

2026–2027 Federal Policy Agenda

For over 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 450 institutions across the United States, Canada, and abroad, representing a total of over 1.7 million graduate students. Collectively, CGS institutions annually award roughly 80% of all U.S. doctorates and 60% of all U.S. master's degrees.

CGS's 2026–2027 Federal Policy Agenda calls upon Congress and the Administration to support policies that, through graduate education, **improve access to graduate education, promote U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, and ensure American research innovation.**





Artificial Intelligence

Strategic investment in AI research at universities is essential to maintaining U.S. global competitiveness and leadership in advanced technology and innovation.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Support bipartisan initiatives and legislation that advance AI-related research and programs and ensure federal support for AI research through federal programs that prioritize expanding access to graduate education, research, and training in AI related fields.
- ▶ Advocate for continued support of federal initiatives, such as the National Artificial Intelligence Research Resource Pilot (NAIRR) and the CHIPS and Science Act, as recommended by the House Bipartisan Task Report on Artificial Intelligence, that help bolster AI research and strengthen U.S. global competitiveness.
- ▶ Support implementation of House Bipartisan AI Taskforce recommendations, including expanding pathways to employment in AI-related fields, developing responsible AI use guidelines, and incentivizing curriculum development for AI-related fields through competitive awards for universities.
- ▶ Facilitate university collaboration with federal agencies, including DOE and NSF, to develop and share information on complementary technology protection measures for basic research and education.

Principles

- ▶ Graduate institutions play a central role in developing a well-prepared AI workforce.
- ▶ Robust university-based AI research and development should be paired with effective technology transfer to ensure real-world impact.
- ▶ AI integration into teaching, learning, and research should be governed by guidelines to ensure ethical, responsible, and fair practices, with active involvement from academic leaders such as graduate deans.

More than 150 resource awards made to 25 states through the NAIRR Pilot program are already yielding AI-powered results in medical, scientific, and workforce advancement.

Source: NSF NAIRR Pilot Resource



Ensuring Access and Avenues to Graduate Education

The opportunity to pursue graduate education should be accessible to all interested in achieving a master's and/or doctoral education.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Support federal policies that promote the recruitment, retention, and advancement of all students, especially those from urban and rural areas, first-generation, veterans, and those in underserved communities.
- ▶ Current and prospective graduate students from all regions, states, and communities should be given the opportunity to pursue a graduate education, particularly in the science, technology, engineering, medicine, and mathematics disciplines.
- ▶ Support White House initiatives that promote educational excellence and innovation, foster career development opportunities, and encourage sustainable private-public-academic partnerships for all academic institutions, including HBCUs, HSIs, and those in rural America.

Principles

- ▶ The United States government must increase investments in federal programs that provide access and opportunities for graduate students and faculty from all walks of American life and communities.
- ▶ Inclusive policies and practices promoted by the federal government and institutions of higher education are needed to support urban and rural students, first-generation and veteran students, and those in underserved communities.

Veterans who used GI Bill® benefits were twice as likely to graduate within six years compared to similar students.

Source: American Institutes for Research Assessment of the Post-9-11 GI Bill®.



Cost of Graduate Education

Rising costs and public skepticism threaten access and success, risking the nation's ability to develop the skilled workforce and cutting-edge research essential to economic competitiveness and global leadership.

CGS Priorities:


- ▶ Extend and expand tax incentives for employer tuition assistance, and support public-private partnerships for funded internships and workforce-aligned training.
- ▶ Share good policy practices with institutions to adopt accelerated and flexible program formats, integrate work-based learning, and align master's coursework with doctoral requirements to shorten overall study duration.
- ▶ Help students "know before they go" by publishing clear estimates of tuition and fees, stipends and financial aid, expected time to degree, and likely post-graduation career paths.
- ▶ Simplify and streamline the federal loan process by eliminating origination fees and ensuring graduate students receive clear, consistent information on repayment options and interest rates, while strengthening loan counseling programs to better guide prospective borrowers.

Principles

- ▶ Federal policy should ensure all students can pursue graduate education without undue financial or structural barriers, with programs fulfilling national workforce needs.
- ▶ Funding structures and program models should reduce time-to-degree, align with state and local workforce demands, and limit unnecessary costs for students and taxpayers.
- ▶ The U.S. should be investing in Americans who want to pursue a graduate education to fill vital jobs in communities like engineers, nurses, public health officials and teachers.

Workers with a graduate degree earn on average **29 percent more** than comparable workers with only a bachelor's degree.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce



Career Readiness: Every Path, Every Graduate

A graduate-educated workforce strengthens U.S. innovation, education, and public service across a variety of sectors and careers, including the innovation economy and the development of critical technology.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Continue and expand grant funding through agencies like NIH, NSF, and NEH that promote career development beyond traditional academia, encouraging partnerships with industry, government, military and nonprofits.
- ▶ Support graduate programs' efforts through federal funding to create internships, cross-sector mentorships, individual development plans and skill-building opportunities outside traditional academic roles.
- ▶ Develop new partnerships between federal agencies, institutions, and employers to meet labor force shortages in critical areas such as education administration, manufacturing, and health care.

Principles

- ▶ Graduate education prepares students for a wide range of career paths inside and outside academia. Academic success is not solely defined by tenure-track placements.
- ▶ Master's and doctoral degrees provide transferable skills and prepare workers for jobs in industry, military and government.
- ▶ Graduate degree programs should provide career counseling and professional development to support an array of career paths.

