NAGPS 2018 Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days Report

Several members of the Western Michigan University Graduate Student Association, joined over 80 peers from across the nation, collectively from 26 schools and 16 states with backgrounds in science, technology, engineering, math, public policy, public administration, law, business, public health, counseling, education, anthropology, and communication. The National Association of Graduate Professional Student is the face of America’s graduate and professional students and this summit provides attendees with the opportunity to share their story with our nation’s policymakers. Graduate and professional education has never been more important for our nation’s future, but we are now at a crossroads.

We are faced with looming budget cuts, dwindling state resources for our institutions and growing student debt. The weekend was a time to learn, listen and share. We heard from distinguished professionals in the fields of higher education and science. Some of the topics include; Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (Prosper Act), Open Access and Open Educational Resources, Grad Unions on Campus, Mental health Crisis for Graduate Students and Work Permit for International Students.

We also learnt about career opportunities in science and education policy. We listened to success stories of organizing and collaborating on policy issues from our peers at other institutions. The weekend prepared us for a dynamic two days on Capitol Hill to tell our members of Congress our story and talk about NAGPS issues in the context of our school and state. Our summit was followed by a networking reception on Capitol Hill Monday evening where we had the chance to meet and network with members of Congress, congressional staff, agency official, and professionals from science and humanities organizations in Washington.

Thanks to the members who represented us in Washington DC. They have asked me to convey thanks for this great opportunity to represent you on Capitol Hill.

“The Advocates of Graduate Education have demonstrated a willingness to protect graduate-professional student interests and acknowledge the value of graduate education. We are grateful for their efforts, and most importantly for the understanding of how those with graduate degrees continue to help all communities prosper.” The 2018 NAGPS Advocate of Graduate Education Award recipients are as follows:

- **Rep. Kevin Brady** (R-TX 8): Rep Kevin Brady is Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. During the debate on the Tax Cut & Jobs Act, Chairman Brady gave
assurances that provisions in the bill that would harm graduate and professional students, such as taxing graduate tuition waivers and eliminating the student loan interest deduction, would be left out in the reconciliation process. Those provisions were ultimately excluded from the final version of the bill.

- **Rep. Lloyd Doggett** (D-TX 35): Representative Lloyd Doggett has a long track record of supporting higher education through efforts to keep college affordable, accessible, and easing the financial aid process. During the debate on the Tax Cut & Jobs Act, Rep. Doggett introduced an amendment to strike section 1204 from the bill to save the Student Loan Interest Deduction, Employer Education Assistance Deduction, the Teacher Expense Deduction, and to expand the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC). Rep Doggett is quoted as saying, “Public education is a right that, through hard work, provides a lifetime of benefits, not a privilege reserved for a fortunate, wealthy few. Working to make college affordable is among my top priorities.”

- **Rep. Pete Sessions** (R-TX 32): During the Tax Cut & Jobs Act debate, Representative Pete Sessions authored a dear colleague letter urging leadership in the House of Representatives and the Senate to remove the provision in the bill that would repeal the income exclusion for graduate tuition waivers stating, “A repeal of the income exclusion for graduate tuition waivers would harm our nation’s students, undermine our competitive position, and hold back economic growth. We strongly urge you to ensure that this harmful provision is not in the final version of the Tax Cut & Jobs Act.”

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students applauds these members of congress for their support of graduate education. Damon Chambers, NAGPS President & CEO, in his address to the attendees further states, “We are very fortunate to have our legislative leaders advocating on behalf of graduate and professional students. We encourage all members of congress to recognize the vital role that graduate education plays in the prosperity of the U.S., and to support legislation that increases its accessibility, affordability, and expands opportunities for all. We also invite our members of congress to include NAGPS in these conversations as we collaborate in advancing graduate and professional education through advocacy, leadership, research, and partnerships.”

Prepared by
Damon D. Chambers
Director of Advocacy and Legislative Affairs, WMU GSA
Interim Director and Editor, Hilltop Review Journal, WMU GSA
President & CEO, National Association of Graduate Professional Students