



ISSUE BRIEF

Undocumented Immigrant Students and Access to Higher Education: An Overview of Federal and State Policy

Spiros Protopsaltis
Policy Analyst

Summary

Thousands of undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools every year, but they are unable to pursue a postsecondary education because of cost barriers. The vast majority of these students have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives and were brought here as children by their parents. Due to their undocumented status, they are prohibited from receiving federal and state financial aid, and they are prevented from paying in-state tuition rates instead facing much higher and often prohibitive out-of-state tuition rates. Among those prevented from completing their education are valedictorians, honors students, award winners, homecoming queens, class presidents and other student leaders.

In order to provide undocumented students with an opportunity for education beyond high school, federal legislation has been introduced to allow states to offer these students in-state tuition. It would also enable them to become legal residents so they can fully contribute to our society and economy. As legislation is pending in Congress, eight states have passed legislation offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented students and three states allow access to financial aid.

Colorado faces a significant future challenge in enhancing the quality of its workforce and ultimately its economic competitiveness. It has a large concentration of undocumented immigrants and a poor record of providing access to higher education, especially for its rapidly growing Hispanic population. But meeting that challenge is in Colorado's best interest. Providing a postsecondary education to undocumented students creates taxpayers and decreases public expenditures. In January 2005, the 27-member bipartisan Colorado Commission for High School Improvement recommended that resident illegal immigrants be allowed to pay in-state college tuition rates.

Following the example of eight states, the Colorado Legislature is considering a proposal to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students who graduate from the state's high schools. This will make college more affordable. Studies clearly indicate that postsecondary education yields important social and economic benefits. By enabling undocumented students to complete their education beyond high school, Colorado will be making an investment in its future. Colorado will also address the inequity experienced by students who have lived here for many years and who entered the country illegally, through no fault of their own.

This issue brief discusses the problem of postsecondary access for undocumented students, provides an overview of federal and state legislative developments in this policy area, and summarizes legislation currently before the Colorado General Assembly.

1) Issue: Undocumented students and access to higher education

- *A rapidly growing share of the U.S. student population consists of undocumented students, many of whom came to this country with their parents as children and had no part in their parents' decision to enter the U.S. illegally.*

The Urban Institute estimates that more than 14 million immigrants entered the country in the 1990s and projects that another 14 million will enter between 2000 and 2010. Foreign-born residents now represent more than 13 percent of the U.S. population. One out of five children has immigrant parents and one out of nine U.S. residents is an immigrant. More than 25 percent of immigrants are undocumented. As of March 2005, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates the current number of undocumented immigrants in the United States at 11 million, of which 6 million are from Mexico.

Foreign-born students represent a significant and growing share of the student population in America. The proportion of foreign-born students in grades 6-12 increased from 1.7 to 6.4 percent from 1970 to 2000. There are 10.5 million children of immigrants in grades K-12, representing one out of five schoolchildren. Overall, there are 1.7 million undocumented immigrants under 18 years of age.

According to Urban Institute estimates, in 2002, over 1.3 million undocumented students had lived in the U.S. for five or more years and were enrolled in grades K-12. About 80,000 of these students turn 18 each year, but approximately one-sixth to one-fifth fail to complete high school, leaving 65,000 undocumented immigrants who have lived in the U.S. five years or longer and who graduate from high school each year. Only 13,000 enroll in college.

- *Every year, an estimated 65,000 undocumented high school graduates face significant barriers to postsecondary education because they are denied access to in-state tuition rates and financial aid.*

Although an estimated 65,000 undocumented high school graduates have grown up in the U.S., they are denied access to in-state tuition available to their U.S.-born peers. Because of their undocumented status, these students also do not qualify for federal and state financial aid. Federal law forbids illegal immigrant students from receiving federal loans and grants, including work-study jobs. In Colorado, undocumented students also face out-of-state tuition rates and are prohibited from receiving state financial aid.

Only one out of 20 undocumented high-school seniors attends college. Even those who make it through college cannot work here legally. Among those prevented from working legally or completing their education are valedictorians, honors students, award winners, homecoming queens, class presidents, and other student leaders.

- *Undocumented students cannot work legally and many cannot become legal residents.*

Most undocumented students are caught in a Catch-22 situation: as illegal immigrants, they cannot work legally, and they cannot complete their education because they cannot afford to go to college. These students do not have access to the two traditional means of gaining legal status: a sponsoring family member or an employer. Due to the undocumented status of their parents and other family members, they have no avenues for family-based visa sponsorship. Due to their age and lack of work experience, few employers would or could sponsor them for a work visa.

