

Master's Degree

# A KEY TO

Master's degrees in international education are not new— but having one today is more important to opening the door to the field.

BY ALAN DESSOFF



## MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

and intercultural relations are gaining new significance as an entryway into the international education profession, reflecting not only the importance of advanced degrees for career development but also the maturing of the international education profession itself. Whether programs focus on academic theory or mix it with practical application, they are drawing students representing a wide span of ages and experiences, some barely out of college and others already in midcareer.

Most of the students, as well as the educators who instruct them and the hiring directors who employ them later, agree that a master's is essential to gain a responsible entry job in the field or advance up the career ladder. That is a key reason for the surge in interest in the master's programs.

"I wanted to get a background in policy and the skills I didn't have so I could do policy analysis. To get those skills, I knew I had to go back to school," says Cris Martin, a student in Harvard's international education graduate program.

"I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have the master's degree," declares Youmna Hinnawi, director of the Office of Study Abroad at Suffolk University in Boston. A native of Turkey, she earned her master's in intercultural relations at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

There was "no way" he could have secured his job without a master's, says J. Scott Van der Meid, another Lesley alumnus, who now is director of study abroad at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

"What we are trying to do is fill a need for people looking to make the next step in their careers. A bachelor's degree is no longer enough of a credential. If you have a master's, you automatically move up into another category in terms of being considered for a job," asserts Bruce LaBrack, professor of anthropology and international studies at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He also chairs the institution's Master of Arts in Intercultural Relations (MAIR) program, which it offers for midcareer professionals in partnership with the Intercultural Communications Institute (ICI) in Portland, Oregon.

# YOUR CAREER?

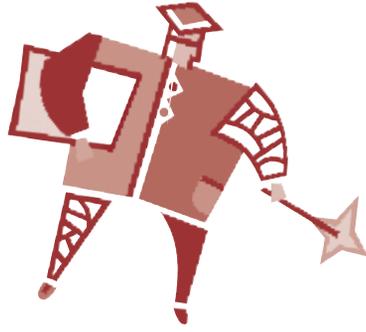
## Degrees Reflect Growing Interest in International Programs

Master's programs in higher education administration are not new. "There are maybe 80 or more around the U.S. and in other countries and many have been around a long time," says Philip G. Altbach, Monan Professor of Higher Education at Boston College (BC), which has been offering advanced degrees in the field for about 40 years. But the international focus is more recent. It began at BC about a decade ago, Altbach says. "Programs around the country are always looking for a market niche, and there is student interest in international programs and increasing numbers of staff-level jobs available," he explains.

"I think it's fantastic that there is such a proliferation now of these international education graduate degrees," says Joel

A. Gallegos, executive director of international programs at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. In addition to providing qualified individuals to fill a growing number of jobs in the field, the master's degree programs and the growing number of people engaged in them as students, faculty, and administrators are advancing the international education profession itself. "It reflects the evolution of our field. It has become a profession that people purposely seek out. For some of us, 15 years ago and earlier, we would just fall into it through area studies or living abroad or the Peace Corps. Now, people are entering the workforce to specifically work in international education," Gallegos says.

"The whole field is expanding enormously now. The research being done, the number of books coming out is just tremendous in areas like study abroad and internationaliza-



tion of campuses. And people filling those types of positions are people who understand the global dimensions,” adds LaBrack.

“There’s just more interest in general” in international programs, states Sandra Staklis, director of the master’s program in international comparative education in Stanford’s School of Education. “There are more ways to compare across countries how education is doing, and I think there is more of a sense that in a global marketplace, countries’ economies are tied to how their education systems are doing,” Staklis says.

Some master’s programs maintain a traditional academic focus. Altbach says Boston College (BC) created its master’s program in international higher education “not to meet this new market but for academic reasons.” But he figures BC has “benefited a little from the fact that there is growing interest in the field and job prospects.” He says BC has attracted students to its programs “not because it is any better or more extensive” than others but “because there are more jobs, and more interest in anything international.”

