

ADMINISTRATION

# Students Want Faster Degrees. Colleges Are Responding.



AJ Mast for the The Chronicle

Josh Boyd (left), director of undergraduate studies at Purdue U.'s communications school, helped start the three-year track for students like J.D. Arland, a first-year who is one of 32 students at the university planning to graduate in three years.

*By Julian Wyllie* APRIL 01, 2018 [PREMIUM](#)

In 2011, in the aftermath of the great recession, Phil T. Neisser was looking for a

way to decrease the cost of a college education. Then associate dean of arts and sciences at the State University of New York at Potsdam, he'd heard students, parents, and administrators complain that it takes too long for many students to graduate. So, thought Neisser, who is now coordinator of professional development, why not build a program that gets students in and out faster, saving time and money?

Under his watch, the School of Arts and Sciences built a number of three-year bachelor's tracks that would let ambitious students jump in and take 18 credit hours a semester. They'd have perks, including priority registration and a special adviser to help manage the workload.



## [4 Years for a Bachelor's? Who's Got the Time?](#)

Colleges are increasingly offering three-year B.A.s and other accelerated programs in response to a growing market of money-conscious go-getters and career changers.

- [Colleges Enter Competition With Coding Boot Camps](#) PREMIUM
- [Nearly a Fifth of One University's Students Are on the 3-Year Track](#) PREMIUM

- [An Efficient Education? Sure. As Long as It's Good, Too.](#)

But the program was not widely marketed, and, in seven years, not a single student at Potsdam, a public university with nearly 3,500 undergraduates, has taken advantage of the official three-year track. Neisser says that Potsdam administrators will consider the role of the program and how to advertise it but that nothing specific is planned.

Compare that with Purdue University, in West Lafayette, Ind., which has aggressively marketed its "Degree in 3" program introduced last year. Purdue, widely known for its STEM programs, has used the option to try to attract a wider range of students, especially since the College of Liberal Arts has seen enrollment decrease from about 4,300 in 2011 to 2,500 now.

One student taking advantage of the opportunity is J.D. Arland, a first-year communications major in the Brian Lamb School of Communication who is set to graduate in May 2020.

Arland says he first became aware of the program because the university sent him packets about it when he was applying for college. A native Hoosier, he also remembers seeing Degree in 3 ads in Boilermaker gold on the football stadium Jumbotron when he visited the campus.

After that, the decision was easy. He's a legacy and more than a dozen members of his family are Purdue alumni. Plus, he didn't find any other accelerated degree tracks that looked as good.

Purdue's president, Mitch Daniels, sparked the effort when he challenged different departments to build a three-year track, says Josh Boyd, director of undergraduate studies for the Lamb School. Boyd says he had already been speaking to his colleagues about designing a three-year track for students who had not necessarily accrued college credits through Advanced Placement or similar work.

He says he knew from the start that the program would not be a good fit for everyone. It would serve students who knew what they wanted to do right out of high school and those who could handle the challenge of completing their 120 credits in eight semesters, including summers.

Boyd and the Lamb School won the president's challenge and used the \$500,000 winnings to advertise the program and recruit students. "We upped our game," he says. Faculty called admitted students who had already expressed interest in the Lamb School but may not have known about Degree in 3. They also created direct mailings, like the ones Arland got, and earmarked some scholarships to help students pay for summer expenses.

"This year, for example, we actually only had three students apply, go figure, and so all of them got \$2,000 scholarships for the summer," he says. In total, there are about 32 students at Purdue doing the three-year track in one liberal-arts college or another, and about half, like Arland, are in communications.

**P**art of the appeal of three-year programs is savings. At Purdue, Boyd estimates

that a student from outside the state or out of the country could save nearly \$20,000. Even with lower tuition for Indiana residents, the [savings](#) are around \$9,000, he says.

But for years, students have cobbled together informal three-year degrees without special advisers or advertising campaigns. So what is the point of selling an official accelerated degree?

For starters, it's a ready-made, visible option that might catch the eye of a student's family, says Kalman A. Chany, founder and president of Campus Consultants, a financial-aid advising company in New York. Especially for households with multiple young adults set to graduate around the same time, he says, a program like this speaks to parents and their checkbooks.

