



One Dupont Circle, NW • Suite 230 • Washington, DC 20036-1146
(202) 223-3791 • Fax (202) 331-7157 • www.cgsnet.org



jedfoundation.org
6 E 39th St. • Suite 700 • New York, NY 10016
(212) 647-7544 • Fax (212) 647-7542 • www.jedfoundation.org

PRESS RELEASE

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CGS Contact: Katherine Hazelrigg – (202) 461-3888 / khazelrigg@cgs.nche.edu

JED Contact: Meg Woodworth – (212) 303-2306 / JEDmedia@yr.com

New Initiative to Support Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellness

Washington, D.C. — The Council of Graduate Schools, (CGS) an association of universities that grant master’s and doctoral degrees, and The Jed Foundation (JED), a non-profit that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults, today announced a new initiative to support the mental health and wellness of master’s and doctoral students. The 22-month project will create a foundation for evidence-based policies and resources to support graduate student mental health and well-being, prevent psychological distress, and address barriers to effective support and care. CGS and JED will give particular attention to the experiences of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities pursuing graduate education.

A growing body of evidence indicates that mental health challenges are common among graduate students. However, many barriers exist to effective support and care. These may include campus services that do not necessarily recognize the unique needs of graduate students, and a lack of evidence about what types of support are best suited to them. Students of different backgrounds may also face different sources of stress and may experience different levels of comfort in seeking help.

The new initiative, *Supporting Mental Health and Wellness of Graduate Students* will address these and other concerns across all broad fields of graduate study. A grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation will support the council’s focus on issues specific to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, while a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will support the council’s work in the humanities.

“Compared with the undergraduate education context, there has been relatively little attention to supporting the mental health and wellness of master’s and doctoral students,” said CGS President Suzanne T. Ortega. “This is a high-priority issue for CGS and the graduate education community more broadly, and we are grateful to our funders for supporting our work on this issue in a coordinated, thoughtful way, and to JED for contributing their expertise.”

The project will convene an advisory committee of experts and graduate education leaders (listed below), who will counsel CGS on its research and action plan. In addition, CGS will survey its member institutions to better understand existing policies and practices for supporting graduate student mental health and factors that may impact the design and delivery of services. In 2020, graduate deans, graduate students, mental health researchers, and other experts will convene in Washington, D.C., for a

one-and-half-day workshop. The final project outcome will include a report and a statement of common principles for supporting graduate student mental health.

“In our work with colleges and universities across the country, we hear time and again the increasing concern for graduate and professional students’ mental health and how best to support them,” said Nance Roy, Chief Clinical Officer at The Jed Foundation. “To date, there is no framework focused specifically on the unique challenges and needs of graduate students. JED is excited to be part of this initiative that will not only identify those needs, but also provide recommended practices for addressing them.”

The report resulting from the project will be released by December 2020.

Advisory Committee



Dr. Hollie Chessman is a research fellow for the American Council on Education’s Center for Policy Research and Strategy, where she supports special projects, including the Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education report and initiatives related to student mental health and well-being. Chessman has served the higher education profession for nearly 20 years, beginning in student affairs and undergraduate education.



Dr. Jan Collins-Eaglin is a psychologist who specializes in mental health issues in higher education and depression among African American women. She is also a Scientific Advisor to The Steve Fund, an organization dedicated to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of students of color.



Dr. Michael Cunningham is Associate Provost of Graduate and Research and Professor of Psychology at Tulane University. Professor Cunningham’s primary research interests include examining adolescent development in diverse contexts with a specific program of research that examines resilience and vulnerability in African American children and adolescents.



Dr. Daniel Eisenberg is S.J. Axelrod Collegiate Professor in Health Management and Policy at the University of Michigan. His broad research goal is to improve understanding of how to invest effectively and efficiently in the mental health of young people. He directs the Health Minds Network, which focuses on mental health and service use in college populations.



Dr. Andrés Gil is Vice President for Research and Economic Development and Dean of the University Graduate School at Florida International University (FIU). As Professor in the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, he has served as advisor or reviewer to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), among other organizations.



Ms. Susanna Harris is a doctoral student in microbiology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the CEO Founder of PhD Balance, a project which serves to empower students to develop their own resilience as they work toward success in and after their graduate training. The organization also provides resources for those dealing with mental health in higher education.



Dr. Paula D. McClain is Dean of The Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education at Duke University. She also holds positions as Professor of Political Science and Professor of Public Policy at Duke, and is President-Elect of the American Political Science Association. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Science, having been elected in 2014. In Dr. McClain's role as Dean, she serves as PI for Duke's University Center for Exemplary Mentoring (UCEM).



Dr. Suzanne T. Ortega (*Ex-Officio* member) serves as President of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). The only U.S. higher education association devoted solely to graduate education and research, CGS has nearly 500 U.S. and Canadian members and nearly 30 international affiliates. A sociologist by training, Dr. Ortega's research focuses on social inequality, mental health, and graduate education.



Dr. Susan Porter is Dean and Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, at the University of British Columbia (UBC). She also currently serves as the President of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies and is a Clinical Professor in Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at UBC.



Dr. Sally (Sarah) Pratt is Vice Provost for Graduate Programs at the University of Southern California (USC) and Chair-Elect of the Council of Graduate Schools Board of Directors. At USC, she is responsible for PhD, master's and graduate certificate programs across the humanities, sciences, and social sciences, as well as seventeen professional schools.



Dr. Nance Roy (*Ex Officio* member) is Chief Clinical Officer at The Jed Foundation and Assistant Clinical Professor in the Yale School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry. Her past roles have included Director of the Health and Counseling Center at Sarah Lawrence College, Assistant Dean of Health and Wellness at Sarah Lawrence College, and Associate Dean of Health and Wellness at Rhode Island School of Design.



Dr. Barry Schreier is Director of the University Counseling Service and Professor of Counseling Psychology at The University of Iowa, and is a member of the board of the Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors. He has a strong interest and commitment to working with Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Queer students. He is also a Gender Specialist and has worked for many years supporting students in the Trans* communities.



Dr. Tammi Vacha-Haase is Dean of the Graduate College at Boise State University and President-Elect of the Western Association of Graduate Schools. She holds a PhD in Counseling Psychology. As dean, Dr. Vacha-Haase led the launch of *GradWell*, a Boise State program that seeks to improve wellness and mental health for graduate students.

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About CGS

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.

About The Jed Foundation (JED)

JED is a national nonprofit that exists to protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. We're partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse and suicide prevention programming and systems. We're equipping teens and young adults with the skills and support to grow into healthy, thriving adults; and we're encouraging community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health. Learn more at jedfoundation.org.

