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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Date: January 11, 2015

To: Sarah Mangelsdorf, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

From: Jocelyn Milner, Associate Provost, Academic Planning and Institutional Research

Subject: UW-Madison Policy on Low-Award Producing Academic Programs

Copies: Sarah Kuba, Sara Lazenby, William Karpus, Marty Gustafson, Jennifer Martin

Periodically, the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) has questioned if the standard set for an academic program to be considered low-degree producing or low-award producing is still appropriate. The purpose of this memo is to provide some analysis that would support a focused discussion of criteria for low-award producing programs at an upcoming UAPC meeting.

Current Policy

In June 2010, the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) adopted a Policy on Low-Enrollment Academic Programs (degree/majors and certificates). A version of this policy has been a part of program review guidelines since at least 1995. Under this policy, academic programs that award fewer than five degrees in five years are considered "low-enrollment", and deans are asked to consider if such programs should be continued, discontinued, or restructured to result in higher levels of completion (Attachment A). UW System Administration also has a policy for low-degree producing degree/major programs that was put in place in July 2010.

Low-Award Producing Programs – Current Status

Because this policy has been in effect for more than 20 years, currently UW-Madison has very few degree/majors that are considered low-degree producing. Some low-degree producing programs continue because they have been reviewed and are of value in the program array. For graduate programs, we have traditionally applied the policy in a way that takes into account both the masters and the doctoral level programs together. Our practice has been to consider awards at the masters and doctoral level together, so a graduate program has to be low-degree producing at both levels to be considered low-degree producing. In 2010, the low-award producing policy was first explicitly applied to certificate programs. A substantial number of certificate programs are considered low-award producing, especially graduate certificates. Degree/majors and certificate programs that are considered low-award producing under the current policy are listed in Attachment B.

Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Institutional Research
170 Bascom Hall University of Wisconsin-Madison 500 Lincoln Drive Madison, WI 53706
jocelyn.milner@wisc.edu | http://apir.wisc.edu

Distribution of Academic Program Size, Peer Comparisons

As a basis for discussion it is helpful to review the distribution of the five-year average of degrees and certificates awarded across categories of programs – bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, undergraduate certificates, graduate certificates, and Capstone certificates (Table 1; also Attachment C, Attachment D). The five-year average is aligned with the policy; programs with a five-year average less than one (1) are considered low-award producing by the policy standard.

For all categories of academic programs the size distribution is characterized by a relatively small number of large programs and a larger number of programs that are relatively smaller in size.

Table 1 provides the number of programs in each category, as well as the median and average number of awards for each category; Attachment C and D provide the full distribution of program size by category. Table 1 also provides a count of programs with fewer than three awards per year and fewer than 5 awards per year as an illustration of the impact of raising the low-award producing threshold.

Table 1. Description of Size and Size Distribution of Academic Programs, through 2014-15 Awards

Program Category	# of active programs	Annual Awards per Program, Last 5 Years		Programs with <3 average awards per year		Programs with <5 average awards per year	
		Median	Average	#	*%*	#	*%*
Bachelor's	125	30	68	4	*3*	9	*7*
Master's	137	6	15	38	*28*	56	*41*
PhD	102	5	8	28	*27*	50	*49*
Undergrad Certificate	62	11	26	13	*21*	17	*27*
Grad/Prof Certificate	39	1	3	17	*44*	22	*56*
Capstone Certificate	17	1.5	2.6	13	*76*	14	*82*

Notes:
Size is based on the number of awards - degree/majors or certificates.
Median and average metrics are based on the past five years of data, 2010-11 to 2014-15, and includes awards that were recorded as of October 1, 2015.
All active programs that have been in existence long enough to have awards are included in these calculations, including those that are less than five years old but were approved long enough ago to have award activity.
Programs that have been discontinued are not included.

UW-Madison has a total of 125 undergraduate majors. On average, there are 68 degrees awarded per major, but the median is only 30 degrees per major (half award more than 30 and half award fewer than 30 degrees each year). The distribution is characterized by some very large majors and a large number of majors that are smaller than the average. There are no active undergraduate majors considered low enrollment under current policy. Four majors (3% of all majors) award fewer than 3 degrees a year and nine majors (7%) award fewer than 5 awards per year.

