



# CU Boulder UndocuCareer Guide

Fall 2023



Center for Inclusion and Social Change  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

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## Acknowledgements

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# Resources for this Guide and Beyond

This guide is intended to help undocumented students navigate available avenues to legally earn an income with or without DACA. While we have used information from sources cited throughout this guide, the guide itself does **not** constitute legal advice.

We strongly encourage students to consult with an attorney or HR professional if you have questions about specific experiences or opportunities, as well as to explore potential avenues in your areas of interest, including making use of [Colorado Law School's Immigration Clinic](#) for free, confidential legal advice.

If you have questions about this guide, please contact [Career Services](#) and/or the [Center for Inclusion and Social Change](#).

Center for Inclusion and Social Change  
Center for Community (C4C) N320; [cisc@colorado.edu](mailto:cisc@colorado.edu); 303-492-0272  
[Undocumented Student Resources webpage](#)  
Support available in English, Spanish and Portuguese

Career Services  
Center for Community (C4C), S440; [career@colorado.edu](mailto:career@colorado.edu)  
Jasimine Evans [Jasimine.Evans@colorado.edu](mailto:Jasimine.Evans@colorado.edu)  
Tzigane Martin [Tzigane.Martin@colorado.edu](mailto:Tzigane.Martin@colorado.edu)  
303-492-6541

Colorado Law School Immigration Clinic Wolf Law Building  
Violeta Chapin [Violeta.Chapin@colorado.edu](mailto:Violeta.Chapin@colorado.edu)  
303-492-5830

While resources are linked throughout this guide, we also include additional resources in the last section for further support



*“Internships help you understand and evaluate whether or not what you are doing is what you really want to do. You don’t want to spend four years in school and end up doing nothing related to it. Apply for anything, any piece of experience counts. Even if it is not related, it will give you an insight as to what you can potentially be doing. Also, get to know different people from different engineering fields even if they are not in your field—networking is key! All my engineering jobs came out of networking...One of my professors worked in an engineering firm, and through him I was able to get an internship as soon as I graduated from college—as a matter of fact, I began work the Monday after I graduated!”*

– Alejandro Mendoza, B.S. Civil Engineering, Santa Clara University;  
qtd. in Immigrants Rising’s [Life After College guide](#)

## Gaining Professional Experience

### On-Campus Work Opportunities

For students with DACA, you may want to look at on-campus job opportunities. Student worker positions are designed to help current students develop professional skills and depending on your interests, you may find a fit (or mentorship) within offices on campus. All student employees must complete the Federal Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9) form.

You can look at student worker positions on the Boulder campus through the [Office of Student Employment](#). Some offices may not post their student positions there, so it may be worth reaching out directly to the department/office too to see if they have any openings.

### What about Work-Study?

Work-study is a way for students to have student employment as a part of their financial aid package. While having work-study does not guarantee that a student will find a campus job, it allows the university to be able to pay students for their work in a way that forms part of their wider Financial Aid support.

Unfortunately, undocumented students are not currently eligible for *federal* work-study grants; *however*, ASSET students *can* be eligible for *state* work-study grants through their CASFA Financial Aid application.

If you see that **state work-study** is a part of your Financial Aid package, you can also look at **state work-study positions** as part of your on-campus job search.

If you see a work-study position that interests you, ask the Office of Student Employment to verify if the work-study is state funded. **You can ask this without needing to disclose status.**



# Internships and Fellowships

Internships and fellowships are both avenues through which college students often find professional experience and contacts. While the differences can be subtle, typically an internship is structured more as a temporary work opportunity, while a fellowship is generally designed to focus on a specific project. Learn more about the [subtle differences between internships and fellowships](#).

Finding an internship in your field of study provides real-world experience at a business, governmental agency or non-profit organization, and is an effective way to improve your resume and experience in the field. **Potential employers will look at your experience and your college degree.**

Similarly, a research internship allows you to do research or provide research assistance at a university or alongside other academics and is a good way to prepare and be a desirable applicant for graduate school.

Additionally, a fellowship can “provide entry into a first job or career change, fund international work experiences, cultivate emerging leaders and change-makers, and support self-designed projects and social enterprises. Professional fellowships are funded by a wide range of organizations including foundations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, universities, media, and corporations” ([Fellowships | What They Are and 3 Reasons Why They’re Exceptional](#)).

Fellowships may also carry the opportunity to be paid through a stipend rather than employee wages, which could be a route available for individuals without work authorization.

