For over five decades, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has served as the national organization dedicated solely to advancing master’s and doctoral education, research, and scholarship. The council’s membership is comprised of nearly 500 institutions across the United States, Canada, and abroad, representing a total of over 1.8 million graduate students. Member institutions in the U.S. award 87% of all doctoral degrees and the majority of master’s degrees. CGS’s 2019–2020 Federal Policy Agenda calls upon Congress and the Administration to support policies that, through graduate education, make positive economic and societal contributions.
Preparing a 21st Century Workforce by Investing in Graduate Education

Recommendations

➤ Consider the unique financial needs of graduate students when making reforms to federal student loans, annual/aggregate caps, interest rates, and borrowing options.

➤ Maintain parity for graduate students in federal loan repayment options, while ensuring that income-driven options are truly income-based, not degree-based.

➤ Allow Pell-eligible recipients to allocate remaining semesters of support unused in undergraduate education toward graduate education.

➤ Preserve Federal Work Study for graduate students.

➤ Strengthen funding for TRIO and Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need.

➤ Strengthen funding for the Title VII Health Professions and Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services).

➤ Encourage participation in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program as an incentive to pursue careers that serve the public's interest.

➤ Promote transparency and financial literacy of federal borrowing and repayment options for graduate students and their families.

Graduate students represent a rich cadre of individuals with varying financial needs. They tend to be older than their undergraduate counterparts, and a greater proportion are married and/or have dependent children. Therefore, the decision to pursue graduate education is often one that affects not just the individual student, but also their family. The educational choices of these individuals have a direct impact on the future workforce here in the United States. Through 2026, jobs requiring a graduate degree at entry-level are among the fastest-growing in the U.S. workforce. Many of these professions are public service-oriented, where financial compensation is not a primary motivation for pursuing them. Therefore, federal student financial aid, federal student loans, and loan repayment programs should be designed to help ensure that future graduates are able to serve in a multitude of sectors where their skills are needed most. Moreover, transparency about borrowing and repayment options for graduate students and their families is critical to support responsible decision-making.

Improving Tax Policies to Support Graduate Students, Employers, and Employees

Certain provisions within the U.S. tax code directly affect the ability of employees to pursue a graduate degree as well as the ability of employers to invest in their employees’ education. These credits and deductions can serve as powerful tools for recruitment and retention of employees, and ultimately the cultivation of a highly-educated and skilled U.S. workforce. These provisions should not only be preserved, but enhanced. Additionally, tax policies should maximize the utility of contributions such as charitable giving and endowments that allow academic institutions to fulfill their missions.

Recommendations

➤ Preserve the Student Loan Interest Deduction (SLID).

➤ Make permanent the above the line deduction for qualified education expenses related to tuition and fees.

➤ Simplify and enhance the American Opportunity Tax Credit and the Lifetime Learning Credit, so that they are easier for students and families to navigate, while allowing graduate students to access them.

➤ Preserve Sec. 117(d)(5), which excludes tuition waivers and remissions from being included as taxable income.

➤ Provide tax credit incentives to allow individuals to contribute to Sec. 529 education savings accounts, including employer tax credits when they match the contributions.

➤ Strengthen Sec. 127, which allows employers to provide tax-exempt tuition assistance, by expanding monetary limits and allow it to include student loan repayment.
As our society becomes increasingly globalized, it is essential that federal policies support the exchange of U.S. domestic and international students. International graduate students bring a rich array of ideas and experiences that promote cross-cultural understanding which is necessary for effective diplomacy. According to CGS data, there are over 339,000 international students pursuing master’s and doctoral programs at CGS member institutions and regional affiliates. International students constituted 18.5% of total enrollment in master’s and doctoral programs in Fall 2017.\(^3\) For U.S. graduate education to remain the gold standard, federal policies should support the ability of U.S. higher education institutions to attract top talent from across the globe. They should be designed to minimize interruption of a student’s academic progress and allow graduates to apply their education and training in the U.S. workforce. Inter-agency collaboration, as well as collaboration with the higher education community on national security issues, ought to remain a high priority.

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Research and scientific inquiry are cornerstones of graduate education. The application of resulting discoveries drives advancements across multiple industries and improves the daily lives of the American people. Federal investments in agencies that support basic science research, as well as timely breakthroughs that are responsive to national need, ought to be strengthened.

Moreover, federal policies should bolster the ability of the research pipeline to investigate, evaluate, and translate findings, as well as promote the safety, efficacy, and transparency of research and data sharing. In addition, policies should support programmatic activities that provide U.S. domestic graduate students opportunities to participate and contribute to international research.

### Recommendations

- **Increase federal investments that support graduate research through**: United States Department of Agriculture, National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Institutes of Health, and others.

- **Strengthen future generations of scientists through postdoctoral traineeships, fellowships, and career development through federal agencies.**

- **Improve the evaluation of program outcomes of U.S. graduate student participation in international research experiences.**

- **Encourage collaborations between private sector and non-profit employers with universities to support graduate students and the impact of their work.**

- **Promote safety, efficacy, and transparency of research and data sharing.**
Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within graduate education enhances cross-cultural understanding, fosters intellectual collegiality, and enriches the overall experience and quality of the science and scholarship that is produced. As our country becomes more diverse, graduate schools must be committed and prepared to recruit, educate, and support the advancement of students who are representative of the nation’s population. Federal policies and practices should enable graduate programs to attract and support students and subsequent postdocs and faculty from marginalized communities and populations historically underrepresented in academia. This not only helps to ensure a rich learning environment, but enhances productivity and ultimately the creation of a highly-diverse workforce both internal and external to academia. Innovations across multiple industry sectors create new opportunities for collaboration that require a diverse, highly-educated and talented workforce. Master’s and doctoral programs must provide rigorous and inclusive training experiences that foster collaboration and promote diplomacy. In addition, legislative and regulatory efforts to address campus climate issues should be approached thoughtfully, and discussions that inform federal policies should include a variety of public stakeholders. This will help ensure that equity and inclusion complement and build upon diversity efforts.

Recommendations

➤ Increase funding for federal programs that help identify, recruit, retain, and support the advancement of students, postdocs, and faculty from populations historically underrepresented in academia and research environments.

➤ Include representation from the graduate education community on federal advisory councils that address campus inclusion, including (but not limited to): accessibility, gender and sexual minorities, mental health, and veterans.

➤ Improve resources for individuals with unique learning needs to ensure graduate education is accessible to those with learning and/or physical disabilities.

➤ Strengthen grants through the Department of Education for institutions of higher education that serve underrepresented populations, including (but not limited to): Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Title III), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (Title III), Alaska Native and Hawaiian Serving Institutions, and the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Title V).

➤ Support institutions’ ability to use holistic review in the admissions process.

➤ Strengthen resources to meet the unique needs of veterans of the U.S. military pursuing graduate education.

➤ Support activities within the Bureau of Indian Education to advance opportunities for Native American and Alaska Native students to pursue higher education, including graduate education.

➤ Enact a permanent legislative solution to allow recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program to legally remain in the U.S. with a path toward citizenship.