Subject: Renewal of CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants

January 14, 2010

Dear Colleague:

The Council of Graduate Schools has published a statement titled, "Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants," since the mid-1960s. The Resolution is concerned with the conditions surrounding the acceptance of offers of certain kinds of graduate student financial assistance, namely, scholarships, fellowships, traineeships, and assistantships. The general spirit of the Resolution is that students should have an opportunity to consider more than one offer and should have until April 15 to do so, that institutions and students should be able to view acceptances in force after April 15 as binding, that everyone should know what the rules are, and that an offer by the institution and its acceptance by the student constitute an agreement which both expect to honor. The intent of the Resolution is to provide a uniform and widely acceptable framework for so doing, one that provides protection for both student and institution.

There are several issues to be considered:

1. The Resolution does not preclude institutions asking students to accept or reject offers in a timely manner. Particularly in the case of some prestigious fellowships, institutions would like to know quickly if the student is going to decline so that the offer can be extended to someone else. An example of one university's approach to this issue is the following statement:
"The Graduate School would appreciate your decision concerning the acceptance or rejection of our award as soon as you are able to give us a reply. In asking you for an early reply, we wish it understood that the [Your University] Graduate School is not asking you to relinquish any privilege, if it is felt necessary to wait until April 15, 20__. However, your early response would be helpful to us in planning for the coming year. [Your university] will consider the accompanying award offer valid until April 15 unless declined at a prior time. If your reply is not received by April 15, the Graduate School may rescind the offer of financial award."

2. Another part of the Resolution concerns what happens after April 15. The intent seems clear: commitments in force after April 15 can be considered by the institution as binding. Students may still change their minds, but this now requires obtaining a written release from the institution. Similarly, institutions that make offers to students after April 15 are to require the student to present a written release from any previous offer.

The effectiveness of this part of the Resolution in providing universities with some assurance about who will actually be in their programs is totally dependent on how seriously it is taken by participating institutions. Obviously, if a student decides, for any reason, that he or she does not wish to attend your institution, there is not much point in insisting on it. However, the language of the Resolution makes it clear that changes after April 15 constitute reneging on a commitment, and are not to be taken lightly by any of the concerned parties.

3. The Resolution states that a copy of the Resolution or a link to the URL should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer. This ensures that each student understands what the options are and knows which institutions subscribe to this Resolution.

4. The role of the graduate dean in this matter is twofold. First, from time to time--probably each year--this Resolution should be brought to the attention of graduate councils, departmental graduate committees, other relevant groups, and individuals in order to ensure that everyone understands and supports the Resolution. Second, when graduate deans are informed that other institutions appear to be violating the Resolution, they should contact their counterparts at those institutions to resolve the matter.
The CGS Board of Directors has completed its five-year review of the Resolution and recommended that it be renewed for another five years with one minor change. The change is to add a footnote to make it clear that the Resolution applies to offers of financial assistance only, not to offers of admission.

The long history of this Resolution, and its widespread acceptance in the graduate community, is recognition that it is regarded as a fair statement of good practice and that it serves a useful purpose. If your institution is not currently signatory to the Resolution and you wish it to be, please complete the response form and we will add your institution to the signatory list. Conversely, if your institution does not wish to comply with the provisions of the Resolution, we will remove your institution’s name at your request. There is no need to respond if you intend to remain as signatory.

Sincerely,

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Debra W. Stewart
President