Employers Dropped Degree Requirements. Hiring Data Shows Limited Follow-Through

While policy announcements outpace hiring, a University of Dallas pathway gives experienced professionals a clear route to graduate business study.

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES, October 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Seventy percent of employers in the National Association of Colleges and Employers' Job Outlook 2026 survey said they use skills-based hiring for entry-level hires, up from 65% a year earlier. A separate 2025 survey from TestGorilla found 53% of employers across the U.S. and U.K. had eliminated degree requirements. Among U.S. employers in that survey, the figure was 57%.

While earlier research illustrates the gap between policy announcements and hiring outcomes, actual hiring has reflected much less progress. A 2024 joint report from the Burning Glass Institute and the Harvard Business School Project on Managing the Future of Work examined 11,300 roles at large employers after degree requirements were removed. Researchers estimated that these policies created incremental opportunities for fewer than 1 in 700 hires. Approximately 45% of firms fell into the report's "In Name Only" category, where removal of stated degree requirements produced no meaningful difference in hiring behavior.

Some employers did translate policy into hiring. The same 2024 study found that 37% of the firms accounted for nearly all of the observed increase in non-degree hiring. At these "Skills-Based Hiring Leaders," the share of workers hired without bachelor's degrees into affected roles rose by nearly 20%. The report tied measurable results to what employers did inside the hiring process after the policy announcement.

Federal tax treatment gives employers and workers a defined number to work with. The IRS states that Section 127 educational assistance programs can provide up to $5,250 per calendar year in tax-free educational assistance for 2025 and 2026. Federal law also made employer payments toward qualified education loans under Section 127 permanent and added cost-of-living adjustments to the $5,250 limit for taxable years after 2026.

For experienced professionals without a completed bachelor's degree, graduate business study can be an opportunity to build on years of responsibility and strengthen the judgment needed to lead. The admissions question is how to evaluate that professional experience alongside readiness for academic work.

The Catalyst Pathway at the University of Dallas Satish & Yasmin Gupta College of Business provides an admissions route that considers substantial professional and supervisory experience. If a candidate has at least eight years of professional work experience, with at least two years in a supervisory role, and has not completed a bachelor's degree, they may apply for graduate admission through the Catalyst Pathway. Current admissions criteria also require all undergraduate transcripts and a personal statement. Applicants submit three letters of recommendation.

Students admitted through the Catalyst Pathway receive conditional admission and must complete six credit hours of prerequisite courses before taking core coursework, earning a 3.0 GPA with no grade below a B.
The University of Dallas Satish & Yasmin Gupta College of Business is accredited by AACSB International.

"Experienced professionals can bring years of responsibility to an application that a degree screen may leave out. In graduate admissions, we can review the work they have done and the responsibility they have earned, then evaluate how that record supports readiness for graduate study," said Michael Sarles, director of graduate admissions and international student services at the University of Dallas.

For professionals considering a master's degree without a bachelor's degree, the Catalyst Pathway offers a route to seek graduate admission based on substantial professional and supervisory experience. Admission does not replace the required academic work. Prospective applicants can review the Catalyst Pathway's requirements with a University of Dallas graduate admissions counselor to discuss their experience, program goals and next steps.

The Catalyst Pathway evaluates professional and supervisory experience as a route to graduate admission for candidates without a completed bachelor's degree.

About the University of Dallas Satish & Yasmin Gupta College of Business
The Satish & Yasmin Gupta College of Business at the University of Dallas has been a pioneer of graduate business education for more than 50 years. Located in Irving, Texas, the college was the first in Texas to offer an AACSB-accredited Doctor of Business Administration. Today, the college offers flexible Master of Business Administration, Master of Science, and professional education programs ideal for early to mid-career professionals seeking to advance their careers under the guidance of faculty who are both scholars and accomplished business leaders. SB Hall, which opened in January 2016, houses the college, providing students with state-of-the-art technology and practical tools to prepare them for their future career. For more information, visit https://udallas.edu/academics/colleges-schools/college-of-business/.

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