



SEFNA

July 9, 2009

Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment

SEFNA Brief: A Comparison of Doctoral Funding Levels Across Federal Programs

Key Findings: *Through a number of agencies, the federal government offers programs to support the training of doctoral students. The one offered through the OSEP¹ provides substantially lower levels of assistance to students and demonstrates greater individual variability than similar federal programs.*

Background: The importance of the federal role in the preparation of doctoral-level personnel is well acknowledged. It helps to produce future leaders in critical areas and is a key component of the nation's economic security, its prestige around the world, and its leading position in research and innovation across all areas. In addition to various loan programs, three federal agencies—NSF, NIH, and Dept. of Ed.—support doctoral preparation through various divisions' programs. They are:

- NSF program established its first program in 1952 to support students preparing for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Its GRF, the largest federal program of its kind, directly funds some 900 new fellows every year.
- NIMH, a division of NIH, in 1953 initiated the Research Training in Mental Deficiency, later renamed the Mental Retardation Developmental Disabilities Behavior Research Training Grant Program. Now managed by NICHD's MRDD Branch, the program awards projects to universities.
- OSEP (then BEH) began a doctoral support program in 1959 that is specifically designed to support the preparation of national leaders (e.g., policy makers, administrators, teacher educators, researchers) in the field of special education.
- In 1974 NIMH began the NRSA program, which targets careers in neuroscience, clinical psychology, sociology, and child development. It follows the funding pattern of other NIH university-based training grant programs.
- With the establishment of the IES in 2003, the Dept. of Ed. began a training grant program to prepare doctoral-level education researchers.

Stipend Comparisons: The stipend support provided through OSEP is the lowest offered through any federal program (See **Table 1** below). Although all other agencies pre-set stipend levels, OSEP funding patterns are highly variable across individual projects, even among those housed at the same university. Stipend levels for full-time students range from \$9,000 to \$24,000 per year, with the typical student receiving slightly more than \$1,000 per month. About one-third of the OSEP projects provide funding to students only during the academic year with a typical stipend of \$15,000; the other two-thirds offer 12-months of support with a typical stipend of \$17,000.

All agencies, except OSEP, set the stipend and other student support levels provided through their training projects. Many agencies have increased these levels in recent years. For example, in 2000, the GRF stipend level \$15,000 was deemed too low, and so, beginning in 2001 the level has been consistently adjusted upward to its current level of \$30,000.

¹For the sake of brevity, the abbreviations for federal agencies, branches, and divisions are used in this brief. They are: National Science Foundation (NSF); Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH); Department of Education (Dept. of Ed.), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD), Mental Retardation Developmental Disabilities Branch (MRDD); National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF), Minority Graduate Research Fellowship (MGRF), and National Research Service Award program (NRSA).

Other Educational Cost Comparisons: In addition to their stipends, each of the aforementioned programs awards funds to help students meet various educational and other expenses (e.g., tuition, travel, research support, health insurance). Again in comparison, OSEP’s package is exceptionally low (see again **Table 1**). While some universities contribute health insurance to OSEP funded doctoral students, slightly more than one-fourth of OSEP projects provide it directly to funded students. OSEP is the only agency that does not mention the provision of health insurance in its program's application guidelines. In 2006 NIH made health insurance an allowable direct cost expense through its related expense category. In the case of those students receiving individual fellowships, universities may pay for health insurance through recovered costs from the institutional allowance category. IES includes the provision of health insurance within the cost-of-education allowance “up to \$10,500 per year per fellow for tuition, health insurance, and normal fees” (IES, 2008, p. 13).

Table 1. Comparison of Doctoral Training Support Across Agencies

Agency	Typical Stipend Amount (12 mos.)	Typical Tuition Support (cost of education allowance)	Other Support (e.g., health insurance, travel funds, research support)	Annual Total	Maximum Duration of Funding
NSF – including GRF	\$30,000	\$10,500	provided through cost of education	\$40,500	3 years of funding across 5 years
NIH: NICHD and NIMH	\$20,772	Up to \$16,000	\$4,200	\$40,972	5 years
OSEP	\$17,000	\$8,500 (varies greatly)	\$1,500 (wide variation)	\$26,000 (no limit specified)	4-year projects (no time-limit for individual students)
IES	\$30,000 (default amount)	\$10,500	\$4,000 (additional requests allowed)	\$41,500 (additional requests allowed)	5 years

Differences in OSEP Support: The OSEP doctoral preparation program lacks standardized funding arrangements, and student support levels are low when compared to those of other agencies. The lack of standardization by OSEP and the ability of project directors to set funding levels for individual projects, results in great variability among OSEP projects, including those operated by the same university. However, it is also important to note that unless more funding is provided to the program, changes in student support levels could cause a reduction in either the overall number of students supported by the program or the number of projects awarded to universities.

Conclusion: OSEP administrators and stakeholders should carefully review and compare this program to those of other agencies. At a minimum, policy makers, federal officials, and university representatives should consider standardizing support levels, proposing a formula for gradually increasing student support, and revising program requirements so students are provided with the option of health insurance.

The Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment (SEFNA) began its work in November 2007. For project briefs and other information, go to www.cgu.edu/SEFNA. Directed by Deborah Deutsch Smith and supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, SEFNA brings together scholars from Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and the nation to evaluate the supply and demand of special education faculty with a focus on new teacher educators to meet the nation’s need for highly qualified special education teachers. This brief was prepared by Deborah Deutsch Smith. Thanks are extended to Melissa Hartley and Anthony Truong for assistance with data collection; and to Roxanne Watson, Susan Mortorff Robb, and this task’s study team (Lou Danielson, Ben Lignugaris-Kraft, Herb Rieth, Naomi Tyler, and Jane West) for their assistance with the final preparation of this document.

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