

2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20)

First Look at Student Financial Aid Estimates for 2019–20—Summary

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Introduction

This First Look report presents selected findings about student financial aid during the 2019–20 academic year. These findings are based on data from the 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20). NPSAS:20 is a national study of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled any time between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, in institutions that can participate in federal financial aid programs. The main purpose of NPSAS:20 is to measure how students and their families pay for postsecondary education and, particularly, their receipt of federal student aid given through Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

NPSAS:20 student surveys began in March 2020, just as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began affecting students' educational experiences. Items were added to the student survey in April to collect data about the early impact of COVID-19 on students between January 1 and June 30, 2020. Details about this impact can be found in *2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20): First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances (Preliminary Data)* (Cameron et al. 2021). Information on emergency aid related to COVID-19 is not included in that First Look report or in this report.

Data used in this report are from about 80,800 undergraduate and 19,700 graduate student survey respondents attending approximately 2,200 institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The sample represents about 17.1 million undergraduate and 3.6 million graduate students¹ enrolled at Title IV eligible institutions at any time between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020.

In addition to the student survey, administrative data were collected for about 196,000 undergraduate students who did not take the survey. With both the survey and the administrative data collection, NPSAS:20 contains 276,800 undergraduate respondents and allows for representative analyses within 30 states.² State-representative data are not included in this report, but supplemental tables with state-level estimates for undergraduate students are available online.

¹ These population enrollment figures are adjusted to count students enrolled in more than one institution in the same academic year only once (Wine, Stollberg, and Siegel 2018). They may differ from other enrollment statistics that do not include this adjustment.

² State representation was determined by institution response, student response, and nonresponse bias analysis results. State-representative estimates are not available for graduate students.

This report classifies financial aid by type (grants, loans, work-study, and other) and source (federal, state, institution, employer, and other private sources). For undergraduate students, grants include scholarships, tuition waivers, employer tuition reimbursements, and federal grants such as Pell Grants. Student loans include subsidized and unsubsidized federal Direct Loans (formerly known as Stafford Loans), state loans, institution loans, and private or alternative loans. Direct Subsidized Loans are limited to students with financial need, while Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available regardless of need. Parents of dependent undergraduates may borrow using Direct PLUS Loans. These loans do not count toward students' debt because the loans are awarded to their parents, but they are considered part of students' total aid. Work-study provides part-time jobs to students with financial need. It is partially paid for by federal (and sometimes state or institution) subsidies. Other aid includes federal veterans education benefits, military (Department of Defense) aid, and vocational rehabilitation and job training grants.³

Graduate students receive grants and fellowships from the federal government, state governments, institutions, and private organizations, including their employers. Graduate students may also take out federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans and federal Direct PLUS Loans, which are awarded directly to graduate students.⁴ In addition, some graduate students may receive assistantships from their institutions or other sources, and some may participate in work-study.

Student financial aid is often allocated based on the total price of attendance, which is the sum of tuition and fees, housing, books, and other expenses. These prices vary by type of institution. Financial aid estimates in this report are thus presented by control and level of institution.⁵ In the interest of examining gender and racial equity in financial aid receipt, estimates are also reported by gender and race/ethnicity.

Attendance pattern and income level are related to eligibility for student aid from federal and other sources. Students who enroll full time for the full academic year generally qualify for more aid than part-time students. Financial aid estimates are reported for full-time, full-year students and for students who enroll part time or for part of the year. Additionally, students with higher levels of income generally

³ Vocational rehabilitation and job training grants are categorized separately from other types of grants primarily because they have different eligibility requirements than typical grants or scholarships.

⁴ Direct Subsidized Loans were discontinued for graduate students after the 2011–12 academic year.

⁵ “Control” refers to the source of revenue and control of operations (public, private nonprofit, private for-profit), and “level” refers to the highest degree or award offered by the institution in any program.

have lower financial need and, therefore, are eligible for less financial aid.⁶ For dependent students, family income consists of the student's parents' income. For independent undergraduate students and graduate students, family income consists of the student's income and, if married, their spouse's income.

