

Undocumented Students in U.S. Higher Education

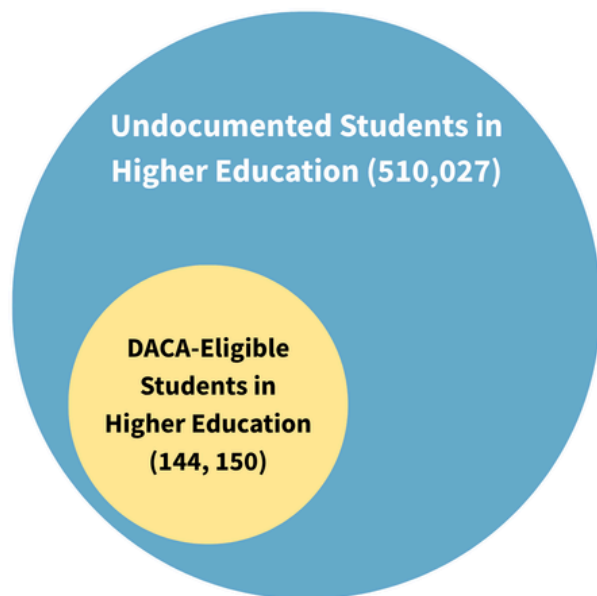
June 2025

Undocumented students are an integral part of American society and the U.S. higher education system. They advance scientific innovation, drive economic growth, and make valuable contributions as classmates, instructors, scholars, and campus leaders. Beyond campus, they contribute to the U.S. economy as entrepreneurs, business leaders, and employees taking on a range of careers. Despite their deep connections to our schools, workplaces, and communities, undocumented students face ongoing threats. Enhanced immigration enforcement, attacks on tuition access, and restrictions on professional licensure can all limit opportunities for undocumented students and alumni, including those with and without Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Who are the Undocumented Students in Higher Education?

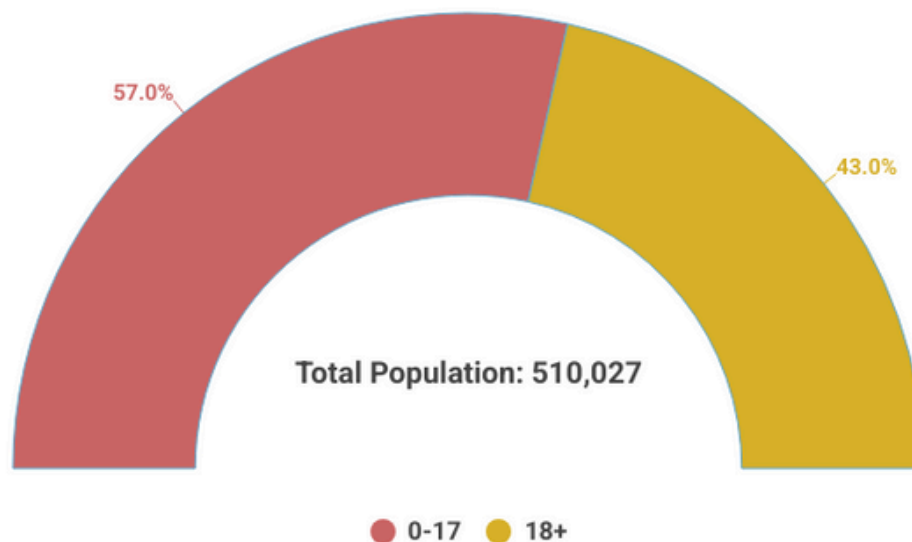
There are approximately 510,000 undocumented students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, representing about 2.4% of all students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education. Of these, 144,150 (27.7%) are estimated to hold or be eligible for DACA.

While most undocumented students in higher education today are not DACA-eligible, more than half arrived in the United States before age 17. 31.2% arrived as children (age 0-9), and 25.8% arrived as adolescents (age 10-17). Of the undocumented students in higher education who arrived as adults (age 18+), 70% are employed. These students are more likely to be enrolled part-time, though some hold full course loads in addition to family-sustaining jobs.



This snapshot was based on data from the 1-year sample of the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS). Analysis was provided by the [American Immigration Council \(AIC\)](#). Between 2024 and 2025, the Council updated the methodology used to identify the subset of the immigrant population that is likely to be undocumented students in postsecondary education. Some changes in the statistics reported in this document as compared with our 2024 analysis are attributable to this adjustment. You can find more information on our methodology [here](#).

