

Industrial-sized Master's Degree Programs for Teachers

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Our university is stuck with a difficult financial situation in which the legislature is cutting our funding year by year, while increasing tuition seems to be very difficult. The administration has evidently decided to forego enrollment growth for next year.

We are growing very quickly in the number of dual enrollment students taking FIU courses taught by high school teachers with sufficient graduate credits. However, FIU gets very little money per student to supervise these courses in the high schools.

Many high school teachers would like to teach dual enrollment courses, but most of them lack the necessary graduate credit hours in the relevant fields.

FIU has had little interest in master's degree programs lately – partly because faculty members are already so busy with undergraduate and doctoral programs, not to mention research.

If we could develop a model of master's degree education which is highly cost-effective, then we could greatly expand our master's degree offerings without damaging our other activities. In fact, tuition from master's degree students would allow us to hire more professors for both teaching and research.

MOOCs are showing the way in this. Some MOOCs have had students evaluating each other's term papers and assigning grades to these papers based on rubrics.

Here are some URLs to articles dealing with students evaluating each other's papers in MOOCs:

<http://lytics.stanford.edu/datadriveneducation/papers/shahetal.pdf>
<http://www.stanford.edu/~cpiech/bio/papers/tuningPeerGrading.pdf>

<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/03/05/essays-flaws-peer-grading-moocs>

<http://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2012/07/06/peer-grading-in-online-classes-does-it-work/>

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/ohio-state-u-lets-mooc-students-grade-peer-graders/47457>

<http://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2013/03/09/why-and-when-peer-grading-is-effective-for-open-and-online-learning/>

<http://moocnewsandreviews.com/massive-mooc-grading-problem-stanford-hci-group-tackles-peer-assessment/>

My conclusion from reading about peer-grading in MOOCs is that this method is not as good as having professors reading the term papers of students, but that it is good enough to use along with other checks on student participation and learning, including machine-graded tests which are carefully proctored.

Very large classes in these master's degree programs should be possible without detracting from the research agendas of the professors teaching the courses.

FIU should establish a broad array of master's degree programs for teachers in many subjects in local high schools who would like to teach dual enrollment courses through FIU.

These classes could have up to 100 students each with one professor. The professor would not necessarily read the term papers of each of them, but they would be in teams of six students and would read and evaluate each other's papers. We would have measures in place to ensure that students are maintaining good academic standards in evaluation.

Students would not actually be grading each other's papers, but their evaluations would help to ensure that everyone was doing work of good quality. Students would be evaluated by each other on the quality of their evaluations.

Professors would grade academic posters from each student which give the essence of their term papers in large type with illustrative images, tables and graphs. The students would have to demonstrate that their arguments were both original and important in their posters.

I call these courses “industrial-sized.” They should be rigorous, but they should also be accessible. We should be challenging to even the best-prepared students.

These students would not write master’s theses, but their coursework should include many aspects of research, including statistics courses. They could cooperate in preparing data and analyzing it, but each student would write a unique, individual paper based on this shared research.

The master’s degree programs in each field would be based on the cohort system, where a given group is taking the whole set of courses together. Students would work with a small team of six and a larger section of 25 within a total class of up to 100.

Students would be expected to help each other in many ways, but ultimately each individual will be accountable for learning what is necessary to pass the course. Our objective should be to have as close to 100% successful completion as possible, but we should be more academically rigorous than any other master’s degree programs for teachers in South Florida.

Substantial scholarly literature says that teachers do not become better in improving the learning outcomes of their students as a result of earning master’s degrees (except in math).

We should study the national research literature very carefully and try to develop master’s degree programs for teachers which actually make a substantial positive difference in the subsequent learning of the students of these teachers.

It would be my hope that as a result of this program, FIU would be able to hire large numbers of new professors in the College of Education who are excellent at both research and teaching. We should strive to become the top university in the nation in the field of urban education.

This program should also result in more hiring in the relevant disciplines in Arts and Sciences and the professional schools.

