CGS Deans and Students Represent Grad Ed on Capitol Hill

Lauren Inouye, Vice President, Public Policy and Government Affairs, Council of Graduate Schools

University of Missouri on Capitol Hill

This month, 40 CGS member deans and graduate students from across the country convened in Washington, D.C., to participate in CGS's 2019 Advocacy Day. Participants arrived on April 3 to attend a training session on effective advocacy strategies with CGS's government affairs staff followed by a networking reception in the evening. The following day, advocates met with 61 House and Senate offices to convey CGS's requests to support graduate education, research, and scholarship. More specifically, members urged legislators to preserve graduate student borrowing and loan repayment options in Higher Education Act reauthorization; strengthen support for federal student aid and research funding in Fiscal Year 2020; and support policies that promote the U.S. as a welcoming environment to attract and retain international graduate students.

University of California, San Francisco delegation with Rep. Jackie Speier

"The Legislative Assistants/Legislative Directors with whom I met were keenly interested in restoration of subsidized student loans for graduate students, and improvement of the loan terms for Grad PLUS loans," said Jerome Kukor, dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Rutgers University, and chair of CGS's Advisory Committee on Advocacy and Public Policy (ACAPP).

Hampton University delegation with Rep. Abigail Spanberger

CGS Board of Directors members and ACAPP members were invited to participate in this year's advocacy day, which, for the first time, included the option to bring up to two of their graduate students. The diverse group of master's and doctoral students represented a broad range of programs of study, from STEM to public policy to health professions and social work. Joint meetings with deans and students offered policymakers and their staff a more holistic perspective of how decisions made at the national level influence students' ability to pursue a degree, propel innovation and research that stems from graduate education, and offer economic and societal impacts associated with a highly-educated and prepared workforce.

University of Iowa delegation outside Senator Chuck Grassley's office

"To be part of the Council of Graduate Schools' Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C., was a truly rewarding experience," said Jonathan Parcell, a master's student at Salem State University. "This event gave me a chance to network with other graduate students in different programs around the country all advocating for graduate education. No matter which side of the political aisle you are on, this is a great opportunity get an inside look on what it is like to work on Capitol Hill. It was a privilege to represent my university alongside my dean, Dr. Elizabeth Kenney, and fellow student, Renee Saleh, and meet with staff members of my senators and representative sharing how graduate school has prepared me for the future."

Salem State University advocates at networking reception

CGS members can learn more about the Council's federal priorities and policy recommendations for Congress and the Administration in its 2019-2020 Federal Policy Agenda. CGS would like to sincerely thank the deans and students who participated in this year's Advocacy Day for dedicating their time, energy, and voice to advocate on behalf of graduate education.

CGS Research in Brief: Closing Gaps in our Knowledge of PhD Career Pathways: How Well Did a STEM PhD Train Degree Recipients for Their Careers?

Hironao Okahana, Enyu Zhou, & Timothy Kinoshita

The vast majority of STEM PhDs work in fields related to their doctoral education and are satisfied with their jobs. According to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Survey of Doctoral Recipients, 92% of employed doctoral scientists and engineers in 2017 held jobs that are closely or somewhat related to their PhDs (NSF, 2019). Using data from the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) PhD Career Pathways project, this brief provides new insight into how STEM PhDs apply their doctoral training in the workforce.

Key Findings:

- A large majority of survey respondents in various stages of their postdoctoral careers believe that their STEM PhD education prepared them well for their jobs. However, there are some differences between those employed by colleges and universities and those employed elsewhere.

- Among those who earned their PhDs in Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, or Engineering, fewer graduates who worked outside of the academy felt that their PhD education prepared them extremely well or very well for their current jobs. There was no difference by sector of employment between those who earned a PhD in the Social Sciences and those who earned a PhD in the Behavioral Sciences. (See Table 1 next page)

Table 1. Percent Responding "Extremely Well" or "Very Well" to Survey Item, "How well did your PhD prepare you for [your current] job?" by Selected Employment Sector for Selected Fields & Doctoral Cohorts 3, 8, and 15 Years Post-Graduation.

