

Following a new state policy, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College will no longer enroll illegal immigrants in degree programs.

But the change likely won't make much of a difference at RCCC. The school has not had many undocumented students in the past, anyway, said Jeff Lowrance, a spokesman for the college.

In fact, of the 5,083 students enrolled at RCCC this spring semester, none were undocumented students, Lowrance said. Three international students took classes, but they had valid visas.

"We have followed the policies laid out by the state community college system," Lowrance said.

Until the change this month, undocumented students could enroll in two-year community colleges if they graduated from U.S. high schools.

If any had been accepted at RCCC and other state schools, "They would have been charged out-of-state tuition," Lowrance said.

During the fall 2007 semester, RCCC had two undocumented students, but both graduated from local high schools, he said.

State officials say that of the 297,000 students in degree programs at North Carolina's community colleges, only 112 are undocumented.

The low reported number has surely raised some eyebrows. At RCCC, the application system is partly based on an honor system when it comes to verifying citizenship, Lowrance said.

The application asks for a Social Security number, but the school doesn't verify it, Lowrance said. The number becomes a student's identification number at the school.

The application also requires potential students to say whether they are U.S. citizens or a non-citizens. If students indicate "non-citizen," they must provide a copy of their green card and issue date.

Or, students must indicate what type of visa they have and the issue date, Lowrance said. RCCC does not verify green cards, but it does turn student-visa information in to the federal government, he said. All schools have been required to do that since Sept. 11, he explained.

The government would notify the school if student-visa information is not accurate, Lowrance said.

At the end of RCCC's application, students are required to sign with the promise that all the information is correct.

If school officials found out an applicant lied, they could take action. "That would be grounds to dismiss a student," Lowrance said.

Lowrance said RCCC does not have plans to revisit its application process in the wake of state changes.

Dr. Richard Brownell, president of RCCC, was reluctant to talk about his views when it comes to admitting illegal immigrants.

"I have no comment about it," Brownell said. "It's just a state policy; we follow the policy.

"We don't express opinions about it, because it's such a contentious issue."

Undocumented students can still take high-school equivalency, continuing education and English-as-a-second-language classes.

"The mission of the community college is open enrollment," Lowrance said. "We've always had an open-door policy to provide education to anyone."