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Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States

For more than a year, CGS and Educational Testing Service (ETS) have been working with a blue ribbon commission on the development of a landmark report: *The Path Forward: The Future of Graduate Education in the United States*. The report was released at a legislative forum on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on April 29. This article reviews the findings and recommendations and discusses what is new about the report. It also provides an overview of the legislative forum as well as future plans for using the report to highlight the vital role of graduate education in enhancing US competitiveness and innovation in the global economy.

The Path Forward Report

The Commission on the Future of Graduate Education in the United States is a joint initiative of the Council of Graduate Schools and ETS. The 18-member commission includes university presidents, graduate deans, provosts, industry leaders and higher education scholars. Their involvement and insights were critical to the development of a report that addresses the strong connection between the nation's need for a highly trained workforce to drive innovation and competitiveness, where we are on addressing that need, and plans going forward to address vulnerabilities in our system of graduate education.

Other previous reports have addressed competitiveness and presented ideas for enhancing it, including strengthening graduate education, but *The Path Forward* report is the first to connect all the dots in a way that positions graduate education as a strategic national asset and makes a compelling case to address vulnerabilities in graduate education now as part of a national innovation strategy.

The key assumption of the report is that the competitiveness of the United States and our nation's capacity for innovation hinge fundamentally on a strong system of graduate education. But that system faces challenges including changing demographics, degree completion rates, workforce projections for additional jobs requiring graduate degrees, and increased international competition in the higher education sector.

To address these challenges the report notes the importance of collaboration among universities, employers and policymakers. It also presents specific recommendations for each of these three sectors.

Recommendations for universities include improving completion rates, clarifying nonacademic career pathways for students and preparing the future faculty. Employers are

encouraged to increase their engagement with graduate programs in a variety of ways and to communicate the skills needed for 21st century jobs.

Policymakers must help ensure that graduate education is a viable option for a growing number of US citizens while simultaneously welcoming the best and brightest from abroad. Recommendations include continuing support for existing graduate programs as well as the implementation of two new initiatives to support doctoral and master's education:

- A COMPETES doctoral traineeship program that would support doctoral education in areas of national need by providing direct student support through a stipend, tuition and fees, ancillary fringe costs, and other costs of education and;
- A new competitive grant program that would provide partial funding to create new, innovative master's programs or reinvigorate existing ones.

Legislative Forum and Report Release

CGS and ETS were pleased to have an outstanding array of speakers to discuss the importance of *The Path Forward* report. The day began with remarks from four policymakers.

US Senator Kay Hagan of North Carolina focused her remarks on the role of graduate education in promoting intellectual curiosity and groundbreaking research. She specifically mentioned the need to reform immigration policies so that international students who receive their graduate degrees in the US can stay and work if they so desire. Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey stressed that graduate education is the cornerstone of research in this nation. He also noted that we do not have a national innovation strategy to build an infrastructure to support competitiveness and innovation in a deliberate way. He has introduced legislation to create a comprehensive national competitiveness and innovation strategy to address this need.

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Congressman Mike Castle of Delaware also encouraged the development of policies to permit international students with US graduate degrees to remain here and contribute to our economy. He cited the need to publicize the benefits of a graduate degree more widely in the media and in other venues as a way of promoting the value of graduate education. Martha Kanter, Under Secretary in the US Department of Education, noted the tremendous importance of graduate education in meeting President Obama's goal that "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world." She highlighted the newly expanded Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program as a way to encourage graduates to enter into public service careers.

Additional perspectives on the report findings and recommendations were shared by corporate leaders and higher education leaders. Roger Ferguson, President and CEO of TIAA-CREF, provided an employer's perspective on the importance of graduate education. He cited the need for quality mentoring of graduate

students that would address career pathways outside of academia; the importance of business/university partnerships to support quality graduate education; and the importance of employer-based programs to provide tuition support for employees interested in pursuing graduate study.

Stan Litow, Vice President, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs at IBM, echoed Dr. Ferguson's remarks concerning the importance of business/university partnerships in developing graduate programs that address workforce needs and the development of the highly skilled workforce for the 21st century. He highlighted an initiative at IBM to help employees pay for higher education through portable personal learning accounts and reinforced the report's recommendation that other employers do the same. He also stressed the need to operationalize the recommendations contained in *The Path Forward* report.

William "Brit" Kirwan, Chancellor of the University System of Maryland, gave a university leader's perspective on the report. He called the report a "wake up" call and said he was pleased with the attention given to the master's degree and to the connection between graduate education and the private sector. He noted the importance of diversity across all sectors of education and that this is a huge issue facing the country.

