



# Broadening Participation *in* Graduate Education



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# Executive Summary

The face of higher education does not mirror the face of our nation. The proportion of college students who are members of underrepresented groups has been increasing, from 22 percent in 1997, to about 28 percent in 2006.<sup>1</sup> However, not enough students from underrepresented groups get their degrees, and not enough go on to graduate school.

Focusing on the increasingly diverse domestic talent pool must be a national priority. Diversity and inclusiveness are about more than gender and race; these concepts include socio-economic status, age, people with disabilities, international students, immigrants, and those who are the first generation in their family to pursue higher education.

Just a few months ago, we inaugurated the 44th president of the United States, the first African American leader of our nation. The president's new cabinet and other members of his administration are a mosaic of ages, races, genders, and ethnicities. Along with policy makers and other leaders, this diverse group brings a fresh perspective and energy to solving problems, revitalizing our economy, strengthening our national security, and improving the perception of the United States in the international arena.

During the presidential campaign, Barack Obama made the connection between a robust educational system and American economic strength and security, and he stressed the need to increase access and affordability of high quality education at all levels. Education must play a key role in our national

strategy to enhance our competitiveness in the global economy.

Our system of higher education is arguably the best in the world, and graduate education is its bedrock, attracting top domestic and international students to our nation's graduate programs. A recent survey ranked the top 200 universities in the world. Six of the top 10 and nearly 40 of the top 100 universities are located in the United States.<sup>2</sup> To develop the talent we need to strengthen our economy and to maintain our quality of life, we must enhance diversity and inclusiveness initiatives in graduate education.

For the past 50 years, the United States has benefited from an investment in the preparation of knowledge creators, innovators, world leaders, and professionals in key fields, particularly science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). But many of the professionals who received their education under far-sighted programs such as the GI bill and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) are approaching retirement. We are faced with the need to replenish this vital resource of people.

This critical need presents us with the opportunity to reverse a troubling trend. There is a leak in the domestic science and engineering pipeline. At a time when the need for STEM professionals is growing, the percentage of U.S. students pursuing graduate study in these fields is declining. If it continues, this decline in U.S. participation will inevitably result in fewer discoveries by scientists within the United States and a decline in the

technology development and innovation on which U.S. economic success has depended in the past.

Our nation is becoming increasingly diverse, yet Hispanic and African American students are highly underrepresented in graduate schools, particularly in fields such as science and engineering, where each group makes up less than 10 percent of graduate enrollment<sup>3</sup> and approximately 5 percent of new PhDs.<sup>4</sup> While women are the fastest-growing group in graduate education, they too remain underrepresented in some key fields. These demographic trends present long-term challenges that can be overcome only by a national commitment to developing all our country's talent.

This report, *Broadening Participation in Graduate Education*, advocates for strengthening diversity and inclusiveness efforts in the graduate education enterprise as a key component of a national talent development strategy, which will ultimately strengthen our economy and maintain our quality of life. Clearly, one factor that contributes to the existing diversity of U.S. graduate programs is the presence of international students, and to remain strong, U.S. programs must continue to welcome talent from abroad. This report, however, focuses on the development of the domestic talent pool and particularly people from traditionally underrepresented groups.

This document explores the relationship between diversity and inclusiveness, and it offers definitions of these terms. We provide statistics on demographic

population trends and their implications for higher education, and for graduate education in particular. A sampling of university-based programs that have had success in broadening participation is provided in the body of the report and in a separate section at the end, along with the results of select evaluations and federal and private initiatives.

We conclude with policy recommendations to develop the talent essential to respond to the challenges we face now and in the future. The historic cooperation and collaboration between government, higher education, and the private sector must be revitalized and strengthened. Considerable progress has been made to expand diversity in higher education and to promote inclusiveness, but more can be done.

We offer recommendations for both universities and policy makers in recognition of the shared partnership that exists between these two entities and the need to strengthen this partnership going forward. Doing so will realize the power of diversity and inclusiveness in graduate education to continue to achieve the promise of our land.

In these challenging economic times, we might consider what economist Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor, has called a “bailout” of America’s human capital, arguing that “the future competitiveness and standard of living of America depend on our people’s skills, their capacities to communicate and solve problems, and innovate.”<sup>5</sup> The time for action is now.