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November 2, 2026

Ms. Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Brown:

In fall 2024, over 3 million students were enrolled in graduate programs at institutions of higher education across the country.[1] Research by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has shown that graduate enrollment and federal student loan borrowing have increased.[2] According to a 2025 ED press release, graduate students received more than half of all new federal student loans in recent years, and graduate student loans constitute half of the $1.7 trillion federal student loan portfolio.[3]

Tuition and fees vary widely by graduate program, even within the same institution. For example, at one public university in California, according to data on its website, annual tuition and fees for certain programs for the 2026-2027 academic year are approximately: (1) $94,000 for a Master of Business Administration; (2) $72,000 for a Juris Doctor; (3) $38,000 for a Master of Nursing; and (4) $23,000 for a graduate program in a non-professional academic discipline (e.g., humanities, arts and sciences).

Colleges may consider multiple factors when setting tuition and fees for graduate programs, including state laws, program operating costs, graduates' expected earnings, and student demand.

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[1]U.S. Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/trendgenerator/app/answer/2/3?f=14%3D2, accessed 9/21/2026.

[2]U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Chief Economist, *Trends in Federal Student Loans for Graduate School* (August 2023), https://assets.arnoldventures.org/uploads/PDFs/OCE_Graduate_Debt_Report.pdf?_sm_nck=1.

[3]U.S. Department of Education, "Press Release: Myth vs. Fact: The Definition of Professional Degrees," (November 24, 2025), https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/myth-vs-fact-definition-of-professional-degrees.

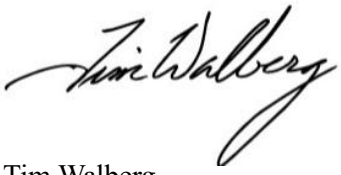
Additionally, they may also consider the price sensitivity of prospective students, particularly those receiving federal student aid through loans or grants. Given the varying costs to students by college and by program, the Committee on Education and Workforce (Committee) seeks to better understand how institutions of higher education set their graduate program costs, particularly among public universities that receive both federal and state taxpayer funds.

Accordingly, the Committee requests the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine the following questions:

1. What factors do selected public universities consider in setting the tuition and fees for various graduate programs? In particular:
    a. How, if at all, do they analyze cost inputs such as faculty salaries, equipment, and lab/classroom costs in setting tuition and fees?
    b. How, if at all, do they consider student demand for graduate programs in setting tuition and fees?
    c. How, if at all, do they consider future expected earnings of graduates in setting tuition and fees?
    d. How, if at all, do they consider the price sensitivity of prospective students, particularly those receiving federal student aid through loans or grants?
2. How does the process for setting out-of-state tuition and fees for various graduate programs differ from setting in-state tuition and fees at selected public universities?
3. How do tuition and fees for various graduate programs, including different tuition for in-state and out-of-state students, fit into the financial ecosystems of selected public universities (e.g., by potentially subsidizing other university programs and operations)?

Please direct any questions to Kent Talbert at kent.talbert@mail.house.gov or 202-225-4527. The Committee looks forward to working with you on this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Tim Walberg
Chairman
Committee on Education and Workforce