		Academic	Non-Academic
Biological Sciences	3 Year	**80%**	**62%**
	8 Year	**81%**	**66%**
	15 Year	79%	72%
Engineering	3 Year	**87%**	**76%**
	8 Year	**87%**	**74%**
	15 Year	89%	81%
Physical & Earth Sciences	3 Year	**84%**	**75%**
	8 Year	**84%**	**71%**
	15 Year	**92%**	**67%**
Soc & Behavioral Sciences	3 Year	78%	67%
	8 Year	82%	76%
	15 Year	83%	86%

Boldface denotes statistically significant difference by employment sector. P<0.05

See 'About the Data Source' on page 3 for data collection information.

- A large majority of survey respondents report that they "definitely" or "probably" would still pursue a PhD in general and in the same field again. Across different STEM broad fields and different PhD cohorts, alumni in both employment sectors were equally likely to say that they would pursue a PhD again. Notable exceptions are for Engineering and Physical & Earth Sciences alumni 15 years out. Although more than a half of them would still pursue PhDs again, fewer graduates in jobs outside of the academy, compared to those working for colleges and universities, indicated that they would definitely or probably do so. (See Table 2)

Table 2. Percent Responding "Definitely Would" or "Probably Would" to survey item, "Given the perspective that you have gained since completing your PhD, if you had to start again, how likely would you do the following?" by Selected Employment Sector for Selected Fields & Doctoral Cohorts 3, 8, and 15 Years Post-Graduation.

		Pursue a PhD in General		Pursue a PhD in the Same Field	
		Academic	Non-Academic	Academic	Non-Academic
Biological Sciences	3 Year	84%	82%	**80%**	**67%**
	8 Year	83%	83%	83%	76%
	15 Year	88%	87%	82%	85%
Engineering	3 Year	**93%**	**83%**	85%	77%
	8 Year	87%	83%	**87%**	**77%**
	15 Year	**100%**	**88%**	98%	82%
Physical & Earth Sciences	3 Year	88%	83%	81%	74%
	8 Year	89%	90%	82%	77%
	15 Year	**96%**	**81%**	**88%**	**69%**
Soc & Behavioral Sciences	3 Year	82%	78%	77%	75%
	8 Year	87%	89%	82%	78%
	15 Year	92%	94%	88%	83%

Boldface denotes statistically significant difference by employment sector. P<0.05

See 'About the Data Source' on page 3 for data collection information.

- PhD graduates within and outside of academia identify similar job skills and attributes as important. Across different STEM broad fields and employment sectors, there are many similarities in terms of attributes and skills crucial to successfully perform work. Persistence was one of the most important attributes across fields and was particularly important for those who work at colleges and universities. On the other hand, cooperation was particularly important for those working outside the academy. (See Figure 1, Table 3)

Figure 1. Differences in Importance of Attributes/Skills Between Those Employed by Colleges and Universities and Those Working Outside of the Academy by Selected Field
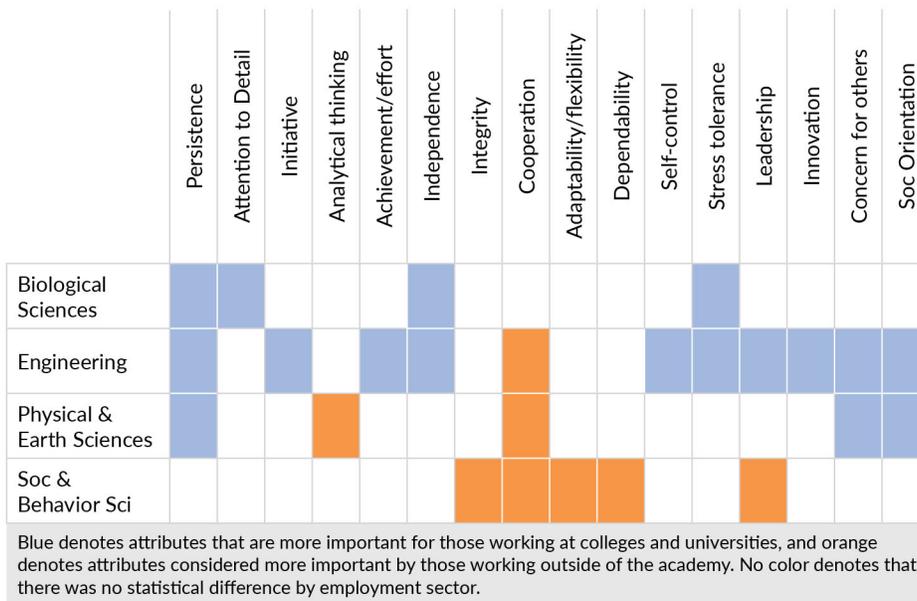
Blue denotes attributes that are more important for those working at colleges and universities, and orange denotes attributes considered more important by those working outside of the academy. No color denotes that there was no statistical difference by employment sector.