Undocumented Students in Higher Education by Age of Arrival (2023)



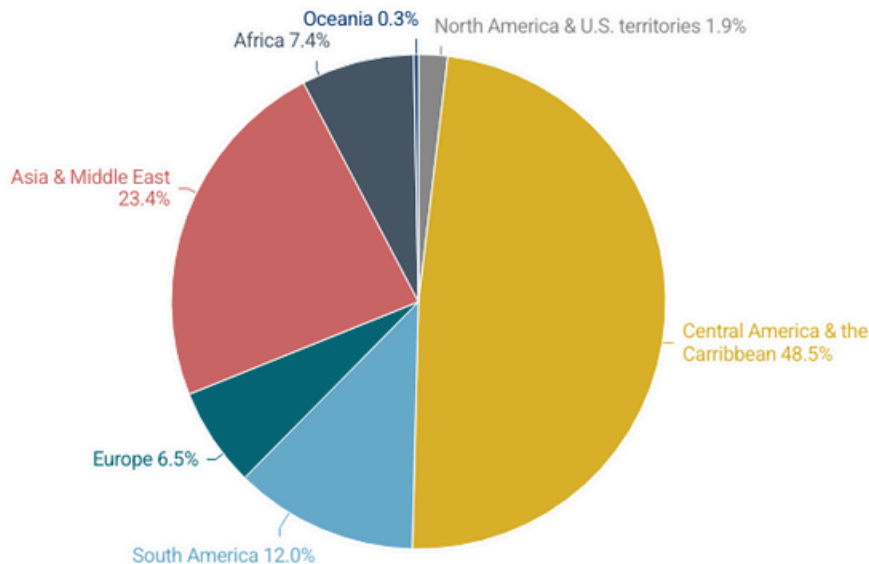
Breakdown of the Undocumented Student Population

Undocumented students are a heterogeneous community, representing the broad range of immigrants in the U.S. A plurality (48.5%) come from Central America and the Caribbean; 23.4% from Asia and the Middle East; 12% from South America; 7.4% from Africa; 6.5% from Europe; and 1.9% from North America and U.S. territories.

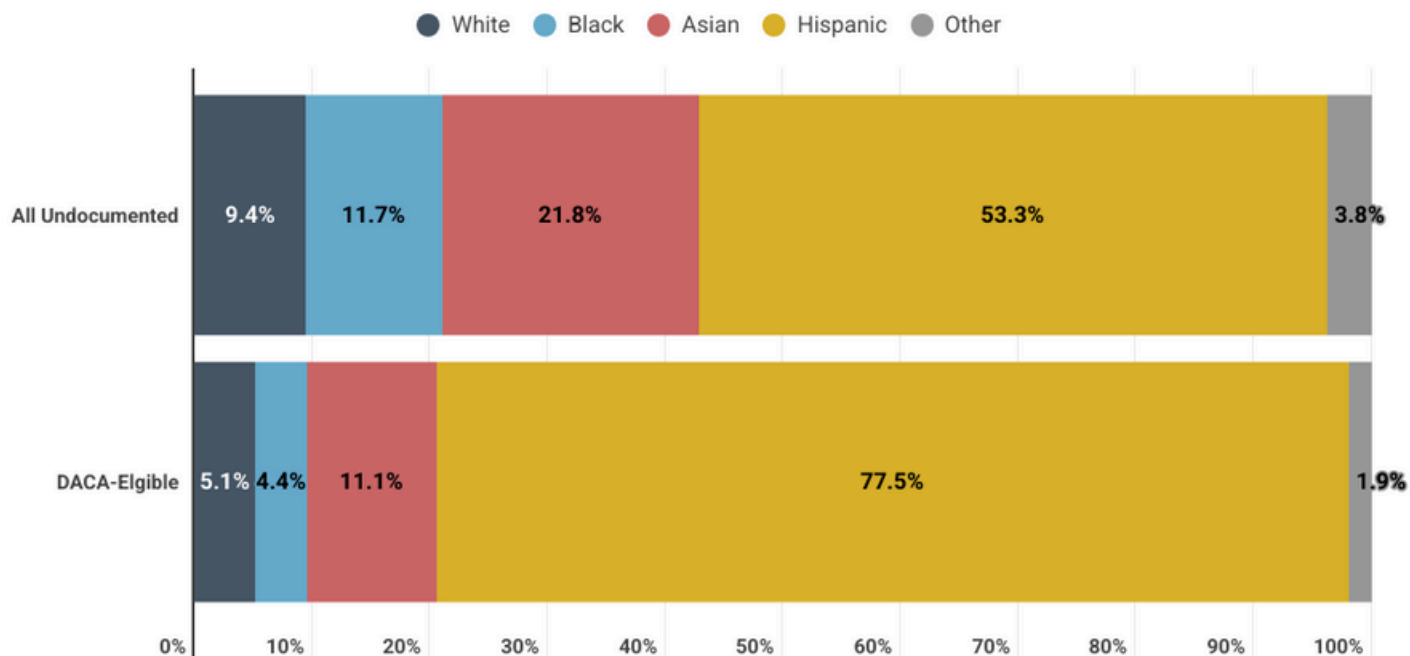
The undocumented student population in higher education is also racially and ethnically diverse, with 53.3% identifying as Hispanic, 21.8% as Asian, 11.7% as Black, and 9.4% as White.

