Boise State University, Now a Carnegie Doctoral Research University

In less than four years, Boise State has launched doctoral programs in biomolecular sciences, materials science and engineering, educational technology, and public policy and administration — all in concert with industry and state partners. In February, a new Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution and Behavior was approved by the State Board of Education.

The university reached another milestone in February — it was officially classified a doctoral research institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

“This designation marks a significant transformation of Boise State’s graduate and research efforts, but equally or even more important is how these improvements serve our first mission — to provide a signature undergraduate education to students from around Idaho and beyond,” said President Bob Kustra.

As a result of tremendous growth in graduate programs, in 2015 Boise State awarded more Ph.D.s than any other Idaho university. And Boise State’s evolving research mission and its longstanding teaching mission go hand-in-hand, added Mark Rudin, Boise State’s vice president for research and economic development.

“The foundation was built by great faculty and great students,” he said. “The role that our students played in building this research enterprise can’t be overstated. From our undergraduates to our growing number of master’s students and Ph.D. candidates — we couldn’t have done it without them.”

In his first university-wide address in August 2003, President Kustra challenged the Boise State campus to set its sights on becoming a metropolitan research university of distinction. “To achieve this goal, we must be collaborative, entrepreneurial and competitive,” he said.

The Carnegie designation is the third major milestone the university has reached this academic year. In August, Boise State reached its goal — two years earlier than planned — in boosting graduates in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math. In October, Boise State and the Micron Foundation announced the largest philanthropic donation in the university’s more than 80-year history: a $25 million gift that will help build a new Center for Materials Research on campus.

The doctoral programs are directly translating into a new level of expertise for the state and region, and the Carnegie doctoral classification means a great deal for Boise State’s future. It will help researchers secure more funding from agencies like the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health, and it will draw potential students to Boise State with the numerous doors it opens for our students and faculty.
Graduate dean Jack Pelton will return to teaching and research in the geosciences this summer, and the university will search for a new dean. Pelton has enjoyed a 35-year career at Boise State. He offers this perspective on Boise State’s path to becoming a Carnegie doctoral research university.

**Q. WHAT WAS BOISE STATE LIKE IN 1971 WHEN THE FIRST GRADUATE PROGRAMS STARTED?**

**A.** We had recently transitioned from Boise College to Boise State College, becoming part of the Idaho higher education system. There were quite a few new buildings on campus, including Barnes Towers, the Student Union, and the old business building (now Riverfront Hall).

The focus was almost completely on undergraduate instruction and costs were low, with students paying resident fees of $165 per semester. The graduate effort officially launched in the summer of 1971, when 183 students enrolled in the first two graduate programs, the MBA program in the School of Business, and the Master of Arts in Elementary Education program in the School of Education. The College of Business and Economics and the College of Education remain major producers of graduate degrees at Boise State.

**Q. WHEN DID OUR GRADUATE PROGRAMS REALLY TAKE OFF?**

**A.** There have been three distinct eras of graduate growth at Boise State.

Our breadth at the master’s level increased steadily from 1971-1991, growing from 2 to 22 master’s programs, with a fall 1991 enrollment of 781 students.

We continued to develop as a comprehensive master’s institution from 1991-2003, growing to 60 master’s programs, and also starting our first MFA and doctoral programs; the fall 2003 enrollment totaled 1,502 students.

We matured considerably at all graduate levels starting in 2003, and currently offer 85 master’s programs, 2 Ed.D. and 7 Ph.D. programs, and our first clinical doctorate, the Doctor of Nursing Practice; the fall 2015 enrollment stood at 2,429 students, and we awarded 716 graduate degrees in the 2014-15 academic cycle.

**Q. HOW HAS BOISE STATE’S GROWTH AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL COMPARED WITH OTHER UNIVERSITIES?**

**A.** Boise State has grown very rapidly as a graduate university since 2000, no matter what metric, university category, or time interval is chosen for comparison. For example, our degree-seeking graduate enrollment grew at an average annual rate of 4.7 percent from 2009-2014 (the most recent Carnegie census period), compared with 0.2 percent for all U.S. public universities, and -0.2 percent for all U.S. universities (combined public and private).

**Q. HOW DOES BOISE STATE DECIDE WHICH DOCTORAL PROGRAMS TO ADD?**

**A.** The university considers the needs of the community, the strengths of the faculty, the availability of funding, and the employability of graduates before adding any graduate program. Doctoral programs undergo especially intense scrutiny because they are very high profile national assets that are expected to produce new knowledge and address difficult problems of broad importance.

**Q. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMMING LOOK LIKE AT BOISE STATE?**

**A.** The stage is set for three major developments in the coming decade: steady and very significant growth in enrollment in professional master’s programs offered with the assistance of eCampus; a renewed appreciation of our thesis-based master’s programs as major contributors to the university research profile; and an increase in average annual doctoral degree productivity to at least 50 degrees per year.