

POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

INSIGHTS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

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ASLANIAN
MARKET RESEARCH
POWERED BY EducationDynamics

POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a companion piece to one produced by Aslanian Market Research (AMR) in 2017 on the demands and preferences of post-traditional undergraduate students. In that report, we advanced the idea that the “post-traditional student” is the 21st century successor to the “adult student” who has been the focus of our work in this domain since 1980. The idea of moving away from “adult” and toward “post-traditional” – coined by the pioneering adult educator John Ebersole – was advanced significantly by Louis Soares in a 2013 ACEnet paper, *Post-traditional Learners and the Transformation of Postsecondary Education: A Manifesto for College Leaders*. In each case the change in terminology was meant to reflect a change in the characteristics of the student.

These moves in terminology have mirrored our own thoughts in recent years. As our market research for colleges and universities has advanced, we have become convinced that age no longer predicts learning behavior – at either the undergraduate or graduate levels. This belief has become the cornerstone of our work, as we

see more and more younger students enrolling in “non-traditional” programs, and conversely, an increasing number of older students who are willing to enroll in “traditional” programs.

This report picks up where our last one left off, by presenting the findings from a national sample of graduate students. Although the post-traditional term was coined for the undergraduate audience, we decided to use the post-traditional student screening methodology (being any age, but if under age 25, NOT being enrolled in a daytime, full-time, residential program) for this study of graduate students.

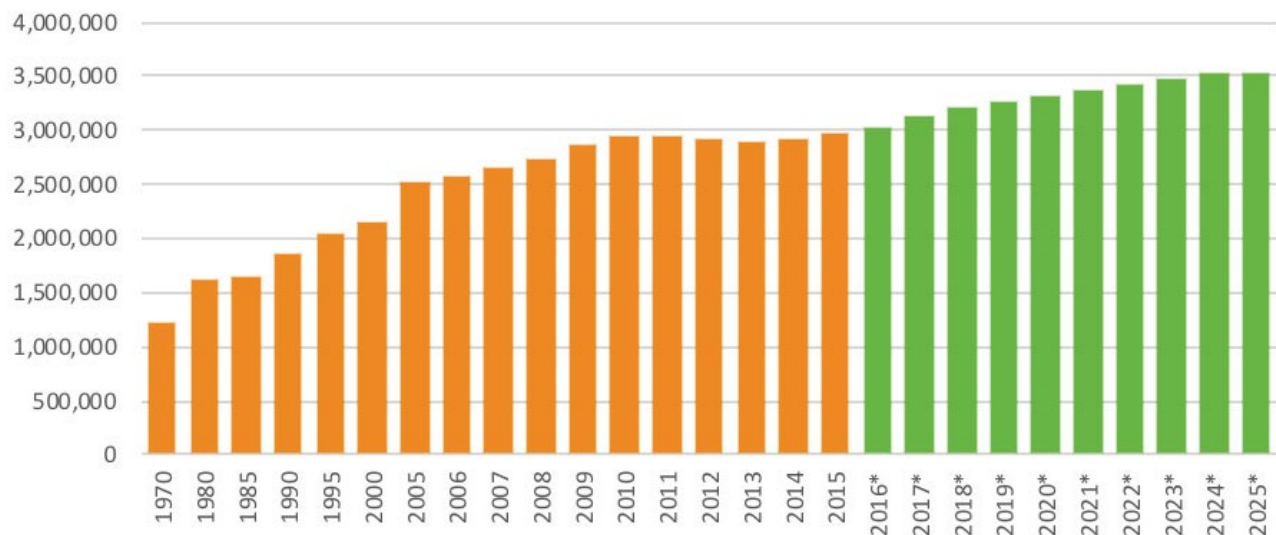
Therefore, this report profiles the demands and preferences of individuals who are quite likely to be balancing graduate study with work, family, and other responsibilities. Before we present our findings, we review below the state of graduate education in the United States today.

Note: In the following pages, we present data from three sources: the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). The most recent year for which NCES data are available is the 2015-2016 academic year, while NSC, which uses a more dynamic term-by-term data collection system, offers data as recent as for the Fall 2017 term. Data from the CGS are gathered through an annual survey jointly conducted with the GRE and offers data from the Fall of 2016. Divergent data collection procedures result in some discrepancies (typically resulting in marginally lower enrollment numbers from the NSC and CGS), but we believe that the more timely data are worth any confusion created.

GRADUATE EDUCATION TODAY

The period between 2010 and today has seen more competition for graduate students than at any other period since AMR began working with colleges and universities. This is due to two factors: the ever-expanding number of institutions seeking to serve graduate students and minimal (if any) growth in enrollment each year. The table below presents trend data from the National Center for Enrollment Statistics (NCES) on Fall graduate enrollment from 1970 to Fall 2015 (in orange) as well as projections through the year 2025 (in green).

GRADUATE LEVEL FALL ENROLLMENT 1970-2025 (NCES)



Between 2010 and 2013 graduate enrollment declined by almost 40,000 students (to 2.90m) before beginning to rebound by almost 70,000 students in 2015 (2.97m). Even though enrollments have grown, increases have come at a time when the “supply” of graduate programs continues to grow (among other things, evidenced by AMR’s continuous flow of requests to assess the feasibility of new graduate programs), thereby diffusing growth more widely than in the past. The good news? The projections indicate continuous growth each year over the next decade, with an increase of as many as 568,000 additional graduate students by 2025.

How can your institution benefit from this enrollment growth? In short, understand your market and be responsive to demands and preferences. We are well past the point of “if you build it, they will come.” We are now at the point where a successful institution must not only offer high demand programs, but also offer those programs in formats and schedules that work for the student, provide the services that they expect, and attract students with messaging and media that connects with them.

“The projections indicate continuous growth each year over the next decade, with an increase of as many as 568,000 additional graduate students by 2025.”

POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

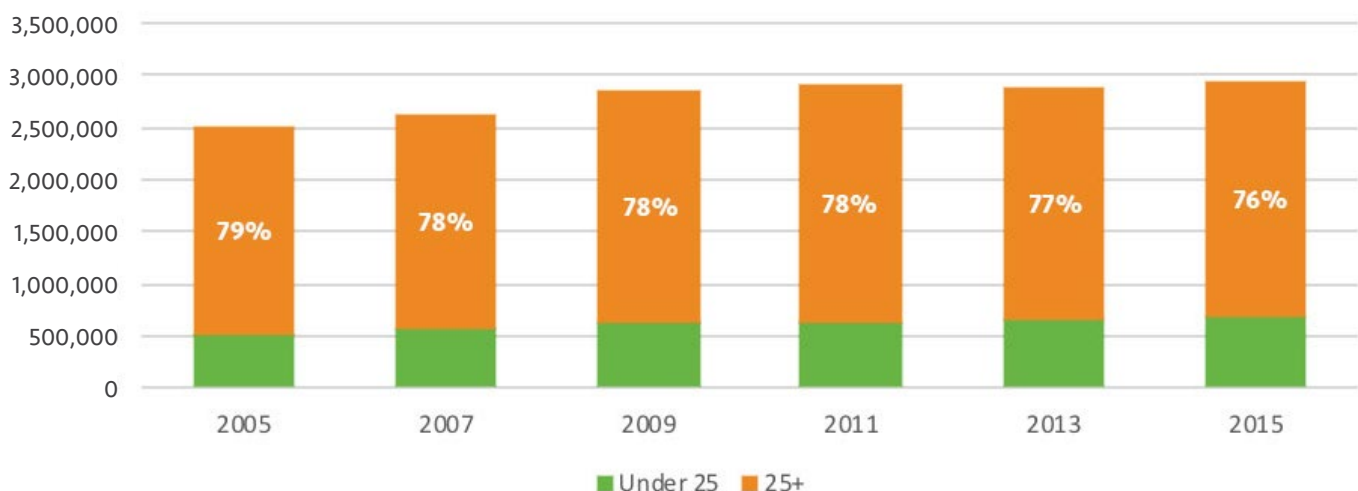
This report is also a response to the fact that there is currently no uniform method of tracking post-traditional students or, more specifically, their demands and preferences. Therefore, data on graduate students who are NOT seeking full-time, classroom-based, residential programs are hard to come by. Having said that, many organizations are either directly or indirectly trying to better understand the undergraduate portion of this population – and many of these efforts are presented in some detail in another report authored by Louis Soares [*The Post-Traditional Student Manifesto Revisited*].



