

# A PROFILE OF THE COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE IV:

THE 2015 NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION'S  
*SURVEY OF EARNED DOCTORATES*



NATIONAL  
COMMUNICATION  
ASSOCIATION

Each year, the National Communication Association (NCA) generates “A Profile of the Communication Doctorate,” based on data contained in the National Science Foundation’s *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)*. The 2015 *SED* was released in December 2016, and this report updates the existing profiles of the Communication doctorate in light of the *SED*’s new information.

## A Note on Disciplinary Classification

Since 2009, the complete set of responses to the *SED* has included specific information about doctorates received in Communication.<sup>1</sup> 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 include “Social Sciences,” “Education,” and “Humanities.”

Respondents to the *SED* are asked to write the name of the “primary field” of their dissertation research and 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 are the Speech & Rhetorical Studies and Rhetoric & Composition sub-fields placed under the broad field classification of Letters. It is possible that some Communication doctorates may have selected Speech & Rhetorical Studies or Rhetoric & Composition as their field, and thus would not be classified in the field of Communication by the *SED*. Notably, the number of dissertations in the Speech & Rhetorical Studies category has declined dramatically over the last ten years.

Data about Communication doctorates, 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

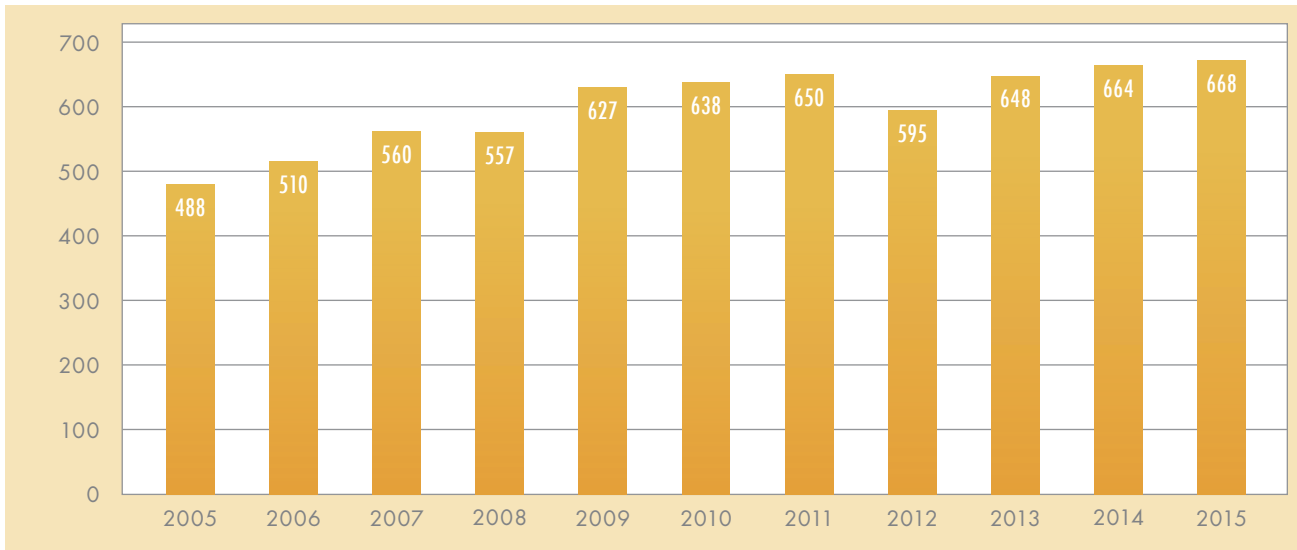
The population eligible for the 2015 *SED* included all individuals who received a research doctorate from a U.S. academic institution between June 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. **This population consisted of more than 55,000 persons at 432 institutions. The response rate for the survey was 90.2 percent.**<sup>2</sup>

Of the 55,006 doctorates reported in the 2015 *SED*, 668 (1.2 percent) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This is an increase of five doctorates since the 2014 *SED*, which reported 663 doctorates in Communication. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, Political Science produced 859 doctorates (up from 777 in 2014), Sociology produced 745 doctorates (up from 678 in 2014), and Anthropology produced 493 doctorates (down from 524 in 2014). In the humanities, History produced 1,145 doctorates (down from 1,186 in 2014) and Foreign Languages produced 656 doctorates (down from 676 in 2014).

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/survey.cfm>.

Total Number of Ph.D.s in Communication, 2005–2015



Source: 2015 SED, Table 13. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab13.pdf>.

Of the 668 Communication doctorates conferred in 2015, 150 (22 percent) were in Communication Research, 41 (6.1 percent) were in Communication Theory, 242 (36 percent) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 37 (5.5 percent) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 119 (17.8 percent) were in Communication/General, and 79 (11.8 percent) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 42 in 2015, just 2.6 percent of all doctorates in Letters. Since 2011, the SED has added a new category to the Letters field—Rhetoric & Composition. The total number of doctorates in this category was 240 in the 2014 SED, or 15 percent of all doctorates in Letters.

