



# College transition guide

for Latin@s and survivors

## A note about this guide

Latin@ students and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) bring resilience, unique perspectives, and diverse experiences that greatly enrich higher education. This guide is designed to honor and support those strengths by providing reliable, current information to assist with the decision-making process about higher education.

Education comes in many forms, each offering unique opportunities and pathways to success. This guide includes information about community colleges, universities, and trade schools. For simplicity and inclusivity, we will use the term “college” to refer to all these educational pathways throughout the guide.

Most college applications for the following academic year open in late summer or early fall, often between August and October, with regular decision deadlines typically falling in early January. We hope this guide provides you with timely information ranging from helping you finalize applications to preparing for the upcoming academic year.

Please note that some information referenced in this guide may be outdated. Policies, state legislation, and rules change, and we cannot consistently keep current on everything. We strongly encourage you to verify specific details about tuition, financial aid eligibility, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and other policies with your state and chosen colleges or universities. Always check the month and year of updates on official websites to ensure the information is accurate and applicable to your situation.

## Your right to education

College can be one pathway to achieving your goals, and both Latin@ students and survivors of GBV bring valuable perspectives and strengths to academic communities. Your lived experiences, dreams, resilience, and insights contribute to a richer learning environment for everyone. Whether you choose to pursue a college degree, trade certification, or other educational opportunities, this decision belongs to you. If you decide that college aligns with your goals, you deserve access to clear information about your rights, available resources, and support services.

[Research](#) shows that individuals with college and university degrees earn significantly more than those without, which can help survivors of GBV break free from cycles of violence and economic dependence. This guide aims to provide you with helpful information about educational options should you choose to pursue them.



### Immigration rights

No federal law prevents U.S. colleges and universities from admitting undocumented students. Public colleges and universities – schools funded by state governments like community colleges, state universities, and technical schools – may be harder to access in some states that have laws limiting enrollment for undocumented students. To check if a college is public or private, you can visit their official website or search for the school on a higher education directory like the [U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard](#). Most colleges, whether public or private, make their own admissions rules.

Schools that receive federal funding, including public K-12 schools, public colleges, and private colleges, must follow the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#). This law protects your privacy and keeps your personal information, like your immigration status, safe. Schools cannot share your

status without your consent if you are undocumented, have DACA, or hold temporary status like Temporary Protected Status or Deferred Enforced Departure. You can often find a college’s admissions policies and privacy practices on their website, typically under sections like “Admissions” or “Privacy Policy.” You also don’t need to show proof of citizenship to apply to college.

## Title IX rights

Title IX, a federal law, also guarantees your right to an education free from sex-based discrimination and harassment. If you are a survivor of GBV, Title IX offices at universities can offer a wide range of support services. These may include trauma-informed counseling, housing adjustments, academic accommodations, and assistance with filing complaints about harassment or assault. Title IX protections ensure that you are shielded from retaliation and you have control over which services you choose to use. You also have the option to report incidents of violence or harassment with confidential support available to guide you through the process. For additional support, resources like the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#), [End Rape on Campus](#), the [National Women’s Law Center](#), and [Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network or RAINN](#) offer specialized services to help you navigate Title IX processes and provide legal support, counseling, and advocacy.



# How to apply to college

If you decide that pursuing higher education is the next step for you, here are some resources and steps to make the process easier. From researching schools to navigating financial aid, this section will help you understand your options and guide you through the application process.

## 1. Research college options

- **Community colleges:** Community colleges offer two-year programs that lead to an associate degree or certification. However, these programs don't require you to finish in exactly two years. Many students take longer, depending on factors like course load, work schedules, or personal responsibilities. They tend to have lower tuition rates and provide flexible schedules. Many also have partnerships with four-year universities, so students can transfer after earning their associate degree. Additionally, community colleges frequently offer English as a Second Language or ESL programs to help improve language skills. To find a community college near you, visit the [American Association of Community Colleges website](#).
- **Trade schools:** These schools offer focused programs that provide hands-on training for specific careers, such as healthcare, information technology, or construction. Trade school programs are typically shorter than university degrees and can provide immediate employment opportunities. Many trade schools work in tandem with community colleges to provide certifications and degrees. To find a trade school near you, check out [Trade-Schools.net](#).
- **Universities:** Universities offer four-year programs and the opportunity to pursue graduate studies. However, this doesn't mean you must complete your degree in exactly four years. Many students take longer, depending on their individual circumstances, such as attending part-time, taking breaks, or pursuing internships and other opportunities. Admission standards at universities tend to be more competitive, but universities offer a broader range of academic and extracurricular programs like sports teams and clubs to connect with students who share similar interests. For more information on universities, explore resources like the [College Board](#) and the [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities](#).

Additionally, if you are undocumented or have DACA, consider whether the field you wish to enter requires a professional license, as some states restrict undocumented individuals from accessing certain licenses. It is important to research the requirements for your chosen industry in your state. Some states allow DACA recipients to obtain professional licenses; others have removed citizenship requirements entirely, like California, Illinois, and New Jersey. For a state-by-state guide, refer to [this map](#) by the Higher Ed Immigration Portal.

## 2. Check academic requirements

Most colleges and universities require a high school diploma or its equivalent. If you did not graduate from a U.S. high school, you can earn a General

Educational Development (GED) certificate instead. The GED test evaluates proficiency in four subjects: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Many community colleges accept the GED and even offer preparatory courses.

