



February 25, 2022

United States Senate
Committee Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

United States Senate
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation Committee
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology Committee
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), I am writing to urge continued congressional support for graduate education in the United States. Specifically, CGS calls upon Members of the 117th Congress to support federal legislation and policies that improve access to graduate education, promote the United States as a global leader, and creates a more equitable and prosperous society for all.

For over 60 years, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated to advancing graduate education and research. Our membership includes 500 institutions of higher education in the United States, Canada, and abroad, representing a total of over 1.8 million graduate students. Collectively, our members grant 87 percent of all U.S. doctorates and majority of U.S. master's degrees. As an association, we are proud to represent a diverse and dynamic group of institutions of higher education ranging from public and private research-intensive institutions to regional comprehensive institutions, minority-serving institutions, and historically black colleges and universities.

In our view, the start of the second session of the 117th Congress is an opportune time for CGS to highlight the significance of graduate education to the nation's higher education and scientific research enterprise, the U.S. workforce and economy, and preserving the U.S.'s position at the forefront of global leadership. In this letter, we will share some of CGS' key priorities for 2022 with you and your staff.

Providing Access to Graduate Education

A high priority for CGS is the expansion of access to the Pell Grant Program to graduate students. For decades, the Pell Grant Program has provided need-based financial support for low-income undergraduate students. This program has served the undergraduate student population well, but it is now time to expand the program to support graduate students. The nation's population continues to diversify, while careers requiring a master's or doctoral degree at entry-level, including in fields such as health care and education are projected to be among the fastest growing in the American economy. By expanding the Pell Grant program to graduate education, Congress will not only ensure needed financial support for graduate students, but also ensure that the needs of the American economy are being met in critical areas such as healthcare, business, and education.

CGS strongly encourages the passage of the Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act of 2021 (H.R. 4002) as a standalone bill, or the inclusion of its language in a legislative vehicle that is being considered by the 117th Congress. Specifically, we encourage the inclusion of legislative language that would provide income-eligible graduate students, who received Pell Grant support as undergraduates, the ability to apply remaining semesters of Pell support towards a graduate degree. In the 116th Congress and now in the 117th Congress, there is bipartisan support for the expansion of the Pell Grant program to graduate students. National indicators show that the number of graduate students who receive Pell Grant support as an undergraduate continues to grow. According to recent data, 46 percent of first-year graduate and professional students were former Pell recipients. However, 35 percent did not fully exhaust all 12 semesters of Pell Grant awards. Thus, there is clearly a need to expand this important grant program to students in your districts and states who are pursuing their graduate degrees.

In addition to the expansion of the Pell Grant Program, CGS supports the Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loan (Graduate PLUS) Program. This loan program provides valuable and needed financial support to graduate and professional students enrolled at least half-time at an eligible school or program leading to a graduate or professional degree or certificate. For many graduate students, who are often married, have dependent children, and/or caregiving responsibilities, this loan program makes it possible for them to pursue master's and/or doctoral degrees. Simply put, Graduate PLUS loans provide a critical pathway for graduate and professional students to finance their degrees, and as a result, enter the U.S. workforce as highly educated and qualified professionals.

CGS is encouraged by the Department of Education's recent announcement to reassess the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. The overhaul of this essential loan forgiveness program for our nation's public servants is not only timely but necessary. Many of the nation's teachers, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants in our communities are often graduates of master's degree and professional degree programs. In our view, student loan borrowers, who devote 10 years to public service and make 120 student loan payments, should have the remaining balance of their student loans forgiven, and the process to do so should be straightforward.

Advancing American Research and Innovation

For the United States to remain at the forefront of scientific research, cutting-edge technology, and advancement in innovation, the nation must continue to make robust investments at all federal research agencies that provide grant opportunities to support graduate education and research. Providing research opportunities to current and future generations of scientists, engineers, and STEM workers through postdoctoral fellowships, traineeships, and career development opportunities is essential for the U.S. to remain ahead of competitor nations and continue to make progress in the advancement of the nation's STEM workforce. For CGS, graduate education and research programs at the Department of Education, the Department of Energy's Office of Science, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities are especially of interest. While there are too many programs to mention in this letter, we would like to highlight a few programs supported by the Department of Education, the Department of Energy's Office of Science, and the National Science Foundation.

- The **Department of Education** sponsors valuable graduate education programs for a diverse cadre of students. The Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need Program (GAANN) provides three-year fellowships to graduate students with demonstrated financial need. Fellowships are awarded to scholars pursuing degrees in fields of study designated as areas of national interest and areas of study that will help the United States to remain globally

competitive. Another Department of Education program that provides needed assistance to academically talented graduate students is the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, which provides funding to 151 institutions of higher education to prepare eligible students for doctoral studies through research and scholarly activities.