The DACA-eligible population is less diverse by comparison, with 77.5% identifying as Hispanic, potentially due to restrictions on the program that have prevented more recent arrivals from qualifying for the program.

Undocumented Students in Higher Education by Region of Origin (2023)



Undocumented Students in Higher Education by Race (2023)



Degrees and Programs

Undocumented students are enrolled in every kind of institution—including community colleges, private colleges and universities, and large state universities—and pursue a range of degree and credential programs. Public institutions educate three quarters of the undocumented student population and even higher numbers of DACA-eligible students.

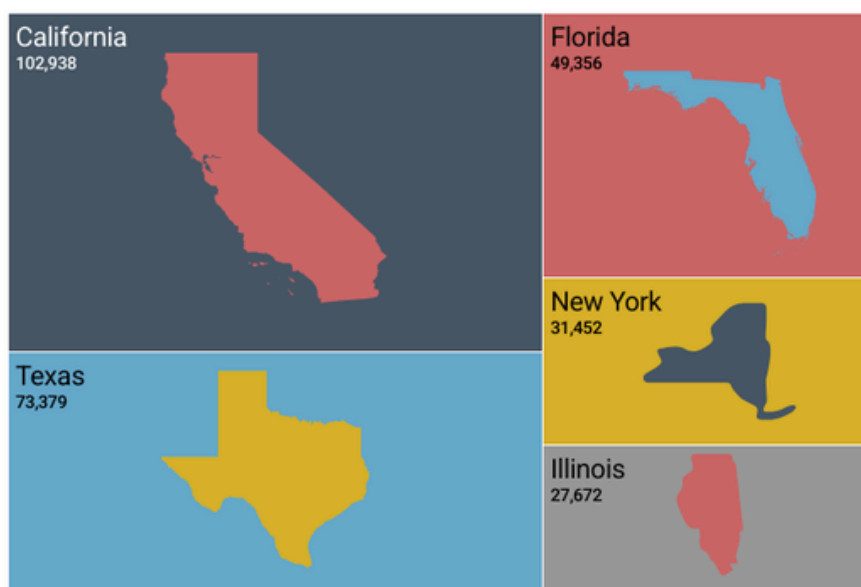
Impact on Science and Innovation

15.2% of the undocumented students in higher education are pursuing advanced degrees, and 84.8% are pursuing an undergraduate degree. **28.7% of the undocumented students currently in graduate school hold an undergraduate degree in a STEM field.** With their undergraduate and advanced degrees, these students are poised to fill critical positions in science, technology, and healthcare.

Enrollment by State

As with the overall undocumented population, undocumented students in higher education are concentrated in a small number of states. California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois remain the top five states when it comes to undocumented student enrollment. But the spread of the undocumented student population across states is changing. Massachusetts, Illinois, North Carolina, and

Top five states enrolling undocumented students



Washington state all saw increases in their undocumented student population between 2022 and 2023, while New Jersey and Georgia saw decreases in undocumented student enrollment. Policies impacting access to in-state tuition and financial aid and localized immigration enforcement efforts can impact whether undocumented students are able to pursue advanced degrees. It is possible that the rescission of tuition equity policies in Florida and Texas will affect the spread of undocumented students in higher education in the coming years.

Impact

Undocumented students with and without DACA make meaningful contributions to higher education and the nation at large. They pursue a range of programs and often go on to achieve advanced degrees—master’s, PhDs, MDs, and JDs—that prepare them to serve as leaders in their fields. They are integral to the intellectual and cultural vitality of our campuses and to the future of our workforce. Supporting all undocumented students—including those with and without DACA—is central to the future of U.S. higher education. Learn more about the impact of undocumented students and other noncitizens in higher education by visiting the [Higher Ed Immigration Portal](#).

You can review the 2024 Undocumented Students in Higher Ed report [here](#). The 2023 report is also available on the Higher Ed Immigration Portal.