

Immigrants without HOPE need help entering college

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

August 15, 2001 Wednesday,, Home Edition

Copyright 2001 The Atlanta Constitution

Section: News;

Length: 1302 words

Byline: MARK BIXLER

Body

Anxiety gripped Jose Alvarado in third-period calculus class at North Atlanta High School. It mounted as students went around the room telling Mrs. Brooks where they would go to college: Emory. Georgia Tech. University of Georgia.

"All I could say was, 'I'm planning to see if I can get into a college because of my situation,' " he recalled.

Alvarado earned a 3.5 grade-point average and 1110 on the SAT. He led the soccer team and was in the National Honor Society and the Latin and Spanish clubs.

AJC

Until recently, though, college seemed out of reach. That's because

when Jose Alvarado was four months old, his parents broke immigration law by bringing him from Mexico to the United States without permission.

By all outward appearances, Alvarado is as American as any other 17-year-old. He listens to the Dave Matthews Band and Tupac Shakur, watches "The Simpsons" and "MTV."

But in the eyes of the law, he is an illegal immigrant. He has lived in Atlanta for six years, but most Georgia colleges would charge him out-of-state tuition. He qualified scholastically for a HOPE scholarship, but he can't get it because of his immigration status. He's ineligible for most student loans and cannot pay his own way because he lacks the Social Security number needed to work legally.

"When I say I'm an illegal alien, my friends think it's a joke. They can't believe me because I don't look the stereotype," said Alvarado, who speaks English at school and Spanish at home.

Help arrived this month for him and five students in similar straits. They each got a \$2,000 scholarship from Teodoro Maus, former Mexican consul general in Atlanta. Maus said he used \$12,000 from his parents' estate to award scholarships to undocumented students who graduated from a Georgia high school and have been accepted to college. With help from Latino businesses, Maus plans to give \$50,000 in scholarships to 10 students next year.

Through private benefactors like Maus and waivers of out-of-state tuition from college presidents, a few undocumented youth like Alvarado are getting a chance to go to college. A lawsuit asking the state to let qualified undocumented students get HOPE scholarship money has gone nowhere, but Latino advocates are trying hard to drum up support for the state to do that.

Immigrants without HOPE need help entering college

On Tuesday, Alvarado went to orientation at Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta.. In addition to the money from Maus, he got a \$1,000 scholarship from Southern Polytechnic. And the university's president gave him a break that lets him pay in-state tuition. Now he has enough help to pay tuition for a year and a half.

Many other undocumented high-school students in Georgia --- perhaps a few hundred, based on various estimates --- are not so lucky. Some drop out. Others graduate with good grades, only to realize that college is not a realistic option.

The University System of Georgia clarified its policy last year to say public colleges and universities can admit undocumented immigrants, but not at in-state rates, making cost a barrier. Out-of-state tuition is triple what state residents pay.

Alvarado's father supports a family of six by installing insulation. He would have trouble paying out-of-state rates.

The other five recipients of Maus' financial aid have backgrounds similar to Alvarado's. There is a Gainesville student brought here illegally when he was 9. He finished high school with a 3.4 grade point average. An Atlanta woman bound for the University of Georgia came at age 10 and graduated with a 3.7 GPA.

"Hopefully this works as an incentive, that they continue going to school," Maus said.

The Southern Latino Foundation also provides scholarships to qualified Latino students, including some who are undocumented. Ray Ortega, owner of Ortega Travel, runs the foundation. He said three students received scholarships last year ranging from \$300 to \$1,000. He hopes to raise money for more scholarships at a Hispanic festival in Centennial Olympic Park on Sept. 15.

"They are usually from low-income or middle-income families, but the system requires them to pay the highest costs," Ortega said. "It's extremely unfair."

Federal law requires schools to provide undocumented immigrants an education through high school, but no law guarantees access to college. This year, Texas became the first state to let undocumented students pay in-state tuition. Lawmakers in California, Minnesota, North Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin are considering similar proposals. One bill in Congress would legalize some undocumented students. Another would make it easier for them to pay in-state tuition rates.

