Understanding the **Changing Market** for Professional Master's Programs

An Introduction for Deans and Other Academic Leaders

Academic Affairs
Forum

Understanding the Changing Market for Professional Master's Programs

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Academic Affairs Forum

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Available Beyond Your Membership

The COE Forum

Supporting Educational Innovation Across Program Types and Delivery Models

The COE Forum provides deans of continuing and professional education with market research and advice to help them—and other deans on campus—identify, launch, and grow successful academic degree, certificate, and noncredit programs. We work with a diverse network of institutions that share a common set of challenges in serving nontraditional students.

Working with Members Across the Spectrum of Nontraditional Education

Professional Master's

- How can we support academic leaders in designing financially viable programs?
- What are the most innovative internship, capstone, and experiential learning concepts?

Certificates

- How do we convert single course takers into certificate completers?
- What disciplines are best suited for "stackable" credentials?

Noncredit

- How can we tailor offerings to match employer tuition reimbursement policies?
- How fast will alternative credentialing go mainstream, and how will it affect demand?

- Marketing and Recruiting
- Market Research
- Student Experience and Outcomes
- Organizational Models

Online Education

- How can we ensure consistent quality of online courses in a decentralized institution?
- How do we train, motivate, and compensate faculty to teach online?

Degree Completion

- What articulation policies grow enrollments while sustaining quality and student success?
- What advising models and technologies have the highest ROI?

Executive Education

- How can we incentivize and run interdisciplinary programs drawing from different units?
- How do we cultivate long-term relationships with employers?

COE Forum Services and Capabilities

Real-time employer demand data for degrees across all US markets

Comprehensive database of degree and certificate programs

Customized market research reports

New program launch plans and recommendations

To learn more about the COE Forum, email us at coeforum@eab.com or call 202-266-6400.

Advisors to Our Work

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Executive Summary

A Market That Is Growing—and Changing

Enrollment in master's programs has exploded in the last two decades, leaving many to wonder if the market for new programs is already gone. Yet the market for master's degrees is both growing and changing. Across the next decade, master's degrees are projected to grow far faster than degrees at any other level. By 2022, experts predict, master's degrees will account for nearly a third of all degrees awarded.

This new growth will come primarily from professional master's programs focused on specific job skills that help students gain a new job or advance in an existing position. These programs will, however, look very different from the historically popular professional programs (such as the MBA, JD, and MEd) that account for the majority of graduate degrees added in recent years. With falling demand and barriers to expansion, those degrees now face slower growth as well as increased competition.

In the core graduate degree disciplines of business, law, and education, the best growth opportunities lie in creating specialized programs—such as the master's in finance or master of laws (LLM)—that appeal to new populations of students, make use of existing high-cost resources, and don't devalue existing degrees.

However, the fastest rates of growth in master's degrees across the next decade will take place outside the fields that currently dominate enrollments. Programs in business, law, education, and health care now award 62% of all graduate degrees, but except for health care these fields are not growing at an especially fast rate. Instead, the fastest growth lies in niche programs that are customized to new and rapidly changing roles, such as cybersecurity, data analytics, and health informatics. These programs are commonly housed outside the major professional schools and tend to cross traditional fields and disciplines.

As niche programs are tied so closely to professional opportunities, many of which are regional, demand may be concentrated in particular geographic markets. Unlike traditional master's programs, which depend on brand recognition and rankings to attract students, niche programs can attract students by "micro-targeting" a specific need in a specific industry to a specific student segment.

Focusing on Student Segments

In both core disciplines and new niche fields, the key to capturing emerging market growth is customizing offerings not just to "working professionals" but to distinct segments within this group—career starters, career advancers, career changers, and career crossers—through features such as flexible delivery, stackable credentials, practical experience, accelerated format, interdisciplinary pathways, and professional development.

These features break through the constraints of geography, schedule, age, and academic preparation that have historically and artificially limited the master's degree marketplace. Freed of these constraints, professional master's programs appeal to the needs of a much larger population.

A Market That Is Growing— and Changing

Graduate Degree Enrollment in the Decade Ahead

SECTION

1

The Next Decade's Growth Opportunity

Master's Degrees Growing Faster Than Any Other Degree Level

Enrollment in master's programs has exploded in the last two decades, leaving many to wonder if the market for new programs is already gone. Yet the market for master's degrees is both growing and changing. Across the next decade, master's degrees are projected to grow far faster than degrees at any other level. By 2022, experts predict, master's degrees will account for nearly a third of all degrees awarded.

Projected Growth by Award Level

2012–2013 to 2022–2023
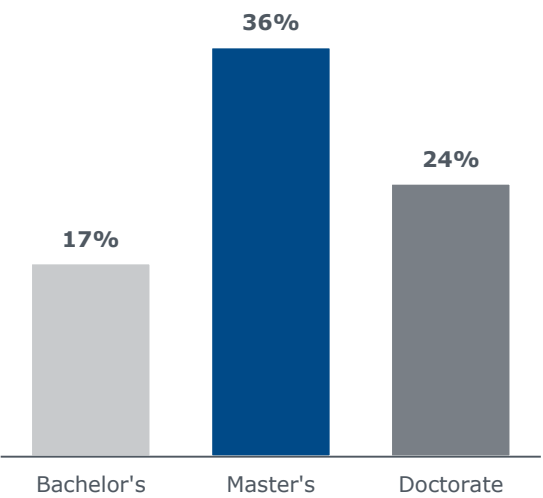
Current and Projected Degree Completions by Award Level

	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate
	17%	36%	24%

2012-13: Doctoral 6%, Master's 28%, Bachelor's 66%

2022-23: Doctoral 6%, Master's 31%, Bachelor's 63%

Legend: Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral
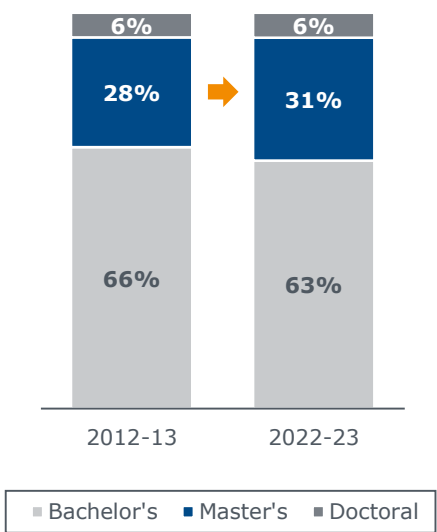
Growth Concentrated in Professional Master's

Very Different from Traditional Master's in Market, Delivery, and Goals

This new growth will come primarily from professional master's programs focused on specific job skills that help students gain a new job or advance in an existing position. These programs tend to be part time and low residence, draw on multiple academic departments, make significant use of adjunct faculty, and serve a market of older, professional students who can pay full tuition. In these ways, professional master's programs differ significantly from traditional master's programs that provide a stepping stone to a PhD.

