

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL DEGREE LOAN LIMITS

This update is as of May 13, 2026

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act established new borrowing limits for graduate degree programs at two different levels. The language in the bill divides all graduate programs into two categories: Professional and Graduate. Despite clear language in the law setting out a test to determine which category a program belongs to, the Department of Education (ED) chose instead to limit the Professional category to just eleven specific programs, ignoring tens of thousands of critical public comments and bipartisan opposition from more than 150 members of Congress. This change will take effect on July 1, 2026.

Why it matters to your campus

Students can access an annual loan limit of \$50,000 and an aggregate loan limit of \$200,000 if enrolled in one of the eleven programs identified as “Professional.” ED has specified the following programs as Professional programs: Pharmacy; Dentistry; Veterinary Medicine; Chiropractic; Law; Medicine; Optometry; Osteopathic Medicine; Podiatry; Theology; and Clinical Psychology. Students in all other graduate programs, including nursing, social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy, public health, and education, are limited to \$20,500 per year and \$100,000 in total.

About 28 percent of all student loan borrowers currently need to borrow more than the new limits would allow ([ACE analysis and talking points](#)). Students who cannot cover the gap through federal loans will be pushed toward private lenders, if they can qualify.

The impact is expected to fall hardest on students in health professions programs. Thirty-nine percent of students in master’s-level health programs borrow an average of \$28,500 more per year than the new limits allow; 67 percent of doctoral-level health students exceed the cap by an average of \$26,700 ([Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia](#)).

[Click here](#) for additional background.

How to take action

ACE is advocating for Congress to act quickly to curb the harm that will be caused by this rule. One of the primary vehicles for doing so is a bill authored by Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY), the [Professional Student Degree Act](#) (H.R. 6718). This has bipartisan support and would codify an expanded definition of professional degree in statute, adding fields, including nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant programs, audiology, social work, public health, architecture, and education.

[Click here](#) to use ACE’s Contact Congress form to send your lawmakers a letter in support of the Lawler bill. We need to continue to gain even more support for congressional action.

What may happen next

This likely will end up in litigation before Congress takes action. We will keep you updated on both the legislative and legal fronts.