If your education was completed outside the U.S., organizations like [Educational Credential Evaluators](#) can help with required evaluations. Many community organizations, refugee resettlement agencies, and public libraries offer free or reduced-cost assistance with this process.

Some colleges require standardized tests like the SAT or ACT as part of the application. These tests assess your readiness for college-level work in subjects like math, reading, and writing. However, many colleges have test-optional policies, meaning submitting scores is not mandatory. Be sure to check each college's specific requirements. If the SAT or ACT is required, register early and take time to prepare. Free resources for test prep include [Khan Academy](#) (for SAT), [ACT Academy](#), and [College Board](#). Your high school or local community may also offer free or low-cost prep workshops.



### 3. Decide whether to apply for in-state tuition

States offer a cheaper cost to students who are considered residents of that state. In some states, undocumented students may qualify for in-state tuition if they meet certain conditions, such as having attended high school in the state for a minimum number of years. You will need to complete your state's residency determination service, which evaluates whether you meet the criteria for in-state tuition.

Even if your state does not provide in-state tuition for undocumented students, if you are a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen (as defined by your state), you may still qualify for in-state tuition. To learn more about whether you qualify for in-state tuition based on your immigration status, look up your state's residency requirements for in-state tuition. For information on your state's

education policies for undocumented students and DACA recipients, check out this [State-by-State Guide](#) by the Higher Ed Immigration Portal.

If your state does not offer in-state tuition for people with your immigration status but still requires you to complete the residency determination, select “No” when asked whether you claim to be a resident of the state. This will generally allow you to skip the remaining questions and will not require documentation.

## 4. Completing the application

When you are ready to apply to college, the process will vary depending on the institution and your immigration status. Ensure you have all the necessary documents, including transcripts, standardized test scores (if required), and proof of residency for in-state tuition, if applicable. Be mindful of whether the college has any specific policies regarding undocumented students or DACA recipients. Many institutions are flexible with documentation requirements, but it’s crucial to confirm with the college’s admissions office for guidance. For more information, check out [How Undocumented Students Can Apply to College](#) on Informed Immigrant.

As part of your application, you may need to write a college essay, which is a personal statement that allows you to share your story, experiences, and goals with the admissions team. This is your chance to go beyond grades and test scores to show who you are as a person. For step-by-step instructions and examples, check out [College Essay Guy’s guide](#) (English only) to help you craft a compelling essay that effectively tells your story.

## 5. Paying for college

Understanding college costs and available financial support helps you make informed decisions. Many states have policies supporting undocumented students with in-state tuition rates, and many organizations offer scholarships recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in higher education.

### Scholarship resources

- [MALDEF’s Scholarship Resource Guide](#)
- [Immigrants Rising’s List of Scholarships and Fellowships](#)
- [DREAMer’s RoadMap](#): This app helps undocumented students locate state-specific scholarships, financial aid opportunities, and resources tailored to their needs.
- [Scholarship & Fellowship Directory for Undocumented Students](#) - Higher Ed Immigration Portal

Check your college of interest’s website for institutional scholarships, too!

## Once you get there

The journey to higher education doesn't end at enrollment – there's also ensuring you thrive when you get there. Once you're in, focus on building a strong support network. Reach out to student organizations, including those for Latin@ students or GBV survivors, which provide community and resources. Take advantage of campus services like academic advising, mental health counseling, and Title IX offices for guidance and accommodations. Cultivate connections and make use of available resources to ensure your success, both academically and personally.

### Support services and community

College campuses increasingly recognize the strength in diversity and many offer resources celebrating Latin@ heritage and supporting survivor empowerment. These might include cultural centers, student organizations, and confidential support services. You decide which, if any, of these resources would benefit your educational journey.



### Moving forward

If you choose to pursue higher education, remember that your unique perspectives and experiences enrich the academic community. The resources below can provide additional information as you evaluate your options:

#### Academic and immigration resources

- [Higher Ed Immigration Portal](#): Information on policies, research, and resources to support immigrant and undocumented students (Available in English)
- [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities](#): Advocacy and resources for Hispanic students pursuing higher education (Available in English)



- [Informed Immigrant’s Resource Library](#): Comprehensive tools and resources for immigrant and undocumented students (Available in English and Spanish)
- [Six Things Undocumented Students Need to Know About College](#): A practical guide to help undocumented students navigate higher education (Available in English)

## Support services

- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#): Resources and support for addressing sexual violence (Available in English and Spanish)
- [National Women’s Law Center](#): Legal resources and advocacy for gender equity in education (Available in English)
- [Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network or RAINN](#): Support and information for survivors of sexual violence (Available in English and Spanish)
- [Love is Respect](#): Support for those navigating unhealthy or abusive relationships (Available in English and Spanish)
- [End Rape on Campus](#): Advocacy and resources for creating safer campus environments (Available in English)

## For organizations and campuses

- [OVW Campus Program - U.S. Department of Justice](#): Provides funding, training and technical assistance to address sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking on campuses
- [Safety Training and Technical Assistance for Administrators, Boards and Law Enforcement Campus Program \(STTAABLE\) | East Central University](#): An OVW-funded program that provides guidance and training to campuses for improving safety and responding to violence (Available in English)
- [Futures Without Violence](#): Resources and tools for colleges and universities to prevent and respond to sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, with a focus on creating safer campus environments (Available in English)

**Your right to education deserves support and respect.** Whether you choose to pursue higher education now, later, or choose a different path entirely, we hope this information helps you make the decision that best serves your goals and aspirations.