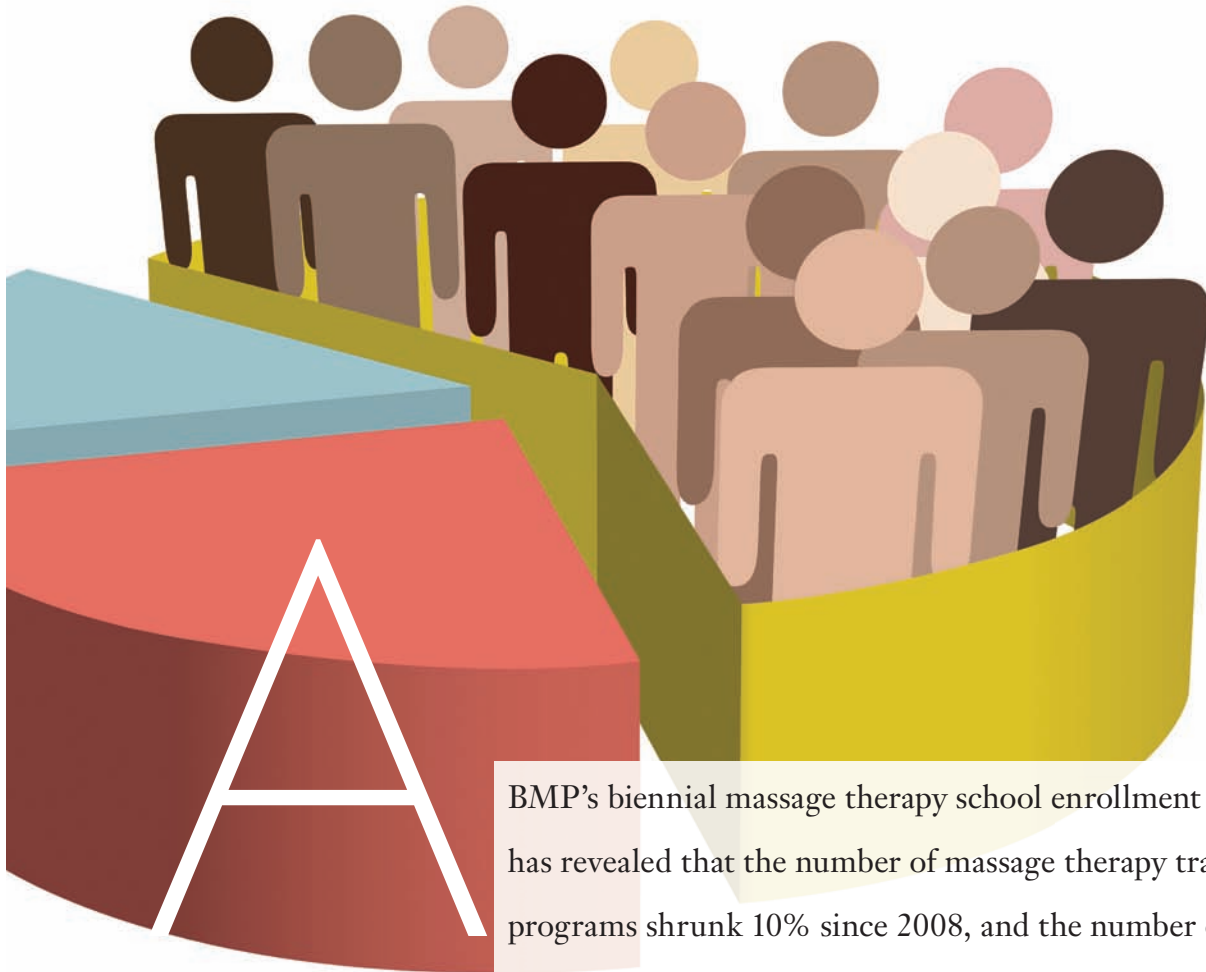


The Shrinking Pie

Massage therapy education universe contracts during recession



BMP's biennial massage therapy school enrollment census has revealed that the number of massage therapy training programs shrunk 10% since 2008, and the number of graduates from those programs decreased 11%.

