UW–MADISON
GRADUATE SCHOOL DATA INSIGHTS

WHAT TYPES OF CAREER ADVISING DO OUR MASTER'S STUDENTS RECEIVE?

Over the past decade, UW-Madison has seen significant growth in master's program enrollments. This brief explores whether students have received career advice and what types of career advising they receive.

Master's degree programs at UW–Madison have seen marked growth over the past decade, both in terms of the number of programs offered, as well as in total student enrollment. From 167 programs enrolling 3,900 students in 2015, the university currently offers more than 210 master's degree programs with a total enrollment of nearly 5,000.[1]

Behind much of this growth has been a rise in the number of master's programs operating under a "service-based pricing" tuition model[2], from just 27 programs in 2015 to 70 programs in 2024. Service-based pricing programs now enroll the majority of all master's students on campus. The past decade has also seen a steep (65%) increase in the number of international students pursuing master's degrees at the university. International students now represent around a third of all master's students on campus. Additionally, around forty percent of all students enrolled in service-based pricing programs are international.

Students are typically drawn to pursue a master's degree out of career considerations—a desire to enter a new career or to advance in their current career. Career advising therefore becomes particularly important for students pursuing a master's as a pathway to new opportunities. However, the career advising services available to master's students at UW–Madison are highly decentralized and uneven, tending to vary depending on the school/college and program in which the student is enrolled. Currently there is no centralized service accessible to all master's students regardless of program.

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Advising services and career events such as job fairs may be offered by the career office at the student's school or college, by the student's academic department, or by the student's academic program itself. These services are supplemented by career advising and professional development programming within the Graduate School as well as by programming offered through other university offices such as the Writing Center. Further complicating the campus

[1] Calculations by author using campus enrollment record (SIS) data. Current counts based on Fall 2024 data.
[2] Service-based pricing programs operate under a "non-pooled" tuition model in which tuition dollars are retained and reinvested by the program instead of going into a general campus tuition pool as is the case under the more traditional pooled tuition model. Service-based pricing programs are meant to have a professional training orientation in response to labor market demand, and to provide more flexible scheduling and course delivery options for non-traditional adult learners. However, students in service-based pricing programs are not permitted to access student services that are funded by the general tuition pool, including career, learning support and advising services offered outside of the program's home academic unit. More information on service-based pricing programs can be found at https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1033.

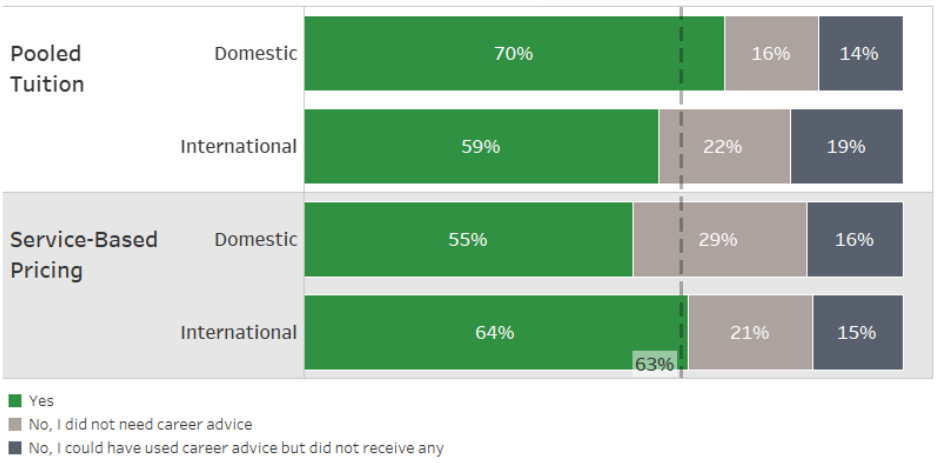
career advising landscape for master's students, university policy states that students enrolled in service-based pricing programs are not entitled to the use of career resources or advising services on campus funded via pooled tuition funds. Students in these programs are assumed to rely on advising and job search assistance provided primarily through their program, with some supplementary services provided by the Division of Continuing Studies and on-demand career platforms, such as Beyond Graduate School, sponsored by the Graduate School.

