Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act of 2019 (H.R. 3334)

A Common Sense Solution to Improving Access, Diversity, and Completion

The Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act (H.R. 3334) would provide graduate students who received Pell Grant support as undergraduates and who remain income-eligible the ability to apply remaining semesters of Pell awards towards a graduate degree. Currently, Pell is only available to undergraduate students, and eligible individuals can receive up to 12 semesters’ worth of grant awards. This legislation would allow students to “rollover” remaining semesters of awards (up to 12) towards their first post-baccalaureate degree.

H.R. 3334 is a bipartisan bill and was introduced by Representatives Ann McLane Kuster (D-NH), Fred Upton (R-MI), Kim Schrier (D-WA), Tim Burchett (R-TN), and Harley Rouda (D-CA) on June 19, 2019.

A Growing Number of Graduate Students Are Former Pell Recipients

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in Academic Year (AY) 2015-2016, nearly 46% of first-year graduate and professional students were Pell recipients, up from 32.5% in AY 2007-2008 and 35.9% in AY 2011-2012. This positive trend is an encouraging indicator that a greater number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds are pursuing graduate education. However, these same individuals are more likely to have greater financial needs than their counterparts.

Giving these individuals the chance to maximize their Pell support could help encourage on-time degree completion at the undergraduate level and reduce the need to borrow at the graduate level.

Meeting Workforce Demands for Graduate-Prepared Professionals

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs that require at least a master’s degree are among the fastest growing in our economy. These include jobs within traditionally public service-oriented professions such as health care and education, which are vital to the public safety of our country. Others are captured within STEM fields, where innovations and research continue to propel the U.S. as a leading global competitor, or within the arts and humanities, which develop critical thinking, analysis, and contextualize meaning across other disciplines.

Moreover, ensuring that individuals with diverse backgrounds enter these professional pipelines increases diversity within the workforce. Numerous studies show that increasing diversity and inclusivity leads to greater cross-cultural understanding and improved problem-solving in team-based settings.