NCES does not directly track post-traditional students at either the undergraduate or graduate levels. Nonetheless, some of the available data help us understand the current shape and position of the graduate market. Because age, enrollment status, online education, and employment status are among the driving factors in the post-traditional population, we present data on these topics below.

AGE: Since 2005, the proportion of graduate students who are 25+ years of age has remained steady – hovering between 79 and 76 percent. AMR has tracked students under/over 25 years of age for decades and graduate students 25+ years of age have consistently comprised about 80 percent of graduate students since the early 1990s.

GRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT - UNDER/OVER 25 (NCES)

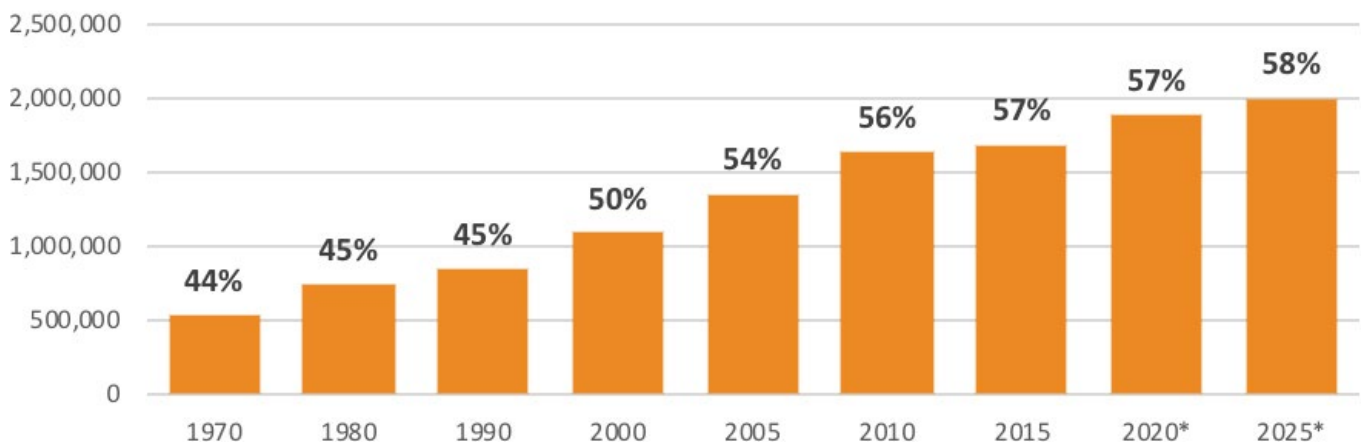


During this same period, the percent of graduate students age 25+ who are enrolled full-time has also grown, in fact becoming the majority of all graduate students in 2013. With the expansion of online and accelerated graduate programs (formats which enable full-time study among those juggling multiple life roles), this proportion is destined to grow further.

FULL-TIME/PART-TIME GRADUATE ENROLLMENT - AGE 25+ (NCES)

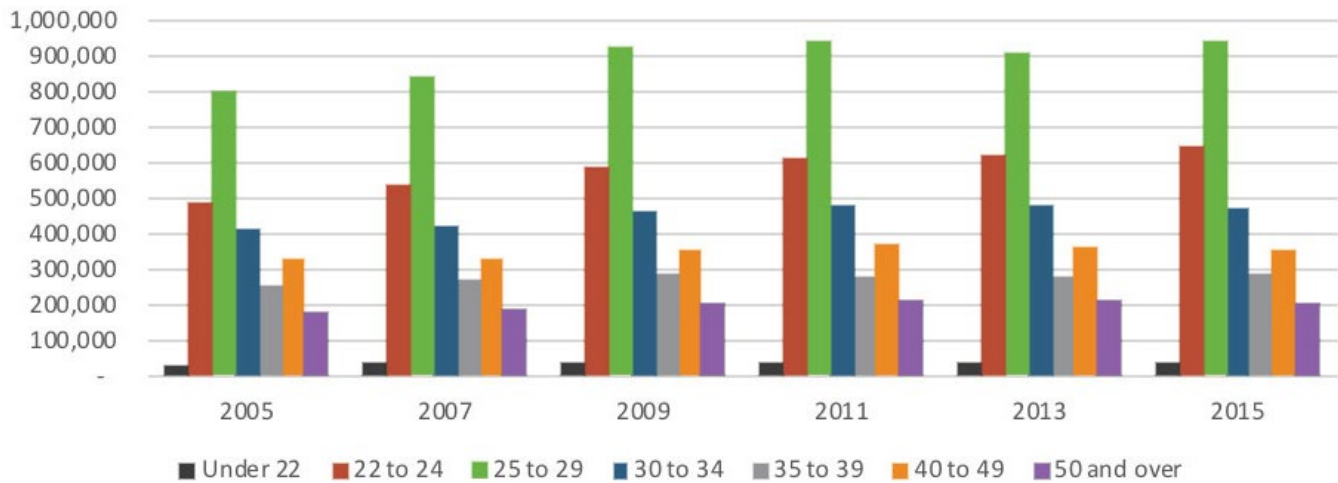
When compared with enrollment data for ALL graduate students, we see that more graduate students are enrolling full time than ever before – in both real terms and as a percent of all graduate students (see percent data in table below). This will add almost 300,000 more full-time students by 2025, accounting for 53 percent of the 568,000 additional graduate students that NCES is predicting. Given that approximately 76 percent of these students will be over the age of 25, institutions offering accelerated and/or online pathways for full-time study will be well positioned for enrollment growth.

FULL-TIME GRADUATE ENROLLMENT - ALL AGES (NCES)
(Percent of Total Grad Enrollment)



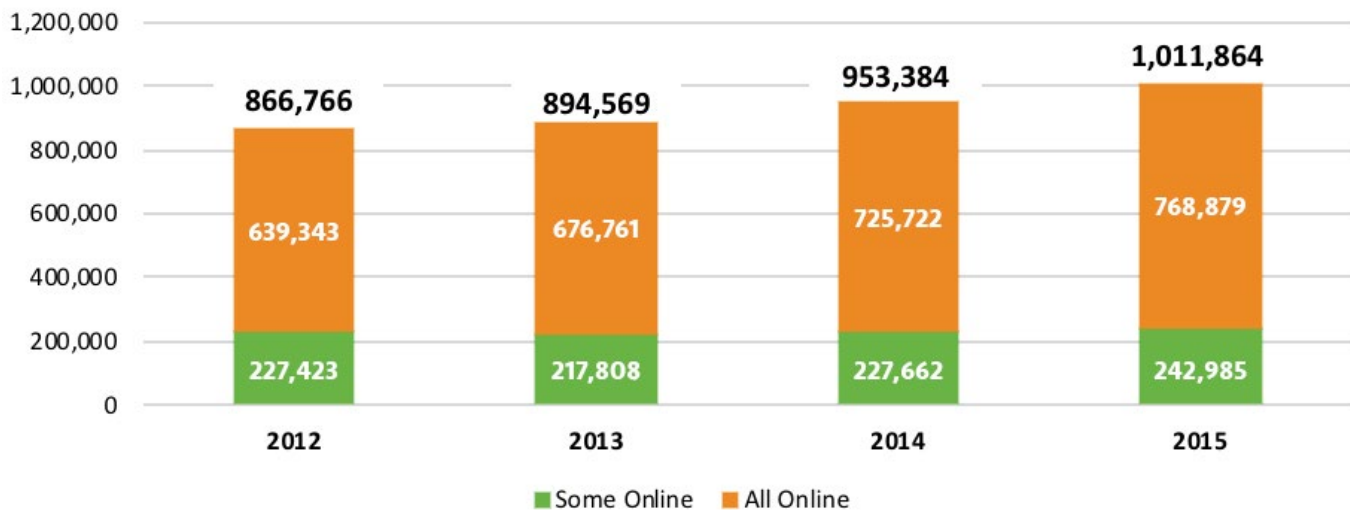
When total NCES graduate enrollment is reported by more refined age brackets, we see that over the last decade the single largest contingent of graduate students has been those who are 25-29 years of age, outpacing those in the 22-24 category by nearly two to one. Although this is true, when all of those who are 30 years of age or older are totaled, the 30+ contingent is even larger than those who are 25-29.

GRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT BY AGE - SELECT YEARS (NCES)



ONLINE STUDY: Graduate students increasingly enroll in at least some online study. The rate of expansion of enrollment in online graduate study (both fully online programs and online courses) outpaces all other growth rates in higher education (between three and six percent) in a three-year period in which total graduate enrollment annual growth ranged between -.3 and .9 percent. While graduate-level study typically comprises about 14 percent of all higher education enrollment in recent years, it comprises about 25 percent of online enrollment. Over the last three years, enrollment in fully online programs is growing at a faster rate (6-7%) than enrollment in online courses (4-6%).

