

**Student Focus Group**  
**February, 2004**  
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This report is on a meeting of a group of graduate students at the annual meeting of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools in Charlotte, NC, and various additional small gatherings at the University of South Florida.

Main Themes:

*Health Care:* Providing health care is essential, and is the single largest financial factor for graduate students (e.g. even if stipends aren't that high, if health care is covered it's much less of a problem). Several students observed that the demographics of graduate school are shifting; students tend to be older and/or married, and less likely to have coverage through their parents, even when getting an MS. The change in demographics make health care an even higher priority.

*Funds for Professional Participation:* Surprisingly, many students stressed, that to them, adequate funding to actively participate in their professions through travel to professional meetings was a higher priority to them than additional salary. They would prefer fellowship awards to include a research or travel allowance rather than additional stipend.

*Career Uncertainty:* The students attended a meeting felt that stipends didn't play a huge role in their decision to pursue an advanced degree, and even less so in what field they chose. However, while passion for the subject matter was the guiding role in their choice of field, a major concern was the ability to have a stable career once graduate school was completed. Many were not optimistic about their future options for staying in the field of their choice after graduate school.