At the Master's degree level there are 137 majors. The average number of degrees per major is 15; the median number of degrees per major is 6. Thirty-eight Masters-level majors (28%) award fewer than 3 degrees per year.

At the PhD degree level, there are 102 active majors. The average number of degrees per major is 8; the median number of degrees per major is 5. Twenty-eight PhD majors (27%) award fewer than 2 degrees

per year. There is only one active graduate program that is low-enrollment at both the masters and doctoral level; the importance of continuing the program was confirmed in a recent program review.

For the 62 undergraduate certificate programs (always associated with a bachelor's degree), the average number of times they are awarded annually is 26; half of the certificate programs are awarded fewer than or more than 11 times annually. Thirteen undergraduate certificates (21%) are awarded fewer than 3 times annually and 17 certificates (21%) awarded fewer than five times annually.

For the 39 graduate/professional certificate programs (associated with a post-bachelor's degree), the average number of times they are awarded annually is 3. Seventeen certificates (44%) are awarded fewer than three times annually including seven graduate/professional certificate programs that have not been awarded in the 2010-11 to 2014-15 period.

For the 17 Capstone certificates (post-bachelors programs for non-degree seeking students), the average number of awards per program is 2.6 certificates annually. Thirteen Capstone certificates (76%) are awarded fewer than three times annually including four Capstone certificate programs have not been awarded at all in the 2010-11 to 2014-15 period.

We also explored how the average and median program sizes of UW-Madison degree/major programs compare to peer universities. To answer this question we compared UW-Madison degree patterns to other public major research universities using standard degree reports to the US Department of Education (Table 2). The patterns we observed for UW-Madison was repeated overall for peers – median number of awards was substantially smaller than the average, characterizing a distribution with few large programs and many smaller programs. Both the median and the average number of awards was lower (program size is smaller) for UW-Madison in comparison to the peers. For undergraduate programs, UW-Madison awards 64.0 degrees per program per year, compared with 70.5 degrees per program per year at peers.

Table 2. Comparison of UW-Madison and Peer Academic Program Size

Program Category	Median annual number of awards per program		Average annual number of awards per program	
	UW-Madison	Peers	UW-Madison	Peers
Bachelor's	28.5	32.0	64.0	70.5
Master's	6.0	7.3	14.3	21.8
PhD	4.7	5.0	7.2	7.5

Notes:
Data is taken from IPEDS Degree Completions survey for the three most recent years available (2011-12 through 2013-14). Programs are counted at the six-digit CIP code classification. Programs with zero awards are not included in the IPEDS Degree Completions data.
Peer data are the median and average of the three-year average awards per program for AAU public institutions

Considerations

Effectiveness of the current policy: The current policy has been fairly successful at ensuring that inactive degree/major programs at all levels are discontinued from active lists. There are currently very few active degree/major programs that full into the low-degree producing status of fewer than 5 degrees in five years. The policy has been applicable to certificates only since 2010, and that may be part of the reason that there are still several certificate programs that are low-award producing.

Size distributions and peer comparisons: Overall, what the analysis of program distribution size shows is a size distribution of academic programs that is characterized by a few relatively large programs and a many relatively smaller programs.
Peer comparisons suggest that the pattern may be similar at peers, but the actual average and median program sizes are slightly smaller than the peers.
These overall patterns has been consistent over a longer period of time; an analysis conducted in the mid-1990s when these peer data sets first became readily available and subsequent more recent analyses have shown that UW-Madison has a wider range of programs that are generally smaller in size than peers.

Questions for discussion: These data and the application of the policy raise several questions. For example:

- Is less than five awards in five years (5 year average less than 1) an appropriate criterion for low-award producing status?
- What would be the impact of adjusting the requirement to one or two awards per year, or 10 awards in five years, or some other standard?
- Is the same standard appropriate for all categories of programs? For example, a standard of 2 or more awards a year would bring only a few percent of bachelor's programs into low-award status, but would impact more than 20% of all other program categories (see Table 1).
- What kind of action is best taken for low-award producing programs?
- Do we have the right balance of action or should be take different steps?
- Should the actions taken for low-award producing programs vary depending on program category?
- Is the policy acceptable as-is or are there changes that should be considered?