GRADUATE ENROLLMENT IN ONLINE STUDY (NCES)



TYPE OF INSTITUTION: The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) reports that over the last three fall terms, the only enrollment growth has been among graduate students – most profoundly at public institutions and to a less extent at private, non-profit institutions. In a reflection of other national trends, enrollment of graduate students at for-profit institutions has declined significantly in the same period. We note that the dynamic way in which the Clearinghouse collects its data (on a term-by-term basis) allows for far more current data, but somehow results in some discrepancies with NCES.

GRADUATE V. UNDERGRADUATE FALL TERM ENROLLMENT 2015-2017
(National Student Clearinghouse)

SECTOR	PROGRAM LEVEL	FALL 2017 ENROLLMENT	% CHANGE FROM PRIOR YEAR	FALL 2016 ENROLLMENT	% CHANGE FROM PRIOR YEAR	FALL 2015 ENROLLMENT
All Sectors	Undergraduate	16,073,901	-1.4%	16,297,766	-1.9%	16,607,735
	Graduate	2,737,379	0.90%	2,712,693	1.5%	2,672,738
Public	Undergraduate	6,777,472	-0.20%	6,789,507	-0.3%	6,809,676
	Graduate	1,309,633	-0.1%	1,310,611	2.7%	1,276,772
Private Nonprofit	Undergraduate	2,653,327	-0.9%	2,676,080	-1.1%	2,705,471
	Graduate	1,121,820	0.8%	1,112,900	0.7%	1,105,705
For-Profit	Undergraduate	645,821	-8.6%	706,769	-17.00%	851,464
	Graduate	255,511	-3.00%	263,498	-7.10%	283,509

Source: Current Term Enrollment Estimates – Fall 2017, NSC Research Center, 2017

APPLICATIONS AND ACCEPTANCES: A recent report from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) [*Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2006-2016*] states that in the fall of 2016, more than two million graduate-level applications were submitted and there were more than 900,000 acceptances. By subject field, interesting patterns appear: engineering programs received the greatest number of applicants across all levels of graduate study; business programs received the greatest number of master's level applications (although closely followed by engineering and then math/computer sciences); and social and behavioral sciences programs received the largest number of doctoral applications.

SUBJECTS OF STUDY: The rise in applications in the field of engineering as well as mathematics and computer sciences highlights one of the rising challenges to graduate enrollment. The CGS also reports that 55 percent of graduate engineering students and 61 percent of computer science students are foreign students. This compares with only about 18 percent among graduate level business students. Given recently proposed changes to U.S. immigration policies, American graduate schools are already seeing declines in the number of foreign student applications and enrollments, and this is only likely to continue in the next few years. Concurrently, the American tech economy is booming and ever more individuals are realizing they do not need a graduate degree in order to get a good job.

“ In the fall of 2016, more than two million graduate-level applications were submitted and there were more than 900,000 acceptances. ”

With all of this in mind, let us now move to the findings of our national study of 500 post-traditional graduate students. The demands and preferences profiled herein provide a template which graduate schools across the nation can use to begin a strategic discussion about pathways to enrollment growth.



KEY FINDINGS

- 1. CAREER-RELATED FACTORS DRIVE POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS BACK TO SCHOOL.** Nearly all post-traditional students enroll in graduate education for career-related reasons. The desire for more income or a promotion was the driving force behind nearly 50 percent of post-traditional graduate students.
- 2. BUSINESS AND COMPUTERS/IT ARE THE MOST POPULAR FIELDS OF STUDY.** Business is the leading master's degree subject field, closely followed by Computer Science/IT. At the Doctoral level, Computer Science/IT leads all subject areas.
- 3. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THEY WANT TO STUDY.** Nearly 60 percent of post-traditional graduate students knew the exact major/concentration in which they wanted to enroll when they began their search. Very few need help choosing a program.
- 4. MOST GRADUATE STUDENTS ENROLL IN TOPICS SIMILAR TO THEIR UNDERGRADUATE STUDY.** Seventy percent of post-traditional graduate students enroll in the same field of study as they did as an undergraduate. Most of those who changed topics did so for career-related reasons.
- 5. MOBILE OPTIMIZATION IS INTEGRAL FOR ATTRACTING POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS.** Eighty percent of post-traditional graduate students used a mobile device in their search for a graduate program. As such, schools must ensure that that pertinent information sought by potential students is mobile-optimized.

“ Nearly all post-traditional students enroll in graduate education for career-related reasons. ”

- 6. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS PREFER NOT-FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES.** Ninety percent of post-traditional graduate students prefer to enroll at a public or private not-for-profit institution. Conversely, only 10 percent of post-traditional graduate students wish to enroll at a for-profit institution.
- 7. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS CONSIDER MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL.** Almost 80 percent of post-traditional graduate students inquired to more than one school, and almost half inquired to three or more. Institutions are competing aggressively for these students.
- 8. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS EXPECT SWIFT ACCEPTANCE DECISIONS.** Eighty-five percent of post-traditional graduate students enroll at the first institution that accepts them into their program.
- 9. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS ARE COST-SENSITIVE, BUT...** Cost of tuition and fees is the #1 factor driving a post-traditional graduate student's enrollment decision (52%). However, other factors can mitigate cost, as 70 percent indicate that they did not enroll at the lowest priced institution at which they inquired.
- 10. THE MAJORITY OF POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS PREFER SOME FORM OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION.** Eighty-five percent of post-traditional students prefer programs with at least some online component. Seventy percent of post-traditional graduate students prefer fully or partially online courses.
- 11. SCHOOLS MUST PROVIDE SERVICES THAT POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS SEE AS ESSENTIAL TO THEIR SUCCESS.** Post-traditional graduate students demand services that will allow them to succeed once enrolled: library resources, 24/7 technical support, and access to faculty for academic advising, and (increasingly) career services.
- 12. ACCELERATED COURSES ARE HERE TO STAY.** Eighty-five percent of post-traditional graduate students prefer accelerated courses 12 weeks or less – with almost half preferring courses of 8-10 weeks.
- 13. POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS RELY ON PERSONAL FUNDS AND LOANS TO PAY FOR THEIR PROGRAMS.** Forty-seven percent of post-traditional graduate students used personal funds to pay for their graduate program, and nearly 40 percent use student loans. Employer tuition benefits are also a factor, with 24 percent indicating they used them.
- 14. MOST POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS STUDY FULL-TIME.** The ability, and desire, to enroll in accelerated courses allows 65 percent of post-traditional graduate students to enroll full time.
- 15. THE POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC.** Typical post-traditional graduate students are a mix of Caucasian men and women about 33 years of age. They comprise single and married individuals, the slight majority of whom have at least one child at home. The highest level of education the largest proportion has obtained is a bachelor's degree, and about half are first-generation students. They are employed full time and have a median family income of about \$71,500.



UNDERSTANDING THE POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT

Through our work with almost 300 colleges and universities over more than three decades, we at AMR have witnessed the ebb and flow of where American institutions of higher learning want to focus their attention. In most cases, the core mission of the types of schools with which we work is to educate the traditional student while maintaining a secondary focus on the adult/post-traditional undergraduate and/or graduate population. When the traditional enrollment pipeline has been strong, the attention paid to these alternative populations has often waned, and when that pipeline has softened, attention returns to these alternative populations.

Today, colleges and universities are confronting a “perfect storm” of challenges that affect successfully meeting enrollment goals. Among these challenges are: demographic shifts that are reducing the number of 18-year-olds in the country; the changing racial/ethnic makeup of the traditional undergraduate audience; an improving economy that is reducing the number of adult/post-traditional undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolling in higher education; the increasing frustration with the cost of college and the related skepticism about the value of higher education; the increasing cost of marketing to and enrolling students; the wavering interest and confidence among foreign students – with whom many colleges and universities have shored up graduate enrollment in recent years.

All of this is to say that the timing of this report is ideal. It has never been more important for colleges and universities to understand what post-traditional graduate (and undergraduate) students need from the institutions and programs in which they enroll. With every college or university in the country – or the world – now among their choices, there is simply too much competition to successfully meet enrollment goals without meeting student needs.

