



**Key Trends in Graduate
and Professional Education:
Attracting Students
in Changing Times**

Support by





ETS on using test scores to attract and enroll a diverse student body

In an effort to increase the diversity of their student population, some graduate schools are adopting “test-optional” policies in their admissions process. However, before making such significant changes, it is important to consider both intended and unintended consequences that could result in negative outcomes.

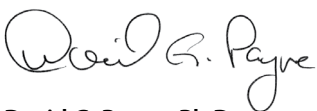
For example, dropping or making standardized tests optional does not necessarily improve diversity in applicant pools. According to University of Georgia research, undergraduate schools that have made the SAT® test optional have not experienced the expected increase in applicant diversity.¹ Instead, their selectivity has increased because more students apply and those who report scores typically report higher scores.

Dropping test scores can also have a negative impact on underrepresented groups. These groups frequently start at nonselective colleges, immediately putting them at a disadvantage because selective graduate programs frequently consider the prestige of the undergraduate school attended. Standardized tests, however, offer programs a fair and impartial way to compare and evaluate students from all types of different backgrounds, including international candidates presenting other admissions documents that may not be well understood or are unfamiliar.

On the other hand, *proper use* of test scores can help institutions attract a diverse and talented pool of applicants and enrolled students. Whereas other factors are subjective and vary from one individual to another depending on their educational and cultural backgrounds and experiences, standardized test scores are the only measures common across all applicants in the admissions process.

Of course, putting too much emphasis on a test, or any other single predictor, is poor educational practice. In fact, ETS [guidelines](#) have long recommended that multiple sources of information always be used when making admissions decisions, particularly when assessing the abilities of disadvantaged applicants. For example, the combination of grades and test scores is a more effective predictor of a student’s readiness than either one alone. A balanced approach enables graduate schools to fairly and impartially identify diverse individuals with varying backgrounds and experiences who have the potential for academic success.

ETS is pleased to collaborate with *Inside Higher Ed* to keep you informed on key trends in higher education so you can effectively evaluate whether they are right for your school and your students.



David G. Payne, Ph.D.

Vice President & COO, Global Education
Educational Testing Service

Tap into these ETS resources to help identify the right students for your programs:

- *Important Guidelines for Using GRE® Scores:* ets.org/gre/bestpractices
- *GRE® Search Service:* ets.org/gre/search
- *TOEFL® Search Service:* ets.org/toefl/search

For more information about ETS, visit ets.org.

¹ Belasco, A. S., Rosinger, K. O., & Hearn, J. C. (2015). *The Test-Optional Movement at America’s Selective Liberal Arts Colleges: A Boon for Equity or Something Else?* *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, June 2015, Vol. 37(2), pp. 206–223.

Introduction

Graduate and professional education programs play numerous essential roles in higher education. They educate not only future professors, but future professionals who will play leading roles in many parts of American society. And their students teach undergraduates and support the work of professors.

Given the centrality of graduate education to higher education as a whole, changes in the field are enormously important. The articles in this compilation discuss admissions practices and strategies, shifts in the curriculum, diversity and the impact of technology on graduate education, among other topics. Essays offer views of experts on a range of issues.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to track these issues and welcomes your reactions to this compilation and your suggestions for future coverage.

--The Editors
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Inside Graduate Admissions

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

What goes on behind closed doors when professors decide who should get a chance to earn a Ph.D.? Author of new book was allowed to watch. She saw elitism, a heavy focus on the GRE and some troubling conversations.

Ph.D. programs are one of the few parts of higher education where admissions decisions are made without admissions professionals. Small groups of faculty members meet, department by department, to decide whom to admit. And their decisions effectively determine the future makeup of the faculty in higher education.

Politicians, judges, journalists, parents and prospective students subject the admissions policies of undergraduate colleges and professional schools to considerable scrutiny, with much public debate over appropriate criteria. But the question of who gets into Ph.D. programs has by comparison escaped much discussion.

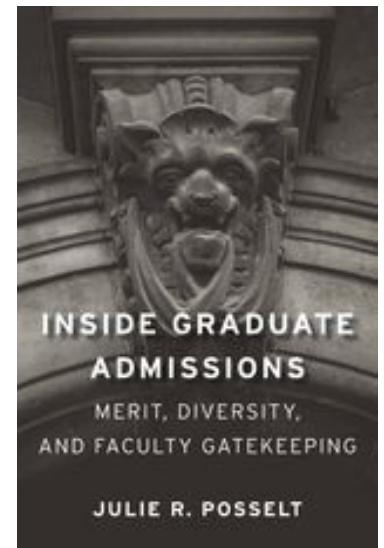
That may change with the January 2016 publication of *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity and Faculty Gatekeeping*, from Harvard University Press. Julie R. Posselt, the author and an assistant professor of higher education at the Universi-

ty of Michigan, obtained permission from six highly ranked departments at three research universities to watch their reviews of candidates, and she interviewed faculty members at four others. All the departments were ranked as among the top programs in their disciplines.

To obtain this kind of access (not to mention institutional review board approval), Posselt had to offer complete anonymity. While her book identifies comments as coming from people in particular disciplines, she reveals nothing about where the departments are, and she also hides most details about the applicants they reviewed.

To judge from the book, the faculty members she observed did not present her with a scripted and idealistic view of admissions. They were frank about things they are unlikely to have shared in public.

For instance, those whose programs were not at the very top of the rankings frequently talked about



not wanting to offer a spot to someone they believed would go to a higher-ranked program. They didn't want their department to be the graduate equivalent of what high school students applying to college call a "safety school." In this sense many of these departments turned down superior candidates, some of whom might have enrolled. Many of the professors sound insecure about their programs even though they are among the very best.

Across departments and disciplines, Posselt tracks a strong focus on ratings, a priority on GRE scores that extends beyond what most department would admit (or that creators of the test would advise), and some instances of what could be seen as discrimination. Of the latter, she describes a pattern in which faculty members effectively practice affirmative action for all applicants who are not from East Asia, effectively having one set of GRE standards for the students from China and elsewhere in East Asia and another, lower requirement for everyone else. And she describes one instance in which a candidate was strongly critiqued and eventually passed over in part related to her having attended a religious undergraduate institution. (More on both of those issues later.)

The book paints a picture of faculty members who are deeply committed to their disciplines and their scholarship. But Posselt also writes that this seems to make many professors on these admissions committees risk averse in ways that limit the diversity of those admitted. And this starts with who gets to be on admissions committees. (The book is based on interviews with many of the committee members, not just the observations.)

Department chairs were aware of the “somewhat political task” of serving on the committee, Posselt writes. While they aimed for thoughtful appointments (and invited back people who were seen as having been especially helpful in

previous years), other factors come into play. Appointments to the committees are made “to downplay internal conflicts, protect specific programs interests or buffer the process from program faculty with outlying perspectives or difficult personalities,” Posselt writes.

White males “dominated” the admissions committees, and Posselt writes that chairs cite diversity as a value in appointing members in only 2 of the 10 departments she studied.

A Focus on GRE Scores

Relatively few of the departments in any public way would say they have minimum GRE requirements. But the book talks about considerable interest in scores. In an interview, Posselt said her consideration of “de facto” policies and not just explicit ones revealed that every department had a GRE cutoff. Posselt said this is particularly surprising since all of the departments boast of “holistic review,” in which each applicant is evaluated on a range of criteria and not a formula. Further, she noted, the Educational Testing Service, which produces the GRE, has never suggested that departments use cutoffs the way departments routinely do.

Many committee members said they simply had too many applications to review, and needed a simple measure with which to compare applicants and to exclude some. Prestige of undergraduate program counted for a lot. But grade point average? Not so much. One astrophysicist Posselt quotes said,

“Grade point, most people said it doesn’t affect them very much because basically everybody in the pool -- everybody in the final pool -- has such high GPAs that it’s not meaningful.”

A sociologist said this was especially a problem with the many finalists from top colleges. “Grades are increasingly a lousy signal, especially at those elite places that just hand out the A’s. So you don’t even have that anymore,” he said.

One professor told Posselt: “I have impressions that some of my faculty -- senior members -- were simply looking for the GRE. They have a threshold such as, ‘If it’s not over 700, I won’t read anything.’ And that cuts usually two-thirds of applicants.”

Posselt writes of asking committee members why they were so focused on GRE scores and whether applicants attended elite undergraduate institutions, even when these criteria minimized diversity of the accepted applicant pool. She heard in response much talk about how much graduate admissions is “gambling,” and how important it is to admit students who will succeed. With small admissions cohorts and faculty members who depend on graduate students to work with them on research and other tasks, any attrition is viewed as a disaster, and committee members want to avoid the risk.

Committee members also seemed to generalize from the experience of past graduate students who failed, wanting to avoid anyone

like them in the future. They spoke of “being spooked” by seeing such applicants.

The admissions committee members generally assumed applicants were getting Ph.D.s for careers like theirs -- faculty jobs at research universities. So they were looking for signs of research potential. And they were also unabashed elitists.

“This is an elite university and a lot of the people at the university are elitists,” one professor said with a laugh. “So they make a lot of inferences about the quality of someone’s work and their ability based on where they come from.”

Bias Against a Christian College Student?

In most cases Posselt observed, the committee members used banter and “friendly debate” when they disagreed with one another. They didn’t attack one another or get too pointed in criticizing colleagues. She describes one discussion she observed -- in which committee members kept to this approach -- that left her wondering about issues of fairness.

The applicant, to a linguistics Ph.D. program, was a student at a small religious college unknown to some committee members but whose values were questioned by others.

“Right-wing religious fundamentalists,” one committee member said of the college, while another said, to much laughter, that the college was “supported by the Koch brothers.”

The committee then spent more

time discussing details of the applicant’s GRE scores and background -- high GRE scores, homeschooled -- than it did with some other candidates. The chair of the committee said, “I would like to beat that college out of her,” and, to laughter from committee members asked, “You don’t think she’s a nutcase?”

