



May 19, 2025

The Honorable Jerry Moran
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Moran and Padilla,

On behalf of SHPE, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, we write to express our sincere gratitude for your leadership in introducing the Relieving Economic Strain to Enhance American Resilience & Competitiveness in Higher Education & Research (RESEARCHER) Act.

This legislation comes at a critical time. More than half of engineering master's graduates and over 60% of PhD graduates from U.S. universities are foreign nationals who leave the country after earning their degrees, resulting in the loss of approximately 16,000 highly skilled individuals every year. This annual exodus exacerbates the projected shortfall of 17,000 advanced engineering degrees by the end of the decade, underscoring the relevance of the RESEARCHER Act in tackling this skills gap¹.

Advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are essential to the nation's ability to drive meaningful innovation, advancing scientific research, and maintaining strong national security. These degrees provide deep and specialized training that is needed to fuel and sustain global leadership and economic growth. However, shortages of skilled STEM professionals are no longer a distant threat, but a present reality that limits our economic growth and technological progress if left unaddressed.

As the largest and longest-standing organization dedicated to expanding the STEM talent pipeline, SHPE is deeply committed to identifying, understanding, and addressing the academic and non-academic barriers our members experience throughout their careers. Our internal research plays a central role in shaping our programming, meeting our members where needed most as they prepare for and transition into the workforce.

Particularly, our data consistently shows that 60% of our graduate students and postdoctoral members report having difficulty balancing academic and personal responsibilities, and 48% of them cited experiencing financial constraints. For many, these challenges are often juggled with caregiving duties, as 9.3% of our graduate members identify as parents or caregivers. While digging

¹ [CHIPPING AWAY: Assessing and Addressing the Labor Market Gap Facing the U.S. Semiconductor Industry](#)



deeper into our graduate membership data, we discovered that 41% reported facing food insecurity "often" or "sometimes," and 28.1% experienced food or housing insecurity.

While financial constraints can take many forms, these findings highlight an urgent need to better support graduate students as they work to achieve their academic goals, while often struggling to meet their most basic living needs.

Further, in line with the RESEARCHER Act goals, SHPE's mission also focuses on strengthening the long-term pipeline of STEM professionals with advanced degrees. Our data proves that there's a strong ambition among our members to seek higher degrees, noting 54% of our undergraduate members aspire to earn a master's or doctoral degree, and over 41% of our graduate members plan to pursue a doctorate². Despite these outcomes indicating their strong desire to pursue advanced degrees, only 3.6% of doctoral degrees in engineering were awarded to those that identify as Hispanic out of the 4.9% master's degree awarded³. This gap between ambition and attainment suggests that many talented students face persistent barriers that limit the potential of highly capable and motivated students.

As such, it is important that we continue to investigate and address these barriers to ensure our STEM students can reach their full potential.

It is our hope that the RESEARCHER Act will provide our nation's research enterprise with the tools and insights needed to better serve this critical segment of the STEM workforce, especially in high-growth, high-impact sectors like advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies. By addressing the academic, financial, and personal challenges faced by aspiring researchers, this legislation can help unlock the full potential of our domestic talent pool and ensure a more inclusive, innovative, and competitive future for the United States.

Thank you again for your leadership and commitment to strengthening our nation's STEM ecosystem. We look forward to working with you to advance the legislation.

Suzanna Valdez-Wolfe, Chief Executive Officer
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE)

² [Society of Hispanic Professional engineers, Latino Donor Collaborative, \(September 27, 2023\). 2023 SHPE-LDC U.S. Latinos in Engineering and Tech Report](#)

³ [Engineering-Engineering-Technology-By-the-Numbers-2023-27-October-2024](#)