This is not to indicate that colleges and universities must meet every demand or preference posed by graduate students – or any other student. Each institution must weigh and measure these demands alongside its mission and values and make informed strategic decisions. But it is incumbent on us to say that if an institution cannot meet many of the demands laid out in this report, it is likely that that institution should plan for lower enrollment in coming years.

In the winter of 2018, Aslanian Market Research conducted a nationwide survey of 500 post-traditional graduate students. To qualify for the study, respondents of any age were eligible with one exception: those under age 25 who were enrolled in full-time study during the day and resided on or very near campus were screened out of our sample. Most important, to qualify, respondents had to have been enrolled in graduate study within the last three years, were currently enrolled, or had firm plans to return within the next 12 months.

The report that follows is organized by the major topics surveyed and the key factors in the profile of today's post-traditional graduate student. Tables and charts present the topics addressed and responses from the sample population.

PRIMARY MOTIVATION, ASPIRATIONS, AND VIEWS ABOUT ENROLLING IN GRADUATE STUDY

MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Obtaining a higher salary, seeking a promotion, and transitioning to a new career are the most common drivers for beginning or continuing graduate education among post-traditional graduate students. New knowledge and skills that these students can apply to their current or prospective careers will reinforce learning that they may have started at an earlier time. To attract post-traditional graduate students, graduate programs must offer career-related programs that will help these students meet their goals. Fifty-five percent of respondents also indicated that at the outset of their graduate education they expected to change jobs after they completed their program. This again reinforces the role that careers play in post-traditional graduate students' decisions regarding graduate study.

PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR ENROLLING IN GRADUATE STUDY	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Graduate study raises my salary	25%
I was seeking a promotion/new position in my field	21%
I wanted to transition to a new career field	19%
Graduate education is required to enter my desired field	14%
I was returning to the job market for the first time in several years	8%
I was unemployed and needed more education to get a job	6%
Periodic graduate education is required for my field	5%
Personal reasons not related to career	2%
Other	6%

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION SOUGHT IN LIFETIME

What is the highest level of education that post-traditional graduate students saw themselves achieving when they began to envision their professional careers? Among master's students, about 60 percent said the highest level of education they foresaw themselves undertaking in their lifetime was a master's degree – with only about 24 percent planning to continue to an even higher level of study. Among doctoral students, about 54 percent

said it was a doctoral degree. Interestingly, 30 percent of doctoral students had not foreseen completing a doctoral or professional degree when they had first thought of their higher education trajectory.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION SOUGHT IN LIFETIME	MASTER'S	DOCTORAL	CERTIFICATE	ALL
A post-baccalaureate certificate	8%	4%	35%	13%
A master's degree	58%	22%	40%	51%
More than one master's degree	13%	4%	5%	11%
A professional degree (Law, Medicine, etc.)	6%	15%	7%	7%
A doctoral degree (Ph.d, Ed.D, etc.)	15%	54%	12%	18%

VIEWS ABOUT GRADUATE EDUCATION

While it is not surprising that roughly half of post-traditional graduate students strongly agree with each of the following statements about the benefits of graduate education, it IS somewhat surprising that these proportions are not higher. Post-traditional graduate students most strongly believe that graduate study is/was worth their time, but fewer strongly believe it is/was worth the money paid. They also believe that graduate study will increase their salary or (more generally) their career prospects – but again, only slightly more than half strongly agree with these two statements.

VIEWS ABOUT GRADUATE EDUCATION	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE
My graduate education is worth the time it took.	59%	31%	9%	1%
I will make more money over a lifetime because I have a graduate degree.	54%	36%	9%	1%
My career prospects are better because I have a graduate degree.	53%	36%	10%	1%
I will/did see an increase in my salary within two years of completing my degree.	52%	41%	7%	1%
My graduate education is worth the money it cost.	51%	40%	9%	0%
Graduate degrees in technical/professional fields are more attractive to employers than liberal arts or humanities fields.	51%	38%	10%	2%
It is best to begin graduate study right after earning your bachelor's degree	42%	38%	17%	3%

CREDENTIALS

INTENDED CREDENTIAL

The post-traditional graduate market is dominated by those seeking a master's degree. About 70 percent of post-traditional graduate students are seeking a master's degree. Another 14 percent enroll in a credit-bearing certificate or licensure program, while nine percent seek a doctoral degree. Another five percent seek a different credit-bearing credential, such as a badge or micro-certificate.

INTENDED CREDENTIAL	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Master's degree	71%
Credit-bearing certificate, licensure program or other credential	19%
Doctoral degree	9%

SUBJECT AND MAJOR OF STUDY

On the following pages, we present data on the areas of study and specific majors at each of the graduate levels, starting with master's degrees, then doctoral degrees, and then credit-bearing certificates and other graduate-level credentials.

FIELD OF STUDY: MASTER'S

The top subject field among master's degree students is business, followed closely by computer science and IT. In a change from past AMR studies, it is noteworthy that nearly as many post-traditional graduate students indicate that they enrolled in a master's degree in a computer science/IT field as in business (the traditional master's level market leader). This is an indication that they are paying attention to how the job market has and will continue to change.

PRIMARY FIELD OF STUDY: MASTER'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS
Business	30%
Computer Science & IT	27%
Health & Medicine	10%
Education & Teaching	9%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	7%
Counseling, Human Services, and Social Work	5%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	5%
Humanities and Liberal Arts	4%
Fine Arts	3%

FIELD OF STUDY: DOCTORAL

At the doctoral level, degrees in computer science and IT outpace demand for degrees in health and medicine and business by about 10 percent. Together these three fields account for half of the subjects in which doctoral students enroll. Although doctoral study in STEM topics has outpaced such study at the master's level for years, these data may indicate that a shift might be on the horizon from engineering to computer science at the doctoral level.

PRIMARY FIELD OF STUDY: DOCTORAL DEGREE	DOCTORAL DEGREE STUDENTS
Computer Science & IT	24%
Health & Medicine	15%
Business	13%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	11%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	11%
Counseling, Human Services, and Social Work	9%
Education & Teaching	9%
Humanities and Liberal Arts	9%
Fine Arts	2%

TOP MAJORS - ALL DEGREE LEVELS

Given that master's-level study dominates the post-traditional degree market, it is not surprising that across both levels (master's and doctoral) the most popular majors are almost all at the master's level. It is interesting that among these top 14 majors (cumulatively comprising 53.9 percent of total degree demand), two are in business fields (comprising 26.1 percent of total degree demand), five are in computer/IT fields (comprising 19.1 percent of total degree demand), and 2 are in education (comprising 2.4 percent of total demand). The remaining 46 percent of degrees were distributed across more than 130 additional majors cited by respondents.

TOP MAJORS AMONG ALL DEGREE STUDENTS	ALL DEGREE STUDENTS
Business Administration - Master's	24.6%
Information Technology - Master's	7.2%
Computer Science/Engineering - Master's	5.0%
Cybersecurity - Master's	4.5%
Business Administration - Doctoral	1.5%
Communications - Master's	1.5%
Biology - Master's	1.2%
Computer Science/Engineering - Doctoral	1.2%
Computer Security/Forensics - Master's	1.2%
Database Administration - Master's	1.2%
Early Childhood Education - Master's	1.2%
Education Administration, K-12 - Master's	1.2%
Engineering - Master's	1.2%
Nursing (MSN, etc.) - Master's	1.2%

FIELD OF STUDY: CERTIFICATE/LICENSE/OTHER CREDENTIALS

Fourteen percent of respondents enrolled in a certificate or professional licensure program and another five percent enrolled in some other credit-bearing credential. Among that five percent, three percent enrolled in a micro-certificate, two percent enrolled in a badge program, and one percent enrolled in some other type of program.

The primary subjects of interest to those seeking certificates and licenses are similar to the primary subjects of interest to those seeking master's degrees: computer science and IT and business, followed by health and medicine.

PRIMARY FIELD OF STUDY: CERTIFICATE/LICENSE	CERTIFICATE STUDENTS
Computer Science & IT	26%
Business	23%
Health & Medicine	15%
Education & Teaching	13%
Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics	10%
Counseling, Human Services, and Social Work	6%
Fine Arts	3%
Social Sciences, Criminal Justice, Law	3%
Humanities and Liberal Arts	1%

“The primary subjects of interest to those seeking certificates and licenses are similar to the primary subjects of interest to those seeking master's degrees.”