Jeffery Gibeling, Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of California, Davis and Chair of the CGS Board of Directors, noted the need to replicate the Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program as well as the need for quality mentoring of graduate students, citing the award winning program at his institution.

Dr. Liora Schmelkin, Senior Vice Provost, Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies at Hofstra University, shared her

view that curriculum reform is crucial and that graduate schools must recognize that there are different ways to educate students and that as more non-traditional students enter graduate study, schools must be prepared to address their needs.

ETS was well-represented by Ida Lawrence, Senior Vice President, Research and Development, and Michela English, ETS Trustee and President and CEO, Fight for Children, who shared their perspectives on the report's findings and recommendations. David Payne, Vice President and COO of College and Graduate Programs at ETS, introduced the



Among the speakers at the 2010 Legislative Forum were US Senator Kay Hagan; TIAA-CREF President and CEO, Roger Ferguson; and Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of California, Davis and CGS Board of Directors Chair, Jeffery Gibeling.

compelling video that was developed with generous support from his organization and that added the voices of students and graduates to the discussion of the importance of graduate education.

Next Steps and Future Plans

The report release and associated media outreach marked the beginning of an ongoing communications effort designed to raise awareness and visibility of graduate education as a strategic national asset and to foster the many important conversations

needed to impact policy initiatives. The timing of the report release was fortuitous as Congress is in the process of reauthorizing the America COMPETES Act. This law implemented many of the recommendations from the National Academies report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*. The current reauthorization is proceeding through the House of Representatives and *The Path Forward* report has been shared widely with policymakers and staff in that body as well as in the Senate.

Looking forward, CGS encourages commission members, deans and others to utilize the findings and recommendations in the report to engage with a variety of internal and external stakeholders about the importance of graduate education and its relationship to discovery, innovation and competitiveness. ETS and CGS have created a special dedicated web site for the report and associated materials at www.fgereport.org. A standard power point presentation for use in discussing the report, a message box of key points to emphasize, the video and other materials will be housed on this site.

State associations of graduate deans and the CGS regional affiliates may want to consider using the report, video and related materials in developing sessions for their upcoming meetings and annual forums with policymakers. Please contact CGS if we may be of assistance in formulating plans for future events or in providing additional information or consultation about the report.

Contact: *Patty McAllister, Vice President, Government Relations and External Affairs*

The NRC Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs

It is likely that the results of the NRC Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs will be released soon. It is keenly awaited and, in the minds of many, long overdue. Although the data will be somewhat out of date, the study and its database will make available in one place comparable data from over 4,500 doctoral programs. The NRC is extraordinarily grateful to the graduate school community for all the effort that it contributed to this study. The study could not have been carried out without the labors of hundreds of data collectors, institutional coordinators, and faculty. In this article, we wish to discuss what will become available when the report is released.

The Database

The NRC report will be accompanied by the release of a database that will consist of comparative data for each program in each of the 61 fields in the NRC taxonomy, with ranges of rankings for a variety of measures provided for 59 fields. The data elements were listed in detail in the November 2009 *Communicator*. Data will be available for all the major fields in which PhD degrees are awarded in the United States with one exception,¹ although it does not include degrees in education, social work, or other areas of professional study. Most of the data were collected for the 2005-06 academic year, but data on publications go back to 1981 and the study reports recent (2002-05) citations referring to all those publications. The user will find data on student funding, completion, and time to degree, as well as on diversity of faculty and students. Users with an interest in the humanities will find bibliographic data that do not appear elsewhere derived from hand counts of books and articles from faculty resumé. The data will appear in Excel spreadsheets, and users will be able to download information from programs of interest and conduct their own customized comparisons.

Though the data would have been more useful if available sooner, data collection and validation were not simple tasks. Although our committee felt that these data may have been already collected or, if not, related to data that should be known to programs or administrators, this was not always the case. We spent a great deal of time reviewing and validating the data (including getting back in touch with the universities that provided them), and when the data are released, there may still be errors. It is the hope of the committee that the data will be updated as soon as possible and will become especially valuable when it is possible to make periodic comparisons.

The Ranges of Rankings

Those who read the Methodology Guide² will recall that the study based its methodology for calculating rankings in two separate ways: first, through quantifying, and giving weights to, those measures that faculty thought important to the quality of a doctoral program by tallying faculty answers to a questionnaire that listed 20 characteristics of doctoral

programs and asking faculty to choose among them; and second, by asking faculty in each field to provide ratings on a five point scale for a sample of programs in their field. These ways of obtaining weights for program characteristics were then combined statistically to give an overall rating for a program. The possibility that raters might disagree on a program's standing was taken into account by repeatedly sampling raters and recalculating the rating. Variability in the values of program characteristics over time was also taken into account. After ratings were calculated that included all these sources of uncertainty, programs were ranked, and the repeated sampling of raters resulted in a range of rankings.