- *Providing a postsecondary education to undocumented students creates taxpayers and decreases public expenditures.*

A 1999 RAND study showed that an average 30-year-old Mexican immigrant woman who has graduated from college will pay \$5,300 more in taxes and cost \$3,900 less for criminal justice and welfare each year

than if she had dropped out of high school – more than \$9,000 in financial contribution each year. A 1995 RAND study showed that a 3 percent increase in the college completion rate of 18-year-old Latinos would grow Social Security and Medicare contributions by \$600 million.

2) Undocumented students in Colorado

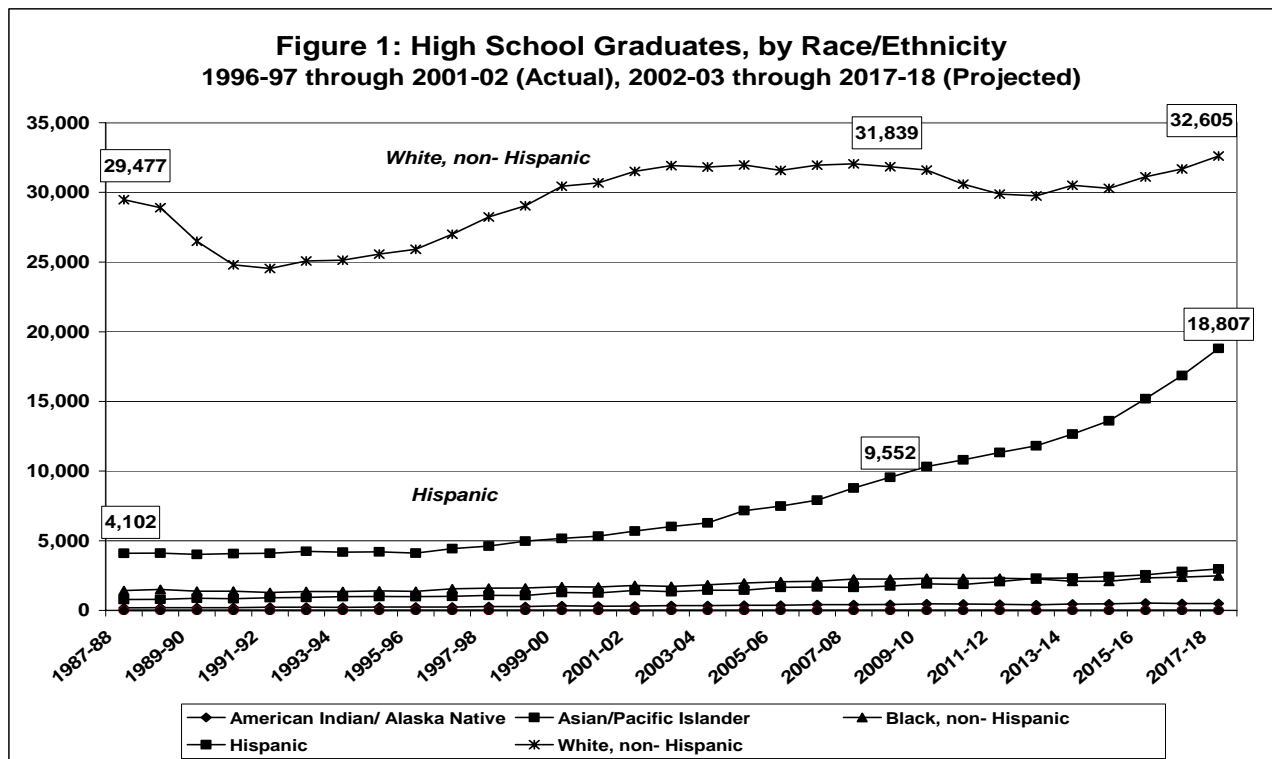
- *Colorado has experienced an enormous growth of its immigrant population and has among the highest concentrations of undocumented immigrants, as well as immigrants with limited English proficiency.*

During the 1990s, Colorado was among the top 10 states that experienced the largest growth of immigrant populations, with rates ranging from 135 to 274 percent. In addition, Colorado was among the 15 states where the number of residents with limited English proficiency more than doubled.