Since 1999, ABMP has contacted every massage and bodywork program in its database every two years to gauge the enrollment health of the school universe. Programs were contacted via e-mail and telephone in January and February to secure participation with multiple attempts at contact made to each school; the 2011 census included answers from 75% of recognized massage programs in the U.S. Enrollment estimates for the remainder of programs were constructed based on prior participation, program type, and trend data from the programs that did respond.

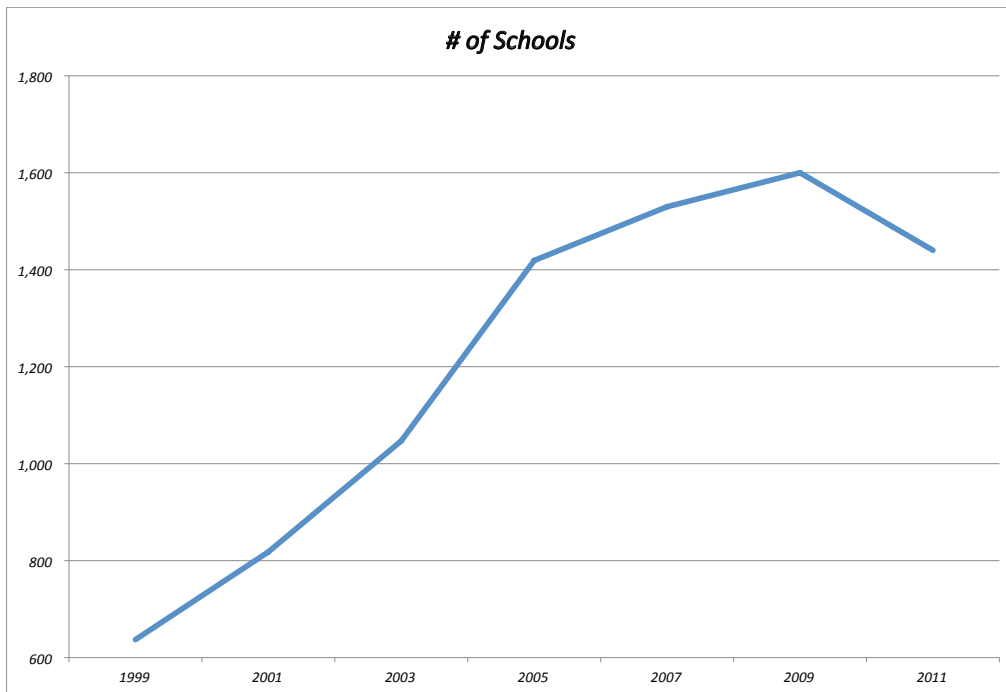
Each program contacted is asked three questions:

1. How many students are enrolled in your primary training program?
2. Is that number up, down, or about the same as a year ago?
3. How many people graduated from that program in 2010?

PROGRAMS

One result of the census exercise is a refined list of programs in operation; the number of entities offering programs decreased from 1,600 in 2009 to 1,440 today. This represents the first decline in the number of massage therapy programs in the period ABMP has been performing the census.

In order to better analyze the results, ABMP organizes schools into 5 different categories, as defined below:



Career Training Institution—Multi-program institutions offering many career training programs in addition to massage therapy (typically medical and dental assisting, medical record-keeping, etc.), nearly all accredited by U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting programs, either privately-held or publicly-traded.

College—Massage program offered at state-run community or technical college. Institution is regionally accredited.

Corporate Massage School—Institutions offering massage therapy and spa programs, typically multi-campus, multi-state. Nearly all accredited by U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting programs. Each campus is counted as a distinct program.

Proprietary—Institutions offering massage therapy (and sometimes also spa) programs, typically single campus, single owner.

