

**REPORT TO THE
LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**BOARD OF REGENTS/
SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD DOCTORAL SUPPORT
INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE STUDENT AND FACULTY DIVERSITY
OF THE
BOARD OF REGENTS SUPPORT FUND
FY 2017-18 COMPETITION FOR AWARDS TO BEGIN FY 2018-19**

INTRODUCTION

An external reviewer, Dr. John Mayfield, faculty emeritus and former Associate Dean of the Graduate School, Iowa State University, evaluated proposals submitted in FY 2017-18 for funding consideration to the Board of Regents/Southern Regional Education Board Doctoral Support Initiative to Promote Student and Faculty Diversity. Staff provided Dr. Mayfield with the FY 2017-18 Request for Proposals (RFP) and subprogram policy.

Five (5) institutions submitted a total of five (5) proposals in the BoR/SREB Support Initiative. All proposals were submitted under the leadership of the institutions' graduate schools or their equivalent. Proposals were assessed based on the criteria for evaluation and scoring rubric set forth in the FY 2017-18 BoR/SREB Support Initiative Request for Proposals.

After thorough assessment of the merits of each proposal, Dr. Mayfield established a rank order for all of the proposals and recommended a number of student support slots for each. Recommendations were made consistent with the limits of available funding allocated by the Board of Regents.

The total amount of first-year funds requested in the BoR/SREB Fellowships subprogram was \$480,000. Dr. Mayfield was advised that \$150,000 in first-year funding was set aside for the subprogram as part of the Enhancement component of the Board of Regents Support Fund.

The panel recommends that four (4) proposals submitted under the BoR/SREB Support Initiative be funded in the amounts specified in Appendix A. Appendix B consists of brief narrative assessments of submitted proposals.

APPENDIX A

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDING

BoR/SREB Doctoral Support Initiative, FY 2017-18 Competition								
Proposal #	Campus	Annual Funding Requested	Slots Requested*	History & Plans for URM Student Retention and Success (45 points)	Appropriateness of Financial & Academic Support (30 points)	History of & Plans for URM Student Recruitment (25 points)	Total Points (100 Points)	Slots Recommended*
001SREB-18	Louisiana State University and A & M College	\$75,000	5	40	26	20	86	4
004SREB-18	Tulane University	\$150,000	10	35	28	20	83	3
002SREB-18	Louisiana Tech University	\$60,000	4	34	24	20	78	2
005SREB-18	University of Louisiana at Lafayette	\$45,000	3	29	29	18	76	1
003SREB-18	Southern University and A&M College	\$150,000	10	20	25	25	70	0

* Slot = \$15,000 (\$10,000 stipend supplement; \$5,000 SREB DSP membership) per year for three years

APPENDIX B

NARRATIVE ASSESSMENTS

**COMMENTS ON PROPOSALS SUBMITTED UNDER THE BOARD OF REGENTS/
SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD DOCTORAL SUPPORT INITIATIVE TO
PROMOTE STUDENT AND FACULTY DIVERSITY**

FY 2017-18 COMPETITION

001SREB-18 LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A&M COLLEGE
“Board of Regents Graduate Fellow Program 2018-21”
Requested: 5 Student Support Slots

Recommended: 4 Student Support Slots for 3 years = \$180,000

LSU A&M is engaged in long-term and increasingly effective efforts to increase the diversity of its graduate student population, especially its PhD students. The results of these efforts are apparent in the data. In fact, it is remarkable that in the face of declining majority applications and admissions, minority PhD applications and admissions have steadily increased over the past six years. Thus, in the 2016-17 academic year, newly enrolled underrepresented minority PhD students constituted 31% of new domestic students. This is up from 14% only six years earlier. Correspondingly, fall enrollment figures show that the percentage of total domestic PhD students who are categorized as underrepresented minorities increased from 17% to 24% over the same time period. Perhaps just as important, minority students are graduating: the percentage of domestic PhD graduates who are underrepresented minorities has nearly doubled from 15% to 29% over this period. An imperfect, but easy to calculate measure of student success is the ratio of graduations to drops in a given year. This ratio for all domestic students has remained more or less constant over the past six years at about 3.3. For URM students over the same period this ratio has increased from 1.67 to 3.6. High graduation rates are the best possible indicator that a constellation of programs from organized mentoring to the pre-scholars institute are paying dividends. Four years of funding for SREB scholars is guaranteed, though \$20,000 per year may not be competitive in many fields. The proposal should make clear if departments are free to supplement this award. Funding is recommended for four student support slots, for a total of \$60,000 per year for three years.

