

Ten Facts about...

Master's Degrees

Master's education is the fastest growing and largest component of the graduate enterprise in the United States. According to the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment & Degrees for Fall 2020, 84.0% of first-time graduate students were enrolled in programs leading to a master's degree or a graduate certificate and nearly three quarters (72.9%) of total graduate enrollment was in master's programs.

01

Increasingly, the nation's workforce needs master's degrees. Jobs that require a master's degree at an entry-level are projected to grow by 15% between 2019 and 2029, the fastest across all education levels.ⁱ

02

The majority of college graduates desire master's degrees. Nearly three quarters of all students completing the baccalaureate expect to pursue an additional post-baccalaureate credential; of those, nearly two-thirds plan to complete a master's degree.ⁱⁱ

03

The U.S. healthcare system depends on master's education. Over three-fourths of nurse practitioners and nurse midwives are master's degree holders and so are nearly two-thirds of nurse anesthetists. In addition, the plurality of various counseling occupations, such as marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors are held by master's degree holders.ⁱⁱⁱ

04

Master's education is a critical pathway to better job security and higher earnings for URM students. Nearly one quarter of master's degree recipients in 2018-19 were underrepresented minorities (URMs), a proportion comparable to URM representation among baccalaureate degree recipients. In the same year, however, only 18.3% of doctoral degree recipients were URMs.^{iv}

05

Master's education helps URM students prepare for STEM doctoral education. Underrepresented minority (URM) doctoral students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are more likely to complete their degree objectives when they have prior master's degrees.^v

06

Not all master's degrees are MBAs. Master's degrees in business accounted for nearly one quarter (23.6%) of all master's degrees conferred in the United States in 2018-19. Education (17.6%) and health professions and related fields (15.8%) were second and third. The remaining were in a variety of fields, including computer and information sciences (5.5%), social sciences and other applied fields, such as public administration and social services (5.9%) and psychology (3.5%).^{vi}

07

The nation's education workforce relies on master's education. Many elementary teachers (46%) and secondary teachers (51%), as well as special education teachers (52%) and education administrators (44.3%) are master's degree holders.^{vii}

08

Master's degree holders are an integral part of community college education. Nearly two-thirds of full-time faculty at community colleges in Fall 2003 had master's degrees, while only 18% of them had doctoral degrees.^{viii} More than half (53.5%) of community college instructors have master's degrees as their highest credentials, while only 11% of them have doctoral degrees.^{ix}

09

Master's education preserves our heritage and spurs cultural innovation. The majority of the nation's librarians are master's degree holders, and the plurality of archivists, curators, museum technicians and conservators, and anthropologists and archeologists, and historians are Master's degree holders.^x

10

Master's degree holders are essential members of the U.S. research and development enterprise. The largest percentage of survey researchers, mathematicians, statisticians, sociologists, economists, and political scientists are master's degree holders.^{xi}



Notes >>

- i. U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table 5.2 Employment, wages, and projected change in employment by typical entry-level education (Employment in thousands).
- ii. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:16/17).
- iii. Ibid.
- iv. U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 2020, Table 322.20. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976-77 through 2018-19, Table 323.20. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976-77 through 2018-19, and Table 324.20. Doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976-77 through 2018-19.
- v. R. Sowell, J. Allum, and H. Okahana, Doctoral Initiative on Minority Attrition and Completion, 2015.
- vi. U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 2020, Table 323.10. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970-71 through 2018-19.
- vii. U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Educational attainment for workers 25 years and older by detailed occupation, 2019.
- viii. U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 2019 (based on the data from National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, 2004).
- ix. National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), National Survey of College Graduates, 2019.
- x. Ibid.
- xi. Ibid.