In 2023, **47% of doctoral recipients** with a job lined up after graduation had committed to a position in industry or business.

Source: National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics



Federal Student Loans and Transparency

Ensuring graduate students can access higher education strengthens America's global competitiveness by enabling the development of a highly skilled workforce.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Advocate for increased annual and aggregate Direct Unsubsidized Loan limits for graduate and professional students.
- ▶ Allow income-eligible graduate students, who received Pell Grant support as undergraduates, the ability to apply remaining semesters of Pell support towards graduate education.
- ▶ Advance policies to strengthen loan counseling for graduate students at entry and completion, addressing interest accrual, capitalization, and risks of high-cost private lending.
- ▶ Repayment programs should reflect the delayed earnings growth and principal balances common to graduate borrowers, particularly those in public service, research, and other high-skill but lower-paying fields.

Fewer than a third of Ph.D. holders who attend public institutions graduate with *any* student loan debt.

Source: Office of Financial Aid Federal Student Loan Portfolio

- ▶ Ensure loan rules are transparent and equitable for both full and part-time graduate students to ensure they can cover the costs of a degree.

Principles

- ▶ Excellence and opportunity must coexist. By maintaining high standards while expanding access, graduate education can serve students and strengthen pathways to meaningful careers.
- ▶ Clear, reliable information about costs, debt, and career outcomes is vital for prospective graduate students. Research shows that graduate students overwhelmingly want better data on program costs, time to degree, employment outcomes, and debt levels.
- ▶ Loan borrowing terms, whether federal or private, must be transparent, fair, and fully understood by students before they assume debt obligations.
- ▶ Maintain high educational standards while ensuring graduate education remains accessible and financially viable for all.



Advancing American Innovation and Research

Graduate schools are training the current and next generation of scientists, innovators, and entrepreneurs that will advance America's research innovation, national security, and economy.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ The federal government must remain committed to supporting competitively awarded research that is peer-reviewed by subject matter experts.
- ▶ Strengthen the current and next generation of scientists, researchers, and innovators through graduate education and training programs supported by federal research agencies, especially programs supported by DOE-Office of Science, NIH, and NSF.
- ▶ Build a strong U.S. research pipeline that includes graduate deans, faculty, and students, by encouraging all interested students to pursue STEM graduate degrees and careers.
- ▶ Provide graduate students with mentorship opportunities and information about STEM and non-STEM career pathways.

The higher education sector was the **second-largest R&D performer in 2023**, producing \$102 billion.

Source: NSB Science and Engineering Indicators

Principles

- ▶ For the United States to remain at the forefront of scientific research and innovation, the nation must remain committed to making robust investments in the fundamental scientific research conducted at the nation's colleges and universities.
- ▶ It is important to recruit, educate, train, and support the advancement of all graduate students in all scientific disciplines. Both domestic and international students are integral to the success of America's scientific and research enterprise.
- ▶ A culture of research integrity in scholarship and teaching, including research ethics and responsible conduct of research, is critical to fundamental research.



Promoting the U.S. Through International Education and Research

International students are vital to the nation's research enterprise and workforce, serving as many of our doctors, leading scientists, and professionals who drive innovation, provide critical services, and contribute to U.S. competitiveness, local communities, and the advancement of science and technology.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Maintain the university and non-profit research exemption from the H-1B visa cap.
- ▶ Support federal regulations and legislation that create more predictable pathways to employment and permanent residency for international students who earn graduate degrees in STEM fields.
- ▶ Maintain the current "Duration of Status" (D/S) policy which allows international students on F-1 and J-1 visas to remain in the United States until the completion of their studies.
- ▶ Maintain Optional Practical Training (OPT) and STEM-OPT.

Principles

- ▶ For U.S. graduate education to remain the gold standard, federal policies must support the ability of U.S. universities to attract top international talent and foster educational opportunities and research collaborations.
- ▶ A transparent and timely visa process supports international students and prevents disruptions to studies and research.

International students contribute nearly **\$44 billion annually** and support more than **378,000 American jobs.**

Source: NAFA and JB International – Fall 2025 Snapshot and Impact Report



Communicating the Importance of Master's and Doctoral Degrees to Communities, Workforce, and the Nation

Key fields that require a graduate degree, such as social workers, nurses, and postsecondary teachers are set to grow faster than average in the next decade, setting the nation up for a potential shortfall in educated workers.

CGS Priorities:

- ▶ Restore GradPlus so more Americans have access to affordable loans so they can pursue a graduate degree, especially in education, healthcare, and technology. medical and research fields.
- ▶ Uncap federal unsubsidized loans so that more Americans can pursue a graduate education without taking costly private loans.
- ▶ Continue to federally fund master's-focused programs at the Department of Education and federal research agencies such as DOE-Office of Science, NIH, and NSF.

Principles

- ▶ Master's and doctoral degree holders are critical to sustaining economic growth, public well-being and innovation in the U.S., making graduate education a national priority.
- ▶ Continued federal support ensures a pipeline of highly-skilled professionals that provide essential services to states and local communities and are vital for advancing the nation's economic, scientific, and technological competitiveness, and workforce development.

As of 2024, the U.S. faces a shortage of approximately **29,000 graduate-trained professionals** in education, counseling, and administration alone.

Source: Council of Graduate Schools' *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*