

2026 CGS Advocacy Day Talking Points

April 22-23, 2026

Overview: CGS held its 2026 annual Advocacy Day to engage policymakers on key issues affecting graduate education, research, and workforce development. The following talking points reflect the organization's priorities and policy concerns discussed during the 2026 Advocacy Day.

Implications of the OBBBA – Loan Limits, Accreditation, and Earnings Premium

- The One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) Act eliminated the Graduate PLUS Loan program and established new federal loan limits for graduate degree programs. The annual loan limit is \$20,500 and \$100,000 in total. The loan limit for professional degree programs is \$200,000, with a \$50,000 annual loan limit.
- According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, an estimated 25 - 40 percent of graduate students may be unable to access the private loan market. The new limits create a significant hurdle for students in fast-track programs like one-year master's degrees or some nursing programs, where annual tuition can surpass the new loan caps. Tighter borrowing limits may prevent students from financing or completing degrees, even with high ROI.
- Since the enactment of the OBBB, the Department has [issued a final rule](#) defining “professional degrees, which include 11 fields of study.
- In its comment letter, CGS noted that the Department of Education has not provided clear guidance on how programs will be designated as professional degrees, including the timeline or review process, creating uncertainty for institutions and students. It also warned that excluding programs requiring advanced training and licensure, OBBB's narrow scope fails to reflect modern workforce needs, particularly as graduate programs face new accountability standards requiring graduates to out-earn bachelor's degree holders.
- In April 2025, the Administration issued an executive order, Reforming Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education, directing the Secretary of Education to realign accreditation by prioritizing intellectual diversity, ensuring programs are free from unlawful discrimination, and requiring the use of program-level outcomes data without regard to race, ethnicity, or sex. It also calls for recognizing new accreditors to increase competition and discourages labeling agencies as “regional.”
- During the week of April 13th, 2026, the Department of Education began negotiations on new regulations for accrediting bodies and discussed reducing regulatory burdens, prioritizing student outcomes (ROI), and making higher education more affordable. The Department of Education released a summary of the provisions.

Graduate Schools Strengthen America's Workforce and Produce Value

- Graduate degree holders are vital to local communities, workforces, and economies. They are our neighbors and community leaders, serving as teachers, nurses, social workers, and professionals who drive innovation, provide essential services, and strengthen local and state economies.

- Engineers, researchers, and data scientists also provide crucial skills in manufacturing. The manufacturing sector employed nearly 13 million workers in March 2023. Over the next decade, 4.6 million manufacturing jobs will be needed, and 2.4 million are expected to go unfilled due to the skills gap.
- In 2024, 73 percent of research doctorate recipients reported graduating debt-free from their program. Fewer than nine percent carried debt exceeding \$70,000. The majority of those with higher debt are in science and engineering fields, which offer high returns on investment and significant societal benefits.
- Graduate education is not just an academic pursuit—it is a strategic investment in workforce resilience, innovation, and leadership. A well-prepared graduate workforce drives economic competitiveness and societal progress.

The Administration’s Gold Standard of Science and FY 2027 S&T Priorities

- In May 2025, the administration issued Executive Order 14303, “the Restoring Gold Standard of Science,” which represents a commitment to the highest standards of scientific integrity.” These research standards include reproducibility, transparency, collaboration and interdisciplinarity, unbiased peer review, accepting negative results as positive outcomes, etc.
- Last year, the administration issued its FY27 Science and Technology Priorities which includes artificial intelligence, quantum science, nuclear energy, biotechnology, national security technologies, and space exploration.
- FY2027 President’s Budget Request: Proposes robust funding for these areas of research, while providing lower funding levels for other areas of research.

Administrative and Congressional Actions Related to Artificial Intelligence

- **Genesis Mission:** On November 24, 2025, the White House issued an executive order launching the Genesis Mission, which directs the Department of Energy (DOE) and other science agencies to rapidly integrate AI into federal research. This includes expanding access to federal datasets, laboratory infrastructure, and advanced computing resources for universities and private corporations.
- CGS supports the federal effort to accelerate scientific discovery using artificial intelligence as it will likely lead to expanded AI-focused research opportunities including more fellowships and traineeships, an improved training and workforce development pipeline, and a greater emphasis on large-scale collaborative research.
- **America’s AI Action Plan:** The Trump administration directed the creation of an AI Action Plan in the early days of his second term based on three pillars of accelerating innovation, building AI infrastructure, and leading in international diplomacy and security.
- CGS supports the recommended policy action led by the DOE that would expand hands-on research training and development opportunities for graduate and postgraduate students and educators, leveraging expertise and capabilities in AI across DOE national laboratories. This includes partnering with

community colleges and technical/career colleges to prepare new workers and help transition the existing workforce to fill critical AI roles.

