Preparing a 21st Century Workforce by Investing in Graduate Education

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.

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.