The growth area in graduate education is in master’s degrees. The number of master’s degrees awarded in the United States has increased 41 percent over the last 25 years, while PhD degrees have increased only 19 percent. Psychology awards master’s degrees but only in a limited number of areas. The largest numbers of master’s awarded in areas of psychology in 1995-96 were in counseling psychology, clinical psychology, school psychology, and industrial/organizational psychology. Psychology ranks after business, education, engineering, public administration, social work, social science, and the health professions in the number of master’s degrees awarded.

Traditionally, in most areas within psychology, we have said the PhD is the entry degree, modeling this on clinical psychology. Perhaps it is time to reexamine the possibility of terminal master’s degrees in all areas of psychology. Many undergraduates enter universities with considerable advanced placement education and other college level work, which transfers to universities or colleges and gives them advanced standing. This makes it possible for undergraduates to obtain both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in the same number of years it used to take to obtain a bachelor’s degree.

Many universities have taken advantage of this to offer fast-track bachelor’s/master’s degree combinations. The lack of terminal master’s degree offerings in psychology interferes with our ability to participate in these programs.

Our field interacts and overlaps with many other fields in the social and biological sciences. Many graduate students in other fields would benefit from graduate education in psychology. Offering master’s level training or certificates in certain areas of psychology would increase the ability of those in other disciplines to interact fruitfully with us.

Executive education and distance education opportunities have increased at all universities. This is a growth business, and other degree providers have entered the market. Many working individuals would be interested in, and benefit from, learning some psychology. Offering master’s degrees via these nontraditional modes would open our field to more people and allow them to use that knowledge in their fields.

Psychology continues to expand at the undergraduate level, reflecting the strong interest people have in our field and the relevance of our field to their lives and to many other fields of endeavor. Bachelor’s degrees in psychology represented 6.29 percent of the total number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in 1995-96, up from 5.4 percent in 1975. In absolute numbers, the increase was from 50,278 bachelor’s degrees to 73,291.

At the master’s level, we awarded only 3 percent of the degrees in 1995-96, unchanged from the 1975
level in percentage terms, although the absolute number of master’s degrees awarded did increase from 10,167 to 13,792.

Certificates in psychology are virtually unknown, but they are increasingly common in other disciplines. Universities award these certificates upon completion of a certain number of graduate courses in a content area, documenting that the recipient has knowledge of that area.

All areas of psychology have much to offer at the graduate level. Providing master’s degrees and graduate level certificates would provide graduate level education in psychology to many who now have no access to this information.