



# Mount Mary Graduate Programs: A Quarter Century of Progress

Graduate programs at Mount Mary College have been offered for over 25 years. Beginning with one program in 1982, the Master of Science in Dietetics, additional programs have been developed over the years in response to the changing nature of the professions, workplace demands, employer expectations, and demographic and market trends.

The College's second master's program, the Master of Arts in Education: Professional Development, was approved in Spring 1990, followed that summer by the Master of Science in Art Therapy. In 1995 the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy was accredited and, in 1998, the Master of Science in Gerontology (deactivated in 2006). The new millennium saw continued program expansion, with the Master of Science in Community Counseling added in 2004 and the Master of Arts in English in 2006. The College's newest master's level program, the Master of Business Administration, was launched in January 2008.

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The addition of graduate programs was an important step in the evolution of Mount Mary College, said Dr. Douglas Mickelson, Ph.D., Mount Mary's Associate Dean for Graduate and Continuing Education. "Graduate programs at Mount Mary grew out of the strengths of programs at the undergraduate level and from the faculty knowledge, expertise, and involvement in their professions. In the past few years, as the size and number of our programs has grown, we have clarified the purposes of graduate education and put new structures in place to oversee it." The College's Graduate Division, formally established in Fall 2006, now offers master's degrees, professional continuing education, and advanced personal enrichment courses of study.

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ate study. In some areas, such as occupational therapy, a master’s degree is considered the entry level degree. And in many professions, a graduate degree is expected or required for advancement. We want to be sure all of our graduates – but especially women, who constitute the vast majority of our graduate students – are prepared to move ahead, to assume leadership roles and to hold positions of influence in their fields.”

“With the increasing sophistication of many jobs and greater expectations for employee productivity and problem solving, graduate studies prepare well-educated professionals focused on contributing to their chosen careers,” agreed Mickelson.

Per the College’s Graduate Education Mission, Mount Mary aims to provide graduate education to both women and men that “results in students who are committed to being critical and creative scholars, just and ethical human beings with a global perspective, and leaders who put knowledge into transforming action.” The goals of graduate scholarship and research at Mount Mary are defined as “reflective thinking, development of in-depth knowledge and specialized skills, and application of theoretical and empirical findings to relevant issues within the discipline.”

“In addition to enhancing students’ career skills and knowledge, graduate offerings also enrich the life of a college,” said Schwalbach. “Graduate programs invigorate the curriculum by building on and supporting the undergraduate programs.” At Mount Mary, Schwalbach noted, each of the various master’s programs is an extension of an area in which the College already had established a reputation for excellence in undergraduate education.

“Graduate study on campus strengthens and deepens the undergraduate experience through the addition of new faculty, and through faculty activities such as research and writing,” said Mickelson. “Graduate programs, particularly at Mount Mary, extend the institutional knowledge base of a discipline. They also expand the type of students attending

the institution, attracting those who are focused on professional excellence and career development through higher education.”

“Graduate programs also increase the College’s visibility and profile in Southeastern Wisconsin among prospective students, other institutions of higher education, and employers,” said Mickelson. “Many of Mount Mary’s graduate programs first attracted our alumnae, who were familiar with the institution and its excellent reputation in undergraduate education. The programs since have grown to appeal to a broader range of students regionally, and in some cases, nationally.”

Today, graduate students comprise an important part of the Mount Mary student body. Over the past four years the Graduate Division has seen steady enrollment growth, increasing from 175 students in Fall 2003 to more than 300 in Fall 2007, and adding three new programs in the past four years.

“The Graduate Division is poised for further growth, as well,” said Mickelson. “We project a 3-5% increase in our graduate enrollment in the next five years. This is especially important because, while undergraduate enrollments are expected to decline nationwide, the number of students pursuing graduate studies is expected to increase.”

As a result, colleges and universities nationwide are expanding their graduate offerings. What differentiates graduate study at Mount Mary College from that at other institutions? According to Schwalbach, the main difference is that “Mount Mary remains very mission-driven, even in our graduate programs. The College’s mission – preparing students to leave here and make a difference in their world – permeates every area and level of study and is the foundation for all of our programs.”

“Mount Mary’s graduate programs combine classroom work and extensive community based-experiences, all infused with the College’s mission,” added Mickelson. “Community-based programs are an integral part of the graduate experi-

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Feedback from our master’s degree graduates indicates satisfaction with this approach, said Schwalbach. “Our graduates have told us they appreciate the strong academics and the combination of theory and practice. They feel they leave here with a solid foundation tied to application in the real world.”

“Mount Mary’s master’s programs each have some distinctive features, as well,” added Schwalbach. “For example, the graduate education program allows students to tailor the program to meet their needs and interests, offering students the option to incorporate 12 credits of subject-area specialization (such as math or art) within their degree. Other programs offer students the option of pursuing a concentration within the field, such as the creative writing track within the Master of Arts in English program.”

Other program hallmarks, according to Schwalbach, are the small classes that foster personalized attention and interaction with fellow students, and the faculty, many of whom are well-known regionally and nationally in their fields.

Mount Mary’s expertise in developing and delivering quality graduate education was recognized in 2006 when its accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, granted the College approval to develop and offer additional master’s degree programs without undergoing an outside accrediting review of each new individual degree. “That was recognition that our graduate programs are solid,” said Schwalbach. “It acknowledged that the College

has reached a level of maturity where we are capable of evaluating and implementing new graduate programs.”

“This was a huge step,” agreed Mickelson. “It allows us the flexibility to enhance existing programs or to add new ones in response to emerging trends or the changing occupational needs of the workforce.” Mount Mary also is a member of the Council of Graduate Schools, a national organization dedicated to the advancement of graduate education and research.

What lies ahead for the Graduate Division? “The College’s strategic plan calls for investigating the addition of two new graduate programs,” said Mickelson. “In addition, we are exploring other graduate program initiatives, such as offering graduate certificates. These are 12- 15 credit programs of advanced study organized around a particular topic that can be taken for professional development or can be part of a larger, complete master’s degree program.”

Any new offerings from the Graduate Division, “will continue to focus on students’ professional development while emphasizing the leadership, integrity and sense of social justice tenets in the College’s mission,” said Mickelson. “We aim to prepare our graduate students, just like our undergrads, to leave here ready to make a difference in the world.”

