



CERTIFICATION MAP'S GUIDE TO A MASTER OF EDUCATION

If you are considering a Master of Education, you are already a teacher who cares about improving your practice and your students' learning. But before you apply for a master's program, you should know a bit more about how the admissions process work. While a Master of Education is not a requirement to be a teacher, it will advance your teaching skills and signal to all that you are a professional interested in consistently improving your practice.

A Master of Education may also provide you with greater job opportunities. Districts and principals look for educators who seek professional development, enjoy collaborating with other educators in communities of practice, have advanced skills and understand the most recent research on teaching and learning. Your ongoing education makes you appealing to more schools and may also help you earn a higher teaching salary.

The benefits of a master's degree are endless. To ensure you are able to take full advantage of these benefits, here are a few tips about the admissions process, program curriculum, financial aid and more.

Keep in mind that teaching requirements vary from state to state. Always make sure that a master's program is compatible with your state's department of education teaching requirements before applying.



CERTIFICATION MAP

Teaching Certification Made Simple

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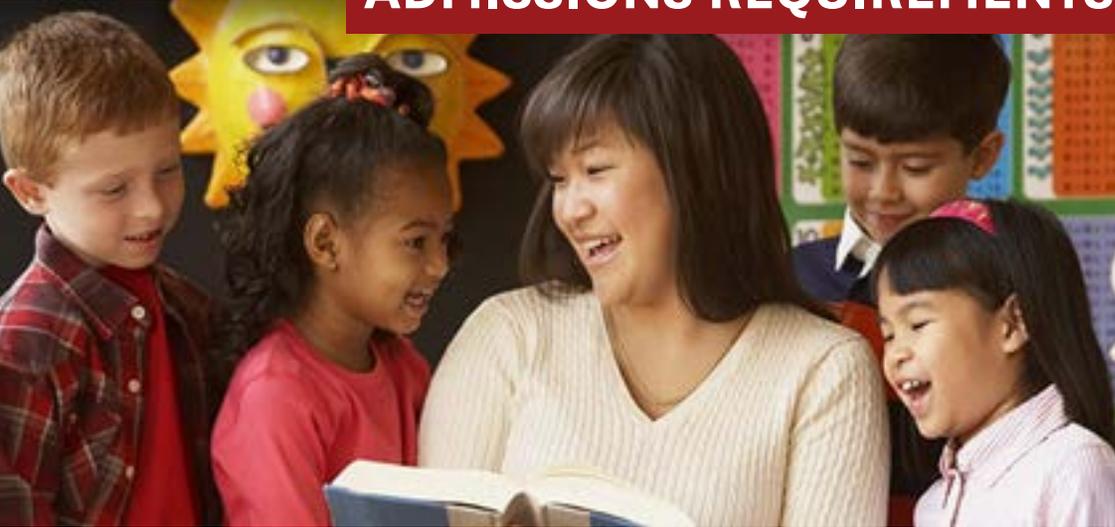
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MASTER OF EDUCATION: ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

TYPES OF PROGRAMS



There are many different types of programs, ranging from those that focus on curriculum and instruction to those that focus on administration (see our “Degree Specializations” section for additional information). You also need to decide whether you want to apply to a traditional school-based program, an online program or a blended program. Most traditional programs offer limited flexibility of course offerings and schedules. If you do not have a full-time job, this might be a good option for you.

Online and blended programs often provide working teachers the opportunity to earn their degree part-time. These programs allow you to learn early in the morning or late at night, which is convenient for working teachers. However, online programs require you to be organized, self-disciplined and you must be able to use the technology.

Before you choose your program, consider which type will best meet your schedule and learning style.

REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for master’s degree programs vary by institution and state. Check that the program you choose meets your state’s requirements before filling out an application. Once you choose programs that interest you, read carefully to be sure you know exactly what is required during the admission’s process. You may want to keep a chart or spreadsheet outlining the materials you need to send and when you need to send them.

Here are some additional requirements:

- **Due Date:** Many institutions require that you submit an application well in advance of the semester that you would like to attend. This may be up to six months before the semester begins.
- **Application Materials:** Graduate applications are lengthy documents. There are typically one or more essays that every applicant must complete. Give yourself enough time to complete application materials of high quality. Have a friend or relative review your materials to be sure everything is well written and also to be sure you have everything you need to submit.
- **Undergraduate Education:** Make sure your undergraduate major and GPA align with school requirements or preferences. Besides transcripts, many universities require a minimum GPA (often 3.0). Some schools may even have a preferred degree that they look for in applicants.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** You may need up to three letters from people familiar with your work (professors, employers, etc). Schools of education generally look for references from different people. Don’t send three personal references. Be sure your references are from those with whom you have worked, professors and maybe others who know how well you will succeed in a rigorous Master of Education program.
- **Teaching Certificate:** Some universities will require this. There are also programs in which you can earn your certificate and master’s simultaneously.
- **Exams:** Some graduate schools require that you have taken your GRE. If you plan on teaching students who are learning English as a second language, you may need a passing score on a TOEFL exam.
- **Application Fee:** Nearly all universities require one, and it is nonrefundable. Your application will not be processed without this.

