

**Q:** How can your agency actually assist with my student loan debt?

**A:** We will conduct a comprehensive review of your full financial situation, including your student debt and all repayment options. This means you'll receive guidance that impacts your long-term goals, not just your immediate budget needs.

**Q:** What if I don't live in your area or will be moving after graduation?

**A:** Our agency is able to serve student loan borrowers in Illinois. Our NFCC® Certified Student Loan Counselors are easy to reach by phone at 800.615.3022, and a full financial review and counseling session can be done over the phone. You do not have to travel to our office unless you prefer to do so.

**Q:** What does an agency like yours know about student loans?

**A:** Chestnut Credit Counseling has over 40 years of experience serving clients who have dealt with similar debt-related challenges. Our knowledge of the various types of student loans and the repayment options for each enables us to work with college graduates who are looking for objective guidance on the numerous repayment options and for help recognizing when they might qualify for debt forgiveness or

deferment. We also have extensive experience assisting borrowers who are struggling to pay debt for a degree not yet earned.

**Q:** What are my options for learning more about adjusting my monthly student loan repayments?

**A:** You basically have two options: do-it-yourself, online resources or holistic, personalized guidance over the phone or in person. For those who prefer the do-it-yourself path, StudentLoanHelp.org is a trusted educational resource for understanding repayment alternatives and finding answers to student loan-related questions and issues. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and Department of Education also offer free tools and resources online. Though convenient and appropriate

for those with simple financial lives or who are only interested in adjusting their monthly student loan payment, we recommend a full review of finances and student loan counseling and education for most of our clients.

**Q:** What is the benefit of receiving a full financial review?

**A:** While going the do-it-yourself route will help you determine the cheapest possible monthly payment for you, it will not give you guidance on whether or not that is actually the best option for you in the long run. A full review provides one-on-one access to an expert in all of the repayment programs who will assess the availability and appropriateness of deferral and forbearance options. Finally, you will walk away with a financial action plan that will help you meet both your short- and long-term goals.

Quick Answers: StudentLoanHelp.org	Full Plan: Student Loan Counseling
Ideal for those...	Best suited for those...
Singly focused on lowering monthly payments through an Income-Based Repayment Plan.	Looking for personal attention and one-on-one professional guidance for a modest fee.
Confident with their own money management skills.	Who want to evaluate all student debt repayment options in the context of their personal goals and other debt.
With a relatively simple financial situation and no other debt besides student loans.	Who are time stressed and need assistance.
Seeking free online resources and quick answers.	Who are fearful of making a quick decision that could cost them more money in the long term.

**Q:** How do I benefit from working with a NFCC® Certified Student Loan Counselor?

**A:** Our NFCC® Certified Student Loan Counselors work one-on-one with you to look at the impact your student loan repayment options may have on other aspects of your financial circumstances and long-term goals. Our counselors undergo rigorous training and ongoing certification. They are knowledgeable about all available options and can walk you through the implications of each on your current financial situation, as well as the potential long-term impact on you and your family.

**Q:** What can a counselor do for me that my servicer can't?

**A:** A counselor is a trained and independent expert whose job is to advocate for you and your unique financial situation. A servicer is paid to work with you as quickly as possible and is not in a position to help you navigate your broader financial goals and challenges.

**Q:** Why is there a fee for student loan counseling?

**A:** Based on our current funding status, our agency offers student loan counseling for as low a fee as possible, while covering the cost of delivering professional, high-quality individual service.

While any fee may seem like a lot when you are struggling with debt, our counseling involves more than

calculating a borrower's lowest repayment option, unlike free resources available online from government websites.

However, our service fee covers a more comprehensive and individualized review of your finances. The purpose is to create an individualized game plan that can potentially lower the overall long-term cost of your loans, reduce payments in amounts that may offset the fee we charge and explore the availability of other loan repayment options, deferrals or even forgiveness programs that you may be entitled to.

**Q:** Why is there a fee if you are a nonprofit?

**A:** While Chestnut Credit Counseling is a nonprofit organization, we are not a government or public agency with federally funded budgets. We don't profit from our clients or their situations, but there is a cost to providing our services that needs to be covered.

To fund our services, we accept funding from a variety of sources including: federal and local grants, charitable contributions from members of the financial industry and donations from individuals and foundations. We keep our fees as low as possible while covering our operating costs.

Regardless, our goal at all times remains consistent: empowering people to take charge of their finances and their futures. And, we work to ensure that the value of the guidance received exceeds any one-time service fee paid.

**Q:** Why are some government agencies warning us not to pay a fee?

**A:** Unfortunately, there are many for-profit firms targeting student loan borrowers and charging fees that can be potentially thousands of dollars to do something you can do for yourself—change your student loan repayment program. The government agencies have issued a general warning for this reason to ensure borrowers know that there are free government resources for making such adjustments to Income-Based Repayment Plans available. <http://www.studentloanhelp.org/tools/>

These warnings against paying fees, however, do not refer to holistic, one-on-one nonprofit financial counseling that also includes a review of your short- and long-term goals and all of your debts, including your student debt. As a leader in financial counseling and education, the NFCC and its member agencies, this one included, take our role as a consumer's financial advocate seriously. We have strong working relationships with the CFPB and the Department of Education and have received recognition for our broader education initiatives and debt programs from these same agencies.

