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An Advanced University Degree: Is It Time For Your Master's?

If you have a bachelor degree, you might consider advancing your credentials while jobs are few and candidates abundant. That's what many others have apparently been doing. As a result, these students are contributing to an increase in master's degree enrollments, according to Inside Higher Education. New and expanded master's degree programs were being created at the time of the publication's last year report. And online master's degree programs might make it easier for many to obtain a graduate university degree.

Earning a master's degree could put you in solid company, since rising numbers of adults since the 1990's have reportedly been obtaining them. In 2006-2007, more than 600,000 master's degrees were awarded, up 44 percent over those awarded in 1996-1997, National Center for Education Statistics show. The majority of those who received master's degrees in 2006-2007 were women, and the number of minority graduate students is said to be increasing.

Working toward a [online graduate degrees](#) might make it easier for students to accomplish their goals. Online degree programs overall are reportedly growing fast, allowing students pursuing these degrees to participate in studies between work and family responsibilities and from wherever they have Internet access. Some online master's degree programs are available in accelerated versions that allow students to accomplish their goals in one year, rather than two. And assistance is available to offset the costs of tuition.

Students pursuing online master's degrees in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects might find incentives and programs particularly easy to find. The Obama administration, business groups, and state governments have been working to enhance initiatives such as these in the STEM study areas, according to a January 2009 article in an educational magazine known as Converge.

Debra W. Stewart, Council for Graduate Studies President, has been quoted as saying that master's degree programs train highly skilled science professionals who significantly contribute to the country's economic competitiveness. STEM careers exist in fields such as nanotechnology, wind and solar energy and space exploration.

Students pursuing online master's degrees in the STEM subjects have a great variety of programs from which to choose. Professional science, environmental engineering, cybersecurity and bioethics are a few of the online master's degree programs currently available. And industries in the STEM subject areas are looking for qualified applicants, the Converge article reported.

But compared with other countries, a low percentage of American students in college and graduate programs study STEM subjects, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Where the majority of master's degrees in the United States in 2006-2007 went to students majoring in education, business and health sciences, degrees in mathematics and statistics were the fewest; and while master's degrees in the field of security and protective services saw the largest percent increase since 1996-1997, those in the areas of physical sciences and science technologies had the smallest percent increase over the decade, the National Center for Education Statistics reports.

Tuition costs for students interested in pursuing online master's degrees can be offset by scholarships and fellowships that colleges, universities, organizations and non-profit foundations provide. Students can find fellowships available in the areas of teaching, the humanities, theology, western civilization and more. Some scholarships and fellowships are intended specifically for women and minorities. Students pursuing [online masters program](#) in the STEM subjects might look toward groups such as NASA, the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the American Society for Microbiology and the U.S. Departments of Energy, Defense and Homeland Security for master's level fellowships.

Many of those in pursuit of a [university degree](#) find online colleges work to their benefit as several of the fields offer work and study programs, including internships. A [bachelor of science](#) is an excellent starting point as the field is diverse. Specialization can come later.

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