In closing, I'd like to thank Sarah Kuba and Sara Lazenby for their work on this report.

I'll follow up with you about scheduling a discussion at an upcoming UAPC meeting.
Please do let me know if you have questions about this topic.

Attachments:
Attachment A. Policy on Low Enrollment Programs (also posted at http://www.apir.wisc.edu/uapc/ProgramReviewGuidelines_LOWENR_June.21.2010.FINAL.pdf)
Attachment B. List of Academic Programs that are considered Low Enrollment Programs, 2014-15
Attachment C. Size Distribution of Bachelor's, Master's, and Research Doctoral Programs – Degrees Awarded
Attachment D. Size Distribution of Certificate Programs - Certificates Awarded

Jocelyn Milner, Academic Planning and Institutional Research
170 Bascom Hall University of Wisconsin-Madison 500 Lincoln Drive Madison, WI 53706
jocelyn.milner@wisc.edu | http://apir.wisc.edu

Appendix II. Policy on Low Enrollment Academic Programs (Majors and Certificates)

http://www.apa.wisc.edu/acad_plng_ProgramReview.html
Adopted by the University Academic Planning Council, June 21, 2010
Revised from May 1995 Program Review Guidelines

Particular attention should be given to low-enrollment majors, defined as those in which enrollment is very low and very few degrees have been granted in recent years. For some programs, they may award few degrees because they serve a specialized audience. For other programs, when few degrees are awarded it may be a signal that the commitment of program faculty has waned or that the program does not serve student or societal needs.

Definition of low-enrollment[1]:

- In general, the standard for triggering low-enrollment status is a program in which fewer than five (5) degrees have been awarded in five (5) years. This standard applies to all of UW-Madison's graduate and professional programs. It also applies to all UW-Madison undergraduate programs that have counterparts at fewer than half of other UW institutions.
- For undergraduate programs that have counterpart offerings at more than half of all UW institutions, then the standard for triggering low-enrollment status is when fewer than 25 degrees are awarded in a five (5) year period. UW-Madison programs that have counterparts at more than half of other UWs typically have strong enrollments and would rarely drop below this higher threshold.

A low-enrollment program will be scheduled for review in the academic year following the program's identification as low-enrollment. The provost will request such a focused review from the dean, and specify a schedule for a status report. The schedule may be adjusted by mutual agreement.

In general, the expectation is that either a compelling case will be made for continuation, or the low-enrollment programs will be discontinued or reorganized.

The following possibilities for handling low-enrollment programs should be considered:

- Discontinue the program.
- Merge smaller programs into an appropriate larger program with a more inclusive scope.
- Merge several low-enrollment programs into one more inclusive title.
- Make the program available to the occasional student through the Individual Major at the Bachelor's level or the Special Committee Degree at the graduate level.

There may be excellent reasons to continue a low-enrollment program. A rationale should be developed by the program faculty based on the following criteria and others that may emerge as appropriate:

[1] Definition aligns with UW System Policy ACIS 1, "Monitoring Low-Degree-Producing Programs", June 10, 2010 Board of Regents Agenda Item I.1.h.(2). System Administration will conduct an audit of low-degree-producing programs every five years.

- What evidence demonstrates a genuine student need and/or community demand -- even at a low level – for graduates with this specific credential?
- Does the program fill a specific academic niche unique to UW-Madison or in some way necessary for the University's identity, or for the fulfillment of the mission of the program, school/college, or university?
- What is the cost of the program? No program is without cost so a clear recognition of all costs is important. All programs incur costs in terms of record-keeping and a range of monitoring activities for the school/college, the Registrar's Office, the Graduate School, the Office of the Provost, and others.
- Is faculty time and effort best invested in such a program? Time must be devoted to review of the program, recruitment of students, curriculum development, and similar activities. Programs with few or no students that are formally offered still need to have a full curriculum available to a student who seeks to enroll in the program.
- What are the compelling reasons why none of the options outlined above (merging this major into a larger major, or offering it as an individual major) are viable alternatives?
- Is the program in question a Master's degree that is associated with a corresponding Ph.D.? If so, and if the doctoral program is robust, there is little reason to discontinue the corresponding Master's degree and such programs will not routinely be identified as low-enrollment.

