

## Project Title

Higher and higher: Examining enrollment predictors and labor market experiences of graduate students

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**Project workplan.** *Please provide start date, end date and brief description of work plan activity. Applicants are required to include all activities that will occur during the fellowship year. (Applicants have the option to provide project activities that will occur prior to the start of the fellowship.)*

### Pre-Dissertation Requirements

May 22, 2018	Comprehensive examination completed
October 21, 2019	Dissertation proposal defense completed (anticipated)
May 1, 2020	Coursework completed (anticipated; 0.5 credits remaining for spring)

### Timeline for Other Dissertation-Related Activities

Oct. 2019	Submit dissertation proposal to IRB for approval
Oct. 2019	Submit pre-registration plan for experiment (Paper 2)
Oct.-Dec. 2019	Develop résumé templates for experiment (Paper 2)
Jan. 2020	Pilot experiment – job openings in Dallas (Paper 2)
Jan. 2020	Analysis for graduate enrollment predictors (Paper 1)
Feb. 2020	Analysis for contingent faculty unionization (Paper 3)
Apr. 2020	Submit APPAM conference proposal for experiment (Paper 2)
Feb.-May 2020	Full experiment – all 14 metropolitan areas (Paper 2)
June 2020	Analysis for experiment (Paper 3)
June 2020	Beginning of NAEd/Spencer Fellowship
Jul. 2020	Submit AERA conference proposal for enrollment predictors (Paper 1)
June-Jul. 2020	Draft manuscript for graduate enrollment predictors (Paper 1)
Aug.-Sep. 2020	Draft manuscript for experiment (Paper 2)
Oct.-Nov. 2020	Draft manuscript for contingent faculty unionization (Paper 3)
Nov. 2020	Present at APPAM conference (Paper 2)
Dec. 2020	Revise manuscript for graduate enrollment predictors (Paper 1)
Jan. 2021	Revise manuscript for experiment (Paper 2)
Feb. 2021	Revise manuscript for contingent faculty unionization (Paper 3)
Feb. 2021	Send dissertation to committee members
Mar. 2021	Dissertation defense
Apr. 2021	Present at AERA conference (Paper 1)
May 2021	Complete dissertation revisions and submit

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**Complete the following sentence in 100 words or less.** *Most scholars now believe...*

...that the estimated economic returns for master's degrees are positive, on average, though there is variation by field. We also have evidence that, despite higher costs at for-profit colleges, job candidates with undergraduate credentials from for-profit colleges frequently experience poorer

labor market outcomes than those with credentials from public and private, not-for-profit colleges. However, it is still unclear whether and how employers distinguish between job candidates with master's degrees from various types of broad-access institutions. This gap in knowledge is particularly conspicuous given the disproportionate share of Black, low-income, and older students who enroll in master's programs at for-profit institutions.

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**Complete the following sentence in 100 words or less.** *As a result of my study...*

...the field will have its first experimental evidence regarding employers' preferences for job candidates with master's degrees in business and health from three types of broad-access institutions: for-profits, other primarily online institutions, and other regional institutions. Collectively, such institutions enroll more than two-thirds of master's students in the U.S., making these findings relevant to hundreds of thousands of (prospective) students annually. With an increasing share of the population pursuing graduate education, these results are highly relevant for policymakers, universities, and students alike. Two additional dissertation papers will identify predictors of graduate enrollment and factors associated with contingent faculty unionization.

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**Abstract.** *Please provide an abstract of your dissertation in the text box below that summarizes the substantive focus and research design of your dissertation and its contribution to education. The abstract is limited to 1800 characters (250 words).*

Enrollment in graduate degree programs has expanded in recent decades, facilitated in part through for-profit institutions and other primarily online programs. Despite the prominence of such comparatively broad-access graduate degree programs, there is little evidence on the impacts of such graduate credentials on labor market opportunities. To help address this gap in the literature, the proposed dissertation includes a résumé audit experiment that will compare employer callback rates for occupations in business and health care, two of the most common fields for master's degrees. For each job opening, the randomized résumés will vary systematically only by master's degree attributes: each résumé will list a master's from a for-profit institution (e.g., University of Phoenix), a master's from another primarily online institution (e.g., Western Governor's University), a master's from a primarily on-campus regional institution, or no master's degree. The results will provide the first experimental evidence of employers' preferences between job candidates who attended various types of broad-access master's programs, and will also facilitate comparisons between candidates with and without master's degrees. Additionally, subgroup analyses will explore how such employer preferences may vary by the applicant's sex and race. Such findings will be relevant to prospective students, universities, and policymakers in their understanding of the potential economic returns to master's degrees. In addition to the résumé audit study, the remaining dissertation papers will examine predictors of graduate school enrollment using multinomial logistic regression models, and will also feature a discrete-time survival analysis of factors associated with unionization efforts among contingent faculty members.

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**Personal Statement.** *Please provide a personal statement that addresses the following:*

- *How your educational and work experiences up to this point have prepared you for doing research on this dissertation topic; and*
- *What career path you hope to pursue after completing your dissertation.*

*The personal statement is limited to 3500 characters (500 words).*

In recent decades, graduate and professional degree programs have represented an area of expansion for postsecondary education. During my 8 years at RTI International, I worked on projects that both helped chronicle such growth and also provided compelling daily reminders of the challenges that many current and former graduate students face. In my role as the data collection manager for two NSF-sponsored surveys, for instance, I worked extensively with recent doctorate recipients, institutional research offices, and department administrators, which provided me with a variety of perspectives on graduate students' expectations and experiences. Additionally, for the 2008/12 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, which covered years during and immediately following the Great Recession, I spent years analyzing survey responses and developing restricted-use variables on such topics as graduate school enrollment decisions, employment experiences, and student loan debt. Throughout this time, I was struck by the frequent disconnect between graduate students' aspirations and their eventual outcomes, the limited data available on outcomes for graduate programs (particularly at the master's level), and the potential equity implications of these factors.

My longstanding involvement in projects related to graduate education has helped spur my interest in better understanding the decision to enroll in graduate school and the labor market experiences of graduate degree recipients. Towards that end, my dissertation includes three papers that focus on 1) predictors of graduate enrollment, 2) employers' perceptions of master's degrees for occupations in business and health, and 3) unionization efforts among some graduate degree recipients in academia. Given that all three papers have a quantitative emphasis, I will draw on my doctoral training, which has featured substantial coursework in econometrics, research methods, and experimental design. Analysis for the dissertation will also require me to apply the programming and data management skills I have developed throughout my time at RTI and as a graduate research assistant. For the résumé audit study in particular (paper 2), I will also benefit from my years of experience as a data collection manager, a role in which I was responsible for developing and successfully implementing procedures for multi-month data collection efforts.

Upon completing my dissertation, I plan to embark on a career as an education researcher at a research firm. With academic interests at the nexus of research and policy, I foresee myself undertaking research projects designed to produce answers to policy-relevant questions within higher education. A key part of my research agenda will include examining policies and practices in graduate education related to equity, such as those designed to increase the enrollment and completion rates of historically underrepresented groups in graduate and professional degree programs. In addition to conducting program evaluations and quasi-experimental studies, I can also envision myself as the director of a national survey that produces original data for the broader research community. Ultimately, my goal is to provide evidence and data that help policymakers and institutions craft policies that provide equitable access to the degrees commonly required for occupations with high private and social returns.