

February 23, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I want to thank you for your leadership in providing this opportunity for us to identify the priorities we have for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. CGS is the only national organization that solely represents graduate education and research. Our membership includes roughly 500 universities in the United States that annually award the majority of U.S. doctoral and master's degrees.

The Higher Education Act has a long history of providing assistance to students, regardless of their financial circumstances, so that they have access to the quality education beyond high school they need to participate successfully in their chosen careers. Unfortunately, for graduate students, the changes made to the federal student loan programs over the last 10 years have only added to the cost of pursuing this education. For example, graduate students are no longer eligible for subsidized loans and the interest rates and origination fees they pay are higher than those of undergraduates. By merely taking a graduate course, the most recent income-based repayment schemes and proposals extend significantly the repayment periods for graduate students. Additionally, graduate students lost access to Perkins loans, and the House Education and the Workforce Committee has proposed to eliminate graduate student eligibility for the Federal Work-Study program.

CGS appreciates the HELP Committee's commitment to engage the higher education community in the reauthorization process. We recommend the following principles for the Committee's consideration:

Establish procedures that support master's and doctoral students in making informed financial aid decisions to reduce their borrowing and debt.

- Provide loan counseling for students at points of transition in the education continuum, including when first entering graduate school.
- Clarify the difference between the amount students are eligible to borrow versus the amount they need to borrow, and require students to affirmatively make the choice.
- Include information regarding the sources of funding that comprise the student's award package and the tax liability associated with each source of funding.
- Notify periodically, master's and doctoral students of their loan repayment options and the amount of interest accrued on their loans.

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Association
of Graduate Schools

Western
Association
of Graduate Schools

- Consolidate, reduce and simplify the number of loan repayment strategies available to students, including income-driven repayment options that are income- not degree-based, with the goal of reducing defaults and the amounts of debt forgiven.
- Eliminate duplicative costs of borrowing for a given academic year.

Modify Annual and Aggregate Loan limits

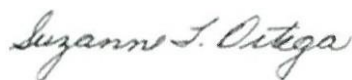
- Provide sufficient federal financing options to graduate students so that they do not seek private education loans.
- Set separate undergraduate and graduate aggregate loan limits for federal loans, as in the FAST Act.
- Provide authority to periodically review and adjust the annual and aggregate student loan limits.

Create incentives for innovative programs and programs that increase degree completion and respond to the demands of the workforce in areas of national need.

- Provide Pell Grants to income-eligible graduate students who did not exhaust their full Pell eligibility as undergraduates, up to the total number of semesters allowed in law.
- Encourage the design and implementation of graduate programs that combine rigorous disciplinary content with workforce expectations.
- Revise the "areas of national need" under Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) to include consideration of the arts, humanities and social sciences.
- Continue the eligibility of graduate students to participate in Federal Work-Study.
- Retain Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) as an incentive to pursue careers in jobs that serve the public good.

CGS is pleased that the Committee has chosen a bipartisan approach to reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. We look forward to working with you to make sure that every student has the support they need to achieve their potential and that America has the educated and skilled talent it needs to compete in the global economy. Please consider CGS as a resource going forward.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President