Reports on the status of low-enrollment programs will be reviewed by the provost and the UAPC, who may make recommendations on the status of the program. If a low-enrollment program is continued, it will be placed in the 10 year cycle of program review.

Attachment B

UW-Madison Certificates that Meet the "Low Degree-Producing" Criteria, Degrees Through May 2015, as of October 1, 2015

Code	Program Name	Certificates Awarded (Last 3 Years) 2013	2014	2015	Average # Awarded 5 years	10 years	Note
Graduate Programs							
116	Biometry (masters)	0	1	1	0.8	0.8	Status as low-degree producing reivewed and approved by CALS Dean's office, 2010-11
810	Portuguese (MA)	0	1	1	0.8	0.8	Program review completed in 2012-13; L&S confirmed value of the program
810	Portuguese (PhD)	0	1	0	0.2	0.6	Program review completed in 2012-13; L&S confirmed value of the program
Capstones							
106	Bioinformatics	1	0	0	0.2	0.4	First certificate awarded 2002; first review completed Fall 2015; review update to address low enrollment required 2018-19
452	(Professional) French Studies	1	0	2	0.6	0.4	First certificate awarded 2003. Reviewed 2014-15.
976	Clinical and Community Outcomes Research	0	1	1	0.6	0.4	Approved in 2009, Renamed in 2013-14. Five year review dues in 2014-15; review is ongoing.
Undergraduate Certificates							
105	Artist Certificate in Music	0	0	0	0.0	0.1	No review on record; review in progress 2014-15; ongoing 2015-16
280	Dance	0	1	0	0.8	1.6	Program review completed Fall 2015; curricular changes made to improve enrollments.
335	Engineering Risk, Uncertainty and Decision Analysis	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	Approved in 2009; no awards made; review scheduled 2014-15; ongoing 2015-16; may be discontinued.
Graduate/Professional Certificates							
100	African Studies	1	0	0	0.2	0.4	Program review underway, 2015-16.
106	Bioinformatics	0	0	0	0.0	0.5	First certificate awarded 2004; first review completed Fall 2015; review update to address low enrollment required 2018-19.
475	Environmental Law and Policy	0	0	0	0.0	0.2	Discontinuation proposal, UAPC, January 2016
356	European Studies at the Graduate Level	1	0	0	0.2	0.3	First certificate awarded 2004; under review 2015-16.
453	Fundamentals of Clinical Research	1	1	1	0.8	0.8	No review on record; review is in progress and ongoing, 2015-16.
810	Gender and Women's Studies at the Graduate Level	0	0	0	0.4	0.9	Program review is in progress, 2015-16.
476	International Law and Business	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	Discontinuation proposal, UAPC, January 2016
432	Material Cultural Studies	0	0	0	0.2	0.9	Program review completed 2014-15: L&S confirmed on-going value of the program .
625	Prevention and Intervention Science	0	0	0	0.0	0.5	Review completed Fall 2015; moved from School of Nursing to School of Education; plans to grow enrollment.
705	Southeast Asian Studies at the Graduate Level	2	0	0	0.4	0.3	Program review in progress, 2015-16.
395	Specialist in Gerontology	0	0	0	0.0	0.7	Discontinued Fall 2015 as a result of program review.
612	Specialist in Library and Information Studies	1	1	0	0.8	0.5	Program review completed 2012-13; L&S confirmed on-going value of the program.

Notes:

Low degree-producing programs are defined as those in which 5 or fewer degrees have been granted in the last 5 years.

Excluded from this list are:

1. newly implemented programs (within last 5 years)
2. discontinued programs; those teaching out students
3. programs with that have admissions suspended
4. masters or doctoral programs in which the corresponding graduate level program is not low-enrollment.