Some of the proposals could conflict with a provision of a 1996 immigration law that says states cannot charge in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants unless they offer in-state rates to U.S. citizens from other states.

At the center of the disputes are young men and women like Alvarado.

Jose Alvarado was born in Mexico in 1983 and brought to Los Angeles as an infant. He moved from grade to grade as his father made furniture and Venetian blinds. The family moved to Atlanta in 1995, and Alvarado made an impression in school. He won a Most Outstanding Student award in eighth grade and picked up four soccer trophies in high school.

Alvarado applied to become a legal resident five years ago. He is eligible for a green card because his father got one after a 1986 amnesty. But Alvarado must wait about five more years before the immigration service gets to his application.

The federal government prioritizes green-card applications, and people in Alvarado's category --- unmarried children of legal residents from Mexico --- face long waits because there are so many. It can take them 10 years to become residents.

In the meantime, the rituals of adolescence unfold.

Immigrants without HOPE need help entering college

The brochures began arriving in his junior year, slick pamphlets that promised possibility at institutions such as Tulane University, Middle Georgia **College**, Colorado State University, Georgia Tech and flagship universities in Georgia, Florida and Tennessee.

Friends mailed off applications and shared their excitement when acceptance letters came. Alvarado's best friend is going to Davidson **College** in North Carolina. Two co-captains of the soccer team are off to George Washington University and Emory-Riddle Aeronautical University.

"I knew that no matter what **college** I applied for, even if it was in Georgia, I would have to pay out-of-state tuition," Alvarado said.

He spoke with a few **college** administrators before winding up in the office of Ron Koger, vice president for student and enrollment services at Southern Polytechnic in Marietta.

"This guy is battling everything in the world," Koger said. "He's the kind of student who can come here and do well."

Alvarado applied for admission and was accepted. But he faced the prohibitive prospect of out-of-state tuition --- \$7,728 a year compared with \$1,932 for residents --- until the **college** president, Lisa Rossbacher, intervened. She gave Alvarado one of about 60 waivers available, allowing him to pay in-state rates.

The president of at least one other **college**, Dalton State University, has granted a waiver that lets a high-achieving undocumented **immigrant** pay in-state tuition.

Koger said he was impressed by the lengths Alvarado will go to just to get to class: two hours each way on public transportation. He plans to take MARTA Bus 44 to the Lindbergh station and ride a train to the Arts Center stop. Then he'll board Bus 10 of Cobb Community Transit to go to Marietta.

Alvarado is thinking about a degree involving computers, international business or business administration.

Classes begin Thursday.

"I know I can be somebody," he said.

Graphic

Photo:

With some financial problems eased, North Atlanta High School grad Jose Alvarado can look forward to **college**. / JENNI GIRTMAN / Staff Photo:

The family of Jose Alvarado, including his mother, Agustina Alvarado, moved to Atlanta in 1995. / Special

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS (89%); **COLLEGES** & UNIVERSITIES (89%); STUDENT FINANCIAL AID (89%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (89%); HIGH SCHOOLS (89%); TUITION FEES (89%); IMMIGRATION (88%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (88%); STUDENT LOANS (78%); UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (77%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (74%); STUDENT HONOR SOCIETIES (73%); CALCULUS (73%); GRADES & GRADING (73%); LITIGATION (72%); MINORITY BUSINESSES (70%); MINORITY BUSINESS ASSISTANCE (70%); SUITS & CLAIMS (68%); SOCCER (55%)

Immigrants without HOPE need help entering college

Company: GEORGIA TECH UNIVERSITY (84%); GEORGIA TECH UNIVERSITY (84%); NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY (57%); NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY (57%)

Organization: GEORGIA TECH UNIVERSITY (84%); GEORGIA TECH UNIVERSITY (84%); NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY (57%); NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY (57%)

Industry: COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (89%); HIGH SCHOOLS (89%)

Geographic: ATLANTA, GA, USA (90%); GEORGIA, USA (92%); MEXICO (92%); UNITED STATES (92%)

Load-Date: August 15, 2001

End of Document