

FASTEST GROWING ONLINE MASTER'S DEGREE FIELDS

2020-2024 Enrollment Growth, Program Expansion, and Opportunity Signals

Published by OnlineMastersColleges.com | © 2026 OnlineMastersColleges.com. All Rights Reserved.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes enrollment growth, university program expansion, workforce demand, and market saturation across today's fastest-growing online master's degree fields. OMC compares growth signals with labor-market demand to distinguish durable opportunity from emerging saturation risk.

OMC RESEARCH FINDINGS

38%	Cybersecurity	Growth $\neq$ Outcomes
Enrollment Growth	Strongest Growth-to-Opportunity Profile	Fast growth alone is not enough
Data Science & Analytics led estimated enrollment growth from 2020-2024.	Rapid enrollment + program growth + persistent workforce shortages.	Demand, salary, and workforce shortages must keep pace with graduate supply.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

- **Data Science & Analytics:** ~38% enrollment growth, the highest among fields tracked.
- **Cybersecurity:** ~34% enrollment growth and 80+ estimated new programs, yet workforce demand still exceeds supply.
- **Public Health:** ~31% enrollment growth, but post-pandemic momentum is flattening and saturation risk is elevated.
- **Nursing:** ~25% growth with the largest estimated online enrollment in the table and persistent structural shortages.
- **Computer Science:** ~29% growth as state flagships and research universities expand online capacity.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Growth metrics: enrollment growth rate, program proliferation, and institutional adoption. **Primary sources:** NCES/IPEDS, institutional program announcements, BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook projections, and Lightcast employer-demand data. **Primary window:** 2020-2024.

IPEDS reporting carries a one- to two-year lag, newer specializations may be understated in CIP coding, and institutional program launches may not be fully captured until after launch. Growth rates are best interpreted as comparative market signals rather than exact real-time counts.

FASTEST GROWING ONLINE MASTER'S FIELDS BY ENROLLMENT

Field / Subject Area	Enrollment Growth	Est. Online Enrollment	Key Growth Driver
Data Science & Analytics	~38%	45,000+	Cross-industry demand for data literacy
Cybersecurity	~34%	38,000+	Federal cyber mandates + private-sector breaches
Public Health (MPH)	~31%	42,000+	Post-pandemic public health investment
Computer Science	~29%	55,000+	Tech hiring + flagship online expansion
Business Analytics	~28%	33,000+	Shift toward technical specialization
Nursing (MSN/NP)	~25%	68,000+	Chronic shortage + NP scope expansion
Social Work (MSW)	~22%	52,000+	Mental-health demand + Medicaid expansion
Healthcare Administration (MHA)	~20%	28,000+	Aging population + system complexity
Applied Behavior Analysis	~18%	12,000+	BCBA certification + autism services
Education Leadership	~15%	35,000+	Leadership pipeline rebuilding

Interpretation: enrollment momentum is not the same as quality or value. The key question is whether employer demand is growing as fast as graduate supply.

PROGRAM PROLIFERATION: WHERE UNIVERSITIES ARE INVESTING

Field	New Programs (est.)	Notable Universities Expanding	Saturation Signal
Cybersecurity	80+	Purdue, University of Arizona, WGU	Low
Data Science & Analytics	70+	Indiana University Online, Northeastern, Colorado State	Moderate
Public Health (MPH)	55+	University of Florida, Johns Hopkins	Elevated
Business Analytics	50+	Penn State World Campus, Arizona State	Moderate
Nursing (MSN/NP)	45+	University of Florida, Grand Canyon	Very Low
Social Work (MSW)	40+	UMGC, Southern New Hampshire University	Low
Healthcare Administration	35+	Liberty University, University of North Texas	Low-Moderate
Applied Behavior Analysis	30+	Florida International University	Moderate

WHAT'S DRIVING GROWTH

- 1. Structural technology demand:** Data science, cybersecurity, and computer science continue expanding as nearly every industry builds data, cloud, security, and AI capabilities.
- 2. Healthcare demographics:** Population aging and long-term provider shortages support continued growth in nursing and healthcare administration.
- 3. Licensure and behavioral health demand:** Mental-health parity, telehealth, and Medicaid expansion increase demand for master's-prepared clinicians.
- 4. Specialist credentials:** Business analytics is growing faster than general MBA enrollment as employers favor technical specialization.
- 5. Online delivery legitimacy:** Flagship universities have expanded fully online graduate offerings, raising employer and student acceptance of the format.

