

## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

August 6, 2020

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### **CGS Takes Action to Protect Pathways to Graduate Schools for Underrepresented Graduate Students during COVID-19**

***Project Will Include Collaboration with Council for Opportunity in Education and Council of Historically Black Graduate Schools***

Washington, DC — The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) announced a new project to examine the obstacles underrepresented students (URM) have faced in their matriculation, persistence, and completion of STEM graduate programs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With funding from the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Rapid Response Research (RAPID) program, CGS will collaborate with the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) and the Council of Historically Black Graduate Schools (CHBGS) to understand challenges currently faced by URM and first-generation students and provide just-in-time information that will help support their success.

"First-generation, low-income, racially, and ethnically underrepresented (URM) students have been at greatest risk of educational disruptions during the recent pandemic," said CGS President Suzanne T. Ortega. "This means that the modest gains the U.S. has seen over the past ten years in URM graduate enrollment and degree completion are in real jeopardy. The insights we will gain from this work will generate evidence-based resources and policies surrounding admissions, funding, and other forms of student support."

The new project, *Investigating Challenges to Matriculation and Completion for Underrepresented STEM Graduate Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, will focus on four specific areas of research: obstacles to matriculation, obstacles to retention, challenges to sustaining graduate school aspirations for rising college seniors, and strategies for graduate school success. The findings will inform graduate student advising and support structures and guide interventions to broaden URM student participation in STEM graduate education.

Maureen Hoyler, president of the Council for Opportunity in Education believes that, "This partnership with CGS presents an opportunity for McNair students and staff to discuss the changing landscape of graduate admissions because of the pandemic. Many McNair students were unable to complete their original research programs due to COVID. Other students have grave concerns regarding financial support for graduate studies at this time. Our goal is to provide students an opportunity to get answers for their most pressing questions so as to support their continued graduate matriculation and completion."

"The Council of Historical Black Graduate Schools (CHBGS) is pleased to partner with CGS and COE on this project. It is extremely important to seek viable strategies and best practices that encourage and inspire underrepresented students to pursue and complete graduate degrees, especially when faced with a myriad of challenges such as those associated with COVID-19," said CHBGS President Mary E. Owens-Southall, Ph.D. "The current discussions taking place are essential in that strategies employed during the upcoming semesters will have a profound impact on enrollment, retention, and degree completion of these students for at least the next 3-5 years."

#### **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.*