

2026 Presidents Institute

# A Deeper Purpose



January 4-7, 2026 ■ Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek ■ Orlando, FL



The Council of Independent Colleges

Coming this year ...

# Graduate Program Network

 The Council of  
Independent Colleges

A Deeper Purpose

| 2026 Presidents Institute

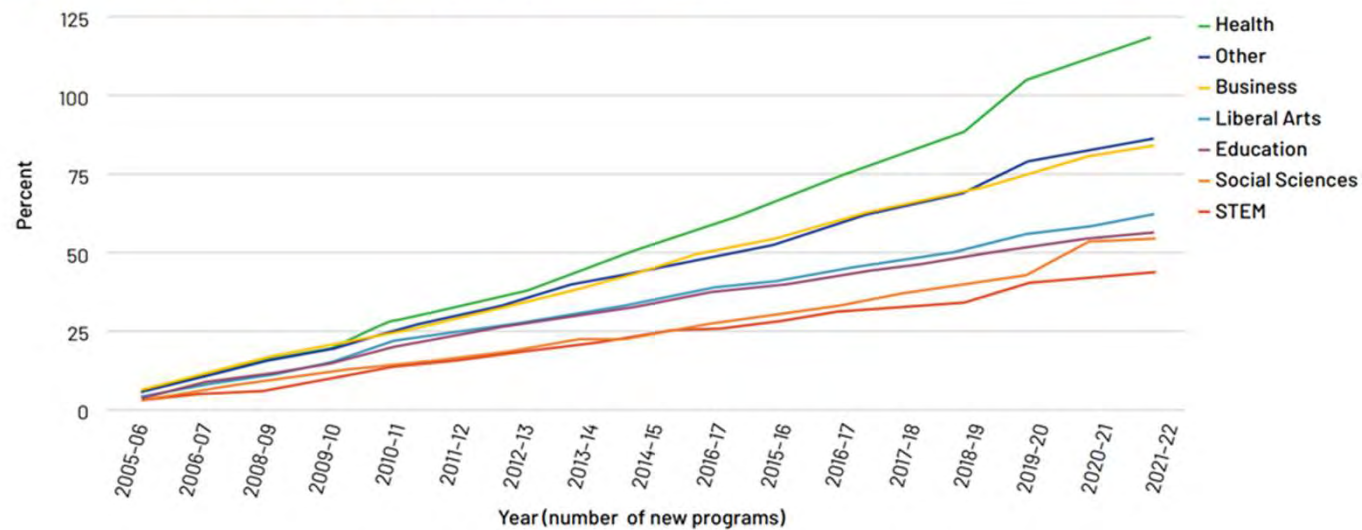
# The Graduate Program Landscape (I)

**“The last ten years have seen a rapid increase in the number of graduate degrees offered at undergraduate colleges.** For the most part, the degrees are introduced triumphantly and without any attempt to justify them. On questioning, responsible officials at some of these institutions show themselves committed to the view that the initiation of such programs is a mark of progress and, as such, highly desirable. Others are of the opinion that the expansion of the colleges, in this as well as in other directions, is an unavoidable consequence of the times.”

— John Lachs, “Graduate Programs in the Undergraduate College:  
The Arguments against Turning a College into a University” **(1965)**

# The Graduate Program Landscape (II)

Figure 2: Trends in master's program growth by field of study.



source: Kelchen & Barrett 2024

# The Graduate Program Landscape (II)

“A variety of factors has led to the growth of and demand for graduate programs.... [As of Spring 2024,] **78 percent of CIC member colleges and universities have graduate offerings**. The vast majority of CIC graduate programs (about 72 percent) are at the master’s degree level.”

— CIC, “Understanding the Landscape of Graduate Programs” (2024)

“Colleges have steadily added more master’s degree programs since 2004–05, with a 69% increase in programs during this period. **Private nonprofit institutions have disproportionately added programs**, which suggests that they may be more willing to meet perceived market needs in an effort to generate additional revenue.”

— Kelchen & Barrett, “Exploring the Growth of Master’s Degree Programs in the United States” (2024)

# The Graduate Program Landscape (III)

What's driving *institutions*?

- “... to generate **additional revenue**” (*plus* the demographic cliff, real or perceived demand, new modes and technologies, mission alignment, other?)

What's driving *students*?

