



22 | Monday, January 6, 2014

your **education**

StatsCan data show gender gap

New Statistics Canada data reveal that in 2011 women accounted for 39% of all STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) university graduates aged 25 to 34, despite the fact that they represented 66% of university graduates.



Graduate studies change with times

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Astrobiology, biomedical engineering, globalization and health management are among more than 65 master's level programs offered at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. The vast breadth of programs on Canadian campuses reflects a noteworthy trend in graduate studies: growing variety.

Here's a look at five current trends in graduate studies.

1. Growing variety of programs
Students interested in graduate studies have a huge variety of programs to choose from. The University of British Columbia offers 250-plus graduate degree programs in nearly every

academic field imaginable. The University of Waterloo offers more than 180 master's and doctoral programs.

"It's a blessing because it means there's something for just about everyone out there," says Allison Sekuler, associate vice-president and dean of the school of graduate studies at McMaster in Hamilton and past chair of the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies. "It's a curse because how do you know which is the right type of program for you?"

Increasingly, the number of "professional" course-based master's programs (unique from research-based master's) continues to grow well beyond the traditional MBA. They're designed for professionals eager to further their careers.

2. Collaborative,

interdisciplinary programs
Another big trend in graduate studies has been the development of collaborative, interdisciplinary programs that bring together two or more distinct disciplines in a bid to examine a phenomenon that lies beyond the scope of a single area of knowledge, Sekuler notes.

Take McMaster's new astrobiology program — the study of whether there's life on other planets — as an example. Five academic departments came together to participate: biochemistry and biomedical sciences; biology; chemistry and chemical biology; physics and astronomy; and geography and earth sciences.

3. Growing number of graduate students

In 2010, there were almost 1.2 million students in degree programs on Canadian

campuses: 755,000 undergraduates, 143,400 graduate students studying full time and an additional 275,800 students studying part time, the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) reports in its Trends in Education publication.

The number of graduate students has grown significantly faster than the number of undergraduate students. The total number of graduate students grew from about 77,000 in 1980 to almost 190,000 in 2010. The AUCC attributes enrolment growth to several factors, including the addition of new faculty to university campuses and additional funding for graduate students.

4. Graduate students getting younger

Master's and PhD students are generally older

in 2010 than they were in 1980, but younger than they were in the early 1990s, the AUCC reports in its Trends in Higher Education publication.

In 1980, 26% of full-time master's students were 30 years of age or older, increasing to a 30-year high of almost 38% in 1994 and then decreasing to 31% in 2010. A smaller proportion of graduate students studied part time in 2010 than in 1980.

5. Health-related disciplines in demand

The three most popular fields of study at the master's level continue to be the combined disciplines of:

- Business, management and public administration
- Social and behavioural sciences, and law
- Architecture, engineering and related technologies

Types of degrees

SCHOOL Generally speaking, Canadian universities offer three types of graduate degrees:

1. A course-based master's, which requires the successful completion of a specific program of graduate-level courses and often has a professional orientation.
2. A research-based master's, which requires both graduate-level course work and a thesis.
3. The doctorate (PhD), which requires the candidate to undertake original research and to develop and defend a thesis that makes a substantial contribution to the advancement of knowledge.