



NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

A Profile of the Communication Doctorate: The 2011 National Science Foundation's *Survey of Earned Doctorates*

Six U.S. federal agencies annually sponsor a census of individuals who receive research doctorate degrees from accredited U.S. academic institutions.¹ Conducted and released by the National Science Foundation, the *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)* calls attention to important trends in doctoral education.

With the release of the 2011 *SED*, the National Communication Association is reporting on the survey's statistics about earned doctorates in Communication. This report is part of NCA's ongoing efforts to achieve specific strategic goals—the cultivation of knowledge about communication and the collection and dissemination of data about the communication discipline for use by communication scholars, educators, and practitioners.

Executive Summary

- The number of Communication doctorates conferred by U.S. institutions has risen 171% since 1981 and 28% since 2006.
- Communication saw the largest percentage growth among all the disciplines in female doctorate recipients over the ten year period from 2001-2011—a 12.4% increase.
- Over 20% of Communication doctorates are “temporary visa” holding non-U.S. citizens.
- 77% of U.S. citizen, Communication doctorates classified themselves as “White.”
- 56% of Communication doctorates have “definite” postgraduate employment or postdoctoral study plans.

¹ NASA, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Education.

A Note on Disciplinary Classification

Since 2009, the complete set of responses to the *SED* has included specific information about doctorates received in Communication.² Communication is classified in the *SED* as “Other non-S&E (Science & Engineering) field.” This “broad field” category includes “Business and management,” “fields not elsewhere classified,” and “unknown field.” Additional non-S&E broad fields included “Social Sciences,” “Education,” and “Humanities.”

Respondents to the *SED* are asked to write the name of the “primary field” of their dissertation research, as well as to select a code from a list of fields to classify their dissertation research. The broad field classification of Communication includes the sub-field designations of Communication Research, Communication Theory, Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, Mass Communication/Media Studies, Communication/General, and Communication/Other. Worth noting is the sub-field under the broad field classification of Letters that is Speech & Rhetorical Studies. It is possible that some doctorates in Communication may have selected Speech & Rhetorical Studies as their sub-field, and thus would not be classified in the field of Communication by the *SED*.³

Data about doctorates received in Communication, thus, should be read broadly, with the understanding that some doctorates may not be included (i.e., doctorates self-classified as Letters-Speech & Rhetorical Studies) while others from related disciplines (i.e., Journalism) may be included in Communication’s totals.

Doctorate Recipients and Institutions

The population eligible for the 2011 *SED* was all individuals who received a research doctorate from an U.S. academic institution between June 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011. **This population consisted for 49,010 persons at 412 institutions. The response rate for the survey was 92.8%.**⁴

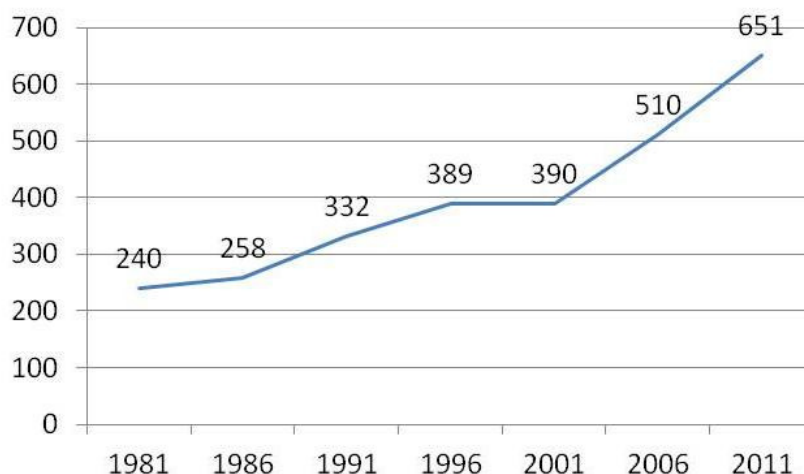
Of the 49,010 doctorates reported in the 2011 *SED*, 651 (1.3%) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This is an increase of 141 doctorates since the 2006 *SED*, which reported 510 doctorates in Communication. Biology and biomedical science produced the largest percentage of total doctorates (16.6%) of any discipline. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, Political Science produced 686, Sociology produced 656, and Anthropology produced 555 doctorates. In the humanities, History produced 1,066 doctorates and Foreign Languages produced 646 in 2011.

² Though the *SED* reports some data on Communication doctorates from 1981 on, full responses organized by field that include Communication are only available from the 2009 *SED* to the present.

³ The full *SED* questionnaire is available at http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/surveys/srvydoctorates_2011.pdf

⁴ Response rates for 2011 are current as of the release of the *SED*. Additional surveys may be returned and the NSF continues to update both its response rate and any changes in corresponding results. The initially high response rate, however, would suggest that any changes to the reported data from additional surveys would be minute. *SED* Response rate information is available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab3.pdf>.

of Ph.D.s in Communication, 1981-2011



Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 12. Available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab12.pdf>

Of the 2011 doctorates in Communication, 125 (19%) were in Communication Research, 29 (4.4%) were in Communication Theory, 213 (33%) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 77 (12%) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 118 (18%) were in Communication/ General, and 89 (14%) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 165 in 2011, or 11% of the total in the Letters category.