NUMBER OF COURSES REQUIRED FOR CERTIFICATE/LICENSE: Although the largest proportion of graduate certificate/licensure students report having enrolled in a program comprised of eight or more courses, even more (37%) report enrolling in a program of 4-6 courses, and 30 percent report enrolling in a program of three or fewer courses – likely meaning that their program would qualify as a badge or micro-certificate while not being labeled under these newer and popular names.

COURSES REQUIRED FOR CERTIFICATE/LICENSE	CERTIFICATE STUDENTS
2 or fewer	17%
3	13%
4	19%
5	10%
6	8%
7	0%
8 or more	33%

GRADUATE STUDY SUBJECT VS. UNDERGRADUATE STUDY SUBJECT

Almost 70 percent of post-traditional graduate students enrolled in a graduate program in the same subject as their undergraduate degree. However, note that it is less often the case among doctoral and certificate students than among master's students. Seventy-two percent of master's degree students studied the same subject as their undergraduate topic field, while only 61 percent of doctoral students and 59 percent of certificate students studied the same topic as they did as undergraduate students.

REASON FOR CHANGING SUBJECTS

Among post-traditional students who changed subject fields for their graduate study, the largest proportions of master's and certificate students said it was because their career path took them in a different direction. The largest proportion of doctoral students believe their undergraduate field didn't prepare them for a job; slightly smaller proportions of 22 percent each said their career path took them in a different direction or that their undergraduate degree was not career-related.

REASON FOR CHANGING SUBJECTS	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
My career path took me in a different direction	46%
My undergraduate field didn't prepare me for a job	15%
Few jobs in my undergraduate field	13%
I lost interest in my undergraduate subject	10%
My undergraduate major was not career-related	8%
Something else	9%

EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT OF STUDY PRIOR TO ENROLLMENT

The majority of post-traditional graduate students know the exact major/concentration in which they wanted to enroll prior to enrolling. When they did not know the exact major and concentration, most graduate students knew the subject area, but were considering several different majors or concentrations. It is of note that considerably more doctoral students know their exact major/concentration prior to enrolling than do master's or certificate students.

EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT OF STUDY PRIOR TO ENROLLMENT	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
I knew the exact major/concentration in which I wanted to enroll.	58%
I knew the subject area, but considered several different major/concentrations.	30%
I knew the subject area, but had little understanding of available majors/concentrations.	4%
I was considering several different subject areas in various disciplines.	8%



STUDY PATTERNS

FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME ENROLLMENT

More post-traditional graduate students study on a full time basis rather than on a part time basis. These busy individuals, juggling multiple family and work-related obligations, find ways to study full-time through the ever-increasing availability of accelerated programs and the multiple formats of instruction that are now available (namely online and hybrid), which enable them to take more courses in shorter intervals, thereby qualifying for full-time study. Having said this, it is important to note that a sizeable percentage also choose to study part-time.

FULL-OR PART-TIME STUDY	ALL DEGREE
Full-time	66%
Part-time	34%

NUMBER OF YEARS TO COMPLETE GRADUATE DEGREE

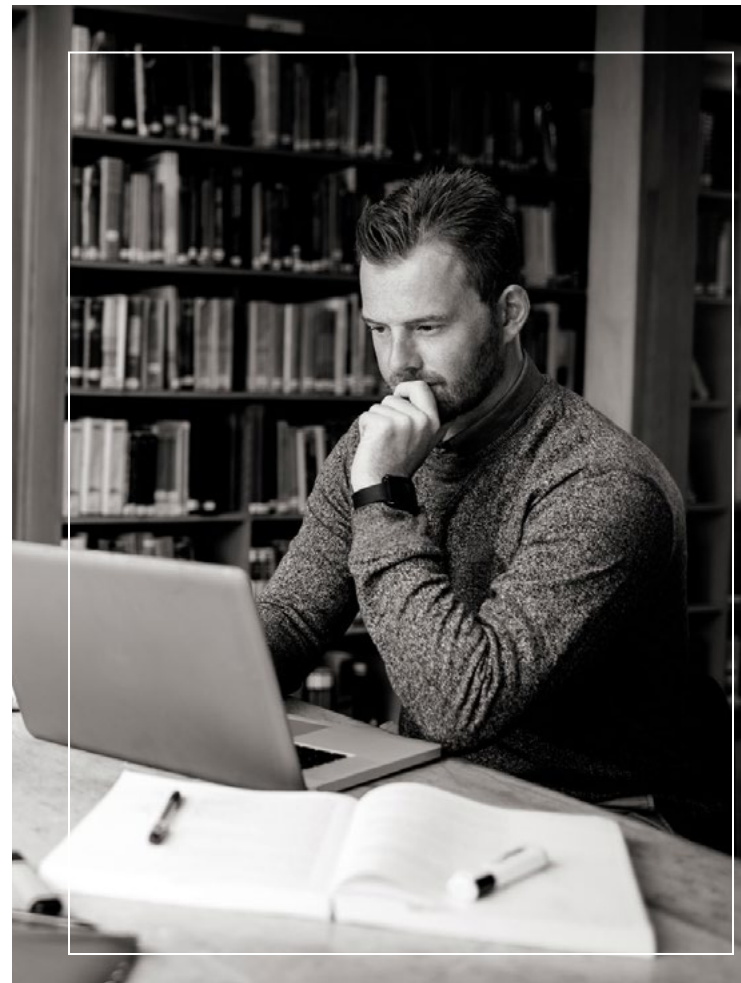
The largest proportions of master's students completed or expect to complete their degree in two or three years – the typical length of many master's programs. An additional 34 percent indicated that they took (or will take) four or more years. This may indicate that many master's programs continue to be structured in ways that make it difficult for students juggling many life roles to finish “on time.” The largest proportions of doctoral students completed or expected to complete their degree in four or three years.

NUMBER OF YEARS TO COMPLETE GRADUATE DEGREE	ALL DEGREE
Less than 2 years	8%
2 years	29%
3 years	25%
4 years	22%
5 years	7%
6+ years	9%

NUMBER OF COURSES ENROLLED PER SEMESTER/TERM

The largest proportion of master's degree students, 33 percent, enroll in two courses per term, but fairly comparable proportions enroll in three courses, or four or more courses, per term. The largest proportion of doctoral degree students, 37 percent, enroll in four or more courses per term, followed by equal proportions who study two or three courses a term.

NUMBER OF COURSES ENROLLED PER SEMESTER/TERM	ALL DEGREE
1	12%
2	32%
3	29%
4 or more	27%





RECRUITING THE POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT

MARKETING

MARKETING CHANNELS

Post-traditional graduate students were most likely to recall seeing advertisements and information about graduate programs from television commercials, email from institutions, and listings on search engines. These marketing channels represent three distinct approaches that graduate programs must consider: mass marketing (television), personal contact (email), and search engine optimization (SEO). It is noteworthy that among 15 channels presented, only six were cited by 20 percent or more of post-traditional graduate students. Master's students were more likely than other respondents to have seen ads on websites they visit. Doctoral students were more likely than others to have attended a college fair or have seen ads on Facebook or other social media sites. Perhaps most important is that no single advertising channel is the “silver bullet” that a majority portion of graduate students recall as being instrumental in raising their awareness of available graduate programs.

TOP MARKETING VEHICLES VIEWED/USED	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Commercials on TV	36%
Email	29%
Listings on search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.)	27%
College fairs	22%
Ads on websites I visit	22%
Ads on Facebook or other social media sites	20%

MOBILE DEVICES IN GRADUATE SEARCH

USE OF DEVICE

A marketing strategy aimed at post-traditional graduate students must include a focus on digital devices. Nearly 80 percent of respondents used a mobile device to conduct at least some of their search for a graduate program, with 34 percent indicating that they used such a device for all or almost all of their search.

USED MOBILE DEVICE FOR GRADUATE SEARCH	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Not at all	19%
Some	48%
Almost all	23%
All	11%

SATISFACTION WITH MOBILE PRESENTATION OF GRADUATE INFORMATION

Graduate programs are clearly getting better at presenting the information prospective students need on websites formatted for the mobile experience. Among the nearly 80 percent of post-traditional graduate students who used a mobile device in their search for a graduate program, the vast majority were very satisfied – with nearly 80 percent rating their experiences as a four or five on a five-point scale with an average rating of 4.1.

There is little doubt that the use of mobile devices to search and learn more about schools of interest will be increasingly important to graduate students. Schools must ensure that information is easily attainable via mobile device.

MOST IMPORTANT WEBSITE CONTENT

From our work across the country each year, AMR knows that the most important information graduate students are looking for on institutional websites is: tuition and fees, application and registration instructions and deadlines, and available schedules and formats (by program), along with the most important: available programs.