Using Graduate School student survey data, this data brief provides insights into the types of formal and informal career advising[3] master's students report receiving during their program. It also explores whether that advising appears to differ by program funding type (i.e. service-based pricing vs. pooled tuition) or student citizenship. The brief is the second in a series meant to provide campus stakeholders with data-informed insights into the career interests, advising, and post-graduation plans of master's students at UW–Madison.[4]

KEY FINDINGS

RECEIPT OF ANY CAREER ADVICE Overall, nearly two-thirds (63%) of master's students report receiving some career advice during their graduate education **(Figure 1)**. When the data are further disaggregated by tuition type and student citizenship, however, they reveal that in pooled tuition programs domestic students are more likely than international students to report receiving career advice, while in service-based pricing programs the opposite is true.

Figure 1. Responses to survey item, "Did you receive any career advice during your graduate program?".



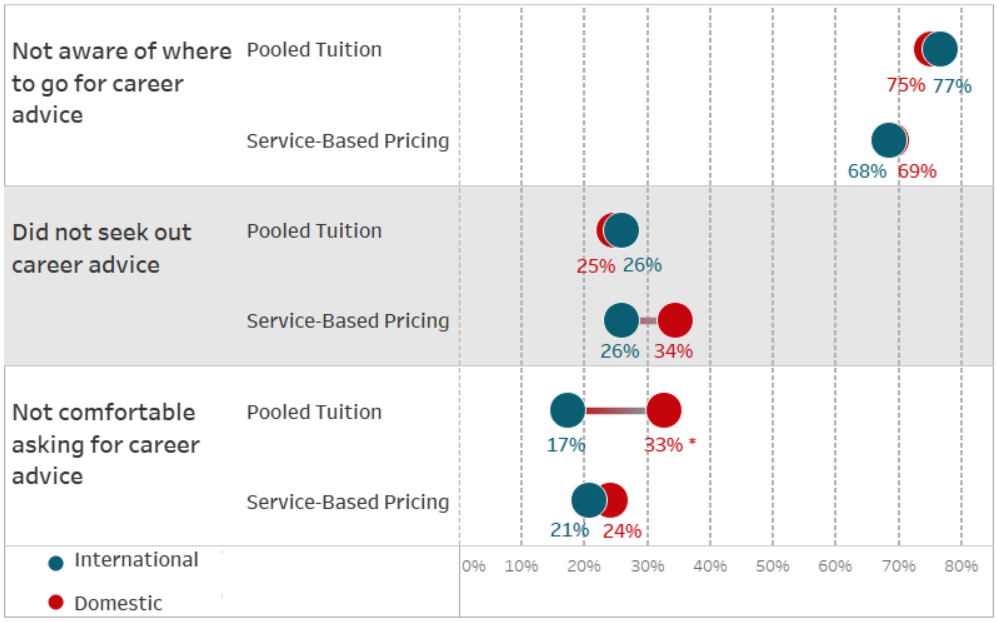
Note: Dashed line indicates overall percent responding they received advice.

[3] The terms "career advising" and "career advice" are used interchangeably and are broadly defined as formal or informal advice on career options, specific career-related information (e.g. salary, employment outlook), and/or assistance applying for jobs (e.g. resume-building, interview practice, job searching).
[4] The first brief in the series on the career interests of master's students can be viewed at: https://grad.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/329/2025/05/Masters-Career-Interests-Data-Brief-spring-2025.pdf

It is important to note that students may not be receiving career advice because they do not need it and therefore don't seek it out. In pooled tuition programs, 16% of domestic students report not needing career advice **(Figure 1)**, while in service-based pricing programs the percentage is nearly double at 29%. In contrast, international master's students appear to have a similar likelihood of not needing career advice whether they are enrolled in a service-based pricing program or pooled tuition program (i.e. ~21-22%).

