



HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

To: Members of the Corporation

From: Bridget Long, Ph.D.
Dean and Saris Professor of Education and Economics
Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)

Re: Proposal for a Pilot Online Degree Program (AY2021-22)

Date: October 23, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to present HGSE's proposal to pilot an online master's degree program during AY2021-22. In this memo, I discuss our current master's degree program, the lessons learned and opportunities we uncovered during our pivot to remote education for AY2020-21, and our vision to the pilot online degree program.

OUR CURRENT MASTER'S DEGREE

The Master's in Education (Ed.M.) at HGSE prepares educators and aspiring educators with the skills needed to be leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers. Our residential, full-time, one-year program offers exceptional academic preparation, personal and professional development, and opportunities for real-world engagement for individuals seeking to further their careers, develop new competencies, or enrich and deepen their knowledge. Courses engage students in both theory and practice to understand the complexities of education and gain the skills necessary to make a meaningful difference in education.

Starting in fall 2021, we will be transitioning to our redesigned master's degree program, which is the result of an ambitious, multi-year initiative to establish the foundational knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that every educator should master and set the standard for what and how education professionals should be taught—much like Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School have done in shaping the preparation of professionals in business and law, respectively. The new residential master's program is an innovative, high-quality curriculum designed to empower the next generation of educators to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. We have focused on creating engaging learning experiences that will help to model the professional standards and pedagogies necessary to improve the preparation of aspiring educators.

HGSE's new residential master's program is centered around three pillars: Foundations, Programs, and Concentrations. Through our faculty's expertise in research and practice, as well as our deep engagement with education leaders, partner organizations, and other professionals, we have identified key competencies that are critical for all educators to master regardless of role (i.e., the *Foundations*). Additionally, we have reorganized into new *Programs*, which will develop students' expertise in a specific area of education practice and deepen their understanding of a primary role or functional domain in the profession. Lastly, *Concentrations* allow our students to develop additional specialized knowledge in a specific topic or context in education. The table below displays the specific Foundations, Programs, and Concentrations topics.

HGSE New Master’s Degree Program (AY2021-22)

FOUNDATIONS	PROGRAMS	CONCENTRATIONS
<i>Competencies for all educators</i>	<i>Domains or role expertise</i>	<i>Area of focused interest</i>
Learning and Development (“How People Learn”) Evidence Leading Change Equity and Opportunity	Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship Education Policy and Analysis Human Development and Education Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology Teaching and Teacher Leadership	Arts and Learning Higher Education Early Childhood Education Global, International, and Comparative Education Literacy and Languages

With the upcoming launch of our new master’s degree, we may see changes in the profile of our residential master’s degree students, but it is our intention to retain the best of what we currently have, and that the new master’s program will help us to attract even greater numbers of talented, aspiring education professionals. The table below summarizes information about our master’s student population based on data from AY2019-20.

HGSE Master’s Students and Graduates, AY2019-20

Our Master’s Students	What Our Graduates Do
Approx. 640 graduates/year	30% Administration or Management
26% international	26% Teaching/Training
41% students of color	19% Data Analysis/Research
71% female	5% Counseling
	5% Entrepreneurship

RATIONALE FOR AN ONLINE DEGREE FOR 2021-22

Our rationale for this proposal centers on four main goals and considerations that are important to our central mission as an impact-focused professional school that seeks to promote success for all learners by putting powerful ideas into practice and preparing education leaders, researchers, and innovators.

(1) We seek to capitalize on the opportunity to establish leadership in the online market, particularly for education professionals.

As noted above, we have already been working to establish a core curriculum for education professionals with our redesigned residential master’s program. With this pilot, we seek to take the first steps towards creating a sustainable online degree program, which would enable us to increase the scale of our work to empower the next generation of educators to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. We would build upon our growing expertise to lead the field and create a model online program—one that delivers an innovative, high-quality curriculum focused on the key knowledge and skills educators must know to be effective leaders and

practitioners. Having an online degree program would increase our reach and capacity to improve education.

(2) The availability of an online master’s degree program would expand access to our programs and expertise among a pool of talented education professionals.

