

Urge the Department of Education to Protect Advanced Nursing Education Students

New Loan Limits

Graduate Degrees

Annual Limit:
\$20,500

Aggregate Limit:
\$100,000

Professional Degrees

Annual Limit:
\$50,000

Aggregate Limit:
\$200,000

Policy Process

Dept of Ed Released
Proposed Rule

30-Day Public Comment
Period (1/30 - 3/02)

Dept of Ed Releases
Finalized Rule

Policy Takes Effect

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"Nursing is a
Professional
Degree" Hub

(More) Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we only discussing the issue of graduate and professional degrees now?

For the first time, this distinction will have a direct, negative effect on nursing students' ability to pursue advanced education. The existing regulatory definition for professional degree programs ([34 CFR § 668.2](#)) did not have any impactful consequences for student loans because graduate and professional degrees were treated equally until the passage of OB3A.

Do these aggregate limits include loans taken out during baccalaureate education?

No. These new loan limits only apply to costs incurred in post-baccalaureate nursing programs, including MSN, DNP, and PhDs. However, separately, OB3A sets a new lifetime borrowing cap of approximately \$257,500 that does encompass baccalaureate education.

How does this impact schools that only offer RN-BSN or BSN programs?

These restrictions could impact all nursing education pathways. Nursing education relies on advanced practice nurses to serve as faculty across all levels of nursing programs. If nurses are not able to affordably finance advanced education, nursing schools may have increased difficulty finding qualified faculty. This would exacerbate the ongoing [nurse faculty shortage](#). A [recent survey](#) of deans at AACN member schools found that 71% of respondents anticipate negative downstream consequences on their BSN enrollment because of these lower loan limits.

Will these limits decrease education costs?

We've seen no evidence to suggest that this action will lower education costs. Schools may feel pressure to eliminate critical learning components, reduce the number of individuals they admit, or cut support services for students, all of which risks diminishing workforce supply and readiness during an ongoing nursing workforce shortage. Further, these new loan caps artificially limit student choice and reduce marketplace competition among schools.

Can students make up the difference in private student loans?

Private student loan debt often has higher interest rates, fewer borrower protections, and less favorable repayment terms compared to federal loans. Additionally, many students do not have the established credit necessary to obtain these loans. If these restrictive limits force students to rely on more private loans, their financial burden may increase rather than decrease and their return on investment may be lower. In a recent [AACN survey](#), over 80% of post-baccalaureate nursing students reported that the lower graduate loan limits would negatively impact their ability to finance their education.

Is the decision that nursing programs are not professional degrees final?

No. The Department of Education's rulemaking process is not yet finalized. The Department must review every comment it receives on its [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) before they can finalize these new regulatory definitions and begin enforcing them.

How can I advocate for nursing as a professional degree?

Please sign up to be an [AACN Advocate](#) and use our action center to [send a comment](#) directly to the Department of Education advocating for nursing as a professional degree **today**. We have tailored comments for students, faculty, and supporters. We encourage you to personalize your message to show the negative impacts of this decision. Your voice and advocacy are essential to this effort.