



# 2023-2024 Federal Policy Agenda

For 60 years, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has served as the national organization dedicated to advancing master's and doctoral education and research. The council's membership is comprised of approximately 500 institutions across the United States, Canada, and abroad, representing a total of over 1.8 million graduate students. Collectively, CGS institutions annually award roughly 87% of all U.S. doctorates and a majority of all U.S. master's degrees.

CGS's 2023-2024 Federal Policy Agenda calls upon Congress and the Administration to support policies that, through graduate education, **improve access to graduate education, promote the United States as a global leader, and create a more equitable society for all.**







# Federal Student Loans and Financial Aid

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ The opportunity to pursue graduate education must be accessible to all. Many students, including under-represented minorities, rely on federal student loans and financial aid to pursue a graduate degree.
- ▶ Loan counseling and financial aid education should be available to all students entering and completing a graduate program and tailored to meet the needs of students and their families.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ Federal student loan system should be reexamined and reformed to improve access to graduate education. This includes reinstating subsidized federal loans for graduate students, reducing the interest rate paid by graduate borrowers for loans including **GRAD PLUS**, and eliminating loan origination fees.
- ▶ Allow income-eligible graduate students, who received Pell Grant support as undergraduates, the ability to apply remaining semesters of Pell support towards **graduate education**.
- ▶ Increase investments in federal financial aid programs for graduate students. The **Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need** program at the Department of Education is a critical source of support for graduate students who would otherwise face financial barriers in accessing a graduate degree.
- ▶ Strengthen programs that recruit and retain professionals with graduate degrees in areas where they are needed most. Those with graduate degrees that work in public service should be eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

## RATIONALE

- ▶ Graduate students represent a rich cadre of individuals with varying financial needs. The decision to pursue graduate education affects the student as well as their family.
- ▶ Federal support for graduate education is critical for meeting workforce needs. According to the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics**, careers that require a graduate degree are projected to comprise the fastest-growing segment of the workforce through 2028. Many of these professions are public service-oriented, where financial compensation is not a primary driving force for individuals in these roles.
- ▶ Ample financial aid and loan repayment options, such as Income-Driven Repayment Plans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness Plans can have considerable influence on whether an individual decides to pursue a graduate degree and enter a particular career field.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands. The right hand holds a black calculator over a laptop keyboard. The left hand rests on the laptop's trackpad. In the background, there are papers, including what appears to be a tax form.

# Priming Tax Policies to Support Graduate Education

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Higher education tax credits should be easily available for individuals pursuing a graduate degree to enhance their skills and cultivate a highly skilled and competitive workforce.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ Simplify and enhance tax credits so they are more navigable for students and families while ensuring the benefits can be used toward graduate education.
- ▶ Strengthen employers' ability to provide tax-exempt tuition assistance by expanding monetary limits and allow it to include student loan repayments.
- ▶ Ensure tax policies support charitable giving and maximize the utility of endowments, which allow academic institutions to fulfill their missions.
- ▶ Continue to exclude current tuition waivers and remissions from being included as taxable income and exclude future grant aid to students from being income taxable.

## RATIONALE

- ▶ Provisions within the U.S. tax code directly affect the ability of employees to pursue a graduate degree as well as the ability of employers to invest in their employees' education. These credits and deductions can serve as powerful tools for recruitment and retention of employees, as well as help cultivate a highly-educated and skilled U.S. workforce.







# Advancing American Research and Innovation

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ For the United States to remain at the forefront of scientific research and innovation, the nation must continue to make robust investments in the fundamental research conducted at the nation's colleges and universities.
- ▶ It is important to recruit, educate, and support the advancement of all graduate students, in all scientific disciplines.
- ▶ When conducting fundamental scientific research, there must be a culture of research integrity in scholarship and teaching, including research ethics and responsible conduct of research.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ There must be robust and sustainable federal investment in the fundamental scientific research funded by the U.S. government, through federal research agencies.
- ▶ Strengthen future generations of scientists through post-doctoral traineeships, fellowships, and career development opportunities provided by federal research agencies.
- ▶ Encourage collaborations between private sector and non-profit employers with universities to support the education and training of graduate students.
- ▶ Build a diverse U.S. research pipeline, including faculty and students, by reducing barriers for underrepresented minorities to pursue STEM graduate degrees.
- ▶ Provide graduate students with mentorship opportunities as a part of their education.
- ▶ Support safe, respectful, and inclusive research environments by addressing sexual harassment, racism, incivility, and other harmful behaviors.

