

## Ten Facts about...

# Master's Degrees

**M**aster'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.<sup>i</sup>

**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.<sup>ii</sup>

**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.<sup>iii</sup>

**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.<sup>iv</sup>

**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.<sup>v</sup>

**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%).<sup>vi</sup>

**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.<sup>vii</sup>

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.<sup>viii</sup> 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.<sup>ix</sup>

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.<sup>x</sup>

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.<sup>xi</sup>



## 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.

