

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)

Legislative Platform

**Submitted for Consideration at the NAGPS National Conference
University of Nebraska Lincoln
November 14-18, 2009**

NAGPS MISSION STATEMENT

NAGPS has a threefold mission for the graduate and professional student community in the United States of America:

- (1) Develop and sustain a member network to connect graduate and professional students and their associations
- (2) Provide resources and support to empower members
- (3) Advocate at local and national levels on their behalf

FOREWORD

Under NAGPS' bylaws, the NAGPS Legislative Concerns Committee is responsible for assisting NAGPS in development of its legislative policy by submitting a proposed Annual Federal Legislative Platform for consideration and approval by the membership at the general business meeting of the national conference. While the Legislative Platform is not an exclusive expression of the federal legislative issues of concern to the Association, it sets out NAGPS' main public policy priorities for the coming year.

NAGPS encourages local graduate and professional student governments to incorporate this Federal Legislative Platform in the creation of their own local legislative agendas and to formally endorse this NAGPS Legislative Platform. Further, NAGPS seeks to work with the higher education community to formulate policies affecting NAGPS' membership that advance national goals and objectives.

STUDENT RIGHTS

1. NAGPS firmly opposes any attempt to infringe on the First Amendment rights of students and their elected representatives to establish and fund their own programs, to publish scholarly work without fear of reprisal, and to engage in advocacy, lobbying, or debate. NAGPS supports student efforts to organize and engage in public policy debates.
2. NAGPS supports access to affordable health care for all graduate and professional students and their dependents, including international students.
3. NAGPS supports access to affordable childcare for all graduate and professional students including international students.
4. NAGPS supports extension of benefits to graduate/professional students that are currently exclusively offered to undergraduates to the extent to which those benefits are relevant to the graduate/professional population.

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

5. NAGPS supports the adoption of federal income-based loan repayment models.
6. NAGPS urges the Administration and Congress to maintain or increase the amount of federal funding provided for America's colleges and universities.
7. NAGPS urges lawmakers to adjust federal loan programs to match Graduate Student time to degree and expenses.
8. NAGPS urges lawmakers to increase borrowing limits for federal student loans and to periodically adjust for inflation and the rising cost of tuition.
9. NAGPS urges increasing tax deductibility of student loan interest. Additionally, NAGPS urges Congress to index the income limitation on student loan interest deductions to the rate of inflation.
10. NAGPS supports the maintenance and continued funding of both the Federal Direct Student Loan Program (FDSLPL) and the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) in order to offer students the maximum spectrum of choices to suit their individual needs.
11. NAGPS urges the adoption of loan forgiveness/forbearance policies for workers in nonprofit fields, public service, and underserved communities such as programs like Teach for America
12. NAGPS opposes any efforts to cut funding from the Federal student loan programs. NAGPS also opposes any measure that would result in increased loan costs to students.
13. Currently students receive one six-month grace period after leaving post-secondary education for payment on their federal student loans. NAGPS calls for the resetting of loan grace periods after completion of any full academic year to ensure that student with breaks in their education status are not prevented from completing their educations.
14. NAGPS objects to subsidy payments to lenders and urges Congress to investigate alternative means for funding student loan programs. NAGPS further urges that lender subsidies be channeled to higher education programs, including graduate and professional fellowships.
15. NAGPS urges support for education programs in financial literacy for higher education
16. NAGPS urges Congress to enact legislation that discourages predatory lending practices.