002SREB-18 LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY
“Increasing Diversity in Doctoral Student Populations at Louisiana Tech University
2018-21”
Requested: 4 Student Support Slots

Recommended: 2 Student Support Slots for 3 years = \$90,000

Louisiana Tech has a solid but not impressive history of recruiting underrepresented minority students to its PhD programs. Total minority enrollment in the targeted programs was seventeen students, constituting 17% of domestic students enrolled in these programs. This is reasonable, but below some other Louisiana institutions in this competition. Enrollments of new underrepresented minority students have trended slightly upward in the past five years. The ratio of underrepresented minority graduations to drops is 3.3 for the past five years, well above the same metric for all domestic students (1.3). This and the observation that no SREB-funded students have dropped without receiving the doctorate indicates that adequate funding combined with mentoring can reduce non-completion rates to low levels. The \$20,000

funding level is adequate in some fields but may be too low to be competitive in some others, and no mention is made of how students will be funded after the first three years. Since most students will take five to six years to finish, this is a major concern. A simple promise that support will continue for two more years with departmental or grant funding should resolve the issue. Last year's decline in underrepresented minority applications will be worrisome if it extends beyond a single year. Funding is recommended for two student support slots, for a total of \$30,000 per year for three years.

003SREB-18 SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AND A&M COLLEGE

“The Pathway to the Professoriate in Public Policy and STEM at Southern University and A&M College”

Requested: 10 Student Support Slots

Recommended: - 0 -

Southern University and A&M College is requesting student support for three PhD programs: Government and Social Science, Math Education, and Environmental Toxicology. Together, the programs enrolled 157 students in the fall of 2016. Of these, 124 were categorized as underrepresented minorities. Over the past five years, an average of 35 underrepresented minority students were recruited annually to these three programs. Nearly all students who apply are admitted, which implies either low selectivity or that students only apply if they have a strong indication that they will be admitted. The narrative does not comment on this. Retention and completion rates are very difficult to determine from the data provided. Form 4B, reporting data from five PhD programs, shows that for the academic years 2012-13 through 2016-17, thirty students graduated and 113 students left the programs without graduating. This would imply that an incoming student has less than a one-in-four chance of graduating with the intended degree. If true, this a serious concern. Table 2 in the proposal narrative, reporting data from 2011-12 through 2014-15, indicates that 123 students graduated over five years. This is better, but still indicates only about half of all incoming students graduate with the intended degree. Form 4C reports only two incoming students received any financial support, and at a minimal level of \$2,500. If this is accurate, it implies that nearly all PhD students in the three programs are self-funded. When absence of funding is combined with a lack of selectivity in admissions, it is easy to understand the low graduation rate. Perhaps data included in the tables are misleading, but these issues are critical and need to be discussed in the narrative. If indeed the programs are lacking funding for PhD students, then ten supplementary support awards could be a major contribution, but what happens to the students after three years of BoRSF support is over? Completing the PhD typically takes five to six years. If there is no continuing support, will these students be able to finish? This issue is also not discussed. Concerns about low completion rates and lack of funding should be addressed in detail in future submissions. No support is recommended.

004SREB-18 TULANE UNIVERSITY

“Board of Regents Doctoral Fellowships at Tulane University”

Requested: 10 Student Support Slots

Recommended: 3 Student Support Slots for 3 years = \$135,000

Tulane has a long history of successful recruitment of underrepresented minority students to its PhD programs, and continues to advance its efforts. Of particular note is the new requirement that departments have a minority recruitment plan in place to be eligible for a \$2,000 recruitment costs grant. The campus hopes that this will prod departments to become fully engaged in minority recruitment; this new initiative may also help address a concern expressed in last year’s BoR/SREB fellowship review that centralizing minority recruitment in the Graduate Dean’s office would move responsibility away from departments and cause them to be less engaged. Looking at the data, total minority enrollment in PhD programs has increased over the past five years, even in the face of declining majority enrollment. Minorities now constitute 24% of total domestic PhD enrollment. Recruitment reflects this, with 28% of new PhD students categorized as minority in 2016, an increase from 12% in 2012. Retention and completion now seem to be bigger issues than recruitment. Calculating the simple ratio of number of students who finish to the number of students who leave their programs in a given year yields 1.1 for underrepresented minority PhD students and 1.4 for all domestic PhD students averaged over the past five years. Such numbers should be of great concern: they imply that roughly one-half of minority first-year doctoral students do not finish, and that the majority ratio is not substantially better. A ratio above 3 seems “healthy.” Tulane needs to study and understand why so many students do not finish their programs and devise a plan to correct the problem. Finally, it should be noted that the call for proposals indicates that the narrative portion of each SREB proposal should be no more than five pages, but Tulane’s proposal includes 18 pages of narrative. Funding is recommended for three student support slots, for a total of \$45,000 per year for three years.