The international education policy (IEP) program at Harvard, like other master’s programs in the Graduate School of Education, is a one-year residential program requiring 32 credit hours or eight courses to graduate. Described by Harvard as “rigorous but flexible,” it provides students with structured choices in four “essential” and substantive areas: concepts and theory, research and evaluation, analysis and planning, and implementation.

That was fine for Martin, who majored in social history at Carnegie Mellon University, then worked for five years for a nonprofit international exchange organization in Washington, D.C., but realized she needed more background in policy to pursue her real area of interest—the absence of sex education in Russia. “Despite their large HIV/AIDS problem, there is no sex education policy. I’m interested in why it isn’t taught and what the ramifications of that are. I’m interested in how Russia shapes its education system,” Martin explains. She expects that the grounding in policy that she gains in the Harvard program will help her pursue her interests.

Stanford offers two tracks toward a master’s: International Comparative Education (ICE) and International Education Administration and Policy Analysis (IEAPA). The master’s program requires four quarters of course work and provides what Stanford describes as “an interdisciplinary overview of the major theoretical and empirical issues in education, development and policy,” with an opportunity for students to pursue “a limited amount of specialized course work and reading in their areas of professional interest and responsibility.”

In its program literature, Stanford acknowledges that the terms “comparative education,” “international education” and “interna-

## Master’s Degree Programs

Master’s degrees in intercultural relations/communication and international education/comparative education can serve as a springboard into a career in international education. Here’s a list of institutions that offer some of the most well-known programs.

### Intercultural Relations/Communications

Intercultural Communications Institute  
Lesley University  
University of Maryland-Baltimore County  
University of the Pacific

### International/Comparative Education

American University  
Boston College  
Boston University  
Florida State University  
George Washington University  
Harvard University  
Indiana University Bloomington  
Loyola University of Chicago  
New York University  
Old Dominion University  
Pennsylvania State University  
Stanford University  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
The International Partnership for Service Learning and Leadership  
The Ohio State University  
University at Albany, State University of New York  
University of California Los Angeles  
University of Maryland  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
University of Minnesota  
University of Pittsburgh  
University of San Francisco

### Intercultural Relations/Communications and International/Comparative Education

School for International Training

Compiled by David Comp, The University of Chicago

Note: This list is meant to include most, if not all, master’s degree programs in the field. However, there may be other institutions that also offer master’s degrees in intercultural relations/communication and international education/comparative education.

## Many students are attracted to programs that combine theory from the classroom with practical application in the workplace, like the programs offered by Lesley, Pacific-ICI, and the School for International Studies (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont.

tional education development” are “sometimes used interchangeably and often referred to incorrectly.” To clarify them, Stanford offers this definition: “Comparativists, as distinct from international educators, are primarily scholars interested in explaining why educational systems and processes vary and how education relates to wider social factors and forces. International education tends to focus more directly on descriptive information about nations and societies and their education systems and structures.”

Pennsylvania State University’s College of Education, the Teachers College of Columbia University and the School of Education at Indiana University Bloomington are among other institutions that offer master’s programs in comparative and international education. The major difference between the two, says Columbia, is that comparative and international education focuses on an academic discipline in the social sciences while international educational development’s thrust is in a professional field of education. Students in both programs specify a discipline or concentration either within or outside the department of international and transcultural studies.

Staklis says students in the Stanford program are split between “those interested in going into research and into applied kinds of work.” Many join research programs run by organizations in the San Francisco Bay area. Either way, “there is a lot of job growth in those fields and generally, the better jobs are going to require a master’s,” Staklis says.

### Adding Workplace Application to Classroom Theory

Many students are attracted to programs that combine theory from the classroom with practical application in the workplace, like the programs offered by Lesley, Pacific-ICI, and the School for International Studies (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont. Although its current degree programs date back only six years, SIT claims to be the first provider of this type of education/training in the field. World Learning, its parent organization that was founded as “The Experiment in International Living” in 1932, was one of the first organizations to provide intercultural exchange opportunities for U.S. students that included homestays and language and culture studies abroad, says Meredith McDill, director of enrollment services.