Traditional Master's		**Professional Master's**
Full-time, residential	⟶	Part-time, low residence
Thesis	⟶	Project or work experience
Path to PhD	⟶	Path to employment
Designed around faculty research interests	⟶	Designed around employer hiring interests
Taught exclusively by tenure-stream faculty	⟶	Taught by tenure-stream faculty and adjuncts
Housed within single department	⟶	Cross-disciplinary/multiple departments
Financial aid available	⟶	Typically self-pay
Younger, less experienced students	⟶	Often older students with work experience

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Yesterday's Opportunities

Historically Popular Programs Face Falling Demand, Barriers to Expansion

Today's high-growth programs will also differ from the professional programs that drove the last two decades' growth. Programs such as the MBA, JD, MEd, and degrees in the health professions account for the majority of graduate degrees added in recent years. However, with falling demand and barriers to expansion, these degrees now face slower growth as well as increased competition.

Graduate Degree Completions by Discipline
2012–2013

Business	197K	↓ Declining MBA demand due to market saturation and wavering value
Education	179K	↓ Declining MEd demand due to policy upheaval and new competitors
Health Care	157K	↕ Rising applications, but limited capacity due to clinical sites and faculty
Law	55K	↓ Declining JD demand due to weak job market and high student debt

Pie chart: All Other Fields 38%, Four Largest Fields 62%

Policy upheavals have weakened demand for master's of education degrees, and demand for JDs and traditional MBAs is declining in the face of market saturation, wavering value, weak job market, and high student debt. Even if demand were rising, accreditation standards, high fixed costs of faculty and facilities, and potential adverse effects on rankings make expanding enrollment in these programs difficult or impossible. Programs in the health professions are seeing applications rise, but difficulty finding enough clinical placements and faculty is impeding growth here as well.

Specialized Programs in Core Disciplines

Using Existing Capacity to Reach New Markets of Students

In these historically popular disciplines, the best growth opportunities lie in creating specialized programs—such as the masters in marketing and communications or master of laws (LLM)—that appeal to new populations of students, make use of existing high-cost resources, and don't devalue existing degrees.

Growth in MBA and Specialized Business Master's, 2007–2008 to 2011–2012[1]

Enrollments Reported by US Institutions to AACSB

11%	**73%**
MBA	Specialized Business Master's (non-MBA)
(from 141K to 156K)	*(from 37K to 64K)*

Growth in Law Degrees Completed by Award Level 2001–2002 to 2012–2013

26%	**87%**
Doctoral Degrees (JD)	Master's Degrees (LLM, MS)
(from 38.7K to 47.8K)	*(from 3.8K to 7.1K)*

Fastest Growth Outside Core Fields

Niche Programs Micro-targeted to New and Rapidly Changing Roles

However, the fastest rates of growth in master's degrees across the next decade will take place outside the fields that currently dominate enrollments. Programs in business, law, education, and health care now award 62% of all graduate degrees, but except for health care these fields are not growing at an especially fast rate. Instead, the fastest growth lies in master's programs designed for new and rapidly changing niche fields, such as cybersecurity, data analytics, and health informatics.

Growth in Master's Degrees Conferred for Select Disciplines

Absolute Growth in Degrees Conferred from AY 2006-07 to 2012-13

Bubble size and label indicate absolute growth in degrees conferred

Percentage Growth (y-axis)

- Criminal Justice 4,723
- Engineering Tech 2,397
- Interdisciplinary Sciences 3,595
- Transportation 636
- Health Care 40,404
- Recreation and Fitness 3,136
- Law[1] 2,656
- Public Admin/Social Work 13,123
- Engineering 10,051
- Psychology 8,247
- Business 42,203
- Education -8,666

Number of Degrees Conferred (x-axis: 0, 50,000, 100,000, 150,000, 200,000, 250,000)

These niche programs are commonly housed outside the major professional schools and tend to cross disciplinary boundaries. As they are tied so closely to professional opportunities, many of which are regional, demand may be concentrated in particular geographic markets. Unlike traditional master's programs, which depend on brand recognition and rankings to attract students, niche programs can attract students by "micro-targeting" a specific need in a specific industry.

1) Data for master's degrees in law only; does not include JD.

Looking Beyond 'Working Professionals'

Designing Programs to Serve Distinct Market Segments

In both core disciplines and new niche fields, the key to capturing emerging market growth is customizing offerings not just to "working professionals" but to distinct segments within this group. The professional audience includes a range of current and prospective workers with varied needs, including career starters, career advancers, career changers, and career crossers.

	Entry into new field	Advancement in current field	
	Career Starters Recent graduates seeking professional degree before entering workforce • Accelerated format • Stackable credentials • Practical experience	**Career Advancers** Mid-career professionals seeking graduate degrees for promotion or raise • Flexible delivery • Stackable credentials • Professional development	*In related discipline*
	Career Changers Mid-career adults seeking graduate degrees to move into new fields • Accelerated format • Interdisciplinary pathways • Practical experience	**Career Crossers** Mid-career professionals seeking cross-training to advance in current fields • Flexible delivery • Interdisciplinary pathways • Professional development	*In unrelated discipline*

Academic Background (vertical axis)

Professional Goals (horizontal axis)

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

What Working Professionals Want

Common Attributes of Effectively Designed Programs

The most successful programs offer features—such as flexible delivery, stackable credentials, practical experience, accelerated format, interdisciplinary pathways, and professional development—that increase the ease and value of earning the degree. Each feature exists in at least modest tension with one other. For example, part-time programs with flexible delivery require longer time-to-completion. Program creators need a thorough understanding of their specific market segment to choose the features and trade-offs that align best with prospective students' needs.

Flexible Delivery

- Accommodates adults with competing professional and personal commitments
- May expand audience to include new geographic and demographic markets

Accelerated Format

- Reduces opportunity cost for those taking time off of work for degree
- May also reduce price, depending on credit and tuition structures

Stackable Credentials

- Allows students to pick out modular, often specialized, parts of degrees
- Encourages students to apply credits toward later, more advanced credentials

Interdisciplinary Pathways

- Tailors content and pedagogy to students formally trained in another discipline
- Provides common knowledge base to students with varied backgrounds

Practical Experience

- Fulfills employer demand for new hires with work experience
- Enhances employment outcomes by producing better-prepared graduates

Professional Development

- Encourages application of program content in current work setting
- Allows for networking, mentorship, and other career advancement benefits

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Accessing a Much Larger Market

Program Design Breaks Through Artificial Constraints on Enrollment

Collectively, these features break through the constraints of geography, schedule, age, and academic preparation that have artificially limited the master's degree marketplace in the past. Freed of these constraints, professional master's programs can access a far larger market than ever before.

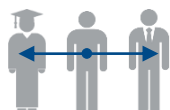### Obstacles to Enrollment in Master's Programs

Geography

"I can't travel or move to this program."

Schedule

"I can't fit this program into my full-time work schedule."

Age or Work Experience

"I'm too young *(or too old)* and have too little *(or too much)* work experience for this program."