The Methodology Guide was developed after the committee had generated ranges of rankings for some, but not all, fields. When we were preparing the final report, it turned out that, upon reviewing the ratings based on the two approaches for all fields, the rankings generated by the two techniques were dissimilar enough that they would be presented individually. Also, based upon the results of the NRC review process, the committee agreed that ranges of rankings calculated by each technique should be presented as illustrative. The committee is not endorsing any one measure or combination of measures as best.

When the report appears, users will be able to see—as illustrations for insights that they provide—ranges of rankings for three measures of doctoral programs (dimensional measures)—based on 1) research activity, 2) student support and outcomes, and 3) diversity of the academic environment. They will also see—again for the insights they provide—two illustrative overall rankings, which we will call the R (for regression) based and the S (for survey) based rankings. The S-based ranking is based on weights calculated from response to a survey that asked the faculty which of the 20 characteristics of a doctoral program mattered most for program quality; the R-based ranking depends on the weights calculated from faculty responses to a survey in which they were asked to rate a sample of programs in their field of programs on a scale of 1 to 5, and then these ratings were related, through a regression, to the 20 characteristics. All five approaches have strengths and deficiencies.

How, then, is the relative standing of a program to be understood? The user must understand what underlies the range of illustrative rankings—that is, the coefficients (or weights) and the program's values for the characteristic. In the most general sense, a rating is simply the sum of the value for each characteristic multiplied by its weight and the ranking results from the ordering, from high to low, of these ratings. Typically, the weights for the R-based rankings are larger for program size, measured by PhDs produced, than in the S-based rankings, which usually give more emphasis (larger weights) to measures of per capita research activity. The ranges of rankings for the

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dimensional measures, of course, rank programs based on a selection of characteristics. The NRC will provide all the data that went into each ranking range, so that users will be able to understand the results.

Which ranking to use—one of the above or a different one—depends on the purpose for which it is intended. The user should choose the measure that weights most heavily what is important for the user's purpose. The committee stresses that the user may take the data that the study provides and construct a set of rankings based on the values that the user places on the characteristics. The NRC will leave the decision about what ranking approach is “best” to the users, but we have gained a number of insights.

- First, that constructing rankings based on observable program characteristics is a highly complex undertaking. The ranking for a program depends on how a characteristic is valued by the ranking index and by the value of the characteristic itself. For example, a program may have a relatively high proportion of students who complete within six years, but that characteristic is not given a large weight on any overall measure. It is given a higher weight on the student support and outcomes dimensional measure. Programs with high completion rates may want to point to their ranking on this measure when explaining what their programs do well.
- Second, although the committee sought to measure the separate effects of the characteristics in a statistical sense, changing a program's performance on a particular characteristic may well have implications for other measures. For example, if a program increases the

number of PhDs it produces through increasing enrollment, these students will also have to be funded. If it doesn't increase funding, the proportion of first year students funded will go down. A program can hold enrollment constant but improve PhD production by improving completion rates through becoming more selective. The discussion has to focus on all the aspects of improving where a program stands in a chosen ranking, not just one highly weighted characteristic.

We hope that the insights that we have gained into the complexity of trying to measure the quality of doctoral programs will assist those who wish to discourage simplistic approaches to accountability. The most responsible answer to “Who is best?” is “That depends on what people find most valuable in a doctoral program.” Our study illuminates the various sets of values that people who believe in doctoral education hold.

By Charlotte Kuh, Deputy Executive Director, Policy and Global Affairs Division, The National Academies

Endnotes

¹Data for computer science will appear later because we are still in the process of compiling data on papers presented at refereed conferences, which is accepted in this field as a form of publication but not fully indexed by Thompson Reuters, the bibliographic source that we used. These data will be released later in the summer of 2010.

