

# The Post and Courier

## 'Best and Brightest' a vital investment in state's future

By Perry Halushka  
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In the mid-1990s, two young men decided to enroll in Stanford University's doctoral program in computer science. Shortly thereafter they founded Google, creating a huge new business not far from Stanford's campus.

The success of Sergei Brin and Larry Page was no accident, because the pieces were all there:

- 1) They were extremely talented undergraduate students.
- 2) They chose a top-rated doctoral program.
- 3) And they were in an environment where entrepreneurship was considered to be a natural partner to scholarship.

South Carolinians know that one of the most powerful investments we can make is in the future of our best and brightest young people. We already do that at the undergraduate level with our Palmetto, Hope and Life scholarships. We also are building a great infrastructure of research excellence with our Centers of Economic Excellence endowed chairs program. South Carolina should now take the next and final step, by making sure our investment in the best and brightest undergraduate students is translated into retaining them in South Carolina as graduate students who will remain in the state once they receive their graduate degree.

It is the intellectual capital of these graduates that will drive new and important discoveries and economic development via creating intellectual property that leads to patents, licenses and then new products that in turn generate new jobs and income.

The discoveries made by faculty and graduate students provide the opportunity to create intellectual property which comes at a significant time for Charleston with the opening of the S.C. Research Authority MUSC Innovation Center that will house start-up biotech companies, the arrival of Boeing and the announcement of Clemson's new wind turbine initiative.

Students in both our undergraduate and graduate institutions represent one of South Carolina's most important investments. Those in graduate school working toward doctorates have the potential to become our next generation of research scientists.

By working with professors on cutting-edge research projects, graduate students also make the state more competitive for federal and industrial research funding — an enterprise that by itself supports a large number of high-value, high-wage jobs. But graduate students do more than work in labs; they serve as a conduit to bring new knowledge and ideas into the mainstream economy.

Our state is fortunate to have major research universities with active research and graduate training programs as well as strong comprehensive colleges and universities with outstanding faculty. The state has a major investment in Centers of Economic Excellence, which have helped bring outstanding scientists to our three research universities. These world-renowned scientists have track records of training students who themselves have gone on to make major discoveries. Faculty at all our state's colleges and universities are ideally poised to train the best and brightest students from South Carolina.

But if we do not provide incentives to keep these students in the state, other states will. Our plan, the Best and the Brightest, would identify those very bright students early in college and place them in a unique program that will incentivize them to stay in South Carolina to receive their graduate education and become the next generation of faculty and research scientists.

These undergraduate students would spend their summers working in the research laboratories of our state colleges and universities. As college seniors, they would work with a faculty advisor from a graduate program at one of our three research universities, and perhaps take selected graduate-level courses while still at their undergraduate institutions. When they graduate from undergraduate school, they already may have finished one year of graduate school during the summers, which would reduce the time it takes to obtain a doctorate by a year.

This program would be available only to those students who are judged by their faculty as truly outstanding and likely to stay in South Carolina for faculty, corporate or government positions.

A second program that would help the state achieve greater economic impact is the Innovations Scholars Program. This program could provide enhanced stipends (beyond the current level) to truly exceptional graduates who state their intention to seek employment in the state after receiving a graduate degree from a participating S.C. institution.

Many institutions in neighboring states have the interest as well as the capability to recruit our best and brightest graduate students — students whose undergraduate educations have been provided courtesy of the S.C. taxpayer. We need to complement the investments we are making via the Palmetto and Life scholarships to keep this from happening. At this time of economic crisis, let us take advantage of the opportunity to develop new support programs for graduate students who will enhance the economic development of our state.

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