



STATEMENT

January 18, 2011

White House “Pathways” Executive Order is Trailblazing

The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) applauds President Barack Obama for signing the trailblazing “Pathways” [Executive Order](#) on “Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates” on December 27, 2010. The Order establishes government-wide Internship and Recent Graduates programs, and strengthens the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program.

The Executive Order is unprecedented in that it proposes a federal recruiting effort aimed solely at students and recent graduates, at both the internship and hiring levels. The President and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recognize the need to create pathways to public service for graduate students; the Executive Order builds a framework for a rigorous selection process to attract and hire the nation's very best into the federal government.

“The Pathways Programs will be a clearly signposted route for promising graduate students and recent alumni to compete their way into challenging federal jobs,” said Frances Berry of Florida State University and President of NASPAA. “We are thrilled to see the President address the importance of offering opportunities for public service for highly trained, highly skilled graduate students,” she added.

The nation's ability to address the impending challenges of 21st century governance rests on our ability to recruit and hire a new generation of leaders who are prepared to tackle the complex management and fiscal problems that the government faces, both now and in the future.

Every year, our nation's graduate schools produce a large cadre of capable future leaders, eager to work in the public arena. More than 10,000 students graduate annually with master's degrees in public administration, public policy, and public management--exactly the highly-educated, highly-skilled professionals who are ready to take on the leadership and management challenges of government in the knowledge age. Additionally, more than 125,000 earn science and engineering master's degrees each year, possessing technical skills critical to the federal government.

The federal government needs these talented future leaders not solely to capitalize on their cutting-edge skills and knowledge, but to invest in their development in order to replace the significant numbers of senior executives and supervisors expected to retire in the near future. OPM projects that within two years, well over a third of management personnel in the federal workforce will become eligible for retirement. If we do not invest in new classes of trained and skilled leaders, the loss of human capital and institutional knowledge will be difficult to overcome.

The Executive Order enunciates the need to develop the next generation of federal leaders, and recognizes that these promising government professionals must be recruited from today's current students and recent graduates. But as the President noted, the regular hiring process (USAJOBS) favors applicants with significant work experience over recent master's graduates. USAJOBS is *not* competitive for graduate students. In fact, there is evidence that recent master's graduates are even less successful in USAJOBS competitions than undergraduate recipients, with the situation worsening.

The current “competitive” process, which should be attracting our most promising future leaders, who would like commit themselves to public service, is instead deterring them. Unless we can recruit graduate

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ADMINISTRATION

1029 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005

(202) 628-8965 naspaa@naspaa.org

www.naspaa.org

students in significant numbers into government employment, we put at risk the future of the ability of government to adequately serve its citizens.

The new Pathways Programs are therefore a critical down payment on positioning the future federal workforce to tackle the challenges that the nation will face. The programs will improve the federal government's ability to attract the best and brightest, who otherwise would pursue other employment sectors. Highly skilled, well-trained master's graduates are capable of improving government efficiency, enhancing government performance, and conducting cost-benefit analyses and evidence-based policymaking. These future leaders will demonstrate a strong commitment to public accountability and transparency.

NASPAA recognizes the vision of the President's Executive Order and OPM's leadership on this issue. OPM has undertaken several recent efforts to improve the PMF program, the federal government's flagship recruitment program for talented graduate students, and the Executive Order injects new strength into it. The PMF has demonstrated success in placing a small number of the country's top graduate students, and the Executive Order will allow for an even more rigorous, demanding competition for talented future leaders.

The promise of the Executive Order is also contained in the establishment of the other two Pathways Programs: the Internship and Recent Graduates programs. These programs will offer wide-ranging opportunities for students and recent graduates to explore and pursue civil service careers. The strengths of the programs lie not only in making the application and hiring processes more robust yet more transparent, but also in offering training, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. Combined, these programs will make the federal service more attractive and navigable for graduate students.

"The Executive Order establishing the Pathways Programs is a welcome and needed policy initiative," said Jack Knott, Dean of the School of Policy, Planning, and Development at the University of Southern California. "The Pathways Programs will help the federal government compete with the nonprofit and private sectors to hire the best from our nation's graduate programs. If top students are dissuaded from pursuing a career with the federal government, they will most certainly find promising employment elsewhere," he added.

NASPAA looks forward to assisting OPM as it devises rigorous selection processes for Presidential Management Fellows and the Internship and Recent Graduate programs, taking into account the unique situation of graduate students who are highly educated and skilled but who may lack significant work experience. Moreover, since most federal jobs are located outside the Washington DC area, NASPAA will work with colleges and universities across the country to promote the Pathways Programs.

NASPAA has released a series of white papers on building the federal workforce for the 21st century, which detail the importance of improve pathways for graduate students into federal service. The papers are available at www.naspaa.org/PolicyCenter.

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The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) is the membership organization of graduate programs in public administration, public policy, and public affairs. Its 275 members confer more than 10,000 master's degrees annually. NASPAA's mission is to ensure excellence in public service education and promote the ideal of public service, and it is the specialized accreditor of master degree programs in public affairs. www.naspaa.org

Contact: Stuart Heiser
heiser@naspaa.org / (202) 628-8965 x106