Other committee members de-



Julie Posselt

fended her, but didn’t challenge the assumptions made by skeptics. One noted that the college had a good reputation in the humanities. And another said that her personal statement indicated intellectual independence from her college and good critical thinking.

At the end of this discussion, the committee moved the applicant ahead to the next round but rejected her there.

Talking About Diversity

When Posselt probed on diversity, she found that many professors said they felt an obligation to diversify their graduate student bodies and thus -- eventually -- the collective faculty of their fields. In some fields, there was discussion about seeking more women, not just underrepresented minority groups.

For example, Posselt found this to be the case in philosophy, a field that has of late been struggling with a perception (many say reality) of being hostile to women.

Many faculty members, however, appeared more comfortable considering race and ethnicity as a slight tip among otherwise equal candidates who had advanced to a finalist round.

One professor said, “I try not to pay too much attention. I try to admit students that are the best in my intellect with no regard for gender and race.” Only with two applicants who are “equal on intellectual merit, then I will prefer a minority,” the professor said.

Others spoke of diversity in terms of “opportunity.” They said they wanted to admit minority applicants, but they regularly spoke about fear of seeing their yield -- the percentage of admitted applicants who enroll -- go down, as they assumed that the best minority candidates would end up at just one or two programs. Posselt writes of hearing comments such as, “Who are we going to get? It’s a gamble,” and “We’ll lose him to Princeton and Caltech.”

One economist put it this way: “Gender is an issue that we get good -- we get top-notch women as well as top-notch men. Black -- we get fewer blacks. It’s true. But we do try -- in the past we’ve tried to attract them. But then they get the same attractive offers from Columbia and Yale and Stanford and Berkeley and so forth. So it’s a small group typically who get a lot of attention.”

Merit and International Students

Many graduate departments -- particularly in science fields -- rely on international students. The departments observed by Posselt appear to practice a form of affirmative action for everyone who is not an international Asian student in that professors de-emphasize the (typically extremely high) GRE scores of such applicants to avoid admitting what they would consider to be too many of them. This is in contrast to the attitudes of many professors with regard to considering American applicants of various ethnicities -- and who insisted on a single (high) standard there.

Referring to international applicants, one scientist told Posselt, "The scores on the standardized tests are just out of sight, just off the charts. So you can basically throw that out as a discriminator. They're all doing 90th percentile and above. The domestic students are all over the place so there was actually some spread, some dispersion ... so you could use that more as one of the quantifiers."

A philosopher said, "There certainly is a kind of stereotypical ..." and then he paused, appearing to catch himself, before saying, "Chinese student who will have astronomical scores."

The professors said their view of international applicants' test scores was not discriminatory, but based on the preparation of students in countries that place more emphasis on testing than does the United States.

Many professors also expressed fears that Chinese applicants are inflating test scores through cheating. One professor, Posselt writes, lowered his glasses during an inter-

view when the admissions process is designed to do just that. One humanities professor told Posselt, "How do you compare six students from China, who all have the same last name?" (It is true, Posselt notes, that the 100 most common last names in China are the names of 87 percent of its population, and presumably of much of the Chinese applicant pool, while the 100 most common last names in the United

States account for only 17 percent of the American population.)

While departments are trying to do a better job of understanding Chinese applicants and are



Gender is an issue that we get good -- we get top-notch women as well as top-notch men.



view to ask her, "You know about the cheating, don't you?"

The concerns about cheating are "pervasive," Posselt writes, with regard to tests designed to demonstrate English proficiency. The faculty members on admissions committees pay a lot of attention to this issue, and report feeling burned in the past by applicants whose scores indicated proficiency but who arrived in the United States with very poor English skills. Several departments that do not interview all applicants require interviews of international applicants.

Chinese applicants appear especially challenging to many American professors, who report that they "seem alike" and hard to distinguish,

certainly admitting many of them, Posselt writes of a "troubling tendency to think of students from China not as individuals, but a profile of group averages."

What Do the Observations Mean?

Posselt said in an interview that she wanted to study graduate admissions because it is so little understood and is so important. While admissions leaders constantly talk about the value of holistic admissions, Posselt said, it is rare to see up close just what that means. She saw much to admire, she said, in the devotion of faculty members to their disciplines and their intellectual traditions.

And she believes holistic review

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has the potential to help graduate programs (and other parts of higher education) to identify and admit more minority talent.

But she also has worries. “If it’s not executed with care, it can lead to reproducing the status quo rather than seeking diversity,” she said.

If higher education is going to focus on holistic admissions to preserve affirmative action, Posselt said, admissions committees need to be open about what they value and consider whether those values should change.

Even with the questions Posselt raises about whether graduate departments are doing enough to promote diversity, she said her observations suggest that race and (in some programs) gender do count.

Posselt said graduate departments could admit more diverse classes if they reconsidered the way they use the GRE. She said her research doesn’t suggest the GRE should be abandoned, but that the departments she observed are “misusing the GRE,” and looking at scores “without context of the appli-

cant.” The one place where departments do consider context -- international students -- gives her some hope departments could, if they wanted, think more about the context of all applicants.

In the meantime, she urged departments to reflect on their practices, and to try to improve them and be more open about them.

While the departments reviewed in the book remain secret, the general process used by elite departments would now appear to be more open as a result of Posselt’s book. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/06/new-book-reveals-how-elite-phd-admissions-committees-review-candidates>

Important guidelines for using GRE® scores

Identify the BEST applicants for your next incoming class

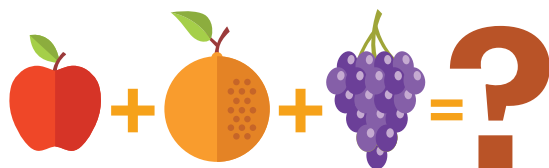


1

Use multiple criteria. Many factors, including GRE® scores, can provide information about an applicant's potential for success. Using multiple criteria in admissions decisions helps ensure fairness and balances the limitations of any single measure of knowledge, skills or abilities.

Be more inclusive by avoiding the use of a cut score. GRE scores help you compare applicants, but if you use a cut score as a criterion, you could miss an applicant who would be a great asset to your program.

2



Consider scores on the three GRE® General Test measures independently.

The level of Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing skills needed for success in your field may vary. The GRE® General test measures these skills independently, and you should treat the scores as three separate and distinct pieces of information about an applicant's skills. Using a single score masks critical information about that individual's specific skills.

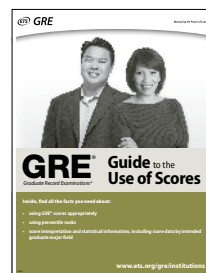
3

4

Use percentile ranks to compare applicants who took the same admissions test. Looking at percentile ranks can help you better understand applicants' relative performance on the same admissions test. It is not appropriate to use percentile ranks to compare applicants across different admissions tests (e.g., GRE test with GMAT® test). Instead, use the GRE Comparison Tool for Business Schools to interpret GRE scores in the context of GMAT scores: ets.org/gre/comparison.



5



Get your free copy of the GRE® Guide to the Use of Scores.

In this must-have resource, you'll find GRE score interpretation data, percentile ranks, best practices and more: ets.org/gre/guide.

Gains in Minority Grad Student Enrollments

BY COLLEEN FLAHERTY

Graduate student enrollments increased nearly 4 percent, with the biggest relative gains seen among underrepresented minority groups.

First-time graduate student enrollments were up 3.9 percent in fall 2015 from a year earlier, according to a report from the Council of Graduate Schools, released in September 2016. Each of the last four annual surveys has found that enrollment has increased, but 2015's bump was one of the biggest since 2009. Contributing to that growth was an increase in the share of underrepresented minority student enrollees, which could be a response to national conversations and institutional initiatives on faculty diversity. At the very least, it's a possible start to broadening the eventual faculty applicant pool.

"This year's data are very encouraging in terms of underrepresented minorities seeing very robust growth in their first-time graduate enrollment -- nonwhite Hispanics are up by 7.6 percent [year over year] and African-Americans are up 6.6 percent," compared to a 2.8 per-

cent increase among whites, said Hironao Okahana, assistant vice president for research and policy analysis at the council and one of the report's authors.

"There's still a way to go in terms of their actual numbers," Okahana said, noting that minority representation within the student body is still relatively low compared to the general population. "But we do think part of this growth comes from how many graduate institutions are working very hard to recruit and retain and help minority students succeed."

The council doesn't disaggregate its data on race and ethnicity to show whether enrollments are in master's or doctoral programs, so it's too early to tell how many underrepresented minority students will seek their Ph.D.s -- let alone to become faculty members. The vast majority of the enrollments over all last year -- some 83.6 percent -- were

First-time enrollment of Underrepresented Minorities is growing (2014-2015)

Hispanics/Latinos	7.6%
Black/African Americans	6.6%
Asians/Pacific Islanders	4.6%
American Indian/Alaska Natives	3.4%

in programs leading to master's degrees or graduate certificates.

Still, at least 22.5 percent of American and permanent U.S. resident first-time graduate students were underrepresented minorities in fall 2015, including American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5 percent), African-American (11.8 percent), native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander (0.2 percent) and Latino (10 percent). Underrepresented-minority women saw particularly big gains in enroll-

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ment.

In another trend, new arts and humanities doctoral enrollments were up slightly (0.1 percent) last year from 2014, but not enough to put a dent in a five-year-average enrollment decline of 0.8 percent. New doctoral enrollments in the social and behavioral sciences have declined year over year and over five years by more than 1 percent, as well.

