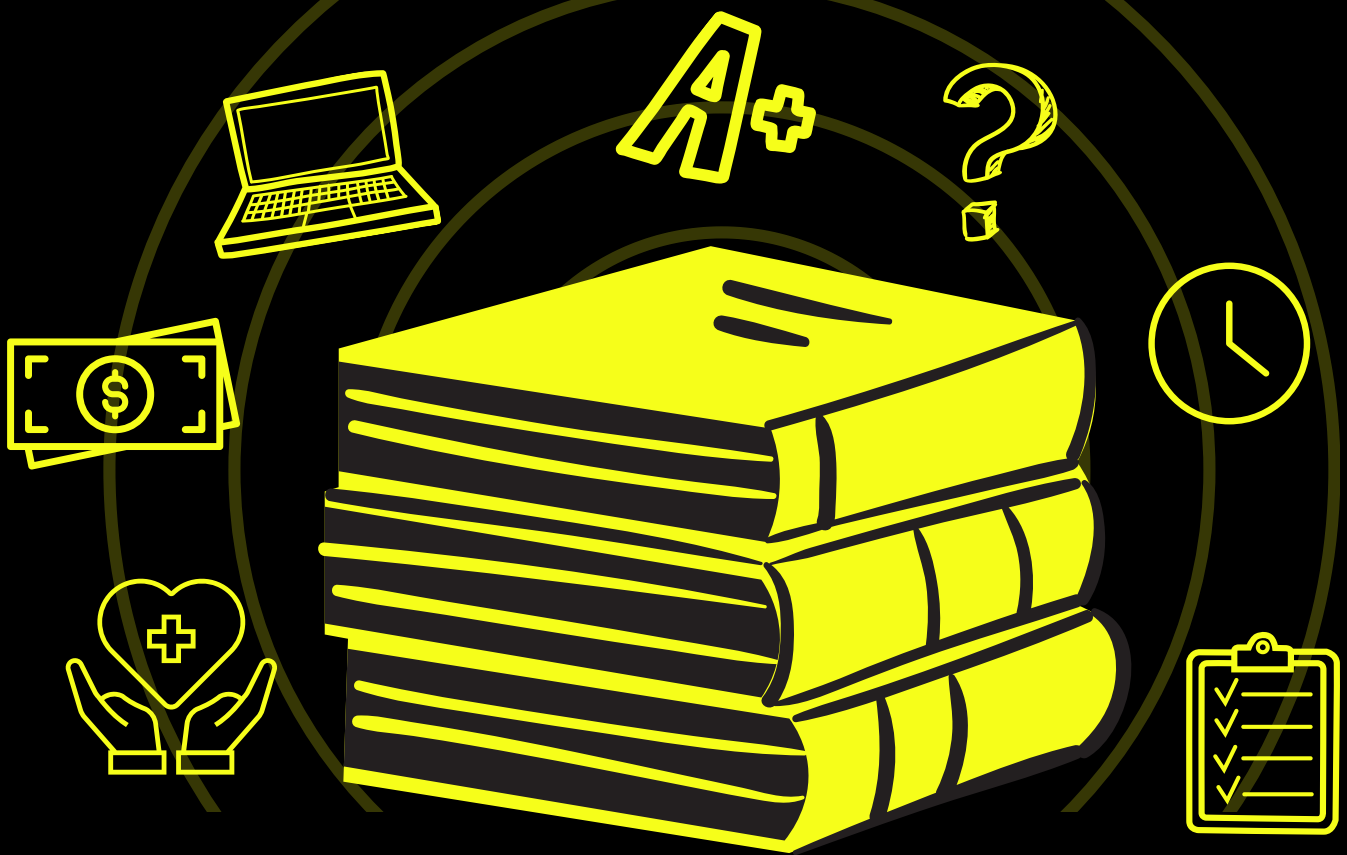


COLLEGE STUDENT RESOURCE HANDBOOK



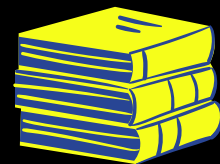
**Do you know what you need for
your first year in college?**



Est. 2007



Student Resource Handbook: Table of Contents



Introduction.....pg 1



Know the Difference.....pg 1



Well-known, Local, Affordable Institutions....pg 2



The Admissions Process.....pg 3



Financial Aid.....pg 4



Texas Dream Act.....pg 5



Support Systems & Campus Resources.....pg 6



Legal Rights & Safety.....pg 9



Resource List & Directory.....pg 10



Introduction



Congratulations on taking a big step and deciding to go to college! There are many resources at your fingertips, waiting just for you.

