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## Business

### Down economy boosts grad programs in Maryland

ALAN DESSOFF  
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From business and technology to nursing and teaching, graduate programs in Maryland's colleges and universities are experiencing a rise in applicants and enrollments that administrators attribute at least in part to the economy as students recognize the value of advanced training in gaining and keeping employment.

Although they have no data to support their observations, administrators said their conversations with some students reflect a common trend during an economic downturn, when workers who have been laid off from their jobs, or fear that they might be, return to school to polish their skills or learn new ones for a new career. Some enter continuing education or professional development programs that award them with certificates of completion while others pursue master's degrees and sometimes doctorates. In addition, administrators said, a surprising number of students fresh out of undergraduate colleges, with the ink on their bachelor's degrees barely dry, are continuing straight into graduate programs instead of trying to find jobs first.

At the University of Baltimore's Merrick School of Business, applications for graduate programs are up 20 percent over this time last year, according to its dean, Darlene Smith. The average age of applicants has declined from about 28 to 24, largely because of the increase in recent undergraduates who are staying in school, she said.

They want to continue their training and make sure they don't have a void in their resumes. "If they can't find a job, they want to be able to 'sell' their resumes while simultaneously advancing their knowledge set," Smith explained.

The Merrick School is considering adding course sections to meet the increased demand and also is introducing a new master's degree in finance, she said.

"We've been on a trend up for the last couple of years," said Jill Barr, assistant director of graduate enrollment at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She attributes it to the institution's reputation and its growth in graduate programs, including master's programs directly linked to career fields like biotechnology, industrial organization, psychology, and engineering management. She said the most popular master's programs are in computer science and information systems.

Also, "we have active Ph.D. programs in pretty much all categories" and the interest in them has been "more significant this year," Barr said, with a rise in international applicants, particularly from India and China.

Salisbury University's largest graduate program, a master's in social work, will have a 20 percent increase in enrollment this fall, reported Richard Culver, a university spokesman. "Anecdotally, several prospective students have indicated that they are 'retooling' by learning new skills due to their job situation," he said. Applicant interest also is up for a master of arts in teaching program, he added.

Further, like UB's Merrick School, Salisbury is experiencing a "significant" increase in applications for its MBA program, largely from students "going straight from undergraduate to graduate study due to the tightening job market," Culver said.

The University of Maryland School of Nursing is seeing "a continued steady rise in applicants; more than we are able to accommodate," said Patricia Morton, associate dean for academic affairs and a professor there. The school has received nearly 200 applications for 50 places this fall in its Clinical Nurse Leader program, a fast-track entry to nursing for individuals with bachelor's degrees, she said. It is "a popular program for people who are making career changes," Morton said.

Although there is a need for nurses nationwide, the Maryland school is unable to graduate more of them because it can't find qualified faculty to teach them, Morton said.

There also is a need for teachers in general education and "I'm getting more phone calls now than I have previously," said Donna Mollenkopf, director of the master of arts in teaching program at Goucher College. Some, she said, are from people in their early 20s who have finished college with degrees in fields like communication or psychology where they are having difficulty finding jobs. Others simply "have always liked children or worked with children and now they want to get certified as teachers," she said.

"We've always had people coming into this program, but I think the economy is driving more interest now. They see teaching as a stable job where there are likely to be opportunities," Mollenkopf said. Critical-need areas include special education, math, science and Spanish, she said.

Similarly, a master's in education has drawn the most interest at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, where inquiries about graduate programs are up about 20 percent, said Heidi Fletcher, vice president for enrollment management.

"It's a little surprising. I would have expected it to be management or something else," she said. "But we're seeing a lot of individuals, working professionals in all sorts of places, who have a bachelor's degree in other fields and see a need for teachers and think it's a more secure field than a lot of others. Even business executives want a teacher's certificate or a master's as a backup, just to have that credential in case they are laid off."

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In addition to a program that it already offers mainly through evening and weekend courses, Notre Dame is starting a new full-time, 10-month, master's in education program in August, all during the day, for a flat fee of \$15,000.

"We expect to get a lot of interest," she said. "It's a pretty quick way to get a master's and help you get a job."

Applications for graduate programs are up 29 percent over last year at Capitol College in Laurel, said Michael Wood, president of the independent college dedicated to engineering, computer sciences, information technologies and business. He expects 25 percent growth over the next year in its master's program in information assurance cyber protection. There also is growth in Capitol's MBA program, "primarily from career changers; they see the MBA as a ticket in that direction," Wood said.

Most of Capitol's graduate students, with an average age of 33, are full-time working adults who take one to three courses per semester part time and online, Wood reported. While the increase in applicants is generally due to the economy, "I didn't think it would be quite so dramatic in this recession, because when people go back to college, they need the financial wherewithal to support it. In these days of tightening credit and reduction of assets, I didn't expect quite the buck we are getting, but people are indicating it's necessary to go back to school," Wood said.

Similarly, at Loyola College in Maryland's Sellinger School of Business and Management, which offers full-time and part-time study options, the number of applications received this spring is "bigger than I have ever seen at this point for fall admissions," said Ann Attanasio, director of Loyola's graduate business programs.

Although the current business job market is "very poor," a common theme among students is that graduate studies will "build their skills and make them more marketable when the job market improves," Attanasio said. The Sellinger School was listed 30th this year in U.S. News & World Report's annual best business school specialty rankings for part-time MBA programs.

Stevenson University is experiencing increased interest in its graduate business, technology and management program, which "covers a lot of territory but basically teaches students to use technology solutions to solve business problems," said Joyce Becker, dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies and professor of legal studies. There also is growing interest in an online program in forensic studies, she added.

Both programs are in "areas that are up-and-coming and where we anticipate seeing additional jobs in the future. Given the economic downturn, it is significant that these programs are seeing increases," Becker said.

At the Maryland Institute College of Art, software training workshops for Web and graphic designers are drawing growing interest, said David Gracyalny, dean of continuing studies. Also popular is a graduate certificate program the institute offers in partnership with the University of Baltimore "to train creative professionals in skills for running small businesses," Gracyalny explained.

"Many of our students have been struggling to make a living as creative professionals and may be recognizing at this point that what they really need is training in how to launch or improve a business," he said.

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