

A PROFILE OF THE COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE V:

THE 2016 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 2016 *SED* was released in December 2017, and this report updates the existing profiles of the Communication doctorate considering 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.¹ Communication is classified in the *SED* as “Other non-science and engineering.” In addition to Communication, this “broad field” category includes “Business management and administration,” “Non-S&E 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 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 counted toward the total number of Communication doctorates.

Doctorate Recipients and Institutions

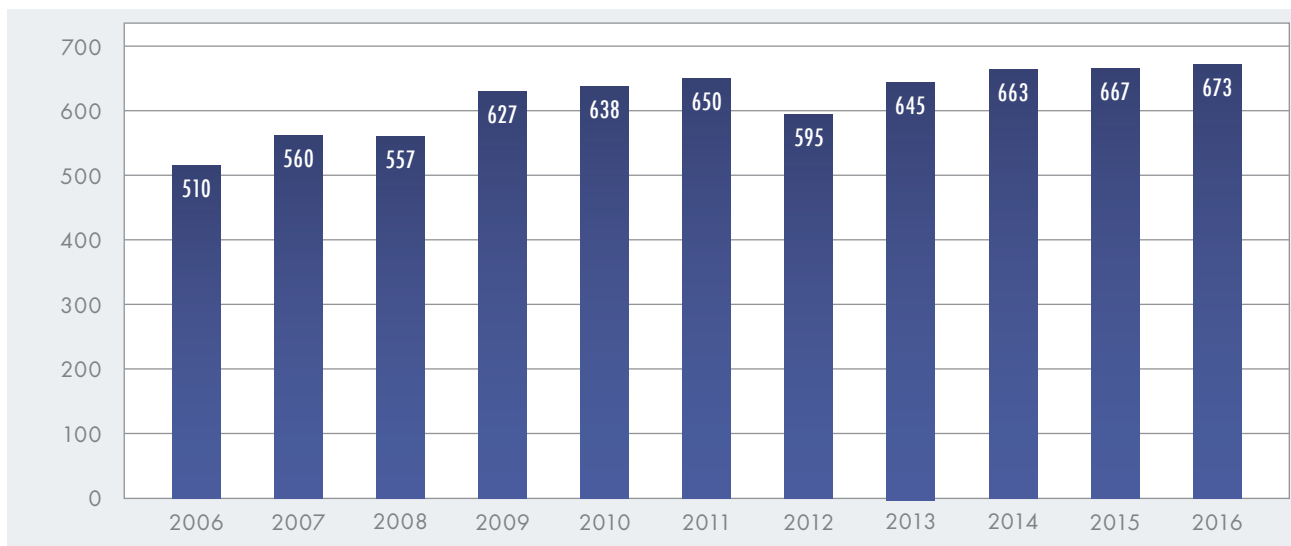
The population eligible for the 2016 *SED* included all individuals who received a research doctorate from a U.S. academic institution between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016. **This population consisted of 54,904 persons at 436 institutions. The response rate for the survey was 92 percent.**²

Of the 54,904 doctorates reported in the 2016 *SED*, 673 (1.2 percent) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This is an increase of six doctorates since the 2015 *SED*, which reported 667 doctorates in Communication. In comparison, Political Science and Government produced 745 doctorates (down from 859 in 2015), Sociology produced 615 doctorates (down from 742 in 2015), and Anthropology produced 460 doctorates (down from 492 in 2015). In the humanities, History produced 1,147 doctorates (an increase of one since 2015) and Foreign Languages and Literature produced 599 doctorates (down from 656 in 2015).

¹ 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.

² See: <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/static/report/nsf18304-report.pdf>.

Communication Doctorates Conferred, 2006–2016



Source: 2016 SED, Table 13. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/data/tab13.pdf>.

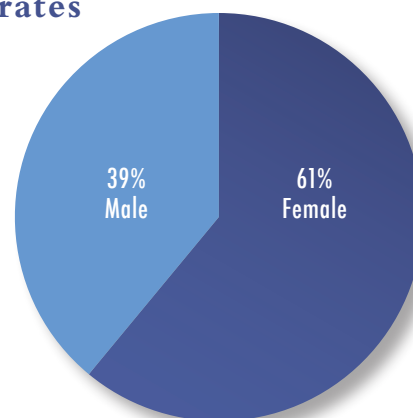
Of the 673 Communication doctorates conferred in 2016, 183 (27 percent) were in Communication Research, 63 (9.4 percent) were in Communication Theory, 211 (31 percent) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 23 (3.4 percent) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 143 (21 percent) were in Communication/General, and 50 (7.4 percent) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 39 in 2016, just 2.5 percent of all doctorates in Letters, while the total number of doctorates in Rhetoric & Composition was 212 in the 2016 SED, or 13.8 percent of all doctorates in Letters.

The University of Texas granted the highest number of Communication doctorates in 2016, awarding 41. The University of Southern California conferred 21 doctorates. Ohio State University awarded 18 doctorates, while the University of Utah and the University of Florida each conferred 17. The table on the right displays universities conferring 15 or more doctorates in 2016.

