

# High-Skill Immigrant: Five Steps to Prepare for College

Are you working in a job below your skill level? Do you have a degree from your home country that you cannot use here? Completing a college program in the United States could help. Getting a certificate or degree that is recognized by American employers will put you in a better position to get a job and start or rebuild your career. Going to college also will help you learn new skills, experience new things, and strengthen your role in your family and community.

Preparing for and enrolling in college can take time. First, you may need to improve your English language skills before enrolling. You also may need help choosing a college and getting financial assistance. There are many people who can help you with each of these steps.

This handout describes five steps to get ready for college.

**Step 1:** Get help from groups in your community.

**Step 2:** Create a plan for going to college and starting a career.

**Step 3:** Earn your high school diploma.

**Step 4:** Choose and enroll in a college program.

**Step 5:** Apply for financial aid.

Depending on the skills you have and your finances, you may be able to skip some of these steps. For example, if you know which college you want to go to, but need help paying for it, you can skip to Step 5 to learn about financial aid. Or, you may need help with improving your English language skills. You can learn more about English literacy programs in Step 2.

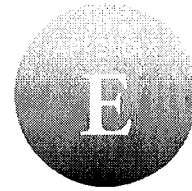
## Noor Boulos's Path to College

Noor Boulos and her family left the turmoil of Iraq and moved to Syria for several years. While in Syria, she received training in medical laboratory technology and worked for three years as a technician. She and her family then moved to the United States. Even with her education and work experience, she struggled to find a job at her skill level. She decided to go to college to earn a degree recognized by American employers. She enrolled in Portland Community College (PCC), where she took general education classes and a class that helps immigrants learn English as they train for a job. She also interned at a local healthcare clinic. After completing her college program, Boulos found a good job. She continues to take college classes at PCC to further her education and advance her career.



## Get Help from Groups in Your Community

There are several resources and groups set up especially to help immigrants. A good place to start is the *Welcome Home: A Guide for New Immigrants*. This guide includes information about working in the United States and becoming a U.S. citizen. It also describes the American education system and where you can go to get help with improving your skills. This guide is available at: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/M-618.pdf>.

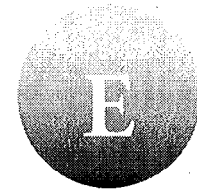


The groups listed below also can help you. Many groups offer college and career counseling. They also can test your education level and then help you improve your skills. Some groups provide other helpful services, like transportation, childcare, and financial aid. If not, they can tell you where to find those services.

- **Adult education programs:** These programs help you with reading, writing, math, and English skills. They also can help you get a high school diploma (called a General Educational Development [GED] diploma or an adult high school diploma). Adult education programs also can help you get ready for college. To find a program near you, go to: <http://www.literacydirectory.org/>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. Then, choose the type of help you need. You will get a list of adult education programs and information for getting in touch with them.
- **Community colleges:** Community colleges can help you get a GED, a certificate, or associate's degree. They also can help you improve your skills so you can do well in college classes. To find a college near you, go to: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/pages/ccfinder.aspx>. Then, enter your Zip Code or city.
- **One-Stop Career Centers:** These centers help you look for a job and find education or training programs. They also can help you to write your resume and practice for interviews. To find a center near you, go to: <http://www.servicelocator.org>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. You will get a list of centers and information for getting in touch with them.
- **TRIO Programs:** These programs help people with low incomes or disabilities go to college. They also help people who are the first in their families to attend college. The different types of TRIO programs include:
  - Educational Opportunity Centers: These centers give advice and information on applying to and paying for college.
  - Student Support Services Programs: These programs provide mentors, education programs, counseling, and other services to help students do well in college and prepare for a job.

Many TRIO programs are located at colleges. To find a program near you, contact your local community college. Your local One-Stop Career Center or adult education program also can help you find a program.

- **Community groups:** Other groups can help you with jobs, education, training, counseling, housing, healthcare, and more. For a list of groups near you, go to: <http://www.211.org>. Enter your Zip Code or city and state. Then, choose the type of help or program you need.



