



Council of Graduate Schools

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Graduate Education Leaders Discuss Potential to Collaborate on Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning

(November 22, 2010) The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) hosted a meeting of assessment experts and graduate deans to explore how universities across the country can work together to better prepare graduate students who aspire to faculty positions with the skills they will need to assess student learning.

Learning assessment is one of the core requirements of today's faculty and institutions. All accredited colleges and universities must demonstrate learning outcomes for their students that are appropriate to the degrees they award. While faculty are key to meeting this mandate, most receive little or no training in this area, there is little coordination among them on sound assessment approaches, and some are resistant to what they perceive to be overly bureaucratic requirements.

Today's workshop was part of a year-long project funded by a grant from the Teagle Foundation to explore how existing professional development programs, such as the Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program (which currently involves over 300 colleges and universities) can help to engage more faculty in meaningful conversations about different assessment approaches by preparing graduate students with the skills and expertise to assess student learning. U.S. Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, Dr. Eduardo Ochoa, participated in the workshop in light of the Department of Education's role in enhancing student learning across the education spectrum.

At the workshop, participants discussed:

- Resources available and needed by faculty and universities;
- Key opportunities for greater national coordination and enhancement of professional development programs;
- Models of collaboration between different types of educational institutions (such as research universities and liberal arts and community colleges);
- Challenges that must be overcome to ensure broader faculty engagement in discussions about higher education accountability; and
- Promising practices evident in current model programs.

While this project focused on needs in assessing undergraduate student learning, also discussed was the need to prepare future faculty to measure graduate-level learning outcomes and to assess skills appropriate to non-academic, as well as academic, career paths.

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“Bringing undergraduate student learning to the highest possible level is a priority for the Teagle Foundation. What better way to reach this goal than to intentionally prepare future faculty to assess student learning and act on their findings?” said Donna Heiland, Vice President of the Teagle Foundation. She added, “We are delighted to see CGS providing leadership in this effort and are proud to support it.”

Debra Stewart, CGS President, said, “Graduate deans hear the calls for greater accountability and transparency, and to answer those calls we must ensure that the quality of our teaching is as evident as the quality of our research.” She added “In order to keep the public’s trust, our colleges and universities need to be able to demonstrate what and how our students are learning. Graduate schools should prepare future faculty to be world-class experts in their subject matter but also in teaching and learning assessment, with skills appropriate to the diversity of the US higher education landscape.”

This new project is part of CGS’ broader national efforts to prepare graduate students for faculty careers across the full spectrum of higher education institutions. Since 1993, CGS has supported over 40 universities working in collaboration with 300 masters-level institutions, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges to establish PFF programs, which provide the most comprehensive and recognizable models for preparing graduate students who aspire to careers in teaching.

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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% 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