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Average Student Debt at Graduation up 4% to \$30,100 for Class of 2015
Report includes national, state and college data; new insights into state-sponsored loans; federal and state policy recommendations

Student debt continues to rise for new graduates, according to a report released today by the Project on Student Debt at The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS). At public and nonprofit colleges in 2015, seven in 10 graduating seniors (68%) had student loans. Their average debt was \$30,100: up four percent compared to the Class of 2014. About one-fifth of 2015 graduates' debt (19%) was in private (nonfederal) loans, which are typically more costly and provide far fewer consumer protections and repayment options than federal student loans.

[Student Debt and the Class of 2015](#) is TICAS' eleventh annual report on debt at graduation. Using the most recent available data, it finds wide variations in debt levels across states as well as colleges. For the first time, it includes an analysis of where state-sponsored private loans are particularly prevalent, as well as policy options for state policymakers concerned about college affordability and debt. Because hardly any for-profit colleges voluntarily report their graduates' average debt, the report's debt figures are for public and nonprofit colleges, which awarded 93 percent of bachelor's degrees in 2015.

"Student debt is still rising, and the typical college graduate now leaves school with over \$30,000 in loans," said TICAS president **Lauren Asher**. "We need to make college more affordable and debt less burdensome for students and families."

HIGH-DEBT STATES	
New Hampshire	\$36,101
Pennsylvania	\$34,798
Connecticut	\$34,773
Delaware	\$33,849
Rhode Island	\$32,920
Minnesota	\$31,526
Massachusetts	\$31,466
District of Columbia	\$31,452
South Carolina	\$30,564
Ohio	\$30,239

LOW-DEBT STATES	
Utah	\$18,873
New Mexico	\$20,193
California	\$22,191
Wyoming	\$22,683
Florida	\$23,379
Hawaii	\$23,456
Nevada	\$23,462
Arizona	\$23,780
Washington	\$24,600
Oklahoma	\$24,849

Wide Ranges in How Many Graduate with Loans and How Much They Owe. State averages for debt at graduation in 2015 ranged from \$18,850 to \$36,100, and new graduates' likelihood of having debt ranged from 41 percent to 76 percent. In 12 states, average debt was more than \$30,000 – up from six states the year before. High-debt states remain concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest, with low-debt states mainly in the West. Average debt at the college level varies even more, from a low of \$3,000 to a high of \$53,000, and the share graduating with loans ranges from seven percent to 100 percent.

An **interactive map** with details for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 1,000 public and nonprofit four-year colleges is available at <http://ticas.org/posd/map-state-data>.

The Type of Loan Matters: Private Loan Usage Including State-Sponsored Loans. Federal student loans come with important consumer protections and repayment options that do not apply to private, nonfederal loans. Importantly, income-driven repayment plans have been widely available for federal student loan borrowers since 2009. These plans cap payments based on the borrower's income and family size and forgive remaining debt, if any, after 20 or 25 years of payments.

About one-fifth (19%) of graduates' debt in the Class of 2015 comes from private (nonfederal) sources. Most of these loans are made by private banks and lenders, but some states and colleges offer their own private loans to students, which also lack the protections and flexibility of federal student loans.

Data newly reported by colleges show that student debt from state loan programs is concentrated in particular states. Two-thirds (67%) of the 2015 graduates with state loan debt attended schools in just three states – **New Jersey, Texas, and Minnesota** – that awarded only 11 percent of bachelor's degrees.

"In addition to how much they owe, it matters what kinds of loans students have" said **Debbie Cochran**, report coauthor and TICAS vice president. "Compared to federal loans, private loans – whether from banks, states, or schools – can be much harder to repay, especially if the borrower hits hard times."

Policy Recommendations. This report uses the best available data on debt at graduation, but the data have significant limitations. Because colleges are not required to report debt levels for their graduates, only some do, and the quality of reported data varies.

For the Class of 2015, 56% of public and nonprofit bachelor's degree-granting four-year colleges provided data, representing 82% of graduates in these sectors and 76% of bachelor's degree recipients in all sectors. For-profit colleges could not be included in the analysis because so few report their graduates' debt loads, but other data consistently show that the sector's students are the most likely to borrow and have the highest debt levels. The problems with voluntarily reported data underscore the need for federal collection of data on debt at graduation by degree level for all schools, including federal and private loans.

"Actual state averages may be even higher than they look," said **Diane Cheng**, report coauthor and TICAS associate research director. "Our state averages are based on what colleges voluntarily report about their graduates' combined federal and private loan debt. Schools with high debt levels can opt out of providing data, and schools that do report may not know of all the private loans their students have."

Other policy recommendations focus on ways to reduce the need to borrow, help keep loan payments manageable, improve consumer information, strengthen college accountability, and reduce risky private loan borrowing. While the main recommendations for reducing the burden of student debt are focused on federal policy, the report also includes options for state policymakers to consider, such as basing state grant eligibility on financial need and exempting forgiven student loan debt from state income tax.

NOTE: The full report and companion interactive map with details for states and colleges are available online at <http://ticas.org/posd/map-state-data>.

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An independent, nonprofit organization, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Our Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. For more information see www.ticas.org or follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).