

Accessing the Educational System in the United States: The Basics



An Overview of Educational
Issues for Refugees and Asylees



Educational Access


In this session, you will be provided with some basic information about the following topics:

- ◆ Primary and Secondary Schooling
- ◆ Vocational Training Programs
- ◆ Colleges and Universities
- ◆ Financial Aid and Scholarship Opportunities
- ◆ Various Academic Examinations

Primary and Secondary Schooling

Elementary, Middle, and High Schools

- ◆ Public school education is free in the United States, and it is available to all refugees and asylees.
- ◆ All children under the age of 17 are required by law to attend school (unless they are being home-schooled).
- ◆ The maximum age for high school students varies by State. All people under the age of 21 are eligible to attend public high schools in Texas.



Houston Independent School District (HISD)

- ◆ HISD offers a program to assist refugees and asylees in the HISD school system.

Contact ___ HISD Refugee Program Director,
at ___ for more information.



Vocational Programs

- ◆ Vocational programs offer educational services that prepare students for specific jobs and employment. They are usually short-term programs lasting anywhere from a few weeks to one year.
- ◆ The following are examples of vocational certificates: nursing assistant; dental assistant; pharmacy technician; air conditioning repair; truck driving; cosmetology; automobile mechanics; childcare provider; welding; and appliance repair.



Vocational Programming

- ◆ Houston Community College offers vocational training specifically for refugees and asylees who have lived in the U.S. for less than five years. For more information, please contact:



Community Colleges

- ◆ Colleges are institutions that offer vocational training certificates and two-year academic degrees called “Associate Degrees”.

Most of the credits one earns at a college can later be transferred to a university.



Universities

- ◆ Universities offer four-year degrees called “Bachelor Degrees”.
- ◆ Some universities also offer post-graduate degrees called “Master’s Degrees”(M.A.) and “Doctor of Philosophy Degrees” (Ph.D.). These degrees usually require an additional three to five years of study beyond the bachelor’s degree.



Financial Aid and Scholarships

- ◆ Financial assistance to pay for tuition is available from the federal government . The amount you are eligible for depends on many factors, but primarily on how much income you earn at your job.
- ◆ Federal student aid is available in the following forms: grants; subsidized loans; unsubsidized loans; and work-study.
- ◆ In order to apply for these funds, you must complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). You can obtain the application from financial aid offices at colleges and universities, or you can complete it on-line at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Scholarships

- ◆ Scholarships are another form of financial aid to assist students with tuition costs. Scholarships are generally offered by private foundations and organizations, and you must compete with other applicants to obtain the funds.
- ◆ The amount of money available through scholarships varies greatly, from as little as a one-time award of \$100 to ones that pay for your entire college education. Applying for scholarships can be a very time-consuming task because you must do a lot of research to find ones for which you qualify. Many scholarships are offered only to specific groups of people based on certain characteristics, such as academic subject interest, religious affiliation, “race”, ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc.



Scholarship Search Websites

- ◆ There are many websites that advertise scholarships. Some of the largest are:

www.scholarships.com

www.college-scholarships.com

www.guaranteed-scholarships.com


www.absolutelyscholarships.com

By using search sites, you may save yourself lots of time and energy in locating scholarship opportunities.



Academic Examinations

There are many academic examinations and placement tests used in the United States. Most of these exams are used to determine whether you will be admitted to an academic institution; others are used to determine the level of courses in which you should enroll.



Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)

- ◆ The TABE is a placement test that many institutions and organizations use in order to place students in the appropriate level for courses such as literacy, ESL (English-as-a-Second-Language), and GED preparation courses. Also sometimes used for placement in vocational programs.
- ◆ For more information, visit www.tabetest.com



Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

- ◆ The TOEFL is a test that measures the ability of non-native speakers of English to use and understand North American English as it is used in college and university settings.
- ◆ For more information, please visit www.toefl.org



General Educational Development (GED)

- ◆ The GED is an equivalency diploma that you receive by passing an examination. By passing the exam, you show that you possess the knowledge and skills of the average person who graduates from a high school in the United States. The GED is usually necessary to gain admittance to a college or university, and it also improves your chances for higher paying employment.
- ◆ For more information, visit the official GED website at www.acenet.edu



Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA)

- ◆ The THEA test is required by most colleges and universities in Texas. They will use your scores to determine if you need developmental courses or not. It is generally used as a placement test to determine what level of courses you should enroll in when you begin your studies.

(*Formerly known as the TASP examination.)

- ◆ For more information, visit www.thea.nesinc.com



Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

- ◆ The SAT is generally used by colleges and universities in much the same way as the THEA (formerly the TASP); the difference is that the SAT is used throughout the United States, while the THEA is only used in the state of Texas.
- ◆ For more information, visit www.collegeboard.com



Graduate Records Examination (GRE)

- ◆ The GRE is an examination that is used to determine whether you will be admitted to a post-graduate program of study for a Master's degree or Doctor of Philosophy degree. This exam is taken after you have completed a Bachelor's degree.
- ◆ For more information, visit www.gre.org



Points for Consideration

- ◆ When applying to a college or university, it is very important to make sure that they do not classify you as an “international student” during the application process. If they do, your tuition rate will be much more expensive. As a refugee, or asylee, you are entitled to regular “resident” tuition rates after living in Houston for one year and paying taxes on your employment income.
- ◆ Always seek advice from academic counselors at colleges and universities before making educational decisions. If you need assistance with locating such people, please call ___ at ___.