

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

GUIDE TO GRADUATE FINANCIAL AID

Education is an investment in your future.

The majority of college students, especially at the graduate level, need to seek financial aid to cover the cost of their tuition and related expenses. You are not expected to fund your education yourself. The federal government as well as private financial institutions offer loans to cover a lot, if not all, of the cost of your education that you can gradually pay back after you graduate.

Think of your education as an investment in your own future: The money you commit to spending now will increase your earning potential in the future. Quite simply, you can be sure that it is money well spent.

Here are answers to common financial aid questions to help you understand your options and get the aid that you need.

What types of financial aid are available to graduate students?

Most graduate students pay for their education through student loans. Some graduate students also receive scholarships for their studies or may be chosen to work for the school in a teaching or research position, known as an assistantship. Scholarships and assistantships are very competitive and may not cover all costs. Federal grants, which do not have to be paid back, are awarded to some undergraduate students with financial need, but they generally are not available at the graduate level.

What types of loans are available to graduate students?

There are three main types of loans available to graduate students: **Direct Stafford Loans**, which are lent by the federal government; **Grad PLUS Loans**, which also are lent by the federal government; and **private education loans**, which are borrowed through private lenders.


Direct Stafford Loans (also called Direct Loans) generally offer the most favorable terms

and conditions for students, such as lower interest rates and fees and better repayment options. There are annual and cumulative limits on the amount of money a graduate student can borrow through Stafford Loans. The annual/academic year maximum is \$20,500 (the annual limit includes the summer term of any academic year). The cumulative maximum is \$138,500 (this includes undergraduate and graduate careers combined).

Grad PLUS Loans (also called Direct PLUS Loans) are available to students who need funds beyond the Stafford Loan limits. These loans require the student to have good credit history, as determined by a credit check. Students may benefit from a cosigner if their application is denied due to a low credit score (which may be due to minimal credit history). Students must apply for and maximize the Stafford Loans first and should only seek Grad PLUS Loans if additional funding is needed to cover tuition and expenses.

Private education loans are available through a wide range of private financial institutions. These loans tend to have higher interest rates





Graduate students must be enrolled at least half time, which is 4.5 credits, to be eligible for Stafford Loans and Grad PLUS Loans.

The Cathedral of Learning

than Stafford Loans and Grad PLUS Loans and may not offer the same repayment options, such as 10-year repayment periods, deferred payments until six months after graduation, and other deferment and forbearance options.

What steps do I need to take to apply for loans?

To apply for and receive **Direct Stafford Loans**, there are three required steps.

1. Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is completed online at fafsa.ed.gov. The University of Pittsburgh's federal school code is 008815. The results of your FAFSA will be sent to the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid at the University of Pittsburgh, which will determine your eligibility for a Stafford Loan. You will be issued a student financial aid award letter advising you of your eligibility. The financial aid office will offer you the maximum you are eligible to receive. If you need to cancel the loan or reduce the amount, you must submit a Student Loan Request and Adjustment form, available at oafa.pitt.edu/pdf/loanchange.pdf, to the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid.

2. Sign a Master Promissory Note (MPN) by going to <https://studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/index.action>.

You will need to enter an FSA ID to sign an MPN. If you don't have an FSA ID or can't remember it, you can create one at fsaid.ed.gov.

3. Complete an entrance interview, also completed at <https://studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/index.action> (FSA ID required).

Note: The loans will not disburse if steps two and three are not taken. For fall admittance, it is best to have all steps done by July 1.

For loan amounts above what is available for Direct Stafford Loans, a student must apply for **Grad PLUS Loans**. A separate MPN and instructions are available at studentloans.gov. Grad PLUS loans do involve a credit check and have a slightly higher interest rate.

For **private education loans**, you should be a smart consumer and choose carefully. Private education loan terms can and do vary. You will need to contact the institution that you have chosen as a lender to learn the eligibility requirements, terms, and conditions of its loans and to obtain the application. Most applications are available online on lenders' Web sites. It is a good idea to compare the borrowing terms of multiple lenders before applying, as some may be better than others. Find out more information about private education loans at oafa.pitt.edu/learn-about-aid/available-aid-programs/private-education-loan-programs.

What are the deadlines for graduate students to apply for loans?

The recommended deadline for the FAFSA (required for Stafford and Grad PLUS loans) is June 1 for students beginning in the fall term. For spring admittance, the recommended deadline is November 15, and for summer admittance, it is April 16. The closer a student follows the recommended deadlines, the sooner his or her financial aid award letter will be generated and the less likely it is that there will be delays in loan disbursement.

Private education loan application deadlines vary by lender. Please contact lenders directly for their deadlines.

