

NASW WI CONDUCTS STUDENT DEBT LOAD SURVEY

In the fall of 2007, NASW WI conducted a student debt load survey with its BSW & MSW students and transition members. Just over half, 312 out of 615 members in these four categories responded, for a response rate of 51%

The median debt load for the BSW students (33 responses) was \$15,000-\$19,999 and the median debt load at graduation projected by the students was \$25,000-\$29,999.

The median debt load for the MSW students (55 responses) was \$25,000-\$29,999 and the median debt load at graduation projected by the students was \$35,000-\$39,999.

MSW graduates (163) showed a median debt load of \$30,000-\$39,999. For those MSW graduates who reported a salary (133) the median salary was also in the \$30,000-\$39,999 range. BSW graduates (61) showed a median debt load of \$20,000-\$24,999 and for those BSW graduates (40) reporting a salary, there was a median salary of \$25,000-\$29,999.

This debt load survey demonstrated the great challenge faced by many new social workers of having both a very high debt load and a relatively low salary. The recent College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, reported in the last edition of *The Wisconsin Social Worker* should provide some assistance to social work graduates over time.

As a follow-up to this survey, NASW WI has organized a networking session at the annual conference entitled, "Managing My Student Loans on My Salary." In addition NASW WI's current student intern will be researching all possible scholarships available to social work students and publicizing this information. On a long term basis it is obviously critical to continue to lobby for loan forgiveness and higher salaries for social workers.

Aside from the debt load and salary information provided by respondents in this survey, many respondents provided additional comments and information. The following is a random sample of these comments

- All my schooling has been covered by state and federal grants" (BSW student)
- I had to take additional alternative loans through a private lender on top of my state loans. I am married and have two daughters. We live on one income and it is not easy. Being able to obtain student loans has helped a great deal, however I am sure they will take me a while to pay back" (BSW student)
- I am unable to pay my loans back yet and do not qualify for an economic hardship deferment so they are in forbearance and I am accumulating interest. (BSW graduate)
- It's hard paying student loans, just starting out of college (05/06 grad), 23 year old, and trying to save money for future and enjoyment. I feel my student loans take a lot of my monthly income and only think if my parents paid for all of my college I would be further ahead and secure financially. (BSW graduate)
- I realize it is a low interest rate, but I feel like I'll still owe student loans when I retire, which is about 20-25 years away. Not a good feeling. (BSW graduate)
- There are not a lot of good paying BSW jobs available. Many places prefer a MSW which makes paying off loans difficult. Then it is difficult to work and try to go on to graduate school also so that you can make a little more money to pay off loans faster. (BSW graduate)
- I have a BA in Communication from a private college, a BSW from a WI University, and will have a MSW in May. It's funny how we're encouraged to continue our education, but it comes with a steep price that will last a lifetime! Also, I'm finding that many hospitals (where I am looking for jobs) have loan forgiveness or education reimbursement programs for PT/OT/Nurses/Physicians/etc., but not for social workers who make less than all of the mentioned professions meaning it will take us longer to pay back our debt. (MSW student)

- Sadly by the time I graduate I will have a greater student loan than the average starting salary for the profession. My loan debt from a private undergrad institution is the sole reason that I chose a public university over a private one for my masters. (MSW student)
- Thank the lord for loan repayment forgiveness, etc. for social workers.....there may be hope for my future debt! (MSW student)
- I am carrying an astronomical amount of debt. I'm 53 years old. I can't imagine ever being able to pay this off in my lifetime. Returning to school at my age required taking on a lot of debt to get through the program; because I "have a life" and other responsibilities, (MSW student)
- I don't know what you plan to do with the data you are collecting, but I hope what I've provided is useful. Even with all I've been through and the debt I've taken on, I love social work and have no regrets about going back to school. I just hope I can find a job when I get finished (in May) and begin practicing in the profession I love. (MSW student)
- The represented loan debt is only for/from my graduate education (\$75,000), as my parents paid for my undergrad. I am nervous about how much I owe—and especially because I have to put my loans on forbearance due to having to resign from my job so that I am able to have surgery. (MSW graduate)
- I will be paying until I die. Something needs to be done to help students who don't have an option of having their parents pay for their schooling and that are also single parents themselves. (MSW student)
- What really hurt me loan/money wise was having to work 20 hours a week at an internship for my masters program with no pay. I had to go to school full time, work 20 hours a week at an internship for free, and then find time to work that was paid. It caused a lot of stressful months and a lot of debt for me. (MSW graduate)
- I have a consolidated student loan for my undergrad work and graduate work. Unfortunately, I had to rely on loans to pay for my tuition and also help me with living expenses, i.e. rent, food, day care, etc. I am trying very hard to start paying them off – but it will be a long time. During graduate school I had two children to raise and was not able to work at my job due to the field placement requirements of graduate school. Therefore, I completely relied on loans to live from day to day. On a positive note, I was able to get most of my loans at a 3.0% interest rate. (MSW graduate)
- It would be nice if NASW fought for loan forgiveness considering the amount we pay for schooling compared to our salary. (MSW graduate)
- Some times the burden of the loan is overwhelming. I feel I am not free to volunteer my services as a social worker because I need to work as much as possible to try to pay this off. (MSW graduate)
- My husband and I are in the human service field. We could not afford a home due to our monthly student loan payments. We both have our masters degree's. We are also investing less in our retirement due to our expensive student loan payments. (MSW graduate)
- It is very stressful to have so much in student loans and make so little. Also, having to come up with the extra money to take APSW/LCSW and belong to NASW. (MSW graduate)
- I currently do not work in social work because I cannot afford to given my student loan debt. (MSW graduate)
- To become a psychotherapist it is necessary to attend graduate school. You must work 3,000 hours post graduate school to become licensed. It is difficult to find jobs that will pay you while working on your 3,000 hours. Teachers have loan forgiveness programs but we don't—even though we must have a masters, work in inner cities and have low pay. (MSW graduate)
- Are there any grants or organizations or any place, etc. that help to pay student loans or donate money? I'm having a very difficult time repaying and I do not want to defer any longer. It is very overwhelming. (MSW graduate)