Bryan D. Caplan, a professor of economics at George Mason University, agrees.

"As long as the university doesn't mess up the reputation of the brand, then I think it's going to be a very good deal for students who are willing to work harder," says Caplan, an [outspoken skeptic](#) of the value of traditional four-year college educations.

"If you can figure out a way to get people over that finish line earlier, then you're golden."

Part of the appeal of three-year programs is savings. At Purdue, a student from outside the state or out of the country could save nearly \$20,000.

But money is not the only reason that a student might be attracted to accelerated learning opportunities. Anna L. Diatlovich, a second-year law and society major, says she chose Purdue because she had both Advanced Placement credits and Advanced College Project credits from high school, so she doesn't have to take summer courses to stay on the three-year schedule. She learned about Degree in 3 after she had planned out her course track by herself using MyPurduePlan, an online course-scheduling system, as a first-year student last year. Since she came to Purdue before Degree in 3 was advertised, she didn't switch into the program until an adviser notified her about it.

"It is a little overwhelming," she says. "But I feel like it's a good opportunity to get into the workplace faster. I've also heard of people who may do Degree in 3 to take a gap year after graduation before they start their jobs."

**S**ome students with clear career interests want to finish their bachelor's quickly

because they want to move on as soon as possible to the next phase of their educations. American University, Drexel University, Georgia State University, Hartwick College, Idaho State University, Kent State University, Seton Hill University, and the University of Southern California are among institutions eager to provide such options.

Georgia State, through its Honors College, has a six-year track that combines a bachelor's and a law degree, say Wendy F. Hensel and Larry Berman, deans of the College of Law and the Honors College, respectively. There are two students on that track: Mariam M. Slaibi and KayLynne E. Kratzer.

Slaibi is officially a fourth-year student because of her financial-aid package, but for all intents and purposes she's a first-year law student with the course schedule to prove it. The program appealed to her because she wanted to stay in Atlanta and work in public affairs. "Me? In corporate law? No way," she says.

Like Slaibi, Kratzer says she's been able to use the accelerated degree track as a talking point with prospective employers, who she says are often impressed by the program. Kratzer has even accelerated her accelerated schedule — she plans to finish in five years.

Idaho State and Kent State have accelerated tracks leading to a bachelor's in nursing that are especially popular for career-switchers. Those who already have a bachelor's in another subject can complete the nursing B.A. in 15 to 18 months.

Anthony Jackson, who graduated with a degree in business administration from Cleveland State University in 2001, played professional basketball for years in France, Mexico, and in the National Basketball Association's developmental league, now called the G League. When he came back to the States, he finished the Kent State accelerated nursing program in 2013.

Jackson says his interest in nursing increased after the deaths of two siblings. His 16-year-old brother was shot in the chest. And his sister had a blood-clot condition and died at 26. In both situations, Jackson says, he saw a lack of urgency by health-care officials when his siblings arrived at the emergency room. He says he would "never let that happen" on his watch, and the experiences fueled his desire to be an empathetic and effective nurse.

Jackson is now looking to get his M.B.A., become a nurse practitioner, teach in higher education, and then climb the ranks of hospital administration. As much as he loved basketball, he says, his current career path is "a lot more fulfilling."

“Students so far who have taken on the three years are very organized and assertive. They're doing what they want to do.”

Alexandra Bryan, who will graduate from Kent State’s accelerated nursing program this May, had spent time at Ohio State University for prepharmacy and at the University of Akron for exercise science. The accelerated degree track suits her because she will be completing the program in about 15 months, and as a mother she didn’t want to spend more time in college than necessary. She’s always been interested in health, but after dealing with a high-risk pregnancy with her twins, she was inspired to study nursing because she saw the impact her nurses had on her.

Chin Kim, at Idaho State, studied art and was a substitute teacher. He discovered the nursing program through word of mouth. He qualified because he had a previous bachelor’s degree, and it’s given him a new opportunity that he hadn’t considered before.

**C**olleges are eager to satisfy this cost-conscious, impatient, and career-minded

market. David A. Reingold, dean of Purdue’s College of Liberal Arts, says he has an unofficial goal of increasing enrollment for Degree in 3 to around 10 percent.