For help finding internship or fellowship opportunities and the details of how they may be compensated, we encourage you to use the resources below:

- [CU Boulder Career Services](#)
  - Career Services helps you explore opportunities, find resources, practice interview skills and more. Use [Handshake](#) to search for available jobs and internships.
  - Many of the Career Center staff have completed UndocuAlly Training. Look for their UndocuAlly placard at their offices.
  - See more information about their office later in this guide.
- [Academic Advising](#)
  - Your academic advisor can help you explore academic opportunities related to your field and may be aware of employers/opportunities that could be a good fit.
  - Students unsure who to start with can contact Ulysses Diaz within advising: [Ulysses.Diaz@colorado.edu](mailto:Ulysses.Diaz@colorado.edu).
- Academic Departments
  - Your specific department and professors may have resources, ideas and connections that could help you find a professional experience like an internship or fellowship. We encourage you to build relationships with your professors in their office hours and ask them for any ideas that might relate to your areas of interest.





For help exploring research opportunities, we encourage you to explore the following resources:

- [Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program \(UROP\)](#)
  - UROP can provide significant guidance in finding research opportunities—short- and long-term.
  - Interested students are encouraged to reach out to Tim O’Neil for more information: [Timothy.ONeil@colorado.edu](mailto:Timothy.ONeil@colorado.edu).
  - Students interested in research can also check out My Undocumented Life’s [UndocuScholarship Series](#).
- Academic Departments
  - Much like for internships/fellowships, your specific department and professors may have resources, ideas and connections that could help you, either through working on their own research projects or connecting you with colleagues.

## Getting Paid for Internships

Internship compensation can vary. Some internships pay hourly, provide stipends or are unpaid.

If the internship is unpaid, the employer generally will not, and is not required to, ask interns to complete employment paperwork (e.g., the I-9), and immigration status should not be an issue.

You may also be able to get academic credit for your internship at CU Boulder. Departments have their own guidance on [requirements to get academic credit for an internship](#).

Paid internships will be treated as employment and you will be asked to provide proof of legal status to work. Typically, this will not happen until after they make you a job offer. If you see an internship that you are interested in applying for, ***then the best thing to do is to apply and once you have amazed them, then you can discuss the possibility of not getting paid or getting paid through other means*** [such as independent contractor work, later in this guide], ***all without having to disclose status***” (E4FC’s [Life After College guide PDF](#)).

Some useful internship resources can also be found here:

- Cornell University’s Resources for [Undocumented Students, Scholarships, Grants & Internship](#)
- [UCLA Dream Resource Center](#)
- [HACU's National Internship Program](#)
- Higher Ed Immigration Portal’s [Fellowships and Other Non-Employment Based Opportunities for Undocumented Students](#)

## Service Learning or Volunteer Work

Service learning classes incorporate a real world, hands-on project as part of the class. The project is related to the topic of the class and can provide you with experience that can go on your resume. Many students are offered internships or jobs after working with a





community organization through a service-learning project.

Below, we have gathered a few resources for departments/offices with information on their website regarding service learning, but if you don't see your department/office here, be sure to ask:

- College of Engineering and Applied Sciences: [Active Learning Program](#)
- College of Arts and Sciences: [Spanish and Portuguese Service Learning](#)
- [CU Engage programs](#)
- [INVST Community Studies](#)
- [Office of Outreach and Engagement](#)

Volunteer work or community leadership will also help you develop new skills, enhance existing skills and establish a network within the community.

CU has a vibrant [Volunteer Resource Center](#) that can help you navigate opportunities, look for a good fit, and even look into future networking opportunities through those experiences, including:

- [Volunteer Placement Program](#)
- [Alternative Breaks](#)

## Networking and Building Community

Meeting fellow students and professionals in your field of study is important – they will tell you about internships, open positions, stipends or scholarships, or graduate programs that seek out and support undocumented students. Good opportunities for networking are career fairs, conferences or campus visits by local employers.

Check in regularly with [CU Boulder Career Services](#) and your academic department about such events.

Mentors or professionals in your field of study are another great resource and will happily tell you about their pathway into their current job. Asking for an informational interview (or even just a casual conversation over coffee) can be a great way to get some insight. See [Career Service's resources on informational interviewing](#) (including sample questions, how to request a meeting and more).

To find a community of college students who, like you, will soon enter the workforce, make sure to connect with [CU Boulder's Center for Inclusion and Social Change](#). Find out more about the **Inspired Dreamers** student organization, a community of DACA, undocumented and mixed-status family students. These students and alumni can become an important network of professionals and peers for you after graduation.

