

Maryland Institutional Debt Public Records Analysis

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Institutional debts, or debts that students owe directly to schools, stem from all sorts of student activity: nonpayment of parking tickets, library fees, or tuition. Although historically overlooked, there is growing understanding that these institutional debts can pose as much a barrier to student success and employment opportunities as traditional student loan debt, and that too often schools engage in harmful and abusive collection practices. The few existing studies show that students of color and low-income students owe a disproportionate amount of this debt and are therefore harmed the most.

The Student Borrower Protection Center (SBPC) submitted Maryland Public Information Act requests to 12 different public higher education institutions in the state of Maryland seeking information about the debt that current and former students owe to their schools. Only five out of the 12 institutions provided any data, and even of those that did, the data received was incomplete.

Table 1. Total Debt and Number of Affected Students by School

Institution	Total Outstanding Debt	Total Number of Debtors
Allegany College of Maryland	\$459,789.00	291
Bowie State University	\$18,927,859.00	Unknown
Prince George’s Community College	\$14,971,472.63	19,817
Towson University	\$19,936,585.60	7,925
Wor-Wic Community College	\$2,706,202.90	3,747

While there are still a lot of unknowns about the demographics of the students holding this debt, records provided by Allegany College of Maryland show that the debt is disproportionately owed by women, Black students, and low-income students. No other school responded to SBPC’s request for data on debt by demographic. However, reports across the country show that institutional debt disproportionately affects low-income students and students of color.

- Pell Grant recipients owe nearly twice as much as non-Pell recipients, and more than four times more in housing debt.
- Nearly four times as many women owed debt to their school than men.
- Black students owe at least three times as much housing debt than students of other races.

Table 2. Demographics of Students with Institutional Debt Owed to Allegany College of Maryland

Demographics	Students w/ Housing Debt	Total Students w/ Debt
Male	11	64
Female	12	227
Unknown Gender	<5	<5
Black/African-American	16	90
White	<5	163
More than One Race	<5	21
Hispanic	<5	16
Hawaiian-Pacific Islander	<5	<5
Unknown Race/Ethnicity	<5	<5
Pell Status	Dollars Owed Due to Housing	Dollars Owed Total
Pell Recipient	\$54,424.00	\$255,014
Non-Pell Recipient	\$12,741.00	\$137,610

Moreover, the consequences to the Maryland students and former students who owe this debt are severe. Schools are prohibiting students from enrolling in classes and receiving transcripts when they have accounts past due. Allegany College of Maryland, Bowie State University, and Wor-Wic Community College do not let students enroll if they have past-due balances. Prince George’s Community College places a hold on a student’s account if the amount owed is greater than \$25, and Towson University does the same if the amount owed is over \$250.

All schools reported that they sent past-due accounts to the Central Collection Unit (CCU) of the state of Maryland. Amounts sent to and successfully collected by the CCU remain unknown.

According to the documents SBPC obtained, Maryland schools are withholding the transcripts and diplomas of tens of thousands of Marylanders, preventing them from continuing their education or securing better jobs. This data only scratches the surface. Marylanders deserve to know how much debt is held by institutions, why, and who is affected most by this issue. Maryland House Bill 920 is necessary to understand the scope of these debts and the harm that they cause so that further action can be taken to address that harm.