## Create a Plan for Going to College and Starting a Career

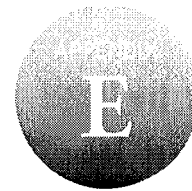
What do you want to learn in college? What kind of job would you like or did you have in your home country? Your local adult education program, community college, One-Stop Career Center, or TRIO Program can help you create a plan for going to college and starting your career. You also can find help at:

- **mySkills myFuture:** On this website, you can search for jobs that need skills you already have. Go to: <http://www.myskillsmyfuture.org/>. Enter your current or past job. You will get a list of jobs using the skills you already have and names and contact information for employers. You also can get information about earnings and any training you may need.
- **My Next Move:** This website can help you find a job that matches your interests and training. Go to: <http://www.mynextmove.org/>. Then, you can search for jobs by industry or key words (for example, build houses or computers).
- **College for Adults:** This website can help you plan your career, choose and apply to a college, and get financial aid. It also links you to other websites with helpful information. Go to: <http://www.collegeforadults.org>.
- **The Occupational Outlook Handbook:** On this website, you can learn about different jobs and the education and training you need for them. The handbook is updated every two years. Go to: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. Then, search for jobs by job type, earnings, or required education and training.

You also can get help with education, training, and the job search from several groups that work only with immigrants. They are:

- **Upwardly Global:** This group helps skilled immigrants and refugees rebuild their career in the United States. You can get help with job searchers and training for a career. To learn more, go to: <http://www.upwardlyglobal.org/>.
- **The Welcome Back Initiative:** Located throughout the United States, these centers help immigrants who have received healthcare training in other countries. The centers provide counseling and can give you advice on education and training programs and how to find a job in the United States. To learn more, go to: <http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org>.
- **World Education Services:** This group helps immigrants with applying to college, finding a job, and becoming a U.S. citizen. To learn more, go to [www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org).

Each of these groups have different eligibility requirements you must meet to qualify for their free services. Their websites describe their eligibility requirements.



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## Earn Your High School Diploma

If you do not have a high school diploma, you can get help from your local adult education program or community college. They can help you get ready for the GED test or get an adult high school diploma. First, they will ask you to take a test to find out which skills you have and which skills you still need to learn. The classes that you go to will depend on your skills. The different types of classes are:

- **Adult basic education (ABE):** These classes help adults with basic skills, such as reading, writing, math, solving problems, and using a computer.
- **Adult secondary education (ASE):** These classes help adults get ready for the GED test or earn an adult high school diploma.
- **English literacy:** These classes help adults with speaking, reading, and writing in English. They also can help immigrant adults become U.S. citizens.

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## Choose and Enroll in a College Program

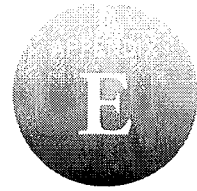
You can work with college and career counselors to find a college program that best fits your career goals. You can choose from several types of college programs, including:

- **Career and technical education (CTE) programs:** These programs help you get the skills needed for jobs (for example, auto repair or nursing). They mix classroom learning with hands-on training. You usually get a certificate when you finish the program. Other training programs include apprenticeships, vocational rehabilitation programs, and Job Corps.
- **Two-year academic programs:** These programs teach skills that can help you do well in many different jobs. They also help you go on to a four-year college for a bachelor's degree. You usually get an associate's degree when you finish a two-year program.
- **Four-year academic programs:** Programs at four-year colleges and universities give you skills needed for many different types of jobs. When you graduate, you receive a bachelor's degree.

You can go to the *College Navigator* website at: <http://collegenavigator.ed.gov> to learn more about these programs. On this website, you can search for colleges by location and type of program. To find out more about the cost of college programs, go to:

<http://collegecost.ed.gov/catc/>. Select the type of college program you are interested in and then search by highest or lowest cost.

Talk to your counselor about getting college credit for any work experience or training you already have. You may need to take tests to get credit for these experiences. If you attended a college in another country, you also may be able to get credit for some of those classes.



You also should talk to your employer about your college plans. Some employers will help pay for college. Some may let you change your work schedule so that you can attend classes.

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### Apply for Financial Aid

You can get help with paying for college from colleges, states, and the U.S. government. The U.S. government offers several types of financial aid. Talk with your college and career counselor to find out what type of aid is best for you.

You also can get help from a website called *Student Aid on the Web*, at: <http://studentaid.ed.gov>. This website can help you get ready and pay for college. It can tell you how to find out what skills you already have and help you look into different careers. It gives information on taking the GED test and college entrance tests. You can learn about choosing a college, getting ready to attend, and paying for it. You also can get information about financial aid for adults by going to: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/pubs>. Then, look for the title *Federal Student Aid for Adults*.