



Early Victory for Naturopathic Medical Students: Preliminary Federal Court Order Directs Department of Education to Recognize the ND as a Professional Degree

The Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC), American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP), and Naturopathic Medical Student Association (NMSA) celebrate the federal court's ruling granting a preliminary injunction in our challenge to the U.S. Department of Education's treatment of the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine (ND) degree under the RISE rule.

In a [60-page opinion issued October 16](#), U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon of the District of Oregon granted our motion for a preliminary injunction in AANMC, AANP, NMSA v. Department of Education. The court ordered the Department to treat the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine as a "professional degree," and students pursuing the ND as "professional students," for federal student loan purposes. The order covers the three plaintiff organizations and their members and remains in effect while the case proceeds. The court found that we are likely to succeed on the merits of our claims, required no bond, and denied the Department's request to put the ruling on hold in the event the Department appeals.

This is a significant and very positive first result for naturopathic medical students and the institutions educating the next generation of naturopathic physicians.

AANMC, AANP and NMSA brought this case because we believe students pursuing accredited naturopathic medical education should be treated fairly under federal law. The ND is a rigorous doctoral-level professional degree that prepares graduates for entry into the licensed practice of naturopathic medicine. The court's decision signals that the ND degree satisfies the applicable statutory criteria that defines professional degree for purposes of student loans.

The court agreed with us on all the contested issues before it. It found that the Department likely exceeded its authority by adding requirements Congress never wrote, treated the ND less favorably than comparable degrees without a reasoned explanation, and departed from more than two decades of treating the ND as a professional degree without considering the harm to students and schools.

For decades, naturopathic medical education has been recognized within the federal higher education system as health professions education.

The Court's ruling provides meaningful interim relief while the underlying case continues. We are grateful that the Court carefully considered the issues before it and the consequences that federal student loan policy can have for students' ability to begin and complete their professional education.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to the current and prospective students who filed declarations describing how this rule upended their lives and plans, including students who had slowed their studies for family, health, or other serious reasons and suddenly faced losing the loans they need to finish. Judge Simon relied on their declarations throughout his opinion. By sharing their stories, they showed the court the real human cost of this rule, and this result belongs to them.

What This Means for Students

We recognize that students and prospective students will have immediate questions about what this ruling means for their federal student loan eligibility.

The Court's ruling will require implementation by the Department of Education and individual institutions. The Department must report to the court within 14 days on the steps it is taking to comply, and school financial aid offices will need to process this ruling along with any upcoming revisions or guidance from the Department. **Students should not make financial decisions based solely on this announcement.** Students should continue working directly with their institutions and financial aid offices regarding their individual eligibility and available financial aid. Financial aid offices will work with students one-on-one as more information becomes available.

AANMC, AANP, and NMSA will share additional information as implementation guidance becomes available.

The Work Continues

This decision is a powerful first step, but it is not the end of this matter. The Department has the right to appeal the preliminary injunction. The underlying litigation continues towards a final ruling in the meantime, and federal policies affecting graduate and professional education remain in significant transition.

Our organizations will continue working together to protect student access to naturopathic medical education through litigation, congressional and administrative advocacy, coalition engagement, and continued work with policymakers.

We also remain committed to the larger issues facing our students and profession: educational affordability, access to financing, transparency, strong student outcomes, and ensuring that federal policy accurately reflects the education and practice of licensed health professions.

We are deeply grateful to the students, physicians, academic institutions, faculty, alumni, professional organizations, and supporters who have stood together throughout this process.

This ruling represents meaningful progress. We will continue working together to protect the future of naturopathic medical education and the students who have chosen this profession.

Litigation of this scale depends on our community. Our goal is to raise \$300,000 to support this litigation. We are a small profession, and every donation counts. The Vis is remarkable, but it can't file a legal brief. Please seriously consider donating to the AANP Foundation to help us keep fighting for naturopathic students!

[Please Donate Today](#)

Sincerely,

Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC)

American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP)

Naturopathic Medical Student Association (NMSA)