Ninety-three institutions conferred doctorates in Communication. The [University of Texas](#) granted 26 doctorates in Communication in 2011 while the [University of Missouri](#) conferred 20 Communication doctorates. The institutions granting doctoral degrees are spread across 40 states and the District of Columbia. No Communication doctorates were conferred in Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, or Vermont in 2011.⁵

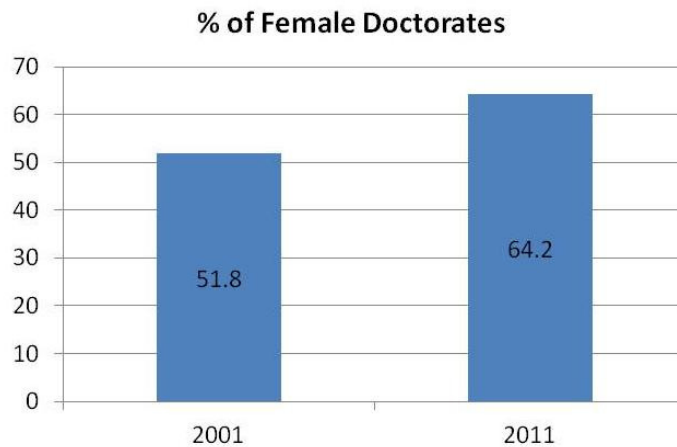
U.S. Institutions Conferring 15+ Communication Doctorates, 2011	
University of Texas	26
University of Missouri	20
University of Southern California	19
Ohio University	18
Michigan State University	17
University of North Carolina	17
University of Florida	16
University of Pennsylvania	16
University of Wisconsin	16
Howard University	15
Purdue University	15

Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

Communication saw the largest percentage growth among all the disciplines surveyed in the *SED* in female doctorate recipients over the ten year period from 2001-2011. In 2001, females comprised 51.8% of doctoral recipients. By 2011, that level had raised to 64.2% a change of 12.4%. The next closest

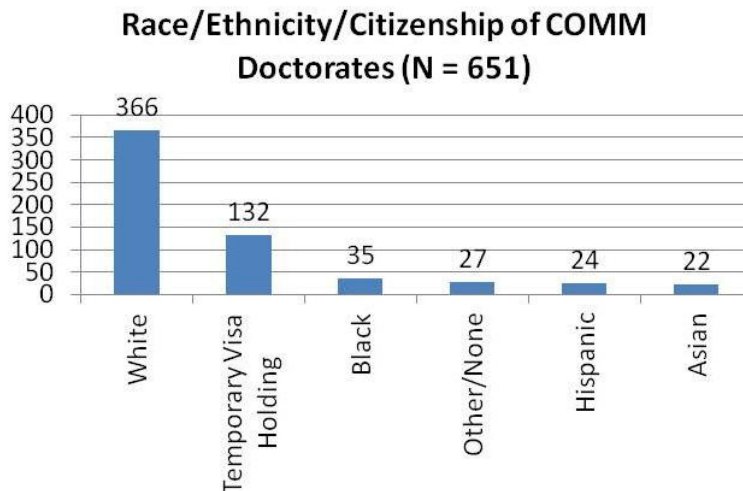
⁵ 2011 *SED*, Table 8, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab8.pdf>

discipline in change of female percentage of doctoral recipients was Agricultural & Natural Resource Sciences, which saw an 11.5% change in the percentage of female doctoral degree recipients.



Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 14, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab14.pdf>

20.3% of all doctorates in Communication in 2011 (132 of the 651 total doctorates) were received by “Temporary Visa Holders,” suggesting that one in five of all Communication doctoral recipients are international students. Of the remaining 474 doctoral recipients, 77% (366) were classified as “white,” 7% (35) were classified as “Black,” 5% (24) were classified as “Hispanic,” and 4.6% (22) were classified as “Asian.” Other *SED* respondents (27) identified as among two or more races, did not answer race/ethnicity questions, or were classified as American Indian or Alaska Native (3).⁶



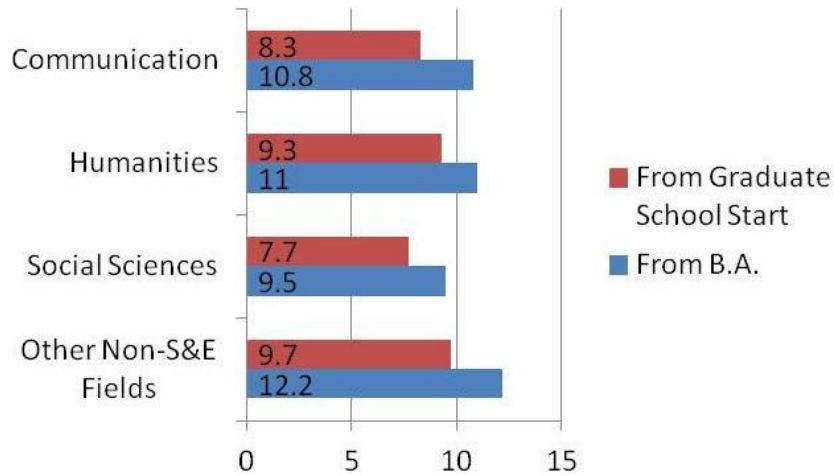
Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 22, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab22.pdf>

⁶ In the “Letters—Speech & Rhetorical Studies” category, 64.2% of the 165 doctorates granted were to females, nine recipients were temporary visa holders, and 134 (81%) of the recipients were “White.”

Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 651 Communication doctorates included in the 2011 *SED*, the time to degree is less than in comparable disciplines. In the broad field (“Other Non-S&E Fields”) that includes Communication, the time to degree is 12.7 years from the B.A., and 9.7 years from entering graduate school. These time to degree figures have declined from a 2001 high of 14.0 years since the B.A., and 10.7 years since entering graduate school for this broad field. In Communication, however, the 2011 time to degree figures are significantly less than for the broad field category—10.8 years from the B.A., and 8.3 years from entering graduate school, in median years.

Time to Doctorate, in Median Years



Source: 2011 *SED*, Tables 32 & 68, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab32.pdf> and <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab68.pdf>

As noted, the 2011 *SED* does not report data specific to Communication in a number of categories— instead, data are offered as aggregated with those other disciplines reported in the same “broad field”



Primary Source of Financial Support

- Teaching Assistantships
- Research Assistantships
- Fellowships
- Own Resources
- Employer
- Other

category—including “Business and management,” “fields not elsewhere classified,” and “unknown field.” This pool includes a total of 2,836 doctorates, of which Communication doctorates are 23% (651).⁷ On a question regarding financial support for the doctoral degree, 2,466 doctorate recipients replied in the “Other Non-S&E Field” category that includes Communication. Almost one third (28.5%) report relying on their “own resources” as the primary source of financial support while pursuing their Ph.D. Another 65.6%

⁷ The exact figures will vary from item to item, depending upon response rates.

of respondents to the *SED* survey report that their primary source of financial support came from teaching/research assistantships, or fellowships.⁸

Other characteristics surveyed by the *SED* include marital status, degree status, and age at doctorate.

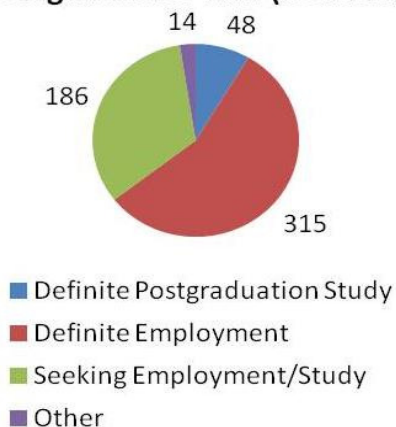
Selected Characteristics of the COMM Doctorate Recipient	2011 SED (N=651)
Never Married	27.2%
Married or Marriage-Like Relationship	55.7%
B.A. in same field	47.9%
M.A. earned	90.3%
Median age at doctorate	33.7 years

Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 68, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab68.pdf>

Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

The 2011 *SED* asked its respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. 7.3% (48) of the 651 Communication doctorates reported “definite postgraduation study,” and of that number, 62.5% report receiving a postdoctoral fellowship, while another 37.5% report receiving a postdoctoral research associateship. 48% (315) of the Communication doctorates reported “definite employment” as their postgraduate plans, and of those 87.9% report employment in academe, 2.9% in government, and 5.1% in business or industry. 28.5% (186) of respondents report that they are “seeking employment or study” at the time they answered the *SED*, while another 2.4% (16) reported “other” as their postgraduate plans.

Postgraduate Plans (# of 651)



Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 69, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab69.pdf>

⁸ Source: 2011 *SED*, Table 35, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2011/pdf/tab35.pdf>

Summary

The 2011 National Science Foundation's *Survey of Earned Doctorates* provides useful and compelling data concerning the state of doctoral education in the United States.

Of particular interest to the Communication discipline are several findings.

- **The number of Communication doctorates in 2011 (651) represents a 171% increase since 1981 (240) and a 28% increase since 2006 (510).**
- **Communication saw the largest percentage growth among all the disciplines surveyed in the *SED* in female doctorate recipients over the ten year period from 2001-2011.**
- **One in five Communication doctorates is a “temporary visa” holding non-U.S. citizens.**
- **Over three-quarters of Communication doctorates identify themselves as “White.”**
- **The time to degree for the Communication doctorate is longer than in the Social Sciences but shorter than in the Humanities and in Other Non-S&E Fields.**
- **56% of Communication doctorates report having secured definite employment or postdoctoral study opportunities at the time they responded to the *SED*.**

About National Communication Association



Founded in 1914, the National Communication Association (NCA) is the oldest and largest national organization promoting effective and ethical communication. The Association supports the communication research, teaching, public service, and practice of a diverse community of scholars, educators, administrators, students, practitioners, and publics. NCA is a non-profit organization with members who work and reside in every state and around the globe. NCA sponsors an annual convention, conferences, publishes academic journals, and web magazine *Communication Currents*. For more information, visit www.natcom.org.