²Available for download for free at:
http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12676

Preparing the Faculty of the Future for US Community Colleges

When President Obama proposed in July of last year the “American Graduation Initiative,” a 10-year, 12 billion dollar investment in the nation's community college system, he both recognized and ensured that community colleges will play a larger role in shaping the future of the US economy than ever before.¹ The success of community colleges is vital to positioning the US for economic recovery. Going forward, Obama noted, “jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience.”² This success will not depend primarily on recruiting more students: enrollment in community colleges is burgeoning, and will likely continue to grow. Total for-credit fall student enrollment at community colleges in 2005 was over 6 million, up from 1 million students in the early 1960s, resulting in a growth rate for community colleges

three times that of four-year colleges during the same period.³ Success will depend on improving degree completion rates, which for community colleges have been a particular challenge. In 2005, only 30% of full-time, degree-seeking community college students had completed their degrees within three years;⁴ within six years of first enrollment, community college students had completed their degrees at half the rate of four-year college students.⁵ The Obama administration's goal of five million new community college graduates by 2020 is realistic. However, for these graduates to be truly prepared for success in the knowledge economy there are two requirements that will be absolutely crucial. First, institutions will need a comprehensive degree completion strategy. Second, they will need a skilled faculty equipped to help community colleges advance all of their

various missions with respect to student success including: degree completion, transition into the workforce, and transfer to four-year colleges.

Completion rates, time-to-degree, and strategies to tackle challenges in both areas have received significant attention in 2009-10, not only from the federal stimulus provided by the “American Graduation Initiative” but also from private foundations (for example, through important projects funded by the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, and an influential report from the Center for America Progress). Such efforts have received significant press attention in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. What has not been at the center of national discussion is the dire need community colleges will have in the very near future for a new core of skilled faculty. There has been little discussion about how, as a nation, we are going to produce these future community college faculty in sufficient numbers to meet student demand and replace the large numbers of current aging faculty who now face imminent retirement. New faculty will need to be well-prepared to understand the full range of roles and responsibilities required in a community college faculty career.

While replacement opportunities in the academic sector have not always materialized according to projections, estimates based on self-reports of faculty and senior administrators in US community colleges point to a serious challenge. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1997), nearly half (45%) of all full-time faculty at public community colleges were over the age of 49 in 1992, and 37% were between the ages of 40 and 49. With “almost half of the full-time faculty...expected to retire within the next 10 to 15 years, and at least 80 percent within the next 20 to 25 years,”⁶ the question of how to prepare sufficient numbers of high-quality faculty should be integral to current discussions about enhancing student success at the nation’s community colleges.

The Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program provides an exemplary model of institutional partnerships that could be significantly enhanced to address this need. The PFF initiative traditionally brought together research universities with other higher education institutions (e.g., liberal arts colleges, master’s focused universities, and community colleges) to prepare doctoral students for the various roles and responsibilities that are required of successful faculty in different academic settings. PFF programs developed with coordination from the Council of Graduate Schools, in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, at 43 doctoral universities collaborating with nearly 300 institutions. Partnering institutions represented the full spectrum of US higher education institutions and included 61 community colleges. Different phases of PFF program development and institutionalization were made possible by grants to CGS from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Atlantic Philanthropies, and the National Science Foundation. The grant-funded phases of PFF (1993-2003) primarily supported the participation of doctoral students. As documented in a series of CGS publications on PFF

programs, those who participated in supervised teaching internships and other activities with community college partners appreciated the opportunity to learn about the diverse expectations of different US higher education institutions. Some PFF participants pursued teaching careers at community colleges, excited by the community college mission and the innovation and expertise in teaching and service. Nationally, among all full-time community college faculty, 13% hold doctorates, and 71% hold master’s, as their highest degree. In some fields, such as the humanities and social sciences, the proportion of doctorates is approximately double this figure.⁷ Where PFF or similar professional development programs exist, exposure to community college careers and expectations may be appropriate for doctoral students.

The large majority of community college faculty, however, hold master’s degrees. One model for identifying and preparing the next generation of community college faculty for the future needs of these institutions and their students would include expanding the PFF initiative to include master’s students and master’s-focused institutions. CGS has worked extensively to promote professional master’s degree programs [such as the Professional Science Master’s (PSM) and the Professional Master of Arts (PMA)] that combine graduate-level familiarity with the subject matter of a discipline with additional skills required of a student’s chosen field, thereby preparing master’s students for successful careers in the non-academic sector. Building on lessons learned in the PSM and PMA as well as the PFF initiatives, master’s institutions (and doctoral institutions with discrete master’s programs or interested master’s) might explore ways to collaborate with nearby community colleges to provide structured professional development opportunities and experiences.

Cultivating Graduate School Aspirations

Clearly, institutional collaborations modeled on PFF could benefit community colleges by identifying a prospective pool of talent, instilling skills that community colleges require, and providing supervised teaching and/or service experiences that could allow aspiring faculty and potential employers to evaluate each other for a good match. One question that might arise is: how might PFF-type institutional collaborations benefit US graduate education?