The Urban Institute estimates that undocumented immigrants represent 40 to 49 percent of the total foreign-born population in Colorado. Between 200,000 and 250,000 undocumented immigrants lived in Colorado during 2002-04, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service reported in January 2003 that almost 70 percent of the total illegal-alien population was Mexican and that about two-thirds of all undocumented aliens who arrived in the late 1990s were from Mexico. As a result, the denial of in-state tuition rates disproportionately impacts the state’s Hispanic population.

- *The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education projects that the Hispanic share of Colorado’s school population will increase dramatically within the next decade.*

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), a regional organization of 15 states, projects that by 2018, almost 19,000 Colorado high school graduates, representing 31 percent of total high school graduates, will be Hispanic, up from 13 percent in 2002, as shown in Figure 1 below.



- *Hispanic students experience much lower educational attainment and poor outcomes, including very low postsecondary education rates.*

Hispanics have the lowest high school graduation rate in Colorado among the largest racial/ethnic groups. A Hispanic high school student is more likely to drop out than to graduate. Colorado has the fifth worst high school graduation rate for Hispanic students among 23 states with available data.

Hispanic young adults age 18-24 have the lowest college enrollment rates among the largest racial/ethnic groups in Colorado. In 2000, only 9 percent of Hispanic male young adults were enrolled in a public higher education institution. In 2002, Colorado ranked 34th in the nation in the college enrollment rate of Hispanic young adults. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) reports that 34 percent of all Colorado high school students who matriculate into higher education are continuously enrolled four years later, but only 23 percent of Colorado Hispanic high school students who matriculate into higher education are continuously enrolled four years later.

- *Out-of-state tuition rates that undocumented students face in Colorado are much higher than the in-state tuition rates charged to their peers.*

As shown in Table 1, the much higher out-of-state tuition rates facing undocumented students are a significant barrier that limits postsecondary access. Nonresident student tuition rates in Colorado range from 182 to 437 percent higher than resident student tuition rates.

In January 2005, the 27-member bipartisan Colorado Commission for High School Improvement recommended that resident illegal immigrants be allowed to pay in-state college tuition rates. This was one of 25 recommendations included in the commission’s first report. The diverse commission overwhelmingly recommended charging in-state tuition to illegal immigrants who are residents of the state and allowing them to receive state financial aid for college. Alex Cranberg, a Republican commission member, businessman and scholarship foundation founder, said: “As a businessman, I see undocumented workers as a very important part of our economy. Until we’re ready to repeal the laws of supply and demand, we’re foolish from a purely selfish point of view not to have well-trained, well-educated workers ... What’s more, they’re taxpayers, even if they’re undocumented.”

TABLE 1: Resident and nonresident tuition rates at Colorado’s public four-year and two-year institutions of postsecondary education

Institution	Resident Tuition	Nonresident Tuition	Tuition Differential	Percent Difference
Public Four-Year Institutions				
Colorado School of Mines	\$7,082	\$19,986	\$12,904	182%
University of Colorado-Boulder	\$4,245	\$21,453	\$17,208	405%
University of Colorado-Denver	\$3,888	\$15,920	\$12,032	309%
University of Colorado -Colorado Springs	\$4,058	\$16,116	\$12,058	297%
University of Northern Colorado	\$3,370	\$12,260	\$8,890	264%
Colorado State University	\$3,790	\$14,377	\$10,587	279%
Colorado State University – Pueblo	\$3,216	\$14,235	\$11,019	343%
Metropolitan State College of Denver	\$2,780	\$10,010	\$7,230	260%
Adams State College	\$2,603	\$8,295	\$5,692	219%
Fort Lewis College	\$3,065	\$12,260	\$9,195	300%
Mesa State College	\$2,724	\$9,010	\$6,286	231%
Western State College	\$2,761	\$10,747	\$7,986	289%

Institution	Resident Tuition	Nonresident Tuition	Tuition Differential	Percent Difference
Public Two-Year Institutions				
Aims Community College	\$1,503	\$7,503	\$6,000	399%
Arapahoe Community College	\$1,774	\$8,454	\$6,680	377%
Colorado Mountain College	\$1,230	\$6,600	\$5,370	437%
Colorado Northwestern Community College	\$1,784	\$6,808	\$5,024	282%
Community College of Aurora	\$1,730	\$8,410	\$6,680	386%
Community College of Denver	\$2,210	\$8,891	\$6,681	302%
Front Range Community College	\$1,872	\$8,553	\$6,681	357%
Lamar Community College	\$1,961	\$6,985	\$5,024	256%
Morgan Community College	\$1,762	\$8,442	\$6,680	379%
Northeastern Junior College	\$2,175	\$7,271	\$5,096	234%
Otero Junior College	\$1,946	\$7,042	\$5,096	262%
Pikes Peak Community College	\$1,755	\$8,435	\$6,680	381%
Pueblo Community College	\$1,826	\$8,506	\$6,680	366%
Red Rocks Community College	\$1,849	\$8,530	\$6,681	361%
Trinidad State Junior College	\$2,154	\$7,250	\$5,096	237%

Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

3) Federal legislation: The DREAM Act and the Student Adjustment Act

- *Since 2001, Congress has been considering bipartisan legislation that would provide an opportunity for undocumented students with “good moral character” who have lived in the U.S. for more than five years and are under the age of 21 to obtain legal status and allow states to offer them in-state tuition rates.*

In August 2001, Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-UT, and Richard Durbin, D-IL, introduced S.1291, the “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.” The DREAM Act would provide an opportunity for young people who have been in the U.S. for five years or more and are at least 12 years old on the date of enactment to obtain legal status. To qualify for legal status, students also would have to earn a high school degree and be under 21 years old on the date they apply to change their status. It would also permit states to determine residency for in-state tuition rates.

In July 2003, Sens. Hatch and Durbin reintroduced another version of the legislation, the DREAM Act of 2003, S. 1545. The DREAM Act was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee with strong bipartisan support on a 16-3 vote in October 2003. Since then, the bill has not moved to the Senate floor for a vote. The DREAM Act attracted 48 co-sponsors of both parties and it was the only immigration reform proposal reported to the Senate floor that year.

Meanwhile, in April 2003, Reps. Chris Cannon, R-UT, Howard Berman, D-CA, and Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-CA, introduced the House version of the DREAM Act, titled the Student Adjustment Act (H.R. 1684), which would legalize young people who have “good moral character,” have lived in the U.S. at least five years, are in school in 7th grade or above, and are under 21 years old. It would also permit states to determine residency for in-state tuition purposes. The Student Adjustment Act was co-sponsored by 152 Republicans and Democrats, representing more than one-third of the House of Representatives.

Both bills would facilitate state efforts to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students and allow U.S.-raised immigrant youth the chance to adjust their status and put them on a path to citizenship. Both are expected to be re-introduced in the spring of 2005.

- ***The DREAM Act repeals a section of federal immigration law, allowing states to grant postsecondary education benefits, including in-state tuition, to undocumented students.***

The DREAM Act amends the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 by removing Section 505, which discourages states from providing in-state tuition to undocumented students and creates the opportunity for these students to achieve permanent resident status. Section 505, still in effect today, requires any state providing in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants to offer the same tuition rate to out-of-state residents. The DREAM Act restores a state's right to establish its own criteria and to determine whether these students qualify as residents for purposes of in-state tuition or other state education benefits. It essentially returns to the states the prerogative of granting in-state tuition to illegal immigrants.

- ***The DREAM Act would allow young undocumented students who have been long-time residents to enter into a six-year conditional permanent resident status if they have either: 1) graduated from high school, 2) been accepted to a college or university or 3) obtained a GED.***

The DREAM Act would protect from deportation students who are at least 12 years old and meet all qualifications except high school graduation. Students could eventually apply for naturalization, if they met specific qualifications. It would permit qualified students to become temporary legal residents, putting them on the path to permanent legal status. Students who arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16 and at least five years before the date of enactment would be eligible to become legal residents of the U.S. Once a student is accepted to a college or university, graduates from high school or obtains a GED, he or she could qualify for conditional permanent resident status. This status would last for a six-year period, which would later count towards the residence requirements for naturalization.

- ***During the six-year conditional permanent resident status, undocumented students would have to either complete two years of college or serve honorably for two years in the military. At the end of this period, students would be granted permanent resident status.***

Within six years of conditional status, DREAM students would be required to complete either two years of college or serve two years in the military before becoming eligible for legal permanent resident status. These students would be able to work, drive and do most things other Americans do, with some limitations. For example, students would not be able to travel abroad for lengthy periods. In addition, as amended by the Senate Judiciary Committee, students would be required to register with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, a government database.

