

# B.

## Program CONTEXT

### **About Section B...**

This section explores the **CONTEXT** of the *MA in Applied Professional Studies (MAAPS) Program.*

Subsections include...

- ▶ About DePaul University
- ▶ About The School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS)
- ▶ About Graduate Study
- ▶ About Adult Learning

## **About DEPAUL UNIVERSITY**

Founded by the Vincentian Fathers in 1898, DePaul University has grown over the years from a small institution with a limited curriculum to a comprehensive university that includes ten schools and colleges which offer a wide range of academic and professional programs serving nearly 23,000 students.

Despite its growth and stature as the nation's largest Catholic university, DePaul remains committed to maintaining its value-centered, urban character as well as serving individuals from a broad range of professional cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

DePaul's commitment to cultural diversity is reflected in its distinctive mission: "...to foster through higher education a deep respect for the dignity of all people...and to instill in its students a dedication to the service of others."

For more information (e.g., mission/purpose, accreditation, etc.), please visit the Course Catalog. (<http://sr.depaul.edu/CourseCatalog/CurrentCourseCatalog/index.asp> ---under *Colleges and Schools*, click *School of Continuing and Professional Studies*.)

## **About THE SCHOOL OF CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES (SCPS)**

The *School of Continuing and Professional Studies/SCPS* (established in 1972; formerly the *School for New Learning*) exists to serve the educational needs of working adults. Recognized as a leader in the field of adult education, the School is dedicated to providing student-centered education in a collaborative learning environment.

SCPS offers innovative undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates that are recognized for their quality and applicability in an ever-changing professional world. The School also provides continuing education and workplace learning opportunities via seminars, workshops and customized corporate training programs as well as personalized academic and career guidance, credit for prior learning, and flexible learning structures designed to meet the demands of busy adult lives. These programs are designed to help students develop skills in collaboration, persuasion, critical-thinking, inquiry, technology, creativity, and adaptability that meet the requirements for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.

(For more information about the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, please visit <http://scps.depaul.edu>.)

To accomplish its mission, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies has identified the following eight commitments to be critical to its success:

**A Commitment to Learning as a Way of Life:** For all of its learners, SCPS cares about the substance and process of learning – the knowledge, abilities and values they acquire, as well as the educational goals they attain. The School believes that adults learn deeply by reflecting--particularly reflecting on experience--and subsequently drawing meaning and transferable knowledge from all they have done. SCPS encourages students to refine their habits of learning and to experience the excitement of expanding their curiosity by using formal inquiry and developing as independent lifelong learners.

**A Commitment to Outcomes:** Curriculum design and assessment practices at SCPS focus on the *outcomes* of learning – the student's demonstrated knowledge and abilities, learned in a variety of ways. This focus on outcomes leads faculty to pursue excellence in curricular design, advising strategies, and teaching methods. It enables students to integrate classroom learning

with learning from life and work, and to apply continuously what they are learning in other contexts.

**A Commitment to Partnership with Students:** SCPS faculty and staff collaborate with each learner in the design, implementation, and assessment of individualized educational programs. This learning-centered partnership, based on mutual respect for each participant's expertise, prior learning, and decision-making power, deepens and broadens learning.

**A Commitment to Diversity:** SCPS faculty develop teaching, advising and assessment practices that value human differences in the broadest sense. SCPS seeks, in particular, to present a welcoming environment for those who have historically been excluded from higher education, and to enable all to benefit from the richness that diversity brings to a learning community.

**A Commitment to an Evolving, Developing Organization:** SCPS is a continuously evolving organization, open and responsive to the emerging educational needs of individuals and groups in a constantly changing world. SCPS engages in ongoing research on effective teaching, mentoring, and assessment, resulting in imaginative design of programs, structures, systems, courses and materials.

**A Commitment to Community in Service of Learning:** SCPS students, faculty, and staff work and learn in a community that fosters the mutual regard and support necessary for learning. Individuals creatively address challenges caused by multiple locations, asynchronicity, and varying areas and levels of knowledge. Members commit themselves to the Vincentian personal regard for the dignity of individuals, respectfully dealing with conflict, celebrating achievements, and setting goals which benefit individuals as well as DePaul and its urban and global communities.