THE OMC GROWTH-TO-OPPORTUNITY FRAMEWORK

Dimension	What It Measures	Opportunity Signal	Saturation Signal
Enrollment growth rate	How fast students enter the field	Demand awareness rising	Graduate supply surging
Program proliferation rate	How fast universities launch programs	Institutions see sustainable demand	Market may be commodifying
Job posting growth rate	How fast employers are hiring	Employer demand is active	Demand may be peaking
Salary trajectory	Whether compensation rises, flattens, or falls	Employers competing for talent	Employer leverage increasing

Core principle: The strongest long-term opportunities appear when demand indicators - job postings, salaries, and workforce shortages - rise at least as fast as student enrollment and program supply.

OPPORTUNITY SIGNAL	CAUTION SIGNAL
Cybersecurity: ~34% enrollment growth, 80+ new programs, and a persistent national skills gap.	Public Health: rapid pandemic-era growth followed by slowing enrollment momentum and increasing program supply.
Nursing: enrollment and program supply continue to rise, but shortages remain structurally large.	Data Science: strong demand remains, but technical depth increasingly separates high-value programs from general analytics training.

EMERGING FIELDS TO WATCH

Field	Why It Matters
Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning	Standalone programs are separating from CS/data science as AI roles expand.
Health Informatics	Healthcare systems are investing in EHR, predictive analytics, and population health data.
Supply Chain Management & Logistics	Global supply complexity is creating demand for advanced operations talent.
Instructional Design & Learning Technology	Corporate learning and digital education continue expanding.
Climate & Sustainability Science	Federal investment and ESG reporting are creating new policy and data roles.

HOW TO USE THIS DATA

- Use growth rate as a filter, not a decision.
- Compare demand and graduate supply in the specific role or specialization you are targeting.
- Verify institutional and field-specific accreditation before enrolling.
- Compare program cost with realistic salary outcomes and employer demand.
- Prioritize alignment with your skills and career goals rather than chasing the fastest-growing field.

DECISION SUMMARY

OMC FINDING

The fastest-growing graduate field is not automatically the best graduate field. Long-term career success depends on how well employer demand, graduate supply, program quality, affordability, and individual career goals align.

SELECT FAQ HIGHLIGHTS

What are the fastest-growing online master's degree fields?

Data science and analytics (~38%), cybersecurity (~34%), and public health (~31%) lead the estimated 2020-2024 enrollment-growth ranking in this report.

Is a growing field always a good choice?

No. Growth can signal opportunity or oversupply. Compare job posting growth, salary trajectory, and program proliferation with student enrollment.

How can I spot saturation risk?

Watch for program and enrollment growth outpacing job postings, flattening real salaries, and employers raising experience requirements.

Which fields have the strongest job-market outlook?

Cybersecurity, nursing, and computer science show particularly strong structural demand signals in the report.

Are newer online master's programs lower quality?

Not necessarily. Evaluate accreditation, faculty depth, curriculum rigor, employer outcomes, and institutional expertise.

CITE THIS REPORT

Suggested citation: OnlineMastersColleges.com. (2026). *Fastest Growing Online Master's Degree Fields: Enrollment Growth, Program Expansion, and Opportunity Signals*. OnlineMastersColleges.com.

Canonical URL: <https://www.onlinemasterscolleges.com/fastest-growing-online-degree-fields/>

Media inquiries: contact@onlinemasterscolleges.com

Primary source families referenced in the page: NCES/IPEDS, BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Lightcast, institutional program announcements, Cyberseek, professional associations, and OMC analysis.