Sources: Degree Trends Analysis, http://apir.wisc.edu/students-degrees.htm

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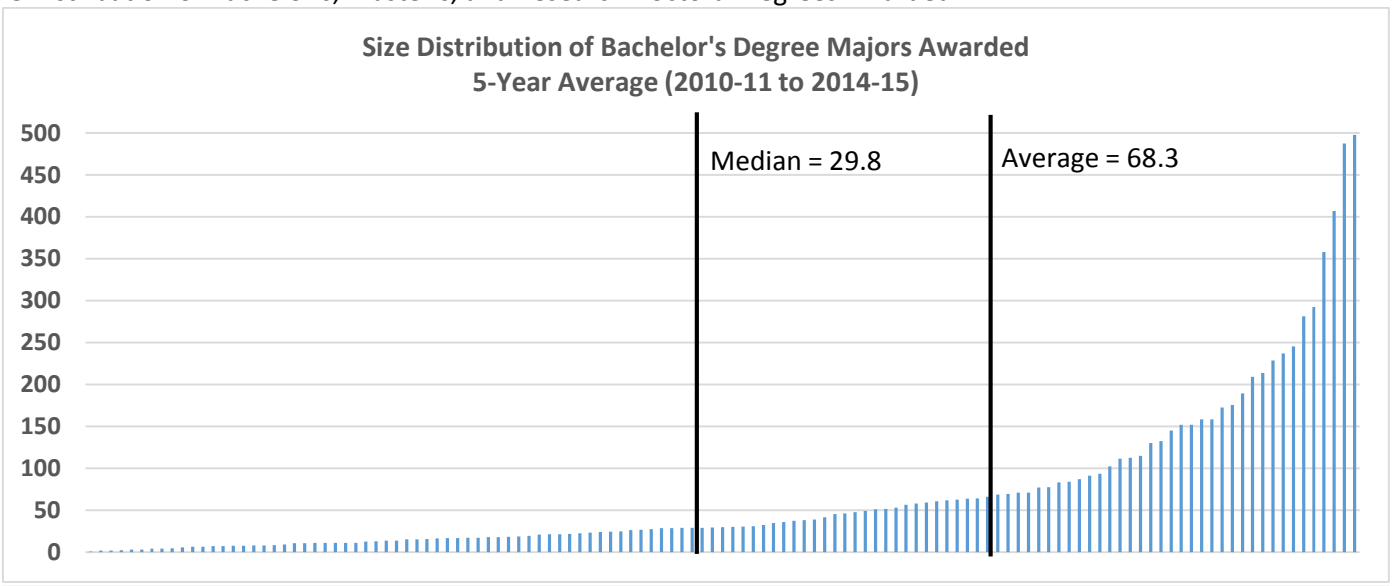