There may be other student organizations through the [CU Boulder Center for Student Involvement](#) that also speak to your interests and passions.



In addition, there are many organizations that aim to improve access to well-paying jobs for DACA and undocumented college graduates; one such group is [UndocuProfessionals](#).

CU Boulder also has resources to connect students to alumni in all fields. Explore the [Forever Buffs Network](#) and make use of LinkedIn to connect with alumni—see the [LinkedIn Alumni Tool \(PDF\)](#) for help in getting started.

## Interviewing Skills

Whether for a job, internship or graduate program, good interview skills are important and can be practiced. Mock interviews are a great way to get that practice and will help you frame good answers to difficult questions. Find a mentor, professional or supervisor in your field, or counselor with [CU Boulder Career Services](#) to practice interviewing skills. You can explore more of their resources here:

- [Prepare for an interview](#)—tips and steps
- [How to answer work authorization questions](#)

Ask for feedback and how you can improve and keep practicing until you feel comfortable.

**You are NOT required to disclose your immigration status during an interview.** If you are offered and accept a position of employment, you may be asked to provide an employment authorization document (EAD, or work permit card) to show that you are authorized to be employed in the U.S. See later sections of this guide if you are pursuing opportunities as an independent contractor.



# CU Career Services Resources

Sometimes it helps to have an overview of the steps Career Services suggests preparing fully for your job search. Start early in your first year or so at CU Boulder. Take it one step at a time and remember that Career Services would love to see you if you have questions or want to talk through your choices. Check out the resources below and meet with a career advisor if you would like help in planning your next steps.

## Step One: Explore Opportunities

- Use Career Services resources to [explore future career options](#).
- Explore academic options and narrow down your interests with the [Majors Card Sort](#) or [What Can I Do With This Major?](#) tools. Keep in mind that DACA and undocumented individuals cannot be paid with federal funds—that may be a consideration for the fields and opportunities you consider.
- Create or update your resume using the [AI resume builder by Quinncia](#).
- Learn how to build professional skills that will appeal to future employers and make a plan for developing these skills through the [MySkills program](#).
- Join a [student organization](#) or [volunteer](#) to further explore your interests and develop your skills.
- Create a profile on [Handshake](#) to explore internships and part-time jobs and stay informed about events and workshops.

## Step Two: Start Seeking Professional Experience

- Test out a potential job by doing a work simulation with [The Forage](#).
- Gain professional experience through a short-term professional project [Buff Works](#), a part-time job or job shadowing. Attend a [workshop](#) or explore online resources, such as [Handshake](#) or [FirstHand](#), to find opportunities.
- Attend [events](#) that feature alumni and employers to learn more about the world of work.
- Practice for interviews with the [AI mock interview tool by Quinncia](#). You can share your recording with trusted advisors for on-demand feedback.
- Make a profile on [LinkedIn](#) and stop by Career Services to use the [free photo booth](#) and add a headshot to your profile.
- Connect with CU Boulder alumni on the [Forever Buffs Network](#).
- [Build career-relevant skills](#) by taking on a leadership role in a student organization, getting a part-time job or internship or participating in programs that build skills. Know what job you want? [Request a personalized skills report](#) to find out what skills employers want when hiring that role.
- Consult with Career Services if you are considering medical school, law school or other graduate school options to learn about timelines and preparation.
- Grow your professional network through [informational interviews](#).



### Step Three: Expand Your Professional Experience

- Apply for internships and other experiences using [Handshake](#).
- Participate in [workshops](#) to learn how to tailor your resume and cover letter to highlight your skills and create your search strategy.
- Revise your resume using the [AI resume builder by Quinnia](#). Remember to feature relevant skills for the work you want, and upload your resume to [Handshake](#). Make sure your profile is visible to employers.
- Attend [career fairs and employer events](#) in your field of interest.
- Continue building your professional network. Identify professional organizations and associations using [What Can I Do With This Major](#) or [FirstHand](#) related to your career interests.
- Check in on your MySkills skill-building plan. Are you building a balance of both [foundational and technical skills](#)? Do you know which skills are required for the career you'd like? If you need a refresher or an update to your plan, request a [skills report](#) to see which skills you should be building now and learn [how to build career-relevant skills](#).