Table 3. Percent Responding "Extremely Important" or "Very Important" to Survey Item "How important are each of the following attributes/skills in successfully performing your work in this job?" by Selected Employment Sector for Selected Fields.

	Biological Sciences		Engineering		Physical & Earth Sciences		Social & Behavioral Sciences	
	Academic	Non-Academic	Academic	Non-Academic	Academic	Non-Academic	Academic	Non-Academic
Persistence	**93%**	**86%**	**93%**	**84%**	**88%**	**82%**	90%	87%
Initiative	91%	90%	**92%**	**87%**	85%	87%	88%	88%
Self-control	77%	71%	**78%**	**71%**	75%	70%	80%	76%
Attention to Detail	**91%**	**86%**	85%	88%	83%	85%	81%	87%
Achievement/effort	89%	85%	**88%**	**82%**	82%	77%	85%	84%
Analytical thinking	91%	92%	94%	92%	**86%**	**92%**	91%	95%
Independence	**88%**	**81%**	**86%**	**74%**	85%	81%	85%	78%
Innovation	69%	64%	**78%**	**71%**	65%	66%	62%	58%
Stress tolerance	**77%**	**68%**	**74%**	**65%**	72%	67%	78%	76%
Adaptability/flexibility	81%	83%	78%	78%	77%	80%	**73%**	**83%**
Dependability	79%	83%	71%	76%	76%	76%	**76%**	**90%**
Integrity	88%	86%	85%	83%	84%	82%	**80%**	**90%**
Leadership	70%	66%	**76%**	**68%**	64%	62%	**56%**	**71%**
Cooperation	81%	86%	**75%**	**81%**	**72%**	**80%**	**65%**	**87%**
Concern for others	63%	59%	**57%**	**50%**	**63%**	**43%**	63%	68%
Social Orientation	46%	45%	**43%**	**33%**	**45%**	**31%**	51%	55%

Boldface denotes statistically significant difference by employment sector. P<0.05

See 'About the Data Source' below for data collection information.

Takeaway Points:

- Together, these results suggest that STEM doctoral education offers relevant training that prepares graduates for jobs inside and outside of the academy. Programs and graduate schools are encouraged to continue to offer training and professional development opportunities that lead graduates to a variety of fulfilling career paths.

- Although large majorities of Engineering and Physical & Earth Sciences PhDs are satisfied with their PhD preparation for their current jobs, the numbers are significantly lower for those who work outside of the academy. This finding was particularly interesting, since there is a long history of Engineering and Physical Sciences PhDs working in non-academic industries.

- Furthermore, fewer PhDs in Engineering and Physical & Earth Sciences who work outside of the academy reported they definitely or probably would pursue a PhD in general or in the same field. While the vast majority of these PhD alumni would still pursue their degrees again, the finding suggests room for PhD programs in these fields to incorporate training and professional development opportunities, such as internships, that are more relevant to those who seek careers outside of the academy.

Conversation Starters for PhD Program Improvement:

We encourage graduate schools to engage in campus conversations about STEM PhD careers. Culture change happens incrementally and takes active participation by various stakeholders, including students, faculty, and employers. A good first step is understanding whether and to what extent there are already efforts on your campus to make career diversity of STEM PhDs seen and celebrated. Some of the questions that you may want to ask of your campus colleagues (i.e., graduate school staff, college deans, graduate program directors, etc.), as well as stakeholders include:

- What kind of professional development opportunities does your institution provide PhD students in STEM fields for their career preparation outside of the academy and for achieving their long-term career goals?

- What kind of resources and guidance does your institution offer to STEM faculty members, so that they talk to their students about STEM PhD careers with more openness toward opportunities outside of the professoriate?

- What are your institution and its STEM PhD programs doing to foster partnerships with current and prospective PhD employers?

- How effective are these approaches and resources in fostering PhD education that leads graduates to a variety of fulfilling career paths? How do you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

Additional Resources:

Professional Development for STEM Graduate Students. CGS, with support from the National Science Foundation (grant number 1413827), conducted a pilot project that studied the professional development needs of graduate students in STEM fields, and the programs and resources in place to meet those needs.