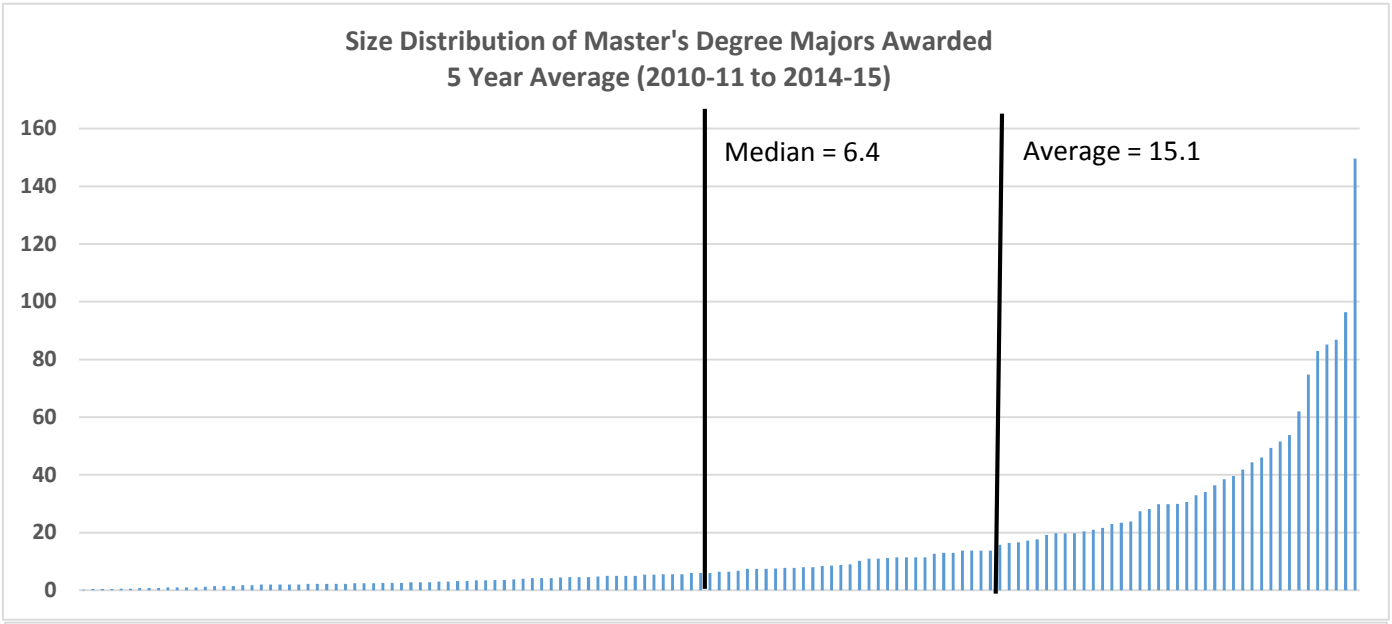
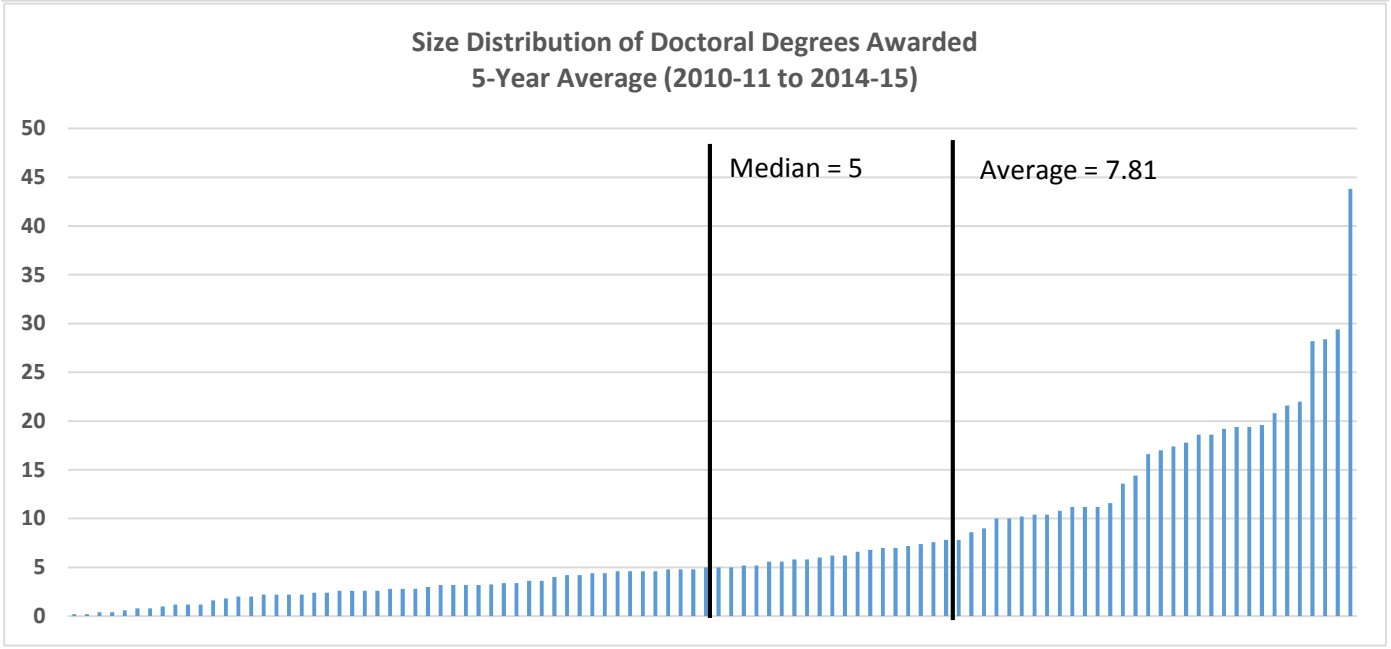
Size Distribution of Bachelor's, Master's, and Research Doctoral Degrees Awarded

