

Comment #1

I certainly have benefited greatly from my masters, in part because of its dexterity, but also because it introduced me to new modes of critical thought that have benefited me greatly in some of the most logistical aspects of my current job. These sorts of things are very difficult to put a price on and even more difficult to analyze. I think that is where some in the audience stumbled. I would also imagine there is also somewhat of an internalized ethical dilemma on behalf of some of those who are arguing because of skyrocketing tuition, especially the humanists. This is obviously a great concern for the administration as well.

Dynamic masters programs are a worthy beginning to find a way out of the revenue conundrum not purely for "professional" development but also as locations for new scholarship that can enhance the pre-existing departments' ability to more fully address the problems of our time. Behavioral economics is a prime example of this sort of academic evolution, where psychologists and economists combine their respective wealth of knowledge to more accurately understand human behavior and the economy. With masters programs Cornell can promote these conversations without compromising the more detailed research carried by Ph.D. students in those disciplines independently.

Thus masters programs are not solely revenue generators, they can be dynamic incubators of new thought and scholarship. This to me satisfies the desires of both the administration and the faculty, not to mention prospective students. An ancillary benefit to interdependent masters study is that it could promote greater transparency amongst the colleges themselves allowing them to find ways to work together, so as to make the whole enterprise operate more efficiently through sharing resources and alleviating redundancies.

Cornell Employee

Comment #2

An important issue that didn't have enough discussion is why professional masters program need a strong pedagogical foundation and a clearly thought out and accredited professional connection. They should not be used just as revenue enhancement. This is an abuse of students (e.g. how does a history masters help you get a job? and how do you ever pay off the debt?) and undermines the quality of education for the undergrads and MA/PhD track if you just assume the revenue-enhancing master students can take undergrad and PhD track classes and not affect the quality and level of instruction in those classes. And now that the Grad School has washed its hands of professional masters degree, no one is looking over this with attention to student needs, pedagogical and professional review. Very scary that at a time when budget pressures force more departments at Cornell to pursue professional masters degrees, no one is policing this to ensure pedagogy and accreditation is solid, and none of the experience from long-standing professional masters programs is being sought. The long-standing programs do not view them as "revenue enhancement." They view them as core to their academic/professional mission and invest real new resources accordingly. There are no free lunches out there and I despair to see Cornell thinking professional masters students can be viewed in this way.

Faculty, AAP

Comment #3: MEng program

Short story, while our President side-steps the debt issue, my domestic [MEng] students are routinely graduating with between \$50K-100K of debt. An incredible burden. About 800 M.Eng are in Engineering.

The hidden story is how College of Engineering faculty see that group. I won't elaborate on that. Be aware that over 50K student are getting terminal masters nationwide. (NY Times Education special section)

[Many MEng] students feel career services is far less than helpful. I've been hiring, advising, placing, interviewing many because of the need. It has been the most rewarding aspect of my [career].

NTT Faculty, College of Engineering

Comment #4

It is important to consider the relationship among the issues addressed by the various speakers at the forum on "revenue enhancement." This includes the relationship between the national trends of increasing non-tenure-track lines, the corresponding shrinkage of tenure-track lines, and the growth of Masters' programs. Who will take on the additional teaching duties in new Masters' programs? Will this lead to an expansion of non-tenure-track faculty positions? These concerns are especially salient at this moment, when Masters' programs are being considered, at least in part, because of their potential for bringing in significant levels of increased tuition revenue. Hiring lower-paid non-tenure-track faculty may be one means of enhancing the revenue gained from Masters' programs. Increasing non-tenure-track faculty lines, however, carries serious costs to academic freedom and tenure. Non-tenure-track faculty, who are in an ongoing situation of job insecurity (even with renewable contracts), will often feel insecure about exercising academic freedom. As we should recall, the job security of tenure is designed to enhance academic freedom and shared governance. If Cornell does create new academic programs – including Masters' programs – this should be done only under conditions that ensure that the teaching will be done by tenure-track/tenured faculty, including new tenure-track lines, as needed.

Risa Lieberwitz
Professor, ILR

Comment #5

Two things came to mind at the recent Faculty Forum. First the prospect of interdisciplinary (between departments and perhaps colleges) masters programs. Second the potential of constructing a semester during the summer for Masters candidates. This reflects my fondness of the experience with my own interdisciplinary Masters program at a peer institution. However, I've always felt that Cornell, in comparison with other peer institutions, has a tremendous advantage in the breadth of its scholarship and that there is untapped potential for new scholarship in the void that exists between the disciplines and the colleges.