Okahana said the longer-term downward trend could be a response to a shaky academic job market in the humanities. “It’s one thing that could be weighing on a potential applicant’s mind.” At the same time, he said, council member institutions and other groups are working with graduate students to broaden their skill sets and help them “think outside the box” about potential nonfaculty careers. One example of many such programs, which Okahana highlighted, is the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Next Generation

First-Time Graduate Enrollment by Citizenship and Race/Ethnicity, 2005-15

Citizenship and Race/Ethnicity	% Change, 2014 to 2015	Average Annual % Change, 2010 to 2015	Average Annual % Change, 2005 to 2015
Total	3.9%	1.7%	2.9%
U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents	3.8%	0.5%	2.1%
<i>American Indian/Alaska Native</i>	3.4%	-1.0%	-0.9%
<i>Asian/Pacific Islander *</i>	4.6%	1.9%	4.1%
<i>Black/African American</i>	6.6%	3.7%	5.0%
<i>Hispanic/Latino</i>	7.6%	4.6%	7.5%
<i>White</i>	2.8%	-0.6%	1.1%
Temporary Residents	5.7%	10.7%	9.4%
Other/Unknown **	-1.7%	-4.5%	-0.1%

* Includes Asians and Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders

** Includes U.S. citizens and permanent residents of two or more races, U.S. citizens and permanent residents whose race/ethnicity is not known, and individuals whose citizenship is not known.

First-Time Doctoral Enrollment by Field and Gender, 2014-15 and 2010-15

Broad Field	% Change, 2014 to 2015			Average Annual % Change, 2010 to 2015		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total	2.4%	1.9%	2.8%	1.4%	1.0%	1.7%
Arts and Humanities	0.1%	2.5%	-2.2%	-0.8%	0.0%	-1.8%
Biological and Agricultural Sciences	3.0%	-0.7%	6.6%	-0.4%	-0.8%	-0.1%
Business	-0.1%	0.7%	-1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Education	2.9%	6.3%	1.3%	0.5%	2.6%	-0.5%
Engineering	-2.3%	-3.1%	0.2%	1.7%	1.5%	2.3%
Health Sciences	2.8%	1.5%	3.4%	8.4%	10.3%	7.7%
Mathematics and Computer Sciences	-0.7%	0.4%	-3.5%	1.7%	1.1%	3.3%
Physical and Earth Sciences	2.9%	1.7%	5.0%	0.4%	0.0%	1.0%
Public Administration and Services	-2.7%	2.7%	-5.4%	1.6%	1.9%	1.2%
Social and Behavioral Sciences	-1.3%	-3.6%	0.5%	-1.2%	-1.6%	-0.8%
Other Fields	5.0%	3.9%	5.9%	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%

Ph.D. Implementation Grants to transform scholarly preparation in the humanities at the doctoral level.

Rosemary Feal, executive director of the Modern Language Association, said there’s been a “longstanding and vigorous discussion about the right size of doctoral programs, with much of the argument focused on the equally longstanding decline in the number of tenure-track positions as compared to the number

of Ph.D.s who seek those positions.” So enrollment data can reflect “responsible decisions” that graduate programs make to reduce the size of entering classes, as well as decisions students make about whether to apply, Feal said.

Anecdotally, Feal said she’s heard departments describe the “advantages that can follow from limiting the size of entering cohorts,” especially when resources can be spread among fewer students, such as to in-

crease support packages or offer more intangible forms of support.

Over all, applications to doctoral programs decreased by 4.3 percent last year compared to 2014. They increased by 3.8 percent for master’s and other programs. At the master’s level, math and computer science saw the biggest one-year increase in applications, of 11.2 percent.

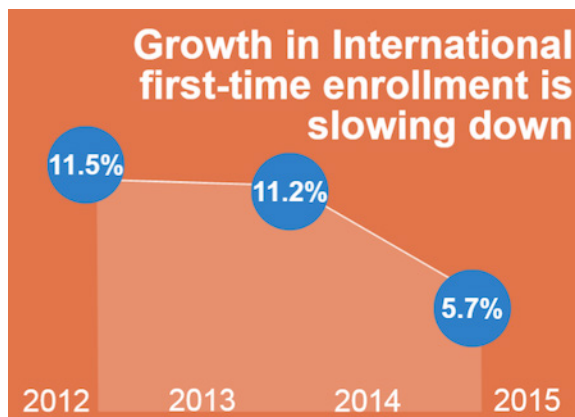
Engineering, business and health sciences admissions offices were

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the busiest, seeing 39.3 percent of all applications for 2015. The largest share of doctoral-level applications was in the social and behavioral sciences, at 18.7 percent of all applications reported. These sciences also were highly competitive for admissions, with an acceptance rate of 14.7 percent (only business was lower, at 13.4 percent).

Education doctoral programs saw the largest one-year increase in applications of all broad fields. At the master's level, math and computer science saw a whopping 11.2 percent jump.

Women made up the majority of



first-time students, at 58.2 percent of master's and certificate-level students and 51.3 percent at the Ph.D. level. According to the survey, women earned 66.4 percent of graduate certificates in 2014-15, 58.4 percent of the master's degrees and 51.8

percent of doctorates. Among first-time enrollees last year, men were more likely to be enrolled full time than women.

Much graduate school application growth has been led in recent years by international students. First-time international student enrollment continued to climb this year over last, by 5.7 percent, but it was considerably lower than recent increases. Okahana said it's too early to tell whether it's a single-year blip or the beginning of a downward trend, and noted that earlier growth was probably unsustainable -- at least in terms of the annual survey. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/16/graduate-student-enrollments-increased-4-percent-biggest-relative-gains-seen-among>

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MicroMasters on a Global Scale

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

MOOC-based master's degree initiative expands to more than a dozen universities. Will learners opt to enroll or settle for a certificate?

Fourteen universities around the world in September 2016 launched modular master's degree programs in which students can complete up to half of the course work online, earn a credential and then decide whether they want to apply to pursue the full degree.

The launch of the 19 programs, known as MicroMasters, follows a pilot at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. MIT has since early in 2016 tested the model in its supply chain management program. Learners start the program by taking massive open online courses hosted on edX, the MOOC platform MIT helped found. After completing five MOOCs, learners who pay a fee can either call it quits and walk away with a certificate -- or apply and, if accepted to MIT, eventually earn a master's of engineering in logistics.

The new programs launching follow a similar blueprint. Most of them consist of four to 10 MOOCs, representing anywhere from one-quarter to half of the master's degrees

they feed into. Learners pursuing the identity-verified credential -- a prerequisite for applying to the full degree program -- will

typically pay about \$1,000 for it. In the MIT MicroMasters, for example, each MOOC costs \$150.

While learners can take the MOOCs free, those who pay get access to some additional features. Anant Agarwal, CEO of edX, said some of the MOOC provider's university partners were hesitant about offering credit for learners whose course work was graded by their peers. EdX will therefore filter learners who pay into separate cohorts, where their papers will be graded by instructors.

In addition to MIT's supply chain management program, the lineup announced this morning focuses on in-demand fields such as artificial



MicroMasters™

intelligence, offered by Columbia University, and user experience research and design, by the University of Michigan.

Each program also comes with a corporate endorsement. Walmart, for example, has endorsed the supply chain management program. In general, the endorsements serve as a stamp of approval from an industry partner, but Agarwal said edX is in discussions with companies about enrolling their own employees or inviting learners who complete the MicroMasters program to job interviews.

"I like to say it takes MOOCs to the next level," Agarwal said, comparing MicroMasters programs to the

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stand-alone courses edX and other MOOC providers are more commonly known for.

While Agarwal stressed the pathway to credit as one of the signature features of the MicroMasters programs, it is not yet certain if the option of pursuing a master's degree will appeal to MOOC learners. The MIT pilot, which began in February 2016, has not yet reached the point where learners can decide if they want to apply to complete the degree.

The closest comparison may be Global Freshman Academy, an edX initiative run in partnership with Arizona State University. The initiative resembles the MicroMasters programs, but is intended for undergraduate students. The university offers a number of MOOCs on edX that learners can complete and -- if they are satisfied with their own performance -- pay to earn credit. But after the first round of MOOCs concluded in 2015, only 323 of 34,086 initial registrants were eligible for credit.

The number of learners who pay to earn the credential may be one indicator. In MIT's pilot, which to date has attracted more than 27,000 registrants, more than 3,500 are pursuing the paid credential -- about four times as many compared to a regular MOOC, Agarwal said.

Several of the universities involved in the launch said they don't have

new forms of delivering education.

"An online education ought to be different from a face-to-face education, and this allows us to explore the interactions between both and figure out what each does best," Hilton said in an interview. "It allows us to continue to experiment with ways to bring high-quality learning experiences to global and lifelong learners."

“An online education ought to be different from a face-to-face education, and this allows us to explore the interactions between both and figure out what each does best.”

Similarly, Jeremy Haefner, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Rochester Institute of Technology, said in an email that he

any set goals for how many paying students they hope the programs will attract. James L. Hilton, vice provost for academic innovation at the University of Michigan, said it is "really hard to predict those kinds of things" since only one MicroMasters program has been piloted so far.

Michigan is launching three MicroMasters programs -- more than any of the other colleges involved -- which Hilton said reflects the university's interest in experimenting with

expected "enrollments in the tens of thousands" but that a "smaller group" would probably opt for the paid credential and academic credit.

Agarwal said he expects other colleges will accept the MicroMasters programs as progress toward a degree. "We believe that a MicroMasters will start a new trend in academia where people will complete it and be able to find pathways to credit at a variety of universities," he said. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/09/20/mooc-based-masters-degree-initiative-expands-globally>

Online M.B.A. Reboot

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM

U of Southern California becomes the latest institution to launch an online M.B.A. program, joining what program directors describe as a market in an “experimental phase.”

The University of Southern California’s new online M.B.A. program is the latest entry in a renaissance for such degree offerings, a development program directors say has been made possible by advances in technology that connect students and professors online.