## RATIONALE

- ▶ Research and scientific inquiry are cornerstones of graduate education.
- ▶ Federal policies should bolster the ability of the research pipeline to investigate, evaluate, and translate findings, as well as promote the safety, efficacy, and transparency of research and data sharing.
- ▶ The CHIPS and Science Act is essential to the advancement of America's research and innovation enterprise. The federal government should continue to invest in programs that support the current and future STEM workforce, STEM graduate education programs, and programs that support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women, minorities, and students underrepresented in the STEM disciplines and careers.





# Promoting the U.S. Through International Graduate Education and Research

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ The strength of our nation's graduate education enterprise depends on both domestic and international scholarship.
- ▶ For U.S. graduate education to remain the gold standard, federal policies should support the ability of U.S. universities to attract top international talent and foster educational opportunities and research collaborations between American students and scholars with their counterparts at institutions in other countries.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ Maintain duration of status for international students with F, M, and J visas to pursue graduate education in the United States.
- ▶ Uphold Optional Practical Training Program (12 months) and the STEM extension (36 months). OPT is an important bridge for international students moving from student visas to employment-based visas.
- ▶ Expand the number of H-1B visas available to holders of graduate degrees from U.S. institutes of higher education to enhance the U.S. workforce.
- ▶ Maintain the university and non-profit research exemption from the H-1B visa cap.
- ▶ Eliminate per-country cap for employment-based green cards and make other needed reforms to the nation's immigration system.
- ▶ Strengthen cooperation and collaboration between the U.S. federal government and higher education community on national security issues.

## RATIONALE

- ▶ As our world becomes increasingly connected, it is essential that federal policies advance global competence as well as promote the United States as the premier destination for graduate education. International graduate students bring a rich array of ideas and experiences that promote cross-cultural understanding which is necessary for effective diplomacy.





# Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ The opportunity to pursue graduate education must be accessible to all.
- ▶ The United States must increase investments in federal programs that aid in the advancement of graduate students and faculty from historically underrepresented groups.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ Broaden participation in STEM by strengthening federal investments that foster and enhance educational and research opportunities at Minority-Serving Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and emerging research institutions.
- ▶ Support federal policies that call for the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women, minorities, veterans, and other groups of graduate students that are underrepresented in the STEM disciplines and careers.
- ▶ Include representation from the graduate education community on federal advisory councils and taskforces that address DEI in higher education and research.
- ▶ Support activities that meet the unique needs of and create inclusive environments for members of (including, but not limited to) underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQI+ community, students with disabilities, and neurodiverse students.
- ▶ Enact a permanent legislative solution to allow recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program to legally remain in the U.S. with a path toward citizenship.

## RATIONALE

- ▶ Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within graduate education enhances cross-cultural understanding, fosters intellectual collegiality, and enriches the overall experience and quality of the science and scholarship that is produced. As our country becomes more diverse, graduate schools must be committed and prepared to recruit, educate, and support the advancement of students who are representative of the nation's population.
- ▶ Federal policies and practices should enable graduate programs to attract and support students and subsequent postdocs and faculty from historically underrepresented communities. This not only helps to ensure a rich learning environment, but enhances productivity and ultimately the creation of a highly diverse workforce both internal and external to academia. Innovations across multiple industry sectors create new opportunities for collaboration which require a diverse, highly educated and talented workforce.





# Communicating the Importance of the Master's Degree

## PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Master's education is the fastest growing and largest component of the graduate enterprise in the United States. As such, the opportunity to pursue a master's degree should be accessible to all.
- ▶ Graduate education, including the master's degree, is a public benefit that produces a highly skilled and competent workforce that meets the needs of local communities, and state and national economies. From school counselors to computer and information analysts, their jobs affect our everyday lives. Master's degree holders help protect our data security, provide essential services in the healthcare professions, are valued public-sector workers, and support innovation in American companies.
- ▶ The nation's education and healthcare systems are particularly reliant upon professional workers with a master's degree or graduate certificate.

## PRIORITIES

- ▶ Advance equitable policies that attract and support a broad array of students pursuing master's education to build a diverse, inclusive, and highly skilled workforce.
- ▶ Support federally funded programs that increase educational and research opportunities for master's degree students.
- ▶ Robust and sustainable funding for master's level-education programs funded by the Department of Education and other federal agencies (DOE-Office of Science, NEH, NIH, NSF, etc.).

## RATIONALE

- ▶ 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 graduate certificate.





The Council of Graduate Schools is committed to working with federal policymakers in a bipartisan manner. To learn more about CGS's policy and advocacy work, including supplemental policy and legislative briefs that further detail the priorities included in this document, please visit: <https://cgsnet.org/policy-advocacy>.



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