

IMPROVING GRADUATE EDUCATION

Investing in Our Economy, Workforce, and Welfare



NAGPS Legislative
Concerns Committee

Graduate Students Training is Unique

- Graduate students are responsible for teaching undergraduate students, conducting research, applying for grants, and developing intensive writing and critical thinking skills.
- Students receive this “on the job” workforce training at a lower cost to universities than they would spend on full-time faculty. Taking care of them saves money, improves undergraduate learning, and helps stimulate research productivity [1].
- 60% of doctoral students have less than \$40,000 of student debt[2], and most of those who do take out loans are first-generation college students who want to lift themselves out of poverty [3]
- Graduate students are directed by a faculty research advisor, and this relationship is the highest predictor of graduate student success [4,5].

Graduate Degrees are In Demand

- 70% of those with graduate degrees work in the private sector [6].
- The projected occupational growth rate for those with master’s and PhDs is higher than any other level of employment [7].
- 60% of the predicted fastest growing occupations require advanced degrees [8], as do 99% of STEM-related jobs [9].
- Advanced degrees increase earning potential [10] and tax revenue, and those with them are less likely to be reliant upon the government and to be unemployed [11]. It also increases worker productivity, quality, and innovation as well as overall revenue [12].

Problems in Graduate School: Mental Health Crisis

- Graduate students are six times that of the general population to suffer from mental health problems, with 39-41% suffering from anxiety and/or depression [13]. Around 20% are in therapy, are on medication, and 10% have suicidal thoughts [14]. Half of PhD students dropout of school because of the culture [15,16] that has been described as “academic hazing” [17], not because they lack the ability [18]. Instead, graduate students lack a safe educational environment.
- Students in an unhealthy environment cannot leave and preserve their long-term financial welfare. Unlike transferring schools as an undergraduate, switching graduate programs is difficult, if not nearly impossible.
- The largest factors are:
 - Very poor work-life balances, including working 60+ hours per week [1,19].
 - Many graduate students live below a living wage, though they are employees of the university. This lasts for around 8 years [20-23].
 - Few faculty receive mentorship training, and there is little to no oversight regarding inappropriate behavior. Consequently, many are neglectful, exploitative, and abusive [1].

Graduate degrees are in demand.

60% of the predicted fastest growing occupations require advanced degrees.

Only - **1/3rd** of graduating doctoral students have student loan debt, but - **2/3rds** of those who do come from low-income families.

39-41% of graduate students suffer from mental health problems, **6x** that of the general population. **10%** have suicidal thoughts. Many students are working **60+** hours a week and below a living wage for **~8 years** in a climate that has been called

“academic hazing.”

Legislation to Support

“Higher Education Mental Health Act of 2018” [S. 3106]
“Graduate Student Savings Act of 2019” [H.R. 1194]

Initiatives to Support

Education Department investigation into mentorship graduate mental health
Funding for university and agency mentorship programs
Increased funding for mental health (SAMHSA) and child care support (CCAMPIS) resources.
Increased financial support for graduate students, especially low-income



How to Help

- Support Advisor Training and Oversight
 - Implement mentorship training for advisors supported through federal and education agencies.
 - Create funding opportunities within granting and science agencies for mentorship.
 - Incorporate mentorship quality in grant applications.
 - Require the Secretary of Education to investigate graduate education advising.
- Financial and Non-Financial Support
 - Expand employee protection laws to graduate students, including fair wages and maternity leave policies.
 - Increase funding for mental health resources on university campuses, including but not limited to the National Council for Behavioral Health via the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
 - Expand housing, health, and dependent support options to graduate students. Increase funding to the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS).
 - Reauthorize GRADPLUS and Public Service Loan Forgiveness programs, retain graduate eligibility for unsubsidized Stafford loans, increase access to income-based repayment plans, and do not add loan limits.