The SIT master’s program grew out of the school’s work providing pre-service volunteer training for the Peace Corps, beginning as the International Career Training Program in 1966 and later renamed the Program in Intercultural Management. “We have been thinking about the issues in the field in the U.S. and abroad and preparing graduates for careers in this area before it was arguably even recognized as a

field of study and professional preparation,” McDill says.

In 2000-01, SIT began offering interrelated but distinct master’s degrees in four areas: international education, intercultural relations, organizational management, and sustainable development. A master’s in conflict transformation was added the following year. SIT’s programs require nine months of campus-based study followed by a six-month professional practicum, which students can complete anywhere in the world. The programs culminate in a capstone research project/seminar and can be completed in less than two years, although two to three years is the norm, McDill says. She reports that the SIT graduate student population is 26 percent international, with students representing 42 different countries and 78 different language groups.

Lesley’s program focused on international education when it began about 20 years ago but evolved into intercultural relations. The university claims that the program’s “unique focus on the human dimension of intercultural interactions” sets it apart from the “traditional macro-political approach” of international relations programs.

“It’s a professional practice-related program,” says Jana Van der Veer, assistant director for advising and student services at Lesley. Students graduate, she says, with “a knowledge of the general theories of intercultural interactions, like communications studies and research methodologies.” But most Lesley students aim to be professionals in the field “so we try to ground them not just in theory but in how that theory relates to practice,” Van der Veer explains. The 36-credit program has three principal components: core courses, elective courses, and a mandatory internship. Students also must be competent in at least one language in addition to English. Students may enroll on a full-time or part-time basis and are encouraged to take no more than nine credits a semester. Courses are offered on Lesley’s Cambridge campus in late afternoon and the evening to accommodate students who are working.

“I liked the Lesley program because they give you the academic grounding but also stress the practical aspects,” says Kenjiro Tsuji, an alumnus. He majored in English in college in his native Japan, where he developed an interest in an international or intercultural career while volunteering in a program for foreign students in Japan. “I asked a lot of people what I should do to get into the field and they recommended that I get a higher degree,” Tsuji says. Interested in studying in the United States, he considered several options. “I thought Boston would be a good place to study” and chose Lesley because “I liked the practical aspects of the curriculum,” he says. He interned at Northeastern University in Boston, then joined the staff of its international student program part-time. Now he works there

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full-time as a coordinator in the program.

One of Lesley’s strengths, Tsuji adds, is its alumni body. Many of his classmates are working in international student offices in New England and elsewhere in the United States “so you can do a lot of networking with other graduates. I think it is beneficial for professional development,” Tsuji says.

With a Turkish bachelor’s degree in food science and nutrition, Hinnawi considered pursuing a master’s in food technology “but it was not attractive to me.” Living in Boston, with two daughters, she saw a newspaper ad for Lesley’s program and decided “that was what I wanted to do.” She interned in the international advising office at Suffolk University. “Then the study abroad person left. They had a small program and asked if I would like to handle it,” Hinnawi relates. Now she directs Suffolk’s office of study abroad. “I ended up in a job that I love,” she says, “but I wouldn’t be where I am if I didn’t have the master’s degree.”

### **Targeting Midcareer Professionals**

The Pacific-ICI MAIR program seeks to blend the theoretical and the practical for a target population of midcareer professionals. “They already know how to do things. We want to give them the theory so they can examine what they practice from that perspective. Then we tell them that the practice has to come back and inform the theory,” says Kent Warren, director of graduate programs at ICI.