The USC Marshall School of Business launched its program in the fall of 2015, marking the first time the university has offered the degree at a distance. Students in the 21-month program, which is split into five semesters, will tackle one course of three to four topics at a time, covering much of the required readings and assignments at their own pace but checking in with classmates and professors during weekly live online sessions. Unlike programs at other universities, which include regular campus visits, USC’s online students will only come to campus once.

USC’s balance between asynchronous and synchronous content is the most recent attempt to find a ratio that works for an online M.B.A. With the announcement, the university joins institutions such as Carn-



CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY: A professor hosts a live online session with M.B.A. students

egie Mellon University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which in the past four years have begun to offer their selective M.B.A. programs online. Program directors at those universities say distance education and the technology to support that mode of delivery offer too many opportunities to justify simply recording a lecture and posting it online, but their opinions diverge on the importance of face-to-face meetings, the role of outside firms, pricing and pace,

among other components.

“If we don’t think that our job is to replicate the lecture experience but find a new and in some respects improved experience, what does that mean?” said John G. Matsusaka, Charles F. Sexton Chair in American Enterprise at USC. “We really believe there’s a set of students out there who prefer to learn in this mode. Of course there are some students that are going to prefer the residential option. Our view isn’t that one is better than the other.”

Dan Bursch, program director of the online M.B.A. program at UNC, called USC's announcement a "validation." UNC launched its online M.B.A. program, MBA@UNC, in 2011, and in less than four years, its enrollment has grown from 19 to about 630 students.

Bursch said the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC views itself as one of the first -- if not the first -- school to use the terms "asynchronous" and "synchronous." In the years since MBA@UNC launched, Bursch said he has seen several universities "imitate and duplicate what we are trying to do."

The fading "stigma" surrounding the quality of online education is partly to thank for that development, Bursch said, but so are advances in technology -- particularly in videoconferencing. Many M.B.A. programs pride themselves on small cohorts and curricula that emphasize group work, so just a few seconds of lag would be a major interruption. Conversations about an online M.B.A. program at UNC began as early as 2005, Bursch said, but at that time, "the school said we weren't in a place where we felt that we could duplicate everything we do on campus."

With the introduction and refinement of software such as Adobe Connect, Google Hangouts and Skype, UNC returned to the idea in

2010. "The ability to have live classes every week is really what set things in motion," Bursch said.

Similar, but Different

Carnegie Mellon spent five years waiting for a similar breakthrough. The financial crisis left the university's business model for online M.B.A.s "more or less dead," said

("because we haven't been able to find the right word to describe it," Monroe said), the program splits course content about equally between asynchronous content, live online sessions and intensive in-person conferences.

Each mini-semester, of which there are six a year, begins with a weekend in Pittsburgh or at Carn-

egie Mellon's locations in New York and Silicon Valley. During the following weeks, students work independently on course modules and attend a weekly 75-minute

live online session.

"For us, the one-third, one-third, one-third breakdown of what was previously 100 percent live class works well," Monroe said. "We came up with a new model that we felt is as good as on-site and gives you a complete experience."

At 32 months, Carnegie Mellon's program takes longer to complete than USC's 21 or UNC's average of 27, and includes the most face-to-face content. Matsusaka, meanwhile, said USC's faculty members made a point of making as much of the content as possible available to students on their own time.

"If you're going to do this, you can't ask [students] to come to campus a lot," Matsusaka said. "I'm sure that's appealing to some, but our sense of the market is the typical person wants more flexibility."

“We really believe there’s a set of students out there who prefer to learn in this mode. Of course there are some students that are going to prefer the residential option. Our view isn’t that one is better than the other.”

Robert T. Monroe, director of the part-time program there. The university's old program was entirely corporate sponsored, with companies paying more than \$100,000 to set up clunky videoconferencing systems so professors could beam courses to their locations. As the economy tanked, partnering companies pulled out. In 2008, the business school killed the distance education program.

"Instead of scrambling to try to keep that one going, we decided to use that opportunity to take a step back and see how things had changed in the 20 years since we started it," Monroe said. "We saw there was an opportunity, but that it was going to be an individual opportunity."

Carnegie Mellon rebooted the program in 2013. Officially named the Tepper School Online Hybrid M.B.A.

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UNC, in comparison, requires students to attend two “immersion weekends” on their way to completing the 66-credit program. The university has hosted in the weekends both in the U.S. – in Chapel Hill, San Francisco and New York – and abroad – in Mumbai and Johannesburg – since the program launched.

Monroe said Carnegie Mellon’s weekend sessions were created with the idea that students would be able to balance their careers, studies and family lives in mind. “It’s very, very expensive for a student to leave work for two years to get an M.B.A. – especially from the more selective schools,” Monroe said. “The ability to both go to a selective program and keep working is a big deal. That’s going to be very appealing to a lot of people.”

An M.B.A. from a selective university can easily cost more than \$100,000. To stress the idea that its program is the same no matter the form of delivery, Carnegie Mellon charges all part-time students the same for tuition: about \$120,000. At UNC and USC, however, the online option comes with a discount. USC’s online students will pay an estimated \$88,502 for tuition, down from the residential program’s \$108,504. At UNC, out-of-state students in the residential full-time M.B.A. program pay \$111,092 for tuition, while MBA@UNC drops the price to \$96,733.

“We spent a lot of time trying to think about what’s the perfect price,” Matsusaka said. “What do we need people to know to feel we’ve been able to give them a USC degree, and what does that take? Clearly you don’t want to go in and be the most expensive guy.”

Finding Students

USC has yet to enroll its first students in the online M.B.A. program, but officials there have an idea of whom the program may appeal to. The ideal student, Matsusaka said, graduated with a bachelor’s degree in computer science and went to work for a company such as Google

show about 60 percent students come from an area within a few hundred miles of Pittsburgh, Monroe said. The West Coast is home to another concentration of students.

UNC’s enrollment data is “pretty varied,” Bursch said. Students in the program reside in 47 states and 35 countries, with most groups in major cities, but also in rural areas where students would have to travel far to the nearest program.

“When people and schools that want to do this talk about the online M.B.A., they use the word ‘flexible’ a lot,” Bursch said. “However, to me, the key word is really ‘accessibility.’

Until 2011, if you wanted an M.B.A. from UNC, you had to pick up and move your family to Chapel Hill.”

As the universities that offer online M.B.A. programs are able to



The ability to both go to a selective program and keep working is a big deal. That’s going to be very appealing to a lot of people.



for five years. Now 30 to 34 years old and ready to climb the career ladder, the student realizes he or she needs to learn about accounting or leadership but sees the prospect of leaving work for more than two years as unacceptable, he said.

“It occurs to me there might be an untapped market of people who prefer this delivery,” Matsusaka said. “Unless your eyes are closed, you have to realize that a lot of people live a lot of their lives and have a lot of meaningful experiences online.”

Results from the first year and a half of cohorts at Carnegie Mellon

market to students who live increasingly farther away from campus, they find both a larger pool of potential students and new competition. Marketing, the program directors said, will likely play an important role for programs to stand out in an increasingly crowded field.

Both UNC and USC have chosen to work with outside firms to help with that task. USC picked All Campus, a firm specializing in online enrollment. UNC took the partnership a step further, partnering with the online “enabler” company 2U (then known as 2tor) to build the program.

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Bursch said the partnership let the business school spend its time on adapting the curriculum, outsourcing the technical aspect to the on-line enabler.

“We like to say we practice what we preach here at the business school,” Bursch said. “When you partner with an expert in the field, you’ll produce a better product.”

The program directors said they expect more universities will launch online M.B.A. programs in the near

future. All three described the market as being in an “experimental phase” that will remain unsettled for several years.

The institutions threatened by that development, Monroe suggested, may be those that place too much emphasis on location.

“If you’re an M.B.A. program whose primary point of distinction is that you’re physically located somewhere that makes it easy for students to get to, you’re going to

seriously have to think about what your differentiator is when there are a lot of good online options available,” Monroe said.

On the other hand, he said, launching an online program is more of an “incremental step” than Carnegie Mellon had anticipated. With email, lecture capture and learning management software already in place in the residential program, “We found we were already doing 70 per cent of it.” ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/04/29/technological-advances-spur-creation-new-online-mba-programs>

Engines of Anxiety

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

Two sociologists interviewed law deans and admissions officers about impact of U.S. News rankings on legal education -- and their new book says impact is significant and generally negative.

A dean of admissions at a law school regularly runs into his university's president in the parking lot, and the president always asks the same question: "How are our LSATs going?"

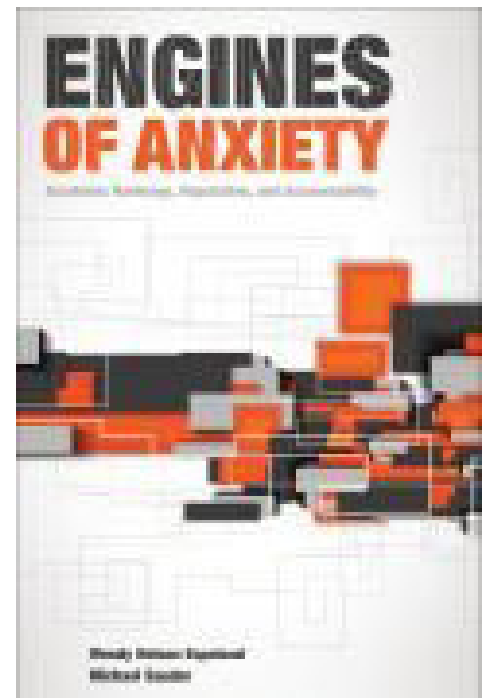
That anecdote is one of many in *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation and Accountability*, which the Russell Sage Foundation published in April 2016. The book provides example after example of how the law school rankings of *U.S. News & World Report* lead admissions officers, law deans and university presidents to obsess about the pecking order and standardized test scores, which are seen as the speediest way to move up in the rankings. There have been plenty of analyses of the negative impacts of rankings, but this one is based on more than 200 interviews -- all anonymous to encourage openness -- with admissions officers, deans and others about how they view and try to game the *U.S. News* rankings. The authors suggest their analysis has relevance for other rankings,

including the *U.S. News* undergraduate reviews.

