligible for federal aid as "Cuban-Haitian Entrants," which could allow them to get federal financial aid. For more information, see [Information for SAVE Users: Cuban-Haitian Entrants](#). Please contact Unafraid Educators (unafraideducators@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

2. Am I eligible for in-state tuition (cheaper tuition) as an undocumented student? What other requirements are there for in-state tuition?

Right now, 25 states in the U.S. offer in-state tuition to undocumented students. You can check the complete list of states and their policies on the Higher Ed Immigration Portal [here](#).

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In Massachusetts, there are two ways undocumented students can get in-state tuition. There is the [traditional residency pathway](#) and the new [Tuition Equity](#) option. Please see the [Tuition Equity](#) section of this guide for more information.

3. *I did well on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and got the Abigail Adams Scholarship. Can I use it even though I'm undocumented?*

Yes, undocumented students who are Massachusetts residents may be able to use the [John and Abigail Adams Scholarship](#). To learn about other scholarships for undocumented students, see the [Scholarships section](#) of this guide.

4. *How can I make myself competitive for scholarships?*

Building a strong resume is important to increase your chances of getting scholarships. Start early—preferably before your junior year.

Here are some things that can help:

- Keep your GPA up: Your GPA is a significant factor in college applications and scholarship chances.
- Get involved in extracurriculars: Join clubs, sports, or student government. Volunteering at places like libraries or food pantries is also a good option. Pick activities you enjoy that will look good on your resume.
- Join youth or summer programs: Some programs may not accept undocumented students, so looking for ones that do is essential. Start searching early to find opportunities that work for you. Here are some options:
 - At local universities: MIT Women Tech Program, MIT Math Roots, MIT Educational Studies Program, BOSTEM, MIT Summer Science, MIT Engineering Design Workshop, Immigrant Youth Advancement Program (IYA) by the City of Boston
 - Other: [Summer Search](#), [City School Summer Leadership Program](#), [SquashBusters](#), [Teens in Print](#), [Hyde Square Task](#)

5. *Are there other ways for me to bring the cost of college down that are NOT scholarships?*

Yes! There are several ways to reduce college costs that don't involve scholarships. Appeal to colleges and scholarships by building a strong resume, and start this process early in high school. Do this by a) keeping up a high GPA, b) joining

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extracurricular activities, and c) participating in summer programs. Accumulate college credits while still in high school through AP courses and dual-enrollment opportunities (see [Massachusetts Early College Initiative](#), which also provides academic and career advising). This will reduce the college classes you must pay for to graduate.

Look into programs like the [Modern States Education Alliance](#), which offers free college-level courses. These courses are designed for college readiness and prepare students for College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, covering the cost of your first try. CLEP exams offer a way to earn college credits and help you graduate faster. But before you take a CLEP exam, check if the colleges you want to attend accept the credits.

The Seal of Biliteracy (for high school graduates) counts for up to 9 college credits. The CLEP test for Biliteracy also counts for up to 9 credits. Google Career Certificates can count for up to 12 college credits in some colleges. (Note: Each school has different Credit for Prior Learning rules.)

Talk to your guidance counselor about options that might work for you. Also, contact the Admissions and Financial Aid Offices at the colleges you're applying to. Tell them your story and advocate for yourself. If you don't get enough financial aid, don't give up—keep trying!

6. I got a financial aid package from a school I want to attend, but it's not enough. What should I do?

Advocate for yourself and find people to support you! You will need to contact the school to request more financial aid.

Try an email like this one to the Admissions Office:

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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is [insert your name]. I am writing to you because I have submitted my application and have been accepted under the student ID [insert the student ID assigned to you by the school].

However, I am not eligible for FAFSA. I want to commit to my acceptance, but I need to ensure that I am financially secure. I would like to meet with a financial aid advisor to talk about options, including the possibility of an extended deadline or an appeal for financial assistance.

I appreciate your time and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,
[insert your name]

You can follow up with a phone call to the Admissions Office if you feel comfortable. You may also ask your guidance counselor for help:

“Hello, my name is [insert your name]. I emailed the [insert the name of the office you e-mailed and/or the person’s name], and I was hoping to set up an appointment to meet with an advisor about a financial aid appeal and to extend my decision deadline.”

MASSACHUSETTS TUITION EQUITY LAW

The Massachusetts [Tuition Equity Law](#) helps some non-U.S. citizens, including undocumented students, get in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities in Massachusetts. It also makes these students eligible for state-funded financial aid to attend a public or private college or university in Massachusetts.

If you think you might not qualify for Tuition Equity, there is also a [traditional pathway](#) for in-state tuition that some students may be eligible for. Consider looking into this option as well.

