

PRESS RELEASE

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CGS to Advance Understanding of PhD Career Pathways Through Convenings, Data Collection Instrument

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Washington, D.C. — The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) today announced it has been awarded grants from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to advance national and local understandings of [the career pathways of PhD holders](#). Over the next nine months, with input from a range of stakeholders in the higher education community, CGS will develop a survey instrument and guidelines for data collection across a broad range of fields. These guidelines will be designed to help universities gather long-term career information from their PhD students and alumni with the goal of improving PhD programs.

A recently-completed [CGS feasibility study](#) also funded by the Sloan and Mellon Foundations found evidence that a lack of clear national standards for data collection is a major barrier to institutions seeking to understand the career pathways of their PhD alumni. In the project just announced, CGS will convene an advisory committee of graduate deans and other experts, which will advise CGS staff in developing a survey instrument and a framework document outlining methodological standards for data collection. This data collection instrument and framework document is intended to support universities' collection and use of program-level PhD career information from matriculation through 15 years past graduation in STEM, social science, and humanities fields.

CGS will also convene two day-long workshops to develop partnerships and benefit from the expertise of stakeholder groups. One workshop will bring together higher education associations, disciplinary societies and federal agencies that use or collect career data on PhDs, while the other will convene graduate deans, provosts and other senior academic leaders. These workshops will provide occasions for these groups to share perspectives and expertise that will inform the work of the project.

CGS President Suzanne T. Ortega explained, "We have heard for many years, and from many sectors, that universities need a better understanding of the long-term career outcomes of their PhD graduates. This information is critical for helping graduate educators to develop curricula and professional development programs that better prepare students for the full range of careers they are likely to follow. We are delighted that the Alfred P. Sloan and Andrew W. Mellon Foundations are lending their support to CGS as we begin to address this important knowledge gap."

Support for the CGS project is part of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's longstanding commitment to fostering improvement and innovation in STEM higher education. Past Sloan-supported efforts in this area include fostering college and university data collection on student entry and retention in STEM fields, the creation of the Professional Science Master's degree, and the founding of eight University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring devoted to improving graduate education of underrepresented minorities in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

(more)

“Understanding the career pathways of doctoral recipients is absolutely essential to creating PhD programs that maximize value both to students and society as a whole, and CGS is very well-positioned to lead this initiative.” says Elizabeth S. Boylan, Program Director of the Sloan Foundation’s STEM Higher Education program. “We are proud to be partnering with the Mellon Foundation in support of this vital effort to craft national data-collection standards and practices that have the potential to transform what we know about the careers of Ph.D. recipients and to improve the quality of programs for future students.”

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has long supported efforts to improve the intellectual and professional outcomes of doctoral education in the humanities. The Foundation assists universities and professional organizations in launching initiatives that broaden the preparation of PhD students for a variety of professional trajectories in as well as outside the academy. It also fosters collaborations within and among institutions that support disciplinary innovation.

“We are delighted to partner with the Sloan Foundation in supporting CGS in its initiative to make progress on this important issue,” stated Mariët Westermann, Vice President of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. “We believe an approach that combines PhD career path tracking in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences is most likely to be successful across American universities.”

Results of the project will be shared with the higher education community in December 2015.

About CGS

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 91% of the doctoral degrees and 81% 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 2013 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*