The authors of the book are two sociology professors: Wendy Nelson Espeland of Northwestern University and Michael Sauder of the University of Iowa. In interviews, both said that, as sociologists, they were attracted to the topic because of their interest in the quantification of quality, the use of numbers to create status and the anxiety of professionals over how they are evaluated.

In their research, they heard a lot of bashing of *U.S. News* rankings. Admissions deans said the rankings were "evil," or they just exclaimed, "Hate them." One admissions dean at a top law school called *U.S. News*, based on its rankings, "a half-assed, shitty magazine." These same law school officials, however, described how they do whatever is necessary to do well in the rankings.

Robert Morse, who heads the college rankings division at *U.S. News*, declined to comment on the book, saying he had not yet read it. He did respond to questions from the



authors, who said he provided data that helped their research.

The LSAT Above All Else

In interviews with law school admissions directors and faculty members who serve on admissions committees, the authors found an overwhelming focus on Law School Admission Test scores -- above everything else and sometimes regardless of other indications of whether

an applicant would be a good or bad law student or lawyer. All producers of standardized admissions tests (and most admissions officials) say such exams should be used in concert with other measures and not dominate the process. The new book suggests this is not the case, in part because LSAT scores count more than undergraduate grades (12.5 percent vs. 10 percent) in the *U.S. News* methodology.

One faculty member of an admissions committee described being told by the dean of admissions that he would not reject anyone with LSAT scores above a certain level – regardless of other indications of an applicant’s appropriateness. The admissions director said he needed these high-LSAT applicants “to keep the numbers up.” Further, faculty members described being told by an admissions dean pushing for high-LSAT students, “I don’t care what the committee says.”

Other admissions directors reported law schools giving them specific targets for an LSAT average, typically higher than the average from previous years, that they are instructed to produce.

While the pressure is most intense at law schools that aren’t at the top of the prestige hierarchy, the trend extends even to those on the top, the book says. (While protecting anonymity, the book frequently identifies the tiers of the law schools from which admissions and other officials are quoted.)

“You’re not going to be able to push your [grade point average] up

very much, and the GPA doesn’t count as much as LSAT anyway,” said one faculty member involved in admissions work at a top law school. “And what [my law school] has done is basically focus its entire decision making on [the] LSAT score. It hasn’t done this formally, but the dean basically controls who is on the admissions committee and makes sure the people on the admissions committee will admit people primarily on the basis of LSAT.”

The point about this being a policy that is not public is common among law schools in the book. Generally, no law school admits to an emphasis on the LSAT along the lines that admissions deans (and law school deans) freely admit to in the book. (In many ways, the findings of the book mirror those of Julie Posselt’s *Inside Graduate Admissions*, published in January by Harvard University Press, which noted the way Ph.D. admissions committees at top graduate programs focus on the GRE far more than they admit to in public.)

By focusing on LSAT scores, admissions officials said they realized they were making decisions that depressed the enrollments of black and Latino applicants, who on average earn lower LSAT scores than do white and Asian applicants. In part this happens by awarding more and more non-need-based scholarships based on LSAT scores, meaning that large awards are being made to wealthier white and Asian applicants (compared to the pool as a

whole).

But admissions directors told the authors that largest way the LSAT emphasis hurts black and Latino applicants is that law school officials fear they are judged by LSAT averages – not just in the *U.S. News* points awarded for test scores, but in the general reputation of a law school. (And the *U.S. News* methodology gives 25 percent of a ranking to a “peer assessment” in which law school officials are polled about other law schools.)

“The most pernicious change is that I know a lot of schools who have become so driven by the LSAT profile that they’ve reduced the access of people who are nontraditional students,” said one law school official quoted in the book. “The higher [the] echelon you are, the more worried you are that if you let your student [LSAT] numbers slide to reflect your commitment to diversity, you’re going to be punished in the polls for that.”

The pressure on doing well in the rankings, the book says, quoting deans and others, isn’t just a matter of law school deans putting pressure on admissions directors. Deans report a trickle-down impact in which university presidents pressure them, in part by citing trustee and alumni pressure they receive.

Likewise, the book says law schools will do just about anything to game the system. For instance, *U.S. News* also gives points for whether law graduates find jobs and whether they find jobs for which a law degree is needed. With the mar-

ket tightening for new lawyers, especially from nonelite law schools, law school career center officials reported being under pressure to get students jobs, any jobs, rather than focusing on which positions would be a good fit.

One director of a career center told the authors the pressure has reached the point that career counselors might say: "Can you get a job in the beauty salon painting nails until these numbers are in?" (The time reference is to when the law school would report enrollment levels.)

U.S. News and the American Bar Association have toughened their rules on reporting job placement in recent years such that a beauty salon job doesn't count in the same way as a job at a law firm. But Sauder, in an interview, said such shifts don't seem to scare law school officials. "It's a continual game," he said. "Where *U.S. News* tries to improve the measure, people find ways to game the measures."

Could Rankings Be Improved?

The conclusion of the book argues that most of what the authors

document in law schools applies in various ways to other parts of higher education in the United States and the world.

Still, the authors said, there could be ways that the law school rankings, and other rankings, might be improved.

Espeland said in an interview that she thought one of the biggest problems with rankings was the use of ordinal numbers to suggest a precision that doesn't exist at all. This misleads prospective students and also creates more pressure on law school officials, she said.

The greatest pressure she saw in the interviews was at law schools that could be either 49th or 51st in *U.S. News* and were scrambling to do whatever they could to get the former rating instead of the latter -- even if the measures had nothing to do with actual quality. There is a sense that being in the top 25, or top 50, matters a lot. And the ordinal rankings convey a false sense that the 49th-best law school (per a ranking) is actually better than the 51st, she said.

Sauder suggested several ways to improve rankings. One would be to divide law schools by mission. Currently, he said, a law school that saw diversifying the law profession or producing more lawyers who would be engaged in helping low-income people likely would be ranked low, as such a mission would be advanced by looking beyond LSAT scores. Such institutions might be better compared to one another, he said.

Further, Sauder said, rankings would be better if they had competition.

He has done other projects studying business school rankings, and while he found many of the same problems, the existence of multiple rankings appears to relieve the pressure to conform to the standard of any one of them, he said.

Still, Sauder doesn't hold out much hope for reform. He hopes drawing attention to the impact of rankings may make educators more reflective about them, but he doesn't expect them to disappear. "Rankings are here to stay," he said. ■

Baby Steps

BY RICK SELTZER

Washington & Jefferson dips its toe into graduate programs, but leaders of the traditionally undergraduate college admit it's a balancing act, and are moving more modestly than other colleges trying to diversify their offerings.

Washington & Jefferson College leaders want to make sure a new foray into graduate education doesn't cause an identity crisis.

The small, 1,400-student liberal arts college about 45 minutes southwest of Pittsburgh announced in January 2016 it was starting new graduate programs in applied health care economics, professional writing, professional accounting and thanatology -- the study of death, dying and bereavement. The move represents the institution's first foray since 1984 into master's degrees, and it only came after years of discussion about how to best meet a changing higher education market.

In the summer of 2016, Washington & Jefferson held some of its first new graduate classes. But it is also still planning the launch of several of the programs announced in January 2016. And it will remain open to tweaks and changes if, say, students prove more interested in certificate programs.

The college's leaders are clear: they want to keep the graduate programs small, and they do not want them to infringe on Washington &



Jefferson's traditional focus on residential undergraduate education. In short, Washington & Jefferson is taking things slowly and trying not to overextend its resources as it finds its way forward in a still-changing market.

The cautious pace contrasts with some liberal arts colleges that have pushed into graduate and professional education with online-heavy offerings after seeing a tightening residential undergraduate market. Even so, a college like Washington & Jefferson, with a strong academic reputation but financial assets that won't be confused with the largest endowments in the country, has

reason to watch the broader market and try changes. It's a strategy experts see more colleges and universities following as degree growth tilts more toward master's degrees and student populations become older and more diverse.

"We feel this is an important time for small colleges to expand their curriculum," said Tori Haring-Smith, Washington & Jefferson's president. "It not only helps our visibility to have these graduate programs -- and obviously our reputation -- but it provides an opportunity for us to build upon our strengths."

The four graduate programs being started each come from Washing-

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ton & Jefferson's traditional expertise, Haring-Smith said. She traced the roots of their creation all the way back to 2010, when leaders considered a number of different ways for the college to position itself for the future. Options considered ranged from creating a law school to starting a nursing program.

New graduate programs could be useful for Washington & Jefferson undergraduates who might be interested in additional education after they finish their bachelor's degrees, college leaders said. They could also be attractive to alumni and other professionals.

And they have the benefit of being low-risk start-ups. You can't start a law school with six students and no major

administrative additions. But you can create small graduate programs if you have strong faculty members and support staff already on campus.

For instance, additional costs to start the applied health care economics program run in the tens of thousands of dollars per year, not counting some institutional costs like information technology staff time, Haring-Smith said. The programs won't be major revenue centers -- they won't be large enough. Still, plans call for them to be breaking even in two to three years.

Professional writing started with about three students over the summer, although it's expected to grow. Applied health care economics will likely start with half a dozen this fall. Accounting, which specifically includes preparation for the certified public accountant examination, will probably start with a dozen next summer, although some at the college think cohorts could grow to be two or nearly three times that size. Thanatology, which is listed as a certificate program and is designed for professionals in funeral homes, hospitals and counseling, as well

know intellectually it's there, it's an opportunity for them, but they should not be bumping against it day in and day out."

