JumpStart Master’s Program Approach
Using Innovative Specializations To Grow New Degrees

The JumpStart Master’s program approach enables units to leverage existing master’s programs to test the market for a new degree as part of their innovative curriculum engine. This approach allows for swift responses to market needs and the exploration of innovative ideas. Keep in mind that the JumpStart Master’s program approach leverages existing curricular options and resources in your unit (e.g., courses, certificates, specializations). The first step in this approach is to pilot a specialization within an existing degree for a period of time (i.e., 2–3 years). Close monitoring of enrollment is key to determine the viability of these specializations. To assist you with this approach, we worked with ASU units (e.g., Law) to gather best practices and offer you the following planning and implementation considerations, plus an example.

1. Getting Started:
Scan Market Needs and Identify Existing Levers

a. A collaborative curriculum team from the academic unit (e.g., Law’s New Education Initiatives Team) collects ideas/options after faculty consultation, questioning job availability, peer trends, what makes sense for the college/school unit, resources and targeted markets. The unit will determine what specializations to proceed with during the upcoming year. Items that were on the list that didn’t get considered in the current year, would be reconsidered for the next academic year.

b. Ensure the chosen program has a flexible curriculum for specialization, which includes fewer core courses and more electives so one or more sets of courses can be utilized. Consider making adjustments if the selected program is not flexible.

c. Revisit admission requirements (e.g., standardized tests, employment history) to streamline the processes and reduce potential hurdles. This doesn’t mean admission requirements are watered down or reduced. Keep in mind that GPA and official transcripts are good indicators of who may be successful.

d. Consider launching several specialization options to have a better chance at success (not all great ideas will always work).

e. Identify relevant courses that are offered and are currently active in your unit that may be utilized in specialization offerings.

f. Identify and include relevant existing courses from other academic units that might be shared. Note that the units need to agree on course offerings before advertising selected coursework to ensure course availability to students.

g. Make sure you answer this question before launching: What is the confidence that you can recruit at least “Y” students in year one, and break even?

h. The graduate application can help track specialization(s) through the supplemental application. For instructions, please see the Graduate College supplemental application guide found at bit.ly/GCappguide

2. Obtain Faculty Buy-in and Secure Approval

a. Identify faculty that would be interested in participating in the new specialization(s). Keep in mind that non-tenure track faculty and graduate student participation might be needed for a fast launch.

b. If significant curriculum program changes (e.g., changes in core courses, addition of electives) are required, they should be made through the formal approval process. Please see the Graduate College program change form found at graduate.asu.edu/file/changes-program-requirements.

3. Identify Champions

a. The right administrator/faculty is needed to run the specialization. Keep the train moving by promoting faculty engagement and nurturing excitement for these initiatives.

b. Ensure ongoing internal communication. Inform your unit leaders, faculty and staff about the goals of this program, so nobody is surprised when new initiatives are announced and launched.

4. Rely on Digital Marketing

a. Rely on social media and email campaigns.

b. Conduct market research. Keep up with peer institutions, Google searches and professional opportunities. Don’t over-analyze.

5. Monitor Performance

a. Did you meet the goals for this initiative? Allow 2 to 3 years to assess next steps. You might need time to adjust your messaging. If successful, proceed with a new master’s program through the university approval process: graduate.asu.edu/graduate-curriculum-development

b. Formalize omnibus courses prior to advertising the new specialization. If evaluations are positive and enrollment goals are met within the year, omnibus courses need to move to the official permanent number course approval process.

c. The specialization(s) should be monitored by the collaborative curriculum team in the academic unit. Consider discontinuing the specialization if not successful after 2-3 years of enrollment. What did you learn? If goals were not met, consider tweaking the specialization design/focus or move on to the next initiative.

d. Try again, multiple opportunities are often needed before a program sticks.
1. Jobs
We searched Indeed.com and other job listing services (e.g., LinkedIn, Monster). There were tens of thousands of open jobs in this specialization nation-wide and almost two thousand in Arizona.

2. Trends
Many of the newly-launched one-year master’s degrees at our peer law schools have a compliance specialization. Some of the oldest and most successful also feature a compliance specialization. At the time of the analysis, it appeared that not having a compliance specialization made us an outlier.

3. Law School Fit
While compliance has many facets and practices, the idea of translating regulations into procedures, documenting, reporting, and ensuring laws are being followed is well within the scope of the skills taught at law schools. Thus, we needed to develop application-focused courses to help graduates hit the ground running.

We consider 12 credits to be the minimum necessary for a specialization under the MLS degree. Our discussions with experts (employers and potential professors) told us how many courses we needed to have to teach the requisite skills.

4. Resources
We were already developing the basic “compliance and ethics” course in an online format. Our professors for the course are well-connected professionally and offered to help identify potential faculty for the other courses, while also assisting with identifying the courses that would need to be created for the launch of a full specialization. In all, 12 courses were needed to create the specialization.

5. Target Markets
We identified three target markets: 1) new grads looking for a career; 2) mid-career professionals looking to pivot; and 3) compliance professionals looking to advance. All three of these are target markets we regularly market to for our master’s degrees. When combined with the reach of ASU Online’s marketing efforts, we were comfortable that we could reach enough people who will be interested in the new specialization.

Launch/Evaluation
We do a pre-launch wrap to make sure all of the courses we’re developing are ready to go or on track to be ready to go during the sessions we plan to offer them. Then, we watch course evaluations and ask questions of our students to make sure there aren't any significant gaps in content or experience. If the program is successful, then we may move to formalize a new concentration or major under the MLS, with established coursework where we already have a jump-start on curriculum.