In this guide, we will break down higher education by walking you through:

- The Admissions Process
- Financial Aid
- Support Systems and Campus Resources
- Legal Rights and Safety
- Resource List and Directory
- Scholarships to Apply For

But first, know that colleges are not all the same!



Know The Difference!



2-Year College: **VS** 4-Year College:

These schools offer certificate programs that can be completed in under two years, as well as two-year associate degrees.

- Known as a “Community College.”
- Are a much more affordable option because of their **low tuition costs**.
- Also includes vocation and technical colleges
- These offer specialized training such as dental, welding, nursing, HVAC, cybersecurity, medical-records technology and more!

Also known as “undergraduate colleges,” these schools offer bachelor's degree programs.

- They tend to be larger schools, offering both undergraduate and graduate-level degrees.
- Usually more expensive because they offer a greater variety of degrees, organizations, and an array of graduate programs.
- They tend to have more student activity on campus, athletics, and more.





Know The Difference!



Public Institutions:

A public institution is funded mainly by local and state governments. They tend to offer lower tuition rates than private colleges.

VS

Private Institutions:

A private institution relies on tuition, fees, and non-government funding sources. Financial aid usually comes from very wealthy donors.



Some well-known, local and affordable institutions include:



Public Universities in Houston	Community Colleges in Houston
University of Houston	Houston Community College (multiple locations)
University of Houston-Downtown	Lone Star College System (multiple locations)
University of Houston-Clear Lake	San Jacinto College (multiple locations)
Texas Southern University	Other Nearby options: Lee College, Brazosport College, Blinn College, Alvin Community College, Wharton County Junior College

Reminder: It's okay to be uncertain about what college you're going to. This information is to help you feel confident in your decision. Don't lose hope; you can do this!



The Admissions Process

The admissions process can be daunting. However, with the right approach and information, you'll get through it in no time.



What Can I Use to Apply to Schools?



ApplyTexas: **VS** CommonApp:

ApplyTexas is a State-run application portal for most Texas schools. You can complete your applications all in one place. This is best for public, in state schools.

Common App is a national platform used by over 1,000 schools. This is used mostly by private and out-of-state schools.



What Materials Will I Need to Apply?



✓ **Most schools require the following :**

- ☐ Official high school transcript
- ☐ Standardized test scores (many schools are now test-optional)
- ☐ Essays (answering prompts on the application platform)
- ☐ Resume (optional, but recommended)
- ☐ Letter of recommendation (less common now)
- ☐ Application fee or application fee waiver
- ☐ Financial aid application using FAFSA or TAFSA (more on this next)

DACA/Undocumented students should apply like any other student.





There are plenty of funds out there to assist you in paying for your education. Your options include:

Scholarships	Government Assistance	Loans	Work-Study
Free money that you do not have to pay back! These can come from all kinds of places.	Money from the government for students who cannot pay the full cost of college.	Loans are borrowed money that must be paid back, usually with interest. These can either be federal or private loans.	A program that lets you earn money through a part-time job (often on campus) to help pay for college expenses.

Scholarships:

Awarded based on things like grades, talents, financial need, or your background.

- Merit-based: For good grades, test scores, or achievements.
- Need-based: For students with financial need.
- Athletic or Talent-based: For sports, art, music, etc.
- Identity-based: For students from specific backgrounds or communities.
- College-specific or Private: Offered by colleges or outside organizations.

Government Assistance:

U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents

- Eligible for FAFSA
- Qualify for in-state tuition if they meet residency requirements

DACA Recipients

- Eligible for TASFA and private scholarships
- The Dream Act was struck down, ending undocumented students right to in-state tuition
- **DACA students, however, remain eligible for in-state benefits under federal recognition.**

Loans:

- Federal Student Loans: Offered by the U.S. government. They usually have lower interest rates and more flexible repayment options.
- Private Loans: Offered by banks or other lenders. They often require a co-signer and can be more expensive.

Work Study:

- Students who demonstrate financial need and apply through the FAFSA qualify for work-study.
- You get a regular paycheck for the hours you work. The money is yours to spend on tuition, books, or personal expenses.





Live From the News Room: HB 1403 - “The Dream Act”

Spring 2025: Texas Attorney General, Ken Paxton, signed a court order claiming that the Dream Act was invalid. The Dream act opened doors and made education accessible because it allowed in-state tuition to students the state said were “Not Lawfully Present.” Starting in the Fall of 2025, Texas colleges and universities have been ordered to amend their in-state tuition policies.

The Dream Act under attack puts students “Not Lawfully Present” - such as undocumented students - in a tough position. Students deemed to be illegally present in the US will now have to pay international tuition and fees to attend university.

The wording of this order is extremely convoluted and open to interpretation among institutions. However, if you are not defined by the state as unlawfully present, then you are lawfully present, and still qualify for in-state tuition.

