

News Release
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RISING STUDENT DEBT: IS THERE REASON TO WORRY? College Leaders, Others Concerned About Potential Impact

New effort to explore issue: <http://projectonstudentdebt.org>

Student debt has reached an all-time high in the United States. More students than ever are using loans to pay for college, and the amounts they borrow have risen dramatically: 60 percent over a period of just seven years. Two of every three college graduates now carry student loan debt, compared with less than half of students in the early 1990s.

A new nonprofit, nonpartisan project, launched today, is bringing together experts from across the political spectrum to focus on the implications of mounting student debt. By promoting examination of the changing role of student loans, the Project on Student Debt aims to identify potential improvements to the systems and policies that help families pay for college.

“To some, the increase in borrowing for college is a sign that Americans see the value of higher education and are willing to invest,” says Robert Shireman, director of the Project on Student Debt. “But how much debt is too much? How does rising debt affect college access, career choices, and family finances? These are issues we need to face, because America risks losing its competitive edge in the global economy if we fail to provide advanced education and training to our citizens.”

The project’s new web site, projectonstudentdebt.org, includes a number of resources intended to prompt discussions about the role of student loans. They include:

- A new national survey of college and university presidents, revealing that 86 percent are concerned about the amount of debt students are taking on to pay for their education. The presidents support a range of policy changes to reduce the burden of student debt;
- A new report, *The Debt Dilemma: Debt Aversion as a Barrier to College Access*, which explores how conflicting views about student loans affect young people, their families, and those who advise them about college and financial aid;
- Featured statements from economists, researchers, education leaders, and others demonstrating the range of opinion about the promise and peril of student loans;
- News on the issue of student debt, and resources listing key studies and data on the issue; and,
- Discussion forums addressing the role of loans in college access and related topics.

Advisors to the Project on Student Debt include Bridget Burns, Oregon State Board of Higher Education; Theresa Fay-Bustillos, Levi Strauss Foundation; Kevin A. Hassett, American Enterprise Institute; Charles E. M. Kolb, Committee for Economic Development; Raymund A. Paredes, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Ian Rowe, MTV Networks; and Blenda Wilson, Nellie Mae Education Foundation. (Affiliations are listed for identification purposes.)

The Project on Student Debt is a project of The Institute for College Access and Success. It is supported by the Partnership to Reduce the Burden of Student Debt, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts with support from the Surdna Foundation. The Project's other funders include The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Level Playing Field Institute.

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For Americans of all socioeconomic backgrounds, borrowing has become a primary way to pay for higher education. The Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of this trend and its implications for our families, economy, and society. Recognizing that loans play a critical role in making college possible, the Project's goal is to identify cost-effective solutions that expand educational opportunity, protect family financial security, and advance economic competitiveness. For more information, go to projectonstudentdebt.org.