Yet she also acknowledged that some may be worried the institution is straying from its traditional mission.

"On campus, there are individuals who worry about mission creep, no doubt about it," Haring-Smith said. "That's an important voice, and it's an important question for us to keep asking."

The question is heavy on the mind of one of the faculty members

tasked with getting a graduate program off the ground. Kathleen McEvoy is an associate English professor and director of Washington

& Jefferson's graduate program in professional writing.

She believes the graduate program can enhance the experience for undergraduates. Starting the graduate writing program this summer allowed McEvoy to reach out to professionals she wants to teach as adjunct professors, she said. Those professionals may not come just to teach one undergraduate class, but they might be interested in the prospect of teaching both an undergraduate course and a graduate course.

"We're outside of Pittsburgh, and a lot of the people we're looking at for

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On campus, there are individuals who worry about mission creep, no doubt about it. That's an important voice, and it's an important question for us to keep asking.

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as other individuals, will likely enroll cohorts of about seven and has already posted scheduled sessions.

A key goal is keeping the undergraduate experience from changing, said Haring-Smith, who plans to retire in the summer of 2017 after leading the college since 2005. Faculty members should not be turning away from undergraduates to focus on their graduate classes, she said.

"I say students and undergraduates at Washington & Jefferson should not know on a daily basis that we have graduate programs," Haring-Smith said. "They should

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these adjunct positions live in Pittsburgh,” McEvoy said. “To convince them to drive 45 minutes to an hour to teach one class, it can be a hard sell.”

Faculty members can also benefit from new experiences, said Samuel Fee, a professor who chairs the college’s computing and information studies department and taught a graduate class in web design and development this summer. The class, which is part of the graduate professional writing program curriculum, was designed to teach students to write content for online audiences, to code and to design websites.

It’s gone well, with students seeming motivated and interested, Fee said in an email,

which let him lead deeper classroom discussions. He took student feedback into account from the very start of the course.

“I took a little time at the beginning of the course to learn what students were interested in knowing and then modified the class a bit from my original planning to suit,” he said.

McEvoy hopes her program can have 15 students a year from now on. She projects awarding the first master’s degree in December 2017, because students are juggling class and working full time.

Washington & Jefferson trying

to strike the delicate balance of marketing new graduate programs while still keeping its bread-and-butter undergraduates at the center of operations is a challenge, McEvoy said.

“The big difficulty is that Washington & Jefferson has a very specific reputation in the region,” McEvoy said. “It’s a good reputation, but it’s the reputation of an undergraduate institution. It’s been three decades since we offered master’s degrees, and from my understanding, a lot of people weren’t aware that we offered master’s degrees back then.”

“

The big difficulty is that Washington & Jefferson has a very specific reputation in the region. It’s a good reputation, but it’s the reputation of an undergraduate institution.

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Institutions will naturally face questions of identity when starting new programs, said Carla Hickman, managing director of research with the education research firm EAB. It is important to acknowledge them, she said.

“If you are going to pursue graduates for the first time, if you are going to pursue, really, a new kind of credential that you have not historically done, that comes down to, I think, a question of scale,” Hickman said. “It just needs to be a conversation about who we are.”

The trend is for colleges and uni-

versities to think about new student audiences or accessing new markets, Hickman said. Institutions are thinking about both their own strengths and the surrounding market.

“What we have seen is a growing number of institutions who are also looking at things like labor market analytics,” Hickman said. “Do we have a good sense of how industries are shifting and changing and what specific skills the professionals in this area might benefit from?”

Washington & Jefferson’s plans seem to fit with another data point

-- projected growth in master’s degrees.

The total number of master’s degrees awarded is expected to jump 37 percent

between 2011-12 and 2023-24, according to National Center for Education Statistics projections. That compares to a 15 percent projected increase for bachelor’s degrees.

Washington & Jefferson is aware of expected demographic changes, said Robert Gould, vice president for enrollment.

“Being an undergraduate institution of about 1,400 students, we’re well aware of the demographic shift,” he said. “So we’re thinking about this as smart from a portfolio perspective, maintaining market share.”

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The option of earning both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in five years could be of great value to students, Gould said. He also sees potential for the graduate programs to attract community college transfers interested in eventually earning master's degrees.

At the end of the day, though, the goal isn't to grow the graduate program too much, Gould said. The aim is small, targeted programs, according to Judy Kirkpatrick, Washington & Jefferson's vice president of academic affairs.

"We don't need one more vanilla

M.B.A. [in the market]," Kirkpatrick said.

"We're talking coming from the liberal arts arena to really look at niche programs."

The programs don't necessarily need to generate a high number of master's degrees to be successful, Kirkpatrick said. Students can also find professional certificates to be valuable, she said.

Washington & Jefferson's strategy isn't typical, but it isn't unheard of, either, said Ron Mahurin, vice president for strategy and planning at the higher education marketing

and research firm Stamats. He expects to see similar moves at many institutions.

"Places like Washington & Jefferson, the sort of small- to midsized liberal arts colleges, they're not adding these because they want to build out some sort of publishing and research portfolio for their faculty," Mahurin said.

"We are seeing more and more of this. 'How do we leverage faculty expertise and build out some new academic programs in spaces where we believe there may be market opportunities?'" ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/19/washington-jefferson-balances-new-programs-old-emphasis>

Stanford's Massive Push in Graduate Scholarships

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

University announces \$400 million gift to help create \$750 million endowment for program to attract the best talent from around the world.

Stanford University in February 2016 announced a \$400 million gift that will help launch a new scholarship program to attract the best graduate and professional students from around the world.

The university is already close to its goal of a \$750 million endowment for the program, which will admit 100 students a year for up to three years of study -- fully funded, including living expenses -- in one of the university's graduate or professional schools. The students will be nominated by their undergraduate institutions. Those in M.D. and Ph.D. programs, which typically take longer than three years to complete, will have the option of additional years of funding.

All students in the program will also receive leadership training and attend special programs that will draw the students together across their fields of study.

The program will be called the Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program. The first part of the name honors Philip H. Knight, who earned his M.B.A. from Stanford, co-founded Nike Inc. and is giving \$400 mil-

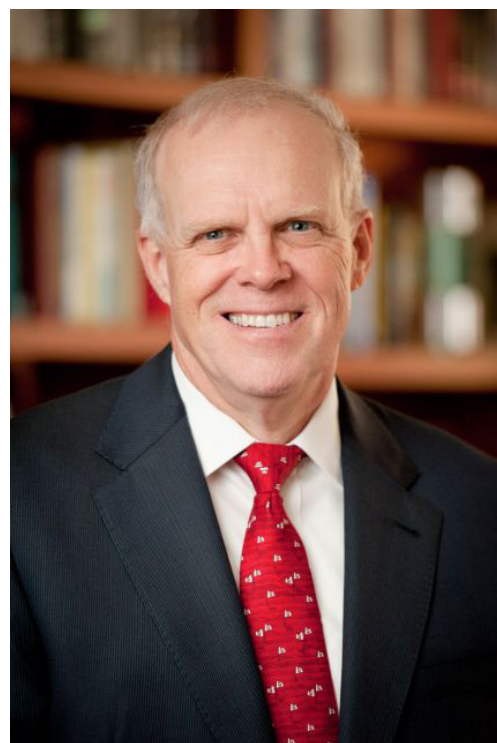
lion for the program. The second part of the name honors John L. Hennessy, who is concluding his presidency of Stanford and who will direct the program after he finishes his work as president.

A faculty committee will soon set specific criteria for awarding the scholarship. In addition to high achievement in academics, leadership and civic commitment will be among the qualities that Stanford will seek. Stanford's announcement also says the university will seek to award the scholarships to people from "a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities."

The university also announced a \$100 million gift, specifically to finance scholarships in the program for those from "less economically developed regions of the world."

Stanford's new program also comes amid something of an international competition for the top graduate student talent.

For decades, the pre-eminent international scholarship program for graduate students from around the world has been the Rhodes Scholarships, which currently are awarded



John L. Hennessy

to 89 students a year (32 from the United States) for study at the University of Oxford.

In 2000, Bill and Melinda Gates donated \$210 million to the University of Cambridge to create a scholarship program for study there. Of the 95 new scholarships awarded each year, about 40 are to students from the United States.

In 2013, Stephen A. Schwarzman,

the founder of Blackstone, gave \$100 million to create a scholarship program to bring global talent to Tsinghua University

in a program explicitly modeled on the Rhodes Scholarships. That program in 2016 announced its inaugural class of 111 students. They were selected from more than 3,000 applicants and come from 32 countries and 75 universities. Nearly half (44 percent) come from the U.S., 21 percent come from China and 35 percent come from the rest of the world.

The Stanford program will admit 100 students a year for up to three years of study -- fully funded, including living expenses -- in one of the university's graduate or professional schools.

Criticism of Big Gifts to Wealthy Institutions

The gift to Stanford also comes at a time when mega-gifts to already wealthy institutions have come under scrutiny, with many questioning whether such donations are needed when many other institutions lack resources. A \$400 million gift to Harvard University last year for

its engineering programs drew many critical responses, including [this essay](#) in *Inside Higher Ed*.

It's too soon to know if Stanford

will face similar criticism, but many of those who raise questions about the spending of the wealthiest colleges and universities have argued that they should spend more on scholarships, as opposed to launching new programs or building new facilities, so the emphasis of the Stanford program may shield it from some critics of other mega-donations. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/24/stanford-announces-huge-gifts-and-new-efforts-attract-best-graduate-and-professional>

Views

A selection of essays and op-eds

Send First-Gen Students to Grad School

By PAULA M. KREBS

Many students, especially those who are the first in their families to attend college, need help from faculty members to think about what happens next, argues Paula M. Krebs.