Attachment C







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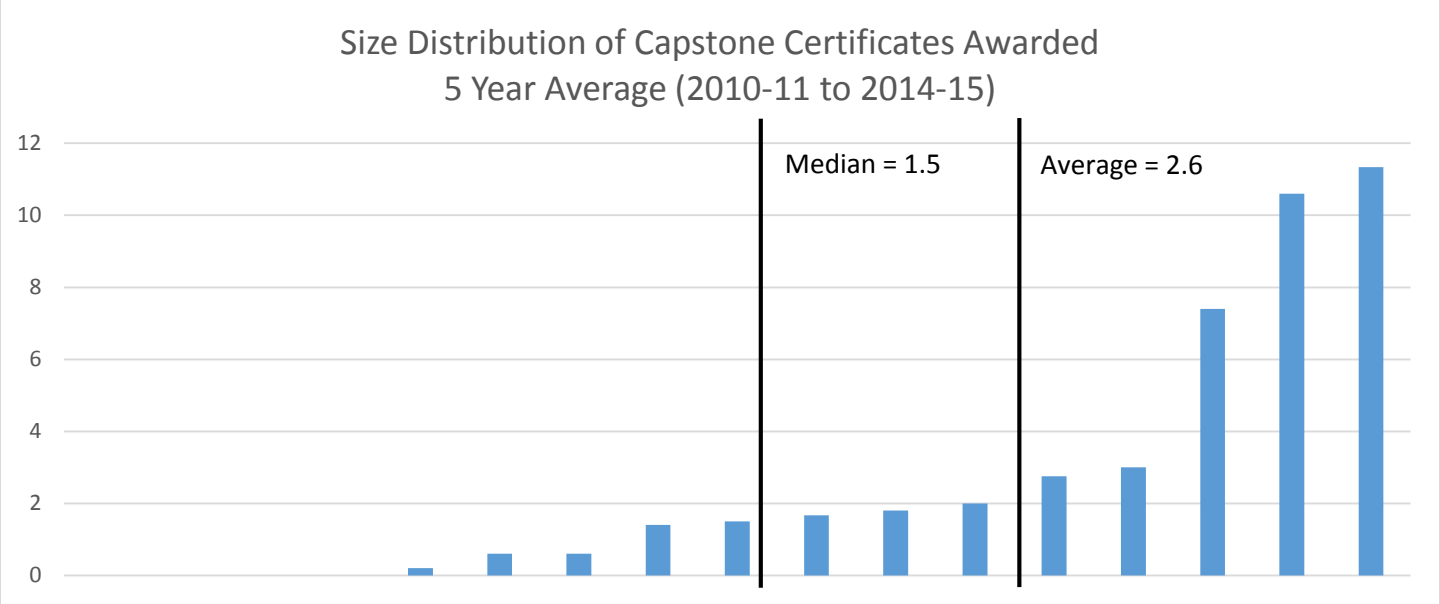
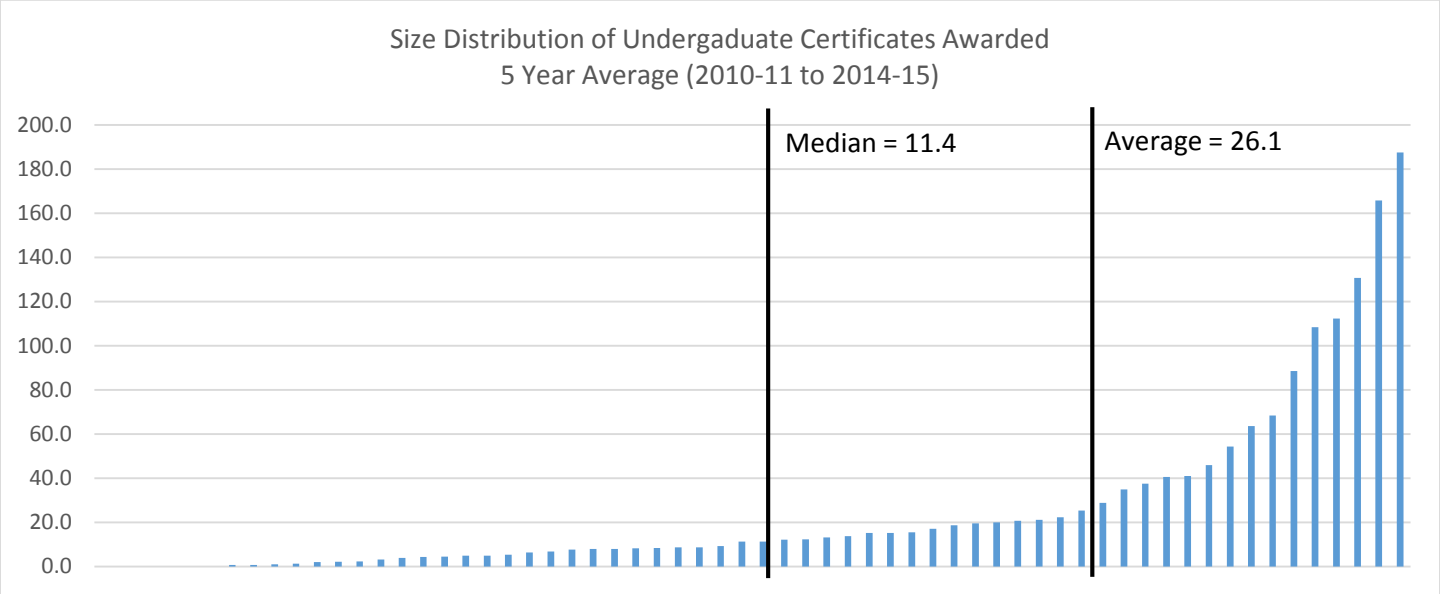