Remember, your application is your opportunity to sell yourself as an ideal candidate. Make sure that you follow directions carefully, revise and proofread your documents for errors (this can make or break you), and make sure that you have sent all required documents.

MASTER OF EDUCATION: CURRICULUM

The best Master of Education programs focus on the development of skills and knowledge necessary for teachers to become confident and successful in the 21st-century classroom. The typical core curriculum not only covers specific academic disciplines, but also focuses on education theory, teaching educators how to develop their methods and become adaptive and responsive to student needs. The curriculum prepares candidates to develop and maintain effective classroom practices, and apply appropriate technologies to help students meet their instructional goals.

Coursework integrates theory and practice, giving teachers an opportunity to practice what they learn. Teachers are not only encouraged to learn and reflect on their existing practices and education trends, but to explore and develop new methods and strategies, always using the classroom as a learning tool to better their teaching. The curriculum also typically includes in-depth research and practice in assessment, pedagogy, curriculum development, reflection and instructional leadership.

DEGREE SPECIALIZATIONS

Most master's programs have you choose a specialization or a focused area of study. Here are 11 specializations that you can choose, as well as the professions for which they qualify you:

ADVANCED INSTRUCTION: This program enables practicing teachers to work with other teachers in their field to improve their instruction and their students' learning and academic achievement.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP OR ADMINISTRATION: This area will qualify you to become a school administrator, such as a principal or superintendent. You would also take a certification exam and, in some states, complete an administrative internship.

READING AND LITERACY: This area prepares you to be an elementary, middle or secondary reading teacher. Literacy instruction is especially important at the elementary level, and you may be a consultant or classroom teacher.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: This enables you to obtain or maintain your license as an elementary school teacher.

MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION: This enables you to obtain or maintain your license as a middle school teacher.

SECONDARY EDUCATION: This enables you to obtain or maintain your license as a high school teacher in a specific area (math, science, physical education, etc.).

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: This area prepares you to work with non-native English speakers as a consultant or classroom teacher. You can also work abroad as an English teacher.

SPECIAL EDUCATION: This program qualifies you to work with students with disabilities. Many special education teachers are required to get their master's.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: This area will qualify you to become a curriculum director or department chair. You could be responsible for designing the curriculum for an entire school or department.

SCHOOL COUNSELING: This specialty allows you to provide counseling services, both educational and social, to students. You can become a school guidance counselor.

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY: This area prepares you as a technology coordinator for your school or district. You might provide teacher training, prepare STEM programs or choose technology and programs for your school.

When choosing your master's program and any specializations, consider factors like job prospects in your area and where your interests lie. You are making a commitment to your education, and you will want to use the skills and knowledge you learn for many years to come. Choose an area of study that you enjoy!

CAPSTONE/THESIS

Although each Master of Education program differs regarding concentration and elective options, the majority consist of a capstone or thesis component, focusing on the development of an action research project in the teaching field. With the guidance of an advisor, both current and prospective teachers conduct research in a field of interest and later create and implement interventions, learning experiences or teaching strategies in their own classrooms. Students may be asked to record and analyze data, develop further research and, in some cases, videotape their action research experience to show improvement.

TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOL

Teachers today must use technology in the classroom and engage their students in using technology to study, inquire and problem solve. Teachers are finding that technology has a place in lesson planning, engaging parents in their children's education and completing simple tasks, like taking attendance. If you are a student hoping to become a teacher, it is imperative that you chose a Master of Education program that promotes technology literacy and learn about how technology is impacting education.

Technology proficiency may be your greatest asset.

Education World interviewed a group of principals to find out what they look for when hiring new teachers. In addition to “passion” and “heart,” principals mentioned 21st-century learning techniques and the ability to make instruction engaging and exciting. Technology enables teachers to create multimedia instruction, engaging all of the senses and appealing to more students' strengths and interests. Imagine taking your students on a virtual field trip to Zimbabwe, rather than just reading about the country and answering questions in the back of a chapter. Great Master of Education programs will integrate multimedia literacy and new media literacy into the courses you are taught so that you are prepared to apply these techniques in your own classrooms with your own students.



Choose your master's degree or teaching certification program carefully, and look for programs that include the integration of technology in education. Without any background or knowledge of technology in education, you will seem ill prepared during interviews or student teaching experiences. If your coursework does not offer much, take some local or online professional development courses and attend workshops. PBS has excellent classroom resources, as well as professional development offerings.