### Step Four: Finish Strong

- Start your full-time job search six to nine months before graduation. By starting early, you can break down the big task of finding a job into smaller, manageable tasks.
- Attend Career Services' [workshops](#) to clarify your job search strategy and find out how to highlight your skills in the job search.
- [Talk with potential employers](#) throughout your final year at CU Boulder and attend [career fairs and employer-related events](#).
- Gather examples of how you [use your professional skills](#) for interviews and resume bullet points.
- Polish your resume the [AI resume builder by Quinnia](#), and work on your interview skills with [Quinnia's AI mock interview tool](#).
- Connect with Career Services if graduate or professional school is your next step after graduation to [plan your application process](#).



## Earning an Income With or Without DACA

An employer in the U.S. is not permitted to knowingly hire people to work who are not lawfully authorized to work in the U.S. (Immigration Reform and Control Act, 1986). However, there are legal ways to earn money in the U.S. even without work authorization. If you are unsure of your situation or your options, please make sure to consult with immigration attorneys or legal support organizations. CU students have access to free and confidential legal advice at the [Immigration Law Clinic](#) at Colorado Law, the university's law school (though there may be costs associated with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security applications or other paperwork). Call 303-492-8126 or email Professor Violeta Chapin at [Violeta.Chapin@colorado.edu](mailto:Violeta.Chapin@colorado.edu) for more information.

In addition, [CU Boulder Career Services](#) offers extensive career assessments, employment and resume-writing workshops, as well as on-campus recruiting events and access to CU Boulder's [Handshake](#) Portal, where you can post your resume, search for jobs, stay informed on upcoming career events and much more.

Immigrants Rising also has a number of [resources and guides](#) to help undocumented students explore their financial options, including their [Income Generation Options for Undocumented Students Toolkit \(PDF\)](#), as does the Higher Ed Immigration Portal with their [Career Pathways for Undocumented Students With or Without Work Authorization: Income Generation](#) resources.

## Employers Want You!

Many employers and companies know that DACA and undocumented college graduates have already overcome immense challenges to succeed in college—lack of financial aid, being the first in their families to attend university, working multiple jobs while taking care of families, attending part-time for many years. They know that your education has taken hard work and perseverance, that you are likely to speak two or more languages, or that you can navigate different cultures with ease.

Some employers—usually larger ones—may have the possibility of sponsoring an H1B work visa for employees, which may be a possibility for undocumented potential employees as well. The H1B is a temporary, non-immigrant visa category that allows employers to petition for highly educated non-citizens to work in specialty occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree or the equivalent. The H1B visa is typically granted for three years, with a maximum duration of six years. We strongly urge you to connect with an immigration attorney to understand whether that could be an option in your individual case. If so, that is a conversation you may be able to have with the company's HR office to see whether the position you are interested in could be eligible for sponsorship.

Although this may not be an option for many, countries like Canada [have invited](#) refugees and immigrants—especially those with college degrees—into their country. For questions about specific countries, and the immigration process, please refer to their [consulates](#). [Immigrants Rising](#) has excellent resources for students interested in exploring possibilities outside the U.S. as well.



### **Question: What about employment-based visas?**

You may be looking for sponsorship through a potential employer for an employment-based visa; according to USCIS, “*Approximately 140,000 immigrant visas are available each fiscal year for noncitizens (and their spouses and children) who seek to immigrate based on their job skills. If you have the right combination of skills, education, and/or work experience and are otherwise eligible, you may be able to live permanently in the United States.*”

For folx who are undocumented and living in the U.S., it may or may not be possible to be sponsored for a work-based visa by an employer. This is a rare option, and for many, they may need to return to their home countries to apply for a work-based visa to work for a U.S. employer. This is risky and it is advisable to contact an attorney who is familiar with immigration and employment law before considering this option. [Work authorization through programs such as DACA, VAWA, TPS or similar programs](#) is often the best option to live and work in the U.S.

## **Earning an Income with DACA**

In 2012, the Obama administration implemented an administrative policy called “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA). DACA recipients receive a renewable two-year deferral of their deportation, a social security number and work authorization. In order to be eligible for DACA, an individual must:

- Be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012.
- Have arrived in the U.S. before reaching their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Must have *continuously* lived in the U.S. from June 2007 through the present.
- Must be in school or have a high school diploma or GED.
- Have no criminal record or pose a “threat to public safety.”

For more information, visit [USCIS](#).

