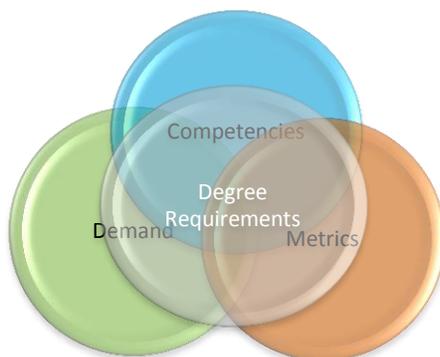


Colloquium

The Alignment Framework for the Master's Degree Summary and Background

In January of 2016, the Council of Graduate Schools published the article titled the *2016 CGS Project on the Master's Degree and the Future of 1.27 Million Master's Candidates*. This statistical snapshot of master's education served as the foundation for the launch of a Council of Graduate Schools 2016 Project on the Master's Degree based on the statistics from the 2014 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees (Allum & Okahana, 2014). Both the magnitude of the master's degree in higher education and challenges to its impact and value as responsive, innovative, and distinctive degrees guided CGS to initiate an in-depth study of the conceptual framework for the degree. The Council enlisted the participation of 18 deans from across the United States to initiate this important study and lay the foundation for developing the framework and applied tools that are need to assure the quality of existing degrees and understand the most effective ways of launching new degrees. The deans were selected intentionally to represent master's education from across the spectrum of public and private institutions that offer the degree. The project revealed that, with the exception of the Professional Science Master's initiative, previous conceptual frameworks intended to guide the continuous improvement of degrees have not been accompanied by proven applied resources (practices, tools, and datasets). The underlying reason for this shortcoming appears to be, at least in part, the long-standing practice of starting with definitions of the master's degree that only provide minimum standards rather than defining its maximum potential. These minimum standards are now fully infused into our policies and guidelines; yet provide no guidance on quality master's education. To address this significant gap in our knowledge, the project team examined the literature and determined that today's workforce-ready programs are defined by competencies, shaped by demand, and distinguished by metrics. When competencies, demand, and metrics are aligned with degree requirements, called the alignment framework, (see the figure below) the result is high quality degrees that meet workforce expectations at career entry and that include a flexible set of competencies needed as disciplines evolve and change in response to new technologies and new ideas.

The Alignment Framework for the Master's Degree



Allum, J. & Okahana H. (2015). *Graduate enrollment and degrees: 2004 to 2014*. Retrieved from the Council of Graduate Schools website: <http://cgsnet.org/graduate-enrollment-and-degrees-fine-field-2004-2014>