

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

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Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Title IX

The [Title IX Regulations](#) announced earlier this year went into effect on August 14th. This was up for consideration since 17 state attorneys general and Washington, DC attempted a [preliminary injunction](#) in the District Court of the District of Columbia. A judge on August 12th, denied this motion. Secretary DeVos counted this as a victory.

Grants Announced

On August 10th, Secretary DeVos announced [\\$3.9 million in new grants](#) to be awarded to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions. These awards are focused on increasing STEM education, since often minorities are underrepresented in the STEM workforce.

The next week, another grant was introduced to [help higher education institutions](#) resume operations and combat the effects Coronavirus had. This was followed shortly by regulations for [distance learning](#). The [Distance Learning and Innovation](#) regulations have been in the works since 2019, however they will not take effect until July of 2021. [Advocates](#) for the *Distance Learning and Innovation* regulations believe the new rules will modernize distance learning rules and give more flexibility for learning that is very needed during the coronavirus pandemic. However, others are concerned that it allows for a lower bar of education, which can be problematic for some degrees where hands on experience is necessary.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

Student Loan Relief Extended

On August 7th, President Trump announced his plan to issue an executive order regarding the [student loan relief](#) that is expiring on [October 1st](#). In March, the administration acted to suspend student loan and interest payments, which Congress supported in the CARES Act. On August 8th, President Trump signed a [memorandum](#) ordering an extension of the student loan relief until the end of 2020. As before, this [pauses the payments](#), but does not forgive them. Secretary DeVos implemented the student loan relief [on August 21st](#).

National Science Foundation Program

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has been trying to address concerns that it will favor specific fields of research when deciding awards. The [Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#) announced that it would emphasize artificial intelligence, computationally intensive research, and quantum information science. People were immediately concerned that this would lead to fellows with similar research compared to previous years. The NSF has tried to reassure people by continuing to encourage application from all disciplines.

IN RELATED NEWS...

GRADUATE SCHOOL AND CAMPUS CLIMATE

As semesters began across the United States, [schools](#) were concerned about the risk of the Coronavirus increasing on campuses. It quickly became apparent that this was a warranted worry. Many colleges and universities are using a hybrid model, allowing students to return to campus if they wish. However, this has already led to problems at several schools. On August 17th, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill announced it would no longer hold in person classes, since 130 students tested positive for COVID-19 in the first week of classes. Another 177 students were in isolation and 349 were in quarantine. On August 18th, [Michigan State University](#) and Ithaca College also announced that they would close their campus and use remote learning. In addition, University of Notre Dame paused the fall semester for two weeks, only eight days into the school year. Again, they had found that out of 947 students tested for the coronavirus on campus, 147 had returned positive. East Carolina University and Towson University have also moved online. Many schools are still concerned about the risk of coronavirus on their campuses and are remaining vigilant.

Unfortunately, many students on college campuses are less careful regarding social distancing. Colleges and universities are quickly finding that even the coronavirus cannot stop their students from throwing and attending [large parties](#). This has caused coronavirus outbreaks or student quarantining at Central Michigan University, University of Toledo, Syracuse University, and St. Olaf College. Meanwhile, University of Alabama, St. Mary's College of Maryland, Northeastern University, and Arizona State University have tried to limit the amount of large parties.

Relevant Reads

Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

[Equity in Illinois higher education: 'We are failing our African American students.'](#)

[International Conference Explores Religious Diversity in Higher Education](#)

[Mental Health Inclusion Must Start in Higher Ed](#)

The State of Higher Education

[Pandemic reveals strains in higher education, panelists say](#)

[Higher education during a pandemic: Giving it the old college try](#)

[COVID-19 is widening inequality in higher education](#)

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