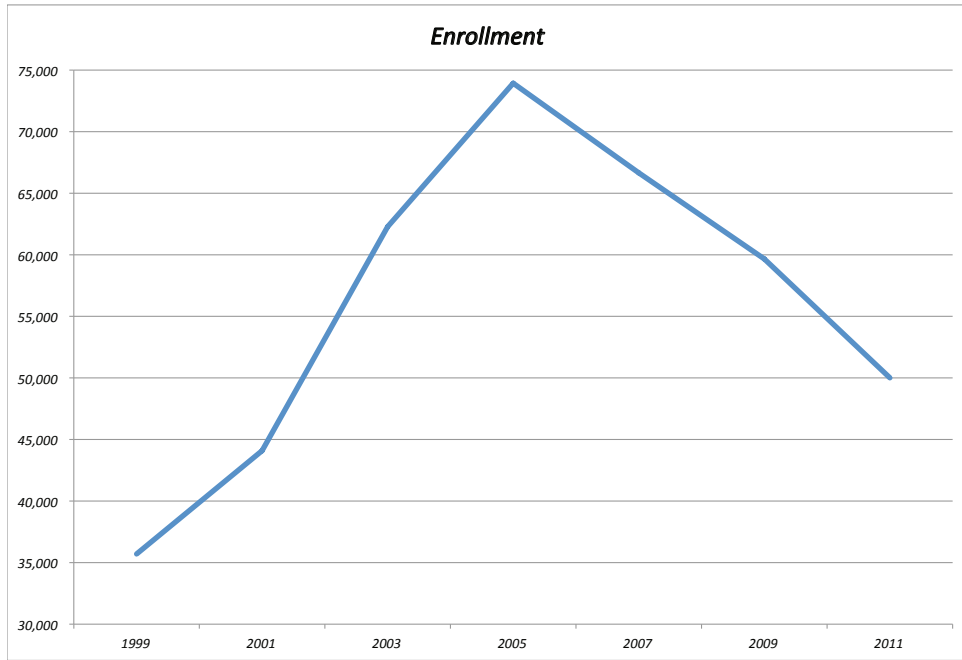
Public School— Massage program offered at an institution that is part of the local public school system. Institution is regionally accredited.

Type of program	Number of programs, 2011
Career Training Institution	407
College	200
Corporate Massage School	62
Proprietary	750
Public School	21
	1,440

The number of career training institutions declined 8% since 2008, while the number of Proprietary schools declined almost 11% during the period.