If you have DACA, when you are filling out your I-9 paperwork to accept employment, simply submit your work authorization card as evidence that you are legally authorized to work in the U.S. You can find more guidance on employment with DACA, and your rights as a worker:

- [National Immigration Law Center: About DACA and Employment](#)
- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center: DACA Workers’ Rights Guide \(PDF\)](#)

## **Earning an Income without Work Authorization**

For students without work authorization, there are still excellent resources to help explore legal options beyond traditional employment. The following sections will discuss these avenues further, and we encourage you to explore some of the resources below:

- The Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education: [Webinar–Alternative Income and Career Options for Undocumented Students](#)
- Immigrants Rising: [5 Tips to Get Started as an Independent Contractor/Freelancer](#)
- Immigrants Rising: [Choosing a Business Structure Guide \(PDF\)](#)
- Democracy at Work Institute: [Resource Guide for worker co-op development](#)
- UC Santa Barbara Career Services: [Undocumented Student Career Guide](#)
- Spark: [Introduction to Entrepreneurship](#)
- TheDream.US: [Summer Career Series](#)



**Question: Should I disclose my immigration status to a potential employer or client?**

Choosing to disclose status is a personal decision. When you are interviewing for a job or client, you are *never required* to discuss your status. As long as you are legally authorized to work in the U.S., immigration status is a protected class (just like age, race or gender) and the employer is not allowed to discriminate against you based on your immigration status.





# Working as an Independent Contractor/Starting Your Own Business in Colorado

Independent contractors can earn an income in the U.S., but they are not employees—they typically work on a temporary or project basis, but may work for the same client, or many different clients, for many years. Because independent contractors are not employees, the person or entity who pays them is not required by federal law to verify that they have work authorization. However, be aware some states may have laws requiring employers to verify that independent contractors have work authorization.

Independent contractors do not complete the I-9 (which requires proof of work authorization), nor do they need to disclose their immigration status or provide proof of work authorization to do their taxes. People without immigration status or work authorization can earn money as an Independent Contractor without violating immigration or tax laws. Be aware, people on temporary visas, such as student visas or work visas, are generally not permitted to work as either employees or independent contractors per the terms of their visa.

As an independent contractor, you are self-employed, and your client pays you for the result of the work you do, not how or when you do it. (For example, you may have to use your own materials or office space to complete the work.) Examples of typical independent contracting work include tutoring, computer/tech support, translation work, financial consulting, construction, or childcare. Instead of a social security number, independent contractors can use a social security number or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) on their paperwork.

This table (adapted from Immigrants Rising’s [Life After College](#) describes some differences between independent contractors and employees:

<b>Employee</b>	<b>Independent Contractor</b>
has a continuing relationship with employer	does the same work for multiple clients
is given tools, materials, workplace etc.	has own tools/equipment; can hire/supervise/pay assistants
can quit at any time	is liable for losses and debts due to unfinished projects
must follow instructions about how, when, and where to work	sets their own hours and schedule
is trained by the employer	uses their own methods
may have benefits such as health insurance, retirement etc. provided through the employer	is responsible for their own benefits



# Applying For and Using an ITIN

An independent contractor will need **either** a social security number **or** a renewable Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to be paid or file taxes. Here is some basic information about ITINs compiled by the [American Immigration Council](#):

## ITINs were created for tax purposes

- The ITIN program was created by the IRS in July 1996 so that foreign nationals and other individuals who are not eligible for a Social Security number (SSN) can pay the taxes they are legally required to pay.
- The IRS does not share information with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

## ITINs are not SSNs

- The ITIN is a nine-digit number that always begins with the number 9 and has a 7 or 8 in the fourth digit, for example 9XX-7X-XXXX.

## Many immigrants qualify for ITINs

- People who do not have a lawful status in the United States may obtain an ITIN. In addition, the following people are lawfully in the country and must pay taxes but *may not* be eligible for a SSN and may obtain an ITIN:
  - A non-resident foreign national who owns or invests in a U.S. business and receives taxable income from that U.S. business, but lives in another country.
  - A foreign national student who qualifies as a resident of the United States (based on days present in the United States).
  - A dependent or spouse of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident.
  - A dependent or spouse of a foreign national on a temporary visa.

August 2017, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has issued nearly 24 million ITINs, **and they are used by different types of workers and in different types of situations.**

Applying for an ITIN is not uncommon and should not be scary. The [process of obtaining an ITIN](#) involves presenting a packet of three items to the IRS:

1. The ITIN application
  - This is the [W-7 Form](#), and it includes the instructions for where to mail the packet.
2. A signed tax return
  - This is important since it indicates that you owe taxes or are due a refund, which is why you need an ITIN.
3. Proof of Identity and Proof for Foreign Status
  - A passport meets both these requirements, although there are other options.

