

# THE FUTURE OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE: RESEARCH, PROFESSIONAL AND OTHER

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redefine THE POSSIBLE.





- 50 years young this year
- Canada's Third Largest University
  - 45,890 Undergraduate students, (full- and part-time students)
  - 4,796 Graduate students, (full- and part-time students)
  - 3,236 International students from 150 countries, (including undergraduate and graduate students)
- Notable Strengths are in the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts
- More than 100 master's and doctoral degrees offered by 56 program
  - Second largest graduate school in Ontario
  - Graduate programs are separate from departments and can draw faculty from across the university
    - First and largest women's studies program in Canada
    - Senate recently approved a policy allowing First Nation's students to submit theses and dissertations in their own language

# Master's Degrees in Canadian Universities Outside Québec: Being Bologna before Bologna?



- The core of the Bologna Process is the three-cycle qualifications framework
  - This is the model that has prevailed over much of Canada until recently
    - ‘postgraduate pre-doctoral study’ (though with the option of it being a terminal degree)
  - Moreover, until recently, master's degrees in much of Canada have been two years in length, and the theory underpinning them was very similar to that used to justify Bologna
  - Situation is changing
  - In general terms, baccalaureates are broadly similar and comprehensible across Canada and are comparable to those in the US
  - Doctoral programs (excepting professional doctorates) are again very similar and comprehensible
  - Masters programs are however quite different: nationally, continentally and internationally
    - EUA has recognized the need for a ‘shared and readable terminology’ for master's degrees

# Historical Patterns



- For previous generations in much of Canada, the Master's degree was a two year degree
- First year consisted of courses
  - Provided breadth – anticipated the field preparation at the doctoral level
  - Provided depth in methodology and theory
- Second year was for thesis preparation
  - Objective usually was a piece of original scholarship +/- 125 pages
    - In practice, many master's theses became mini-dissertations
    - Most students were full-time, relatively young, and faculty tended to see themselves in this cohort (self reproduction of the academy)
- Overarching characteristic was that these were research degrees – distinguishable from undergraduate degrees
- Provision for direct entry/promotion into PhD programs in the sciences had become common by the 1970s/80s

# The Ontario Situation



- Ontario has the largest number of universities and the greatest number of students in Canada: 20 universities offering graduate programs (about 1/3 of the total)
- unique in Anglophone Canada in having a well-established – autonomous and arm's length Quality Assurance Process
- Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS)
  - graduate programs are not recognized until they have been approved by OCGS to commence – subject to subsequent reviews on a seven year cycle
  - arguably one of the most robust QA processes in the world
  - downside is that it is expensive and labour intensive
  - currently being revised
- as a consequence, graduate programs in Ontario tend to conform to one another more than is the case in other jurisdictions
  - use of a common vocabulary

# Transformation in Ontario



- last five years have seen radical transformations in Ontario
- 'Reaching Higher' (2005)
  - government initiative -- \$220M
    - increase graduate enrolments by 12,000 students in 2007-08 and 14,000 by 2009-10
  - response to double-cohort and to the knowledge economy
  - underpinning assumptions were that there was wave of potential graduate students – universities were invited to submit targets
  - as this was the only new money on the horizon, universities responded enthusiastically
    - proliferation of programs – especially at the master's level
      - traditional 'research' degrees, professional programs, more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programs, shift towards more one-year course-based master's
      - Master's thesis giving way to major research papers and aide memoire
    - intensified competition for students
      - targets only took into account domestic students
  - pool of prospective students was not as large as had been assumed
    - moreover, the government's preference was for master's students – large universities like York wanted and found it easier to grow at the PhD level
  - end result is that the characteristics of the master's degree have become more muddled

# Western Canada



- There is not the same degree of integration, oversight and coordination across the four western provinces
  - nothing like OCGS
- nor in any of these provinces has there been anything like the ambitious plans of Reaching Higher
  - nevertheless there are considerable similarities in master's programs
- Persistence of two-year master's in many universities
  - Typically one year of courses followed by a year of thesis
    - yet times to completion often proved to be problematic
- Sometimes because it was an alternative to doctoral programs
  - Times to completion are often stretched
- Often rationalized in terms of superior training for doctoral programs
- Also provided ways of securing tutorial assistants for universities coping with larger undergraduate classes
- hence there has not been the same incentives to move from two year to one year master's

# Recent Trends: Professional Degrees



- Most obvious global shift has been the proliferation of professional master's degrees
  - though less evident in Canada than in the US and Europe (except in business)
    - eg. Relatively little talk of the professional science masters
    - partly because of tradition – partly because of funding formulas
    - partly because of the sometimes paradoxical efforts to treat them simultaneously as terminal degrees and entry points into doctoral programs
      - this in turn may reflect the need in some disciplines/faculties for future faculty members



# Recent Trends: Professional Degrees



- Yet distinction between professional (applied) and more traditional degrees is not always clear in some of the newer programs
  - e.g master's of education
  - issues surrounding MBA programs and government investment in graduate education in the business area

# Recent Trends: the One Year Master's



- covers a broad spectrum
  - course-based (taught) master's
  - course-based with research project
  - portal to the PhD
  - terminal degree
  - professional and para-professional (applied)
  - capstone to undergrad
- rationalizations vary
  - moves students more quickly through the system
  - more attractive to students
  - less demanding of resources
  - allows faculty to concentrate on doctoral students
- tensions here between pedagogy and fiscal reality

# Recent Trends: Global Uncertainties



- what is perhaps most distinctive about master's programs is that they are the most market sensitive
  - EUA's 2009 report observed that the master's is the 'most marketised' of the three cycles
    - often viewed, however, erroneously, as a revenue stream for cash-strapped universities
    - often legitimated in terms of 'life long learning'
- Creates opportunities – but there are also pitfalls
  - Stats Can report: 'Grad Studies are on the rise but the payoff in cash is small'
  - What about mobility – will students choose to stay with their undergraduate institutions

# Implications and Contradictions



- One-year master's versus two year master's
  - will they be seen as equivalent?
  - Concerns expressed in England that their one year master's will become less popular in the face of Bologna-style two-year degrees
    - will we face the same choices if Bologna becomes the standard
- Mobility
  - Popularity of two-year master's in Europe partly due to opportunities for student mobility (declining at the baccalaureate level)
- Blurring the boundary between undergraduate and graduate education
  - perhaps the master's should be seen as the culmination of the baccalaureate rather than the beginning of the graduate
    - Growing interest in the five year BA/BSc – Master's
    - European interest in this