



**BUFFALO STATE**  
The State University of New York

# Financial Aid for Graduate Admissions

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## **Conferral Date of Bachelor's Degree** [top](#)

Students entering graduate school must have their bachelor's degree officially conferred **prior** to the date they begin graduate school in order to be eligible for federal aid.

**How you can help:** Students who do not have a bachelor's degree prior to entering a graduate program will not be eligible for financial aid and should not be considered for admission to a graduate program. Students that have a bachelor's degree pending should be advised that if they intend to use federal financial aid, it cannot disburse until the degree has been conferred and the Buffalo State Graduate School Office has proof of this status.

## **Federal Aid-Eligible Admission Statuses** [top](#)

Financial aid-eligible admission statuses include Graduate Degrees (e.g., M.S., M.A., M.S.Ed., M.F.A), Post-Baccalaureate or Teacher Certificates, Pre-Majors, and Graduate Certificates. However, each status has different aid options. **All federal loans require the student be enrolled in at least six (6) credit hours of required coursework.**

**How you can help:** Below is a brief summary of the admit types and aid programs available. More detailed information can be found on the [Federal Financial Aid for Graduate & Post-Baccalaureate Students](#) handout.

<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Loan Eligibility</b>
<i>Graduate Degree or Graduate Certificate</i>	The annual loan limit for a graduate student is \$20,500.
<i>Post-Baccalaureate or Teacher Certificate</i>	The annual loan limit for an independent student is \$12,500 and \$5,500 for a dependent student. A student's dependency status is determined by the FAFSA.
<i>Graduate Pre-Major</i>	The annual loan limit for an independent student is \$12,500 and \$5,500 for a dependent student. A student's dependency status is determined by the FAFSA. Graduate pre-majors are broken down into the following two categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A student in a pre-major status taking graduate-level courses may receive a loan for a maximum of six credit hours (one semester), so long as they were not admitted into this status solely to raise their gpa.</li> <li>○ A student in a pre-major status taking preparatory coursework (undergraduate prerequisites) may receive loans for up to 12 months of continuous enrollment.</li> </ul>

## **Federal Aid Options** [top](#)

Student aid options for graduate students are limited to Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford loans, Graduate PLUS loans, and in some cases of exceptional financial need, Perkins loans. Please visit the [Federal Loans](#) webpage for detailed information on each loan program. Students must enroll in at least 6.0 required credit hours to be eligible for any federal loans. Students wishing to attend less-than-half-time (1-5 credit hours per semester) may apply for a [private loan](#), which is a non-federal loan.

## **Full-Time Status: Academic vs. Financial Aid** [top](#)

For federal aid purposes, “full-time” refers to any student enrolled in 12 or more credit hours. However, 9 graduate credit hours is typically considered full-time by most other college offices and external agencies. Since the costs for a student attending 9 credits are less than the costs for a student attending 12 credits, the Financial Aid Office must differentiate between these enrollment loads. Students that need to go “full-time” should not be concerned with how the Financial Aid Office categorizes 9 credits and 12 credits. Further, students should understand they need only attend half-time (6.0 credit hours of required coursework) to be eligible for federal student loans.

## **Required Coursework** [top](#)

Students may only receive federal aid, including loans, for courses required for their degree program. Courses the student takes to enhance their degree or gain experience, but not required, cannot be used to determine their aid eligibility.

*Example: Cole is enrolled in six credits his final semester. He is taking one required course, a research project, and an additional elective that interests him. Cole does not need to take the elective to have his master’s degree conferred; rather, he is taking it solely to gain knowledge. Since the course is not required for his degree, Cole is ineligible for federal student loans because he cannot enroll in 6 credits of required coursework (he has only 3 credit hours remaining of required coursework).*

### **How you can help:**

- Students should be encouraged to map out their coursework in future semesters to ensure they will have at least six credits of required coursework to enroll in each semester (provided they are relying on student loans).
- Students wishing to take additional coursework are permitted to do so, so long as they are also enrolled in at least 6 credit hours of required coursework. They will only receive loans based on the credit hours actually required.
- Students that consistently take courses not required may exhaust the time limits by which they must complete their degree. Therefore, students should be encouraged to focus on actual degree requirements.

## **Undergraduate Coursework** [top](#)

Students pursuing a master’s degree or graduate certificate may only receive federal aid based on graduate-level coursework.

*Example: Carson is pursuing a Master of Art degree in History. He enrolls in three credits of undergraduate coursework and three credits of graduate-level coursework. Carson is not eligible for a student loan because he is only enrolled in three (3) credits that are required for his program. The undergraduate credit hours will be ignored for financial aid eligibility but he will be billed for them.*

***How you can help:*** Admitting students into a regular graduate program for which they do not meet all the undergraduate prerequisites can cause issues with their financial aid eligibility. If a student is admitted without all necessary prerequisites and is instructed to take the undergraduate courses as a graduate student, they must take at least 6 credit hours of graduate-level course in addition to the undergraduate course(s) to qualify for a federal student loan. However, they will be billed for all credits for which they are registered.

### ***Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for Graduate Students*** [top](#)

[Satisfactory Academic Progress](#) (SAP) is the process used to determine if a student is making acceptable progress toward their degree. Graduate students must maintain a cumulative 3.0 GPA and must complete at least two-thirds or 66.67% of their total attempted credits hours. In addition, students must be able to complete their degree within 150% of the normal time to complete a degree, as measured in credit hours. For example, if the degree program requires 30 credits, the student must be able to complete it within 45 credit attempts. Buffalo State monitors SAP end the end of each term (summer, fall, and spring). Students not making SAP are notified in writing shortly after grades are officially posted.

### ***Changing Majors*** [top](#)

Graduate students that wish to change their major are permitted to do so; however, students that attempt 150% of the credits needed to graduate without graduating will be reviewed by the Financial Aid Office to ensure timely completion before additional loans are awarded.

### ***Readmission after an Extended Absence*** [top](#)

Readmission to Buffalo State after a long absence does not automatically mean reinstatement of financial aid eligibility. A student's SAP status only "resets" after a degree has been earned.

### ***How you can help:***

- When considering readmitting a student with a weak academic history, a referral to the Financial Aid Office is good practice. In general, if the student's cumulative GPA is below a 3.0 or their overall pace ratio is less than 66.67%, they will most likely have an eligibility issue. Pace is calculated as: cumulative graduate attempted credit hours divided by cumulative graduate earned credit hours.
- If the student is readmitted into a different program and has 15 or more credits attempted in their academic history, they may encounter an issue with financial aid in subsequent semesters. They are advised to complete their degree as quickly as possible (e.g.: no course withdrawals, no failing grades, and only taking and completing required coursework).

### ***Thesis or Research Project Continuation*** [top](#)

Oftentimes students are unable to complete their graduate thesis or research project in one semester. Students are allowed to continue work on their project in subsequent semesters, but since they are not registered for any "new" credit hours, they are not eligible for additional funding or loans. Likewise, they are not charged additional tuition and fees while they complete the project.