- The **Department of Energy's Office of Science (DOE-OS)** sponsors graduate education programs, which are integral to the United States remaining at the forefront of energy technology development and innovation. The Graduate Fellowship Program supports outstanding students pursuing graduate education in basic research in physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, engineering, computational sciences, and environmental sciences. The Graduate Student Research Program prepares graduate students for STEM careers by providing graduate thesis research opportunities at DOE laboratories. The ARPA-E Fellows Program – a program designed to create a strategic vision and direction for transformational energy technology and research – provides graduate students with the opportunity to work with DOE and national laboratory staff, as well as work independently on their own energy-related research.
- The **National Science Foundation** provides significant funding for graduate education and research. CGS strongly encourages continued Congressional support for the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP), the Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) and the National Research Traineeship (NRT) program. As the oldest federal fellowship program supporting graduate education, “the GRFP recognizes and supports outstanding graduate students who are pursuing full-time research-based master’s and doctoral STEM degrees or in STEM education. The GRFP provides three years of support over a five-year fellowship period for the graduate education of individuals who have demonstrated their potential for significant research achievements in STEM or STEM education.”

Again, the abovementioned programs are just a sampling of the rich and dynamic graduate education and research programs sponsored by the federal agencies. Federally funded graduate education and research programs provide multiple benefits to the individual student and the nation. Indeed, graduate education is both a personal benefit and a public good that leads to an educated and well-prepared workforce.

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within graduate education enhances cross-cultural understanding, fosters intellectual collegiality, and enriches the scholarship produced at institutions of higher education. As the nation becomes more diverse, CGS members are committed and prepared to recruit, educate, and support the advancement of all graduate students. As a result, we support federal policies and legislation that enable graduate schools to attract and support students, postdoctoral researchers and fellows, and faculty from diverse backgrounds, including those from historically underrepresented minority groups, first-generation graduate students, military veterans, low-income students, and graduate students from rural communities.

CGS also recognizes your support for students from the LGBTQI+ community, students with disabilities, and students who embody neurodiversity. In 2019, CGS reaffirmed its statement of principles on DEI – “Building a Diverse, Equitable, Accessible, and Inclusive Graduate Community.”

As Congress continues its work on FY 2022 appropriations, as well as authorization legislation, such as the America COMPETES Act of 2021, CGS strongly encourages the support of programs that foster DEI at

our nation's universities.

Immigration and International Education

For many years, CGS and the broader higher education community have been strong advocates for comprehensive immigration reform. While immigration reform legislation may not be considered by Congress this year, CGS encourages federal legislation and policies that benefit undocumented graduate students, including dreamers and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. In addition, we encourage federal legislation and policies that benefit international students at the nation's graduate schools, such as: maintaining the duration of visa status for F-1, M-1, and J-1 visa holders; maintaining Optional Practical Training (12 months) and the STEM extension (36 months); expanding the number of H-1b visas available to holders of graduate degrees for U.S. institutions of higher education; and finally, eliminating the per-country cap on the issuance of green cards.

The nation's security, its economic growth, and its success in navigating increasingly complex global challenges hinge on our ability to understand and engage with diverse cultures at home and around the world. That is why the U.S. must increase investments in programs that facilitate study abroad opportunities for U.S. domestic students. We must also strengthen investments in programs administered under federal agencies that allow U.S. graduate students to participate in international research opportunities. This includes addressing the need for strong research capacity in foreign languages and international study (Title VI of the Higher Education Act) and funding for group, faculty, and doctoral dissertation research abroad (Fulbright-Hays).

Master's Education and the U.S. Workforce

As mentioned above, CGS members grant the majority of master's degrees earned in the United States. [Master's education](#) is the fastest growing and largest component of the graduate enterprise in the United States. According to the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment & Degrees for Fall 2020, 84-percent of first-time graduate students were enrolled in programs leading to a master's degree or a graduate certificate and nearly three quarters (72.9-percent) of total graduate enrollment was in master's programs. Given these statistics, as well as statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, there are increasing workforce demands for workers with a master's education. The nation's education and healthcare systems are particularly reliant upon workers with master's degrees or graduate certificates. For example, a majority of nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, family therapists, and mental health counselors have master's degrees. Likewise, many elementary, secondary, and special education teachers are master's degree holders. Given the importance of master's education to the U.S. economy and workforce, CGS encourages federal policies and legislation that supports master's-level education. It is an integral part of the educational pipeline.

Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

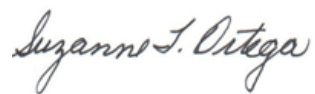
Graduate student mental health and wellbeing continues to be a pressing priority for CGS and our institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health stressors for graduate students and their families. In April 2021, CGS and The Jed Foundation released the report titled, "Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: Evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Graduate Community." The [executive summary](#) and [full report](#) provide valuable information concerning the need for access to mental health services for graduate students. The report also calls for institutional support for wrap-around services for graduate students, postdoctoral researchers and fellows, and for childcare, food security, housing, and respite for those serving as caregivers. The American Rescue Plan provided valuable and much-needed financial support to the nation's institutions of higher education. Thus, we were able to provide mental health services and support to our students, including graduate students

and their families. CGS appreciates and encourages continued federal policies that support the mental health of students and their families.

Conclusion

For six decades, CGS has been the national voice for the graduate dean community. We are the only national organization in the United States that is dedicated solely to the advancement of graduate education and research. CGS accomplishes its mission through advocacy in the policy arena, innovative research, and the development and dissemination of best practices. CGS also acts as a convening authority, organizing major events that bring together graduate deans and other stakeholders to discuss and act on the broad range of issues affecting graduate education today. It is of utmost importance for continued Congressional support for graduate education in the United States.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President

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