



January 29, 2015

United States Congress
Washington, D.C.

Dear Member of the 114th Congress:

Congratulations on your election to the 114th Congress. A new congress brings with it new opportunities for policymakers such as you to spur American job creation, innovation, and productivity. As you begin your work, we want to call to your attention to the critical role that graduate education plays in producing highly skilled individuals that meet the demands of the U.S. economy and allow the U.S. to remain competitive globally. To maintain our world-class workforce, we need public policies that encourage talented individuals to pursue education beyond the undergraduate level, specifically master's and doctoral degrees.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) represents over 500 universities and is the only national organization dedicated solely to the advancement of graduate education and research. CGS member institutions award more than 92 percent of all U.S. doctorates and over 78 percent of all U.S. master's degrees. The nation's graduate schools are the epicenters of discovery, innovation, and application, leading to advancements that impact the lives of every American.

As Congress gets underway, there are four key issues that CGS believes have significant impact on graduate education and graduate students. They are the reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and the America COMPETES Act, along with reforms to federal tax and immigration policies. When evaluating such policies, we encourage you to consider the following:

- The past few years have brought changes to the federal student loan program. These changes have resulted in graduate students paying more for their student loans. In fact, underrepresented minorities and master's degree students have been particularly hard hit. Americans who pursue advanced degrees, which are becoming an entry-level requirement for the fastest growing occupations in the U.S., must not be disadvantaged financially for furthering their education.
- Proposals for tax reform, which would repeal the lifetime learning credit and eliminate the deduction for student loan interest paid and the cost of education related expenses, have the potential to further reduce federal support for graduate students. These actions could make graduate education less affordable, especially for low-income students.
- The most critical investment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and innovation is the America COMPETES Act. By reauthorizing COMPETES, the U.S. can continue to produce the highly skilled professionals our economy needs to fuel innovation, conduct top-level research across all disciplines of basic science research and engineering, and meet the increasing demand for STEM skills in the workforce.
- Improving current immigration policies is necessary to ensure that our nation continues to attract top talent to meet the demands of the 21st century knowledge economy. The U.S. economy will benefit by allowing international students who have received advanced degrees in the STEM disciplines to earn green cards and work in jobs related to their fields of study.

As these issues move forward, please keep in mind the needs of those obtaining master's and doctoral degrees and the programs that support them. CGS believes that graduate education is a critical component to sustaining our nation's global competitiveness. Our nation's public policies should encourage the pursuit of education beyond the undergraduate level.

CGS research, data, and best practices reports, as well as fact sheets and a financial education tool for students can be accessed through the CGS website, www.cgsnet.org. We believe that you and your staff will find these useful resources as you work on policies relevant to graduate education. Please do not hesitate to contact us at (202) 223-3791 or govaffairs@cgs.nche.edu, if you or your staff would like to discuss these issues further. We welcome such an opportunity and look forward to working with you on these and other important issues throughout the 114th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Suzanne T. Ortega'.

Suzanne T. Ortega
President