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Is the Master's Degree the New Bachelor's?

First-time enrollments in master's degree programs are up nationally by 2.4 percent each of the past 10 years. What's driving such increases? While a majority of master's students report "personal enrichment" as their top motivation, a master's degree has become the entry degree for many professions. Development of specialized programs support such a conclusion. Georgetown University reports that of the 55 million

new jobs to be created between 2010 and 2020, six million will require a master's degree or higher, encompassing most new professional jobs.

So if you hold a bachelor's degree and are underemployed, what should you do? First, do not presume that a master's degree will solve your problems. Second, if a specialized program suits your aptitude and career objectives, go for it.

But do not underestimate the value of a master's degree, since earning such a degree often shows that you have advanced analytical and communications skills and that you have a strong work ethic. Already working? Check out part-time programs and ramp up your credentials!

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College-Level Skills and Employment

The education report card is in, and the results are not good. Some 30% of students admitted to selective colleges and 60% to open-access institutions are unprepared for college-level work. SAT/ACT scores remain flat. On the other end, research—based on the College Learning Assessment (CLA) that measures achievement in critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and communication skills—indicates that many college graduates haven't learned as much as they should.

Further, CLA-measured skills correlate more highly with career success than do social networking, college selectivity, or college major (although liberal arts graduates did better on these skills compared with other majors). Students with low-CLA scores are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and twice as likely to lose their first jobs within a year. Employers can tell who got a good college education!

In response, many colleges are working hard to address these problems. For example, Trinity College's graduate courses uphold rigorous standards for reasoning, critical thinking, and writing to reflect expectations of our academic fields and to make sure that our graduates succeed later in life. Such efforts supply important added value to any degree. Something else for prospective students to check out!

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OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Does a college's location matter in today's environment? In an era of online degree programs, MOOCs, and videoconferencing, some contend that concerns about geographic location are outdated and irrelevant. Our graduate students at Trinity College, however, tell a different story: location matters very much.

Personally engaging others from diverse professional and social backgrounds, in and out of class, enriches any student's educational experience. In addition, the Greater Hartford region—as a capital city hosting major corporations, art and historical museums, artistic and

dramatic institutions, medical and research centers, major public agencies, and eminent educational institutions—offers unique opportunities for experiential learning and research, networking, and employment. Students taking advantage of such opportunities also contribute much, in that way, to the region.

So if you are thinking about entering a degree program, do consider the program's content and cost. But also consider the program's geographic and social advantages. A richer experience will enhance the value of your degree.

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BADGES VS. DEGREES

A recent study as summarized in a Business Insider video that went viral asserts that hiring officers typically review each job seeker's résumé for only six seconds. During that brief time, their gaze flicks from name, to current and recent positions, to education. Trying to stand out, some job seekers have turned to “badges,” “certificates,” “licenses,” or “nanodegrees” to prove that they have learned specific skills beyond or instead of merely earning traditional degrees. Does such a strategy work?

Results are mixed. In highly technical fields such as IT, nondegree certification might make sense, depending on the source and level of achievement. Most applicant screening algorithms, however, have not

been updated to recognize such alternative credentials. Moreover, many studies show that managerial advancement correlates highly with the theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills that most degree programs emphasize.

Most colleges recognize that the dichotomy of alternative credentials vs. degrees is false. Good programs, especially at the graduate level, combine higher level skills with deeper theoretical reflection that will sustain a career. Persons seeking career advancement should carefully weigh which type of credential best suits their long-term goals.

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HIGHER EDUCATION BENEFITS ALL

Who should benefit from higher education: individual degree recipients or society as a whole? The obvious answer is “both”! But that answer increasingly is not matched by public policy or funding. Continual decreases in the proportion of the cost of college borne by government funding is a major factor in shifting the financial burden to the shoulders of individual students, often resulting in crushing debt.

The advanced education that health care professionals receive amply illustrates how education benefits all. To be sure, health care workers enhance their careers by earning professional degrees and certification. But the skills that they receive and the research that many conduct result

directly in better health care for us all. Accordingly, Trinity College aims for its graduate program in health care policy to benefit the community, not just individual students.

Restoring public funding for the education of all professionals to prior levels will reduce individual student debt and help ensure that society as a whole will continue to benefit.

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COMPLETE THAT DEGREE!

**THREE-YEAR
FLAT TUITION RATE
FOR M.A. STUDENTS**

Degree completion rates in higher education have garnered much attention lately, with good reason. According to the most recent data from the National Student Clearinghouse, graduation rates are slowly climbing. Here are U.S. and Connecticut figures for all student types from 2014:

Type of Institution	U.S. Completion	CT Completion
4-year public (starting + other)	60%	69%
4-year private (starting + other)	61%	80%
2-year public	40%	32%

Further, a multitude of other studies confirm that income and employment prospects correlate very highly with degree completion regardless of field and for all degree levels. This is why we work very hard at Trinity College to help students finish their baccalaureate and master's degrees. In general, students who complete their degrees will enjoy a sense of accomplishment, greater confidence, and enhanced opportunities.

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WHAT ARE YOU READING?

Most of us read, some quite a lot, but we're reading differently these days. Single-page memos, blog posts, e-mail messages, social media posts, tweets, headlines, smartphone texts, emoji – the race toward brevity is unmistakable. Crowded schedules at work or home leave little time or energy for long-form, reflective reading. Students in our master's classes at Trinity College often report that they haven't read so much in years! They aren't complaining, since they welcome an opportunity to read and reflect on works that significantly expand their horizons.

I have been privileged to know attorneys, underwriters, and health professionals who have completed master's degrees in American studies or English. Actively engaging material outside their professional field enriches their lives and careers. As new alumni/ae receive their diplomas this spring, I hope that they will continue to read, reflect, and learn. They now know how.

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