Academic Preparation

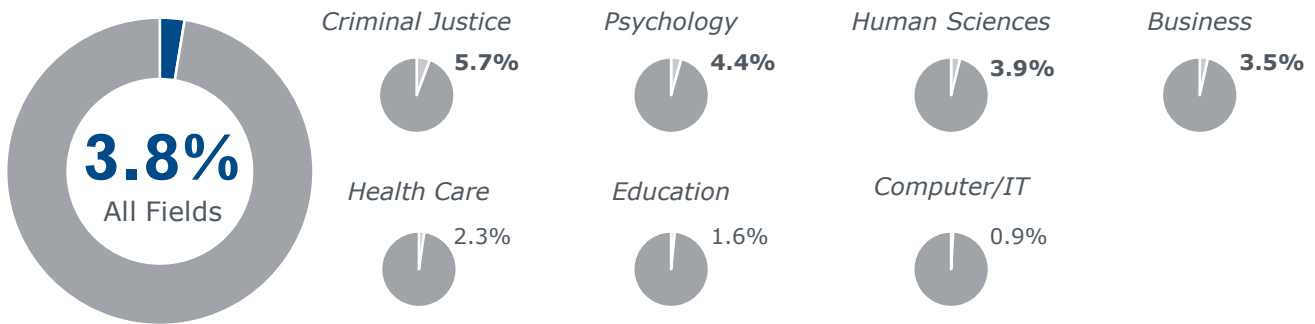"I have the skills for this program—but not the standard qualifications."

Worries of Market Concentration Overblown

Even the Largest Provider Has a Relatively Small Share

With online delivery expanding institutions' geographic reach, some worry that the market for master's degrees will concentrate in a few large, national players. Yet evidence shows these fears to be overblown. Even institutions that have invested most aggressively in national expansion have managed to secure no more than a tiny fragment of the market.

University of Phoenix's Share of Online Master's Degree Conferred

2012-2013

3.8%
All Fields

| *Criminal Justice* **5.7%** | *Psychology* **4.4%** | *Human Sciences* **3.9%** | *Business* **3.5%** |

| *Health Care* 2.3% | *Education* 1.6% | *Computer/IT* 0.9% |

The University of Phoenix illustrates just how unlikely it is that a few large players will dominate the online master's degree market. The University of Phoenix is currently the largest university in the nation; in the 2012-2013 school year it had 374,006 degree-seeking students and conferred over 14,147 master's degrees through online programs. Even after the recent backlash against for-profit institutions, it still maintains 112 campuses across the country. It also has a marketing budget of about $558 million. But this single biggest player, with all those funds behind it, still has less than 4% of the online master's market. Its share is greater in some fields (such as criminal justice, where it confers almost 6 percent of degrees), but relatively small overall. It's hard to imagine that one (or even ten) institutions like Phoenix could squeeze out all other universities. In general, we think you have more to fear from your local competitors and peers than from large, national entities.

Tables Turned

For-Profits Losing Online Share to Nonprofit Institutions

As more nonprofits colleges and universities begin to offer fully online degrees, they are now taking market share away from for-profits. Many students prefer a name they know and would rather earn a degree from a reputable state university than an institution they have only seen advertisements for.

Online Market Share by Control

2010-2013
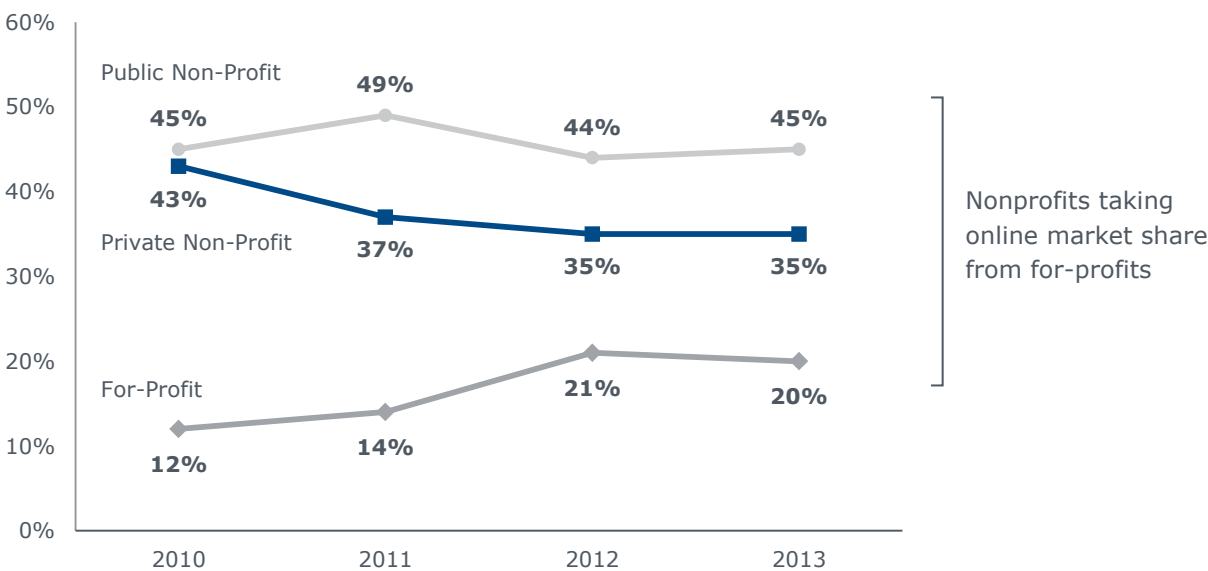
Nonprofits taking online market share from for-profits

Best Strategy for Growing Tuition Revenue

Professional Graduate Programs Insulated from Key Challenges

For most institutions, growing professional graduate programs is the fastest and least difficult way to increase tuition revenue substantially. On average, launching a new professional master's program requires 18 months[1]—far less than the time required to achieve comparable gains in tuition revenue through other channels. More importantly, professional master's programs are insulated from many of the daunting challenges to growing tuition revenue at the undergraduate level.

		Undergraduate Programs	New Professional Master's
	Demand Growth	Declines in college-age population, difficult economy limiting growth	Program design and delivery removing artificial constraints on market
	Institutional Selectivity and Brand	Difficult to grow enrollment without lowering admission standards	Specialized programs have little or no impact on rankings and brand
	Tuition Pricing	Tuition caps at many publics; students unable/ unwilling to absorb increases	More flexibility pricing degrees at market rates
	Use of Adjunct Faculty	Pushback, quality concerns from increasing reliance on adjuncts	Fewer concerns over lower-cost instruction by professionals working in field

At the undergraduate level, institutions face a host of demographic and economic challenges to growing enrollment. Expanding undergraduate classes may mean lowering admission standards. Bachelor's degrees are often subject to strict tuition guidelines at public institutions, and all institutions are finding the undergraduate market increasingly unwilling and unable to absorb steep increases in tuition. If enrollments do increase, institutions face the challenge of either hiring additional, expensive faculty or managing pushback and quality concerns related to increasing reliance on adjuncts.

By contrast, institutions can expand professional master's programs with less impact on selectivity and brand, and they may have more flexibility pricing professional degrees at market rates. Finally, these programs can make use of adjunct instructors with far less protest, since it makes sense to have professionals in the field teach other working professionals.

