

PRESS RELEASE

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CGS Launches Project to Study Feasibility of Tracking PhD Career Pathways

Washington, D.C. — The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) today announced a new initiative to address the need for tracking the career pathways of PhD holders across broad fields of graduate study. With input from its member institutions, CGS will assess the feasibility of a larger project to develop and enhance processes for tracking the career pathways of PhD alumni of STEM, humanities and social science graduate programs.

A new grant from the Mellon Foundation will support the council's work to understand distinctive features of the employment outcomes of PhD holders in the humanities and social sciences, and research methods appropriate to their study. CGS will simultaneously, and comparatively, study similar questions with respect to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and economics with support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, continuing two earlier grants to study STEM graduate education. The combined one-year study will determine the potential value of implementing a long-term project recommending best practices in tracking the career pathways of PhD-holders.

At the Council of Graduate Schools' Annual Meeting in San Diego today, CGS President Debra W. Stewart noted that the project is the first of its kind. "This project addresses a major gap in the understanding of PhD career outcomes, one of the key outcomes of graduate education that has not yet been measured on a large scale across a broad spectrum of fields. While past and current efforts to map the career pathways of PhD holders have furthered our understanding of this issue, this project addresses the specific need for program-level data, which will most effectively allow institutions to improve their programs, and students to make more informed decisions."

The current lack of reliable information beyond first-job data means that pathways into careers are not always transparent to prospective or current graduate students, faculty, employers, or graduate program administrators. Each of these groups stands to gain from a fuller understanding of PhD career pathways, including the extent of PhD careers outside of the academy.

Through direct grants to universities and by underwriting research, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has long supported efforts to improve the intellectual and professional outcomes of doctoral education in the humanities. In recent years, the Foundation has assisted universities and professional organizations in launching initiatives that broaden the preparation of PhD students for a variety of professional trajectories in as well as outside the academy.

The Sloan Foundation, too, has had a longstanding interest in graduate education and workforce development, related to its core commitment to education and basic research in STEM fields. Sloan has partnered with CGS on studies of the career outcomes of those graduating with Professional Science Master's (PSM) degrees; this new model for graduate education has gained traction, with over 300 PSMs now established in universities across the country.

The project will include a survey of over 500 universities on their current practices for tracking doctoral program alumni, a white paper exploring all that is currently known about the demand for career tracking for PhDs, and a two-day intensive workshop of researchers, graduate deans, PhD holders and other experts on the subject of tracking career pathways.

A final report on the study will be shared with the graduate community in December 2014.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 92% of the doctoral degrees and 78% of the master's 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.*

** Based on data from the 2012 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*