

# Private Student Loan vs PLUS Loan for Graduate Students

Many graduate students are considering financing their education with either Federal Graduate PLUS Loans or private student loans. The comparison chart below will help you understand the features and benefits of each type of loan.

Interest rates and fees for private loans vary from lender to lender based on the credit of the individual borrower and cosigner. We recommend that you research private loans before deciding which type of loan is best for you. Remember, applying for a private student loan does not obligate you to accept it and typically shopping for a loan has minimal impact on your credit score.

	PLUS LOAN FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS	PRIVATE LOAN
<b>Whose name is on the loan?</b>	Student	Student and cosigner (if applicable)
<b>Cosigner requirement</b>	No. If the student has adverse credit history an endorser may be required.	No, but having a cosigner can help borrower qualify and obtain a better rate. Any creditworthy individual willing to assist the student may cosign.
<b>Cosigner release option</b>	No. The student, and any endorser, is making a commitment to repay the loan for the life of the loan.	Yes. Many lenders provide a cosigner release option where the student can apply to release the cosigner after he or she graduates and makes a specified number of on-time payments.
<b>Interest rate</b>	Fixed rate of 7.9% <sup>1</sup>	Many lenders offer both variable and fixed rate options. Interest rates range from 2.25% – 13.99%. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Origination/disbursement fees</b>	4% <sup>1</sup>	Varies by lender — 0% to 5% <sup>2</sup>
<b>Borrower benefits</b>	0.25% percentage point interest rate reduction for automatic debit enrollment. <sup>3</sup>	Most lenders offer a 0.25% percentage point interest rate reduction for automatic debit enrollment. Additional benefits vary by lender (e.g., graduation rewards). <sup>2</sup>
<b>Repayment period</b>	10 – 25 years <sup>3</sup>	Varies by lender; typically 5-15-year terms are offered. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Minimum loan requirement</b>	\$100 per semester	Varies by lender — Typically, \$500 to \$1500 per loan.
<b>Loan limits</b>	Up to 100% of the cost of attendance minus other financial aid received.	Generally, up to 100% of the cost of attendance minus financial aid received. Lenders may impose limits based on various factors, and can have different loan limits for different loan programs.
<b>Credit check required</b>	Yes. The student must not be in default on a federal loan or 90 days or more delinquent on any debt.	Yes. Loan approval and pricing is generally based on creditworthiness.
<b>Minimum enrollment status</b>	At least half time.	Varies by lender. Some offer loans to borrowers who are attending school less than half time.

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<b>Application process</b>	Online through the Department of Education.	Online with lender.
<b>Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) required</b>	Yes. In addition to the FAFSA, some states/colleges require additional forms or applications for aid.	No. Students are not required to complete the FAFSA unless it is the policy of the school.
<b>Minimum payment amount while the student is enrolled in school</b>	PLUS loan payments are deferred during school and for 6 months after graduation (interest continues to accrue and is added to the loan's principal).	Varies by lender. Many lenders allow private loan payments to be deferred while in school (interest accrues during this time). Many lenders offer options to make interest payments while in school.
<b>Loan forgiveness</b>	Yes. If the primary borrower dies, or becomes permanently and totally disabled, then the loan will be discharged if certain conditions are met.	Varies by lender. Some lenders waive the remaining balance in the event of the primary borrower's death or permanent and total disability.
<b>Ability to consolidate through the Department of Education</b>	Yes. The student can consolidate with other federal loans in their name.	No. Cannot be included with federal student loans.
<b>Options for denied loans</b>	If denied, the student may re-apply with an endorser (cosigner).	Student could apply with another private lender or re-apply with a cosigner or a different cosigner.
<b>Repayment plans</b>	PLUS loans are eligible for graduated, income-based, income-contingent and extended repayment options, federal consolidation, and some public service loan forgiveness options.	Most lenders have programs available to assist troubled borrowers, but they are discretionary and not part of the loan agreement.
<b>Interest tax deductible</b>	Yes. The student may be able to use the interest paid on the loan for a tax deduction, subject to IRS guidelines.	Generally, yes. The student may be able to use the interest paid on the loan for a tax deduction, subject to IRS guidelines. Restrictions apply to loans for less-than-half-time enrollment.

<sup>1</sup> This information was gathered on May 8, 2012, from <http://www.direct.ed.gov/PLUSLoansGradProfstudents.jsp>.

<sup>2</sup> Interest rates, fees, terms, and borrower benefits based on a May 17, 2012 review of national private loan programs.

<sup>3</sup> This information was gathered on May 8, 2012, from <http://www.direct.ed.gov/inrepayment.html>.