The summer semester idea stems from CAU where a huge draw is obviously the weather but also the fact that it allows faculty to teach in a palpably more relaxed atmosphere, not to mention make a little more money. It provides for a great sense of cohesion amongst the group as well as people are more likely to socialize outside of class rather than retreat to their homes as they do in the winter months.

Dartmouth acutely operates on a trimester system where every sophomore stays on campus during their second summer in exchange for taking a winter semester off. This actually gives students a huge leg up in securing internships and other professional development opportunities because they are not competing with most other university students during the summer. This could be advantageous for Cornell masters students as well.

Another aspect of an interdisciplinary approach is that it lends more credence to the humanities programs (in the “professional” realm) in that it gives students in the hard sciences a set of skills that allows them to communicate more effectively and perhaps approach very pragmatic problems with a greater capacity to think critically.

On the other side of that coin humanities students might have the opportunity to ground their more theoretical conjectures with solid empirical evidence.

Don Randel has defended this: <http://www.cornell.edu/video/don-randel-relevance-of-the-humanities-in-the-21st-century>

Cornell Staff

Comment #6

Tuition-based Master Programs in the Humanities

Matthew Evangelista

Still puzzled about why, so many years after the 2008 economic crisis, Cornell is still pursuing a policy of austerity and seeking further budget cuts, I watched President Skorton’s presentation and attended the informative Faculty Senate forum on Masters degrees as a source of revenue-enhancement. I attribute my puzzlement in part to the term I spent chairing my department (Government), 2008-2011. At the time we were told that the cuts we were implementing were intended in part to close a “structural deficit” in the provost’s budget on the order of \$100-135 million (according to my notes of the time), and that we would do it in three years – with hiring freezes, early retirements, staff-cutbacks, selling library books to China, and other measures that our richer peer institutions appeared not to be undertaking. Now, in 2015, we are told that the provost runs a \$55 million deficit.

After President Skorton’s presentation, he was asked a question by a graduate student, whose department was eliminating teaching assistantships to meet its new obligations to reduce spending. She wondered – as many of us do – whether anyone would be held accountable for this situation. The president replied, “The people accountable is everybody.”

During the discussion following the Senate forum's presentations, Professor Ronald Ehrenberg explained the broader socio-economic context of the predicament that Cornell, and higher education in general, faces: Decades of stagnant family wages and growing income inequality have put an end to Cornell's ability to increase tuition continuously at above the rate of inflation -- and students just can't afford to take on the debt necessary to pay the rising costs.

In that context, the idea of encouraging students to pay further for Masters degrees might seem counterintuitive, but the panel assembled for the Senate forum made a strong case for its benefits -- not just as a source of revenue, but for the added value the students themselves will enjoy. In fact, the consensus of the panelists seemed to be that these degree programs would not be worth pursuing for the sake of revenue if they were not, above all, valuable to the students, most obviously, perhaps, in enhancing their job prospects. The most persuasive cases came from Engineering and Computer Sciences, and the idea of combining training in those fields with study of the humanities or social sciences -- in, say, a five-year joint Bachelors-Masters program, seemed especially promising.

The panel did not explore the merits of the tuition-generating Masters for the humanities and humanistic social sciences, and there is reason to doubt that the model would work well at Cornell. As I see it, there are four potential problems.

- 1) Diversion of resources from existing teaching and advising responsibilities. Our department, for example, devotes a great deal of attention to teaching undergraduates and to training a relatively small number of PhD students for future careers in scholarship and teaching. The PhD students all receive fellowships that cover their tuition and pay a stipend, and, in return they work as teaching and research assistants, under faculty supervision. Teaching and advising Masters students would entail establishing an admissions process, creating a system of qualifying examinations, supervising Masters theses, and probably creating new courses suited to the career interests of the new students. Without additional faculty hires and administrative resources, the new initiative would compete with our existing priorities.
- 2) Establishing a two-"class" graduate program. If we did not create new courses for the Masters, the students would join our existing seminars with the PhD students -- although much of what they would learn, about theoretical debates in the field and pedagogical techniques for teaching our subject, would be irrelevant to their future careers. Colleagues elsewhere who have a tuition-based Masters program and a fellowship-based PhD program report that the applicant pool is essentially the same students. Why pay for a Masters when you can receive a fellowship to pursue a PhD -- and get the MA as a "consolation prize" if you decide not to continue? So the MA students are in the same classes as the PhD students, knowing that their professors thought less of them -- and perhaps for good reason -- than their PhD-pursuing peers.
- 3) Dubious value of a humanities MA. At the undergraduate level, the benefits of pursuing the liberal arts seem apparent to us: students learn skills in critical thinking and writing, for example. It seems doubtful that an additional year of absorbing such skills would be worth the tens of thousands of dollars an MA would cost. In some areas, including the Government Department's field of political science, one could imagine reorienting some of the courses to focus on career-oriented training in politics -- campaigning, corporate fund-raising, working for governments or nongovernmental organizations. But even if