EAB

Reaching New Students in Core Professional Fields

Specialized Programs in Education, Business, Law, and Health Care

SECTION

2

MEd: A Degree Under Scrutiny

K-12 Policy Upheaval Threatens Demand for Master's of Education

The most popular degrees in education, business, and law are facing serious threats to enrollment. Over the last few years, states have scrutinized teacher education, and several have rolled back policies that had guaranteed automatic salary bumps to teachers with advanced degrees. This, combined with frozen school budgets, sluggish hiring, and changes to the K-12 teaching environment (such as a growing emphasis on assessment), has made the master's in education a less desirable degree.

Average Annual Percentage Change in Master's Degrees Awarded in Education

Period	Change
2003-2013	1%
2009-2013	-2%
2012-2013	-6%

Acceleration of downward trend
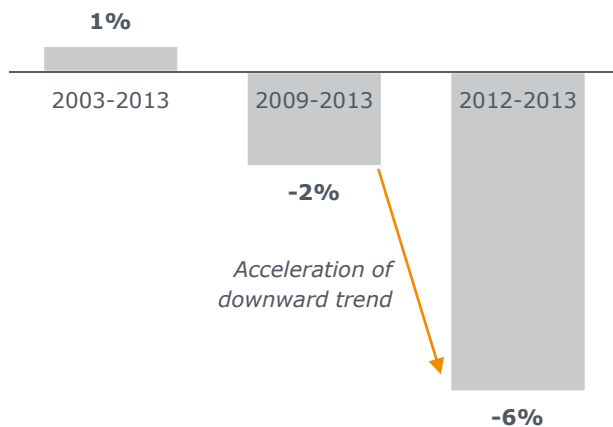
THE CHRONICLE
of Higher Education

Duncan: Rewarding Teachers for Master's Degrees Is a Waste of Money

EDUCATION WEEK

Education Master's Programs: Add Value or Shut Down

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Loss of Master's Bump Has Impact on Teachers, Grad Schools

MBA: No Longer an Exclusive Degree

Many Questioning Degree's Return on Investment

Business schools have also seen softening demand for their flagship programs. Some of this decline is cyclical; MBA enrollments typically tick up when a recession begins and then decline as the economy recovers and students go back to work. But this time we're also seeing public opinion question the value of the degree. Many feel this increasingly common degree no longer delivers a sufficient return on investment for most students.

MBA Programs Reporting Decline in Application Volume

Chart data:

Year	2-Year Full-Time Programs	1-Year Full-Time Programs	Part-Time Programs
2010	49%	43%	44%
2011	67%	57%	46%
2012	51%	44%	42%
2013	46%	46%	53%
2014	35%	60%	54%
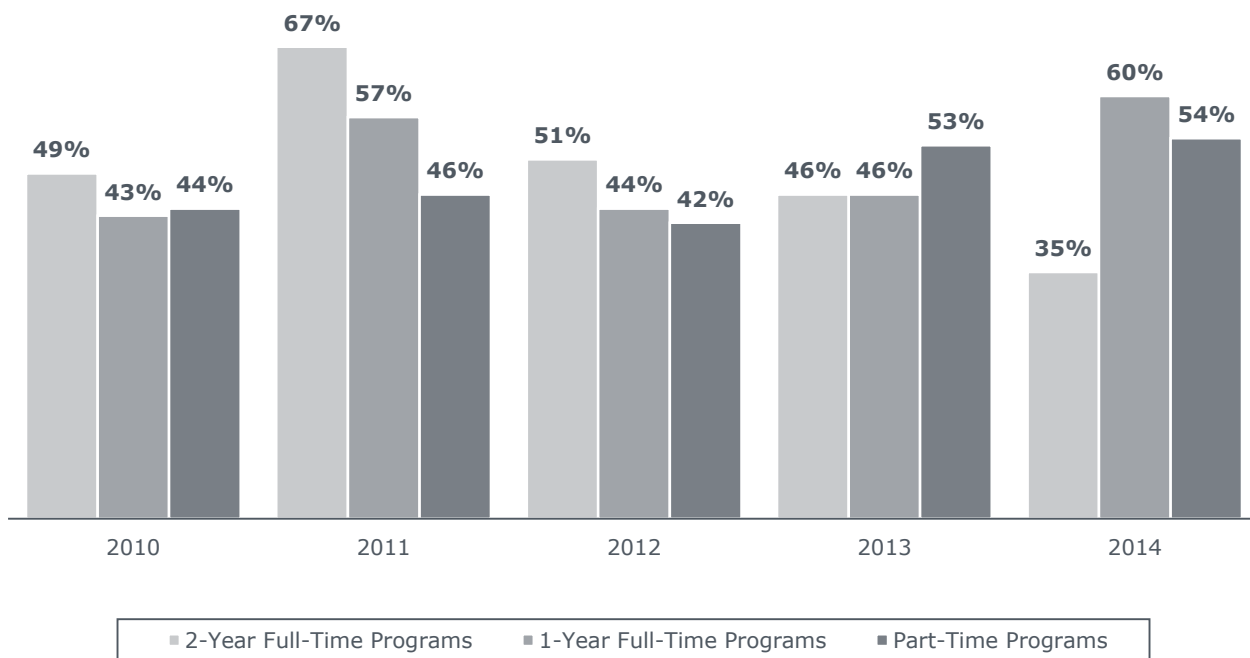
the Atlantic
There Are Officially Too Many MBAs

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
A Smart Investor Would Skip the MBA

QUARTZ
If You Can't Get into a Top 5 MBA Program, Don't Even Bother

BusinessWeek
The MBA's Value? Debatable

Enrollments Now in Decline

US MBA Growth Rates Dropping into the Negative

Between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years, the number of students enrolled in US MBA programs actually declined. In 2012-13, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) stopped reporting on enrollments for US institutions only and began grouping that data with all institutions in North America, preventing exact longitudinal analysis for the US beyond 2011-12. However, the total number of MBA enrollments reported for all of North America in 2012-13 (156,104) was less than enrollments reported for the US only in the previous academic year (156,400).

MBA Enrollments Reported by AACSB

157000

156,400

156,104

156000

155000

| US Only | All of North America |
| 2011–2012 | 2012–2013 |
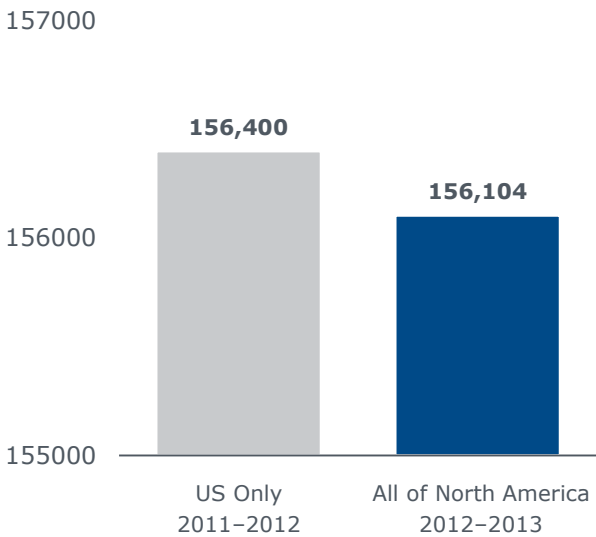
JD: A Degree in Crisis

Applications and Job Prospects Are Plummeting Together

Law firms are reducing costs by opting for less expensive alternatives to lawyers, including paralegals, new technology, and outsourcing. Facing bleak employment prospects, many students who in the past would have studied to become lawyers are pursing other fields. Applications have plummeted over the last several years, and the number of applicants is now dangerously close to the number of open seats.