Offering an online degree program in the future would allow us to improve access to our master’s degree program by making our learning opportunities broadly available. This is the major lesson we learned when we conducted an extra round of admissions this past summer after announcing we would be remote during AY2020-21. The response to our announcement was incredible and suggests there is a robust pool of education professionals who are interested in a HGSE master’s degree but who could not otherwise travel to Cambridge to attend Harvard. This is reflected in an unsolicited comment emailed to a faculty member this fall by a student in our current School Leadership Program:

“I wanted to share my thankfulness at the unconventional step that HGSE took in opening admission in the summer, extending the program virtually to so many around the world, and providing a space for those who have wanted to be part of HGSE’s incredible graduate programs, but for logistical reasons were unable to join. It is a true step for opening up more equitable options for so many. As we move forward in this grand experiment this year, know that I am excited and committed to helping HGSE make this a successful model for the future.”

The matriculants admitted during the summer process tend to be mid-career professionals who have already demonstrated leadership talent and aspirations. Through our executive education experience (e.g., the Principals Center and our suite of Higher Education Programs available through Programs in Professional Education [PPE]), we know this is a critical group we can serve well and help to propel to leadership positions.

If we experience similar levels of interest among prospective students as we did this past summer, we will not only be able to increase access for students, but we will also increase the selectivity of our master’s degree program overall. On average, the summer matriculants are more racially and ethnically diverse than our typical pool of applicants, and thus we may be able to further diversify our student body with an online degree program. As described below, the design of our pilot program targets education professionals with more experience than our typical residential student, so we hope to create an online program that complements our current program rather than replacing it.

(3) By broadening our student body, we could enhance the educational experience of our programs.

With the addition of a set of more experienced students as part of our master’s program, an online degree program would increase the range of student perspectives that might be introduced into course and community conversations. We have already witnessed this phenomenon this fall as faculty report that summer matriculants are contributing in important ways by bringing into discussions examples from their years of experience in education and problems of practice they are currently confronting. While we do not expect significant overlap between the residential and online degree programs, we do recognize the opportunity to foster interactions between our less experienced (i.e., residential) and more experienced (i.e., online) students through select course experience and virtual events.

We have experimented with the integration of residential students and practitioners in the field in the past in a course entitled, DataWise. The course focuses on helping teachers and school leaders make the best use of their data in decision-making and lead collaborative inquiry centered on a key problem of practice. We have a degree-program offering of the course as well as versions that are part of our executive education portfolio for practitioners in the field. However, during the January term, Prof. Kathy Boudett has offered a version of DataWise that integrates practitioners into the degree-program course. According to the course evaluations, both practitioners and degree-program students reported that the integration supported their learning by leveraging the experiences within and across these groups. We would imagine doing the same with thoughtful mixing of the residential and online students.

(4) An online degree program could also benefit our executive education offerings through the creation of reusable assets.

We have already seen how the teaching assets developed for our current online courses can be reused in other courses and offerings. The online degree program we propose would prompt us to invest in the creation of even more assets targeting mid-career professionals with leadership aspirations, which overlaps with a major audience in our executive education program. The possibility of getting multiple uses out of our creations makes this strategy particularly appealing and cost effective. In fact, our vision is that our executive education offerings might serve to attract students to apply to the online degree program (for those who do not already have a master’s degree). Overall, we envision our executive education portfolio to serve as a source of lifelong learning for education professionals.

LESSONS FROM THE SUMMER 2020 ADMISSIONS ROUND

HGSE is very reliant on the tuition revenue garnered from our master’s program, and so when we decided to only offer remote education during AY2020-21, we became concerned about melt among the students we had accepted in the spring. In the hope of mitigating against a possible sizable drop in enrollment, we decided to hold a summer admissions round, not something we had ever done before. At the time of the decision, we had no way of knowing whether what the response of the market would be, but this turned out to be an excellent chance to uncover hidden demand among potential students who previously did not apply to HGSE.