17. NAGPS supports federal loan consolidation programs, and seeks more options in these programs, including additional fixed or variable interest rate choices and the ability to reconsolidate loans.
18. NAGPS supports graduate fellowship programs as a means of training tomorrow's scholars, scientists and leaders of industry, government and education.
19. NAGPS urges the Administration and Congress to provide, wherever possible, additional sources of grant funding for graduate and professional students. Specifically, NAGPS supports increased funding for the graduate fellowship programs included in the Higher Education Act (Javits Fellowships, GAANN – Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need – Fellowships, and the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program).
20. NAGPS also supports graduate and professional fellowship programs that are portable and that provide educational opportunities to traditionally underrepresented groups, as well as to traditionally underfunded disciplines such as the Second Chances Act and TRIO.
21. NAGPS supports cultural and intellectual diversity and suggests the expansion of federal fellowships for international students.
22. NAGPS opposes across-the-board denial of access to financial aid based on a student's convictions for a drug related offense, nor should any criminal offense prevent access to federal student loans.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ISSUES

23. NAGPS supports the DREAM Act.
24. NAGPS urges policymakers, law enforcement, and school administrators to respect international students' civil and human rights and to uphold their rights to due process.
25. NAGPS urges university officials and higher education organizations to work for fairer student visa policies and actively advocate for their students whose visas have been unfairly denied or delayed.
26. NAGPS supports streamlining visa and immigration processes.
27. NAGPS urges lawmakers to make more visas (particularly H1-B) available to foreign students who obtain their graduate degrees in the U.S.
28. NAGPS strictly opposes blanket bans on international student entry based on their country of origin and/or field of study. NAGPS urges the government to reverse its decision to single out students on the basis of their country of origin and/or field of study, while remaining attentive to potential threats to the nation's security.
29. NAGPS supports all reasonable efforts to shorten student visa and security check processing times.
30. NAGPS is concerned about students losing status due to bureaucratic failures in the SEVIS system itself. NAGPS specifically calls for the ability of international students to transfer and continue degrees without any obstacles and to be provided a 60-day grace period to appeal a loss of status.
31. NAGPS urges the Federal government to bear the cost for the operation of SEVIS rather than imposing this burden on individual students or the host institutions.
32. NAGPS urges that all student visas, regardless of the student's country of origin and/or field of study, should be multiple-entry and of a duration consistent with that of the student's educational program. NAGPS believes that international students should be fully able to travel abroad to pursue scholarly opportunities and visit their families.

33. NAGPS supports equal access for international students to parental, family, and medical leave.
34. NAGPS supports the right of legal immigrants to pursue a graduate or professional education without impediment and to participate in federal student aid programs. NAGPS supports any legislative efforts that encourage U.S. permanent residency, citizenship and civic participation among graduates from institutions of higher learning.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

35. NAGPS urges the administration and congress to adopt policies such as FRPAA that ensure online, open access to published research.
36. NAGPS urges the administration and congress to adopt policies that support online open access/peer-reviewed textbooks.
37. NAGPS supports legislative efforts that encourage diversity at institutions of higher learning.
38. NAGPS supports legislative efforts that address impediments in the education pipeline that are limiting diversity, such as the DREAM Act.
39. NAGPS believes that education is a continuum from pre-kindergarten through the graduate and professional level. NAGPS therefore supports additional funding to P-12 and to undergraduate programs from sources other than graduate and professional student programs.
40. NAGPS encourages establishment of an ED Graduate/Professional Education Advisory Committee comprised of university and student representatives.
41. NAGPS encourages the appointment of a graduate and professional education coordinator within the Office of Postsecondary Education in the United States Department of Education (ED) specifically charged with development of national strategies designed to encourage the pursuit of a graduate/professional education and to serve the nation's growing population of graduate/professional students.
42. NAGPS supports federal recognition of the first week of April as an annual celebration of Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. This event brings awareness of the contributions that graduate and professional students make to their campuses as teachers, researchers and students; the positive impact their work has on local, state, and federal economies.

TAX POLICY

43. NAGPS opposes the imposition of government taxes or fees other than those imposed by educational institutions on graduate and professional students for registering for or attending school.
44. NAGPS urges the broadening of tax exemptions and deductions for graduate and professional education expenses and to protect all such existing exemptions and deductions. NAGPS further urges that congress restore the tax exemption for graduate student stipends eliminated in 1986.
45. NAGPS supports the FICA tax exemption offered to graduate and professional students.