Among the approximately one in six master's students overall who report needing career advice but not receiving it, the most cited reason is that they did not know where to go for advice **(Figure 2)**. Notably, one third (33%) of domestic students in pooled tuition programs who did not receive advice but needed it also report not feeling comfortable asking for advice—a significantly higher percentage than among their international counterparts (17%).

Figure 2. Responses to survey item, "What were the primary factors that prevented you from getting career advice?" among those reporting they did not receive career advice but could have used it

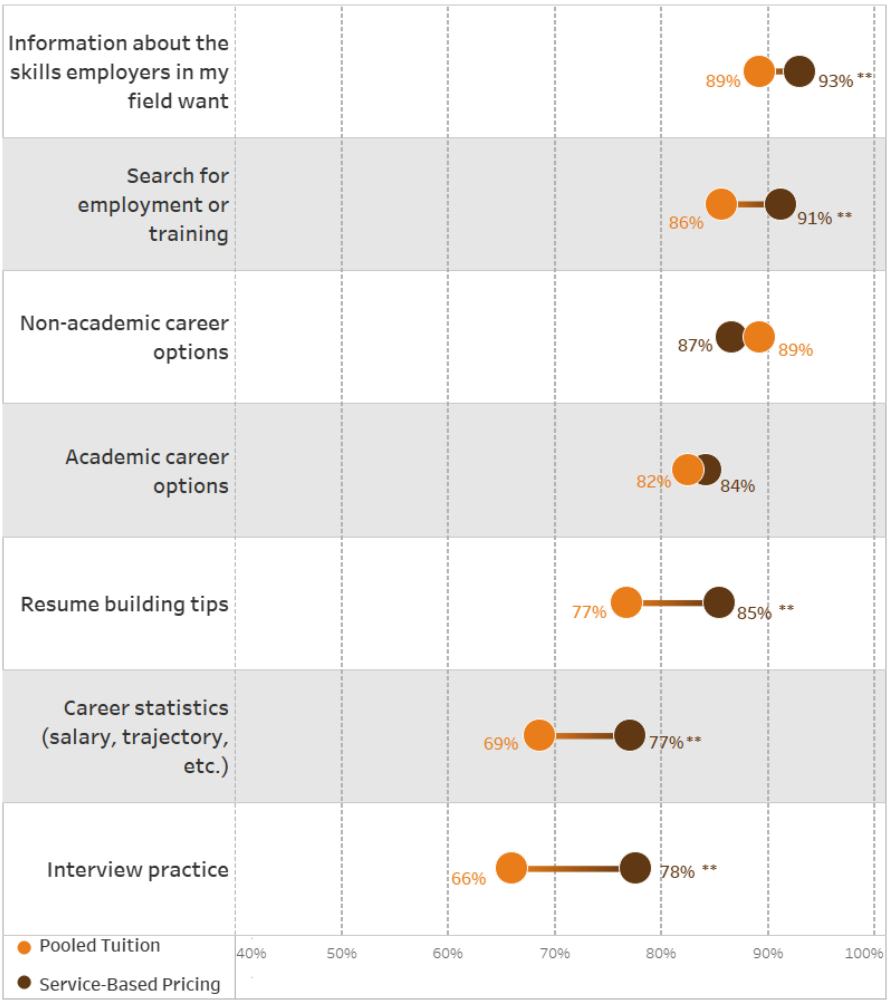


Note: Students could select more than one factor.
**p<.05; **p<.01*

TYPES OF ADVICE RECEIVED Students who receive career advice during their program report receiving a variety of different types of advice. When asked if they had received each of seven different types of career advice **(Figure 3)**, students in service-based pricing programs report receiving six types on average, while those in pooled tuition programs report receiving five. In both types of programs, international students report receiving more varieties of advice than do domestic students—approximately one additional advice type on average.

Students who receive career advice report receiving each of the seven types of advice presented to them on the survey at extremely high rates—between eighty and ninety percent on average for most types **(Figure 3)**. However, students in service-based pricing programs are also significantly more likely than their counterparts in pooled tuition programs to report receiving most types of career advice **(Figure 3)**. Gaps in received advice by program tuition type appear to be particularly pronounced in the areas of resume building, career statistics, and interview practice, and to a lesser extent in the search for employment and the skills employers are looking for.