INSTITUTIONS CONSIDERED

PREFERRED INSTITUTION TYPE

About two-thirds of post-traditional graduate students enroll at a public college or university, with slightly more certificate students and slightly fewer doctoral students enrolling at such institutions. Doctoral students are the most likely to enroll at private, non-profit colleges and universities (with about one-third doing so). While many for-profit colleges and universities started by serving post-traditional students generally and graduate students specifically, only ten percent of respondents indicated that they enrolled at such an institution.

PREFERRED INSTITUTION TYPE	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Public	66%
Private non-profit	24%
For-profit	10%

NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS CONSIDERED AND APPLIED TO

Graduate schools are competing more than ever for post-traditional students at the earliest stage of the enrollment pipeline. While in decades past, only a handful of schools in any given community offered graduate programs that were feasible for students juggling competing life responsibilities; now, almost all do. Nearly 80 percent of post-traditional graduate students consider two or more institutions – and almost half consider three or more. Interestingly, this was true in almost equal measure across all levels of graduate study.

NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS	
	Considered/ Inquired	Applied
1	21%	40%
2	35%	41%
3 or more	44%	19%

Sixty percent of post-traditional graduate students apply to more than one graduate school, and nearly 20 percent apply to three or more. Even among the 40 percent who only applied to a single institution, we know that many considered more during the inquiry stage. Similar to the inquiry phase, post-traditional graduate students have many options when it comes to selecting a program that works for their busy schedules.

On the whole, graduate students are considering and applying to more than one institution, which in turn makes immediate attention and relatively quick turn-around of institutional recruitment and enrollment steps critical to enrollment growth.

INQUIRY AND APPLICATION PROCESSES

METHOD OF FIRST INQUIRY

Post-traditional graduate students most frequently make their first inquiry submitting an information request form on the college's website. Next most often, they didn't inquire at all, they simply submitted an application for the program that interested them. Doctoral students are more likely than students at other levels to inquire in person.

METHOD OF FIRST INQUIRY	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Via the college website information request form	35%
I submitted an application	21%
Email	14%
In person	13%
Other	16%

With only about 20 percent of graduate students inquiring in person or by phone (6%), a school's website is of utmost importance in attracting graduate students and is a prospective student's primary vehicle for contacting and/or applying to their schools of choice.

EXPECTED FREQUENCY OF CONTACT AFTER INQUIRING AND APPLYING

Post-traditional graduate students expect the same pace of contact from their programs of interest at both the inquiry and application stage. Institutions that put greater emphasis on personal contact during the post-application stage may be losing students by not aggressively courting inquirers. Both inquirers and applicants expect to be contacted on a weekly basis. Although AMR studies across the country indicate that post-traditional graduate students prefer email contact, we also know that it is essential that a combination of emails and telephone calls be used during the enrollment process. Additionally, we have learned that graduate students also demand personalized contact, and can sense (and are turned off by) "form letter" content.

EXPECTED FREQUENCY OF CONTACT AFTER INQUIRING	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS	
	After Inquiry	After Application
Weekly	43%	40%
Bi-weekly	33%	36%
Once a month	17%	18%
Less than once a month	7%	5%

As competition for graduate students grows, it is critical that admissions/recruitment staff initiate and maintain steady contact with inquirers and applicants from the first day they make contact.

“A school's website is of utmost importance in attracting graduate students.”



ENROLLING THE POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENT

TIMING OF ENROLLMENT

GAP BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDY

About one-third of post-traditional graduate students enroll immediately after completing their undergraduate studies – but do not enroll in traditional, full-time graduate programs. Another 28 percent enroll in a program that is not full-time, classroom and in-residence (the AMR screener for traditional graduate programs) within two years of completing their undergraduate studies.

Both of these findings support our belief that age no longer predicts learning patterns or behavior. While many of the students in these categories would be close to traditionally aged graduate students, they are not enrolling in traditional programs – likely because they are juggling multiple work and life responsibilities,

or simply cannot afford the costs associated with full-time, traditional graduate programs.

ENROLLMENT IN FIRST INSTITUTION TO OFFER ACCEPTANCE

Meeting the expectations regarding notification of acceptance have real consequences for institutions seeking to serve post-traditional graduate students. More than 80 percent of respondents (who applied to more than one institution) indicate that they enrolled at the institution that accepted them first.

ENROLLMENT IN FIRST INSTITUTION TO OFFER ACCEPTANCE	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Yes	84%
No	16%

MONTH THAT STUDY BEGAN

Post-traditional graduate students start their graduate study throughout the year. Perhaps nothing better demonstrates the increasing pervasiveness of multiple start dates and year-round study better than the fact that no more than 20 percent of respondents start their graduate study in any given month. While there is a cluster of about 35 percent who start in the fall (August and September starts), every month of the year – including December – was cited by post-traditional graduate students as their start date.

TIME BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDY	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Immediately	36%
1-2 years	28%
3-5 years	19%
6-10 years	7%
More than 10 years	11%

MONTH WHEN INITIAL GRADUATE STUDY BEGAN	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
January	19%
February	6%
March	10%
April	7%
May	6%
June	7%
July	2%
August	20%
September	15%
October	4%
November	3%
December	1%

FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

MOST IMPORTANT ENROLLMENT FACTORS

The most profound change we have seen in the post-traditional student market – at both the undergraduate and graduate levels – since the great recession of 2009-2010 has been regarding the most important factors in enrollment decisions. Prior to 2009, we had rarely seen cost of tuition and fees among the top five decision-making factors – particularly at the graduate level. Since 2009, we have rarely conducted a study in which cost of tuition and fees was not in the top three – and usually number one.

This study is no exception. Cost of tuition and fees has a significant edge over all other issues in being the most important decision-making factor. This is not to say that post-traditional graduate students always enroll in the lowest priced institution that they consider (we present data on this later in this report), but it is to say that cost plays an unprecedented role in enrollment decisions today.

Post-traditional graduate students also rank the reputation of the college or program and the professional accreditation of their program (these are the factors that historically led decision making of similar graduate populations in our studies prior to 2009) as among the most important factors in their enrollment decision. The importance of the availability of online programs represents a new finding in AMR studies, and is reflected in the number of respondents who have enrolled in fully or partially (hybrid) online programs as presented elsewhere in this report.

MOST IMPORTANT ENROLLMENT FACTORS	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Cost of tuition and fees	52%
Reputation of the college or program	36%
Professional accreditation of my program	34%
Availability of online programs	32%
Length of time to complete my studies	30%
Location where my courses are offered/available	29%
Availability of flexible formats (online, hybrid, low-residence, etc.)	26%
Availability of accelerated courses	20%
Availability of graduate assistantships	16%
Recommendations of friends, family, associates	13%
Recommended by my employer	11%
Other	1%

“ Cost of tuition and fees has a significant edge over all other issues in being the most important decision-making factor. ”

MOST IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES

When considering specific institutions that interest them, post-traditional graduate students are most likely to be attracted to one institution over another if that institution has the programmatic accreditation (e.g.: AACSB for business, CACREP for Counseling) that the student values. This is consistent with findings from other AMR graduate-level studies and something that is unique to the graduate level. Past studies have revealed that graduate students have very little information on what these programmatic accreditations require of an institution, but that they are a hallmark of the highest quality programs.

The other institutional features that are most important to post-traditional graduate students are related to convenience and flexibility issues rather than quality. The importance of both multiple start dates and back-to-back terms are reflected elsewhere in this report when we report the speed with which post-traditional graduate students expect to go from application to enrollment to starting classes today. In one of the only divergences by level of study, doctoral students also deem important that faculty are full time and hold a doctoral degree.

MOST IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Specific accreditation of my program	45%
Multiple start dates throughout the year	43%
Back-to-back courses offered year-round	39%
Reputation of specific faculty members	34%
Most faculty are full-time and hold a doctoral degree	27%
Programs offered in cohorts-in which you study with the same group of students throughout	26%
Availability of graduate fellowships	25%
Many faculty teach part-time and are work in their field	22%





TEACHING THE POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT

It is important that graduate schools not only offer programs in subject areas for which there is demand among post-traditional students, but also that those programs be offered in formats and with schedules that work as they juggle competing life and work priorities. To this end, we asked post-traditional students a detailed set of questions about their format and scheduling preferences.

