

Episode 41 – Bonus Episode! Summer 2025 Grad Ed Updates

Welcome to this bonus edition of Grad-post! I'm your host, Brian S. Mitchell and we're here to talk about life before, during, and after graduate school, and whether an advanced degree is right for you. I'll draw upon my experiences as a graduate dean and research mentor, as well as my network of students, colleagues, and experts to bring you the most complete information on graduate education that I can.

I hope your summer is going well! Mine has been busy, but enough has happened in recent weeks that this bonus edition is in order. I thought I'd give a few updates on some topics I raised in Season 2, especially with respect to the rapidly-changing landscapes of financial aid and immigration policies for international students. In [Episode 38](#), I outlined three things that I thought would negatively impact the ability of students to pursue graduate and post-graduate degrees in the United States: anti-DEI sentiment; limitations on F-1 visa issuance for international students; and the potential elimination of Grad Plus loans for financing advanced degrees.

Let's work backwards and start with the Grad Plus loans. In short, they're gone. [Section 81001 of H.R. 1 of the 119th](#) Congress terminated interest subsidized loans to graduate and professional students effective July 1, 2026. This means that you can still receive a subsidized loan for graduate or professional studies until this change goes into effect on July 1, 2026. Recall that a subsidized loan is one in which the interest is waived (paid by the government) while you meet eligibility requirements like continued registration in an approved program. Unsubsidized loans will still be available – as of the airing of this podcast – but annual limits have been set at \$20,500 for graduate students and \$50,000 for professional students with lifetime limits of \$100,000 for graduate students and \$200,000 for professional students, with lots of stipulations that require some advanced mathematics to figure out the actual maximum. These limits also go into effect July 1, 2026. There are other changes to loan programs in this bill including changes to parental loans for students and loan repayment programs. But the upshot is that while federal loans will still be available, you may want to look elsewhere for a loan that is less than the anticipated interest rate of 8.94% which you will have to pay beginning day one. Oh, and try to complete your degree in three years or less which is the expected time to credential in the bill. Good luck, PhD students! As I mentioned in [Episode 38](#), these changes disproportionately impact students from lower income groups.

Next, let's discuss the F-1 visa situation. Kathleen Gasparian gave a great update to the process of obtaining an F-1 visa in [Episode 39](#) earlier this year, but I want to look at where visa issuances stands. Recall that there was a [pause in non-immigrant visa interviews](#) which have since been resumed, but perhaps more importantly is the [suspension \(read: ban\) on visa issuance to foreign national from 19 countries, including Afghanistan and Iran](#). What used to be a tortuous but at least plausible path to entry to graduate and professional programs for students from these countries is now essentially closed as of June 9, 2025. But all student visa applicants will now have to go through [enhanced screening, including a potential review of all social media accounts](#) as part of the visa interview process. I say "potential" because – as with most things these days – details are sketchy on what this includes and how it will be implemented, what the interviewers are actually looking for, and what constitutes a red flag insofar as enrollment in a U.S. institution of higher education is concerned. If enforced, this new policy will slow down the already-backlogged interview process to the point that it will effectively constitute a suspension of ALL F-1 visas. Label me an alarmist if you wish, but the numbers reflect that F-1 visa issuances are down. The most recent month for which the [State Department has release data – May 2025](#) – shows a 22% decrease in the issuance of F-1 visas over 2024. And that's before the pause and enhanced interview processes hit in June. The graduate program administrators, deans and provosts I hear from are already preparing for a large number of enrollment deferrals this fall simply because of delays in obtaining F-1 visas. There is little to suggest the situation will change for next year, so even if an admission deferral is granted, international students

who were accepted into graduate programs will essentially be forced to look elsewhere for their advanced degrees. The economic impact here in the United States will be enormous.

Finally, let's talk about the continued assault on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Institutions are continuing to acquiesce and eliminate or rename all departments, offices, and programs that have these terms in their names or missions. And those that haven't – or are perceived as trying to maintain status quo with merely cosmetic changes – are facing consequences. The [president of the University of Virginia was recently ousted by the UVA Board](#) of Visitors for supposedly not following through on eliminating DEI from his institution. More such examples will arise in the coming months. But the true impact of anti-DEI efforts on applications, enrollment, and degree attainment for students from under-represented and marginalized groups will not be felt until they start entering programs – or not. We may not have indicators of this impact until December of 2026 when the [Council of Graduate Schools](#) Graduate Enrollment and Degrees report for 2025 comes out.

As I opined earlier this year, it's the cumulative effect of these factors that will undermine graduate education in the United States over time. We're already starting to see that American students are applying abroad to go to college. For example, [a record 8,000 students applied to study in the UK](#) this year – a 14% rise over the previous year. Those are mostly undergraduate students, but they're also our future graduate students. Whether or not they choose to return to the United States for their graduate degrees remains to be seen.

To end on a positive note, despite efforts to ruin what is arguably the best thing the United States has going for it, our colleges and universities are scheduled to begin a new academic year in just a few weeks. They are still staffed by dedicated, talented, and resilient people and your degree will still be as valuable as it was before. I'll be back as well with a new set of topics and updates to these issues and much more in Season 3 of Grad-post. In the meantime, all the transcripts to these podcasts as well as the podcast archive and other resources are available at Grad-post.com. Those resources are meant to help you make every degree count.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Links

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text>

<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/27/trump-team-orders-stop-to-new-student-visa-interviews-as-it-weighs-expanding-social-media-vetting-00370501>

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/suspension-of-visa-issuance-to-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-united-states-from-foreign-terrorists-and-other-national-security-and-public-safety-threats.html>

<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/06/announcement-of-expanded-screening-and-vetting-for-visa-applicants>

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics/monthly-nonimmigrant-visa-issuances.html>

<https://www.npr.org/2025/06/30/nx-s1-5450348/the-impact-of-uvas-president-resignation-on-public-higher-education>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-uk-university-applications-record-b2790978.html>