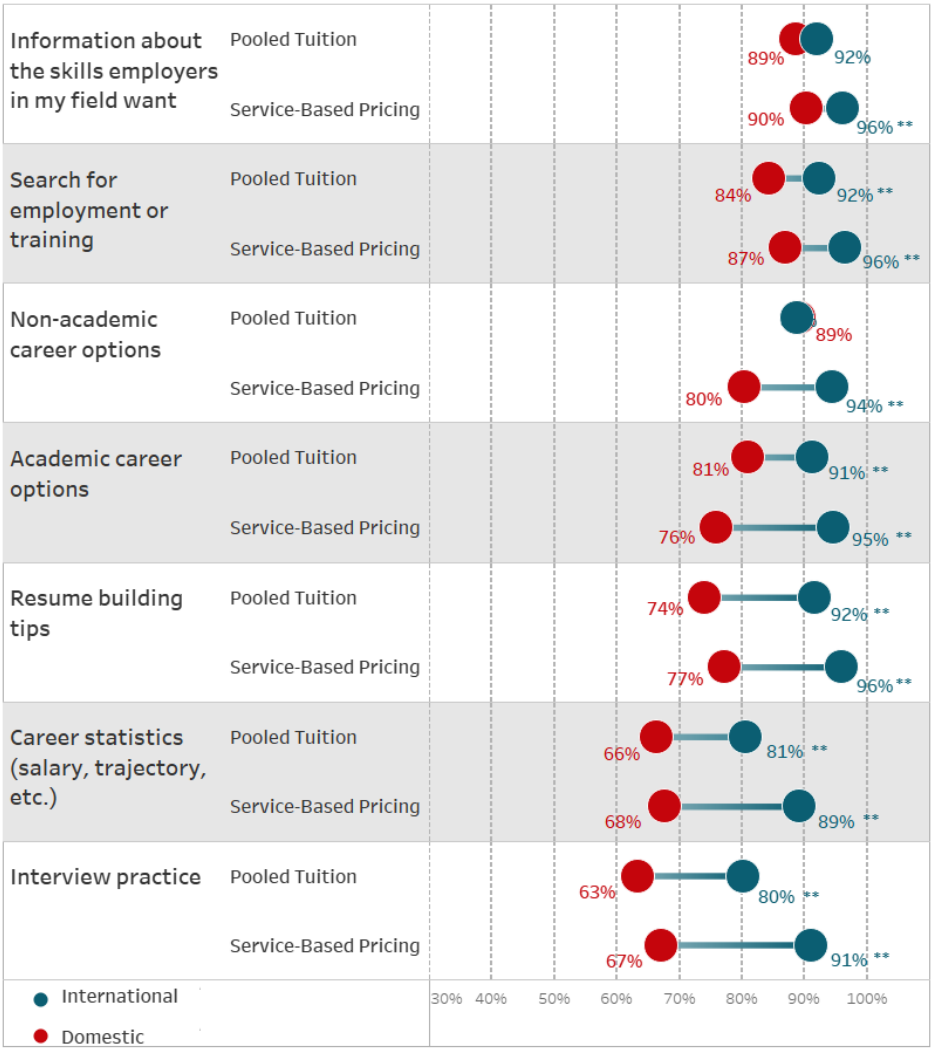
Figure 3. Receipt of specific types of career advice by program tuition type among those reporting receipt of career advice.



*p<.05; **p<.01

Irrespective of program tuition type, international students who receive career advice are significantly more likely than their fellow domestic students to seek out and receive several different types of career advice **(Figure 4)**. Differences in the receipt of advice are largest in the areas of resume building, career statistics, and interview practice where rates among international students are generally 15 to 20 percentage points higher than domestic students. Also notable is that international students, whether in service-based pricing or pooled programs, are significantly more likely to report receiving advice on academic career options, likely reflecting academic careers as a particular area of interest among this group.

Figure 4. Receipt of specific types of career advice by program tuition type and citizenship among those reporting receipt of career advice.



