

November 22, 2024

Dear President-elect Donald J. Trump:

Before you begin your term as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) would like to take this opportunity to introduce our association to you and your administration. We welcome you back to Washington, D.C. and look forward to working with you to advance graduate education and research.

For over 60 years, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has served as the national organization dedicated to the advancement of master's and doctoral education and research. We represent over 400 institutions in all 50 states. As an association, we are proud to represent a diverse and dynamic group of higher education institutions ranging from public and private research-intensive institutions to regional comprehensive institutions, minority-serving institutions, historically black colleges and universities, and rural institutions. As the leading organization for graduate education, it is our mission to improve access to graduate education, promote the United States as a global leader, and create a more equitable society. Graduate education provides master's and doctoral students with the necessary education and training needed to be active and productive members of the American workforce.

In addition to educating and preparing the American worker for success, it is important to note that over 60 percent of the fundamental scientific research conducted in the United States is performed at the nation's colleges and universities. Research conducted by graduate students and faculty is vital to the economy, security, health, and wellbeing of our nation. Moreover, graduate educated workers serve vital roles in our communities across the United States as teachers, counselors, public health officials, engineers, cyber security experts, and many more important occupations.

Below is information about CGS reports that may be of interest to your presidential administration. These reports will provide the newly elected Trump administration with additional information about the graduate education community.

#### **Innovative Research on Graduate Education Graduate Enrollment and Degrees Report**

Conducted annually since 1986, the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees (GE&D) is the only national survey designed to provide information about trends in applications for admission to graduate school, graduate student enrollment, and graduate degrees and certificates conferred. Between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022, first-time graduate enrollment decreased by 4.7 percent and total graduate enrollment plateaued at 0.6 percent. The ten-year trend from 2012-2022 shows that total graduate enrollment only increased on average 1.2 percent annually. The data shows a negative trend that could impact the U.S. need for a graduate educated workforce. To keep the American workforce strong, CGS supports federal policies that invest in education career pipeline programs, making graduate education more accessible, and funding for domestic student support programs that boost enrollments and graduation rates.

#### **International Graduate Applications and Enrollment Report**

The 2023 CGS International Graduate Applications and Enrollment report contains data on international graduate application, admission, and enrollment trends. According to this report, U.S. universities have witnessed a surge in applications and enrollments from India and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa since Fall 2020. Meanwhile, graduate applications have decreased two years in a row from Chinese nationals. As you may already know, international students are valued members of our campus communities. They contribute to the diversity, scholarship, and advancements in scientific research taking place at U.S. universities. CGS supports federal policies and regulations that streamline the processing of visa

applications and makes it easier for international students to join the U.S. workforce after they graduate from a U.S. institution of higher education.

### **Microcredentials and Master's Degrees: Understanding the National Landscape to Support Learners and the Workforce**

At the beginning of 2024, CGS released the first of its kind exploratory report highlighting broad trends of microcredentials in graduate education. Microcredentials are a subset of learning achievements or outcomes that are less than a full degree or certificate. In surveying institutions of higher education, CGS found that most microcredentials are not seen as an alternative to master's degrees but as an "add-on" or complement to a master's curriculum or experience. U.S. employers have more confidence in universities as credential providers than private providers or even other employers and have shown interest in partnering with universities in creating microcredentials. Some see credentials as a way to provide upskilling opportunities to workers. Despite the value of microcredentials to students and workers, only 57 percent of graduate microcredentials are eligible for financial aid. Expanding financial aid to include microcredentials could make this a pathway to graduate degrees and workforce development. CGS encourages the incoming Trump administration to consider extending financial aid support to students in microcredential programs.

### **CGS Priorities for 2025**

The CGS membership calls on the new presidential administration to support federal programs and initiatives that advance graduate education and benefits the nation's graduate students by supporting the following recommendations:

- **Advancement of Graduate Education programs by the incoming Trump administration:** As the crown jewel of the U.S. higher education system, graduate education has educated top domestic and international students by creating dynamic programs that foster scholarship, research, and scientific discovery.
  - CGS recommends the appointment of a U.S. Secretary of Education who has a demonstrated record of supporting the higher education community with a specific understanding and appreciation of the value of graduate education to the nation's workforce, economy, national security, and society.
  - CGS recommends and encourages the administration to robustly support federally funded graduate education and research programs, including programs at the U.S. Department of Education.
  - CGS recommends and encourages the incoming administration's support of U.S. Department of Education programs that benefit graduate students, such as Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans, Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Graduate Assistance and Areas in National Need (GAANN), International Education Programs, and programs that benefit rural America.
- **Student Financial Aid and Literacy:** The opportunity to pursue graduate education must be accessible to all. For prospective and current students to be successful in their pursuit of a graduate degree, many students will need to receive financial assistance, whether it be federal financial aid, scholarships, fellowships, or student loans. This is particularly the case for students from underrepresented groups (first generation, underrepresented minority students, LGBTQ+, rural students, and veterans).