**A Commitment to Social Justice:** SCPS deliberately works to shape a more just, livable world. It strives to ensure that those who have historically been ignored, excluded, marginalized, oppressed, and economically disenfranchised can benefit from the many learning opportunities available at the School and beyond. In its curriculum, its classroom environments, its assessment practices, its advising strategies, and its formal advocacy, SCPS creates an intellectual and social milieu where a plurality of worldviews, cultures and value systems are respected, understood, encouraged and appreciated.

**A Commitment to Adult Learning:** The active, reflective practice of established and emerging principles of adult learning is central to the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. The School's multi-disciplinary learning community fosters an environment conducive to continuous exchange of innovative practices on the development, application, and dissemination of knowledge in the field of adult education.

## **About GRADUATE STUDY**

Education beyond the baccalaureate level can be divided into two major categories: (1) education undertaken for personal and professional development that does not lead to a degree, and (2) education leading to a formal graduate degree. Non-degree seeking post-baccalaureate education takes a number of forms including seminars, conferences and formal certificate programs offered by colleges and universities. Degree seeking post-baccalaureate education includes both masters and doctoral degrees. Both forms of post-baccalaureate education are necessary and important to support career advancement and ongoing professional development. However, it is the distinctive role and nature of graduate education at the master's level that serves as the focus of this section. Master's level graduate education has a rich and important heritage. Since its inception in the newly founded universities of medieval Europe, the nature of the master's degree has changed in both

content and form. The word “master” derives from the Latin word *magister*, which means “teacher.” Thus, in the medieval university, a master was a *licensed teacher in the faculty of arts*.

Following its transplantation to the United States, master’s education grew both in content specialization and in the number of students enrolled. According to Conrad, Haworth, and Millar in their landmark study of master’s education entitled *A Silent Success: Master’s Education in the United States* (1993), the number of master’s degrees awarded annually in the U.S. grew by 48% from 1970 to 1990. Nearly 300,000 master’s degrees have been granted each year since 1987—a number which accounts for nearly 25% of all degrees awarded by institutions of higher education.

In recent years, master’s level education in the United States has evolved to incorporate the much broader purpose of professional development across numerous fields of endeavor. This evolution has been driven, at least in part, by society’s increasing demand for professionals capable of deriving and contributing timely, accurate and relevant information. To this end, master’s level education has expanded to become an important means through which professionals are able to both expand their knowledge and skills and enhance the competency and competitiveness of their contributions (Conrad, et al., 1993). Thus, master’s education today stands in sharp contrast to the traditional aims of graduate education which historically included “...full-time, sustained examination of an academic discipline, unlimited access to mentors and research facilities, mastery of broad academic skills in research methodology and foreign languages, and an explicit expectation that the novitiate would produce new knowledge in the form of a monographic thesis” (Spencer as cited in Conrad et al., 1993, p. 17).

Today, “most people who pursue master’s degrees...are seeking a kind of advanced education designed to expand their understanding and improve their skills so that they can be more effective in their careers” (Hasselmo as cited in Conrad et al., 1993, p. xi). In response, master’s education has become increasingly practitioner oriented. It emphasizes career development, skills training and pragmatic goals (Glazer, 1986). Such education is based on a whole new set of assumptions: “...that students should be encouraged, through evening and external programs, to consider graduate study as an adjunct to the other priorities in their lives; that they are expected to master specific, rather than general, techniques and bodies of knowledge; and that they are being trained to become, however tired the cliché, consumers rather than producers, of scholarly research” (Spencer as cited in Conrad et al., 1993, p. 17). Proliferation of a wide range of master’s degrees occurred in the US in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This variety prompted some discipline-based scholarly organizations like the American History Association to mobilize its Committee on Graduate Education to scrutinize categories, criteria, and standards (*The Education of Historians for the Twenty -first Century*, University of Illinois Press, 2004.) Despite these efforts, diversity in what master’s degree education in the US could be continued to grow, in keeping with the increasing diversity of the graduate students themselves.

In short, contemporary master’s education “is linked to the needs of the student and the demands of the marketplace...it emphasizes practice [as well as] theory, skills [as well as] research, and training [as well as] scholarship...” (Glazer, 1986, pp. 83-85). As a result, it has also developed models of educational delivery that are non-traditional in nature. These programs emphasize alternative modes of course delivery and innovative, flexible scheduling. They also work to accommodate the needs of their adult students—most of whom are typically employed full-time (Johnstone, 1996).