Typically, our spring admissions cycle includes a 9-month recruitment campaign, with announcements about next year’s offerings in April and the application deadline in early January. During our summer admissions process, however, the recruitment period was extremely truncated—our recruitment campaign was only 5 ½ weeks (from the initial announcement on June 3rd until the application deadline of July 13th). Even under these circumstances, the response to our offer of the possibility of an online master’s degree generated a tremendous response. We received 14,060 total leads, which includes prospective applicants who submitted the inquiry form, began the application, and/or registered for a virtual information session. As summarized below, **we received 54% more applications during this 5 ½-week summer round in comparison to our usual 9-month winter/spring round.**

Comparing the Spring and Summer Admissions Rounds

	Spring Round	Summer Round
Applications	1,614	2,489
Admit Rate	54.3%	16.9%
Yield Rate	70.1%	92.9%

Our summer admissions round uncovered a great deal of interest in the possibility of an HGSE online master’s degree. Importantly, we discovered a pool of talented educational professionals who are not currently served by our programs or those of our peers.¹ As shown below, the applicants we admitted from the summer round who enrolled this fall tend to be older and have more work experience than our typical student (i.e., those from the spring round). A larger proportion of the summer admits are also students of color, suggesting that the availability of the online degree helped us to further diversify our student body without compromising on quality, though a smaller proportion are from outside of the United States. Summer matriculants also applied and qualified for financial aid at lower rates than spring matriculants, and on average, they received about \$2,000 less in need-based aid. We hypothesize that this is due to the higher incomes of summer admits and the fact that they were more likely to choose the part-time study option, which lowered the annual cost of attendance by spreading it over two years. In the appendix, I provide examples of summer matriculants to further illustrate the types of students we attracted once announcing the opportunity to complete the HGSE master’s degree online.

Comparing Spring versus Summer Matriculants, Fall 2020

	Spring Admits	Summer Admits
Total Enrolled (Headcount)	514	381
Part-Time	18%	57%
<i>Student Demographics and Location</i>		
Students of Color	34%	51%
Female Students	74%	65%
U.S. Citizens	65%	81%
From Massachusetts	21%	15%
<i>Financial Aid</i>		
Applied for Financial Aid	76%	67%
Qualified for Financial Aid	66%	50%
Mean Age	28	35
<i>Work Experience and Environment (at the time of application)</i>		
Mean Work Experience	4.1 years	10.4 years
K12 School	31.4%	40.3%
Higher Education	11.7%	10.8%
Non-profit	11.9%	15.1%
Media/Technology	4.2%	5.1%
Current Student	12.0%	0.3%

Data current as of September 21, 2020 (the Monday after the tuition refund deadline).

¹ During the summer admissions round, due to the truncated timeline and cancellation of GRE testing dates due to COVID, we did not require applicants to submit exam scores. As is growing practice among graduate schools, we instead emphasize transcripts, essays, and recommendations to assess students’ academic skills.

Our total enrollment for AY2020-21 is higher than usual. Due to the incredible response to our summer admissions round and the pool of high quality applicants, we elected to accept more students than the original plan of just maintaining our usual class size of about 640 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Additionally, the yield rate among summer admits was incredibly high at 93 percent. As a result, our total enrollment of master’s students for this year is 738.5 FTE. However, the headcount is much larger due to the fact that we decided to give students the option of applying to be part-time students with our online degree program, which is the predominate enrollment pattern of most online students nationally. As such, our total head count is 895. As discussed further below, delivering our program online has enabled us to serve a greater number of students with our current faculty and staff—thus, online education does offer the possibility of increasing our scale without sacrificing educational or student quality.

HGSE’S CAPACITY TO DELIVER A HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAM

HGSE’s Academic Innovations and Growth in the Online Realm

The creation of an online degree program builds on HGSE’s recent history of academic innovation and expansion. During the past decade, we have created the Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) and successfully launched the Ph.D. in Education joint with GSAS (sunsetting our Ed.D. program). Additionally, for Harvard College undergraduates, we created the Harvard Teacher Fellows Program, an innovative, practice-based model that prepares students to become innovative teachers in high-need schools, and the Secondary Field in Education Studies that enables undergraduates to engage in deep academic study of education as a field. Our most recent degree-program innovation is the new (residential) master’s degree program described earlier in this memo. In addition to our degree offerings, we have also greatly expanded our Programs in Professional Education (executive education), reaching over 12,000 educators each year pre-COVID with transformative adult learning opportunities—and providing the infrastructure and networks to reach thousands of educators already in the field. These accomplishments have given us the track-record, expertise, and reach to craft and deliver a pioneering new degree program.