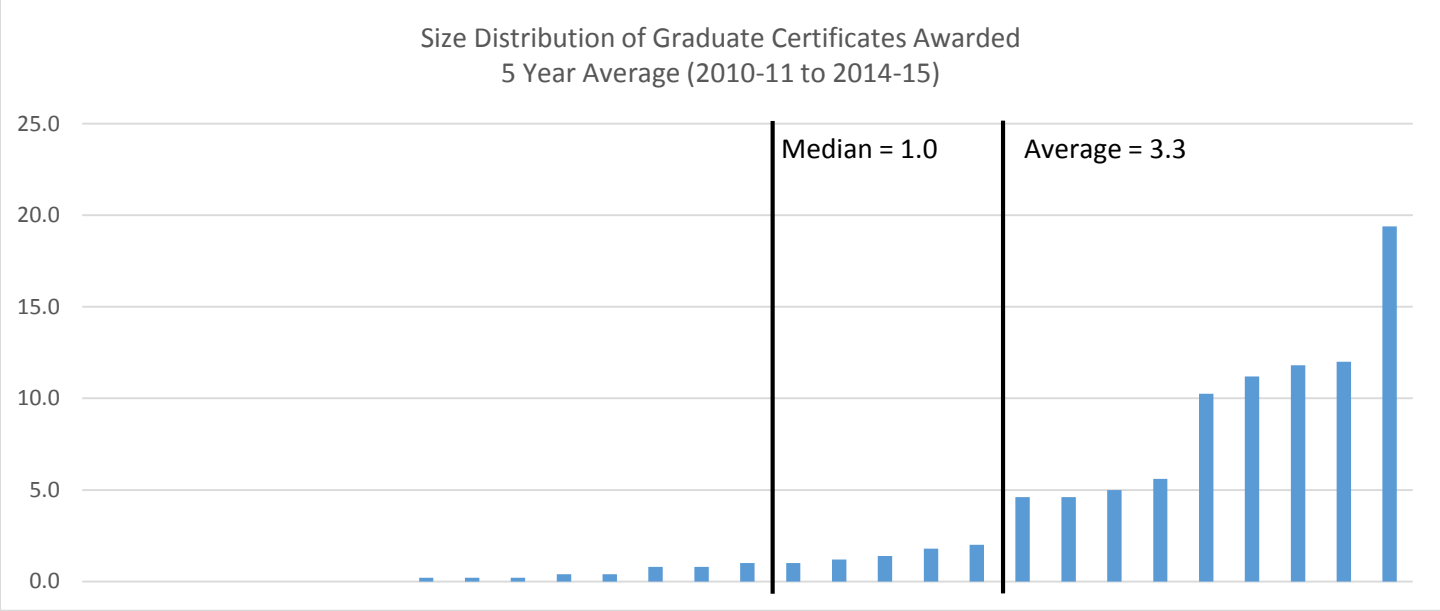
Size Distribution of Certificates Awarded







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