- Bipartisan NSF AI Education Act of 2026: For the meeting with the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee (Majority), we want to be sure to reference this legislation introduced by Senators Cantwell (D-WA) and Moran (R-KS).
- The NSF AI Education Act would authorize the agency to award undergraduate and graduate scholarships in AI, including scholarships focused on the use of AI in agriculture, education and advanced manufacturing. It would create fellowships for professional development for those already in the STEM and education workforce. It would also create grants for AI research, development and training in agriculture through Land-Grant Universities and the Cooperative Extension Service.
- CGS supports 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.

Immigration and Visa Policies

- International students and scholars are valued members of our state, local, and campus communities. International students contribute nearly \$43 billion annually to local communities and support more than 355,000 American jobs. Their spending on food, housing, and services sustains businesses in every state. Every three international students who study here create one American job.
- The Optional Practical Training program not only helps the United States attract, educate and retain these students, but it ensures that small businesses, startups, and research institutions have the talent they need to grow and innovate.
- Optional Practical Training: CGS and our fellow members of the U.S. for Success Coalition endorsed the bipartisan bill Keep STEM Talent Act, which will codify OPT into law.
- Pause in USCIS Adjudications: Since January 2026, the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) has placed a hold on all benefits applications for certain foreign nationals from 39 high-risk countries, which are listed in Proclamation 10998.

Duration of Status

- In 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on Duration of Status (D/S) which would limit F-1 and J-1 visa holders to a four-year stay in the United States. CGS joined other higher education associations in opposition to the proposed rule.
- The NPRM is proposing significant changes to the current duration of status policy, including:
 - **Fixed Time Period:** Currently, F and J non-immigrants are able to remain in the United States for the duration of their educational program. Again, this proposed rule would restrict that to a 4-year period.
 - **Departure Date:** Currently, nonimmigrant visa-holders have 60 days to depart the United States upon completion of their programs. Under the proposed rule, they will now only have 30 days to depart.

- **Extension of Stay (EOS):** This proposed rule includes a detailed application process for the extension of stay (EOS). F and J nonimmigrants would have to file a Form I-539 (Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status) with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. *NOTE:* The NPRM includes many scenarios concerning the proposed EOS process.
 - **Optional Practical Training (OPT):** F and J nonimmigrants who need additional time to complete their current program of study, F-1 OPT or STEM OPT, or J-1 academic training must apply for an extension of stay. *NOTE:* The NPRM includes many scenarios concerning OPT and the automatic extension of authorized employment.
 - **Restrictions on Transfers and Educational Objectives:** This proposed rule prohibits F-1 students in a graduate-level program from changing educational objectives or transferring from within the United States. The proposed rule prohibits F-1 students from lateral and reverse matriculation of educational levels. For example, an individual in a master’s program may not reverse matriculation and start another educational program at the master’s level or baccalaureate level.
- In the community’s comment letter to DHS, we noted that it takes longer than four years for doctoral students to complete their studies. The letter noted that “the proposed rule is especially problematic for the majority of PhD seeking students, who take an average of 5.8 years to complete their program. In addition, the median time it takes to complete a research doctorate is 7.3 years, which includes the time it takes to complete a master’s degree. For F-1 graduate students pursuing a doctoral degree in the health sciences the median time for completion of the degree is 8.8 years, and for non-science and engineering degrees it is 10 years.”
 - DHS has not issued a final rule on D/S yet.

Fiscal Year 2027 Funding for Federal Agencies

Department of Education

- CGS urges Congress to support robust funding in the FY27 budget to strengthen graduate education, workforce readiness, and American global competitiveness. Federal investment is essential to ensure that all students can access and complete advanced degrees to contribute to the local workforce.
- The FY27 budget request proposes a \$354 million reduction in discretionary funding for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), effectively zeroing out several grant programs.
- MSIs serve a disproportionate number of students with high financial need; more than 50% of MSI students receive Pell Grants, compared to only 31% at other institutions.

Federal Work-Study

- CGS, along with the broader higher education community through the Student Aid Alliance, is requesting \$1.31 billion for the Federal Work-Study program for FY27.