Graduate STEM Education for the 21st Century. A recent consensus study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine calls for, among other recommendations, career exploration and preparation for graduate students. The report calls for STEM graduate students to have opportunities to explore the variety of career opportunities and pathways that STEM graduate degrees open doors for.

Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER). A program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that provides free online training materials for engaging faculty mentors in career and advising for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

About the Data Source: The CGS PhD Career Pathways Project Fall 2017 Alumni Survey was distributed to doctoral degree recipients that were three, eight, or fifteen years out of their PhD in selected programs at 35 participating institutions. Each of the universities administered the survey individually and shared the resulting data with CGS. This analysis is based upon the restricted-use, deidentified, individual-level data file, which includes doctoral degree recipients who reported working for one of five postsecondary sectors (Research University, Master's/Region University, Liberal Arts College, Community or Two-Year College, and College or University System) in their current job and reporting at least a primary work responsibility. The sample sizes by field and by cohort are as follows: Biological Sciences (3-year, n=409; 8-year, n=262; 15-year, n=120), Engineering (3-year, n=402; 8-year, n=257; 15-year, n=124), Physical & Earth Sciences (3-year, n=387; 8-year, n=227; 15-year, n=139), and Social & Behavioral Sciences (3-year, n=274; 8-year, n=192; 15-year, n=137).

References: National Science Foundation. (2019). Table 27-1. U.S. residing employed doctoral scientists and engineers, by selected demographic and employment-related characteristics and primary or secondary work activity: 2017. Retrieved from https://ncsesdata.nsf.gov/doctoratework/2017/html/sdr2017_dst_27-1.html

What Works: Reflections on Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Community at UNC-Chapel Hill

Steven W. Matson, Dean of The Graduate School and Professor of Biology, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Receiving the Debra W. Stewart Award for Outstanding Leadership has been an incredible honor and has caused me to reflect on my professional journey and the successes at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that have meant the most to me. One such success is the progress we are making in increasing diversity on campus and within several of our graduate programs. This progress has immediate benefits for our students and our graduate school community, as well as a lasting impact within the disciplinary fields in which our students will work, eventually affecting society as a whole.

Working toward a diverse and inclusive graduate community has taken many years and the commitment of many individuals. And our work at The Graduate School at UNC-Chapel Hill is by no means finished. This is a continuous effort that will require our commitment, creativity and support as long as there are systemic disparities in our society to overcome. While we haven't yet reached our ultimate goal, we are very fortunate in having a campus community that believes strongly in diversity, and we are beginning to achieve some notable successes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. I'd like to share with you some strategies that have worked for us.

Addressing the whole student journey

In my experience at UNC-Chapel Hill, and in my conversations with other graduate deans, I've observed that programs that address the entire student life cycle seem to be more successful over time than those that address only one point in the student journey. For example, we have all witnessed well-intentioned efforts to increase the recruitment of a diverse population only to see some of those same students leave the program without a degree.

There are many barriers to increasing diversity, including individual biases, entrenched institutional practices and campus culture. Efforts to increase diversity will be well served by starting with an analysis of the many facets of the student journey, academic and otherwise. Achieving your ultimate goal is likely to require making changes to recruitment strategies, admissions processes and retention programs, as well as working toward a more inclusive culture overall.

The graduate school at most institutions is uniquely positioned to influence admissions processes and retention programming and to create community. At UNC-Chapel Hill we are engaged in all three efforts. We sponsor workshops on holistic admissions practices that are intended to make the graduate community aware of best practices in graduate admissions. In addition, we established our Diversity and Student Success Program to enhance retention, create community and promote inclusion. In a typical semester, the DSS program will host dozens of events with several hundred students participating. I know from talking with students that this is making a difference.

Experimenting with Admissions Processes

A number of graduate programs at UNC-Chapel Hill are experimenting with changing their admissions processes, often with the goal of increasing student diversity. Many of them are having success while others are still working to overcome some of the barriers.