At the end of the conditional period, lawful permanent resident status would be granted if the student graduated from a two-year college or certain vocational colleges, studied for at least two years toward a bachelor's degree, or served honorably in the U.S. armed forces for at least two years. In addition, the student must maintain a criminal-free record and remain off public assistance. The six-year time period for meeting these requirements could be extended upon a showing of good cause, and the Department of Homeland Security would have the authority to waive the requirements altogether if compelling reasons, such as disability, prevented their completion.

According to proponents, the DREAM Act entails a one-time only fix that would not encourage illegal immigration, since it clearly states that eligible students must be in the country for at least five years at the time of enactment.

- ***The DREAM Act enjoys the support of numerous organizations and of public opinion.***

The National Immigration Law Center, "I Have a Dream" Foundation, American Federation of Teachers, Hispanic Association of College and Universities, National Education Association, National PTA, National

Immigration Forum, and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees are among the national organizations supporting the DREAM Act.

Polls have shown two-to-one support for the DREAM Act among the general public, and passionate and overwhelming support from Latino and Asian voters, according to the Center for Community Change. Sen. Durbin has cited a poll of likely voters that showed 59 percent support the bill and 35 percent oppose it. A Zogby International poll released by the National Council of La Raza in June 2004 showed that 86 percent of Latino voters support legislation along the lines of the DREAM Act.

4) Legislation in other states

- *Several states have enacted legislation along the lines of the DREAM Act that grants in-state tuition to illegal immigrants.*

In June 2001, the Texas Legislature passed a law extending in-state tuition benefits to illegal immigrants who had attended a Texas high school for at least three years, provided they signed an affidavit pledging to seek permanent residency. Now any student who attends school in Texas for three years or more and graduates or gets a GED in Texas is eligible for admission and resident tuition at Texas public colleges and universities. Since 2001, over 6,500 undocumented students have attended colleges – with more than 75 percent attending two-year colleges.

Texas was followed by seven other states that passed similar laws, including California, and Colorado neighbors Utah, Oklahoma, and Kansas, the latest state to pass such legislation. In addition to Congress, it has been the topic of debate in 21 other state legislatures. Of the eight states with in-state tuition laws on their books, only Texas and Oklahoma offer state financial aid to illegal immigrants and Utah allows the students to qualify for only one of its financial aid programs. Table 2 presents a summary of state provisions.

TABLE 2: States offering in-state tuition to undocumented students

State	Requirements	State financial aid	Number of students	Annual student tuition savings
California	Must attend a California high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	No	N/A	\$16,956 at the University of California; \$10,114 at the California State University
Illinois	Must attend an Illinois high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	No	N/A	\$12,920
Kansas	Must attend a Kansas high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	No	30	\$6,734
New York	Must attend a New York high school for 2 years and enroll at a state college or university within 5 years of graduating or earning a GED	No	2,000 at City University of New York; the State University of New York does not track	\$6,800 at CUNY; \$5,950 at SUNY

State	Requirements	State Financial Aid	Number of Students	Annual Student Tuition Savings
Oklahoma	Must attend an Oklahoma high school for 2 years and graduate or earn a GED	Yes	N/A	\$7,404
Texas	Must attend a Texas high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	Yes	2,114	\$8,069
Utah	Must attend a Utah high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	No, except for one \$170,000 need-based scholarship program	N/A	\$5,364
Washington	Must attend a Washington high school for 3 years and graduate or earn a GED	No	123	\$9,351

Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*

5) Colorado legislation

- *For the third consecutive year, Colorado is considering legislation that would grant in-state tuition to undocumented students who have graduated from a Colorado high school and have resided in the state for at least three years.*

For the third consecutive year, State Rep. Val Vigil, D-Adams, introduced a bill in the 2005 session of the Colorado General Assembly to grant in-state tuition to undocumented students. Sponsored in the State Senate by Sen. Abel Tapia, D-Pueblo, House Bill 05-1124 provides that students, regardless of immigration status, shall receive in-state tuition if they:

- Graduate or receive a GED from a public or private high school in Colorado.
- Attended a Colorado public or private high school for at least three years immediately preceding the date the student graduates or receives a GED.
- Provide the institution an affidavit stating that the student has or will file an application to become a permanent resident at the earliest opportunity the student is eligible to do so.