we acquired or diverted the necessary resources to impart such skills, why would good students pay us to teach them, when there are schools of public policy (including at Cornell) that already offer Masters degrees in the practical aspects of politics? Presumably there are no such competitors offering career-oriented training in English, History, or Comparative Literature, so our colleagues in those fields – if they wanted to offer valuable Masters programs -- would have to navigate that *terra incognita* on their own, at the expense of their existing priorities.

- 4) Contributing to a fundamental problem underlying the crisis in higher education. This might be putting it too strongly, but if the crisis stems in part from inequality in our economic system, then trying to sell humanities MA programs to students as a way to enhance their job prospects risks making matters worse. I can offer two examples, close to home, to illustrate the point. Our younger daughter graduated in 2013 in psychology and knew she wanted to become a psychologist working with underserved communities. She enrolled in a program to earn a Masters in Counseling Psychology with a specialty in substance abuse. Working two part-time jobs, along with unpaid internships, and with help from her family, she was able to pay her tuition and living expenses – and the money seemed well-spent to achieve the skills required. (Many of her peers are borrowing money, and will not pay it back quickly, given the low pay in this profession.) Our older daughter graduated in 2009 in Romance Studies, with good language and writing skills, and lots of foreign experience of various kinds. She wanted to work in the non-profit sector, preferably on international issues. Every job to which she applied required at least two years' relevant experience or a Masters degree – and not one of them specified which field or what kind of expertise was assumed by possession of the Masters. It was clearly just a way to limit the pool of eligible applicants. Before she finally found a job that suits her interests (in Peru), she was on the verge of applying for a Masters-in-Anything.

We in the humanities and social sciences could offer such Masters to help people like my daughter become more competitive on the job market, even as they or their families make the economic sacrifices necessary to do so. But that will only lead to inflation in the market for credentials – a kind of arms race as each job candidate accrues more degrees of dubious value simply to get an interview. If anyone can “win” an arms race, it will be the families with means who do so, as the disadvantaged fall further behind. We will be exacerbating the problem of inequality that helped get us into this mess.

A related form of credentialing would target wealthy foreign students and take advantage of income inequality in their countries. We could structure our Masters programs to traffic on the Ivy League name and the competitive advantage of US higher education in the global market. But that approach would risk undermining the University's founding ethos.

I might be missing something. I am not an expert in revenue-enhancement. Clearly there are initiatives at Cornell – the tech campus in New York City, for example – that are suited to integrating teaching, research, corporate sponsorship, and job-training. It is hard to imagine how the humanities and social sciences that form the core of the College of Arts and Sciences could successfully adopt that model, without losing much of its value in the process.

Matthew Evangelista

Comment #7

I was unable to attend the form on “Revenue Enhancement” but have had a chance to review the slides (via PDF) for which I thank you.

Two immediate responses:

There is much information provided concerning faculty and student head counts but apparently none concerning administrative personnel head count. If Cornell is like any other University and one’s personal perceptions are fundamentally sound, there has been a disproportionate increase in such personnel. It would be good to know the numbers, for the sake of a fair overall picture of the issue.

I suggest that, given the tenor of the times, “Revenue Enhancement” should be a third rather than a first priority behind “Cost Control” and “Productivity Increase,” two more critical, inter related issues over which the Cornell community has more control than over revenue enhancement, which is essentially market-controlled. There are very many suggestions and observations that can be made in either category but I will restrict myself to two only:

There is no enterprise which cannot reduce costs 1-2%/year for a number of successive years, especially if such reductions are incentivized by providing a 5-10% one year return to the personnel who make suggestions that are adopted and prove to work in practice.

Cornell is long overdue for a radical revolutionary reconsideration and alteration in its academic calendar: a move to a quarter system with each quarter containing 10 instructional weeks, one review week and one examination week, combined with return to uniform 50 minute instructional blocks (2 x 75 do not equal 3 x 50, except in the lower grades of public schools!) would yield immediate productivity increases and be much more student friendly in an era when students must work to support their educational costs.

Jonathan Black