INSTRUCTIONAL FORMATS

RECENT/CURRENT PROGRAM FORMAT

Post-traditional students demand a level of convenience and flexibility in their graduate programs that goes well beyond what can be offered in classroom courses. In fact, only 14 percent of post-traditional graduate students enrolled in a fully classroom program, while almost double that number enrolled in a fully online program. All remaining respondents – 60 percent – enrolled in a program that blended classroom and online instruction.

Doctoral students were significantly more likely to enroll in a classroom program than master's and certificate students, and were also significantly less likely to enroll in a fully online program. We were struck by the level of demand for online study among certificate students – more than half of whom enrolled in either a fully online

program or an online program with several required visits to campus.

FORMAT OF RECENT/ CURRENT GRADUATE PROGRAM	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
All online courses, no visits to campus	25%
All online courses, with one or more full-day visits to campus (low residence programs)	23%
A mix of classroom, hybrid, and online courses	19%
All hybrid courses (requiring regular classroom and online instruction)	19%
All classroom courses	14%

“ Post-traditional students demand a level of convenience and flexibility in their graduate programs that goes well beyond what can be offered in classroom courses. ”

PREFERRED COURSE FORMAT

Do the formats in which post-traditional students actually enroll (as represented by the data presented above) match their preferences? This is a question AMR has been asking for decades and over the last 10 years we have seen a convergence of preference and actual practice, as more and more graduate programs offer convenient and flexible programs.

Respondent data on preferred format on a course-by-course basis make some interesting observations: post-traditional students who prefer online courses (27%) are finding fully online programs in which to enroll (25%); more students prefer classroom courses (29%) than enroll in fully classroom programs (14%); students who prefer hybrid courses (43%) are not always enrolling in programs comprised of such classes (19%), but rather in a range of different types of programs that blend classroom and online instruction.

PREFERRED COURSE FORMAT	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Fully classroom courses	29%
Partially online/hybrid courses	43%
Fully online courses	27%

SATISFACTION WITH INSTRUCTIONAL FORMATS

Post-traditional graduate students are not only enrolling in a variety of instructional formats, but they are also highly satisfied with their experiences. While classroom courses are given the highest average rating when asked to rate their “satisfaction with the quality” of each course type in which they have enrolled at the graduate level, the average ratings are nearly as high for both online and hybrid courses. It is also interesting to note that there was nearly no divergence of ratings across the various levels of graduate study.

SATISFACTION WITH DELIVERY FORMAT	AVERAGE RATING
Classroom (face-to-face)	4.4
Partially online (hybrid)	4.1
Fully online	4.1

PREFERRED COURSE LENGTH

Post-traditional graduate students demand accelerated study. Only 15 percent prefer courses of typical semester length. Almost half prefer courses of between 8 and 10 weeks – with nearly one quarter preferring 8-week courses alone. Both master’s and doctoral students share these preferences, with doctoral students demonstrating only slightly more demand for semester-length courses (24%).

PREFERRED COURSE LENGTH	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
5 or fewer	8%
6	8%
7	6%
8	22%
9	8%
10	16%
11	1%
12	16%
13 or more weeks	15%



PREFERRED SCHEDULES

In addition to having specific demands regarding instructional formats, post-traditional graduate students also have very specific demands regarding the schedules on which their programs are offered. In what follows, we present summary profiles of the scheduling demands and preferences of post-traditional graduate students organized by the format of program that they most recently selected (see page 28 for these data). In each of the following summaries, underpinning data from the survey are presented in parentheses.

CLASSROOM PROGRAMS

Post-traditional graduate students who have most recently enrolled in a classroom-based graduate programs (14 percent of our sample) prefer accelerated courses of eight to ten weeks (34%) with courses offered either on weekday mornings (41%) or weekday evenings (37%). They prefer courses that meet twice (40%) or three times (31%) per week, in sessions lasting two hours (30%). They prefer to enroll at the main campus (64%) of an institution that is within 30 minutes (59%) of where they reside. They typically spend between six and 10 hours per week studying for each course in which they enroll.

“Post-traditional graduate students who have most recently enrolled in a classroom-based graduate programs prefer accelerated courses of eight to ten weeks with courses offered either on weekday mornings or weekday evenings.”

HYBRID PROGRAMS

Post-traditional graduate students who have most recently enrolled in hybrid programs that either offer all hybrid courses or a mix of all course types (38 percent of our sample) prefer accelerated eight to ten week courses (51%) with classroom sessions offered on weekday mornings (40%) or weekday evenings (26%). They prefer courses that meet twice (43%) or once (30%) per week, in sessions lasting two hours (40%). They prefer to enroll at the main campus (79%) of an institution that is between 15 and 45 minutes (71%) from where they reside. Those that prefer to enroll in programs comprised of all hybrid courses most frequently spend more time – 16-20 hours per week (26%) – on each course, than those who enroll in a mix of all types of courses – 6-10 hours per week (32%).

LOW RESIDENCY ONLINE PROGRAMS

Post-traditional graduate students who have most recently enrolled in an online program that requires regular visits (typically full-day visits) prefer accelerated courses of eight-to-ten weeks (52%). They prefer that on-campus convenings with instructors and classmates occur two or three times per course for either a full day (29%) or a half day (24%) on either Saturdays (34%) or Mondays (37%). These students prefer to enroll at institutions that are at most 25-50 miles (32%) or more preferably under 25 miles (40%) from where they reside. They typically spend 10-15 hours (29%) or six to ten hours (28%) each week on each course in which they enroll.

FULLY ONLINE PROGRAMS

Post-traditional graduate students who have most recently enrolled in a fully online program prefer accelerated courses of eight to ten (37%) or six or fewer (22%) weeks. Although they generally seek asynchronous programs, all but 11 percent are willing to periodically log in at a set time for a virtual convening with their instructor and classmates. They prefer that such activities occur 2-3 times per month (34%). Online students most often enroll in a graduate program at an

institution within 50 miles of where they reside (42%). Their primary concerns related to online study are inconsistent or poor communication with instructors (33%), motivation or attention challenges (28%), and/or perceptions of online education among employers and others (24%).

STUDENT SERVICES

MOST FREQUENTLY USED/NEEDED STUDENT SERVICES

Selecting the student support services to make available to post-traditional students (at either the undergraduate or graduate levels) is among the most complicated issues that administrators face. With limited staffing budgets, the goal is to select those services that students not only indicate the need for, but those they actually use. In many cases, student services staff sit for long shifts with no “customers,” but when the service is eliminated, students complain of not having it available.

Perhaps most important to note is that only five services were cited as being used (or important to know are available). Those services are: library resources, 24/7 tech support, research assistance, faculty advising, and career planning/placement assistance. At the Master’s level specifically, peer study groups are also used and important to have available.

PREFERRED DELIVERY FORMAT OF SERVICES

Among these top services, post-traditional graduate students want four of them to be available both in person and online. Library resources and faculty advising preferences lean toward in-person service, but with significant demand for online access; while research assistance leans toward online access, but with significant demand for in-person service. Preferences for 24/7 tech support – unsurprisingly – is clearly for online access. While all other measured services saw a preference for in-person service, most of these services were used (or deemed important) by only one-quarter of respondents.

MOST FREQUENTLY USED/NEEDED STUDENT SERVICES	AMONG TOP THREE SERVICES USED	PREFERRED DELIVERY METHOD		
		In Person	Phone	Online
Library resources	40%	54%	5%	41%
24/7 tech support	30%	21%	21%	57%
Research assistance	29%	40%	8%	52%
Faculty academic advising	28%	52%	11%	38%
Career planning/placement services	27%	47%	8%	45%
Peer study groups	24%	54%	8%	38%
Bookstore	23%	55%	8%	37%
Tutoring	21%	65%	7%	29%
Student networking events	19%	63%	5%	32%
Career fairs/events organized by college/university	17%	71%	4%	25%
New student orientation	12%	55%	5%	40%
Health/wellness counseling services	11%	64%	11%	25%



FINANCING THEIR EDUCATION

Cost of study has already been reported as a primary consideration among post-traditional graduate students. Responses to the questions in this segment of our report should cause senior administrators to not only take a careful look at the affordability of their programs over the long term, but to also look at the convenience and flexibility features of their offerings that could inspire a graduate student to select a more expensive program over a less expensive program.

BALANCING TUITION WITH OTHER FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

Although the cost of study is of preeminent importance to post-traditional graduate students, equal numbers of students enroll in higher priced programs that are flexible and convenient as enroll in the lowest priced program that they considered. Next most important were programs that were the best match to what they

wanted to study at the graduate level. Interestingly, fewer than 10 percent enrolled in a higher priced program due to the reputation of the program of school.