We are also building on growing expertise and assets in the online space. Several years ago, HGSE created the Teaching and Learning Lab (TLL), which supports and develops innovative and effective approaches to teaching and learning at HGSE—and is the only center of its kind at an education school. Working with our faculty, the TLL provides a powerful engine to create the necessary ground-breaking learning experiences for an innovative new program. We have developed strength in online teaching through the creation of courses like *How People Learn* (HPL), one of the Foundations for the new, redesigned master’s program. The course uses all of the advantages of digital learning—videos and interactive multimedia tools as well as discussion platforms and periodic assessments—to provide our students with an understanding of key concepts in learning and human development and the ability to apply those concepts in educational settings. Students wrestle with complex issues in education by engaging in Field Studies embedded in the course, and they are able to personalize their pathways through the material based on their context of interest.

In addition to HPL, we have also invested in several other online courses, including several that are part of HarvardX: “*Leaders of Learning*,” “*Introduction to Family Engagement in Education*,” and “*Data Wise: A Collaborative Process to Improve Learning & Teaching*.” Joint with HBS, we have also developed three modules for the Certificate in School Management and Leadership (CSML), which seeks to improve the effectiveness of school leaders. Another example is the Certificate in Advanced Education Leadership (CAEL), which is based off of content from the Ed.L.D. Program and is designed to provide current and aspiring system-level leaders with the knowledge and tools to improve their leadership and effect meaningful systemic improvement. A third online program we offer is the Certificate in Early Education Leadership (CEEL), which is a job-embedded program that provides early education leaders with the skills needed to strengthen learning environments and foster quality improvement in early education settings.

With the pivot to remote education for AY2020-21, we also made serious investments over the summer of 2020 to increase our online offerings and the capacity of our faculty and staff to teach remotely. In terms of instructional supports, the TLL created a short course on online teaching that faculty could complete at their own pace. They also conducted live workshops and offered individual consultations and coaching as instructors worked to design our online curriculum for the year. We continue to have many professional development opportunities for faculty, including a brown bag series that has focused on topics such as: building community, humanizing pedagogy, active learning approaches in online synchronous sessions, and engaging the field while teaching online.

In addition to increasing the overall skill level of our faculty, during summer 2020, we also engaged in curriculum design for a year of online learning. We had to choose which courses to prioritize and focused on building assets that could address the needs and interests of most students. Overall, we developed over 280 courses for our virtual curriculum. Almost all of our traditionally-residential courses were redesigned or built from scratch for online delivery, including approximately 30 courses designed to easily accommodate a large number of students while still prioritizing community and relationships in their design. We also took advantage of the opportunity to create new content related to the current needs of the field (e.g., education leadership during a crisis). Finally, to help the students prepare for this different modality, we created an online success module, which was designed to support students for not only academic success but also wellbeing in HGSE’s online learning environment. We offered it as part of Orientation, and students can continue to refer back to for many of the supports available to them.

Lessons from Spring and Early Fall 2020

The last several months have also been a tremendous learning period for us. As we pivoted to remote education in spring 2020, we also actively gathered feedback and data on what was working well and what improvements we could make. In addition to surveys, we learned a great deal from conversations with students, including a focus group conducted on June 19, 2020. This enabled us to unearth highlights and challenges students shared about their HGSE experiences with online learning. Students highlighted positive aspects of their online experience, spotlighting particular faculty members, sharing they were able to attend events and make professional connections virtually that may not have been possible in-person, and noting

effective uses of small groups. However, they also noted that community was not the same in the online modality. Also challenging was differences in faculty skill and fatigue from long synchronous class sessions and back-to-back online class sessions. Many of these conclusions were also reflected in a report drafted by a group of students based on a survey they did with 104 respondents. That report encouraged more creative use of technology and emphasized the use of breakout groups on Zoom to have made a positive difference.

