College Now Social Security Number (SSN) Policy

Questions and Answers

In order to register its students in the CUNY system, the College Now program must now require all participating students to register using their Social Security Number (SSN).

The Social Security Number (SSN) is an important identification tool for most college students, as it is required to process student financial aid forms (such as the FAFSA) and for campus reporting purposes. All U.S. citizens and permanent residents should have an SSN. **Students who are not U.S. citizens can still participate in College Now.** Please review the questions and answers below in order to learn more about the use of the SSN for students participating in College Now.

1. Why does College Now ask for a student’s Social Security Number?

College Now asks for a student’s Social Security Number (SSN) for several reasons:

- CUNY is using a new enrollment and campus operations system called CUNYfirst. This system requires all students who have an SSN to provide the number in order to generate a college I.D. number.
- The college I.D. number will soon be the only way a CUNY student’s records can be “connected” across all campuses. Using this I.D. (called an “emplid”) will ensure that course credit is awarded from any previous or future CUNY enrollments, including College Now. Students will use the college I.D. number to access their own academic records to share with colleges or to apply for licensure in various occupations.

2. What happens for students with undocumented status who do not have a Social Security Number?

*Access to College Now will not be denied to students who do not have a Social Security Number.* In such cases:

- The college will generate a number that functions in the same way as the SSN; this number will be used for generating the college I.D. so that students can register for classes, etc. Students must keep this number and use it for all CUNY applications going forward in order to avoid duplication of records. **It will be difficult to track student records if this number is lost.**
- Students who receive this number should keep it confidential, just as they would a Social Security Number.
3. What are the consequences for not disclosing a Social Security Number?

When registering for College Now classes, failure to provide a Social Security Number if they have one will prevent students from accessing their CUNYfirst account (this account requires the last 4 digits of the SSN or, for students with undocumented status, the last 4 digits of their “replacement” number). Without a CUNYfirst account, students will face the following consequences:

- No access to registration information.
- No access to a CUNY email account.
- No access to course materials on the Blackboard online instructional system.
- No transfer of records to other colleges and/or employers, as the college transcript process requires a SSN.

These students risk having multiple CUNY records, thus increasing the likelihood that their academic file will not include all college credits a student earned.

4. How does CUNY protect the Social Security Number from identity theft?

- A student’s SSN is recorded only once in the initial registration process. At that time, a unique college I.D. is generated by CUNYfirst for use by college personnel.
- Social Security Numbers are never displayed in CUNY records. Using the college I.D. protects the student from identity theft.

5. If the NYC Department of Education (DOE) does not ask for Social Security Numbers, why does College Now?

There is one major reason the NYCDOE cannot ask for a student’s SSN:

- A Federal law protects the privacy of student education records -- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The laws were created for the protection of educational data involving minors (children under 18) and apply to all schools that receive money from the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children’s educational records. In order to ensure the privacy of student information, the DOE does not collect SSNs; instead, the DOE assigns students an OSIS number.
- FERPA does not apply to students above the age of 18, or to those who attend school beyond the high school level. Because College Now students are college students, they are given the rights to their educational records.

Remember: College Now participation is voluntary and not required as part of the high school program. Participants must adhere to CUNY college policies.