

Pathways Through Graduate School and Into Careers



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Context for the Commission

- Graduate degree holders are critical to our national workforce strategy
- People with graduate degrees contribute to a broad range of occupations
- And yet, employers, policymakers, educators, and students need to learn how to best put this talent to work

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Why is Career Transparency Important?

- About 2.6 million new and replacement jobs will require an advanced degree
 - 22% increase for jobs requiring a master's degree
 - 20% for jobs requiring a doctorate or professional degree
- Advanced education levels are associated with higher salaries and lower unemployment rates
- Understanding career options may be an important factor in encouraging students to consider graduate education

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The issue and our approach

- Little was known about how the work lives of graduate degree holders develop and how they are prepared for the careers they pursue
- The report examines the views of three groups—students, universities, and employers—that directly observe and experience graduate career pathways

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What do Students Know?

- Prior to graduate school
 - There is perceived value in obtaining an advanced degree because it provides better career opportunities and increased income potential
 - But this perceived value is tied to limited information about viable careers
 - Prior to graduate school, students consulted informal sources – such as family, friends, and coworkers – but did not consult sources that are better equipped to provide career information – such as employers, career counselors, or placement offices

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What do Students Know?

- During graduate school
 - Faculty are the primary source for career information
 - Careers encouraged by faculty are aligned with career interests of students
 - Teaching/faculty and research positions were the two most endorsed careers by both faculty and students
 - Positions in industry, government, and nonprofits were of interest to students but are endorsed less frequently by faculty
 - Very few students discuss options with a career counseling or placement office

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What do Students Know?

- Following graduate school
 - Those with graduate degrees work in a broad range of occupations
 - Prior research shows that among new doctorate recipients, about one-half find initial employment in business, government, or nonprofit jobs
 - Our research shows that, even more so than those with doctorates, master's degree holders work in a variety of settings
 - In business (30%)
 - In teaching/faculty (22%)
 - In nonprofit, public service, government, and research organizations (9% - 12%)

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The Role of the University

- Critical in helping students find pathways through graduate school and into careers
- Graduate dean survey focused on four types of programs
 - Professional master's
 - Research master's
 - Professional doctorate
 - Research doctorate

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Deans' Perspectives: Career Guidance

- Providing career guidance to graduate students is not often a high priority
- Institutions lack focus in
 - Supporting graduate student career goals
 - Providing career guidance
 - Preparing graduate students for nonacademic careers

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Deans' Perspectives: Faculty Roles

- Faculty and advisors provide advice in two major areas
 - Helping students publish or present research
 - Helping students find employment opportunities
- But faculty are generally knowledgeable only about their own career trajectories which are focused on research and teaching

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Deans' Perspectives: Tracking Graduate Outcomes

- Tracking recent graduates into careers and informing faculty and students of these career paths is needed
- The majority of deans are dissatisfied with their ability to track outcomes
- Major impediments
 - Time, money, lack of personnel
 - Accurate contact information

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Interviews with Employers

- Graduate degree holders bring value to their organization
- But some graduate degree holders lack certain other skills necessary for job success
 - Working in a team environment
 - Creating and delivering presentations
 - Business acumen
 - Project management
 - Communicating technical issues to a nontechnical audience

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Interviews with Employers

- Employers advocate for stronger ties between graduate school experiences and workforce needs
 - There is a disconnect in the graduate school or program's curriculum and employer needs
 - A multidisciplinary focus is needed

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Recommendations for Universities

- Make early connections with students
 - Build relationships between K-12, community colleges, and four-year colleges
- Make career counseling services available to graduate students
 - Professional skills development
 - Needed resources
 - Guidance in preparing for a variety of career options

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Recommendations for Universities

- Track career outcomes and job placement information for graduates
 - Track beyond initial employment following graduate school
 - Provide this information to faculty
- Broaden the focus of graduate education to include the development of professional skills

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Recommendations for Employers

- Enhance and expand collaborative relationships with graduate education
- Make strategic investments in graduate education programs
- Provide support for employees pursuing graduate studies while employed

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Recommendations for Policymakers

- Establish a Professional Plus Program
- Increase federal government support for graduate education
 - COMPETES doctoral traineeship program
 - New Integrative Graduate Humanities Education and Research Training program
- Create an advisory commission to support workforce priorities

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Collaboration among universities, employers, and policymakers is critical in meeting the nation's need for highly skilled talent with graduate level preparation.

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Materials available at:
www.pathwaysreport.org