The program is structured with limited residency to meet the needs of working people unable to take time off from their other commitments for a traditional full-time master’s program. Close to 90 students with an age span from the 20s to the 50s usually are enrolled, says LaBrack. Students come to Portland for three two-week residencies, held six months apart in January and July, where they take nine core courses in intensive seminars. They complete the assignments for the courses on their own during the intervening periods as well as electives that they select or design around their particular professional and personal interests. They usually complete the degree requirements in two-and-a-half to three years. “Our thinking,” he continues, “is that people would come from a wide variety of disciplines—from cross-cultural nursing, or refugee services, or somebody in charge of human resources. The idea was to offer opportunities for people who wanted this kind of training in intercultural relations and simultaneously wanted to apply it in a lot of different areas.”

One ICI graduate, Emily Hagadorn, earned her degree in 2004 while working in the international center at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey. “I wanted a theoretical understanding of the things I was experiencing in my work—the interactions with

the study abroad students and the international students at our institution, and I wanted to be able to help them develop further in their own experiences,” Hagadorn explains. She used her vacation time to travel to Oregon for the residency sessions. Although it was “taxing, demanding” pursuing her degree while holding down a full-time job, Hagadorn is glad she did it. “It brought such richness into the work I was doing, and I was able to bring my experiences from work into the program. They constantly played off one another,” she says.

With a newborn child, she resigned her position as director of Brookdale’s international center last summer, but still works there part-time as project director for U.S. Department of Education grants. The master’s degree “gave me more leverage in being able to work out an alternative work arrangement after my son was born,” says Hagadorn, who also plans to pursue a Ph.D.

Their ambitions for the program notwithstanding, Warren and LaBrack say they have encountered difficulties finding students. “We still run into people who say they didn’t know the intercultural relations field existed,” says Warren. He also notes that he has encountered a number of people in the international education field who don’t think that intercultural is necessary as part of international education.

### **September 11 Impacted International Enrollments**

LaBrack says the program’s enrollment also is vulnerable to external events. He notes that before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, about a third of the students came from abroad, mostly Europe and Asia with a few from Latin America. “They wanted to get these materials because they were not available in their countries in the same way,” La Brack says.

After September 11, the foreign enrollment “dropped to almost zero,” La Brack says, mostly because the U.S. government stepped up scrutiny of foreign students coming to the United States. Since then, enrollment from other countries “has come back somewhat,” La Brack says. “We have students from Japan and Germany, but not the mix we used to have.” He points to “all the hoops” foreign students have to go through—“the interviews and the papers they have to file to get the papers to allow them to come.” The erosion in enrollment by foreign students has “reduced the natural diversity” of the program, La Brack says.

McDill says SIT has been able to maintain relatively consistent international student percentages since September 11. But she adds that recent federal moves to tighten immigration to the United States have caused SIT “to invest more human and financial resources than ever” toward recruiting and enrolling international students.



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For example, the institution pays the \$100 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee that is now required to obtain a visa interview date for prospective international students. It also has designated one admissions counselor to work with the students from the time they begin the visa application process, and relies heavily on its senator's office to write letters of support to U.S. embassies and consulates for students seeking visas. More than 40 percent of SIT's total financial aid budget is earmarked for international student scholarships.

### Previous Work Experience Enriches Master's Studies

Although they don't have to be in midcareer, most students entering master's programs in international education and intercultural relations bring some related work experience with them. Students and alumni of several programs, as well as educators, agree that while professional experience might not be necessary to enter and succeed in a program, it is helpful. "I would have been so unfocused without it," says Lesley alum Van der Meid, who taught English and German for two years in Japan after graduating from Allegheny College and before applying to Lesley.

"We don't accept many students right out of undergrad. We expect they will have at least a year or two of work experiences beyond that level," says Van der Veer at Lesley. "We generally recommend that they at least have experience in their undergraduate study abroad program offices. Some have had entry-level positions in the field."

"We get some students who come directly from college, but they may have worked in education in some capacity before coming to our program," says Staklis at Stanford. At SIT, students on average bring up to five-and-a-half years of professional experience and two years of intercultural experience with them, reports McDill.