005SREB-18 UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE

“Board of Regents/SREB Graduate Fellowships to Promote Diversity and Inclusion at UL Lafayette”

Requested: 3 Student Support Slots

Recommended: 1 Student Support Slot for 3 years = \$95,000

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette is struggling with low PhD enrollment and, until recently, difficulties with retention. The text indicates there were 24 underrepresented minority PhD students in the fall of 2016. The tables provided are for all doctoral students, not just PhDs, so are difficult to interpret in the context of the proposal. For all doctoral programs, over the past five years, underrepresented minority applications have dropped significantly and newly enrolled underrepresented minority students declined from 27 to nine. In spite of this, total PhD underrepresented minority enrollment has held reasonably constant at around 70. Part of the reason for this may be improving retention. The ratio of underrepresented minority doctoral graduates (data for PhD students is not given) to doctoral students who drop out has in recent history been less than 0.5 (i.e. more than twice as many students drop as graduate); numbers for majority students were only slightly better. This problem was recognized by the university administration and various efforts to remedy the problem may be working. Academic year

2016-17 showed a major reversal, with the graduation to drop ratio improving to 2.1 for all U.S. doctoral students and 1.7 for underrepresented minority doctoral students. If this trend continues, it will represent a major success. The experience with SREB students shows that attention to retention leads to good results. The first two cohorts of SREB scholars resulted in four students being admitted and all four leaving without a PhD degree. Since that time 100% of SREB scholars have either finished or are progressing to completion. The current funding scheme, introduced to accommodate changes to the BoRSF program, will offer five years of support with the first three years at \$28,000 per year. This should be competitive. A novel change is that funding priority will be given to new underrepresented minority students who are entering departments that already have underrepresented minority students. This should provide better opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring and less danger of isolation. Both are known to improve retention and completion rates. Providing data for PhD students rather than all doctoral students would be very helpful to future reviewers. The three support slots requested seems reasonable, though competition in the program does not allow that number to be recommended. Funding is recommended for one student support slot, for a total of \$15,000 per year for three years.

APPENDIX C

LIST OF PROPOSALS SUBMITTED

**BoR/SREB Doctoral Support Initiative to Promote Student and Faculty Diversity
2017-18 Competition
Proposals Submitted**

Proposal #	PI Name(s)	Institution	Proposal Title	Slots Requested	Funds Requested
001SREB-18	Michelle Massé	LSU A&M	Board of Regents Graduate Fellow Program 2018-21	5	Y1: \$75,000 Y2: \$75,000 <u>Y3: \$75,000</u> Total: \$225,000
002SREB-18	Bala Ramachandran	Louisiana Tech	Increasing Diversity in Doctoral Student Populations at Louisiana Tech University 2018-21	4	Y1: \$60,000 Y2: \$60,000 <u>Y3: \$60,000</u> Total: \$180,000
003SREB-18	Habib Mohamadian	Southern A&M	The Pathway to the Professoriate in Public Policy and STEM at Southern University and A&M College	10	Y1: \$150,000 Y2: \$150,000 <u>Y3: \$150,000</u> Total: \$450,000
004SREB-18	Michael Cunningham	Tulane	Board of Regents Doctoral Fellowships at Tulane University	10	Y1: \$150,000 Y2: \$150,000 <u>Y3: \$150,000</u> Total: \$450,000
005SREB-18	Mary Farmer-Kaiser	UL Lafayette	Board of Regents/SREB Graduate Fellowships to Promote Diversity and Inclusion at UL Lafayette	3	Y1: \$45,000 Y2: \$45,000 <u>Y3: \$45,000</u> Total: \$135,000

BoR/SREB PROPOSAL SUBMISSION SUMMARY, FY 2017-18

NUMBER OF PROPOSALS SUBMITTED: 5

SUPPORT SLOTS REQUESTED: 32

FIRST-YEAR FUNDS REQUESTED: \$480,000

TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED: \$1,440,000