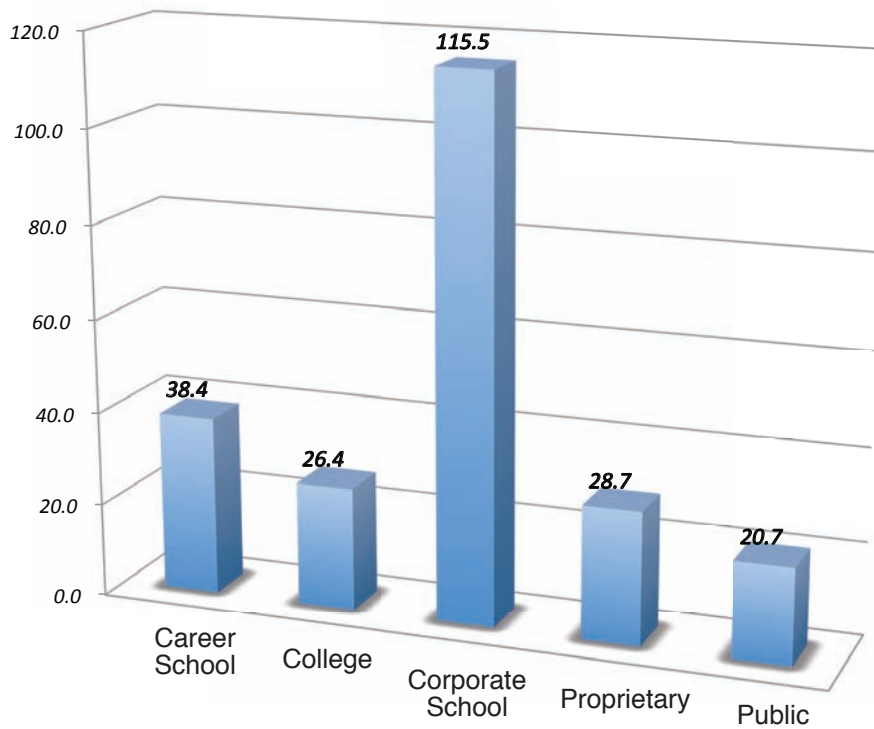
ENROLLMENT

The student population at massage therapy programs declined 16.2% from 2009 to 2011, continuing a decline from the historical peak reported in spring 2005.



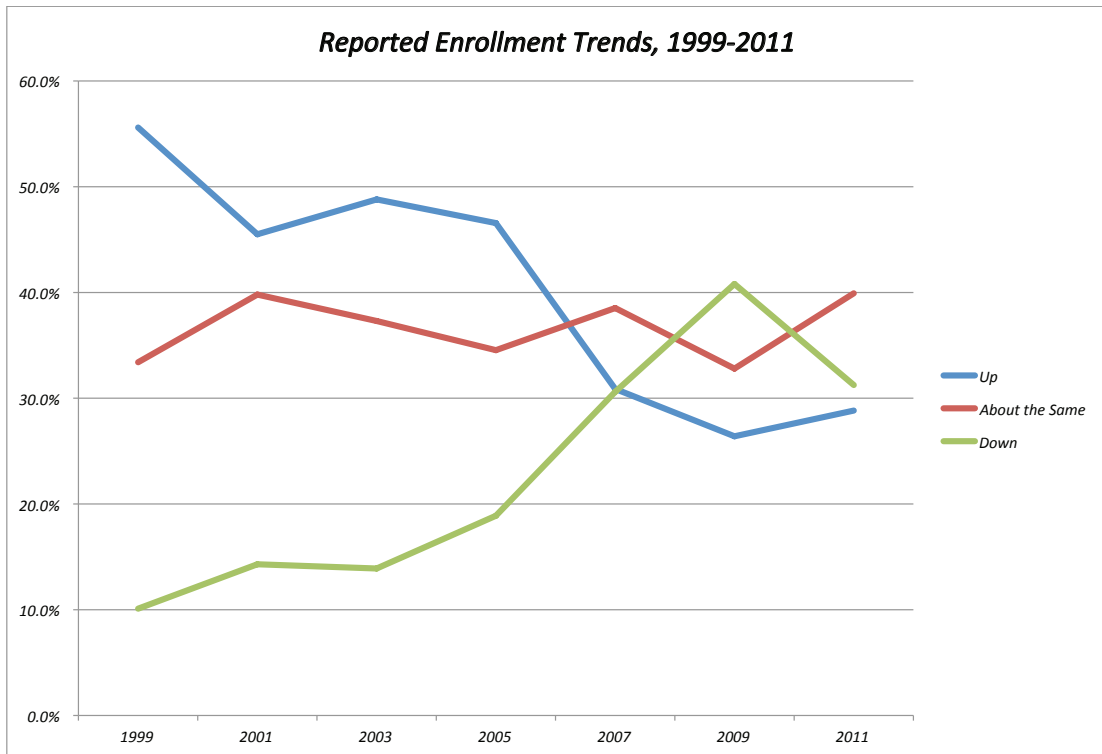
The five school categories show different enrollment averages:

Enrollment by School Category



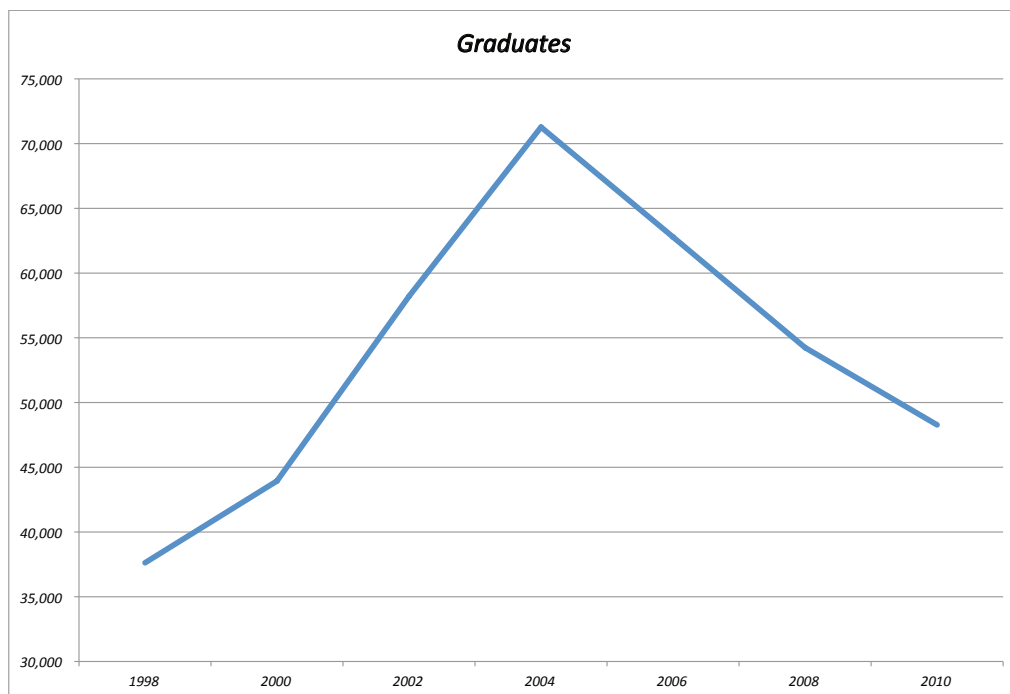
SELF-REPORTED TRENDS

Those programs who participated in the survey provided a self-assessment regarding their enrollment by answering question #2 (“Is that total up, down, or about the same as last year?”). The 2011 responses show an increase in positive reporting over 2009 results, but still lag the heady results of the early 2000s.