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In-State Tuition

To qualify for In-State tuition under the Tuition Equity Law in Massachusetts, you need to meet these requirements:

- You must have attended a high school or an approved homeschool program in Massachusetts for at least 3 years. The 3 years don't have to be in a row. For example, if you went to school for 2 months in 10th grade and then two full years after that, you would still qualify, according to communication we have received from the Department of Higher Education.
- You must have earned your high school diploma in Massachusetts or something equivalent, like a GED or HiSET.
- You must be accepted to a public Massachusetts college or university or a private, non-profit college or university in the state.
- Provide one of the following:
 - Social Security Number (SSN),
 - Proof of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN),
 - Registration with Selective Service (military draft), OR
 - An Affidavit from the Department of Higher Education (DHE) saying that you will apply for citizenship or legal permanent residency soon (this is usually the most straightforward option). If you are not a citizen or permanent resident, you'll need to say that you will apply for citizenship or legal residency within 120 days of becoming eligible.
- You need to fill out a Tuition Equity form and send it to the financial aid office at the school you're applying to. The form might look different depending on the school, so talk to your guidance counselor or the financial aid office to ensure you have the right one.
 - For example, there is the [Tuition Equity and Eligibility Form \(for high school seniors\)](#) and the [Tuition Equity Eligibility Form and Affidavit \(for all other applicants\)](#) that certain schools may require students to complete to be considered for in-state tuition.

For more information, visit the MA Department of Higher Education (DHE) site [here](#).

State-Funded Financial Aid

To be eligible for state-funded financial aid, you must:

- Have attended a Massachusetts high school for at least 3 years.
 - Note: The 3 years of high school do not have to be complete or consecutive.

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- Have received a GED or equivalent.
- Be ineligible for FAFSA.

To Apply:

- Provide one of the following:
 - Social Security Number (SSN),
 - Proof of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN),
 - Registration with Selective Service (military draft), OR
 - An affidavit from the Department of Higher Education (DHE) saying you will apply for citizenship or legal permanent residency.
- Create a MASFA account and complete the form. Please create an account through the member sign-up page on [MASFA's website](#). After you submit your application, look out for a confirmation email. If you have not emailed one, please follow up with the MA Department of Higher Education's (DHE) Office of Student Financial Assistance at 617-391-6070 or osfa@osfa.mass.edu
- If you are considered a dependent (meaning your parents' income is counted), you'll need to fill out the MASFA Dependent Student Verification Form, which asks for income details from your parents—even if they live outside the U.S. This could include tax returns or other proof of income. If your parents didn't file taxes, you'll need a Verification of Non-Filing Letter, which is free. Students should contact their financial aid office for specific instructions since requirements and forms may vary slightly by institution. Independent students do not need to provide their parents' income information, but they will still need to submit a Verification of Non-Filing Letter if they cannot file taxes.
 - Note: This requirement was waived for many students for the 2023-2024 school year and might also be waived for the 2024-2025 school year. Check with your college to see if this rule applies to you.

For more information, visit the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education site [here](#).

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Specific scholarships for Underrepresented Students:

Scholarship	Description	Deadline
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Red Pine Scholarship	A competitive, need-based Massachusetts scholarship typically awarded to high school seniors who have demonstrated academic excellence, leadership, and a strong commitment to their communities	February
Speak Out Boston Scholarship	This is for students who identify as LGBTQIA+	March
Science Ambassador Scholarship	This is a full-tuition scholarship for women and non-binary students pursuing a degree in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM)	December
Alray Scholars Program	This is for students who have started college but had to take a break	June, October
Unafraid Scholarship	This scholarship is run by the Boston Teachers Union Unafraid Educators group (the group that made this guide!). This scholarship is for ALL undocumented students, including those without DACA or TPS. There is no GPA requirement, and you can apply even if you graduated from Boston Public Schools a few years ago.	June

Broader scholarship opportunities and organizations that routinely update their scholarship lists:

- Immigrants Rising Scholarship List: This [list](#) is updated often and is easy to use. It's a good starting point if you're overwhelmed by other options.
- Dream US National Scholarship (for UMass Boston and Salem State University)
- MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund): A Latino legal organization
- United We Dream
- My Undocumented Life
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund
- Scholarships A-Z
- Presidents' Alliance K-12 Guide: A [helpful guide](#) that provides a state-by-state breakdown of college access and financial aid for undocumented students.

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- My (Un)Documented Life: This website regularly updates its [long list](#) of scholarships, so it's a great resource to check often.

Talk to your school's guidance counselor to see if any scholarships are specific to your school. Sometimes, alumni or other people connected to your school donate money for scholarships that all students, including undocumented students, can apply for.

This isn't a scholarship, but some people have found it helpful to work with a company called [Inversant](#) to save money for college.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

1. ***What does it mean for a school to be "undocumented-student friendly" (or "undocu-friendly")?***

A school is considered "undocu-friendly" if it meets some or all of the following criteria:

- The school usually offers scholarships specifically for undocumented students.
- The school typically has programs or support services to help undocumented students.

2. ***Which "friendly" schools offer financial aid, including large scholarships, to undocumented students?***

Check out the list below for schools known for being friendly to undocumented students and offering financial aid. Note: If a school you're interested in isn't on this list, try searching for their resources or contact the school directly to find out if they offer support for undocumented students (many schools do).

If you find a school that isn't listed, let us know, and we will add it! For the schools listed, do your research to verify what support they offer. Keep in mind that this list is not complete.

