NEW MEXICO GRADUATE ACHIEVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

The Graduate and Professional Student Association of the University of New Mexico (GPSA) serves as the only graduate and professional student government in New Mexico. In support of our unique constituency, our organization intends to minimize the barriers that limit the success of state residents in the graduate and professional degree programs of New Mexico Institutions. GPSA requests an annually recurring total of $5,000,000 from the New Mexico State Legislature to create the New Mexico Graduate Achievement Scholarship and award qualified graduate and professional students $1,500 per semester. The purpose of the scholarship is to address workforce shortages related to the pandemic, and prevent brain drain across the state, encourage New Mexico residents to pursue graduate and professional education opportunities, and promote diversity among graduate and professional degree programs.¹

The lack of financial resources currently available to graduate and professional students in New Mexico proves to be a barrier to education that unequally impacts low-income and minority populations. According to our research, a statewide graduate and professional scholarship does not currently exist. The scholarship would serve as an opportunity for our state to set a positive example for the rest of the nation and increase the total amount of graduates with advanced degrees in New Mexico. The scholarship would establish New Mexico as a national leader in higher education, support the development of research and innovation among local industries, and empower low-income and minority students. Approximately 111,500 resident alumni from UNM alone contribute to the New Mexico workforce and enhance the state economy. The number of resident alumni has reportedly grown exponentially since the 1980s. Additional data indicates that graduates with higher degrees are increasingly likely to participate in the local workforce.²

Figure 1: UNM Alumni Residing in New Mexico by Highest Degree and Year of Graduation

Source: UNM Office of Institutional Analytics
The skills graduate and professional students bring to the labor force make New Mexico businesses more productive. The performance of numerous organizations across the state have been enhanced by the specific knowledge that alumni obtain from graduate and professional degree programs. The skilled labor of these individuals acts as a complement to improved technologies and other forms of non-labor business capital across the state. Therefore, employers of students with completed graduate and professional degrees generate higher profits as a result of the increased productivity of their capital assets. An investment in the graduate and professional students of all New Mexico Institutions is anticipated to increase the retention rates of resident alumni and pose as a contributing solution to the workforce shortages experienced across the state. The development of a graduate and professional focused scholarship would also provide more incentive for New Mexico residents to pursue higher education opportunities within the state.  

Figure 2: Labor force Participation Rates: New Mexicans 25-64 by Educational Attainment, 2019.

It is evident that New Mexico takes pride in serving a minority majority resident population. Approximately 67.5% of New Mexico residents enrolled in primary education programs are low-income or minority residents. A similar trend is true of undergraduate student populations. However, there is a departure from this narrative among graduate and professional student enrollment rates by race and ethnicity. There is a negative trend in the enrollment of graduate and professional students by race and ethnicity that does not mirror the populations that New Mexico Institutions are intended to serve. The negative trend is evident in graduate and professional programs across the state and highlights an opportunity for the state to invest in equality-focused education opportunities that prioritize low-income and minority students at the graduate and professional level.  

As trends in post-secondary education programs begin to prioritize equality, the shortfall of the state of New Mexico and its institutions provides an opportunity to set a positive example for the rest of the nation. For example, the enrollment of the University of New Mexico, the states only Research 1 (R1) University, reflects our claims. In AY 2019-2020, 47% of graduate and professional degrees were completed by racial and ethnic minority students, compared to 65%
of undergraduate degrees. The New Mexico Graduate Achievement Scholarship is anticipated to increase the percentage of racial and ethnic minority students enrolled in graduate and professional degree programs. The undergraduate programs of New Mexico Institutions clearly reflect that of the larger New Mexico population when considering race and ethnicity. A major factor for reflective demographics is the financial aid opportunities available to undergraduate students, whereas graduate and professional students are often left to their own devices.\textsuperscript{5}

**Figure 3: New Mexico Statewide Degree Production for AY 2019-2020 by Race and Ethnicity.**

It is important for the state of New Mexico to recognize that the creation of equal financial resources for graduate and professional students enrolled in New Mexico institutions will directly contribute to the diversification of the New Mexico workforce and the development of the New Mexico economy. In the 2019-2020 academic year, the three research universities of the state, the University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, and New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology awarded a combined 1,841 master’s degrees, 340 doctoral degrees, and 325 professional degrees for a total of 2,506 graduate and professional degrees. Furthermore, in the 2019-2020 academic year, all institutions of the state that offer post-secondary education opportunities awarded a combined 2,832 master’s degrees, 340 doctoral degrees, and 325 professional degrees for a total of 3,497 graduate and professional degrees.\textsuperscript{6}

Identical to the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, the New Mexico Graduate Achievement Scholarship will be managed and disbursed by the New Mexico Higher Education Department in tandem with the Financial Aid Department of each institution, starting on August 1, 2022. Graduate and professional students would automatically qualify to receive the financial award, so long as they meet the requirements of the scholarship. Qualified students would receive a total of $1,500 each semester to accommodate tuition and fee expenses for a maximum of 8 consecutive Fall and Spring semesters. Only New Mexico residents enrolled in their first graduate or professional degree program will qualify for the scholarship. Eligibility guidelines will detail that a student must earn a bachelor’s degree from a New Mexico Institution with cumulative 3.0 GPA, enroll in a graduate or professional degree program at a New Mexico Institution with a cumulative 3.0 GPA, and register for a minimum of 3 credit hours each semester.

No refund amount attributed to the New Mexico Graduate Achievement Scholarship will be awarded to graduate and professional students. The scholarship would not apply to New Mexico residents enrolled in their second graduate or professional program. In the incident that the requested annually recurring amount is not enough to be awarded to all students that qualify, priority will be given to students based on FAFSA status (or an equivalent needs analysis tool) and ESL status. The scholarship will be applied before all federal and state financial awards.
In the 2019-2020 academic year, the total of 3,497 graduate and professional students graduated from New Mexico Institutions and became available to the New Mexico workforce as educated individuals. In the 2021-2022 academic year, the enrollment of graduate and professional students at UNM alone has increased approximately 20% from the previous year, with 6,409 students currently enrolled in graduate and professional degree programs. With only 85% of the graduate and professional student population enrolled at UNM, we anticipate that approximately 7,540 graduate and professional students are enrolled across all New Mexico Institutions. These higher enrollment rates directly correlate with higher graduation rates, and our organization expects to observe the number of graduate and professional students graduated from New Mexico Institutions to increase within the next couple of years. The anticipated increase of graduate and professional graduation rates serves as a solution to accommodate the workforce shortfalls experienced in New Mexico and support diversity and inclusion among state industries. We encourage the state of New Mexico to support the right of graduate and professional students to graduate and professional education opportunities.

TOTAL ASK: RECURRING AMOUNT OF $5,000,000

REFERENCES

2. https://app.box.com/s/85vsg5xp8eks3jie7r9kxr8ef7ilrfod
3. https://app.box.com/s/85vsg5xp8eks3jie7r9kxr8ef7ilrfod