Applications and Matriculations to JD Programs, 2003-2013

Legend: ●— Total Applicants ◆— Total First-Year Enrollment
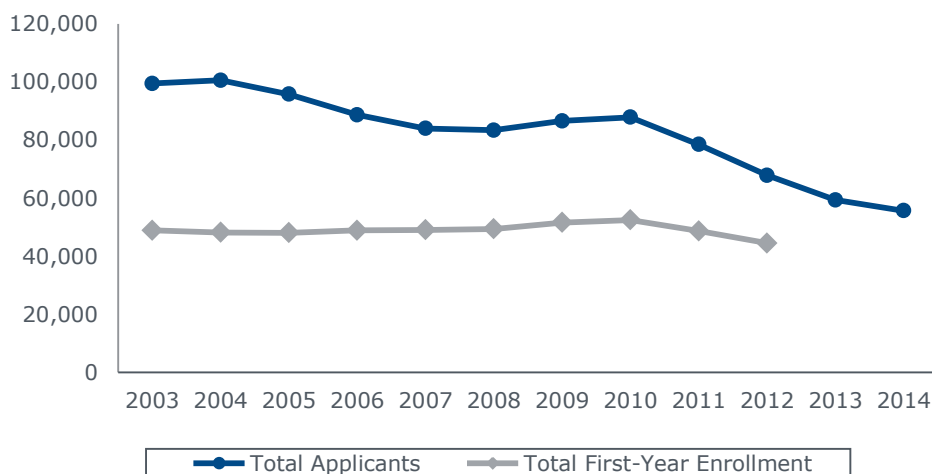
The New York Times	salon.com	TIME	BusinessWeek
Law Schools' Applications Fall as Cost Rises and Jobs Are Cut	**Law School Is a Sham**	**Just How Bad Off Are Law School Graduates?**	**The Case Against Law Schools**

Health Care: Demand Outpacing Capacity

Receiving More Interest Than Programs Can Accommodate

Health care is the one core field that is experiencing no shortage of demand. Many health professions—including physician assistants, physical therapists, audiologists, nurse anesthetists, and occupational therapists—are projected to grow rapidly as the population becomes older and sicker (from chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes). Yet programs are struggling to find the facilities, faculty, and clinical placements needed to grow enrollment.

1.7M New Jobs Projected
2012–2022

↑ *Aging Baby Boomers*

↑ *Improved survival rates*

↑ *Obesity and chronic illness*

↑ *Workforce retirements*

? *Affordable Care Act*
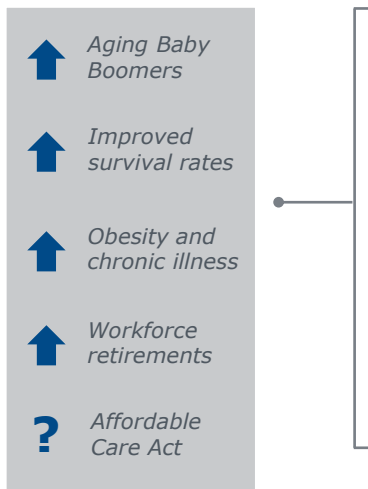
Health Care Practitioners and Technical Occupations

Projected Growth for Select Occupations
2012–2022

Occupation	Growth
Physician Assistants	38%
Physical Therapists	36%
Audiologists	34%
Nurse Anesthetists	31%
Occupational Therapists	29%

11% Average across all occupations

20% Average across health care practitioners and technical occupations
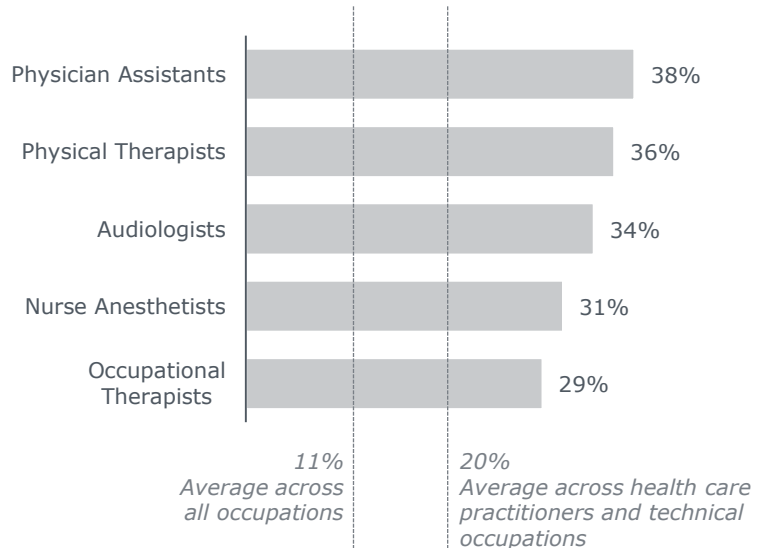
Average Number of Applications and Enrollments in Doctor of Physical Therapy Programs, 2003-2012

Rising popularity of centralized applications system contributes to growth

Applications

Growing gap between demand and capacity

425

92

32

Enrollments

42

2003   2004   2006   2007   2009   2010   2011   2012
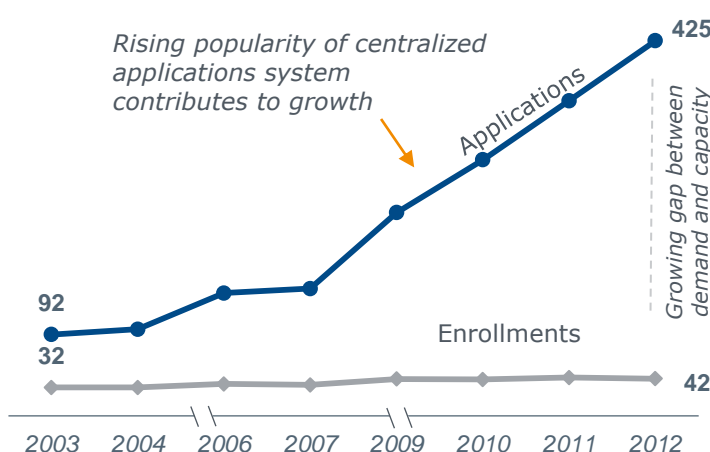
Common Capacity Constraints

- Clinical Placements
- Faculty Availability
- Physical Space & Equipment

Solving Challenges to Demand and Supply

New Specialized Programs Open Opportunity for Growth

Even if students were clamoring for more MEds, MBAs, and JDs, most universities would face challenges expanding these programs as well. Accreditation standards often limit class size, and the fixed costs of faculty and facilities are extremely high. Also, it may be difficult to increase enrollment without lowering admission standards and damaging a program's ranking. The best strategy for overcoming these challenges to demand and supply is creating new specialized programs that appeal to new populations of students, make use of existing high-cost resources, and don't devalue existing degrees.

