

Aid For Undocumented Students

By Anne O'Dell

California Assembly is debating a new bill that would allow undocumented immigrant students to become eligible to receive financial aid in the University of California and California State campuses.

Currently, about 1,800 illegal immigrant students attend the state schools and pay much higher fees than do local non-immigrant students.

The bill, if passed, may lead to moderate disquiet among students who are already U.S. citizens and who believe that they should get first consideration for taxpayer-funded aid. The bill has been signed by the State Senate and awaits the decision of the Assembly.

Although the state bill cannot mandate federal aid for undocumented students, it does propose to extend campus-based grants and loans to all students who are eligible for in-state tuition, including undocumented immigrants.

A California Assembly Bill passed in 2001 made it possible for students who attended California high schools for three years to pay standard in-state fees and not nonresident tuition. For most undergrads, this is a difference of more than \$17,000.

However, this bill was challenged in January by nonresident students who have been forced to pay out-of-state tuition. They say this legislation contradicts a 1996 federal law stating that noncitizens cannot be eligible for benefits that are not also extended to all U.S. citizens.

The success of the new bill will depend on the validity of the 1996 law.