

ABSTRACT

THESIS: A Rung on the Ladder: A Mixed-Methods Study of Writing Studies MA Programs Preparing Students as Researchers

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As scholars in English and Writing Studies wrestle with the purpose and scope of master's degrees, questions about curriculum and expectations reflect multiple values, local exigencies, and considerations of pathways to future careers. Reflecting these conversations, the purpose of this convergent mixed-methods thesis is to identify how MA programs in Writing Studies are preparing MA students as researchers. This convergent mixed-methods study had two primary phases: 1) A content analysis of 30 online program descriptions of MA programs, paying particular attention to how programs discuss and present research, and 2) An online survey distributed to MA program directors, research methods professors, or other appropriate faculty asking questions about curriculum, final projects, and research experiences offered to master's students. The findings of this study suggest MA programs in Writing Studies are providing minimal preparation for students as researchers and rely primarily on exposure to existing research in coursework and through experiences such as culminating projects like master's research projects, theses, portfolios, and comprehensive exams. The data collected in these two phases indicates master's programs are highly idiosyncratic, which may result from an emphasis on local exigency compared to national guidelines and ideas about the purpose of a MA in Writing Studies. As MA programs serve as bridges to PhD programs and academic or non-academic careers, individual MA programs must consider the purpose of the MA degree and how these programs are serving master's students in their programs but a larger conversation needs to take place at a discipline-level to question the purpose of a MA degree in Writing Studies.