There are a number of organizations in the Denver/Boulder area that can help you apply for and use an ITIN, such as the [Mi Casa Resource Center](#), the [Denver Asset Building Coalition](#) or [E for All](#) in Longmont. Even if you live in Boulder, we encourage you to contact these organizations for help if you would like that support.



Colorado residents can also use the IRS field office to make an appointment and get help applying for an ITIN. You can look up [Colorado Taxpayer Assistance Centers](#):

**Denver Taxpayer Assistance Center (TAC)**

1999 Broadway, Denver CO 80202

303-446-1675; make appointment by calling 1-844-545-5640

For more information about the Denver Taxpayer Assistance Center, or others located throughout Colorado, please [contact your local IRS office](#).

Additional ITIN information can also be found through [TheDream.US](#) and the [Immigrants Rising ITIN Guide \(PDF\)](#).

## Paying Taxes

If you have a social security number through DACA or have an ITIN, then you can and should pay taxes—not paying taxes on income in the U.S. could become a potential problem when you pursue a more stable immigration status.

[The Denver Asset Building Coalition](#) offers free tax preparation services, help with ITIN filings, and all other tax preparation questions. These services are free for families making less than \$55,000 per year, or individuals earning less than \$35,000 per year.

## Starting Your Own Business

[Immigrants Rising](#) has created a very informative [webinar](#) on being undocumented and starting a business.

Many independent contractors start their own business. Common business types are the Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) or Sole Proprietorship. Although some fees and taxes are associated with such businesses, this can be a good option for your long-term professional life in the U.S.

More information on how to form a small business can be found through the [Colorado Small Business Development Center](#). Also, the [Mi Casa Resource Center](#) offers free, bi-lingual workshops and small business counseling sessions and will be able to answer your questions, no matter what your immigration status may be. For a broader resource, we recommend looking at New York State Youth Leadership Council's [The Non Citizen's Guide to Entrepreneurship \(PDF\)](#).

**Please note that along with an ITIN, you may need a Federal Employer Tax ID Number (EIN, or Employer Identification Number).**



# What is the Difference Between an EIN and ITIN?

Nerd Wallet's article "[EIN vs ITIN vs SSN: What Business Owners Need to Know](#)" succinctly lays out the difference between each of these numbers in the context of owning a business.

In order to get an EIN, you will need either a Social Security Number or an ITIN. An EIN can be a more private way to pay business taxes, rather than using an individual Social Security Number or ITIN, which some individuals prefer. Please consult with counselors from [Mi Casa Resource Center](#), [Denver Asset Building Coalition](#), [E for All](#) or similar organizations for more details.

## Colorado Driver's License for Undocumented Students

Colorado's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) will issue a license to those without a social security number if an application provides certain documentations, including:

- Proof of Colorado residency.
- Proof of identity from your home country with name and date of birth (such as a passport).
- An Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).

However, this driver's license cannot be used for federal identification purposes, such as flying out of an airport ([Immigrants Rising](#) provides an excellent resource on things to consider when traveling within the U.S. undocumented).

You can make an appointment by calling 303-205-2335 to get a driver's license at various locations throughout the state. More information can be found at [Colorado DMV](#).

Starting in 2019, undocumented immigrants in Colorado can renew their driver's licenses online, instead of having to make appointments at a limited number of locations. This new law will also allow a Social Security Number or ITIN to be used to obtain ID cards, instruction permits, or driver's licenses.

Undocumented immigrants, or DACA recipients whose status had ended, were previously required to provide proof of an ITIN to obtain a driver's license, instruction permit or ID card, but now a Social Security Number will be accepted as well—even if the user of the number is without legal status. Social Security Numbers are not revoked upon expiration or loss of DACA.



# Professional Licenses in Colorado

Many professions, such as social workers, teachers or nurses, require licenses. (A [list of Colorado professional licenses](#) is available) For example, a teacher's license is provided through the Colorado Dept. of Education, while Colorado's Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) provides and renews many other common licenses, such as licenses for dentists, speech-language pathologists and architects.

In May 2021, Governor Polis signed into law Senate Bill [SB21-077](#). This was an important development, as it removes all questions about "lawful presence" from such license applications. This makes it much easier for Coloradans to apply for such professional licenses at the state and local level, independent of immigration status.