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SOURCES OF ADVICE RECEIVED Among students who received career advice, faculty advisors, other faculty members, and other graduate students are the three most reported sources of that advice **(Figure 5)**. In contrast, campus career offices appear to be less common sources of career advice overall, with only around half those who received career advice reporting they received it from a career office.

The top sources of career advice—faculty advisors, other faculty members, and other graduate students—are consistent across both pooled and service-based pricing programs. However, the data also indicate that students in service-based pricing programs are more likely than those in pooled tuition programs to receive career advice from a number of additional formal and informal sources **(Figure 5)**. These sources include graduate program staff, practicum/internship advisors, work supervisors, university alumni, and notably, career offices which are cited as sources of advice by students in service-based pricing programs at a nearly 50% higher rate (19 percentage points) than by those in pooled tuition programs.

Figure 5. Sources of career advice by program tuition type among those reporting receipt of career advice.

**p<.05; **p<.01*

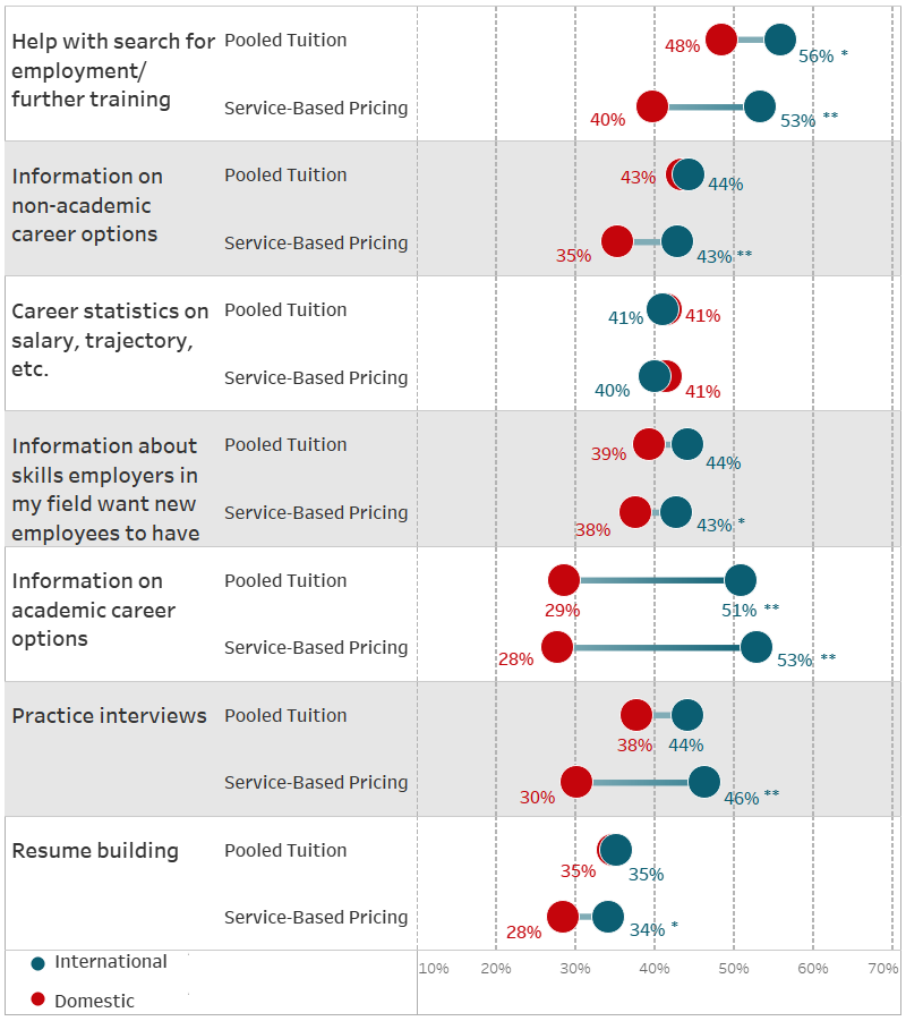
Mirroring their greater propensity to receive a variety of different types of career advice, international students are also significantly more likely than their domestic peers to receive advice from a variety of different sources. Of the ten sources of advice presented to them, international students report receiving advice from eight of those sources on average compared to six sources among domestic students. And while international students are more likely than domestic students to report receiving advice from any given source **(Figure 6)**, the source of advice with the largest gap in access between the two groups appears to be career offices where international students are around twice as likely as domestic students to report receiving advice.