Softening of Traditional Demand	Roadblocks to Expanding Supply
Economic recession	High fixed costs (faculty, facilities)
Shifting industry structures	Accreditation standards
Regulatory changes	Rankings anxiety

Identify "nontraditional" professional students subject to a different set of market and industry trends

Develop specialized programs that draw on existing resources without detracting from rankings or accreditation

Design new programs that deliver existing courses in ways that appeal to new student markets

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

A Growing Trend

Many Institutions Already Shifting Resources to New Specialized Programs

Many institutions have begun shifting resources from core graduate programs such as the MBA toward specialized master's programs that serve new audiences—such as the master's in marketing or management. Across the last five years, the number of enrollments in these programs have nearly doubled. Law schools are also starting to diversify their portfolios beyond the JD, adding LLM programs for current lawyers looking for specialization in fields such as taxation, or foreign-trained lawyers seeking exposure to US law. The number of degrees awarded by these programs has almost doubled in the last 10 years.

US Enrollments in Specialized Business Master's[1]

Reported by US Institutions to AACSB

2007-08	2011-12
36,997	64,066
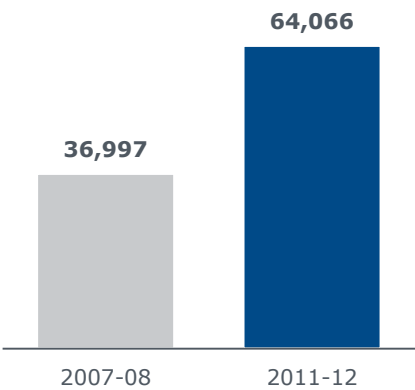
Master's Degrees in Law Awarded (LLM and MS)
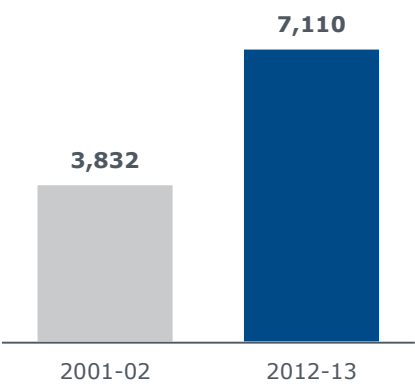
2001-02	2012-13
3,832	7,110

Reaching New Student Segments

Specialized Programs Move Beyond Segment Field Has Traditionally Served

Core professional programs tend to serve one of the four student segments outlined in section one: career starters, career advancers, career changers, and career crossers. The MBA, for example, focuses on career advancers, while the JD serves career starters. New specialized programs will serve working professionals outside the segment the field has traditionally served.
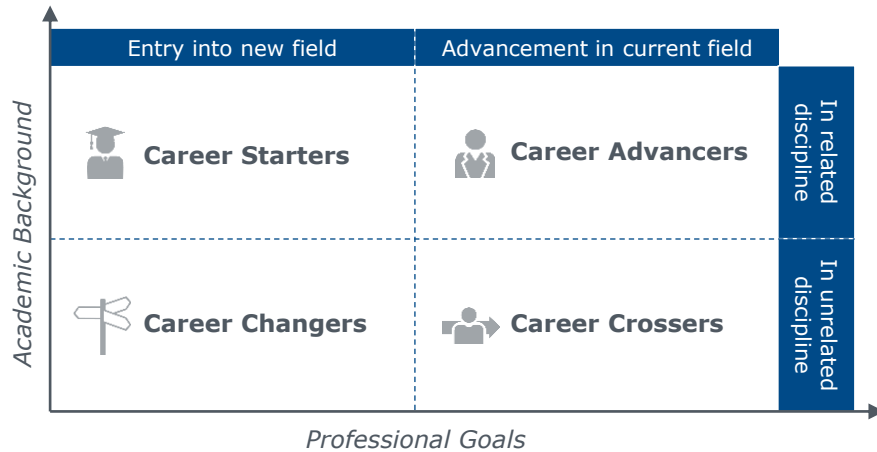
Traditional Degree, *Segment Served*	Opportunities Serving New Student Segments	
Education Career Advancers (MEd)	**Career Changers** *Alternative routes to licensure* • State-based alternative licensure programs • Local fellows programs (e.g., New York City Teaching Fellows)	
Business Career Advancers (MBA)	**Career Crossers** *Programs for technical professionals* • Executive MBA in Management of Technology • Physician Executive MBA	**Career Starters** *Programs for pre-professionals* • MS in Management
Law Career Starters (JD)	**Career Advancers** *LLMs for practicing lawyers* • Master of Laws in Employee Benefits • Global Professional Master of Laws	**Career Crossers** *Programs for non-lawyers* • Master of Studies in Law for Health and Science Professionals
Health Care Career Starters (entry-level clinical degree)	**Career Advancers** *Post-professional degrees* • Doctorate in Occupational Therapy	***Career Changers*** *Post-baccalaureate pre-health programs* • Pre-physical therapy certificate • Communicative Sciences and Disorders Leveling Program

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

For Career Starters

Speed Entry into Workforce, Lead into Advanced Degrees

The MS in Management offered by Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) is an innovative master's degree targeted to career starters. Built entirely out of existing MBA courses, the 10-course program can be completed in one year. After accumulating two or more years of work experience, program graduates may then earn MBA at WPI by completing only seven additional courses; nine of their ten MS courses count toward the MBA degree. Since students would need twice as long to complete an MBA elsewhere, this "stackability" encourages master's students to return to WPI for their MBA.

MS in Management/MBA

Recent graduates jump-start career with one-year master's, then return with work experience for MBA

Accelerated Format

- 10 courses from MBA program

- Tuition incentive covers cost of four courses for young alumni who complete in two semesters

Stackable Credentials

- 9 courses count toward MBA

- Returning students can earn MBA after only seven more courses, including capstone

Practical Experience

- No experience required for MS

- Students must earn 2+ years of work experience before returning for MBA

Alternative Approach

Reduce time to master's with 4+1/3+2 option

Alternative Approach

Build stackable certificates out of master's curricula

Alternative Approach

Offer 3-semester MS to allow for summer internship

WPI encourages graduates of its own BA programs in science and engineering to enroll in its MS in Management by offering an alumni tuition incentive. Recent graduates who complete the program in two semesters receive a tuition waiver for four courses.

For Career Advancers

Accommodate Current Work and Varied Academic Backgrounds

Some of the most innovative examples of degrees for career advancers are at the doctorate level, though they are professional doctorates rather than PhDs. Thomas Jefferson University, a health sciences institute in Philadelphia, offers a hybrid doctorate in occupational therapy that accommodates students' schedule and travel limitations and differences in academic background. The program offers three start dates per year and the option to attend all on-campus sessions virtually. Its modular curriculum allows multiple points of entry, depending on students' prior degree attainment.