- “[A]dult students tend to be **pragmatic** and decisive.”
- “The most common reason that domestic students further their education is **to advance their careers.**”
- “**Cost is the ultimate gatekeeper** to enrollment; once that hurdle is cleared, **quality signals** shape student choice.”

— EAB, “The New Rules of Engagement for Enrolling Today’s Adult Learners” (2025)



Does your institution have graduate programs?

According to the CIC survey, as of spring semester 2024, 78% of CIC members offer graduate programs. The majority of all graduate programs (72%) are at the master's level. About half are online.



Graduate Program Network

*Note:* The icons on these slides have been adapted from the Noun Project





Has your Board had a discussion devoted specifically to graduate programs (or a particular graduate program) in the past 6 months?

Our guess was *two-thirds*!



Graduate Program Network



# Q: How *many* graduate programs?

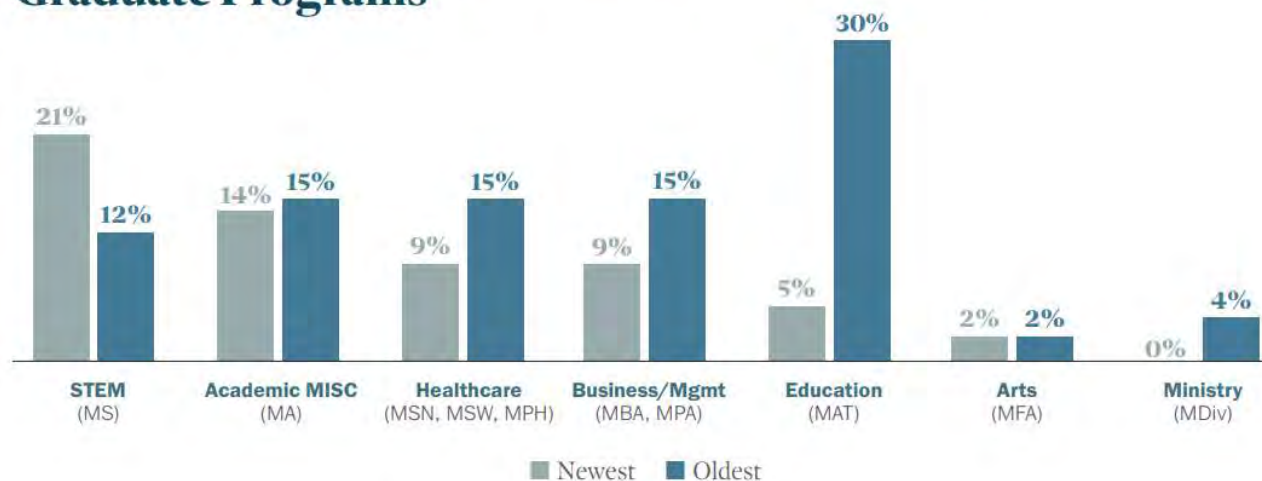
The survey  
says ...

## Number of Graduate Programs

1 to 5 programs	32%
6 to 10 programs	27%
11 to 15 programs	18%
16 to 20 programs	7%
20 or more programs	16%

# Q: What's your newest program?

## Percentage of Institutions' Newest and Oldest Graduate Programs



# NetVUE

Network for Vocation in  
Undergraduate Education



Council of  
Independent  
Colleges  
Networks

# TEP

Tuition Exchange Program  
(CIC-TEP)

# OCSC

Online Course Sharing Consortium  
(CIC-OCSC)

