Dear Ms. Cristin Dorgelo and the OSTP Agency Review Team,

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the nearly 7,000 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) represents the approximately 7,700 graduate students of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). We wish to thank you for the invaluable work that you and your team are doing preparing for a successful transition of OSTP and the broader federal research environment to a new presidential administration, and bring to your attention certain specific issues of relevance to graduate students at MIT and across the country.

As you review the various initiatives and actions of the previous administration, there are a few we recommend keeping or expanding:

1. Maintain an interagency committee focused on bolstering U.S. research. Currently, this is filled by the Joint Committee on the Research Environment (JCORE). We recommend implementing a similar structure or maintaining the current one. If JCORE remains, particular emphasis should be placed on the Subcommittee on Safe and Inclusive Research Environments, as this is an area in dire need of improvement.
2. We advocate keeping the Students, Post-Doctoral and Early Career (SPEC) Subcommittee of PCAST or employing a similar structure. If SPEC is kept, we recommend formally empowering SPEC to issue recommendations to the full Council, clarifying its mission, and creating an open application process for the selection of future SPEC Subcommittee members.

As you look to the future, we ask that the federal science agencies:

3. Expand non-academic opportunities for researchers through such programs as NSF I-Corps, INTERN, GRIP, GROW, and SBIR, as well as expanding opportunities for researchers to complete tours of service with government agencies. These programs facilitate the application of scientific research to societal problems, directly advance the U.S. skilled workforce by providing a greater diversity of career opportunities for researchers, and improve the scientific knowledge base of agencies across the federal government.
4. Increase direct graduate student and postdoctoral fellow funding, via such programs as NASA’s FINESST and Fellowship Activity; the NIH’s F31, F32, F99, and K99 Fellowships; NSF’s GRFP and the aforementioned GRIP, GROW, and INTERN; and the NSF National Research Traineeships; among others. One legislative approach to this is the Supporting Early-Career Research Act. Such federal research funding supports the education and training of talented researchers who go on to benefit our society in innumerable ways in academia, industry, government, and NGOs. Currently, federal funding neglects this benefit by focusing narrowly on research grants, which only indirectly support graduate students and postdoctoral fellows and tie these research trainees to the interests of their advisors. Directly funding researcher trainees allows for more fruitful career exploration, greater personal stability, and more daring research topics.
5. Increase support of research and students at institutions historically neglected in federal research endeavors, including HBCUs and rural colleges and universities. The previous recommendation addresses one method of doing this; funding the trainees rather than the professors allows for talented students, regardless of institution, to receive support.
6. Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the national labs and other federal research entities, including by resuming or establishing diversity and inclusion training across the national laboratory system. These agencies help set the cultural norms for the U.S. research ecosystem as a whole and are one avenue to encouraging diversity more broadly.

7. Commit to the open and uncensored publication of research. Political appointees in the past administration have edited, censored, or delayed an alarming number of federal research reports and publications, particularly, but not exclusively, in the fields of environmental and climate research. This is unacceptable, and we strongly urge you to establish clear and formal policies that safeguard the ability of researchers in the federal government to share their work openly during this administration and into the future.

8. Commit to eliminating the one year embargo period for publishing federally funded research in an openly accessible manner in favor of immediate open access publication. This facilitates public access to research and enables participation in the research endeavor by more than just the wealthiest institutions.

We understand that this transition is just the beginning and that the new administration will be pushing forward with advancing our nation’s scientific endeavors over the coming years. We wish to make ourselves available for contributing ideas and providing feedback, and can be reached at gsc-eab-fed@mit.edu.

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