Have questions or want to add a school to the list? Feel free to email us at unafraideducators@gmail.com!

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MA Public Institutions:

[Bridgewater State University](#)
[Fitchburg State University](#)
[Framingham State University](#)
[Mass College of Art and Design](#)
[Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts](#)
[Massachusetts Maritime Academy](#)
[Salem State University](#)
[UMASS Amherst](#)
[UMASS Dartmouth](#)
[UMASS Lowell](#)
[Westfield State University](#)
[UMASS Boston](#)

MA Community Colleges:

[Bunker Hill Community College](#)
[Bristol Community College](#)
[Holyoke Community College](#)
[Massasoit Community College](#)
[Middlesex Community College](#)
[North Shore Community College](#)
[Roxbury Community College](#)

Private Institutions:

[Amherst College](#)
[Bates College](#)
[Bowdoin College](#)
[Brown University](#)
[Bryn Mawr College](#)
[Carleton College](#)
[Colby College](#)
[Columbia University](#)
[Cornell University](#)
[Dartmouth College](#)
[Emory University](#)
[Harvard University](#)
[Haverford College](#)
[Macalester College](#)
[Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#)
[Middlebury College](#)
[Oberlin College](#)
[Occidental College](#)
[University of Notre Dame](#)
[Pomona College](#)
[Princeton University](#)
[Providence College](#)
[Rice University](#)
[Smith College](#)
[Swarthmore College](#)
[Tufts University](#)
[University of Chicago](#)
[Wellesley College](#)
[Wesleyan University](#)
[Williams College](#)
[Yale University](#)

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND OTHER RELATED INFORMATION

- What to Do if ICE Comes to Your Door: United We Dream [shares essential steps](#) to take if ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) shows up at your door. Make sure you know your rights! Check out their "[Here to Stay](#)" site for more details.
- Tips from the National Immigration Law Center: Visit their site for [helpful advice](#) and a "Know Your Rights" factsheet.

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- Information from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT): AFT offers [guidance](#) on immigration rights and defending against deportation. They also have resources for teachers.
- If You Think You've Been the Victim of a Hate Crime: The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) provides resources for [responding to hate crimes](#). This page was made for LGBTQ+ survivors, but the steps apply to everyone.
- Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA): [MIRA](#) offers many resources, including help with DACA, legal services, and health assistance. They are a good place to reach out if you need a free attorney.
- Stay Updated on Immigration News: Follow the [My \(Un\)Documented Life](#) blog for the latest news and updates.
- Feeling Unsafe?: If you feel unsafe, talk to someone you trust at your school for support.
- Looking for Affordable Legal Services? Check out this [website](#), which lists affordable legal services in [Massachusetts](#) and other states. If you're a Boston Public Schools (BPS) student, we recommend contacting Boston-specific organizations on the Massachusetts list for more relevant help.
- Interested in Naturalization?: If you're considering becoming a U.S. citizen, [Project Citizen](#) can help guide you.

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**WHAT TO DO
IF ICE COMES TO YOUR DOOR**



DO NOT OPEN DOORS

ICE cannot come in without a signed warrant or if you let them in. Tell them to pass the warrant under the door before you open.



REMAIN SILENT

ICE can use anything you say against you in your immigration case so claim your right to remain silent!

*Say "I plead the fifth amendment and choose to remain silent".



DO NOT SIGN

Don't sign anything ICE gives you without talking to an attorney.



REPORT THE RAID!

Report immediately: UWD hotline 1-844-343-1623.

Take pictures, video and notes: badge numbers, number of agents, exactly what happened!



FIGHT BACK!

Get a trustworthy attorney & explore all options to fight your case. If detained, you may be able to get bail - don't give up hope!

unitedwedream.org/KnowYourRights


HOW TO GET INVOLVED

If you're interested in getting involved, check out these opportunities:

- [Stories Inspiring Movement \(SIM\)](#): SIM offers programs for undocumented and immigrant youth to learn about grassroots organizing, building relationships, and political education. These programs help you explore these topics through personal and group experiences.
- [My \(Un\)Documented Life](#): This website has links to ways you can join, help create resources for undocumented immigrants, take part in actions with the [Cosecha Movement](#), and share your own story.
- Join the [Cosecha Movement](#) and/or donate [here](#).

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- Become a [United We Dream](#) member.
- [Learn about civil rights protections](#) in Massachusetts. You can also [report civil rights violations](#) to the Massachusetts Attorney General, Maura Healey.
- Report hate crimes: The [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) collects data about hate crimes. You can report any incidents you see.
- If you're a teacher, check out the Boston Teachers' Union's Unafraid Educators toolkit at bit.ly/unafraidtoolkit. You can also explore more resources for educators on [this page](#) by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and other helpful tools like [BPS: We Dream Together](#).
- The [Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement](#) offers several events, programs, and resources for Boston's immigrant communities. For example, their [Immigrant Youth Advancement](#) program provides leadership training and hands-on experience to immigrant youth regardless of immigration status. Please visit MOIA's website for more information.