HOW UNIVERSITIES ARE PREPARING MASTERS STUDENTS

According to the U.S Department of Education, more universities are changing their programs to integrate technology into the classroom. The University of Southern California offers a robust Master of Education program online. The University of Texas in Austin incorporates technology regularly into their classes, having students take assessments online and preparing teachers to use technology in their future classes. These skills are becoming more imperative as virtual schools and online classes become increasingly popular at the elementary, middle and secondary levels. Georgia has made major moves to bring more virtual learning to students, recently proposing a bill that would require all high school students to take some online classes. Virtual programs offer schools flexibility while containing program costs, and with similar initiatives spreading throughout the country, schools are looking for new teachers that are technologically savvy.

Technology in the Classroom

U.S Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has proposed that all schools convert to digital textbooks by 2017. More schools have embraced the use of netbooks, iPads, interactive white boards and other technological tools for the classroom. Outside of school, students are already interacting with technology regularly, so it makes sense to assist their learning with something that they already find engaging.

With the drive for more STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs, as well as the need to compete in a global economy, students do not just want to interact with technology; they need to in order to become successful in the future. Therefore, teachers must catch up with media-savvy students and embrace the new ways of sharing information. Use YouTube and video podcasts to make lessons more entertaining, and study geography on Google Earth. There are an infinite number of resources at your fingertips, and they are only just a click away.



MASTER OF EDUCATION: FINANCIAL AID

A Master of Education degree can certainly help you advance your career and further your pedagogical knowledge. However, some students feel uneasy about entering a master's program due to the costs of higher education. Fortunately, there are many financial aid options available.

FEDERAL AID

This is the primary source of financial aid for college students and includes loans, grants and work-study programs. To apply for federal aid, you must fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online.

Federal Loans

If you plan on taking out a loan, investigate federal options before looking into private loans, as the former usually has more favorable terms. As a teacher, you may also be eligible for loan forgiveness. The Federal Direct Loan program is the largest program available, offering low-interest loans from the U.S. Department of Education. Graduate students can apply for Direct Unsubsidized Loans, Direct Plus Loans and Direct Consolidation Loans. To be eligible, you need to be enrolled at least part time. The interest rates are typically lower than private loans, and the Department of Education offers many flexible payback programs. You also do not need to start paying back your loans until after you graduate. The Federal Perkins Loan is also available to students with high financial need. You must check with your college's financial aid office to see if you qualify for this loan.

Work-Study

Work-study is part-time employment for students who exhibit financial need. Many of the related jobs are on campus and may even be within your field of study. Again, check with your school's financial aid office to see which programs are available.

This is assistance that does not have to be paid back. By filling out a FAFSA, you may also become eligible for several federal grants.

The Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant is specifically for students pursuing careers in education. Eligibility requirements include enrollment in a school participating in the TEACH Grant program, grade point average of at least 3.25 and an agreement to serve a high-needs area in a school serving low-income students for at least four years.

Scholarships are also available to students who show exceptional performance in specific academic areas. Your financial aid office should have more information on the variety of scholarships and the application processes for each.

PRIVATE LOANS

Teach.com recommends that you use this only as a last option. In many cases, private loans will require a credit check and cosigner. While you can usually defer your payments until after you graduate, loans are offered by private institutions, so they set the rates and terms.

MASTER OF EDUCATION: CAREER PATHS

While many graduates of Master of Education programs continue working in the classroom, the degree may also help you advance to higher-paying, specialized teaching jobs and open the door to other lucrative educational careers. Here are five education careers that require a master's degree:

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

If you are organized, good at working with teachers and parents, and have leadership qualities, you may want to consider becoming a school administrator. Principals, deans, superintendents and other administrative positions require a master's degree. According to Edu Choices, most administrators begin their careers in education and obtain advanced degrees. Certification requirements vary from state to state, so check with your state's department of education. Some universities offer a master's degree in school leadership or a similar program.

COLLEGE PROFESSOR

While many universities look for candidates with doctorates, most community colleges, online universities and continuing education programs require that instructors possess a master's degree. If you have teaching experience, that is an even greater asset. With a Master of Education, you can teach education courses as well as classes in your content area. If you maintain a typical teaching career during the day, you can teach a night class or an online class, which allows for flexibility.

EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

Do you have a passion for helping other educators? If you excel in a specific area, like the integration of technology into the classroom or effective classroom management, then you might consider becoming an educational consultant. A good way to get started is to get involved in professional development in your district. Some consultants write books or manuals, using social networking to spread the word. There is no specific formula on how to become an independent consultant, it varies depending on your specialty — but a master's degree may give you more credibility and experience.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) defines educational research as “a field of inquiry aimed at advancing knowledge of education and learning processes, and development of the tools and methods necessary to support this endeavor.” If you are interested in being a scientist of education, this type of job is for you. The AERA site includes information on how to obtain grants and funding for projects.

CURRICULUM SPECIALIST

The U.S. Department of Labor considers curriculum specialists, or instructional coordinators, to be a rapidly growing occupation. This position entails reviewing a district's curriculum and teaching standards, and making specific recommendations on how to improve them. It can involve selecting textbooks and materials, facilitating professional development and making sure that state and federal standards are being met. A master's degree, and sometimes experience as an administrator, is required.



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