

StudentLoans.gov Changes for PLUS Counseling
Attachment to February 2015 Electronic Announcement

In the [Federal Register notice posted on January 14, 2015](#) and in the [January 27, 2015 Electronic Announcement](#), the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) announced that it will implement changes to the adverse credit history provisions for the determination of an applicant's eligibility for a Direct PLUS Loan. The regulations also added a requirement that PLUS Counseling must be completed by Direct PLUS Loan applicants (by parents of dependent undergraduate students as well as graduate/professional students) with an adverse credit history who qualify for a Direct PLUS Loan by obtaining an endorser who does not have an adverse credit history, or who document to the satisfaction of the Department that there are extenuating circumstances related to the adverse credit information.

In this attachment, we highlight the StudentLoans.gov Web site changes specific to the new PLUS Counseling described above.

We provide information in the following order:

- Addition of PLUS Counseling Module on StudentLoans.gov
- PLUS Counseling Sections

Note: Additional information about the changes to the Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) System specific to the new PLUS Counseling is included in a separate attachment to this Electronic Announcement.

Addition of PLUS Counseling Module on StudentLoans.gov

Beginning March 29, 2015, a new PLUS Counseling module will be added to the StudentLoans.gov Web site in English only. This counseling must be completed by Direct PLUS Loan applicants (by parents of dependent undergraduate students as well as graduate/professional students) who are determined to have an adverse credit history, but qualify for a Direct PLUS Loan by obtaining an endorser or by documenting extenuating circumstances. The PLUS Counseling is intended to help Direct PLUS Loan applicants:

- Understand the costs and obligations that come with borrowing a PLUS loan.
- Make careful decisions about taking on student loan debt.

While the completion of the new PLUS Counseling is mandatory only for certain Direct PLUS Loan applicants with an adverse credit history, as explained above, the new PLUS Counseling will also be made available for all Direct PLUS Loan applicants to complete on a voluntary basis.

Note: Schools are not responsible for providing the new mandatory PLUS Counseling. Applicants who are subject to the new counseling requirement must complete the counseling on the StudentLoans.gov Web site.

Applicants will be able to view PLUS Counseling without logging into the StudentLoans.gov Web site using the "PLUS Counseling Demo" link under the "Getting Loans" section. However, applicants who are required to complete the new PLUS Counseling as a condition for receiving a Direct PLUS Loan must complete the counseling *after* logging into the Web site to fulfill the requirement.

Once an applicant has logged in to StudentLoans.gov, the PLUS Counseling module can be accessed from the following pages:

- Complete Counseling
- Request Direct PLUS Loan

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- Document Extenuating Circumstances
- Complete PLUS MPN

A new “PLUS Counseling” link will be added to the counseling type options available on the “Complete Counseling” page. If accessing the PLUS Counseling from the Request Direct PLUS Loan, Document Extenuating Circumstances, or Complete PLUS MPN pages, the applicant will be taken directly to the PLUS Counseling module.

PLUS Counseling Sections

Applicants will need to select whether they are a parent or a graduate/professional student before they begin the counseling session. The PLUS Counseling content will be tailored specifically for a parent of a dependent undergraduate student or a graduate/professional student, depending on the applicant’s selection.

When completing the PLUS Counseling session, the applicant will not have the option to select a specific school(s) to notify upon completion. More information about school notification is included in a separate attachment titled, “COD System Changes for PLUS Counseling”.

PLUS Counseling Overview

Applicants who are logged into the StudentLoans.gov Web site and who have been determined to have an adverse credit history based on a credit check performed within the past 180 days will be presented with additional information related to their credit decision and the available options to obtain a Direct PLUS Loan. This information will not be displayed for applicants who have an accepted credit decision or applicants who are not logged in to the Web site.

Loan Summary

Applicants who are logged in to the StudentLoans.gov Web site will be presented with their loan information and total loan balance from the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS). Loan information for applicants completing the “Demo” version will not be displayed, but they may manually enter their loan information.

Parent applicants will be presented with loan information for all Direct PLUS Loans received on behalf of each of their dependent undergraduate children.

Project Loan Balance

Applicants will have the ability to add additional loan information to assist them in estimating how much they will need to borrow in the future for their or their undergraduate children’s continuing educational expenses. Tools will be provided to assist applicants with estimating their future educational expenses if they do not know the exact amounts needed.

- If an applicant knows which school they, or their undergraduate children, will be attending they can select to use the school’s estimated expenses from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).
- If an applicant does not know which school they, or their undergraduate children, will be attending they can select to use the national average from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), based on the type of school and state selected.

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Income and Expenses

Applicants will have the ability to add additional information about their income and expenses to show the impacts of repaying their Direct PLUS Loans on their monthly budget.

Note: The information provided will only be used during the counseling session for estimating purposes and will not be saved by the Department.

Repayment Plans

Applicants will be presented with a list of the different repayment plan options that are available to parents of dependent undergraduate students or graduate/professional student borrowers. The repayment periods and estimated monthly payments for each plan will be included to help applicants determine which repayment plan is most affordable for their budget.

Alternate Repayment Options

Calculators will be provided to show applicants the impacts to their loan balance and interest accrual when the applicant pays additional amounts towards their monthly loan payments, or temporarily postpones their repayment with a deferment or forbearance.

Avoiding Default

Additional information and guidance will be provided to instruct applicants on how to avoid defaulting on their student loans.

PLUS Counseling Summary

Once the PLUS Counseling session has been completed, applicants will be provided a financial summary that includes their loan balances, income and expenses, and repayment plan details based on the information provided during the counseling session. Applicants will have an option to export the summary results into a spreadsheet or e-mail the summary results to themselves.

Applicants will receive a confirmation e-mail, if an e-mail address was provided, upon completion of the PLUS Counseling session.

Note: Options for e-mailing, exporting, printing, and tweeting are available regardless of whether the applicant is logged in to the StudentLoans.gov Web site or views the counseling in the “Demo” mode.