When can I expect my Stafford or Grad PLUS Loan to be posted to my student account?

Federal loans cannot be disbursed any earlier than 10 days prior to the beginning of the term. If you have completed all of the steps listed previously by (or close to) the recommended deadline but your loan has not shown up 10 days before the start of the term, please contact the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid at 412-624-7488 to see if the office is missing any information or if there is any other delay in your loan disbursement.

Will I get a refund?

If your loan amount exceeds the cost of tuition and fees (your total bill) for a given term, you will be issued a refund by the Student Payment Center. Students may sign up to have their refunds deposited directly into their accounts at payments.pitt.edu/refunds.html.

What are overawards?

There are federal limits on the amount of aid a student can receive in a given year. If a student receives more aid than his or her federally determined aid eligibility, it is known as an overaward, and a reduction in aid may be required. This typically happens when circumstances change after the initial financial aid award is made. The financial aid office takes care to avoid overawarding, but the timing of certain awards makes it impossible to entirely prevent.

Do I have to be a full-time student to receive graduate financial aid?

Graduate students must be enrolled at least half time, which is 4.5 credits, to be eligible for Stafford Loans and Grad PLUS Loans. Private lenders have varying policies on enrollment.

Your financial aid eligibility is based on your enrollment, so the more credits you are enrolled in, the higher your eligibility should be because your bill will be higher.

What if I need financial aid for the summer?

If you are beginning your program in the summer term, you may need to complete two FAFSA forms. Because the academic year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30, the summer term will be the end of one academic year while the fall term will be the beginning of another. The recommended deadline is April 16.

If you begin your program in the fall or spring and need financial aid for the summer term, your Stafford Loan eligibility will depend on the amount you have used in the fall and spring terms.

A graduate student may not borrow more than \$20,500 in Stafford funds per academic year. An academic year at Pitt is fall, spring, and summer. If a student uses the full \$20,500 in the fall and spring, he or she will not have remaining Stafford eligibility for the summer term.

If additional aid is needed, a student may wish to consider a Grad PLUS or private education loan for the summer term.

Useful Financial Aid Resources on the Web

Pitt Office of Admissions and Financial Aid:
oafa.pitt.edu

Pitt tuition rates:
ir.pitt.edu/tuition/tuitionrates.php

Federal student aid Web site:
studentloans.gov

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):
fafsa.ed.gov

General financial aid info:
finaid.org

Sallie Mae private student loans:
salliemae.com

Fastweb scholarship database:
fastweb.com

Pittsburgh Foundation scholarships:
pittsburghfoundation.org

What scholarship or assistantship opportunities are available to me?

All incoming School of Education master's students are automatically reviewed by our scholarship committee for merit-based awards. There is no application process for these scholarships, as students are entered into the pool upon being accepted. These awards are competitive and are typically given to select highly qualified new students based on GPA, recommendation letters, goal statements, and other admissions materials. Award notifications are sent in mid-to-late spring for merit-based scholarships.

There are many external scholarships available to students in the education field for which we encourage you to apply. The amounts, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and deadlines for these awards vary. Searching online for scholarships in your area of study is a great way to start. There also are Web sites, such as Fastweb, that categorize scholarships by areas of study, which can help to narrow down your search. The University Honors College lists opportunities on its Web site at scholarships.honorscollege.pitt.edu, and Michigan State University offers a comprehensive database of awards by category at staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3subject.htm.

If some of the information I reported in my original financial aid application changes, do I need to let someone know?

It is important to inform the financial aid office of any information that has changed since you first submitted your materials. For example, if your aid eligibility was originally determined based on out-of-state residency but you end up qualifying for and being assessed Pennsylvania resident tuition, you will need to alert the financial aid office so that your eligibility can be rereviewed and adjusted if necessary. Other changes, such as a change in full-/half-time enrollment, a change in external aid amounts, or a switch from a degree program to a certificate program (or vice versa), should be reported as well, as they could have an impact on the amount of federal aid you are able to receive.



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Assistantships are primarily awarded to PhD students but may be awarded to select qualified master's students, depending on the needs and funding available in each department. These positions are limited, even at the doctoral level. There is no formal application for assistantships in the School of Education. Students interested in these opportunities should express their specific desires and qualifications to their appointed academic advisor.

I am going to be enrolled in a certificate program but not an actual degree program. Will I still be eligible for financial aid?

Students in certificate programs are eligible for Stafford Loans but not for Grad PLUS Loans. The Stafford Loan maximum for a certificate program is \$12,500.

Students in certificate programs are required to enroll at least half time to receive Stafford Loans.



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