**Q:** How much time does a student loan counseling session take?

**A:** A typical financial review and student loan counseling session may take 1–2 hours. The length of the session varies based on the number of loans you may have and the complexity of your overall financial situation—including other loans and obligations. No matter how complex your situation is, you will receive a comprehensive action plan to manage your student loan debt and overall finances. Also, you should know that our fee covers the entire review, regardless of how long it takes.

**Q:** What happens during a counseling session?

**A:** If you are already out of school, we first review your current source(s) of income and then look at your student loans and any other outstanding debt you may have, such as a mortgage, car loan or credit card balances. Then, working with you, we will help you develop a game plan that is right for you and your family. The process is not considered done until you feel you are ready to take charge of your financial future.

If you are still in school or about to enroll, we will look at your financial circumstances—including those of your family, if appropriate—and discuss your expectations for the future to help guide you toward a loan program that will serve you going forward.

**Q:** Why should I work with an NFCC member agency?

**A:** The short answer for why you want to work with us is simple: trusted advice. The student loan area is fraught with

scammers and for-profit businesses that see you primarily as a bottom-line opportunity. More than the fact that we're a nonprofit organization staffed by NFCC® Certified Student Loan Counselors, we're actually in your corner and committed to serving as your financial advocate. Your best interest is our best interest.

**Q:** Who is the NFCC?

**A:** Founded in 1951, the National Foundation for Credit Counseling® (NFCC) is the nation's first and largest nonprofit dedicated to improving people's financial well-being. With 600 member offices serving 50 states and Puerto Rico, NFCC® Certified Student Loan Counselors are financial advocates, empowering millions of consumers to take charge of their finances through one-on-one financial reviews that address credit card debt, student loans, housing decisions and overall money management.

**Q:** Why does NFCC backing, training and certification even matter?

**A:** As the nation's largest and longest-serving financial counseling organization, the NFCC is the leader in helping all Americans achieve their financial goals, regardless of their income or circumstances.

As an NFCC member agency, we work directly with creditors to create realistic debt management and repayment plans to get people back on track.

Our NFCC® Certified Student Loans Counselors serve as consumer advocates to help ensure you are treated fairly by your creditors.

The NFCC's approach to financial counseling and education, through the Sharpen Your Financial Focus® program, is proof of the type of difference this comprehensive approach to counseling can make in our clients' financial outcomes in the areas of:

- Consistent payment of debt
- Setting financial goals
- Managing money
- Reducing debt
- Improving overall financial confidence

**Q:** What is REPAYE?

**A:** In December 2015, student loan borrowers were given a new repayment option to consider. The new program, Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE), enables borrowers to cap their monthly payments at 10 percent of their discretionary income regardless of when they borrowed or how much they owe.

Another benefit is that after 20 years of making payments (25 years for graduate students), any outstanding loan balance will be forgiven under the program. It's similar to the current Pay As You Earn (PAYE) option, but REPAYE is open to all students who borrowed directly from the federal government. More information about this program can be found here: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/about/announcements/repay>. You can also view the NFCC's press release about REPAYE here: <https://www.nfcc.org/press/nfcc-shares-what-student-loan-borrowers-should-know-before-enrolling-in-new-repayment-option/>.

**Q:** Where can I find other free resources related to managing my student loans?

**A:** Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) Know Your Options Tool: <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/repay-student-debt/#federal>

Repayment Estimator (Department of Education): <https://studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/mobile/repayment/repaymentEstimator.action>

StudentLoanHelp.org: <http://www.studentloanhelp.org>

NFCC Online Tools: <http://www.studentloanhelp.org/tools/>

NFCC Blog: <http://www.studentloanhelp.org/articles/>

**Q:** What other resources does the NFCC offer?

**A:** As advocates of financial literacy and with an overriding mission to empower individuals to regain and maintain control over their household finances, the NFCC and its member agencies offer free educational resources through [NFCC.org](http://NFCC.org) and [StudentLoanHelp.org](http://StudentLoanHelp.org). All of the material is selected for its usefulness and trustworthiness. While NFCC.org offers more general money-management advice, StudentLoanHelp.org is devoted exclusively to student debt management topics.

On StudentLoanHelp.org, visitors can:

- Get descriptions of the various repayment plan options available to them.
- Find definitions to terms associated with the programs.
- Access direct links to a variety of loan calculators and other helpful tools from reliable sources.
- Download material on aspects of the different loan programs.
- Read articles that look at news currently impacting student loans and get tips and explanations related to managing student debt.