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Florida universities may offer new professional science master's degree

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Florida's universities are primed to offer a new type of degree program designed to dovetail with the high-tech sector of the job market.

Called a professional science master's degree, it is one of the fastest growing programs in higher education. Some 60 universities in 25 states already offer PSM degrees.

The Florida Council of Graduate Deans met today in Tallahassee with representatives of the Board of Governors, the governor's office and perhaps most importantly, a handful of industry leaders in the state in an attempt to develop PSM programs at all 11 schools in the State University System.

There didn't appear to be any opposition to the initiative, which could begin to take shape at Florida State University soon. FSU already offers master's degrees in financial mathematics and computational science, and may apply for the formal designation to call them PSMs, said Nancy Marcus, dean of the Graduate School.

"It's a recruiting tool in a way to be officially designated," Marcus said. "We want to develop additional master's degree programs, particularly in health-care technology."

Fiona Crawford, associate director of the Roskamp Institute in Sarasota, said there's a genuine need for graduates with master's degrees. Roskamp is a growing basic science institute.

"Too often we're finding that Ph.D. graduates are far from ready to face the real world," Crawford said. "This would provide skill training with a focus, which we would welcome."

The national Council of Graduate Schools strongly supports Florida's efforts to develop a statewide PSM program, according to Carol Lynch, a program director at the council. She noted that the federal stimulus package provided \$15 million for PSM programs.