Personally, I'm in favor of implementing a holistic admissions process, in which every piece of information an applicant submits is evaluated to reach an informed conclusion about his or her potential to be successful in the program. No single piece of information in an admission packet can be directly correlated with successful completion of the degree. Undergraduate GPA, the transcript and GRE scores all provide valuable information about an applicant's cognitive and critical thinking skills as well as previous coursework and program rigor. In fact, the Analytical Writing score from the GRE exam has been found to be the best or second best predictor of GPA. Many of us fail to consider the writing sample in our analysis of the application materials – a deficiency that should be addressed.

But an applicant brings more to a program than just what these metrics might indicate. That is why we look to personal statements, resumes and letters of recommendation for more context about the student's experiences, passions and challenges. While most

programs do consider all of these components for at least a portion of its applicants, a truly holistic admissions process will consider how faculty committees will review all submitted materials for all applicants. In addition, it will determine at what point in the process it will consider each piece and how it will utilize each piece of information in arriving at an admission decision.

For example, at UNC-CH, the Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program faculty responsible for admissions examines each piece of the 1400+ applications it receives annually. The admissions team works very hard to avoid bias in the admissions process by understanding both the value and potential pitfalls associated with each piece of the application packet including GRE General Test scores. One way they do this is by not using "cut scores" to reduce the size of the applicant pool being considered. The program also removes GPA and GRE test score information from the packet it provides to faculty who interview students for admission. This changes the interview conversation and reduces preconceived notions based on GPA, test scores and transcripts. Coupled with other initiatives, this program has increased underrepresented minority enrollment from 10 percent to more than 25 percent of its student population over the last decade, and we continue to see an upward trajectory for the future.

Resources for learning how to implement a holistic admissions practice are becoming more readily available. Local resources may be available to you at no cost. At UNC-CH, we ask programs already engaged in holistic admissions, and seeing good results, to serve as facilitators for workshops where other programs can learn. Beyond your local resources, HolisticAdmissions.org, a web site maintained and curated by ETS, has free and useful information on ways to diversify the student population, how to think about the admissions process and how to make changes. It also has promising practices from institutions that are having success, and you can scan these practices for ideas that might fit the culture and circumstances on your campus.

Retention and Inclusiveness
As mentioned above, efforts to increase student diversity do not stop at admissions or enrollment; we must support our students throughout their entire journey. The Biological and Biomedical Sciences program I mentioned above has done just that by focusing on building community and providing extensive professional development resources. And the results are paying off.: The degree completion rate they have achieved for

underrepresented minority students is in excess of 85 percent — the same as for students who represent the majority.

As I mentioned, at UNC-CH all programs are supported by a campus climate that values diversity. We are very fortunate that the commitment starts at the top. All of our higher administration officials are absolutely committed to diversity at all levels, including both graduate and undergraduate students as well as the faculty and staff. The Graduate Schools' DSS program, referenced above, has the goal of improving student retention and having a positive impact on students through degree completion. Now in its fifth year, DSS provides programming to support first-generation, international, underrepresented minority, military-affiliated and LGBTQIA graduate students, and aims to address the needs of the whole student.

A challenge we faced at the start was getting student buy-in — getting the students to come and participate. To address this issue, our co-directors created an advisory board of students for each initiative. The students tell us what they need to succeed. We now have a program with hundreds of students participating in activities every year.

The professional development opportunities and the community building we provide help promote the inclusive community we are working to build on campus. We strive for a community in which all our students have a sense of belonging with their peers. One of the students in DSS recently said, "It's easy to just keep your head down and power through a two-year master's program. But DSS brought me a new sense of community. It helped me slow down and helped me not only in my professional but also personal development." I think that says a lot about the value of this program to the students.

Creating an Inclusive Community
We work to create an inclusive community at UNC-CH through our partnerships across campus. Our DSS co-directors have years of experience in community building. Their work is intentional and focused on inclusion and diversity. They share their experience with individual departments and schools to support their recruitment and orientation events. They also consult with individual faculty, associate deans and graduate students on how to create an inclusive community within their areas.

Through our partnerships with departments and offices across campus like University Career Services, Office of the Dean of Students, Counseling and Psychological Services, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, and Student

Wellness, we have worked to ensure that they are providing workshops, events and student services to reach out more intentionally to our diverse graduate students. When people say that they are not sure how to incorporate diversity into their work, our DSS co-directors are able to share their expertise on how they can be more intentional in their inclusivity.