Graduate student aid can also vary by graduate programs. Due to differences in aid availability and amount by program of study, financial aid estimates are reported by graduate program for graduate students.⁷

The variables in this report are just a few of the several hundred represented in the NPSAS:20 data. Results shown in this report are not causal. Many of the variables in the report relate to one another, but only simple comparisons are presented, which do not account for all possible relationships. Comparisons of means and proportions were tested using Student's *t* statistic.

For readers interested in appendixes with estimate and standard error tables, definitions of terms used in the findings and tables, and additional information about the survey from which the findings are drawn, please see the "View full report" link at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023466>.

⁶ The analyses use 2017 income because it was the basis for calculating aid eligibility for the 2019–20 academic year.

⁷ Financial aid estimates by degree program for undergraduate students are not shown in this report.

Selected Findings

- Seventy-two percent of all undergraduate students received some type of financial aid in 2019–20 ([table A-1](#)). Sixty-four percent received grants, 36 percent took out student loans, 5 percent received work-study awards, 2 percent received federal veterans education benefits, and 4 percent had parents who took out federal Direct PLUS Loans.
- Seventy-four percent of undergraduates who identified as female received some type of financial aid, compared to 68 percent who identified as male and 67 percent who identified as genderqueer, gender nonconforming, or a different gender identity ([table A-1](#)).
- Among undergraduates who received any aid, the average total amount received was \$14,100 ([table A-2](#)). The average amount received from grants was \$9,300 and the average amount received from student loans was \$7,900. Students in work-study programs were awarded an average of \$2,500. Students with federal veterans education benefits received an average of \$17,900. Parents of undergraduates borrowed an average of \$16,300 in federal Direct PLUS Loans.
- Among full-time/full-year undergraduates who received any aid, dependent students received higher amounts on average (\$20,900) than independent students (\$16,500) ([table A-2](#)). While dependent students also received higher grant amounts (\$14,900) than independent students (\$8,800) on average, independent students took out higher loan amounts (\$10,900) than did dependent students (\$8,400).⁸
- Fifty-five percent of all undergraduates received federal student aid, 23 percent received state aid, and 28 percent received aid from their institution ([table A-3](#)).⁹
- The average amount of federal student aid for undergraduates who received it was \$8,700 ([table A-4](#)). The average amount of state aid for undergraduates who received it was \$3,600, and the average amount of institution aid for undergraduates who received it was \$9,900.

⁸ These loans include only loans to students and may be from federal, state, institution, or private sources. Student loans do not include Direct PLUS Loans to parents.

⁹ Students can receive aid from all these sources at the same time.

- White undergraduates who received federal student aid received on average \$8,800 ([table A-4](#)). Compared to them, Black undergraduates and undergraduates of two or more races received higher amounts on average (\$9,700 each), while Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native undergraduates received lower amounts (\$7,500, \$7,400, and \$7,000, respectively). There was no significant difference between the average amount of federal student aid received by White and by Asian undergraduates (\$8,800 and \$9,100, respectively).
- Forty percent of undergraduates received federal Pell Grants, and 12 percent received federal campus-based aid ([table A-5](#)). Thirty-four percent of undergraduates took out subsidized or unsubsidized federal Direct Loans.
- Undergraduates who received federal Pell Grants received an average of \$4,100 ([table A-6](#)). Undergraduates who took out federal Direct Loans borrowed an average of \$6,500 overall, including an average of \$3,800 in subsidized loans and an average of \$4,000 in unsubsidized loans.
- Seventy-four percent of graduate students received some type of financial aid in 2019–20 ([table A-7](#)). Forty-three percent received grants, 12 percent received graduate assistantships, and 42 percent took out loans. Thirty-nine percent took out Direct Unsubsidized Loans, and 11 percent took out Direct PLUS Loans.¹⁰
- Among graduate students who received any aid, the average amount of aid received was \$25,300 ([table A-8](#)). The average amount received from grants was \$11,300 and the average value of a graduate assistantship was \$18,800. Graduate borrowers took out an average of \$26,000 in loans, including an average of \$18,700 in Direct Unsubsidized Loans and an average of \$25,100 in Direct PLUS Loans.

¹⁰ Federal Direct PLUS Loans to graduate students, or Graduate PLUS Loans, are unsubsidized loans available for graduate students in addition to Direct Unsubsidized Loans.