Figure 6. Sources of career advice by program tuition type and citizenship among those reporting receipt of career advice.

*p<.05; **p<.01

TYPES OF ADVICE DESIRED When asked about the types of career advice they wish they had received more of during their program, most students select help searching for employment or further training **(Figure 7)**. On average, approximately half of all master's students report that they want more of this type of career assistance, with rates significantly higher among international students. International students in both service-based pricing and pooled tuition programs also desire more information on academic career options at rates significantly higher than their domestic counterparts. And in service-based pricing programs international students appear to particularly desire assistance with interview practice, with nearly half (46%) citing this particular type of advising compared to less than a third (30%) of their domestic peers.

Figure 7. Responses to survey item, "What types of career advice do you wish you would have received more of during your program?"



Note: Students could select more than one type of advice.
$*p<.05$; $**p<.01$

TAKEAWAY POINTS

1. There appears to be unmet need for career advising among master's students in both service-based pricing and pooled tuition programs. Survey data suggest that an estimated 15% of master's students overall feel they need career advising but do not receive it during their program. Most of these students report not knowing where to go for career advice as the main reason they did not receive it.
2. Master's students who receive career advising tend to report receiving multiple types of assistance including guidance on career options, career-related information (e.g. in-demand skills, salary, etc.), and assistance with job searching. These students also report receiving each of the various types of career advice presented to them on the survey at extremely high rates—in most cases at over 80% overall. Whether these high rates of access to both multiple and individual types of career advising are because students tend to seek out multiple types of assistance, or rather because they simply receive various types of assistance from campus career advising sources as a matter of course isn't clear from the data. However, it does suggest a high level of demand for diverse career advising resources exists which may help guide faculty advisors and other individuals who are the primary sources of career advice for master's students.
3. Although master's students who receive career advising also receive a variety of advising at high rates, gaps in the receipt of certain types of advising appear to exist by both program tuition type and student citizenship:
   a. Students in service-based pricing programs tend to receive assistance with resume building, career statistics (e.g. salary, career outlook, etc.), and interview practice at significantly higher rates than their counterparts in pooled tuition programs.
   b. International students also tend to receive most types of career advice at significantly higher rates than their domestic peers. This of course may be due to a greater propensity among international students to seek out multiple types of career advice. However, it also raises the question whether conditions exist that make it more difficult for some domestic students to receive needed advising. One such possibility is related to differences between international and domestic students in the sources of career advising they access.
   c. In general, international students are significantly more likely than their domestic peers to receive career advice from a campus career office, for example, which may provide them access to a wider variety of career advising assistance than other campus advising resources.
4. Master's students report that faculty and other graduate students are the most common sources of career advice regardless of program tuition type. However, students in service-based pricing programs are significantly more likely than those in pooled tuition programs to receive advising from several additional formal and informal sources including graduate program staff, practicum or internship supervisors and notably, career offices.

80%

OF STUDENTS REPORT RECEIVING EACH TYPE OF CAREER ADVICE PRESENTED ON THE SURVEY

15%

OF STUDENTS FEEL THEY NEED CAREER ADVISING BUT DO NOT RECEIVE IT DURING THEIR PROGRAM

That 60% of students in service-based pricing programs who receive career advice report that a career office was a source of that advice is particularly unexpected given campus policy restrictions on the use of career services outside the program's home academic unit, which are typically funded via the tuition pool.[5]