Please see the Texas Dream Act website for more details on who is defined as “Unlawfully Present” in the state of Texas.

REMINDER:

ANY STUDENT CAN GO TO
COLLEGE, REGARDLESS
OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.

*This court order only addresses the tuition rate
that some immigrant students must pay.*



More on This Topic / Resources



Texas Immigration Law Council - The Texas Dream Act: What Students Needs to Know

- A guide on what the change in the Dream Act means for students and who considered “lawfully present.”

Texas Allies and Advocates - Toolkit for Undocumented Students in Higher Education

- A guide with steps to follow and resources for students. (Please ask a FIEL member for information on how to access this document)

Canneta Foundation - Group Counseling Sessions

- Mental health resource for those who need help coping during this difficult time. Participation is completely anonymous!



Support Systems and Campus Resources



Student Organizations

Student organizations are a wonderful resource that could help you get comfortable and socializing in college. Colleges and universities have extensive lists of organizations that you can join. Additionally, the local colleges and universities have high first-generation populations, and have resources dedicated to serving them.

Student organizations are spearheaded by other students just like you. Aside from their studies and their personal lives, they participate to involve themselves in the community, sharpen their professional skills, and make friends!

Student-Led organizations at the University of Houston-Downtown include:

- Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers
- ChangeMakers
- Latinas Achieve
- UHD Association of Latino Professionals For America

Student-Led organizations at the University of Houston include:

- Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA)
- Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers
- Hispanic Business Student Association
- Hispanic Pharmacy Student Association

With a student body that is 43% first-generation, the University of Houston provides guidance through their own initiatives tailored to first generation students. Some examples include:

Center for Student Empowerment (CSE)

From the CSE Website: “The Center for Student Empowerment (CSE) provides opportunities for the university's vast student population by preventing minor obstacles from becoming major setbacks to degree achievement. The services that CSE offers have been strategically chosen to develop CSE students into well-trained career professionals.”

First Generation Coogs

From the First Generation Coogs Website: “Our First-Gen initiatives are to increase retention and graduation rates, normalize experiences with first gen peers, connect students with positive adult role models and mentors, partner students with academic, social, and financial supports, and create networking opportunities with community organizations.”



***You are not
alone!***





Top 5 Freshman “Must Knows”



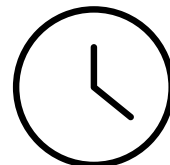
How does the college credit-hour system work?

The college credit hour system assigns the same amount of credits as hours you're in class in a week. Generally each class meets twice a week, (for 1.5 hours), totaling 3 hours of class time. This would mean 3 hours of credit. To be a full time student (and to be eligible for most scholarships/grants), you must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours, which usually turns out to be around four 3-hour classes.



How should I schedule my classes?

Colleges have online portals where you can enroll in classes. To know which classes are best for you, you should always visit an academic advisor. They will map out which classes you must take for your major or career focus. If you work while in college, you must arrange your classes around your work schedule. An academic advisor can help you with this too.



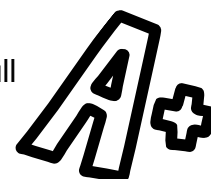
How do I keep track of my assignments?

Start with this syllabus, always. It should be made available to you by your professor. The syllabus outlines the class structure, meeting times, assignment deadlines, and exam dates. It is the best practice to put all of your deadlines into a calendar or planner. Use this planner for academic, professional, and leisure activities. Ensure that you organize time in your schedule to study long before any exam. Online calendars are easy to use and you can share deadlines and reminders with peers.



How do I make sure I understand the class and pass?

Take notes of lectures presented by the professor, (either digitally or on paper). Take full advantage of the office hours that your professor provides. Each professor makes themselves available for several hours to answer questions or concerns.



What ways can I take care of my mental health?

College can be mentally draining. Luckily, scheduling appointments with mental health professionals is easy! Most colleges have an accessible network of professionals that can help you calmly and confidently achieve your goals. Don't be afraid to contact a mental health professional. They are equipped to help you overcome emotional difficulties and from balancing school with your obligations.

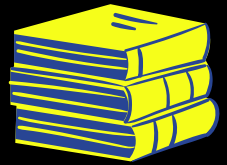


If you are in distressed and are having suicidal thoughts, know that *you are loved*. Please contact a trusted individual immediately and speak to the suicide prevention hotline. The number below will connect you with an individual willing to listen.



Houston Crisis Intervention
832-416-1177
Spanish Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-888-628-9454





I Know My Rights!

Legal Rights and Safety Tips for When You're on Campus



ICE Officers are not allowed to enter into private university spaces.