For all professional licenses provided by [Colorado's Department of Regulatory Agencies](#) and the [Colorado Department of Education](#), an ITIN may be used in place of a Social Security Number, and the licensure process does not ask about "lawful presence" in the U.S. However, for many licenses, government-issued identification, background checks, and/or work authorization may still be a requirement. Applicants may also need to meet other requirements, such as knowledge tests or relevant practicums.

Important Colorado resources to help with professional licensing questions:

- [Dept. of Regulatory Agencies](#): 303-894-7855
- [Mi Casa Resource Center](#): 303-573-1302
- [Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition](#): 303-922-3344

**IMPORTANT:** This information only applies to Colorado professional licenses. Professional and occupational license requirements—such as immigration status—vary state-by-state. Federally issued licenses, such as pilot's licenses, also have different requirements. [This overview](#) provides state-by-state information; please note it was published in 2019 and there may be updates.



# Loans for Undocumented Community Members

Getting a loan is important not only when starting a business but also to build your credit score, which is how banks rate you as a borrowing customer. This score can have a big impact on the amount and conditions connected to loans you may need in the future. (More information about financial stability and credit can be found in [Immigrants Rising's "Capital and Financial Capital Guide."](#))

## **Question: Can I get a loan without a social security number?**

Yes. Some financial institutions—such as [Fitzsimons Credit Union](#) in Aurora—will allow you to use an ITIN or SSN to apply for a loan. Also, any business owner, regardless of legal status, may use their business name and number (EIN) to access business credit without having to disclose personal immigration status.

Fitzsimons also offers the [DREAMer Loan Program](#), which provides 0% loans specifically for immigration-related fees charged by USCIS.

Important local organizations that can help you find out more:

- [Fitzsimons Credit Union](#): 303-340-3343
- [Denver Asset Building Coalition](#): 303-388-7030
- [Dreamer Graduate School Loan Program](#)



# Unemployment Benefits for DACA Recipients

DACA recipients, green card holders (lawful permanent residents), refugees/asylees, VAWA recipients and all others with work authorization are eligible to receive unemployment benefits in Colorado. Individuals without work authorization in the U.S. are not eligible. You can [apply for unemployment benefits](#).

**Question: Will unemployment benefits make me a “public charge” or endanger my immigration status?**

No. According to the [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services policy manual](#), unemployment benefits are not considered “in the public charge inadmissibility determination as they are considered earned benefits.”





# Graduate/Professional/Vocational Schools

**Graduate schools** offer master's degrees (1-2 years full-time) or Ph.D. degrees (5 years and more) with coursework only focused on your specific academic interest. The emphasis is typically on rigorous research, lengthy reading and writing assignments and collaborative, in-depth projects with your "cohort" or classmates.

**Professional schools**—specifically law and medical school—focus on teaching you how to practice a certain profession. Professional schools are often more expensive and more difficult to finance than other graduate school opportunities (More on funding for graduate and professional schools below.)

Additionally, **vocational schools** train specific areas of work—such as electricians, mechanics or professional chefs. Those degrees are usually more affordable than graduate or law/medical school and can often be completed in a shorter amount of time.

There are some useful guides for specific graduate school questions, including resources on law and medical school considerations, as well as broader guidance for graduate school in general:

- TheDream.US: [Navigating Graduate School: Resource Guide for Undocumented Students \(PDF\)](#)
- Immigrants Rising: [Law School Resource for Undocumented Students: Getting Into Law School](#)
- Higher Ed Immigration Portal and the [Pre-Health Dreamers](#) organization: [Medical School for Pre-Med Undocumented Students](#)
- Higher Ed Immigration Portal: [Graduate & Professional School: Pathways & Support Systems](#)
- Pre-Health Dreamers: [Pursuing Nursing: Q&A for Undocumented Students \(in California\) \(PDF\)](#)
- AAMC's annual guide to [medical school acceptance policies for undocumented students \(PDF\)](#)
- New York State Youth Leadership Council: [Undocu-Grad School Guide](#)

## Choosing the Right Program

When choosing a school and program to attend, whether professional or graduate school, consider these important questions (adapted from E4FC's [Life after College guide \(PDF\)](#)):

- *Why are you going?*
  - *Is it to enhance your knowledge in a specific subject/topic?*
  - *Is it to improve your future employability?*
  - *Is it required in your field of study/work?*
- *Do you meet the academic requirements of this program?*
- *Do you need to take the GRE, GMAT, MCAT, LSAT or any other entrance exam?*
  - *If so, what scores are they looking for?*