"Eighty-six percent of students who started in the fall are in a major that has a three-year option," he says. "It doesn’t mean 86 percent are going to do it, but it’s at least an option." Students will have access to their four-year financial-aid packages for the three-year plans, he says, "so nobody leaves any money on the table."

Josh Boyd, the communication-school director, says some students still have expressed apprehensions. "The main concern I’ve heard is that, ‘You know, college is

about more than classes, and if you speed it up it might make it more difficult to study abroad, to do internships, to be a part of student organizations.' I understand that argument," he says.

"At the same time, I have not witnessed those kinds of problems in our three-year students. This is not surprising, but the students so far who have taken on the three years are very organized and assertive. They're doing what they want to do."

He cites Gabby Gary, a mass-communication major doing the three-year program at the Lamb School. In addition to being a full-time student, she owns and runs an upscale clothing boutique, with two brick-and-mortar locations and 10 employees.

Gary, who is set to graduate this May, came to Purdue with a semester's worth of Advanced Placement credits. Knowing that her mother graduated in three years from Tulane University, she inquired and found out about Degree in 3.

Gary currently splits her time between coursework, the Dawson & Daisy Boutique, and as a student manager for the men's basketball team, for which her father, Greg Gary, is an assistant coach. Also, she says, her mother owns a law firm, "so I think that was inspiring to me because she was able to have five kids and also be an incredible businesswoman."

After graduation, Gary will potentially open up a new store or focus more on the online shop. Although she's happy that her liberal-arts courses have helped her better market her company and advertise on social media, she's excited for her next chapter.

"Did I choose the three-year degree because of the boutique? No. But has it worked out wonderfully? Yes," Gary says. "The boutique is getting to the point where it's getting bigger and I need to be there more."

*This article is part of:*

[4 Years for a Bachelor's? Who's Got the Time?](#)

*A version of this article appeared in the [April 6, 2018 issue](#).*

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# Colleges Enter Competition With Coding Boot Camps

By Julian Wylie APRIL 01, 2018 PREMIUM

Whatever their undergraduate fields, résumé polishers and career

switchers are finding that just about every industry needs coders. Private specialized outfits have dominated the market for coding boot camps, but colleges are aggressively getting into the game.

At the University of Central Florida, a 12-week full-time or 24-week part-time boot camp is offered through a partnership with Trilogy Education Services, says Todd Freece, director of the university's division of continuing education. Similar programs with Trilogy are offered at the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Texas at Austin, and about 30 other colleges in North America, says Dan Sommer, the company's president and chief executive.

Prices range from about \$8,000 to \$10,000, depending on the institution and boot camps offered, the programs' length, and whether they are online or in person. For example, George Washington University, catering to Washington's federal, defense, and association employers, works with Trilogy to offer a cybersecurity boot camp.

Northeastern and Case Western Reserve Universities offer boot camps at costs comparable to those of colleges that partner up. At Case Western, the program costs \$9,500 for its 24-week part-time offering, and students can take out loans through the university or arrange a payment plan, says Brian Amkraut, executive director of the Siegal lifelong-learning program. At Northeastern, most of the boot camps cost just

under \$8,000 for both full-time and part-time sessions, says Chris Mallett, vice president for online experiential learning.

Tom Renicker, a graduate of the Case Western boot camp who now works as an application developer and teaching assistant in the program there, previously attended Cleveland State University and graduated with a biology degree in 2014. He says his interest in gaming led him to computing, especially after he became increasingly frustrated with the job market. "There's this thing," he says, "where you need a job to get the experience, but you need the experience to get the job."

Freece, of Central Florida, says boot camps are a way out of that career netherworld.

Timothy Hayes was a 2013 graduate of Temple University who earned a bachelor's degree in natural sciences and chemistry. He moved to Orlando, Fla., and worked as a restaurant manager, bartender, and server. "Before I knew it, I woke up and two years had gone by," he says. "I was mentally finished with that career. The hours stink, I was frustrated with where I was, so I decided I needed serious change."

His affinity for science and math drew him to Central Florida's 12-week boot camp. Six weeks after finishing, he found work as a junior software engineer at FanHero, which helps develop apps to make money from fans. He also works part time for, guess who: Trilogy Education Services — as a senior tutor.

