March 3rd, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
Washington, DC, 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

We are writing on behalf of students and student governments at 38 universities representing over 800,000 students. We support policies that strengthen the American science and technology base, drive American economic competitiveness, and ensure that the development of new technology is guided by American values. **We wish to thank you for the invaluable work that you and your team are doing and to bring to your attention certain topics of concern to graduate students including attracting foreign talent to American science, hiring practices for STEM students entering the defense sector, funding and research development, and research security.**

As the new administration begins its leadership of the department, we ask that you keep in mind the following topics:

Global Talent: America's technological leadership in both defense and nondefense areas is critical for our national security. As discussed in the [Future of Defense Task Force Report](#) as well as recent reports from the [Center for a New American Security](#) and the [American Academy of Arts & Sciences](#), maintaining global partnerships will be critical for American innovation. Securing American research must be part of a larger effort that ensures that America remains a hub for global talent and integrated with the global research environment. To this end, we recommend that the Department of Defense support efforts at the Departments of State and Homeland Security to **prioritize the attraction and retention of global talent in nondefense areas by expanding access to work visas and Green Cards for U.S.-educated international students, including through the creation of a National Security Innovation Base Visa.** This goal has a long history of bipartisan support, including in Congress (See [H.R.4623](#)/[S.1744](#) and [S.328](#) from the 116th and [H.R.6412](#), [H.R.2161](#), and [S.3185](#) from the 112th). Because a major method of knowledge transfer is through [hiring away talented researchers](#), concerns regarding the retention of global talent have a direct impact on American security.

Research Funding: The [Congressional Research Service](#) notes that defense R&D funding is a building block of our innovation ecosystem. To maintain America's technological superiority, we recommend:

1. **Expanding graduate student funding.** We recommend expanding the [NDSEG Graduate Fellowship](#), which funds PhD students working in defense-critical areas or who are themselves connected to defense, to at least 1,000 fellows per year. We also recommend expanding the [SMART Scholarship](#), which provides significant funding to train STEM students for a career at the Department, to at least 500 scholars per year. Additional support will come through non-defense programs as NASA's [FINESST](#) and [Fellowship Activity](#); the NIH's [F31](#), [F32](#), [F99](#), and [K99](#) Fellowships; NSF's [GRFP](#) and the [GRIP](#), [GROW](#), and [INTERN](#) programs; and the [NSF National Research Traineeships](#). We also hope that new programs will be established in specific areas, such as the recently proposed [National Defense Education Act II](#).

March 3rd, 2021

2. **Building connections between academic institutions, the entrepreneurial space, and the defense sector**. This includes expanding the operations of [NSIN](#) of [DIU](#) through opportunities such as fellowships or hackathons, supporting and expanding initiatives like the [Activate Fellowship](#), and encouraging cooperation between academia and defense research sites such as [MIT's Lincoln Laboratory](#) and the military research offices.
3. **Supporting veterans who wish to pursue STEM careers.** We applaud the [GI Benefits Extension,](#) which extends GI bill benefits for veterans studying for STEM degrees to 5 years. Further efforts should extend the pipeline beyond the GI bill benefits for STEM degrees and establish incentives and career options for veterans at all stages. These efforts may include a version of [Technology and National Security Fellowship](#) from [NSIN](#) for veterans and explore expanding innovation centers under [DIU](#) and the branch innovation commands that allow reservists to combine military and civilian expertise.

Energizing the American defense innovation base will require an all-hands approach, involving increased training of STEM professionals as well as [mentoring early-career scientists and defense workers](#).

Hiring Practices: [There is a demonstrated lack of STEM professionals working in the defense space, especially in the field of AI.](#) To streamline hiring practices for STEM graduates entering the workforce, **we recommend several initiatives proposed by the [National Security Commission on AI (NSCAI)](#) in its [Q1 report](#), including accelerating security clearance processes, creating unclassified workspaces for those awaiting clearances, expanding the [Cyber Excepted Service](#), and using portfolio reviews in line with standard industry hiring practices.** Similar practices should be instituted across all defense fields that face a shortage of STEM workers. Additionally, creating unclassified workspaces is even more urgent with the current need to work from home and improves emergency preparedness.

Research Security: The security of American research remains an urgent policy matter. Policy must balance security concerns with maintaining the open environment required for research and must be cognizant of the challenge of addressing security in a targeted manner. Dialogue between officials and graduate students will not only serve to create a more secure research environment, but will also demonstrate more equity and transparency around policy that can be divisive. **In order to create policies that adequately address security concerns without harming American science, policymakers should involve graduate students in the process as key stakeholders and ensure that neither international nor domestic graduate students are unjustly targeted.** Depending on the structures implemented by the new administration, student input may be sought through subcommittees of [PCAST](#); the [JCORE](#) of the [NSTC](#); and direct input from students. The effects of research security policy and training should be discussed with the OSTP and science funding agencies, including the NSF and the DARPA administrators.

We understand that the Biden 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 or or gsa-vpea@andrew.cmu.edu.

March 3rd, 2021

Sincerely,

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Brown University Graduate Student Council
Carnegie Mellon University Graduate Student Assembly
Case Western Reserve University Graduate Student Council
Chicago Graduate Student Association

March 3rd, 2021

Council of Graduate Students at Missouri S&T
CUNY Climate Coalition
CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice Student Council
CUNY School of Public Health Graduate Student Government Association
Duke University Graduate and Professional Student Government
Georgia Tech Graduate Student Government Association
Graduate and Professional Student Assembly at the University of Pennsylvania
Graduate and Professional Student Government Association, Oklahoma State University
Iowa State University Graduate and Professional Student Senate
John Jay College Student Council and CUNY University Student Senate
Lehigh University Graduate Student Senate
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Graduate Student Council
Miami University Graduate Student Association
Pacific University Professional Student Senate
Rutgers Graduate Student Association
Sacred Heart Graduate Student Advisory Committee
Stony Brook Graduate Student Organization (SB GSO)
Texas A&M University Graduate and Professional Student Government
The University of Arizona, Graduate & Professional Student Council
UC Berkeley's The Graduate Assembly
UNC Charlotte Graduate and Professional Student Government
University of Arkansas Graduate-Professional Student Congress
University of Colorado - Boulder Graduate and Professional Student Government
University of Connecticut Graduate Student Senate
University of Delaware Graduate Student Government
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa Graduate Student Organization
University of Kentucky's Graduate Student Congress
University of Maryland Baltimore Graduate Student Association
University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, Graduate Student Senate
University of Michigan Ann Arbor - Rackham Student Government
University of New England Graduate and Professional Student Association
University of Pittsburgh Graduate & Professional Student Government
University of Rochester Arts, Sciences & Engineering Graduate Student Association
University of Southern California Graduate Student Government Executive Board
Washington State University Graduate and Professional Student Association
Yale Graduate and Professional Student Senate