Advanced Doctorate in Occupational Therapy

Modular curriculum accommodates various academic backgrounds, while delivery options accommodate schedule and travel limitations

Flexible Delivery

- Asynchronous online courses with three start dates per year

- Saturday on-campus sessions twice each semester, with option to attend virtually

Alternative Approach

Schedule half-term courses for busy professionals

Stackable Credentials

- Multiple points of entry build on prior academic credentials:
  – 46-credit track with BS
  – 33-credit track with MS

- Optional 12-credit certificate can be applied toward OTD

Alternative Approach

Offer prior learning credit for professional experience

Professional Development

- Core courses include clinical, research, and leadership skills

- Capstone fellowship brings new learning from academic work into current place of employment

Alternative Approach

Facilitate networking through alumni events, social media

Students who have a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy must complete 46 credits to earn the professional doctorate. Those who enroll with a master's degree (the most common entry-level credential in the field today) need to complete only 33 credits. Many students who enroll with master's degrees opt to take a 12-credit advanced certificate before committing to a full doctorate. Those who decide to proceed can then apply these credits toward their degree.

For Career Changers

Provide Fast Routes for Students Trained in Diverse Fields

Since teaching has historically been a popular field for career changers, schools of education have been particularly innovative in creating alternative paths to licensure that fast-track career changers into the classroom. In a program designed with the state of Virginia, Regent University prepares midcareer adults for full-time, mentored teaching in as little as four months. After completing the first phase of this two-phase program, students may teach full time on a provisional licensure. This option allows students to hold a paying job while they complete the program's second phase.

Career Switcher Teacher Licensure and MEd

Provisional licensure prepares midcareer adults for full-time, mentored teaching in as little as four months

Accelerated Format

- Three start dates (May, Aug, Jan) allow employed students to set their own pace

- One-third of students complete all six pre-licensure courses in one intensive summer term

Interdisciplinary Pathways

- Students demonstrate subject expertise from bachelor's and 5+ years of work experience

- Courses teach general pedagogy, plus research-based methods for classroom management and measurable learning

Practical Experience

- Level I: Five of six courses include structured practicum

- Level II: Full year of teaching under provisional license, with mentorship from retired teacher or school administrator

Alternative Approach

Apply program prerequisites toward degree requirements

Alternative Approach

Offer post-bac classes to help students meet prerequisites

Alternative Approach

Provide unpaid externships if paid placements are scarce

The program also offers online delivery and three start dates so students can select their own pace. Those who start in August have a full year to earn their provisional licensure, while those who start in May can do the same in four months and start teaching as soon as the K-12 school year begins.

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

For Career Crossers

Customize Format and Curriculum for Target Audience's Industry

Programs for career crossers tend to provide either general skills for technically trained professionals (such as management for engineers) or technical skills for generally trained professionals (such as compliance for law or business executives). The University of Tennessee's Physician Executive MBA falls into the first category. Its delivery of general business competencies is tailored to the distinct professional needs of its niche audience.

Physician Executive MBA

Distinct professional needs of niche audience shape delivery of general business competencies

Flexible Delivery

- One-year, blended format reduces commitment
- Saturday classes recorded in case of emergency absences
- Four one-week residencies fit into PTO and CME allowances

Interdisciplinary Pathways

- Curriculum teaches business principles through health care applications and case studies
- No prior business coursework assumed

Professional Development

- Credential-conscious health care industry values MBA over non-degree programs
- Annual symposia connect 450 physician alumni for continuing education and networking

Alternative Approach
Offer 100% online route to expand geographic bounds

Alternative Approach
Provide introductory courses to "level" diverse backgrounds

Alternative Approach
Diversify audience to facilitate interprofessional learning

Since doctors are generally busy during the week, classes take place on Saturdays. And, since doctors may need to miss class due to medical emergencies, classes are recorded and archived for later viewing. On-campus components are scheduled into four one-week residencies that fit into standard allowances for continuing medical education and PTO.

The classroom experience is also tailored to physicians. Instructors use case studies based in health care, and program admission is restricted to physicians, since physicians prefer to study and network with peers.

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Don't Start from Scratch

New Programs Should Draw on Existing Faculty and Courses

One key to reaching new market segments cost-effectively is drawing on existing resources. The nature of your new and existing programs will determine the degree of potential cross-listing. Some side programs do require substantial course development, but they may still reduce costs of program launch by drawing largely on existing faculty.

Models for Cross-listing Content

100% Existing Courses
LLM in American Law

JD

LLM
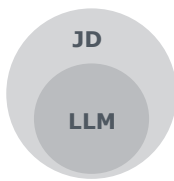
New students fully integrated into existing classes

Substantial Cross-Listing
Master of Finance

MFin   MBA

Program combines existing courses with newly created ones

New Content, Shared Personnel
Advanced Doctorate in OT

Master of Occupational Therapy

Doctor of Occupational Therapy

Existing faculty develop new set of courses at advanced level

In law, the LLM in American Law is often built entirely out of the JD program; foreign-trained lawyers simply join domestic law students in their classes. In business, the specialized master's program often shares some core and elective courses with the MBA, while maintaining a set of dedicated courses in more technical topics. An advanced doctorate in occupational therapy would require many courses not currently offered at the master's level, but existing faculty could develop them.

The Cross-listing Debate

Do Challenges of Cross-listing Courses Outweigh Efficiencies?

While cross-listing courses between new and existing programs offers clear advantages, there are also possible complications to keep in mind.

		Advantages of Cross-listing	Related Challenges
	New Expenses	Reduces course development costs	May require creation of new course sections
	Instructional Logistics	Increases instructional efficiency, especially for small programs	Often requires reconciliation of conflicting schedules and grade scales across programs
	Classroom Experience	Provides greater academic, professional, and cultural diversity in the classroom	Demands that instructors balance the needs of students with divergent experiences
	Curricular Content	Enhances elective options (if new courses are added to core program curriculum)	May result in electives too specialized or technical to be relevant to core program

Serving New and Rapidly Changing Professions

Niche Programs Micro-targeted to Evolving Roles

3

Serving Students in New and Rapidly Changing Roles

Hyper-customization More Important Than Institutional Brand

In the decade ahead, the fastest growth in master's enrollments will come from specialized programs serving new and rapidly changing industries, such as cybersecurity, data analytics, and health informatics. A much larger range of institutions can compete effectively for these enrollments. Programs in core professional fields typically rely on institutional brand and rankings to attract students. Programs serving niche markets rely on micro-targeting: they attract students by designing programs that are highly customized to their specific industry and role.

Niche Programs

Core Professional Programs

Percentage Growth

Number of Degrees Conferred
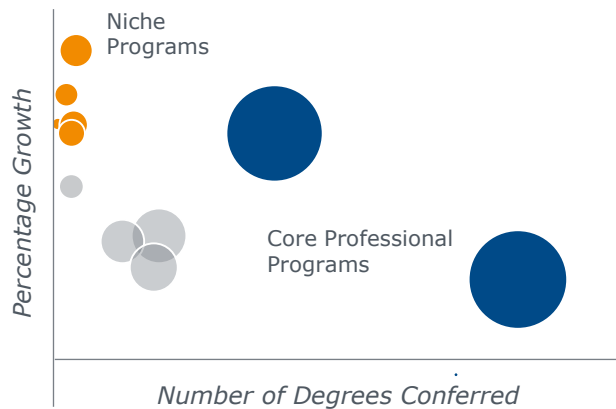
Core Professional Programs

- Larger enrollment
- Slower growth
- Targeted to large, well established professions (lawyers, teachers)
- Less focus on specialized skills

> Marketing focused on institutional brand and reputation

Niche Programs

- Smaller enrollment
- Faster growth
- Targeted to new industries, new and rapidly changing roles (e.g., cybersecurity engineer)
- More focus on specialized skills

> Attract students with programs highly customized to their industry and role

Niche programs tend to cross disciplinary boundaries and have multiple potential "homes" across campus. Data analytics programs, for example, are housed in business schools, engineering schools, schools of arts and science, continuing education units, or even their own interdisciplinary centers. The programs may draw faculty from across these units.