5. The survey data indicate that international master's students tend to access significantly more sources of career advice compared to their domestic peers. They are also considerably more likely than domestic students to report receiving career advice from any given (re)source. This includes both university-based sources such as faculty advisors, other graduate students, and career offices, as well as non-university-based sources such as alumni and practicum/internship supervisors. Overall, the data paint a picture of more robust and varied access to career advising resources among international students relative to their domestic counterparts.
6. Approximately half of all master's students report that they wish they had received more advice during their program related to their search for employment or further training post-graduation, making this type of career advising/assistance the most desired overall. Around half of all international master's students also express a desire for more information on academic career options—a rate nearly twice that of their domestic peers. This finding also echoes those from an earlier data brief in this series indicating a marked interest in academic careers among international master's students.[6]

CAMPUS CAREER ADVISING RESOURCES

UW–Madison master's students are encouraged to explore the following career advising resources on campus:

- Beyond Graduate School – This career training platform features on-demand modules to help master's students explore career options and learn job search strategies.
- Individual Career Advising from the Graduate School – Students in research-based, pooled master's or doctoral programs, not otherwise served by a career office, can meet with an advisor to discuss career exploration, goal setting, job materials review, networking, interview prep, negotiation, and more.
- DiscoverPD – Graduate students can assess their professional development needs, explore related resources, and define clear goals for their Individual Development Plans.
- Handshake – This platform allows students to browse and register for career events, explore job and internship opportunities, and receive personalized job recommendations.
- Big Interview – This online tool combines training and practice to help students improve their interview techniques and build confidence.
- Career Advising – Schools, colleges, departments, and programs are often best positioned to provide tailored advice on career exploration and job search within a master's student's discipline. Students are advised to check with their advisor or graduate program coordinator for guidance, or visit careers.wisc.edu.

[5] Campus service-based pricing program policy notes, "Students in service-based pricing programs are not entitled to access student services that are funded by the tuition pool which includes career, learning support and advising services offered outside of the program's home academic unit. Service-based pricing programs are presumed to offer such services to their students." https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1033

[6] https://grad.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/329/2025/05/Masters-Career-Interests-Data-Brief-spring-2025.pdf

ABOUT THE DATA SOURCE AND SAMPLE

This brief is based on data from the UW–Madison Graduate School Master's Exit Survey (MES). Since 2019, the Graduate School has administered the MES to graduating master's students as a required component of degree processing and conferral. Collected data therefore represent a near census of master's program graduates at the university. The survey gathers a variety of information from students on their academic experiences, as well as on their career interests, use of career advising services, and post-degree plans. More information on the MES can be found on the Graduate School KnowledgeBase website.[7]

Analyses in this brief are based on data collected from master's program graduates between academic years 2021 and 2024 (summer 2020 through spring 2024). The final analysis sample (n=5,339) was limited to students who entered their master's programs prior to entering a PhD or other doctoral level degree program. The sample therefore generally represents students who intended to earn a master's, rather than doctoral students who earned a master's degree as a component of their doctoral program. Sample sizes by student citizenship, program tuition type, and academic division are as follows: Domestic (n=3,733); International (n=1,606); pooled tuition (n=2,416); service-based pricing (n=2,923); Arts & Humanities (n=265); Biological Sciences (n=807); Physical Sciences (n=1,765); Social Sciences (n=2,502).

[7] Graduate School Surveys: https://kb.wisc.edu/grad/56327

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL DATA INSIGHTS SERIES

This data brief is part of the Graduate School Data Insights Series. Series publications, which include both shorter data briefs and longer data reports, are meant to highlight and provide data-informed insights into topics relevant to graduate education policy and practice at UW–Madison. Graduate education stakeholders on campus—including administrators, student support office staff, program faculty and graduate students themselves—are encouraged to use Graduate School Data Insights publications to initiate and guide conversations aimed at improving the support and academic success of graduate students at UW–Madison.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief was prepared by Peter Kinsley from the UW–Madison Graduate School Office of Academic Analysis, Planning & Assessment. Many thanks to Meghan Chua for providing layout and production support, and to Jenna Alsteen, Alissa Ewer and Elizabeth Hart for their helpful feedback throughout. Questions or comments can be sent to data@grad.wisc.edu.