

## Episode 57: Spring 2026 Grad Ed Updates

Welcome to Grad-post! I'm your host, Brian S. Mitchell, and we're here to talk about life before, during, and after graduate school and whether an advanced degree is right for you. I'll draw upon my experience as graduate dean and research mentor as well as my network of students, colleagues and experts to bring you the most complete information on graduate education that I can.

Once every few months I give updates on topics we've discussed before, or short items that have recently come across my virtual desk. I have half a dozen things for you today!

First, in [Episode 54](#), I opined over the decisions the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee made regarding professional degree programs, and recent Department of Education decisions to limit the definition of professional programs to 11 for the purposes of student loan eligibility. There has been much concern expressed about the exclusion of nursing, public health, audiology, accounting, and social work to name just a few from those 11 programs. A [recent article in Higher Ed Dive by Ben Unblesbee](#) outlines some of the responses coming from the affected parties requesting reconsideration by the DoEd, including the Council on Education, the Nurse Practitioner Alliance, and the American Academy of Physician Associates. It remains to be seen what the DoEd will do with the roughly 65,000 public comments they received on this topic, but with the deadline for public comment now past, we should have a final determination soon. Stay tuned.

Second, I've routinely promoted the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program – or GRFP – as a potential funding source for those in STEM-related fields to attend graduate school. That pathway seems to have hit a roadblock for some graduate students as it recently came to light that as many as 50 GRFP applications were returned without review this year – an unusually high number. As [explained in an article in Science](#), the applications were deemed ineligible without an explanation as to why. The life sciences appear to be hit particularly hard with rejections, which leads me to believe that the Apparatchiks in charge at NSF are keying on forbidden terms like “diversity” and “equity” as I outlined in [Episode 44](#) even though these terms have completely different meanings in the biological sciences context. Unfortunately, there's little these applicants can do, although an advocacy group called [Grant Witness has a Google document that provides some guidance](#) on how to craft a letter of appeal. I still hold out hope that the GRFP program will return to its mission of preparing the next generation of scientists and promoting a diverse scientific workforce, so I still recommend that you consider applying, but you may want to attend one of the informational sessions they have or speak directly with a program manager to inquire about the appropriateness of your topic.

Third, the war in Iran presents difficulties for many on multiple fronts, but insofar as graduate education is concerned, one major impact has been on staff and students at U.S. institutions with campuses in the Middle East. As reported in the [Chronicle of Higher Education, classes were cancelled](#) at New York University Abu Dhabi, American University of Beirut, and programs in Dubai offered by Southern Methodist and Georgetown Universities, just to name a few. It is unknown if personnel from these campuses have been evacuated or when programs will resume.

In a related vein, number four is that I've provided periodic updates on the ever-changing landscape of non-immigrant visas for study in the United States, including interviews with immigration specialist Kathleen Gasparian in Episodes [29](#) and [39](#), as well as recent changes to the H1-B visa program in [Episode 47](#). Things are getting even more restrictive with the [recent suspension of visa processing to additional countries including Nigeria](#). Effective January 1, 2026 the list of restricted entry countries was expanded by 19. It not only includes Nigeria which is a top ten country of origin for students studying in the United States, but extends the visa processing for Iran. Students from Iran always had a tough road to entry since there were no formal diplomatic relations between our countries, but at least they could seek a visa through other consulates or embassies. That pathway is not closed as well. Listen to how I think restrictions like this will ultimately lead to the diminution of graduate education in the United States in [Episode 38](#).

Fifth, speaking of international students, one of the major English-language assessment services – IELTS – [just announced that they are moving to a computer-based only testing method](#) by August, 2026. According to their website, the skills assessment will be entirely computer based, although test takers in selected markets will still have the option to complete the Writing component on paper with a pen, which will be known as “Writing on Paper.” The “selected markets” in which this option will be available are not listed. The Speaking test will remain a face-to-face interview. None of these changes will affect the scoring system or assessment methods, so the impact to institutional admissions functions should be minimal.

Finally, if you have an offer of admission to a graduate program with financial support such as a stipend, assistantship, or fellowship, remember that you have until April 15 to accept or decline the offer. Check out the [very first episode of Grad-post](#) for more information.

Thank you for joining me today. Please join me again in two weeks for a very special episode with Treviene Harris of the American Council of Learned Societies to discuss their Doctoral Futures program. Remember, all of the links provided in my podcast are available on my website at [grad-post.com](#). There, you'll find more information to help you plan your adventure for an advanced degree.

#### Links

<https://spotifycreators-web.app.link/e/W0hYNvm0c1b>

<https://www.science.org/content/article/nsf-s-flagship-fellowship-program-rejecting-applicants-without-peer-review>

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<https://www.highereddive.com/news/trump-expands-travel-bans-and-restrictions-to-39-countries/808185/>

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<https://ielts.org/news-and-insights/updates-to-ielts-test-delivery>

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