The University of Texas granted 30 doctorates in Communication in 2015, while the University of Wisconsin conferred 25 Communication doctorates. The University of Southern California conferred 22 doctorates, while the University of Minnesota and the University of Missouri each conferred 19 doctorates. Rounding out the top ten institutions conferring Communication doctorates are: Michigan State University (18); Northwestern University (17); University of Alabama (16); The Pennsylvania State University (15); and the University of Illinois (15). The top four institutions in doctorates conferred in 2014 were the University of Texas (36), The Pennsylvania State University (18), Louisiana State University (17), and Michigan State University (17).<sup>3</sup>

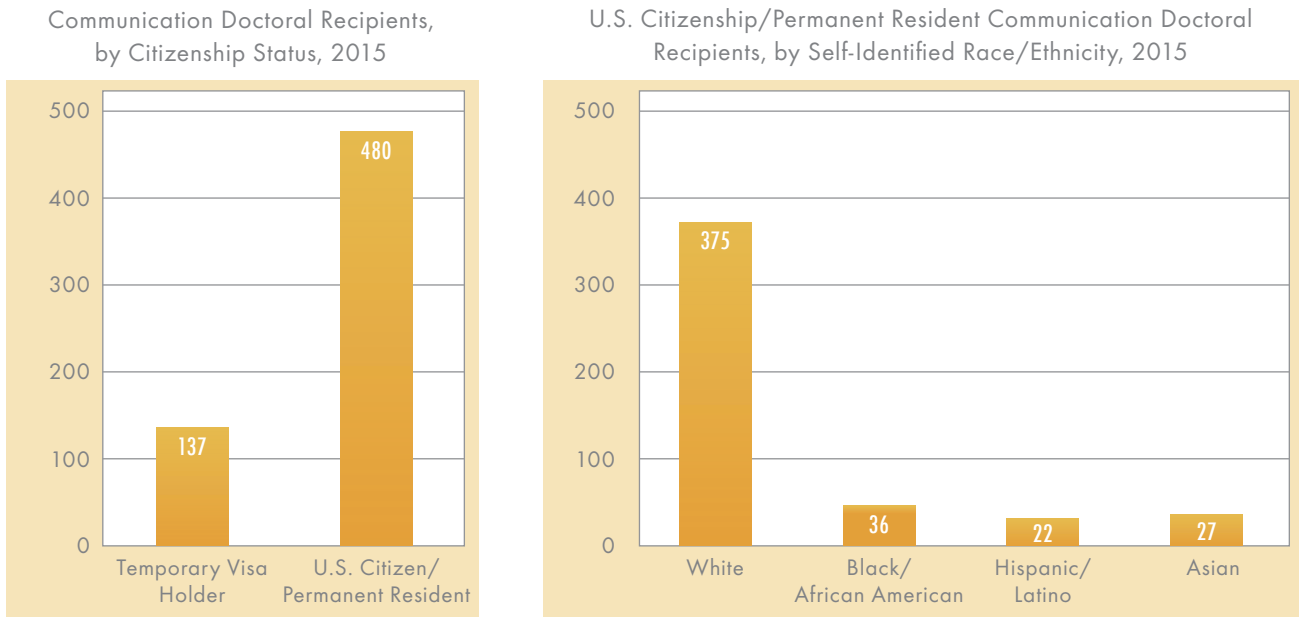
TOP TEN U.S. INSTITUTIONS CONFERRING COMMUNICATION DOCTORATES, 2015	
University of Texas	30
University of Wisconsin	25
University of Southern California	22
University of Minnesota	19
University of Missouri	19
Michigan State University	18
Northwestern University	17
University of Alabama	16
The Pennsylvania State University	15
University of Illinois	15

## Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

Nearly 62 percent of 2015 doctoral recipients in Communication were female, up from 57.8 percent in 2014. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, 38.6 percent of doctorates in Political Science were awarded to females, while 61.9 percent of doctorates in Sociology went to females. In the humanities, 44.8 percent of History doctorates were awarded to females and 63.6 percent of doctorates in Foreign Languages went to females.

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2015 SED, Table 8. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab8.pdf>.