Understanding Students' Needs

Students' Unique Profile Should Influence Every Aspect of the Program

Successful niche programs address the constraints, values, and ambitions of the specific students they serve. These considerations should shape a program's launch cycle, marketing strategy, administration, and student services.

If Your Students Are...	Then You Need to Offer...
In fast-changing industries	Faster program approval
Strongly focused on ROI	Rigorous market research
Long out of college	More flexible admissions requirements
Evaluating multiple programs	Student-centric program design
Shopping online	Online marketing and recruiting
Working full-time	Flexible delivery modes
Expecting 24/7 support	Working adult support services
Looking to rise within their organization	Leadership development
Seeking a degree as route to a specific job	Career placement

Examples of Niche Programs

Agricultural Communications

Biodefense

Bioinformatics

Computational Linguistics

Construction Management

Cyber-Physical Systems Engineering

Cybersecurity

Data Analytics

Digital Fabrication

Emerging Media

Geodesign

Geographical Information Science

Geospatial Intelligence

Health Care Analytics

Health Informatics

Human-Computer Interaction

Intelligence Analysis

Mechatronic Engineering

Nursing Informatics

Online Education

Quality Engineering

Renewable Energy Engineering

Social Media Management

Sustainability Management

A Market-Driven Approach to Program Design

Analyzing Industries, Roles, Skills, and Geographic Markets

Even more critically, designing and marketing niche programs for fast-changing roles requires staying on the pulse of the evolving industries in which graduates will work. Colleges and universities have traditionally relied on industry advisory boards, Bureau of Labor Statistics data, and student surveys to guide decisions on new professional programs. For niche programs targeting rapidly changing roles, institutions need detailed and accurate information on emerging trends in what skills and qualifications employers are demanding and how demand is fluctuating for specific roles, with specific types of employers, and in specific geographic areas.

Critical Questions for Program Design

Industries and Employers

- In what fields should this program prepare graduates to work? Who might hire them?

- What employers might seek contract training?

Occupations and Roles

- To what types of positions should we target our program?

- What level of education and specialized training do these positions require?

Required Skill Sets

- What specialized skills should our program teach to match employer needs?

- What general skills (e.g., leadership) do roles in this field typically require?

Geographic Markets

- What metropolitan areas demonstrate the strongest demand for this program?

- What industries or employers are driving demand within the hottest markets?

Source: Education Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Real-Time Employer Demand Analytics

The COE Forum's Market Research Service

A Powerful New Market Research Tool

The COE Forum provides member institutions with a complimentary market research service that helps institutions plan their program portfolio, validate market demand, and grow existing programs.

Our team of market research analysts uses data from Burning Glass, a Boston-based leader in human capital data analytics, to provide information you can't get from surveys, Bureau of Labor and Statistics data, or typical job posting database searches. Burning Glass's unique artificial intelligence tools mine hundreds of millions of online job postings for real-time intelligence on the titles, skills, and educational requirements in demand across the country and in your local and regional market.

Our analysts then conduct any additional research needed to answer your questions, interpret all the data, and prepare a customized report that explains the findings clearly and succinctly.

A Quantum Leap in Market Insight
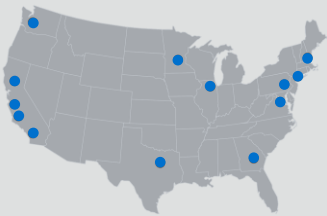
What You Can't Get from Surveys, BLS, or Keywords

- ☑ Data mining of "natural language" postings
- ☑ Unprecedented geographic specificity
- ☑ Specific job titles, beyond O-Net categories
- ☑ Minimum educational requirements, by title

- ☑ Key skills and certifications
- ☑ Validation of faculty's anecdotal assumptions
- ☑ Early warning of growing (and declining) demand
- ☑ No time lag in gauging emerging skills

Illustrative Analysis

Top Job Titles

Business Analyst
System Analyst
Data Analyst
Extraction Developer

Not recognized by BLS

Top Hiring MSAs

Fastest Growing Skills

Information Systems
Network Security
Data Analysis

2007   2010   2012
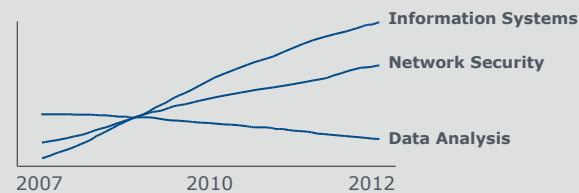
Emerging Career Ladders

Data Architect
40% of postings
BS in computer
science preferred

Data Analyst
5% of postings
BS in statistics
coursework

Data Scientist
10% of postings
grad degree
preferred
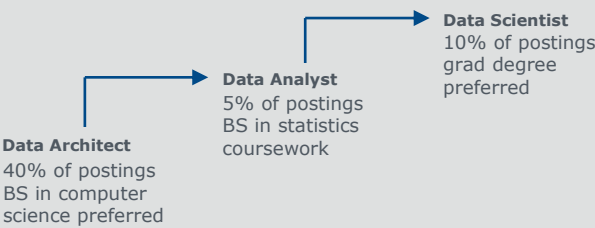
Ensuring Enrollments Across the Program Development Life Cycle

Real-Time
Employer Data

National
Enrollment Data

Peer Program
Benchmarking

Thought Leader
Interviews

Industry
Literature

Accreditation
and Associations

NEW PROGRAMS

> Inform Strategic
  Planning

Scan the region for top five fastest growing fields to
select focus of new degree completion program

> Validate Market
  Demand

Confirm market size and employer interest before
launching new master's in engineering management

EXISTING OFFERINGS

> Refresh the
  Curriculum

Revise learning objectives of long-standing IT degree
to include cutting-edge skills required by employers of
technology professionals

> Refine the Marketing
  Message

Quantify the career value proposition in recruiting
materials with compelling data on job postings and
top employers to command the attention of
prospective students

Identifying the Next Decade's Critical Employer Needs

In addition to conducting projects at member request, the COE Forum combines state-of-the-art
analytics with deep insight into emerging demand drivers in major fields, alerting members to
national, regional, and state-by-state trends in employer hiring, job titles and position descriptions,
and critical skills and competencies.

Future Field Reports

Cybersecurity

Second Bachelor's Degrees

Allied Health and Nursing

Aging Services

State Market Demand Dashboards

Fastest growing job titles

Hottest skills and competencies

Employers with greatest hiring need

Trends in state and regional employment

To learn more about the COE Forum, email us at coeforum@eab.com or call 202-266-6400.