

Overview of Undocumented Immigrants and College Students

Undocumented immigrants came to the US as children or adults and either overstayed their visas or came to the US without legal authorization. In 2010, it was estimated that there are approximately 11.2 million undocumented immigrants residing in the US (Passel & Cohn, 2011). The majority of undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala (Chan, 2010). The image of undocumented immigrants is often that of Latino immigrants and is sometimes used synonymously with Latino. However, there are a significant proportion of Asian undocumented immigrants, particularly from the Philippines, China, and Korea (Chan, 2010). The breakdown of countries of origins for all undocumented immigrants is: 60 percent from Mexico, 20 percent from other Latin American countries, and 11 percent from South and East Asia (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

Every year 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school and are not eligible to work legally and do not qualify for financial assistance to attend college (Passel, 2006). Financial constrictions are a major barrier to postsecondary education for undocumented students. No federal or state law prohibits undocumented students from applying to institutions of higher education; however, undocumented students do not qualify for in-state tuition or financial aid. Additionally, thirty-nine percent of undocumented children live below the poverty line, compared to 17 percent of native-born children (Passel, 2005). The average income of an undocumented family is 40 percent lower than native-born and legal immigrant families (Passel, 2005). An undocumented student's ability to pursue higher education is closely linked with their ability to receive in-state tuition or private grants and scholarships.

Currently, 13 states have passed legislation that allows undocumented students who graduate from high school in that state to qualify for in-state tuition: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin (Morse, 2013). Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma also allowed undocumented students to be eligible for state financial aid grants. The implementation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has provided an opportunity for additional states and Board of Regents to offer in-state tuition to certain undocumented students under existing state laws.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

On June 15, 2012, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano announced a new executive order called deferred action for childhood arrivals (DACA). This policy allows certain young adults who came to the U.S. as children and meet certain criteria to receive deferred action from deportation ("DHS outlines deferred action," 2012). Many undocumented students have the potential to be granted a two-year visa through DACA, which will allow them to obtain work and pursue higher education with legal papers. Although DACA may only provide a two-year visa, the hope is that comprehensive immigration legislation will be developed to provide a longer-term solution to undocumented youth's legal status.

As a result of DACA, a total of 1.54 million DACA-eligible individuals may now have the opportunity to pursue higher education. As of August 2013, there were 552,918 DACA recipients nationally and the top countries of origin were Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, South Korea (USCIS, 2013). Mexican immigrants represented the largest number of DACA recipients (421,649 recipients) (USCIS, 2013). The top two Asian countries of origin for DACA recipients are South Korea (7,408 recipients) and Philippines (3,615 recipients) (USCIS,

2013). Ohio was estimated to have between 10,000-20,000 potential eligible beneficiaries of DACA (Batalova & Mittelstadt, 2012). As of August 2013 there were 2,950 accepted DACA recipients in Ohio (USCIS, 2013). A Brookings report found that 5.5% of DACA applicants in Ohio were from Asian countries of origin, compared to 4.2% nationally (Singer & Svajlenka, 2013).

In July 2013, after nine months of advocacy work, the Ohio Board of Regents announced that based on Ohio law, DACA students are eligible for in-state tuition ("Regents," 2013). Columbus State Community College and Terra Community College were among the first institutions in Ohio to offer in-state tuition to DACA students. Since the Board of Regents' announcement, other public institutions, including The Ohio State University, have committed to implementing an in-state tuition process for DACA students as early as Spring 2014.

DACA and the Asian Community

Several important trends have emerged from initial analyses of DACA applicants' countries of origin. A Center for American Progress report (Wong et al., 2013) analyzing data of DACA applications found that:

- Asians make up 4.2 percent of DACA applicants, although they represent 6.1 percent of the total DACA-eligible population. Applicants from South America comprised 93.5 percent of the total sample.
- One-third of Asian applicants live in western states, one-third live in the Northeast, and one-third live in the South and Midwest. More than half of the Asian-origin DACA applicants live in California and New York.
- Compared to estimates of DACA-eligible population, Mexicans are overrepresented in the sample (+3.8 percent) while other groups including Asians (-1.9 percent) are underrepresented.
- Africans, Asians, Europeans, and Central Americans experience disproportionately higher denial rates than Mexicans.

More research is needed to explain the difference in DACA rates. Some Asian immigrant service organizations believe that ethnic media sources targeting Asian immigrants could play a role in increasing the information about DACA (Fernández, 2013; Wong et al., 2013). In particular, Asian advocacy organizations are encouraging Chinese ethnic media to provide more coverage of DACA and feature stories of Chinese DACAmented youth in order to address the apprehension expressed in the Chinese community about the program (Wong et al., 2013). Continued fear and stigma attached to the undocumented status is another issue that may be impacting the low numbers of Asian DACA applicants (Fernández, 2013).

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