



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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Doctoral Education the Focus of Transatlantic Dialogue between Council of Graduate Schools and European University Association

Competition and cooperation in an era of globalization

Salzburg, Austria—What is needed for the US and for countries and regions around the world to attract and retain the world's top talent in the twenty-first century? How much will depend upon each country's follow-through on national competitiveness strategies, and how much upon the success of strong international collaborations? Over forty graduate education leaders from North America and Europe convened for the first time this week to address these questions at a conference on "Doctoral Education in a Global Context." Sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the European University Association (EUA), the three-day event engaged participants from 19 countries in an international dialogue about the role of doctoral education in the production of global talent and national research capacity, and in strengthening economic competitiveness.

Participants discussed the latest findings, presented in papers commissioned for the conference, from some of the world's leading researchers on graduate education, exchanged ideas about best practices in the administration of doctoral programs, and engaged each other in an international dialogue about the political, social, and economic forces shaping doctoral education.

All agreed that doctoral education has moved to center stage as key to responding to the challenges of the knowledge society in North America and Europe. Participants exchanged information about shared priorities such as: providing adequate financing crucial to student success, better preparing students for careers inside and outside academia, emphasizing teamwork, and enhancing the "generic skills" of Ph.D. students to ensure their success in all aspects of their future careers as researchers and scholars. Discussion focused on issues of the structures of successful doctoral education systems and strategies for an inclusive graduate community in different regional and national contexts. Participants agreed that further discussion is needed, particularly to answer three common concerns:

- The articulation of master's and doctoral education
- The definition, purpose, and structure of Ph.D.s as well as professional doctorates
- The broadening of international dialogue on graduate education to the global arena

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Lesley Wilson, EUA Secretary General, said: “At such an important time for the development of doctoral programs in Europe, this meeting has provided an invaluable opportunity to open up dialogue about doctoral education with our colleagues in North America. This will be a defining moment. Our hope is that this flow of information will now continue naturally.”

One of the goals for the meeting was to create an international forum for sharing information about decade-long reform initiatives that have changed the face of doctoral education on both sides of the Atlantic. Since 1999, European universities have been engaged in the Bologna Process, a major reform initiative involving 45 countries designed to increase mobility within Europe and to enhance the economic competitiveness of the region. Now that bachelor’s and master’s degrees are in place, Europe is turning its attention to doctoral education.

In the United States and Canada, doctoral reform initiatives since the early 1990s have focused on: preparing doctoral students to better balance their research and teaching responsibilities as future faculty members; encouraging students to actively participate as leaders and public intellectuals in the civic arena; and on helping universities to ensure that greater numbers of students who enroll in doctoral programs complete those programs (with attrition from Ph.D. programs as high as 60% in some fields). Until now, there have been no specific opportunities for a focused exchange of information about the progress of these reforms among international graduate education leaders or to ascertain their national, regional and global implications.

Debra W. Stewart, President of the Council of Graduate Schools, said: “Competition is an undeniable fact of the global doctoral education enterprise. This event has reaffirmed our belief that the best way to compete in the global arena of the twenty-first century is as much through the exchange of best practices and ideas as through the exchange of students over national borders.”

EUA and CGS both see this conference as the beginning of a long-term global dialogue about doctoral education that will take place on the basis of a report to be issued by early December.

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EUA is the representative organization of universities and national rectors’ conferences in 45 countries across Europe. EUA’s mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of education and research at the European level, acknowledging the diversity of its members and the importance of solidarity.

Through projects and services to its members, EUA aims to strengthen institutional governance and leadership, and to promote partnership in higher education and research both within Europe, and between Europe and the rest of the world.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of 470 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. CGS member institutions award more than 90% of the doctoral degrees and over 75% of the master’s degrees in the U.S. 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.