- Public spaces are those that are open to the general public
 - ICE is allowed in these areas like everyone else
- Nonpublic spaces are those that are restricted to the general public
 - This includes dormitories, private offices, and any facilities that require a badge/ID
 - ICE cannot enter into these spaces, and faculty is not required to grant them access!

ICE officers are required to have a criminal arrest warrant or search warrant to lawfully enter nonpublic areas without consent

- Ice officers have civil authority and carry administrative warrants. These are NOT signed by a judge!
- Administrative warrants do not authorize ICE to enter nonpublic areas without consent of the institution.

Campus officers cannot inquire about immigration status, they cannot report you, and they cannot detain you for purposes of immigration enforcement.

If you are approached by ICE on campus:

- Remain calm
- Do not run
- Do not resist
- Do not mention your legal status or mention if you have a lawyer
- Demand to speak to the school's legal counsel
- Contact FIEL Houston for support 713-364-3435
- Exercise your fifth amendment right to remain silent! Anything you say can and will be held against you.

I am giving you this card because I do not wish to speak or have any further contact with you. I choose to exercise my constitutional rights to remain silent and refuse to answer your questions. If you arrest me, I will continue to exercise my right to remain silent and refuse to answer your questions. I want to speak to an attorney before I answer any questions.



I want to call this organization:

713-364-3435



I do not wish to speak with you, answer your questions or sign or hand you any documents based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution.

I do not give you permission to enter my home base on my 4th amendment rights under the United States Constitution unless you have a warrant to enter, signed by a judge or magistrate with my name on it that you slide under the door.

I do not give you permission to search for any of my belongings based on my 4th Amendment rights

I choose to exercise my constitutional rights.





Applying To Schools:

- ApplyTexas application guide
 - <https://www.applytexas.org/application-guide/>
- CommonApp application guide
 - <https://www.commonapp.org/apply>
- Understanding the Types of Schools
 - <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/find-your-fit/types-of-colleges/types-of-colleges-the-basics>
- List of Texas Colleges and Universities
 - <https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/education/msp/schools/list/>

Financial Aid:

- Filling Out the FAFSA Form
 - <https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out>
- TASFA Homepage
 - <https://www.highered.texas.gov/students-families/tasfa/>
- Scholarship Websites:
 - United We Dream Scholarships
 - The Dream US Scholarships
 - Immigrants Rising List of Scholarships

DACA / Immigrant Student Resources:

- For more information on the Texas Dream Act, please visit:
 - Texas Dream Act Resource Guide
- Checklist for Proving Lawful Presence for In-State Tuition Eligibility
 - https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/fed278a5-ea9e-47d7-b156-8ab2e276b758_Texas-Dream-Act---Student-Checklist.pdf
- FIEL Houston's Know Your Rights page
 - <https://fielhouston.org/knowyourrights/>
- Immigrant Legal Protection Resource Guide
 - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XkxG2ReN2j9Nh9CU4xK9OUtVaLS6zPzqAXLlcopsIxo/edit?tab=t.0>
- Information from the National Immigration Law Center
 - <https://www.nilc.org/resources/know-your-rights-immigrant-students-and-schools/>

Mental Health Resources:

- United We Stand's Mental Health Resources for Undocumented People
 - <https://immigrantsrising.org/resource/mental-health-resources-for-undocumented-people/>



FIEL's Higher Education Department was our first program when we started as a non-profit organization in 2007. Since then we have helped thousands of students every year in applying for college and financial aid. We help ANYONE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS.

About Our Director:

Abraham Josue Espinosa Flores is a proud immigrant from the city of Mexico. He was brought to the United States at the age of 1 and has grown up to become a proud Houstonian and Texan. He was undocumented up until the age of 20, so growing up, he knows the trials and tribulations that Undocumented Immigrants, especially youth, face here in the United States. In 2007, he co-founded FIEL Houston Inc, along with his mother, brother and sister in order to provide guidance and help to not just immigrant youth in Houston but to their families as well. Now, he is the Director of Higher Education at FIEL and every year he helps hundreds of students apply to college and receive financial aid, regardless of their immigration status.





Special Thanks To You and our Team!



If you have made it this far, thank you for taking the time to read and making an investment into your future! FIEL is here for your family and their education!

Special thanks to our team who put this handbook together!



Maria Espinosa
FIEL Administrator



Lucia Baños
Intern

**NEED COMMUNITY
SERVICE HOURS
FOR SCHOOL?
WANT TO HELP
YOUR COMMUNITY?
BECOME A FIEL INTERN
ROCK STAR!
FOR INFO, EMAIL**

MESPINOSA@FIELHOUSTON.ORG



Joshua Sambrano
Intern