- Federal Work-Study provides critical, flexible employment that aligns with graduate fields of study, such as research and teaching. Increased funding helps institutions offset rising costs and allows students to gain professional experience without increasing debt.

Federal TRIO Programs (McNair Program)

- CGS, along with the broader higher education community through the Student Aid Alliance, is requesting \$1.3 billion for the Federal TRIO programs.
- TRIO programs, specifically the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Program, are the primary pipeline for underrepresented students moving into doctoral studies. This investment is vital for diversifying the highly skilled U.S. workforce.

Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need

- CGS, along with the broader higher education community through the Student Aid Alliance, is requesting \$28.6 million for GAANN.
- GAANN fellowships provide critical financial support to high-achieving graduate students pursuing degrees in fields of national priority, such as engineering, physics, and cybersecurity. Increasing funding to \$28.6 million would support nearly 400 fellowships. For institutions in rural states, GAANN helps support advanced research capacity.

Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)

- Childcare is a primary barrier to degree completion for graduate student parents. A robust \$85 million investment would expand campus-based capacity and significantly reduce attrition for parenting students, which is a \$10 million increase from FY26 levels.

International Education (Title VI)

- CGS, along with the broader higher education community through the Coalition for International Education, is requesting \$85,664,000 in funding for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays in FY27. Of the total amount, \$75.35 million would be for Title VI programs and \$10.31 million for Fulbright-Hays.
- Title VI and Fulbright-Hays are the federal government’s primary investments in U.S. expertise in foreign languages, world regions, and international studies. Fulbright-Hays complements this through overseas research and training grants for doctoral students, faculty, and educators to conduct fieldwork and language study abroad, particularly in non-Western regions.
- Funding at this level is critical to recover from the FY 2025 cancellation of 350 grants, including over 1,500 FLAS fellowships and 185 Fulbright-Hays awards. These programs are essential for U.S. national security and maintaining a globally competent workforce.

Department of Energy’s Office of Science

- As a member of the Energy Sciences Coalition, CGS requests \$9.5 billion for the DOE-Office of Science in fiscal year 2027. This level of funding is necessary to maintain U.S. competitiveness and unleash innovation in critical new energy and emerging technologies.

- The Department of Energy is a leader in STEM education, traineeship, and workforce programs and prepares the next generation of scientists, engineers, and technicians to be world leaders in science and technology and find innovative solutions to the nation’s pressing energy and national security challenges.

National Institutes of Health

- In the FY27 President’s Budget Request, the administration proposes \$41.5 billion for the biomedical agency, which is \$5 billion below the FY26 enacted level of funding.
- As a member of the Ad Hoc for Medical Research coalition, CGS supports the coalition’s request of at least \$51.3 billion. The coalition warns that a roughly \$6 billion or 12 percent NIH cut would undermine progress on treatments and cures, weaken U.S. global leadership in medical research, and reduce opportunities for emerging talent. It further notes that such reductions would slow scientific advancement and run counter to public expectations, with nearly two-thirds of voters opposing major cuts to medical research funding.
- Every \$1.00 of NIH spending in rural states generates \$2.30 in total economic impact.
- In the FY27 President’s Budget, the Administration proposes a shift to “forward funding” grants, requiring NIH to fully obligate all competing research project grant awards at the time of initial grant rather than spreading funding across years. This approach is intended to “increase NIH budget flexibility” and free up more annual funds for new awards, but it also effectively front-loads commitments, which may reduce the number of new awards available in any given fiscal year, with early-career scientists being the first to lose out.

National Science Foundation

- The FY27 President’s Request proposes \$3.9 billion for the National Science Foundation, which is a \$4 billion cut compared to the FY26 enacted level of funding.
- As a member of the Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), CGS supports the coalition’s request of at least \$9.9 billion for the agency in FY27.
- Investing in fundamental research is imperative to win the international innovation race. The United States cannot afford to cede leadership in the fields that will define the future, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, advanced materials, and biotechnology.
- Funding NSF at \$9.9 billion will allow for the funding of all NSF directorates and enable them to maintain and strengthen current programs and seed new ones. This will ensure that NSF’s research, infrastructure, education, and translation focus areas move forward.
- According to the FY27 President’s Budget, it is estimated that 13,000 graduate students and 1,000 post-doctorates will be involved in NSF-funded research. This is a marked decline from FY25 which funded 40,200 graduate students and 4,500 post-doctorate associates.
- The FY27 President’s Budget eliminates the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate.