Increase Funding and Equity to Support Graduate Research

An investment in the public good and global competitiveness

Graduate students are the backbone of research conducted at American universities and rely on federal research funding for financial support. Federal investment in research funding drives the United States technological advantage, contributes to local economies, and fuels innovation. Universities benefit from graduate students due to the high research and teaching power returns given proportionately low overhead and labor costs [1]. Yet graduate students across disciplines are particularly vulnerable to funding declines. While we are encouraged by recent bipartisan support for increasing federal research funding, it is important that this increase supports all graduate students given the diversity of research disciplines and researchers. Initiatives to educate and train the next generation of graduate students must coincide with initiatives to increase research funding.

Increase graduate student funding opportunities for underfunded and non-STEM fields

Steady rates of National Institute of Health (NIH) F31, F32, and National Science Foundation (NSF) GRFP grant proposals do not match the growing graduate student population. Flat funding for select agencies [2] and loss of key fellowships have a tremendous impact on non-stem fields.

➢ 50% of GRFP awards go to the top 30 scoring universities and the NSF is less transparent in the success and support of diverse applicants compared to peer institutions [3]
➢ FY18, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) received $152.8 million adjusting for inflation, which is still below its FY 1973–1995 appropriation levels [4]
➢ The humanities are more dependent on teaching assistantships and self-sustaining funding [4]

SAGE Recommends:
➢ We suggest an expansion of current fellowship opportunities for graduate students, particularly the introduction of an NEH Humanities graduate fellowship, the re-introduction of the EPA STAR fellowship, and increased transparency and equity among NIH and NSF GRFP fellowship funding.
➢ Support and pass bills that emphasize agency transparency such as: H.R. 2528/S. 2579 STEM Opportunities Act and H.R. 4623/S.1744 Keep STEM Talent Act

Improve diversity-focused funding efficacy to ensure success of underrepresented students

Support in mentoring, research, opportunities, and academia are critical for the success of underrepresented students in STEM [5]. Beyond funding, a support structure is necessary to make the graduate training environment more inclusive and equitable. Current diversity-focused fundings, such as NIH F31-Diversity and NSF GRFP, do not explicitly provide this type of support, nor do they request it from the applicants’ institutions [7, 8]. Specific attention is needed to support female investigators, who make up only 36% of total R01 awardees as of 2018 even though female investigators are equally likely to be successful in their research [9].

SAGE Recommends:
➢ Support and pass bills that provide important student support structures such as H.R. 4528/S.2578 Women and Minorities in STEM Booster Act