This is a marked change from the pre-recession (2009) era, during which reputation of program and/or school was among the top priorities reported in AMR studies of similar populations. Doctoral students diverge slightly from other levels in that they are less likely to enroll in programs that are more expensive but have ideal programs and even more likely to enroll in programs that might be more expensive but have preferable formats.

TUITION STATEMENTS	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
Tuition was/is the lowest among the programs I evaluated.	31%
Tuition was/is higher than some others, but the available format, schedule, or location are ideal.	31%
Tuition was/is higher than some, but the degree programs best matched what I wanted to study.	26%
Tuition was/is higher than some, but the school/program has the best reputation.	9%
Tuition was among the highest, but this was not a priority in my decision.	3%

“Equal numbers of students enroll in higher priced programs that are flexible and convenient as enroll in the lowest priced program that they considered.”

COURSE PAYMENT METHODS

Historically, AMR studies have reported that as many as 75-80 percent of graduate students used personal funds to pay for their studies. Since the great recession, AMR has seen that drop to between 45-60 percent. This study reports that only 47 percent of post-traditional graduate students used personal funds to pay for their studies, with 66 percent of these people indicating that it was their primary method of financing their studies. Thirty-eight percent used student loans, with 56 percent indicating this was their primary method of payment. Perhaps most interestingly, 24 percent of respondents used employer tuition benefits, with 61 percent indicating that this was their primary (if not only) method of payment. This aligns well with findings of several AMR employer studies which have indicated that many employers are focusing such benefits on graduate study rather than undergraduate study. This refocusing is likely a result of an economy that has seen high proportions of over-qualified (and over-educated) individuals applying for jobs.

COURSE PAYMENT METHODS	USED PAYMENT METHOD	PRIMARY	SECONDARY METHODS
Personal/family funds	47%	66%	34%
Student loans (Government, subsidized, unsubsidized, etc.)	38%	56%	44%
Private loans (from a bank)	22%	51%	49%
Government grants (Federal, state, local, etc.)	27%	59%	41%
Private third-party scholarships	11%	40%	60%
Employer tuition support benefits	24%	61%	39%
Other	1%	86%	14%

PERCENT OF GRADUATE TUITION PAID BY PERSONAL/FAMILY FUNDS

In order to better understand the use of personal funds, we asked respondents who used ANY personal funds to tell us what percent of their total costs were covered by personal funds. For both master's and doctoral students, the median proportion of tuition and fees covered by personal funds was between 51-75 percent, while for certificate students is was upwards of 76 percent.

PERCENT OF GRADUATE TUITION PAID BY LOANS

Since the great recession, AMR has seen a significant increase in the number of graduate students who are taking on (both student and private) loans. To better understand the extent to which loans are financing graduate study among this population, we asked respondents who indicated they took out loans to tell us what percent of their total costs were covered by any type of loan. Across all levels of graduate study, at all three specific levels of study, the median proportion of total costs covered by loans was between 51-75 percent.



STUDENT LOAN DEBT EFFECT ON ENROLLMENT DECISION

The largest proportion of post-traditional graduate students did not have any loan debt at the time they most recently enrolled in graduate study. Among those who did, it affected their enrollment in a variety of ways. The largest proportions said they looked for programs that had assistantship to help cover costs, or programs for which they wouldn't have to borrow any money.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT AT TIME OF ENROLLMENT

Among respondents who had existing loan debt when they most recently enrolled in graduate study, the median amount of debt across all levels was slightly more than \$20,000. Master's students specifically had about \$20,000, while certificate students had only about \$10,000. Doctoral students had more than anyone else, with a median student debt of almost \$30,000.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT EFFECT ON ENROLLMENT DECISION	POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS
I didn't have any loan debt	44%
I looked for programs that had assistantship to help cover costs	16%
I specifically looked for programs for which I wouldn't have to borrow any money	13%
I decided to enroll part time in order to control costs each semester	12%
I didn't consider some of the programs I liked due to cost	9%
I delayed enrolling in order to save up or pay off existing loans	5%
Other	1%

STUDENT LOAN DEBT AT TIME OF ENROLLMENT	MASTER'S	DOCTORAL	CERTIFICATE	ALL
None	7%	11%	20%	10%
Under \$10,000	14%	11%	32%	17%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	22%	11%	14%	20%
\$21,000 - \$30,000	17%	15%	14%	16%
\$31,000 - \$40,000	17%	30%	11%	17%
\$41,000 - \$50,000	10%	7%	7%	9%
More than \$50,000	13%	15%	2%	11%



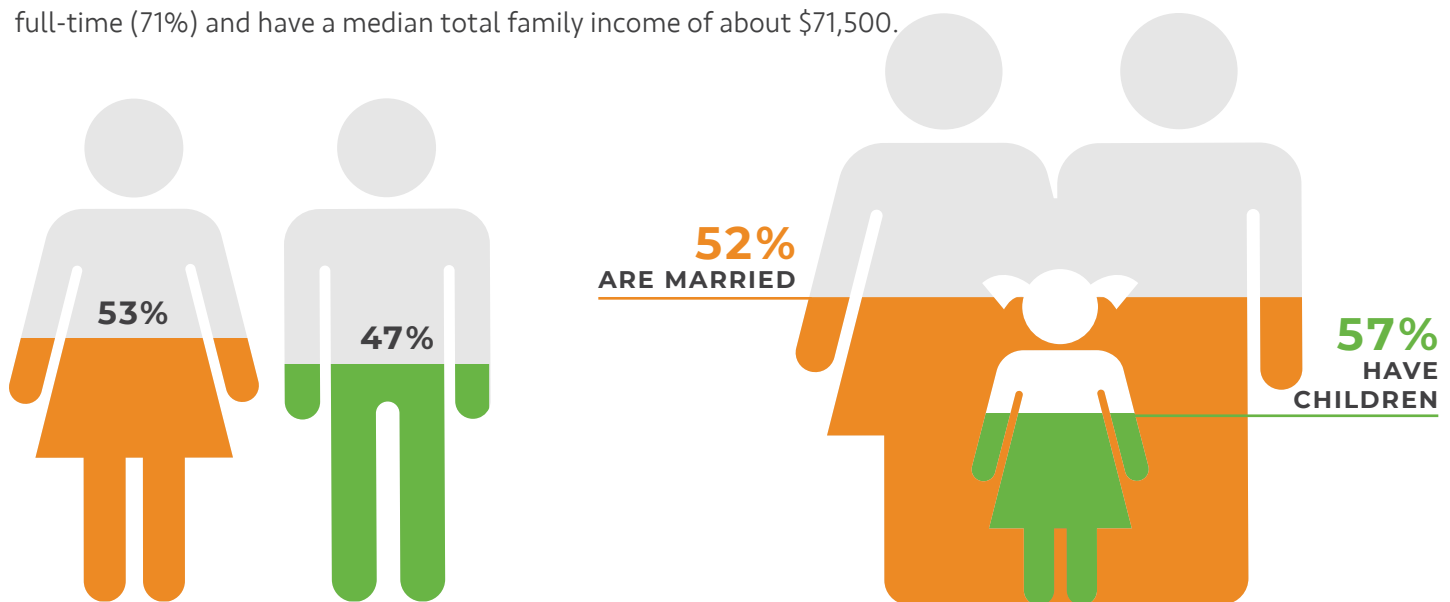


DEMOGRAPHICS OF POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

The demographics of the post-traditional student changed considerably over the last decade, and again seem to have been permanently affected by economic conditions that started in 2009 and the great recession. AMR has linked almost all of these factors to job displacement and related factors. Since that time, the median age has decreased from about 36 years to about 33, the proportion of males has increased from about 40 percent to almost 50 percent, and the median household income has declined from the mid-\$80,000s to the low \$70,000s.

At the same time that the median household income has declined, the proportion of those working full time has remained steady (at about 70-75 percent), as has the racial/ethnic makeup of this student population (with about 65 percent being Caucasian).

The demographic profile of our sample is as follows: The typical post-traditional graduate student is a first-generation graduate student (55%). They are slightly more likely to be female (53%) than male (47%), and are typically between 25 and 34 years of age (49% of respondents). They are most likely to be Caucasian (66%) and about equally likely to be married (52%) or single (48%). They have children (57%), and most often have one child (28%). They work full-time (71%) and have a median total family income of about \$71,500.



POST-TRADITIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

INSIGHTS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

AUTHORS

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