This early feedback—based on a near-instantaneous switch to remote education—helped us to focus our summer efforts. As described above, we created and offered numerous professional development opportunities to faculty. This year, we continue to collect and examine a wide variety of data and feedback on our current offerings, and the results suggest our summer preparation and investments have paid off handsomely. Early pulse survey data suggest nearly all course experiences have been “very positive” or “somewhat positive.” Among the things that appear to be working well: using breakout rooms for smaller group discussions; community building exercises; using collaborative documents for notes; and providing content asynchronously. We continue to address challenges such as managing technology during live sessions and working with shorter synchronous time blocks than faculty are accustomed to having.

To summarize, both faculty and students have overwhelmingly voice satisfaction—and even enthusiasm—for how well the year is going thus far. Still, many faculty are seeking regular feedback in mid-term evaluations. Moreover, HGSE will be launching a formal mid-year student survey in late November. We typically do this survey annually, but during this unusual year, we want to learn not only how courses are going but also how students feel about cohort and community activities, supports for wellness, and efforts to help in their professional growth. I expect this survey and subsequent focus groups to provide us with valuable and actionable information about our students’ experience as we make adjustments for the spring semester and any future online offerings.

VISION FOR THE ONLINE MASTER’S DEGREE FOR 2021-22

The tables below summarize our vision for the online master’s degree we propose to offer for AY2021-22. Building from our growing expertise and the potential pool of outstanding candidates that we uncovered during the summer admissions round, we propose to create a program that focuses on serving midcareer education professionals who have already demonstrated being on a leadership trajectory. The focus of the program would be on leadership, with the option of students specializing in one of three strands: PreK-12, higher education, and general educational sector leadership (e.g., nonprofit organizations, technology firms, entrepreneurial ventures, etc.). Students would enroll part-time for a 20-month program that would include two summers of study. And while we seek an exemption to the residency requirement, we are considering the possibility of students coming to campus for up to two weeks.

Program Overview

Target Audience	Midcareer (8-12 years of experience) Current employment; evidence of being on a leadership trajectory U.S.-based predominantly (implications for course offerings/timing)
Application Requirement	Applicants must hold a position in which they can implement what they are learning and practice leadership. Explicit employer endorsement would not be a requirement, although this is a useful signal of support for student learning. This approach to authentic application of program learning is a clear differentiator, as the program could be designed to give students an opportunity to use their own leadership roles as a practicum for experiential learning.
Course Model	8-week stackable modular courses in Fall, Spring, Summer (with possibility of 15-week course options) Feature learning experiences that take advantage of students’ significant career experience and their current leadership roles. Synchronous and asynchronous components We may also allow students to take a residential executive education offering through PPE with a related project or paper overseen by a faculty member for 2-4 credits Courses will be optimized for Eastern U.S. time (to minimize the impact on HGSE operations)
Program Strands	PreK-12 Leadership Higher Education Leadership Education-Sector Leadership (e.g., nonprofit organizations, technology firms, entrepreneurial ventures, etc.)
Enrollment Pattern	Part-time study (balanced with concurrent employment) Time to degree: 20 months (includes starting in the summer and attending during the middle summer)
Residential Component	Mostly online; 2 weeks of in-person residency for courses and cohort-building

The intended curriculum and academic experience for the online pilot degree program would focus on three kinds of courses.

- The Professional Core Experience, which incorporates the competency areas also found in our redesigned, residential master’s program: Learning and Human Development, Leading Change, Evidence, and Equity

- The Leadership Core, which focuses on deeper leadership- and systems-related course-taking connected to the student’s strand (i.e., preK-12, higher ed, education-sector leadership)
- Personalized Elective Pathway, which is a set of courses taken related to the students’ interests from a reduced set of online electives

Given we are still rapidly learning and increasing our expertise in online education and remote teaching, we do not have a definite target size for the online program during the pilot year. This will also depend on the quality of the applicant pool, which we hope will be as robust and large as the summer admissions round. Based on these uncertainties, the table below presents two possible scenarios for the pilot cohort size. We are shooting for a cohort size of 90, but I have also outline what a much smaller cohort of 30 might experience.