The last point I have to offer is this: You don't need to do this all at once. It doesn't have to happen overnight. Take

one step at a time. The important thing is to start and make a commitment to continuing your efforts to promote a diverse and inclusive environment. It is essential that we work toward increasing the diversity of the graduate population as a critical step in increasing the diversity of our workforce.

Dr. Steven W. Matson is dean of The Graduate School and professor of biology at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Council of Graduate Schools and is former chair of the GRE Board.

CGS Board Reaffirms the April 15 Resolution

After a final review of survey data and comments from CGS members about the April 15 Resolution, the CGS Board voted to renew the resolution for another 5-year term at its December 2018 meeting. The Resolution will now continue until October 1, 2024. More than 325 CGS member institutions have agreed to abide by the Resolution, in order to ensure the best match between program and student applicant.

First established in the mid-1960s, the April 15 Resolution stipulates that student applicants have until April 15 to accept any offer of admission that comes with financial support. The intent of the Resolution is to allow students to choose the graduate program that best aligns with their long-term career goals and aspirations. Programs that adhere to the expectations of the Resolution can encourage students to make a decision in a timely manner

but cannot set a decision deadline prior to April 15. Programs also cannot offer financial incentives for early acceptance decisions.

Each Fall, CGS provides graduate deans with materials for distribution to their graduate programs to explain the expectations of the April 15 Resolution. These materials include a draft letter to program directors as well as an FAQ of commonly asked questions. Graduate deans then monitor compliance with the expectations of the Resolution on their own campuses and manage conflicts if they arise.

More information and a list of currently signatories to the April 15 Resolution are posted on the CGS website, www.cgsnet.org/april-15-resolution. The list of signatories to the Resolution is updated as changes occur, most recently in March 2019. If your institution wants to be listed as a signatory, please contact Jeffrey Engler (jengler@cgs.nche.edu) for more information.

Master's Education: A National Study on Admissions and Future Research Directions
Robert Augustine, Senior Vice President, Council of Graduate Schools

A National Study on Admissions
Late last year, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) released *Master's Admissions: Transparency, Guidance, and Training*, the result of a year-long study on master's admissions supported in part by Educational Testing Service (ETS) (Okahana, Augustine, and Zhou, 2018). The study addressed a significant gap in our understanding of master's education (Augustine, 2018), building upon prior work on admissions and holistic admission practices conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS, 2012 and Kent & McCarthy, 2016).

The project collected national-level data through a survey administered to graduate program directors and graduate

deans as well as qualitative information gathered during four regional focus groups. CGS sought answers to three questions about master's admissions: (1) What is success in a master's program? (2) What attributes are currently used in admission decisions to predict success? and (3) What evidence is currently used to evaluate student attributes? Once we had gathered data from deans and admissions directors, we convened a diverse group of leaders to discuss the implications of this information: program directors, experts in business and industry, leaders of disciplinary societies, educational researchers, and graduate deans. These discussions, which took place at the 2018 Colloquium on the Master's Degree in

Washington, DC, informed the final report, whose findings we summarize below.

Defining Success During Admissions
The study found that according to graduate program directors and deans, an applicant's likelihood of completing the requirements necessary to receive a graduate degree was the most important admissions criterion. This finding was consistent for both research and professional master's degree programs. It was also consistent with information obtained from earlier discussions with program directors who indicated that degree completion rates are used when evaluating and/or accrediting programs. Admitting students who have the best potential to complete the coursework lays the foundation for degree completion.

By contrast, program fit and post-graduate success were weighed as less important considerations at the time of admission. The data indicated that programs seek to admit students who are most likely to complete the degree, and completion of coursework lays the foundation for that success. Establishing degree completion as the primary attribute defining success at the time of admission gave insights into the attributes that programs are looking for to achieve that success.

Role of Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Attributes
During the admission process, critical thinking, analytical thinking, and written communication were identified as the most important attributes associated with the potential for completing coursework required for degree completion. This was true for both research and professional master's programs. However, in certain professional fields, non-cognitive attributes, including integrity and professionalism, were rated as important for degree completion. These findings suggest that an applicant with the best potential for success as defined by degree completion is one who has a cognitive foundation integrated with non-cognitive competencies.