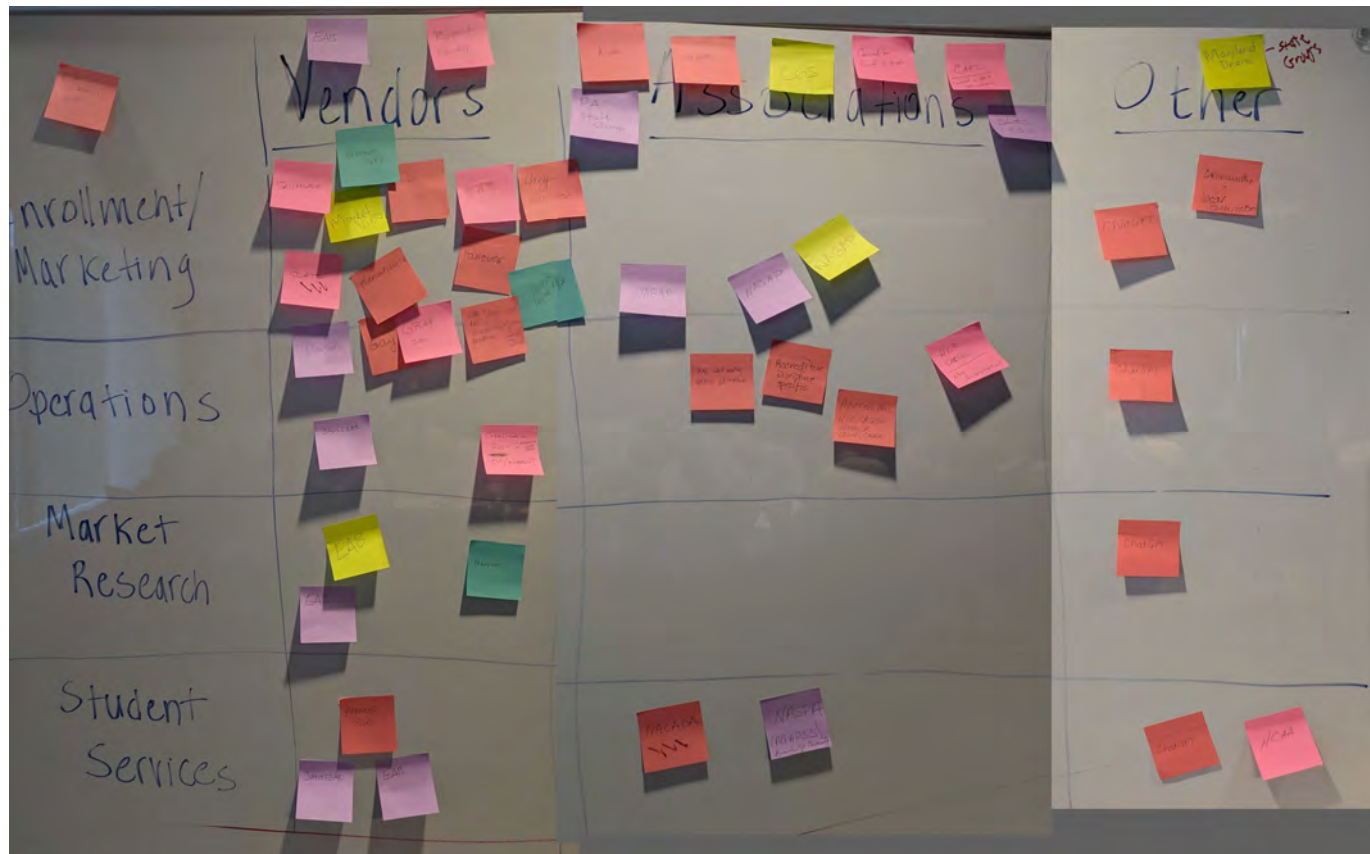
# Belong

An Inclusive Learning Community

# AI Network

AI Ready

# Why we need a CIC Graduate Program Network:



# Benefits of Participation in the Network

- Reinforce your institution's commitment to graduate programs by supporting the campus team that develops and leads graduate programs.
- Help them:
  - Take a deep dive into essential topics — and then surface with practical solutions
  - Learn from experts (peers, practitioners, vendors)
  - Become part of an exclusive community of practice
  - Shape the future of graduate education at independent colleges



Graduate Program Network

Network dues (per institution)  
= \$2,400/year

# Deep Dive Topics for 2026

- Launching a New Graduate Program
- Marketing
- Business Models and Institutional Structures
- Retaining and Supporting Your Graduate Students
- Graduate Programs and Institutional Sustainability



DISCUSS

**Which of these topics are most important for the future of your institution? What other topics would you like to see the Network tackle?**



# Future Topics We Intend to Explore ...

- Dealing with Accreditation
- Faculty Preparation and Support
- Distinctive Pedagogies for Graduate and Adult Learners
- Graduate Degrees vs. Other Credentials
- Selecting and Partnering with Vendors
- Evaluation for Accountability and Sustainability
- The Shifting Landscape of Federal Policies



# Q&A

**Thank you for attending  
this session!**



**Learn more at  
*cic.edu/gradnetwork***

**Or contact Phil Katz at *pkatz@cic.edu***