Every Georgian Deserves Access to Higher Education

By: Jennifer Lee, Senior Policy Analyst, and Stephanie Angel, Policy Fellow

Diana graduated from Gainesville High School at the top of her class in 2014. She started attending the University of North Georgia (UNG), taking a lower course load than she wanted, because she could not afford to go to school full-time. Though she grew up in Georgia, she had to pay the out-of-state tuition rate, nearly $10,000 per semester.

Diana is one of thousands of young Georgians who participate in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. Georgia is home to 20,900 DACA recipients, ranking eighth in the nation for the largest population of active DACA recipients. Additionally, there are 44,000 DACA-eligible people living in Georgia. These Georgians may struggle to afford post-secondary credentials, but there are options for Georgia leaders to lower barriers to higher education for young undocumented Georgians.

Lowering Barriers to Higher Education in Georgia

Higher levels of education are connected to higher incomes, better health outcomes and longer life expectancies. Also, communities with higher levels of education experience less crime, lower rates of incarceration and greater participation in school, community service, civic and religious organizations.

Georgia ranks 31st among states in the percentage of adults who have an associate degree or higher. Georgia is also one of only three states with policies that bar undocumented students from enrolling in certain colleges. The other two states are South Carolina and Alabama, which are home to much smaller populations of DACA recipients.

What is DACA?

When President Obama created the DACA program in 2012 for young people without legal status, they became eligible for work permits and protection from deportation for two years. To apply, individuals had to have come to the U.S. before age 16 and lived in the country for at least five years as of June 2012. They also had to be in high school, a high school graduate or a veteran and have no felony convictions. Though the DACA program makes these young people lawfully present in the U.S., it currently does not offer a path to permanent legal status. Congress has been debating this issue for years with no action. The U.S. Supreme Court will decide in spring 2020 whether the current Federal administration properly ended the DACA program in 2017.
Diana learned of this ban after the University of Georgia recruited her and encouraged her to apply for a scholarship. Later, she was told that the school was unable to accept her application. “That hurt,” she says. “And it scared me.” She considered looking at out-of-state schools but decided to stay in Georgia to be closer to family.

In addition to certain enrollment barriers like the one that barred Diana, undocumented students face financial challenges that limit their ability to acquire post-secondary education. In fact, undocumented students pay tuition rates that are nearly three times that of other students in the university system and four times that of their classmates in technical colleges. When you couple higher tuition rates with the ineligibility for state and federal financial aid, higher education becomes inaccessible for many undocumented young people.

### Undocumented Students Pay Tuition Rates Two to Four Times Higher Than In-State Tuition Rates

*Tuition Rates Shown For 15 credit hours, one semester, no fees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In-State Tuition, Fall 2019</th>
<th>Out-of-State Tuition, Fall 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Colleges</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$3,000 / $6,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Georgia Gainesville, Associate Degree</td>
<td>$1,602</td>
<td>$5,918</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of North Georgia Gainesville, Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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<td>Georgia Gwinnett College</td>
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<td>$7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennesaw State</td>
<td>$2,781</td>
<td>$9,815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Note: Selected colleges shown as examples, but in-state and out-of-state tuition rates differ for all public colleges. Technical colleges have separate tuition rates for out-of-state U.S. citizens and most non-U.S. citizens. See Technical College System of Georgia Residency policy, [https://tcsg.edu/tcsgpolicy/files/6.2.2p.pdf](https://tcsg.edu/tcsgpolicy/files/6.2.2p.pdf)*
In-State Tuition Rate Policy Is Fair and Common-Sense

Extending in-state tuition rates to undocumented students who live in Georgia would increase access to higher education for thousands of Georgians. Nineteen other states, including our economic neighbors and competitors, like Florida, have long-since implemented in-state tuition policies for undocumented residents that ensure they are charged the same tuition rates as their citizen peers. Making college more affordable provides opportunities for people who grew up in Georgia, and helps the state meet its workforce goals. A more educated Georgia means more prosperous, healthier and safer communities.

Some Georgia campuses with shrinking populations use out-of-state tuition waivers to attract students from nearby states, called “Border Resident Waivers.” These waivers cover some students from five different states (Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee) at 16 different colleges. As a result, Georgia gives many out-of-state students the benefit of paying in-state tuition rates but denies Georgian-raised, undocumented students like Diana the same opportunity.

As to why she continues to pay out-of-state tuition rates, Diana explains, “I didn’t want to give up because of difficult circumstances.” She won scholarships to help pay her tuition at UNG, but it was difficult to continue paying the high price. She transferred to a private college, which offered more scholarship opportunities, but is currently on a break from school to find more scholarship support for her education.

As the United States Supreme Court decides the fate of the DACA program, state-level immigration policies supporting undocumented young people are even more vital. This decision could end key protections for current DACA recipients, but Georgia lawmakers and others who oversee the state’s higher education policies can help these potential students by knocking down barriers that stand in the way of accessing higher education. Due to the uncertain fate of the DACA program, the General Assembly should support legislation that expands access to in-state tuition rates to all undocumented Georgians, not just DACA recipients. This will ensure that individuals with or without DACA have the opportunity to access higher education.

Undocumented Georgians deserve an opportunity to continue their education and contributions within our communities. Diana works for a non-profit organization focused on increasing high school graduation rates and providing leadership, education and community service opportunities for Latinx youth. She says, “I want to make sure other students have the opportunity.... I want to be able to make the state better.”
**By the Numbers**

- Georgia is 1 of 3 states that bar undocumented students from enrolling in certain colleges
- Out-of-state tuition rates are 3 times higher than in-state rates
- Since 2001, 18 states have passed in-state tuition laws for undocumented students
- 16 colleges give out-of-state tuition waivers to students from other states
- Georgia ranks 31st among states in the share of adults with an associate degree or higher

**End Notes**


2 Migration Policy Institute. *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) data tools/DACA recipients and eligible population, by state (Georgia).* (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles); Note: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates of the DACA-eligible population as of 2019 include unauthorized immigrant youth who had been in the United States since 2007, were under the age of 16 at the time of arrival, and were under the age of 31 as of 2012. Three populations are estimated: (1) Immediately eligible youth and adults who met both age and educational criteria (i.e., they were ages 15 to 36 in 2019 and were either enrolled in school or had at least a high school diploma or equivalent); (2) youth and adults who were eligible but for education (i.e., those ages 15 to 36 in 2019 who met the other requirements but did not have a high school diploma or equivalent and were not enrolled in school); and (3) children eligible in the future who met the age-at-arrival requirements but were ages 9 to 14 in 2019, and will become eligible when they reach age 15 provided they stay in school. To capture the population eligible to apply in 2019 using 2016 data, MPI included youths aged 12-14 in 2016 (ages 15, 16, and 17 in 2019) in the estimates.

4 GBPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates on Education Attainment, Table S1501. Postsecondary attainment defined as percentage of population 25 years and over with associate degree or above. Retrieved using American FactFinder, [http://factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

