

Drexel's enrollment on target for second Sacramento term

Philadelphia university working to carve out a niche with programs not offered at other local schools

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kelly Johnson](#) Staff writer

When [Drexel University](#)'s Center for Graduate Studies opened 10 months ago, it had a formidable challenge: no name recognition in Sacramento.

But the Drexel center has started the fall term with 124 new students to add to the 50 initial students from January. Enrollment is right on target, if not a little better than Drexel officials anticipated as the school quickly adjusts its offerings to better fit the region's needs.

In September, the Drexel center doubled the number of master's degree programs it offers to eight, and started its first doctorate program, in educational leadership and management. The latter has attracted 20 students, which was "much larger than expected," said Carl "Tobey" Oxholm III, the center's dean.

The program will accept another cohort of doctoral candidates in March.

The doctorate program and a master's program in public health were selected because such programs weren't offered locally, Oxholm said.

Drexel decided to offer the public health degree partly on the advice of local public health directors, including Richard Burton, Placer County's health officer and director of the [Department of Health and Human Services](#).

Drexel's Sacramento center is introducing the public health degree at a time "when there has never been a greater need for public health professionals to inform public health policy and practice," he said, adding that Drexel's School of Public Health is one of the best in the country.

Drexel's biggest challenge to growing enrollment is a lack of brand awareness. From a phone survey in January, Drexel learned, "Nobody had heard of Drexel University," Oxholm said.

If they're not familiar with an institution, it's difficult to convince prospective students to plunk down \$30,000 to \$40,000 and invest a couple years.

Katrina Salazar, an accounting consultant to small businesses, is one of Drexel's new 124 students. The Vineyard-area resident has always wanted to get her master's in business administration, but other institutions didn't offer the flexibility and innovation she wanted as a working professional. With a husband and two elementary-school-age kids, she was attracted to Drexel's program of weeknights instead of weekends.

Reputation also was important to Salazar. Even though Drexel is new to Sacramento, she had no doubts about the university's track record and talent pool given its 118-year history.

"My professors fly out for my classes," she said.



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Sal Falletta, left, teaches Human Resource Development, a new class at Drexel University's Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento.

Salazar, who teaches introductory accounting at [Cosumnes River College](#), also was impressed by Drexel's investment in technology locally, which includes video conferencing and smart boards.

"They will quickly become a key player" in the Sacramento education market, Salazar said.

Sanjay Varshney, dean of the College of Business Administration at [California State University Sacramento](#), isn't convinced.

With 175 students so far, Drexel isn't making a visible impact on the region's business community or economy, he said.

"They're not a brand name on the West Coast," and that's going to continue to be an obstacle, Varshney said.

Drexel is going up against Sacramento State and the [University of California Davis](#) — state-supported market leaders that are reasonably priced, have a wide range of programs and have word-of-mouth referrals from all the alums in the region, he said.

Drexel provides the flexible schedule desired by working professionals. But [University of Phoenix](#), which has a strong local presence, already does "a spectacular job in that segment," Varshney said.

Not everything has gone as planned for Drexel.

Two programs were put off until September 2010 — a master's in engineering management, which wasn't getting enrollment traction given the construction industry's slump, and a master's in the science of instruction, which failed to attract sufficient interest given layoffs of elementary through high school teachers.

Among its newest students, Drexel has fewer unemployed students than Oxholm expected. The Sacramento center offered tuition at half price for people who had been laid off — until they find a job. Only 7 percent to 8 percent of students are paying the discounted fee, Oxholm said.

And only eight military veterans took Drexel up on an offer for free tuition.

The Drexel center's new students are a diverse group, Oxholm said. Of the 114 students for which Drexel has ethnic data, half are minorities. Students range in age from 22 to 68. A few are right out of college, and at the other side of the spectrum, some want to change careers instead of retiring. The average age is 36. Almost 20 of the students have done some prior graduate work. And the male-female ratio is close, with women at 55 percent.

[Drexel University Center for Graduate Studies](#)

- **Opened:** January
- **Location:** 1 Capitol Mall, Sacramento
- **Students:** About 175
- **New degrees:** Master's in public health, doctorate in educational leadership and management
- **Typical length of degree program:** Two years
- **Web:** sacramento.drexel.edu