Broad Use of Letters and Personal Statements
The study also identified the strengths and weaknesses of current evidence used to evaluate the cognitive and non-cognitive attributes associated with program success. Our data suggest that transcripts and standardized test scores have limitations due to the very narrow range of competencies they assess. The evidence most frequently viewed as having the greatest potential to evaluate the cognitive and non-cognitive attributes associated with success were letters of recommendation and personal statements. These forms of evidence are highly valued because they are considered to reflect a broad range of attributes that define a strong applicant.

Potential Practices: Transparency, Guidance, and Training
The project's findings identified three broad categories of potential practices which could be applied to improve master's admissions processes: transparency, guidance, and training. An ethos of transparency begins when we make explicit the attributes that faculty and others evaluating candidates seek in applicants. This information may be published via websites and other communications and accompanied by profiles of successful past applicants, and examples of letters of recommendation and personal statements. Prompts that clearly articulate the types of evidence admissions committees are looking for when evaluating applicants was also identified as a best practice.

Admissions practices may be further strengthened by providing guidance to graduate administrators on how to review admissions materials. Promising practices identified in the study include developing rubrics, matrices, or related practices to achieve consistency when reviewing "subjective" materials such as letters and personal statements. Guidance is particularly important in evaluating such application materials because of valid concerns about reviewer bias. An effective practice for reducing bias was to organize admission reviews among panels of faculty to ensure that those reviewing the documents stay focused on the attributes and that the panels discuss the order of review in order to avoid biases that have been associated with reviewing GPAs and test scores too early in the process. Some programs have consulted their external advisory boards for guidance on how to avoid bias and others have also found that including applicant interviews can strengthen the admission processes. Knowing that interview practices may introduce other biases and that faculty require training to recognize and account for these factors strengthens the use of these practices.

Training in admission practices was identified as a key element of practice. Only 26% of the graduate schools participating in the survey reported that their institutions provide training to those who review applicant files; yet,

9

effective training was identified as important for achieving admission success. A comprehensive faculty development program on mastery of the most effective admissions review practices further strengthens the connection between admissions and program success.

CGS members can find more information on the project by accessing slides from the presentation during the 2018 Annual Meeting titled *Understanding the Master's Admission Landscape* featuring James Marshall, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies at California State University Fresno and Sheryl Tucker, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate College at Oklahoma State University. A webinar on the project titled *Master's Admissions: Transparency, Guidance, and Training* was also presented on Tuesday, March 26, 2019 and featured Dean Marshall and M. Scott Herness, Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at Montclair State University. CGS members can access a recording of the webinar on the CGS website https://cgsnet.org/cgs-webinars.

Future Research on Master's Education
The master's admissions project revealed additional areas of needed research. For example, many program directors and deans requested more research on best practices for evaluating non-cognitive competencies such as leadership and interpersonal effectiveness. The challenge of assessing non-cognitive competencies was further amplified during the Colloquium on the Master's Degree held in Washington, DC, on September 16, 2018.

The current study also revealed that many admission practices used by master's programs were developed for traditional on-campus master's programs. There are significant gaps in our understanding of how admission practices should be modified or adapted when the

master's degree is offered using an alternative degree type such as accelerated degrees, online/blended degrees, competency-based degrees, interdisciplinary degrees, dual/joint degrees, or degrees that may be earned by "stacking" certificates and other micro-credentials. CGS looks forward to continuing to work with our member institutions to address these gaps.

The complete report is available free of charge at the CGS website: https://cgsnet.org/online-store.

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In the Midst of War, Students and Professors in Syria Carry On – And You Can Help

Ursula Oaks, Managing Director for External Relations, Al-Fanar Media

Sixty-two. That's the number of Syrian refugees who were accepted into the United States in fiscal year 2018. (In 2016, the number was 12,500.) Meanwhile, 5.6 million Syrians have left the country, displaced by a war now entering its ninth year. Inside Syria, more than 6 million people are displaced, and four out of five live in poverty.

With the doors of the United States essentially closed, scholarships for Syrians outside Syria dwindling, and the humanitarian needs so overwhelming, we might understandably wonder: What can be done to support the educational aspirations of Syrian young people and Syrian professors?

Last fall I hosted a Syrian professor in Washington and New York City for two days of roundtable discussions

with audiences in search of answers to that question. His visit here was part of a growing effort by my organization Al-Fanar Media – a nonprofit news organization dedicated to covering higher education, research and culture in the Arab region – and others to raise awareness of and action to support individual, sometimes small-scale interventions that could make a big difference to those still struggling to pursue education inside Syria.

