

Professional Masters: Tips for a wildly successful program

There is no “magic formula” - every successful professional masters program is adept at reacting to their relevant industries, funding realities, and department/college infrastructures. After meeting with 6 professional masters programs* at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Graduate School presents the following successful practices:

VIBRANT, CLEAR WEB PRESENCE

Websites developed as marketing tools, with posted program learning outcomes, clear curriculum descriptions, program statistics, cost of program attendance, diversity of studies and students, and career outlooks for program graduates. Market the competitive, intensive components of degree.

INTENSIVE, MULTIDISCIPLINARY CURRICULA

Fidelity to intensive scholarship (that may habitually evolve as a result of intensive, continual program assessment). Include components specific to professional practice

COHORT/GROUP COMPONENTS

Students who experience either a partial or full size-controlled cohort component in their program enjoy a positive program climate and gain experience in building a network of professionals. Group components foster student community.

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIA and INDUSTRY

Deliberate use of faculty from academe and faculty adjuncts from industry. Reflecting industry needs in learning outcomes.

EXPERIENTIAL/CAPSTONE COMPONENT

Invested staff serving as internship identifiers/coordinators. Curricula that highlight real-world learning experiences either in group assignments, internship activities, or on-the-job, supervised projects.

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Involved and interested faculty who practice strong link between teaching and practice. Program administrators that support faculty with IT and other administrative needs so that the faculty are free to focus on teaching.

INTENTIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

Program administrators provide customized IT, administrative and career support to prospective, current and graduate students. Program developers might design program in a way that serves non-traditional students with a flexible curriculum (night/weekend courses) or a compressed curriculum (entire degree completed in a compressed time).

DEVELOPED LEARNING OUTCOMES/CAREER ASSISTANCE EFFORTS

Survey students in first year and again an exit survey as they finish the degree (surveying the students helps the program respond to particular skill-building needs). Dedicated career development coordinators assess and reflect industry needs in the curriculum.

FIDELITY TO AND AWARENESS OF ALUMNI NETWORK

Use of alumni list-serves, alumni newsletters (printed and distributed through traditional mail), deliberate use of social media (LinkedIn). Students and graduates share experiences, job postings, practical advice, and networking opportunities.

CREATIVITY IN ACHIEVING PROGRAM GOALS

Some programs have tried: “Teacher-exchange” with other departments, borrowing class space from related departments as student interest shifts, differentiating professional student goals from traditional students’ goals, and allowing students to earn credit for workplace accomplishments.