

Minorities at financial disadvantage in earning STEM Ph.D.s



File Photo: President Barack Obama looks through a transmission electron microscope as he tours a semiconductor manufacturing facility at the Intel Corporation in Hillsboro, Ore., Friday, Feb. 18, 2011. (Photo by Carolyn Kaster/AP Photo)

A new study by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) [suggests](#) that many African Americans and Hispanics owe much more than their white and Asian counterparts by the time they graduate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Only 51% of African-Americans and 64% of Hispanics earning STEM Ph.D.s graduated debt-free in 2010 while 73% of white and Asian STEM Ph.D.s avoided debt. African American women felt an even greater burden, 27% of those in STEM fields accumulated more than \$30,000 in debt. Comparably, the figure for white and Asian women was 10%.

The researchers “note that their findings suggest the cost of a degree needs to be a larger consideration in any initiative trying to attract more minorities and women into STEM careers.”

President Obama has advocated the pursuit of STEM fields, committing \$3.1 billion to nationally improve STEM education. The recent failure of Congress to fix federally subsidized student loans can only hurt students pursuing STEM Ph.D.s.

Stafford student loans doubled Monday soaring from 3.4% to 6.8%. Congress’ Joint Economic Committee estimated the increase would cost the average college student an additional \$2,600.

Congress’ failure to prevent a hike in student loan rates may deter minorities from pursuing STEM graduate degrees because minorities with STEM PH.D.s “were more likely than whites and Asians to have taken on debt as undergraduates.”