Target Size: Possible Scenarios

Feature	Small Pilot (30 cohort size)	Larger Pilot (90 cohort size)
Size Considerations	Initial pilot with a small “pioneer” group Lower faculty FTE and TF support needed	Based on lessons from AY2020-21, we can scale to 90 and still balance residential and online education without much difficulty due to gains from economies of scale Higher faculty FTE and TF support needed
Program size and groups	Group of 30 forms a program class with smaller project teams focused on the different strands	Group of up to 90 forms a program class, with groups of 15-20 students being the smallest unit of course-taking and community-building
Smaller focused professional cohorts	1 cohort for the program, with smaller pods for each strand (e.g., 10 student each)	6 “cohorts” of 15-20 students divided among the strands (e.g., 2 cohorts of preK-12, 2 cohorts of higher ed, 2 cohorts of education-sector leadership)
Requirements vs. electives	80% requirements; 20% student choice and personalization	60% requirements; 40% student choice and personalization
Required Courses	Taken as a group of 30	Taken with whole program (90) or strand-specific groups (e.g., the 40 preK-12 students together)
Seminars and Electives	Offered for the group or by strand	Groups of 15-20 for seminar-sized classes (e.g., 20 students from the preK-12 strand)

In terms of timeline, we would like to be able to announce this online opportunity in late fall 2020 to allow for sufficient time to collect applications. We also do not want to interfere with our admissions process for our residential program, and so we want to be able to clearly differentiate the residential versus online degree programs in our messaging and not have this

announcement cause confusion for prospective students who are already in the midst of an admissions process. We hope to make clear that the online program is distinct and for a different audience, so that applicants properly sort according to their experience levels, goals, and preferences.

Financially, we predict that the introduction of an online degree program will have a positive impact on our balance sheets. As we have already experienced this fall, we are able to serve more students using the online modality, which translates into greater tuition revenue even in the face of additional expenditures. (Our additional costs this year are far outweighed by the increase in tuition revenue we will receive.) Additionally, the online students we attracted over the summer were less likely to need financial aid and had lower levels of need, which would also suggest this will allow us to increase our revenues.

In the long run, we will need to determine the appropriate size of the residential degree program and the proposed online degree program. This will depend critically on student interest and quality (i.e., admissions indicators) as well as faculty capacity and teaching preferences. Over time, we will develop a better sense of the right mix and may need to engage in faculty hiring or other investments to properly be able to support both a residential and online master's degree.

APPENDIX: Summer Matriculant – Examples from their applications

Senior Program Officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

“In one generation, I, an undocumented child of immigrant parents who labored tirelessly in San Diego’s manufacturing plants, went from poverty to graduating from an elite public university and into directing and influencing policymaking at the highest levels of government....After over twenty years out of the educational system and in the workforce, I am ready to return to ‘school.’ At this critical juncture, I want to pursue an advanced degree in education in preparation for the next stage of my career to become an even more impactful change agent and to join those who seek to truly transform the educational system.”

CEO of an ed tech company in Kenya, Ghana, and Cote d’Ivoire that provides educational resources via basic mobile phones to millions of school children

“(W)e have demonstrated exponential growth in key numbers such as visitors and active users, and as questions have swirled about the value of remote learning versus in person learning, I have begun to grapple in earnest with the question of impact. How do we ensure that the learners using our platform not only consume lessons but actually achieve learning? I am gratified that you have taken the bold step of delivering learning fully online for this academic year, as it allows me an opportunity to study while still practicing in EdTech.”

Education Fellow, National Geographic Society

“The opportunity to access and network with some of the most accomplished education policy scholars in their fields while simultaneously supporting youth advocates in Kentucky to hold our newly appointed Commissioner of Education accountable is deeply motivating. The prospect of conducting cutting edge research on equitable school funding formulas while working with National Geographic to build an international network of youth-led movements is an opportunity almost beyond belief. And as a queer person of color who grew up in Kentucky feeling like he didn’t quite belong, the chance to develop as a leader alongside the nation’s brightest in education policy while having the space to continue to mentor dozens of young people who look or love like me would be a blessing.”