



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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New project to examine minority completion and attrition in STEM doctoral programs

Washington, D.C. – The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has been awarded a 3-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to examine completion and attrition among underrepresented minorities in STEM doctoral programs. The nearly \$1.5 million grant will be used to study differences between Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) and non-AGEP institutions in order to better understand the factors that promote successful completion and the policies and practices that hold promise for increasing completion and reducing attrition.

“We know that attrition rates from doctoral programs average between 40-50%, and minorities tend to complete at even lower rates. Institutions are strongly motivated to reduce attrition but it isn’t clear which interventions make the most difference for minority students,” said CGS President Debra W. Stewart. She added, “This project is vitally important because a robust STEM workforce is essential to a competitive economy. This new grant will provide information on how best to support these graduate students in diverse contexts so that they successfully complete their doctoral programs, and are fully acculturated in the norms and cultures of their disciplines and capable of mentoring and teaching the next generation of researchers.”

NSF’s AGEP program is intended to increase the representation of minorities in STEM doctoral education, and ultimately in the academic workforce. Previous evaluations of the AGEP program have indicated that the numbers of underrepresented minority students enrolling in STEM doctoral programs have increased over time at AGEP institutions, but it is not clear which interventions have the most potential to positively impact doctoral completion rates for underrepresented minority students.

“The AGEP program is quite interested in interventions that would increase the number of students from underrepresented groups completing doctoral education. Learning from this award will facilitate the development of models that can be adapted by other institutions,” said Dr. Jessie DeAro, AGEP Program Officer at NSF. She continued, “CGS is well positioned to accomplish this study and to disseminate the findings, and thus increase the impact of AGEP throughout the graduate education community.”

Building on previous research on Ph.D. and master’s completion and attrition, CGS will investigate in more detail the experiences of underrepresented minorities in STEM doctoral

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programs. Twenty institutions will be selected through a competitive process to provide completion and attrition data for all underrepresented minority students entering all STEM doctoral programs from 1992-93 through 2011-12. Participating institutions will administer surveys to underrepresented minority students, provide detailed data on activities and initiatives that may have affected completion and attrition rates, and facilitate access to faculty, administrators, and students during site visits designed to collect in-depth information on program policies, practices, and climate, and the perceived impact of these factors on completion and attrition.

The research findings from this project will provide a rich and compelling portrait of the experiences, academic progress, stumbling blocks, and perceptions of underrepresented minorities enrolled in STEM doctoral programs in a variety of AGEP and non-AGEP institutions across the nation.

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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 92% of the doctoral degrees and 77% 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 2010 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*