If you're teaching at a four-year college or university, you may have had some training in the needs of your first-generation college students, many of whom have probably transferred to your institution from a community college. You probably haven't been asked to think about first-gen status in relation to what happens *after* graduation, though. Students whose families don't know much about college need more help acculturating to the expectations of college. Likewise, many students, perhaps even most students, need help from faculty members to think about what happens after college.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, graduate degrees bring higher wages to their holders, but their value varies by field. Some

occupations demand graduate degrees at the entry level, and others, such as the master's in social work, want you to have some experience first. Most first-generation college students don't know how to begin to think about graduate study, however.

At my public regional university, we offer quite a few master's-level programs, mostly geared toward professional qualifications: teaching degrees such as the M.A.T.; professional programs such as the

M.S.W., M.P.A. or M.B.A. Those programs can complement all sorts of undergrad social science degrees or humanities degrees, building on the critical thinking, writing, speaking, synthesis, project management and data analysis skills of a liberal arts degree. Other graduate pro-



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grams aim to give students skills and credentials that make them better qualified for particular kinds of careers: public history or criminal justice programs, or library and information systems degrees.

Whatever the graduate program, however, its very gradueness might make it intimidating to students whose families are unfamiliar with graduate education. Most of our students don't have parents who have professional positions; most don't have advanced-degree holders in the family. If students are to get advice about graduate school, it's probably going to come from their faculty members.

Faculty members don't have to become career counselors, but if we're at master's-granting universities, we can start by learning about the graduate degree programs at our own institutions. Perhaps faculty in foreign languages can encourage their students to take their training and enthusiasm into public health programs. Maybe sociology B.A.s could move into clinical psychology master's programs. At my university, we have a criminal justice master's program that can help any undergraduate move into many different kinds of work in and around the justice system, and our master's in public administration helps students into jobs in local government.

With the increasing importance of graduate degrees in the workplace, and the decreasing likelihood that employers will pay for workers to pursue graduate degrees, it falls to undergraduate faculty to think about how we can become better advisers for students who would benefit from graduate degrees. We can help them to learn what programs are worth the investment, both of tuition dollars and of delayed entry into the labor market, as well as to choose undergraduate courses that will move them to the next step.

It can be a tough sell for first-generation students to talk to their fam-

help our students figure out the right questions to ask.

We can also start talking to students about postgraduation options sooner in their undergrad careers. If a student wonders aloud about topping her art degree with an M.B.A., we can encourage her to take some basic business courses while she's still an undergraduate. If a student thinks he might want to teach, but he doesn't want to get an undergrad education degree, we can look up the requirements for postbaccalaureate teaching certification to see how he can get a head start right away.

Perhaps the most important thing we can do in undergrad programs is to demystify graduate study for all our students, so the people who don't know much about

“With the increasing importance of graduate degrees in the workplace, and the decreasing likelihood that employers will pay for workers to pursue graduate degrees, it falls to undergraduate faculty to think about how we can become better advisers for students who would benefit from graduate degrees.”

ilies about spending more years in the classroom. The more we can help students to sort out the advantages and disadvantages of various degree and certificate programs and of delayed entry into grad programs vs. moving straight from undergraduate, the better they'll be able to talk with the folks at home about their plans.

Should they take out more loans to get a master's degree? Should they work first and pursue a grad certificate at night or on weekends? Will they be eligible for aid or assistantships in grad school? We can

it can feel free to ask questions. Familiarize yourself with the graduate options at your own institution and the financial aid possibilities for each one. Put yourself in your students' shoes: If you were a junior and had never thought about graduate school, what would you need to be told? What mistakes might you make?

If you work at an institution that has graduate programs, ask your dean to set up an opportunity for faculty members to learn about the requirements for graduate admissions and the expectations of

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grad students at your school. Invite the graduate dean to a department meeting. He or she is looking to boost enrollments and so will be thrilled to come and tout the advantages of the various degree and certificate programs.

If you don't have grad programs, look around your area to see what programs are within driving distance (for your commuting students), check out the Bureau of Labor Statistics link above and look into the resources about master's programs at the Council of Graduate Schools. Find out from your alumni office

what kinds of degrees and certificates your grads are pursuing after graduation. Talk to alumni.

If you understand the various postbachelor's options available for your students, you can make a big difference in how they are able to use what you've given them in the undergrad classroom.

There's room for a lot more connection between undergraduate education in one discipline and graduate education in another. It's the undergrad faculty who'll have to help students to see those connections.

I'm not recommending sending more of our students to research Ph.D.s -- the degrees most of us have and understand.

That's a whole different topic and raises a whole different set of questions about access, social class, diversity, time to degree and other issues widely discussed in the higher ed literature.

What I'm advocating here is keeping the option of graduate study -- the kind that can result in career advancement and increased earnings -- in front of all of our students, not just the privileged ones. ■

Bio

Paula M. Krebs is dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bridgewater State University, in Massachusetts. On Twitter, she is @PaulaKrebs. Paula M. Krebs is dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bridgewater State University, in Massachusetts. On Twitter, she is @PaulaKrebs.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/04/faculty-members-should-help-first-gen-students-go-grad-school-essay>

The Costs of ‘Colorblind’

BY JULIE R. POSSELT

To increase racial diversity in the professoriate, we need to build the pool of Ph.D.s of color, writes Julie R. Posselt, and that means confronting barriers in the admissions process.

In a closed-door meeting on Nov. 5, 2015, Yale University President Peter Salovey admitted to students of color, “We failed you ... I think we have to be a better university. I think we have to do a better job.”

Protests over racism at Yale prompted this meeting and all but eclipsed a major announcement administrators there had approved unprecedented funds -- \$50 million -- to diversify their faculty.

Few universities can match Yale’s investment, but almost all need the change that Yale seeks. Even at flagship universities of ethnically diverse states like Texas and Florida, people of color make up less than 25 percent of the teaching force. It’s in part a supply problem. Only 26 percent of doctorate recipients are black, Latino/a, Native American, or Asian-American, and their share is even lower in the highly ranked Ph.D. programs from which colleges and universities like to recruit faculty.



To increase racial diversity in the professoriate, we need to build the pool of Ph.D.s of color, and that means confronting barriers in the graduate admissions process. As admissions season ramps up and the U.S. Supreme Court debates *Fisher v. University of Texas*, the timing to do so is ideal.

First, the obvious question: Is bias a barrier? A recent field experiment found the answer may well be yes. Faculty members were less likely to hit reply when email inquiries from prospective advisees had names that suggested they were Indian,

Chinese, Latino, African-American and/or female. And when professors did reply, it took them longer. If racism can creep into these early interactions, then those responsible for admissions and recruitment should take steps to avert the risk.

The public policy that governs admissions presents barriers, too. State affirmative-action bans have reduced graduate and professional-level enrollments in several fields of study, including medicine. These findings are especially important as the Supreme Court again weighs evidence in *Fisher*. The equivalent of a

nationwide ban on race-conscious admission hangs in the balance, and if implemented, it would likely decimate the already small professoriate of color.

Finally, the admissions process creates its own barriers. I witnessed that firsthand through a major study of doctoral admissions that I recently completed. It involved two years of fieldwork with 10 highly ranked doctoral programs in three well-known research universities. I had the privilege of observing admissions committees deliberate in a variety of disciplines, and I interviewed 68 thoughtful professors who were charged with reviewing applications.

Overrelying on Scores and Pedigrees

Despite their good intentions to increase diversity, broadly defined, admissions work was laced with conventions – often rooted in inherited or outdated assumptions – that made it especially hard for students from underrepresented backgrounds to gain access.

From philosophy to physics, nine out of 10 committees made the first cut of their large, highly qualified applicant pools through race-neutral or “colorblind” methods. Some did so by requirement; for others, it was voluntary. The common standard at this point consisted of very high GRE scores and very high grades, ideally from tough classes and a name-brand college or university.

A sociologist summed up the process: “First you have to be above a bar. Then we can ask the diversity

question.” In using this sequence, many believed they were achieving a standard of “pure merit,” as one economist called it.

In principle, race neutrality means excluding race from the criteria on which students are judged. But in practice, it can be much more powerful than that. I saw how colorblind admissions could effectively shut down any discussion of race or ethnicity – even that which is well within the law, such as GRE scores’ uneven distributions by race.

Ironically, colorblind review made professors myopic. When they failed to see race, they also failed to see that the bar they set to reduce the pool had much to do with diversity, even if they did not actively ask “the diversity question.”

The priorities I observed are consistent with national trends. In the most comprehensive study available, two of the three strongest predictors of graduate school admission were high composite GRE scores and degrees from selective institutions. However, black and Latino students’ odds of enrolling in the most selective undergraduate institutions are declining over time, relative to white and Asian students. And a recent analysis in *Nature* concluded that the median quantitative GRE score in American physics programs (700, or 166 on the new scale) eliminated almost all black, Latino, and Native American test takers and about 75 percent of female test takers. However, it retained 82 percent of white and Asian-American test takers.

Heavy reliance on high GRE scores and college pedigree thus systematically excludes some of the very groups that an institution’s diversity commitment implies they wish to attract – people who might rise to the top in later rounds of review. This apparently neutral, even desirable, criterion carries disparate impact.

U.S. courts have not yet considered whether using admissions criteria with disparate impact constitutes unlawful discrimination (as it does in South Africa), but they have taken up similar questions in employment law. The Fifth Circuit Court ruled the consideration of age in determining pay to be constitutional only when implemented for the purpose of “business necessity.”

Is selecting students with very high GRE scores a matter of business necessity for graduate programs? It’s hard to make the case with current research. In a recent ETS study, only 43 percent of graduate students in biology departments with combined GRE scores in the top quartile also earned first-year grades in the top quartile. Correlations between GRE scores and first-year grades meet levels that testing proponents hold up as statistically significant and skeptics dismiss as practically insignificant. And the test poorly predicts longer-term outcomes, such as graduation and time to degree.

