



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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October 20, 2010

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Completion and Attrition in STEM Master's Programs Project Launched

(October 20, 2010) The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has been awarded a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to collect and analyze data on master's degree completion and attrition in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The project will yield important information on patterns of completion and attrition in master's programs that will help inform policymaking on higher education and talent development issues.

The \$659,000 grant will support a master's completion project, focused on STEM fields and modeled on CGS's groundbreaking Ph.D. Completion Project. Five institutions will be selected competitively to:

- Provide completion and attrition data on several cohorts of master's students by program and demographic characteristics,
- Survey entering students, graduates, and those who do not complete their degrees, and
- Conduct focus groups with administrators and students to better understand reasons for enrollment, factors that contribute to student success, and promising practices to improve completion.

The project's findings will be released in a monograph at the end of the project in 2013.

"Preparing talent at the Master's level in STEM fields is crucial to developing the workforce we need to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Yet in many ways we are hampered by a lack of important data on completion, attrition, and why a student does or does not succeed," said Debra Stewart, CGS President. She added, "The end result of this project will be a rich portrait of master's degree completion and attrition in our graduate schools, and a better understanding of how to foster student achievement."

Ted Greenwood, Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, said "Master's degrees in STEM fields are often a gateway to professional employment, especially for minorities," adding "This project will not only gather valuable data but also raise the visibility of student completion and attrition at the master's level."

The project builds on a review of currently available data on completion and attrition in STEM master's programs, funded by a previous grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. A monograph summarizing the information gleaned from that review, entitled "The Role and Status of the Master's Degree in STEM," is forthcoming.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 93% of the doctoral degrees and 76%

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*of the master's degrees. * The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.*

** Based on data from the 2009 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*