- Since the 116th Congress, CGS has advocated for the expansion of the Pell Grant program to allow income-eligible graduate students who received Pell support as undergraduates the ability to apply remaining semesters of Pell support towards their graduate studies. While the expansion of the Pell Grant program is a legislative matter, CGS requests support from the presidential administration to expand financial aid to graduate students.
  - CGS recommends reinstating the eligibility of graduate and professional students to receive Federal Direct Subsidized loans.
  - CGS recommends that the administration support the Graduate PLUS, Parent PLUS programs, and encourage policymakers to explore ways to reduce the interest rates paid by borrowers on Federal Direct Loans (i.e., Graduate and Parent PLUS).
- **Advancement of Research and Innovation:** CGS recommends robust and sustainable federal funding for fundamental scientific research across academic disciplines. The federal research and biomedical research agencies (i.e., Agricultural and Food Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science, National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, etc.) support vital graduate education, research and training programs that not only advance the nation's research agenda, but also trains the next generation of scientists, engineers, and biomedical professionals.
  - CGS encourages the Trump administration and 119th Congress to continue to implement the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022. Specifically, CGS requests and plans to encourage the 119th Congress to appropriate the authorized funding levels for the Department of Energy's Office of Science and the National Science Foundation.
  - CGS recommends that the new presidential administration support the implementation of other provisions in the CHIPS and Science Act such as increasing the number of Graduate Research Fellowships at the federal agencies, greater support for mentorship of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers and increased federal funding and support for artificial intelligence and quantum information sciences.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** AI is increasingly being integrated into various facets of society, including postsecondary education. Higher education institutions are leveraging AI to enhance student support services, enrich their curricula, and investigate future applications of AI in the workforce.
  - CGS encourages the Trump administration and 119th Congress to work together in a bipartisan manner to support AI initiatives and federal programs that advance the nation's scientific research enterprise. § CGS encourages the new administration to continue to utilize the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, which establishes guiding principles and associated practices aimed at ensuring the responsible design, use, and deployment of automated systems.
- **Global Engagement, International Education, and Immigration:** CGS believes that graduate education is evolving in a global context, and that the United States must remain committed to fostering international student exchanges and collaborations. In our view, U.S. institutions and graduate schools must continue to be welcoming environments for international students and scholars.
  - To ensure that the United States remains the destination of choice for talented international students and scholars, CGS recommends that the incoming administration improve the visa process and to remain in close communication with the higher

education community to avoid future visa processing delays.

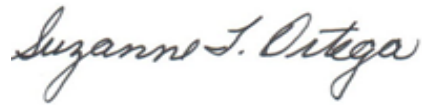
- CGS also recommends that the new presidential administration support international projects and initiatives that foster educational exchanges and scientific collaborations between U.S. and foreign universities. CGS particularly encourages greater U.S. supported international collaboration with foreign universities in the Global South, such as Africa, South America, and Asia. This nation-to-nation and scholar-to-scholar exchange will foster greater working relationships and be an opportunity to engage in soft diplomacy.
- Staple-a-Green Card: CGS appreciates President-elect Trump's recent statement about stapling a green card on the diplomas of foreign nationals that have graduated from the U.S. institution of education.
- Dreamers and DACA-recipients: CGS encourages President-elect Trump and the incoming administration to support Dreamers and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.
- **Inclusiveness in Graduate Education:** CGS believes that equity, access, and inclusion are essential to the excellence of graduate education and expanding the US workforce in critical areas of national need. Supporting these points is both a moral and economic imperative, as it strengthens innovation, sustainability, and national prosperity. In our view, students from all backgrounds should have the opportunity to take advantage of graduate educational opportunities, especially students in rural America.
  - CGS supports federal programs that support underrepresented groups that include, first-generation students, underrepresented minority students, low-income students, students in rural communities, and veterans.
  - In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education hosted the National Summit on Educational Opportunity which explored equal opportunity barriers in postsecondary education. CGS recommends the administration continue discussions on promoting strategies for increasing inclusion and educational opportunities for underrepresented students, specifically at the graduate education level.
  - CGS asks the incoming administration to continue investments in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to ensure that barriers which adversely affect science, technology, engineering, medicine, and mathematics (STEMM) students are re-moved. Students from all regions, states, and communities should be given the opportunity to pursue a STEMM education.
- **Graduate Student Mental Health and Wrap-around Support Programs:** The nation's graduate schools serve two important and distinctive roles in the mental health arena. First, graduate school provides a place where students can succeed academically because they are in a stable environment and are being given the education and training that allows them to compete academically. Second, graduate schools educate and train the mental health professionals needed to provide health care services and support to the people in our communities.
  - CGS recommends that the Trump administration work in concert with the graduate education community to make graduate student mental health programs and wrap-around services a policy priority for the U.S. Department of Education.
  - In April 2021, CGS and the JED Foundation released a report, "Supporting Graduate

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing,” in which we recommended the following: (1) federal agencies provide support for research to better understand graduate student mental health and wellbeing, especially challenges and barriers experienced by underrepresented and underserved groups of graduate students; and (2) Review how current practices for evaluating the impact of research funding may exacerbate hyper-competitiveness and graduate faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate student stress.

**Conclusion**

CGS welcomes the opportunity to work with your administration to advance graduate education in the United States.

Sincerely,



President  
Council of Graduate Schools

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Schools

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