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NASBA Urges U.S. Department of Education to Restore “Professional” Status for Accounting Degrees

Reclassification creates barriers to entering the workforce, puts investors at risk and ignores the rigorous state-regulated licensure required of all CPAs

NASHVILLE, TENN. (March 5, 2026) – The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) has officially responded to a new federal proposal that would reclassify accounting degrees as “non-professional.” In a formal letter to the U.S. Department of Education, NASBA warned that this change would severely cut federal loan limits for graduate students and create new barriers to entering the profession.

The response builds on concerns raised by NASBA in November 2025 regarding federal student-loan policies that reclassify accounting degrees as “non-professional.” Under the new framework, graduate students in “non-professional” tracks are limited to \$20,500 annually in federal loans, while “professional” students may access up to \$50,000.

“Classifying accounting students as anything other than professionals fundamentally misrepresents the education and licensure required of CPAs,” said Daniel J. Dustin, CPA, NASBA President and CEO. “The American economy, investors and the public rely every day on the work of highly skilled CPAs to make critical decisions involving global trade, business operations and retirement planning. That is why certified public accountancy is a licensed, state-regulated profession. Federal policy should reflect that reality.”

NASBA's letter highlights several critical risks if accounting is excluded from the professional category:

- **Higher Financial Barriers:** While licensure pathways are evolving, graduate accounting programs remain a critical route for many CPA candidates. A nearly 60 percent reduction in loan access would significantly limit students’ ability to finance this pathway.
- **Workforce Shortages:** The change comes at a time when the U.S. already faces a shortage of CPAs who are vital to protecting investors and the economy.
- **Clarifying State Authority:** NASBA is asking the Department to clarify that federal loan labels do not override a state’s power to regulate and license professions like public accountancy.

“Federal classifications carry weight beyond loan limits,” Dustin added. “We urge the Department to correct this designation and avoid unintended consequences that could weaken the CPA pipeline and the public protections it supports.”

NASBA remains ready to work with policymakers to ensure federal student-loan policy supports a strong, highly qualified accounting workforce.

[The full comment letter is available here.](#)

About NASBA

Since 1908, the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) has served as a forum for the nation's Boards of Accountancy, which administer the Uniform CPA Examination, license approximately 653,000 certified public accountants and regulate the practice of public accountancy in the United States.

NASBA's mission is to enhance the effectiveness and advance the common interests of the Boards of Accountancy in meeting their regulatory responsibilities. The Association promotes the exchange of information among accountancy boards, serving the needs of the 55 U.S. jurisdictions.

NASBA is headquartered in Nashville, TN, with operations in San Juan, PR. To learn more about NASBA, visit www.nasba.org.

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