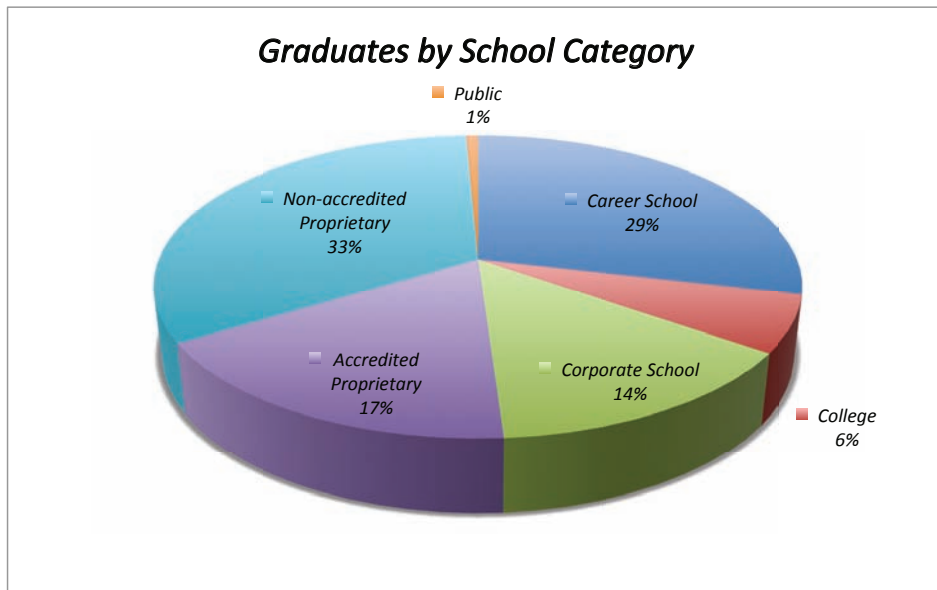


GRADUATES

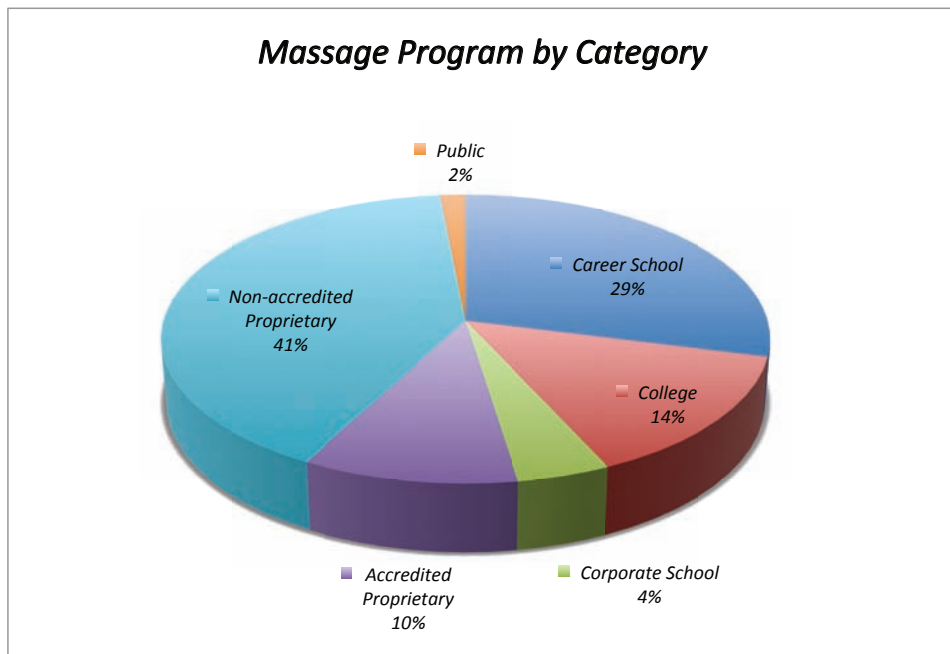
The number of graduates in 2010 extended a now six-year decline from the historical peak of 2004, representing a drop of more than 32% during the six-year period. The number of graduates from massage therapy programs in 2010 dipped below 50,000 for the first time in 10 years. However, the last time fewer than 50,000 students graduated from massage therapy programs in a year, there were 600 fewer schools.



The distribution of graduates by program category shows Corporate Massage Schools graduate 14% of all students, despite only representing 4% of all programs. Note that Proprietary schools are segmented into two subsets—Accredited and Non-accredited.



The significance of accreditation status for Proprietary schools can be seen by comparing the above graphic with the following, which shows the proportion of all schools by category.