In addition, HB 05-1124 repeals existing statutory rules for establishing domicile (the intent to remain in Colorado) for purposes of qualifying for in-state tuition status. It authorizes the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) to establish guidelines for institutions regarding domicile and tuition classification. According to the Colorado Legislative Council, “Currently, CCHE has the authority to establish tuition classification policies and its general policies allow immigrant aliens, those who have a Resident Alien Card, to petition for resident tuition status. Non-immigrant aliens, those on a visa, may petition for resident status depending upon their visa category. Statutes currently grant resident tuition status to Canadian military personnel, Olympic athletes, and 25 students deserving of support from China or Russia enrolled in the graduate school of public affairs.” Undocumented immigrants are not addressed and are classified for tuition purposes by each institution on a case by case basis.

Qualified immigrants under the bill would not receive preferential treatment because of their status as undocumented aliens. Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 prohibits states from conferring any postsecondary education benefits to aliens who are not legally present in the United States, unless a citizen is eligible for the same benefit. According to the Colorado

Hispanic Bar Association, HB 05-1125 is consistent with this federal mandate because it holds undocumented aliens to a higher standard for establishing residency. Rather than the current one-year state domicile requirement for citizen students, the bill requires undocumented students to have attended high school within the state for three years immediately preceding high school graduation.

For more information contact Spiros Protopsaltis, Policy Analyst at spiros@thebell.org