Students say their own and classmates' previous experiences enrich the programs. "You bring insights based on your experience. There are people in my program who are just out of college and they don't have

other value to add in the classroom. I think some of the best conversations come from people who say 'well, from my experience working in Zambia,'" says Martin. Her work experience also "helped me realize what I wanted to do. I wouldn't have known that five years earlier," she adds.

Jessica Corlett earned a bachelor's degree in American studies from Tufts University, then taught English abroad for a year, and worked for two more years in international education programs before entering a master's program in international communication at American University. "I'm so glad I took that time off. I felt that I got so much more out of the master's personally because I really wanted to be there," says Corlett, who now is working toward a Ph.D. in international education policy at the University of Maryland.

"It's advantageous to have professional experience before entering the program because it allows you to see what your interests are and where you want to go," adds ICI graduate Hagadorn. Although she had studied abroad as an undergraduate at Fordham University and interned in a program for foreign students in New York, "I didn't really have an understanding that international education could be a career path," Hagadorn says. So with her business degree from Fordham, she took a job in advertising and considered pursuing an M.B.A. before realizing it "wasn't where I wanted to go."

She heard about the ICI program at a NAFSA conference while working at Brookdale Community College. "At the time, I knew I wanted to get a master's to further my professional development and for personal interest as well," says Hagadorn. "But if I had gone directly from my bachelor's to a master's program, I probably would have pursued an M.B.A. and ended up in a direction that wasn't where I wanted to go."

Students and alumni of master's programs advise others interested in pursuing degrees to consider programs carefully. "When you look at schools, be sure they have the resources you need and professors who share your interests. Having mentors can help you in your work," says Martin at Harvard.

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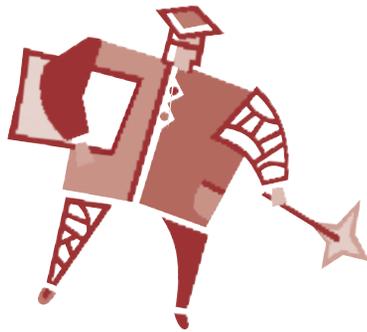
### Employers Prefer, Often Require, Applicants to Have Master's Degrees

At the other end of the spectrum are the organizations that will employ students in a wide range of positions in the international education-intercultural relations arena. Their preference that job applicants have master's degrees is a key factor driving the emergence of the master's programs in the first place.

For example, Western Michigan University, which posted an opening for a study abroad coordinator on the NAFSA Job Registry last October, said a bachelor's degree in a related field was a minimum requirement but a master's was "desired." Other hiring directors require it. "I would not hire anyone without a master's degree. It's a bare minimum," says Van der Meid, director of study abroad at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. He also likes applicants who have experience working abroad, as he did.

Gallegos at UNC-Charlotte, seeking recently to hire a director of education abroad, required a minimum of a master's degree and five years of professional experience in study abroad management. He notes that some institutions prefer applicants for that job to hold doctorates.

But Mary M. Dwyer, president of the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), who holds a Ph.D. in public policy analysis, says she sees "an emerging trend in the field toward hiring professionals with master's degrees and a lessening of importance placed upon having a Ph.D." Still, she asserts, there are "so few" international education master's degrees compared to other disciplines that IES does not actively search for master's holders in IED to work at its headquarters. Instead, it looks for experienced professionals with international education experience who hold graduate degrees "across a full range



of disciplines primarily in the humanities and social sciences," Dwyer says.

Carl Herrin, founder of Herrin Associates, is skeptical about encouraging individuals who might be interested in getting a job in the field to pursue international

education master's degree as an entry-level step. "I'm wondering if we do our professional community a service by talking about this as if it's the preferred or ideal path to professional success," says Herrin.

But most educators and administrators say that as more individuals gain master's degrees in the field, they will enrich and expand the profession. "I would expect that the pipeline of graduates from the relatively few international education and relations degree programs will begin to play a larger role in hiring practices," says Dwyer. **IE**

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