Higher education in Syria has been seriously harmed by the war, with an estimated $35 million in damage to the sector's infrastructure (according to government sources). Somewhere between 30 and 50 percent of Syrian professors have left the country, and inflation has caused the collapse of the average monthly salary of those still there – from $1,500 in 2010 to $150 today. Students struggle to attend classes and navigate damaged buildings, electricity cuts, checkpoints, and a lack of almost everything, from basic laboratory materials to textbooks. Sanctions have crippled the country, and although there is an exception for educational activities under the U.S. Department of Treasury's OFAC guidelines, online educational portals are often blocked inside Syria.

Still, Syrians are proud of the fact that many of the country's universities have remained open during the war, despite, in some cases, having to relocate. Today there are seven public and 22 private universities in operation. My Syrian guest painted a picture that was much more nuanced, and hopeful, than what one might expect. His story also belied the idea that "all of the best have left." Despite sometimes harsh conditions and almost complete isolation from the international academic community, learning, teaching, and research continue. The power is mostly on, however intermittently, especially in Damascus and the surrounding area, and there is reasonably reliable Internet, at least for those who can afford it at home or on a mobile device. Classes are being held and students are writing theses and dissertations.

Sometimes what's needed, according to this professor and other Syrian academics and students we've hosted and talked with, are sometimes the simplest things. A pharmacy student needs an up-to-date pharmacy textbook. A curriculum update effort needs a bit of outside consultation. A doctoral candidate needs a committee member with a particular type of expertise who can Skype occasionally and provide input. Students and professors are hungry for access to scholarly databases and opportunities to connect with their counterparts outside

the country. They need help with English proficiency or writing a thesis. In short, what is often needed is person-to-person support.

There is understandable concern that without a political resolution to the Syrian conflict, engagement with public universities in Syria could be viewed as supporting the government. Many international donors also remain cautious, concerned about crossing a "red line" and reluctant to become involved before a clear diplomatic framework for reconstruction and accountability for potential war crimes for all participants in the Syrian conflict are in place. But a recent report from Oxfam and the Danish Refugee Council appeals strongly for more to be done now to respond to the needs of Syrians. We must, the report urges, begin thinking about and interacting with these thorny issues in a different way.

It is in this spirit that my organization Al-Fanar Media is facilitating conversations and activities to support the educational aspirations of Syrians inside Syria. Last May we co-hosted, with the British Council and the American University of Beirut, a roundtable discussion on politically neutral ways to support the educational needs of youth in Syria. Attendees included international organizations, Syrian professors and students, and nongovernmental organizations. Last fall, we conducted a survey of graduate students inside Syria that asked about their greatest challenges and needs, the report of which we presented at a follow-up meeting of representatives of major Western NGOs and European Union officials concerned with education in Syria, in Brussels last November. And in February we again hosted Syrian academics, this time for a tour of six universities in the United Kingdom.

By bringing together groups of people to learn and explore ideas of what could be done, we want to catalyze interest and action. And it's working. As a result of contacts made during his visits, the professor I hosted is planning a program at his university on "peace engineering," a new discipline that seeks to use technology to prevent violence. Some of our U.K. university hosts have struck up communication with our Syrian guests to look at jointly applying for research grants to support Syrian educational initiatives. And momentum is growing behind a more public effort by Western NGOs and universities to urge more support for education inside Syria. One idea is professional development workshops for Syrian professors, possibly held in Lebanon. Another is an informal academic network for Syrians studying in the

United Kingdom and their counterparts back home. For individual Syrian students and educators, the impact of these efforts could be transformative, and could give an important psychological lift to Syrians devoted to education who have been shunned for many years.

Work we do now on this issue will only help to advance the far greater task that lies of ahead, of reimagining with the Syrian people a higher education system that can contribute to the country's rebuilding. We stand ready to help make connections, organize opportunities for discussion, and provide reporting and data to help build

awareness and understanding. We don't run programs or give grants, but we can serve as an impartial, credible convener and an independent voice. We hope that organizations, individual faculty members, administrators, and students in the United States will take a closer look at how they might be able to engage in this work. We invite you and your colleagues to contact us with your ideas and questions. Ursula Oaks can be reached in Washington at 703 231 4995 or uoaks@alfanarmedia.org.

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