For more information, refer to the NAGPS “Graduate Student Life Brief” at bit.ly/2NTQH3q

References

- [1] Glover, K. (2019, March) Graduate Student Life Brief. The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students. Retrieved from bit.ly/2NTQH3q
- [2] The College Board (n.d.) Cumulative Debt for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies over Time. Trends in Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://trends.collegeboard.org/student-aid/figures-tables/cumulative-debt-undergraduate-graduate-studies-time>
- [3] Okahana, H. (2018, July 2) Data Sources: Increasing Number of Graduate and Professional Students Are Former Pell Recipients. Council of Graduate Schools. Retrieved from <https://cgsnet.org/data-sources-increasing-number-graduate-and-professional-students-are-former-pell-recipients-0>
- [4] Spalter-Roth, R., and Erskine, W. (2007, March). ASA Research Brief: Race and Ethnicity in the Sociology Pipeline. American Sociological Association Research and Development Department Retrieved from <https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/raceethsociologypipe.pdf>
- [5] Curtin, N., Stewart, A.J., Ostrove, J.M. (2013, February 1). Fostering Academic Self-Concept: Advisor Support and Sense of Belonging Among International and Domestic Graduate Students. American Educational Research Journal 50(1):108-137 <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212446662>
- [6] The Economics Daily (2003, February 25) Most doctoral grads work outside of academia Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2003/feb/wk4/art02.htm>
- [7] Rolen, E. (2019, January) Occupational Employment Projections Through The Perspective Of Education And Training. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2019/education-projections/pdf/education-projections.pdf>
- [8] Economic News Release (2018, January 30). Employment Projections: 2016-26 Summary Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm>
- [9] Fayer, S., Lacey, A., and Watson, A. (2017, January) STEM Occupations: Past, Present, And Future. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2017/science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem-occupations-past-present-and-future/pdf/science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem-occupations-past-present-and-future.pdf>
- [10] Torpey, El. (2018, April) Measuring the value of education Career Outlook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2018/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>
- [11] Economic News Release (2019, February 1) Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm>
- [12] CareerBuilder.com (2017, March 16) Press Release: 41 Percent of Employers Are Hiring College-Educated Workers for Positions That Had Been Primarily Held by Those with High School Degrees, Finds CareerBuilder Survey. Career Builder. Retrieved from <http://press.careerbuilder.com/2017-03-16-41-Percent-of-Employers-Are-Hiring-College-Educated-Workers-for-Positions-That-Had-Been-Primarily-Held-by-Those-with-High-School-Degrees-Finds-CareerBuilder-Survey>
- [13] Evans, T.M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J.B., Weiss, L.T., and Vanderford, N.L. (2018) Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. Nature Biotechnology 36 282–284 Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/nbt.4089.pdf?origin=ppub>
- [14] Garcia-Williams, A.G., Moffitt, L., Kaslow, N.J. (2014, October) Mental Health and Suicidal Behavior Among Graduate Students. American Psychiatry. 38(5) 554-560 Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs40596-014-0041-y>
- [15] Cassuto, L (2013, July 1) Ph.D. Attrition: How Much Is Too Much? The Chronicle of Higher Education <https://www.chronicle.com/article/PhD-Attrition-How-Much-Is/140045>
- [16] Patterson, E. (2016, July 6) Why Do So Many Graduate Students Quit? The Atlantic. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/why-do-so-many-graduate-students-quit/490094/>
- [17] Perry, D.M. (2019, February 5) How to Make Grad School More Humane. Pacific Standard Retrieved from <https://psmag.com/ideas/grad-school-continues-to-ignore-students-with-disabilities>
- [18] Council of Graduate Schools (2008) PhD Completion Project. <http://www.phdcompletion.org/information/index.asp>
- [19] Haar, J.M., Russo, M., Suñe, A., Ollier-Malaterre, A. (2014, December) Outcomes of work–life balance on job satisfaction, life satisfaction and mental health: A study across seven cultures. Journal of Vocational Behavior 85(3) 361-373. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.08.010>
- [20] PhD Stipends (n.d.) Retrieved February 10, 2019 from <http://www.phdstipends.com/results>
- [21] Berger, J. (2017, October 3) Exploring Ways to Shorten the Ascent to a Ph.D. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/03/education/03education.html>
- [22] Bidwell, A. (2014, March 25) How Much Loan Debt is From Grad Students? More Than You Think U.S. News <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/03/25/how-much-outstanding-loan-debt-is-from-grad-students-more-than-you-think>
- [23] Cassuto, L (2011, November 20) Graduate Student Debt Matters. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Graduate-Student-Debt-Matters/129812>