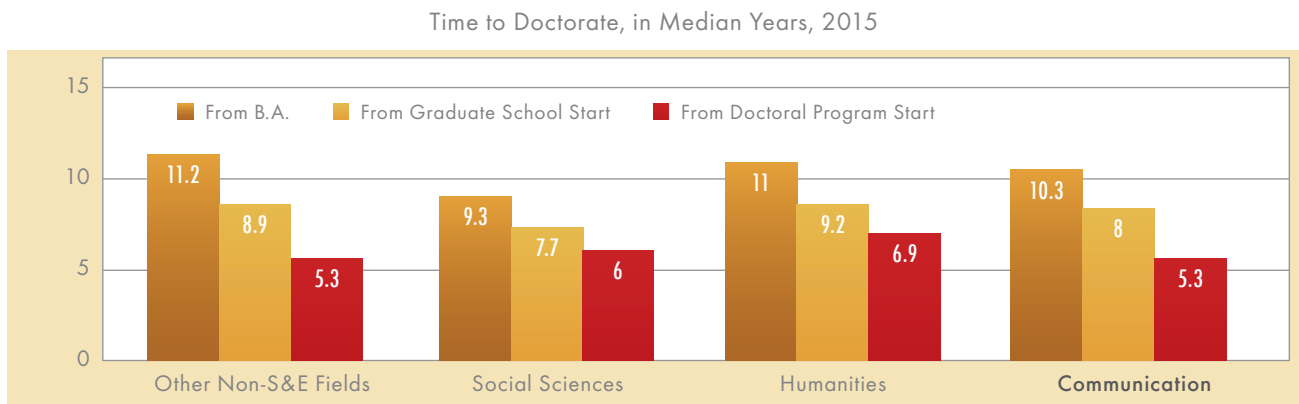
Just over 20 percent of all Communication doctorates in 2015 (137 of the 668 Communication doctorates) were received by “Temporary Visa Holders,” suggesting that one in five of all Communication doctoral recipients is an international student. Of the 480 doctoral recipients who were not temporary visa holders and who responded to queries about race/ethnicity, 78 percent (375) were classified as “white,” 7.5 percent (36) were classified as “Black,” 4.5 percent (22) were classified as “Hispanic/Latino,” and 5.6 percent (27) were classified as “Asian.” Other *SED* respondents (20) identified as among two or more races, did not answer race/ethnicity questions, or were classified as American Indian or Alaska Native (1).



Source: 2015 *SED*, Table 22. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab22.pdf>.

## Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 668 Communication doctorates included in the 2015 *SED*, the time to degree was less than in comparable disciplines. In the broad field (“Other Non-S&E Fields”) that includes Communication, the time to degree was 11.2 years from the B.A., and 8.9 years from entering graduate school. These time-to-degree figures for this broad field have declined from a 2001 high of 14.0 years since the B.A., and 10.7 years since entering graduate school. In Communication, however, the 2015 time-to-degree figures were lower than for the broad field category—10.3 years from the B.A., and 8.0 years from entering graduate school, in median years. The *SED* now includes data on the time to degree from the doctoral program start—in 2015, the median time from entering a Communication doctoral program to the doctorate was 5.3 years.



Source: 2015 *SED*, Tables 62, 68, & 70. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab62.pdf>, <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab68.pdf>, and <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab70.pdf>.

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

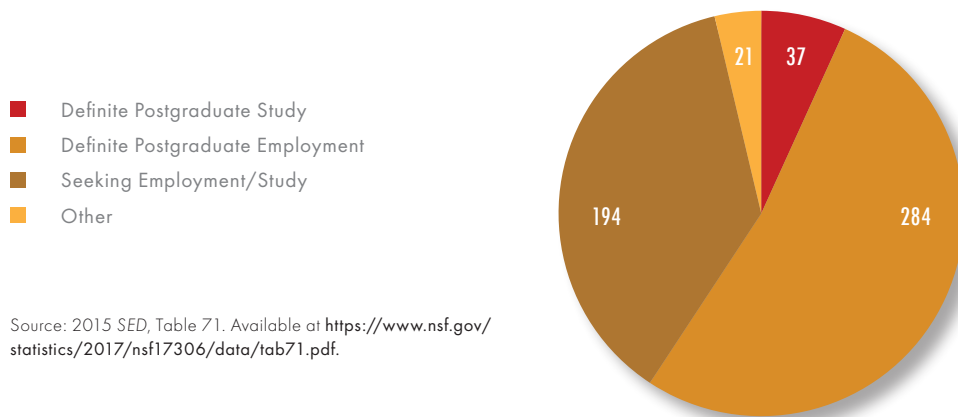
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS, 2015 (N=668)	
Never married	28%
Married/Marriage-like relationship	54.8%
B.A. in same field	44.8%
M.A. earned	87.3%
Median age at doctorate	33.4 years

Source: 2015 *SED*, Table 70. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab70.pdf>.

## Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

The 2015 *SED* asked respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. Of the 536 Communication doctorates who responded to this question, 5.5 percent (37) reported “definite postgraduation study”; of that number, 100 percent reported receiving either a postdoctoral fellowship or a postdoctoral research associateship.

Another 42.5 percent (284) of the Communication doctorates reported “definite employment” as their postgraduate plans; of those, 89.1 percent reported employment in academe and 6 percent reported employment in business or industry. Nearly 30 percent (194) of respondents reported that they were “seeking employment or study” at the time they answered the *SED*, while another 3 percent (21) reported “other” as their postgraduate plans. These data are largely unchanged from the 2014 *SED*.



Source: 2015 *SED*, Table 71. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2017/nsf17306/data/tab71.pdf>.

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

The National Communication Association (NCA) advances Communication as the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic inquiry. NCA serves the scholars, teachers, and practitioners who are its members by enabling and supporting their professional interests in research and teaching. Dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication, NCA promotes the widespread appreciation of the importance of communication in public and private life, the application of competent communication to improve the quality of human life and relationships, and the use of knowledge about communication to solve human problems.

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