

Graduate students under the ax

In four months, barring a change in military draft rules, graduate students by the thousands will be filing into camp for basic training.

Deferments end in June for students beginning graduate work since June of last year, and according to the military practice of taking eldest men first, they are the ones who will be filling military ranks next year — unless a Presidential directive changes the order of callup.

That means 60 percent of the first and second year graduate classes throughout the country next year.

As anguished cries went out from the academic community last week, following Congressional hearings, there was no sign from executive offices that a change is forthcoming. Hoping to prod some action, an education subcommittee, under the chairmanship of Representative Edith Green (D-Ore.), expressed "deep concern" in letters to the President, the Selective Service System and the House Armed Services Committee. "The current draft policy affecting graduate students is intolerable," said Mrs. Green.

For a temporary solution, the President could order the draft to drop its eldest-first policy and to draw equally, according to numbers, from seven age levels—19 through 25. He could also defer all graduate students during the course of their studies, but the justice of doing so has apparently been the cause of such executive infighting.

For years, graduate students have been able to avoid the draft—by the time they leave school, they are too old to serve. The practice is no longer possible, but it has left antagonism and a sense that graduate students deserve no privileges.

If the justice of the problem is complicated, its mathematics are simple. The estimated draft call for 1968 is 240,000 men; that, however, is a budget figure; supplemental appropriations for a larger force are not unlikely. There are some 264,000 graduating seniors and first-year graduate students who are eligible for the draft. Under present policies, virtually all of them will be taken, leaving for graduate school, as has been said, "women, the lame and the weak." Some 300,000 men with BA degrees earned since last June are ineligible by reason of physical disqualification, occupational deferment, or because they are medical students (facing a special, later, doctor's draft), veterans or fathers.

Without a change in the draft policy, says John Morse of the American

Council of Education, the first two years of graduate school next September will have about 60 percent lower enrollment that would normally be expected.

"This couldn't help but be a serious breach," says Dr. Nathan W. Pusey, Harvard University president. By forcing a two-year hiatus in graduate school, he says, the draft would be breaking off the continuous supply of teachers and cutting into higher education in midstream. Recovering the flow would take years, says Dr. Pusey.

He favors taking draftees from all levels of graduate school, thereby not penalizing one or two classes. Under present rules, graduate students now past their second year may be deferred at the option of local boards—in itself a variable, arbitrary process. Local boards have, in the past, used their own judgment on drafting graduate students, regardless of national policy, and have created such odd situations as that in Kentucky where half the boards draft graduate students; the rest do not.

Dr. David Carpenter, chief of the graduate academic programs branch at the Office of Education, believes draft boards may still use some local discretion in drafting the now vulnerable graduate students, even if nothing is done to halt their wholesale callup. "I have a hunch that the graduate in engineering or physics is less likely to be drafted than the student of classics," says Dr. Carpenter.

It's this kind of selection—and competition among disciplines for special treatment—that Dr. Pusey and other academic leaders find highly objectionable. "I'm strongly opposed to maintaining categories for deferment," says Dr. Pusey. "Most of the people in the academic world are."

There's enough rivalry in the physical sciences, mathematics and engineering without having it exacerbated by draft policies," he says. "I would hope we will treat all graduate students alike."

In any case, he points out, a math major is not necessarily more critical to the nation than a major in Chinese literature.

If the President has not already decided to let matters stand, he has several alternatives for handling the graduate problem.

He can draw next year's draftees from all age levels, thereby taking 25 percent rather than 60 percent of the first and second year graduate students. Such action is possible, but if that policy were pursued for more than one year, it would put every eligible

man under maximum liability for three, four and five years. How many men would gamble time and money on graduate training if they had to face the draft every year?

Another alternative is to switch, after a year of readjustment, to a "prime age" group—the 19-year-olds—and feed into that group all those receiving baccalaureate degrees. This would create a draft pool every year of, by some estimates, 500,000 to 600,000 men. Anyone making it through his year of maximum vulnerability would fall back into a safer category. Many educators favor this combined approach.

A third route is to call a year's moratorium on drafting graduate students, giving time to "assess the pain if we cut off our leg," says Mrs. Betty Vetter, an eloquent defender of graduate deferments at the private Scientific Manpower Commission.

Mrs. Vetter sees no good alternative to graduate deferments across the board. Graduate study is in the national interest, she says. The main complaint—that students stay in school until age 26 and slip sideways out of the draft—is no longer valid. They are now callable until age 35.

A student coming out with a higher degree would immediately go into the draft pool, with the exception of those whose occupations are at that moment critical. "We can't look ahead five years and predict what jobs will be critical," says Mrs. Vetter. The only thing to do is to defer all students and then select.

Mrs. Vetter even has an answer to the complaint that Negroes carry the burden of military service. The proportion of Negroes in the service is 11 percent, no higher than that of the population, she points out.

But more important, she says, this is the first year that a substantial, though still small, number of young Negro men are coming out of college ready for graduate school. There are relatively few Negroes in graduate studies now, but three times as many are prepared for next year.

If they are drafted, "we'll throw it all away," says Mrs. Vetter, "and it can't make any difference to the military."

It seems unlikely that across-the-board graduate deferments will be forthcoming this year, particularly since two proponents of graduate deferments, John Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, are leaving their Cabinet posts.