- *How big of a graduate program are you looking for?*
- *Is mentorship and guidance important to you?*
- *Will research and assistantship opportunities be open to you?*
- *Are there any student graduate support groups that will help you through the program?*
- *Where do students publish, get exposure to conferences, and become acquainted with opportunities of employment from 'X' college?*
- *Is this university and the local community supportive of undocumented students?*

Choosing the right program should take time, thought, and (ideally) meetings with other graduate students currently in the program, a professor or the department chair. Such meeting requests are common – but make sure to come prepared with questions.

### **Graduate/Professional School Funding–Public and Private Universities**

Nearly all funding for public graduate or professional schools will come in the form of scholarships, stipends, or research or teaching assistantships. In many states, those funds come from the state or federal government. While federal funding is not currently available for undocumented students, state funded opportunities may or may not be available, depending on that state's policies.

However, DACA students are eligible to work for universities as research or teaching assistants. It is important to check on funding options before you apply at a program of your choice, as these can differ greatly. For example, the University of California system, with its many different campuses, has developed the [Dream Resource Center](#) that will assist you financially and connect you to excellent professional opportunities during and after graduate school.

While private schools often cost a lot more on paper, they can also offer bigger stipends or financial aid, as they often have more control over how to use their funding than public schools. One example of a private school that has been supportive of Dreamer students is [Loyola's Stritch School of Medicine](#). Likewise, [Brown University](#) and [Pomona College](#) developed programing, policies and financial assistance for Dreamers, and other private schools have also begun to recognize the academic potential of DACA and undocumented college students.

Explore the websites for the universities you are considering to see if they have an undocumented student support page (even if it is not a full Dream Center) that can be a help in finding these answers, and give you a sense of how supportive the campus itself might be.

Organizations like [TheDream.US](#) can also help link you to resources and organizations that may be open to helping undocumented graduate students fund their programs.



# Entrance Exams and the Personal Statement

## Exam Fees

Standardized tests such as the [GRE](#), [MCAT](#), [GMAT](#) or [LSAT](#) are usually—but not always—a requirement for graduate school. To prepare, you can choose to enroll in courses or prepare yourself with up-to-date books and practice tests. Many college students are able to receive high scores on graduate school entry exams without attending any formal prep courses.

Some of the exams do offer limited fee waiver opportunities—including for undocumented students—and/or opportunities to invite folks to help with the cost of the exam, but more information can be found on the websites linked above.

## Personal Statement

Many graduate programs will also require that you write a Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose, which you should write very carefully and revise often with help from writing tutors, professors or other academic professionals.

Career Services staff can help you develop the content of your personal statement, and the [Writing Center](#) team can help review grammar, flow and offer their support on developing content.

## Question: Should I disclose my undocumented status in the Personal Statement?

According to E4FC's [Life after College: A Guide for Undocumented Students \(PDF\)](#): *“This is a very common question, and ultimately it is a matter of personal choice. You may choose to disclose your status in order to discuss its impact on your life. It is important to familiarize yourself with the program so that you can feel comfortable with your decision.*

*“My undocumented status was always a centerpiece of my personal statements, and I always figured that if a school was not willing to accept me because of my status then it wasn’t a school I would be comfortable at anyway.”*

- Perla Flores, B.A. Hispanic Languages & Bilingual Issues, U.C. Berkeley, M.P.H. Candidate, San Francisco State University, qtd. in Immigrants Rising’s [Life After College guide](#))

*It is also critical that you establish a comfortable relationship with an admissions officer, faculty member, or staff representative of your desired institution who may be able to vouch for you in the end. Regardless of whether you disclose your undocumented status, the most effective personal statements are the ones that are most open and sincere about goals, motivations, experiences, and passions.”*



## Additional Resources Used for this Guide

- [Metropolitan State University of Denver's UndocuCareer Guide](#)
- [UC Santa Barbara's Undocumented Students Career Guide](#)
- Immigrants Rising
  - [Life after College: A Guide for Undocumented Students](#)
  - [Income Generation Options for Undocumented Students—Toolkit \(PDF\)](#)
- [The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration](#)
- Higher Ed Immigration Portal [Employment Guides](#)
- [My Undocumented Life](#)
- [Immigrants Rising collection of resources](#)
- [Dream.US general guides](#)