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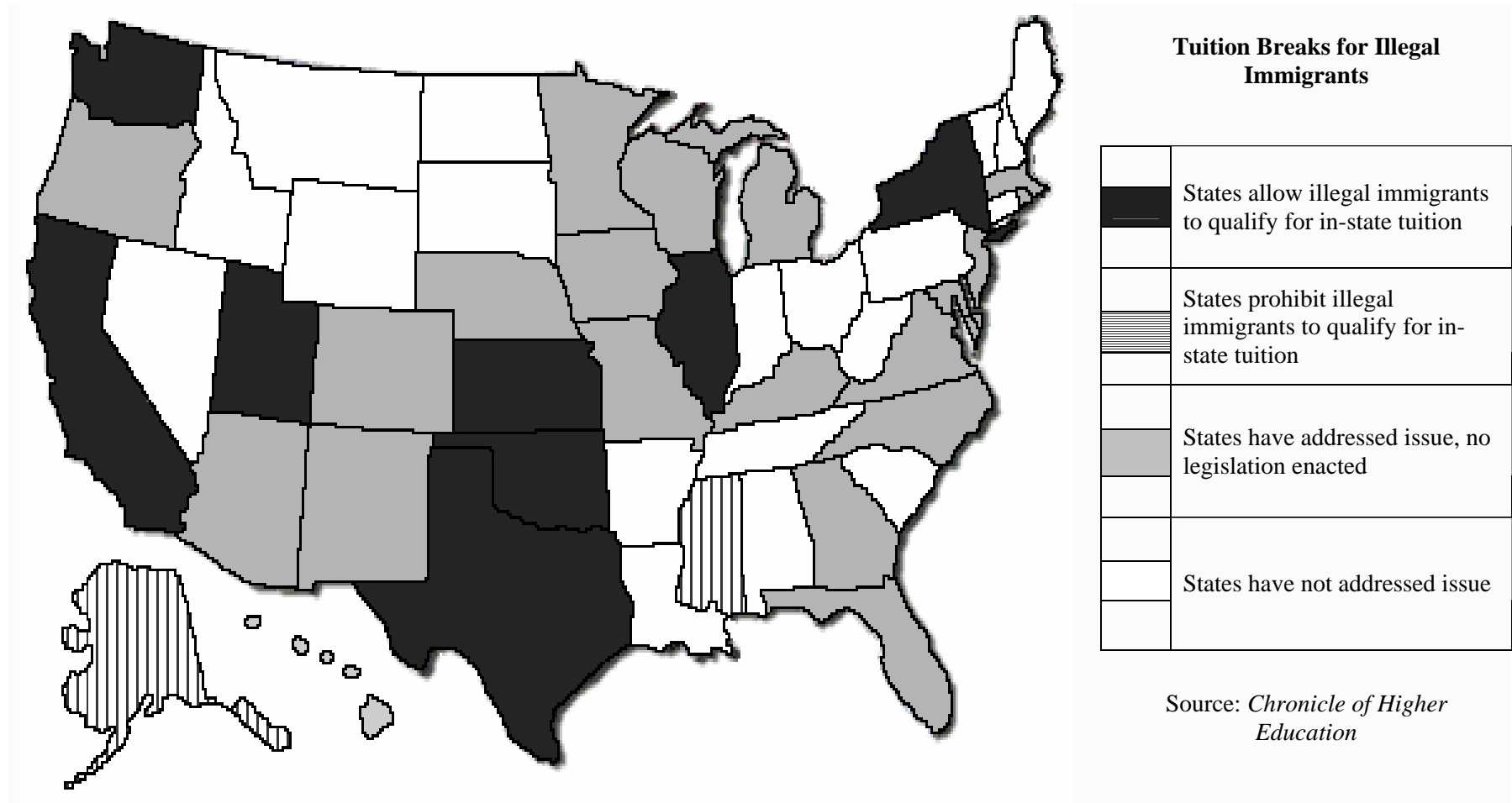
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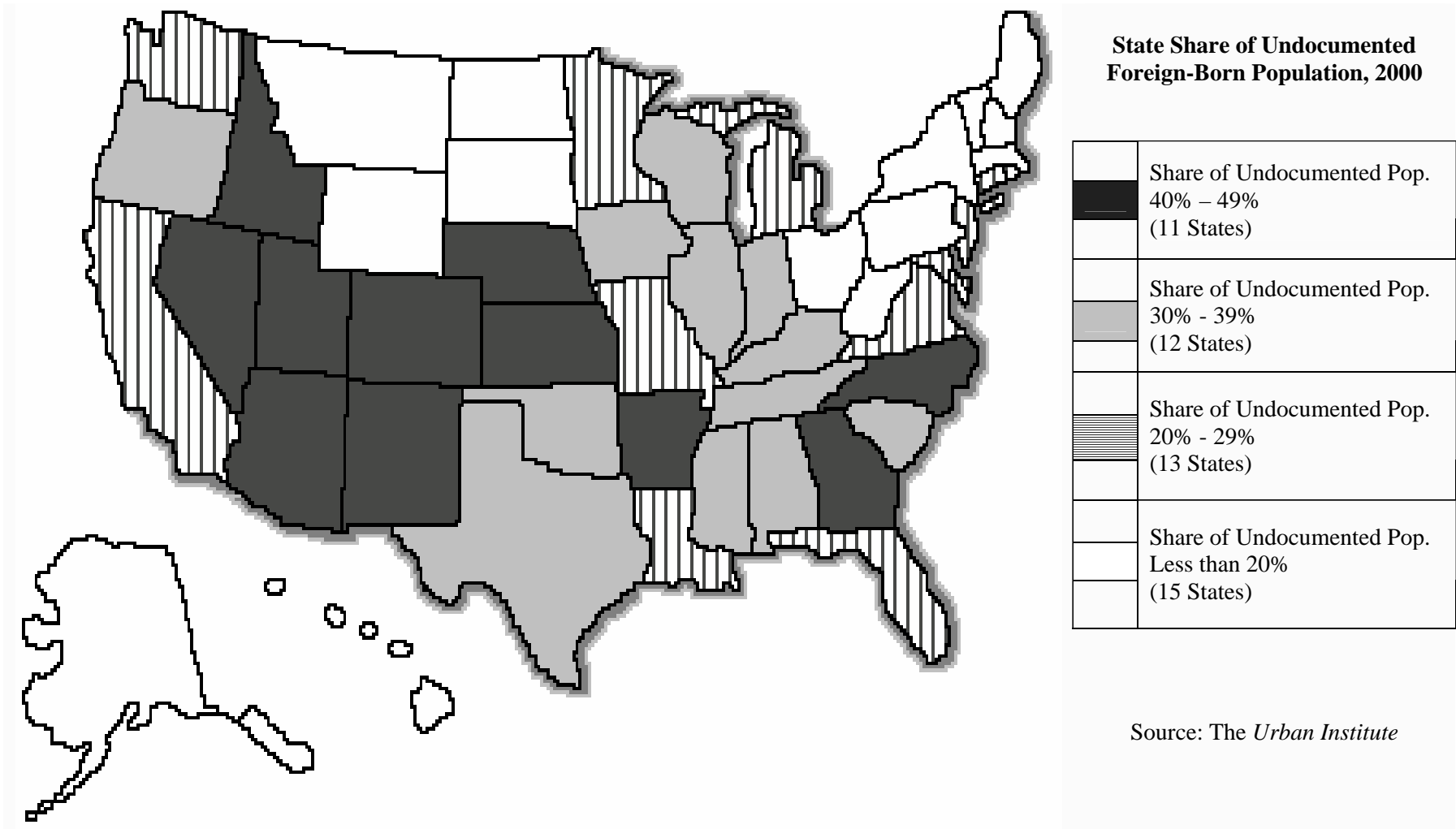
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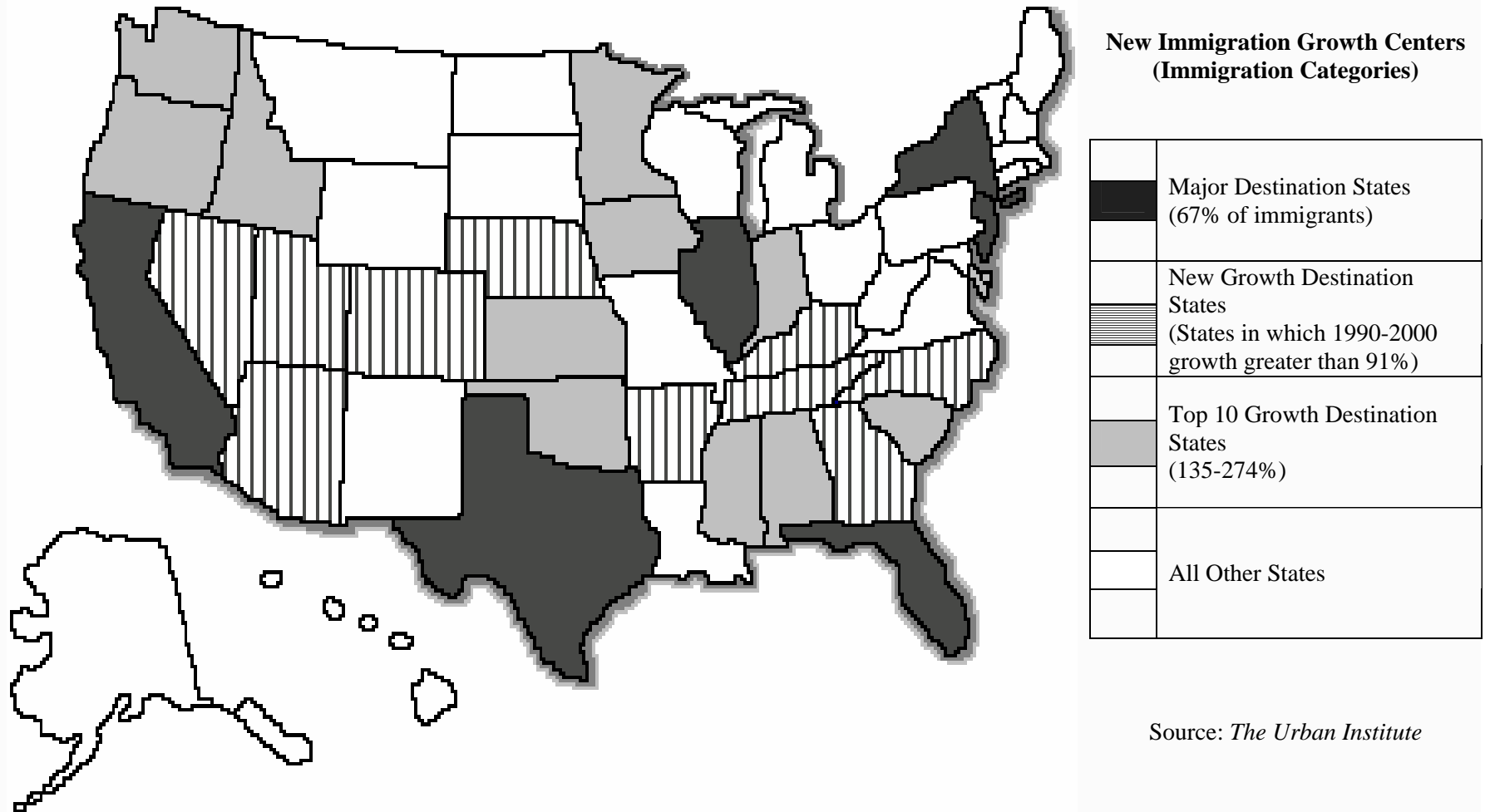
MAP 1: IN-STATE TUITION FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN THE STATES



MAP 2: SHARE OF UNDOCUMENTED OF FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION, BY STATE (2000)



MAP 3: IMMIGRATION GROWTH IN THE STATES (1990-2000)



MAP 4: GROWTH OF LIMITED ENGLISH POPULATION IN THE STATES (1990-2000)