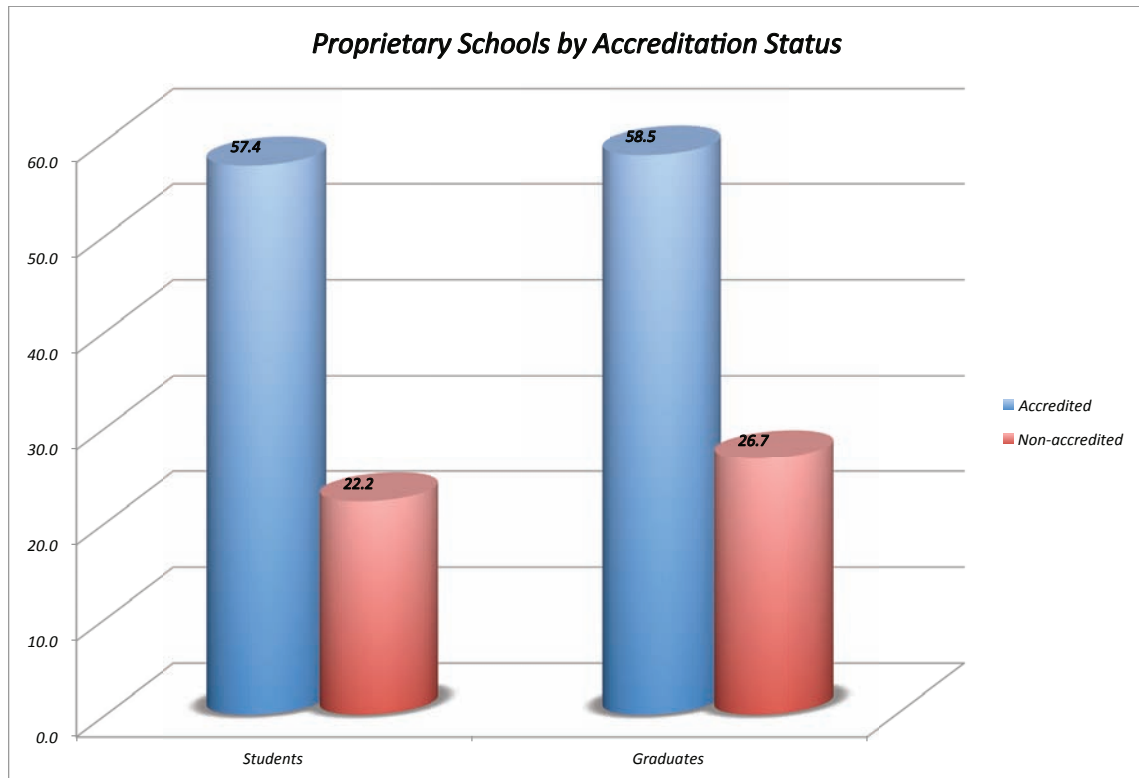
Two categories stand out for have a larger market share than their program count would indicate. As previously mentioned, Corporate Massage Schools represent 4% of all programs, but graduate 14% of all students. Accredited proprietary schools represent 10% of all programs but graduate 17% of all students.

The converse exists for non-accredited proprietary schools and colleges—both graduate a smaller proportion than their program count represents.

MORE FOCUS ON PROPRIETARY SCHOOLS

In four of the five school categories identified, access to federal (Title IV) financial aid is nearly automatic—only a handful of Career Training Institutions are not Title IV-eligible, and all Corporate Massage School, College, and Public Institution programs are Title IV-eligible.

A significant segment of non-Title IV programs populate the Proprietary school category. Of the 750 programs in this category, only 143 (23.6%) of programs are accredited and Title IV-eligible. The enrollment survey gives insight to the difference accreditation and Title IV funding can make in a school's enrollment profile.



Accredited programs on average graduate more than twice as many students as their non-accredited colleagues.

CONCLUSIONS

While it is dangerous to derive “universal truths” from such aggregate data (there are certainly non-accredited proprietary schools that continue to prosper), the trends are attention getting:

- Of the many career training institutions that flooded to add massage therapy program offerings in the middle of the century's first decade, more than 40 proved to lack deep commitment or staying power just since 2009;
- While community colleges weren't immune from the attrition other categories faced, the desire for additional program offerings at many colleges spurred overall category growth in the past two years;
- It is challenging to find students who can afford tuition if you are a small, non-accredited proprietary school with a limited marketing budget; and
- More school attrition appears likely; many schools with fewer than 20 students (40% of all programs) may find they simply do not have a cushion that can survive uneven economic times.

How many students and graduates overall would be healthy for the massage profession? Did the boom years leave a glut of educated massage therapists who have been unable to sustain an economically viable career—meaning a continued decline in the number of graduates will help the market stabilize and help those remaining find sustainable work?

Eventually, as Adam Smith preached, the marketplace will find its equilibrium—demand and supply will match.

Our professional challenge is to keep educating the public about the value of a life that includes massage therapy, attract and keep more customers, and keep that equilibrium point as high as possible. The 2011 ABMP school census suggests that considerable school capacity exists to meet such demand.