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# Nearly a Fifth of One University's Students Are on the 3-Year Track

By Julian Wyllie APRIL 01, 2018 PREMIUM

**A**t Lynn University, in Boca Raton, Fla., three-year programs are not an

exotic rarity but a popular staple. Nearly 20 percent of the students are enrolled in them, according to the college's most recent study.

The only majors without three-year options are music and education, says Kevin M. Ross, Lynn's president, and that's because of conservatory requirements for the former and state teaching certifications for the latter. Otherwise, 406 out of some 2,200 undergraduates were on the three-year track in 2016, the latest year for which data are available.

The program began less than a decade ago with just 27 students in its pilot phase.

When it was introduced, in 2009, the three-year program required a higher grade-point average to qualify, Ross says. The idea was that only students with higher marks in high school could handle the heavier workload. After some internal studies, however, the GPA requirement was lowered from 3.0 to 2.8.

"GPA mattered, but it's not the only thing," says Ross. "We didn't want to have that conversation with someone and say, 'We can save you a lot of time and money and give you value, but you can't do that because you don't have this GPA.'"

"It's like saying someone's standardized-test score would be the only thing that would predict how well you'll do."

Gregg Cox, vice president for academic affairs, says Lynn students in the three-year program tend to have higher grades than required anyway.

The program pleases both students and faculty members — students because they're getting a more economical education, and professors because they're getting more-eager students.

"As the program has grown, faculty tell me constantly that these are some of their best students," Cox says. "At the end of the day, when you're teaching, one of the most important factors to a student's success is motivation. If a student is highly motivated, faculty members can work wonders."

Ross says Lynn continuously tracks how the program does in relation to traditional four-year tracks. The university is particularly interested in learning if fast-track students fare better in postgraduate opportunities.

A recent study that measured the program's first five years found that 62 percent of students completed it within three years, and 75 percent completed it in four.

Preliminary data from a survey distributed to students now in the three-year program found that 86 percent said the three-year track had influenced their decision to enroll at Lynn. Forty-three percent said they had enrolled for cost savings, 40 percent to complete their degrees faster, and 10 percent for the academic rigor. The rest cited other reasons.

Even if students start the three-year cycle and change their minds, the program will be considered successful, Ross says, because those students will very likely get their degrees within four years. There are also "3 +1" bachelor's and master's degrees at Lynn, and "3+3" bachelor's and law degrees.

### ‘My Parents Were Very Grateful’

Also popular is Lynn's three-year degree in partnership with the Watson Institute, in Boulder, Colo. Eric Glustrom, Watson's chief executive and founder, describes it as a social-entrepreneurship incubator geared to students who eschew the standard higher-education format.

One of those students, Tessa Zimmerman, went on to found [Asset Education](#), a nonprofit group that assists high-school teachers in helping students with anxiety-related disorders. She was the first graduate of the Lynn-Watson accelerated-degree track, in 2016, earning her bachelor's through Lynn.

Zimmerman says she's glad she got both sets of experiences. At Watson she could immediately focus on starting her project, while at Lynn, through online courses, she gained skills in grant writing and investment theory that help her in her career.

"I liked the three-year degree because I wanted to run this nonprofit right out of school," she says. "The cost, too. I would say my parents were very grateful."

Another student, Michael Hentschel, plans to graduate in May 2019. Right out of high school, he worked in a facility that manufactured nuclear fuel for shipment to reactor sites and learned there what he *didn't* want to do with the rest of his life.

As his dissatisfaction grew, he and two friends became interested in nonprofit ideas, and in 2014 traveled to Sri Lanka for a conference on how to use sports to bridge racial and social gaps.

When he returned, he attended a community college back home in Columbia, S.C. He thought he needed a degree to be taken seriously to start a venture, but he wasn't happy there.

He considered some colleges in the Midwest, he says, but "was really dreading going to a four-year institution. I didn't feel like they had a whole lot of interest in me being successful. It felt very transactional, as if you get in, go there, pay money, and leave."

He Googled around and found Watson. While earning credits toward an accelerated degree, he's been working on his project, [Share One Love](#), a nonprofit group that works with young people in schools and juvenile-detention centers by engaging them in structured sports.

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