Community colleges are increasingly serving as feeder institutions to four-year colleges and universities as well as to graduate programs. As reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, one in five Americans (19.2%) who earned a doctorate in 2008 attended a community college at some time.⁸ Comparable rates among the minority groups most underrepresented in graduate education are much higher: among American Indians, 39% of those who earned PhD’s attended a community college prior to earning their degrees, and this is the case for one out of every four Hispanic PhDs. Community colleges, then, serve as the gateway for a significant portion of underrepresented students in US doctoral education. Certainly, it is a gateway to master’s education for even more

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underrepresented students. In striving to recruit underrepresented students and to identify ways to enhance their preparation for and awareness of graduate education opportunities, both doctoral and master's-focused institutions should embrace the opportunity for greater collaboration with community colleges on faculty preparation. Recent reports also suggest that the economic recession has caused students who might once have entered directly into four-year colleges from across demographic groups to consider community colleges as a more affordable route to a bachelor's degree.⁹ An important part of the community college mission now is delivering curricula that facilitate students' multiple aspirations to transition: whether to college, through college on the way to a graduate degree (PhD or master's), or into the workforce.

An Invitation

Fast-growing enrollments and retiring faculty in the US community college system make for a perfect storm and a perfect opportunity. PFF and PFF-like programs could potentially be strengthened to include master's institutions and focus on the growing national need for community college faculty. In so doing, such programs could help secure the federal government's recent investments in the community college system. A focus on degree completion and time-to-degree issues is important, but preparing a generation of faculty who can best cultivate the aspirations community college students have for their own future might be one of the best interventions for increasing degree completion. CGS is in the process of exploring ways to enhance the PFF initiative to respond to this national need. If you are interested in this effort, or have experiences and ideas to share with us about preparing community college faculty, please contact us.

Contact: Daniel Denecke, Program Director, *Best Practices and Publications*

Endnotes

¹The approved Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act includes \$2 billion dollars over four years for community college and career training.

²Lothian, D. "Obama: Community Colleges Can Help Boost Ailing Economy," July 14, 2009. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/07/14/obama.community.colleges/index.html>.

³Rifkin, T. "Public Community College Faculty." <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/pastprojects/Pages/publicccfaculty.aspx>.

⁴NCES, IPEDS 2008 Graduation Rate Survey. <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?level=nation&mode=graph&state=0&submeasure=24>, cited in McIntosh, M. and C.E. Rouse. (2009). "The Other College: Retention and Completion Rates Among Two-year College Students." Center for American Progress.

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⁵McIntosh and Rouse. (2009).

⁶Rifkin, op.cit.

⁷"Faculty and Staff at Community Colleges," AACC website, http://www2.aacc.nche.edu/research/index_faculty.htm

⁸"From Community College to PhD" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 2010, citing 2008 Survey of Earned Doctorates data) <http://chronicle.com/article/Chart-From-Community-College/63712/>

⁹"Five Major Steps to Reducing the Cost of College." (2009). <http://blog.gocollege.com/2009/11/04/five-major-steps-to-reducing-the-cost-of-college/>

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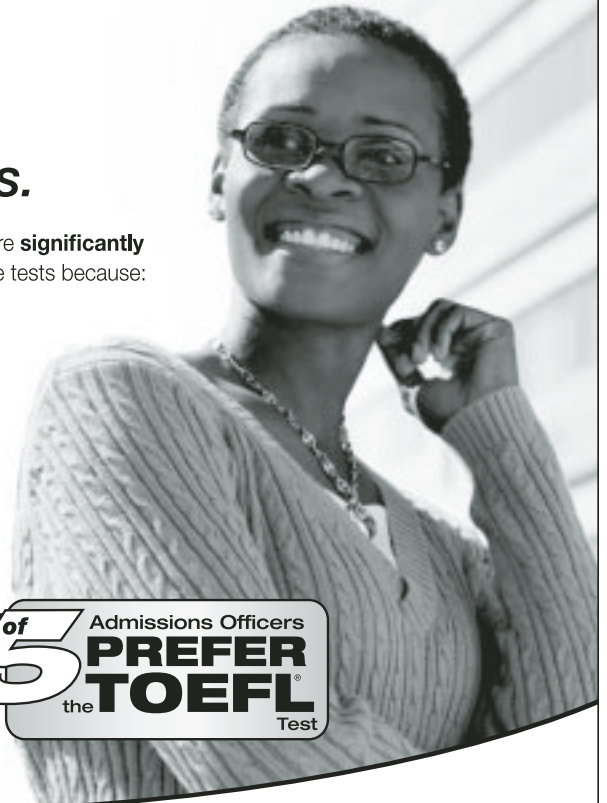
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