## **About ADULT LEARNING**

SCPS' MAAPS Program offers a unique and distinctive approach to graduate education, founded upon the following presuppositions about adult learning:

### **(1) Personal and Professional Competence**

*Adult learning is enhanced when students have opportunities to develop both social and work role competencies.* Therefore, the MAAPS Program provides students with a Liberal Learning and Professional Competence framework that can be tailored to their individual needs. This framework is designed to assist students to develop: (a) in areas generic to all professionals (i.e., Liberal Learning); (b) in specialized areas pertinent to their areas of focus (i.e. in the articulation of specific professional competences in their self - designed or in their structured professional tracks; and (c) in the integration of the two.

### **(2) Outcomes-Based Planning**

*Adult learning is enhanced when learners have specific, measurable learning goals and are able to expand their inherent capacity to be self-managing in both the planning and accomplishing of such.* Therefore, the MAAPS Program provides students with a graduate-level competence framework through which to develop and articulate their personal and professional goals and develop a customized plan for their professional and liberal learning within the Program. The Program also maintains that the role of the instructor is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with the student rather than merely transmitting knowledge and evaluating conformity to it.

### **(3) Multiple Methods and Ways of Knowing**

*Adult learning is enhanced when learners are able to participate in structuring the learning experience and choosing learning activities best suited to their learning needs and individual learning differences.* Therefore, the MAAPS Program enables students to identify and pursue learning activities of their own choosing to develop and demonstrate competencies in accordance with their Graduate Focus Area Learning Plans and their individual learning styles. The Program also encourages students to explore and employ a wide variety of activities (e.g., work projects, individualized studies, tutorials/guided readings, conferences/special programs) to supplement their learning through formal coursework.

### **(4) Relevant Experience and Reflection**

*Adult learning is enhanced when both its content and its process are linked to learners' past and present experiences and they are able to draw on such experiences as a resource for learning.* Therefore, the MAAPS Program requires that students identify a base of prior experience in the areas of study they wish to pursue as well as an ongoing setting (work or otherwise) in which to derive and/or apply related learning while enrolled. In this regard, the MAAPS Program stresses the ability to articulate, reflect upon, and analyze experience in order to better apply knowledge (derived through content) and create knowledge (derived through experience).

### **(5) Ongoing and Multifaceted Assessment**

*Adult learning is enhanced when ongoing, systematic feedback is provided regarding learners' growth and development and incorporates the perspective of those closest to the context of the learning and its application.* Therefore, the MAAPS Program actively incorporates assessment processes (formative and summative) into all aspects of the curriculum. Multiple assessors, including the students themselves, faculty members with expertise in adult learning methodologies, and practicing professionals with content expertise in students' individual areas of study, are used to evaluate various portions of students' graduate work. In so doing, the MAAPS Program encourages students' constant development of skills in both reflective self-assessment and the solicitation/utilization of

feedback.

### **(6) Peer Collaboration**

**Adult learning is enhanced when learners are provided with opportunities to interact with peers during the learning process.** Therefore, the MAAPS Program encourages students to network with one another to identify and develop appropriate learning colleagues. Core courses and the Liberal Learning Seminars provide important occasions for peer interaction with other students; however, the Program also challenges students to deliberately ‘interact with peers’ in the larger community of practice (beyond DePaul) associated with their areas of study.

### **(7) Supportive Climate**

**Adult learning is enhanced when it takes place in a climate that minimizes anxiety and encourages experimentation.** Therefore, the MAAPS Program seeks to create an environment responsive to, and supportive of, the needs of adult learners. Such an environment includes: (a) classes offered whenever and wherever a critical mass of students wish; (b) a flexible model of education fostering peer challenge and support among students; (c) a curriculum deliberately incorporating the interests of the individual; and, (d) relationship-building opportunities with a resident faculty advisor/mentor and a working professional in one’s practice community—both of whom provide mentoring support and feedback throughout the program of study.

## **Adult Learning Resources: An Initial List**

- Baird, L. (1990). The melancholy of anatomy: The personal and professional development of graduate and professional school students. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education Handbook of Theory and Research*. Vol. IV, pp. 361-392. New York, NY: Agathon Press.
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- Berberet, J., & Wong, F.F. (1995). The new American college: A model for liberal learning. *Liberal Education*, 81(1), 48-52.
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- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: Continuum Books.
- Gelb, M. (1998). *How to think like Leonardo da Vinci*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
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- Knowles, M. (1978). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing.
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- Taylor, K., & Marienau, C. (2016). *Facilitating learning with the adult brain in mind: A conceptual and practical guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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