A Standard of Pure Merit?

It’s time for professors to acknowledge the GRE’s limits and put scores in their proper place. Setting

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high cut scores and reading scores devoid of context not only undermines diversity. It runs contrary to ETS directives and promotes a false sense of security in admissions investments.

Make no mistake: when the admissions committees that I studied reviewed their short lists, merit meant something very different than it did when they made the initial cut. Only in one case -- a student dubbed "freaking genius" for his perfect Harvard grades and perfect GRE scores -- was conventional achievement sufficient to secure an admissions offer. More often, admitted students had "interesting," "unique" or "cool" profiles rooted in personal or professional experience. One committee excitedly moved to admit a retired CIA operative, a contributor to a hip magazine and the department's

first-ever applicant from Malaysia. They mockingly compared a solid Midwestern student to a Ford: "He's everything you look for and nothing you weren't expecting." They rejected many accomplished students from China.

Indeed, judgment of students from Asian countries, especially China, reflected a common exception to the norm of colorblind review. A linguist stated it bluntly: "If a kid from China does not have essentially perfect GRE scores ... they're regarded as probably brain-dead." Professors attributed high scores of students from China to a test preparation industry that is a "well-developed machine" and "second to none in the world." They mused openly about suspicions of rampant cheating. Memories loomed large of students who arrived on campus with terrible

English skills.

President Salovey wasn't talking about graduate admissions when he acknowledged Yale had "failed" students of color.

But he might as well have been -- and many other top university leaders could say the same -- so wide is the gap between diversity rhetoric and usual means of identifying academic talent.

To "do a better job" educating college students means not only taking a strong stand against overt forms of racism on campuses.

We also need to see the subtle ways that racial inequalities are institutionalized in standard operating procedures and the ideals of "pure merit" through which college students become graduate students and graduate students become professors. ■

Bio

Julie R. Posselt is an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Michigan and a fellow with the National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation. Her book, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity and Faculty Gatekeeping, is now available from Harvard University Press.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/01/18/how-so-called-colorblind-admissions-reviews-create-barriers-people-color-essay>

The Master's Question

BY J. H. PEARL

Faculty members and administrators tend to forget that, for most undergraduates, grad school doesn't mean a doctorate, writes J. H. Pearl.

The debate over advising students interested in a humanities Ph.D. has now raged for years, if debates in the scholarly world can actually be said to rage. After William Pannacker's salvo, "Graduate School in the Humanities: Just Don't Go," professors of English and other disciplines have argued seemingly all sides of the Ph.D. question.

We tend to forget, however, that for most undergraduates, grad school doesn't mean a doctorate. It often means a master of arts. Prospective students might be unsure about their futures, but many know already that the technical fixations of academe aren't for them. For some, the M.A. is an opportunity to learn that firsthand. For others, it's a chance to enjoy personally cherished intellectual pursuits. And for others still, the M.A. is part of a route to career possibilities well beyond the ken of most professors.

Some will say I have this backward. The modern M.A. was conceived as a sort of participation

award for doctoral students who couldn't or didn't want to finish. Looked down on, openly derided, the M.A. in most humanities disciplines has long been treated as a beginner Ph.D., rather than an advanced B.A. Consequently, master's programs, badly needing renovation, have fallen into neglect, a predicament detailed by Leonard Cassuto in "The Degree for Quitters and Failures," now part of his excellent book, *The Graduate School Mess: What Caused It and How We Can Fix It*.

M.A. programs are on the rise, however. According to a study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the number of degree completions has risen steadily in the last three decades. The trend dipped a little in the early 2010s, and humanities M.A.s continue to lose ground to professional and scientific degrees. But in 2014, the last year for which there is data, roughly 25,000 students graduated with a master's in English, history, linguis-



tics, classics, philosophy, art history, religious studies, area studies or gender studies. That's almost five times the number graduating with doctorates in those fields: five times as many, and most professors think only of the Ph.D.

Granted, there are good reasons not to get an M.A. Where there's a doctoral track, the master's will always be a poorer cousin, even though M.A. programs at most institutions function as cash cows. People in elite Ph.D. programs cor-

don off these “lesser” degrees, never giving them the attention they deserve, and professors everywhere, out of ignorance or self-absorption, refuse to account for the needs of students whose ultimate goal is not to enter the professoriate. Perhaps most significantly, the cost can be prohibitive: two years of education and potentially a lifetime of loan payments. That Arts and Sciences study provided data on funding for doctoral students but not master’s students, yet a recent article – aptly entitled “Graduate-School Debt Is Raising Questions About Degrees’ Worth” – points out that three-quarters of all M.A.s, compared to two-thirds of Ph.D.s, finish school with debt. The average for master’s graduates is \$40,000.

M.A. students know what they’re doing, however, and we ought to listen to them. That was the purpose of a survey we conducted at my institution, a large second-tier state university in the Southeast with a high Hispanic enrollment. Among other questions, we asked, “What was your reason for pursuing an M.A. in literature? What do you hope to do with the degree? What are your plans after graduation?”

The most common reason, sometimes given all by itself, was that reading literature – and thinking, talking and writing about it – is fulfilling and enriching. Over and over, students avowed a passion for the intellectual rewards of thinking through big ideas and learning from experts, of spending long hours at the library researching George Eliot,

for instance, or the Harlem Renaissance. “I have a passion for literature and wanted to continue my studies,” one student explained. “I’m passionate about the intersections of literature, the environment and activism,” another said. “I’ve always had a passion for literature and writing,” said another.

Trained in the protocols of “suspicious reading,” I at first saw these declarations as uncritical, a little naïve. Then I remembered our respondents were already enrolled; they’d already taken courses; many had finished course work and were writing theses. And still the enthusiasm. I reread their answers, and it occurred to me that no one betrayed the malaise of a dissertating Ph.D. candidate, the paranoia of an assistant professor, the cynicism of a long-tenured associate professor. Our students had plenty of suggestions, even criticisms, but clearly the system hadn’t beaten them down.

And besides, isn’t passion the best reason for doing anything? What do we gain by second-guessing students’ aspirations? More important, what do students themselves gain? We assume we must debunk their illusions, telling them how long the Ph.D. takes and how tough the job market is, but maybe instead we can learn from their idealism.

About half our students voiced an interest in getting a Ph.D.; getting an M.A., they said, was a way to test the waters. Would they be able to move to another state, another part of the country? How committed were they to the professional study of litera-

ture? It’s hard for even the most ardent B.A.s to know. As one student revealed, “Although I knew I ultimately wanted a Ph.D., my gap year between undergrad and grad school left me feeling insecure about my abilities. I was questioning my goal ... but my experiences as an M.A. student have helped reaffirm my commitment to pursuing a Ph.D.” Undoubtedly, many will decide otherwise, but they’ll have a versatile degree in hand and plenty of time to try out alternatives. Twenty years ago, in an M.A. program myself, I remember a friend complaining he wanted to “enjoy” literature, rather than “analyze it to death.” That peer didn’t go on, but he left academe more informed about the discipline, more mindful of his own distinct ambitions.

Of course, to no one’s surprise, many students said they aimed to get jobs or promotions at area high schools, but a significant share saw the degree as a means to other careers. Respondents hoped to use the M.A. to teach English abroad, to adjunct at a community college, to work as an academic adviser. One student, already a writer, simply wanted higher-level academic credentials: “The degree would give me more experience with theory and also a bit of legitimacy that lived experiences alone wouldn’t.” Another student planned to “become an editor and help diversify the big five publishing houses.” And another, who expressed interest in advertising, explained simply that it was difficult to find a job with only a B.A.

Insofar as reading, writing and speaking well are valuable skills, an M.A., especially in English, will always have much to offer. Moreover, to write a thesis on, say, the history of the Ming dynasty is to develop an argument about some portion of our rapidly globalizing world. My wife has an M.A. in English and now works as vice president of marketing and communications at a health care nonprofit. In graduate school, she learned how to speak in front of a crowd. She also learned about representations of gender and disease on the early modern stage. And I know of many other former master's students who've migrated to professions as diverse as filmmaking, political consulting and overseas economic development.

No one can predict the future, so when students come to us, we need to tread lightly, never passing final judgment on their suitability (or unsuitability) for a particular career.

Put crassly, an M.A. reduces these stakes. I've never counseled against getting a master's, and if the desire is there, it's hard to imagine circumstances under which I would. Long ago, another peer in my M.A. cohort told me that whatever happened after graduation, she'd at least spent two years thinking about great books -- a fair deal, she reasoned.

Ultimately, the master's question, as I'm calling it, is a question less for students than for us, for the professors and administrators running graduate programs. Are we willing to rethink our course offerings and degree requirements according to actual students' needs? Will we reach out to employers to learn what they're looking for? How about asking recent graduates how the degree has helped them and how it might have helped them more?

At many universities, the M.A., like the Ph.D., is chained to the past. Things are done a certain way be-

cause they've always been done that way.

When we discussed conducting a survey, the point was made that we couldn't let students drive our priorities, couldn't let them dictate what we teach them. But whose priorities take priority?

These traditions might seem right, and they've certainly become comfortable, but it's unethical, not to mention bad teaching and bad advising, to ignore the prospects of the students who fill our classrooms, to carry on as though they're all destined to be Ivy League Ph.D.s.

At my institution, we've sent graduates to great programs, but that's the exception, and we shouldn't expect everyone to pursue such a goal -- or desire it. When the truly gifted, truly committed M.A. student walks into my office and asks about Ph.D. programs, that student usually knows quite a lot already. We need to think more about everyone else. ■

Bio

J. H. Pearl is an associate professor of English and the director of graduate studies at Florida International University.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/09/07/advising-graduate-students-who-are-interested-ma-not-phd-essay>

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