INSTITUTIONS CONFERRING 15+ COMMUNICATION DOCTORATES, 2016	
University of Texas	41
University of Southern California	21
Ohio State University	18
University of Florida	17
University of Utah	17
University of Minnesota	16
Ohio University	16
University of North Carolina	15

Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

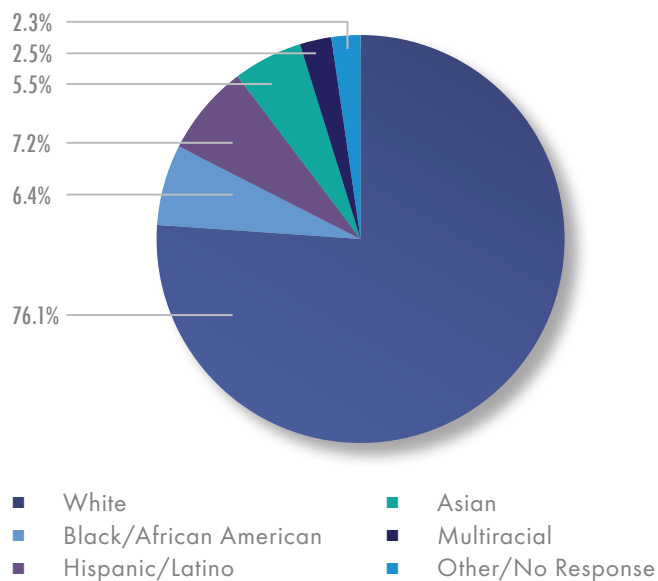
Nearly 61 percent of 2016 doctoral recipients in Communication were female. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, 38 percent of doctorates in Political Science were awarded to females, while 58 percent of doctorates in Sociology went to females. In the humanities, 46 percent of History doctorates were awarded to females and 61 percent of doctorates in Foreign Languages and Literature went to females.



Source: 2016 SED, Table 16. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/data/tab16.pdf>.

Of the 673 Communication doctorates awarded in 2016, 23.8 percent (160) were received by “Temporary Visa Holders,” suggesting that nearly one in five Communication doctoral recipients is an international student. Of the 472 doctoral recipients who were not temporary visa holders and who responded to queries about race/ethnicity, 76.1 percent (359) were classified as “White,” 6.4 percent (30) were classified as “Black or African American,” 7.2 percent (34) were classified as “Hispanic/Latino,” 5.5 percent (26) were classified as “Asian,” 2.5 percent (12) identified as being “more than one race,” and 2.3 percent (11) either reported being an “other” race (2) or did not answer race/ethnicity questions (9).

U.S. Citizen and Permanent Resident Communication Doctorate Recipients by Race/Ethnicity, 2016

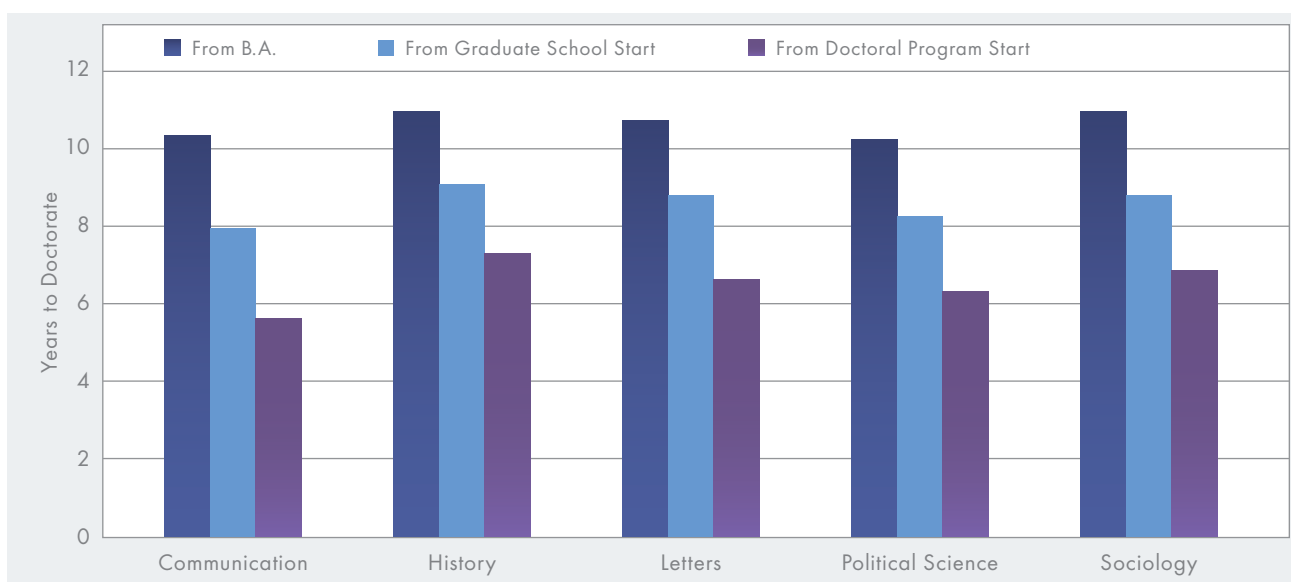


Source: 2016 SED, Table 22. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/data/tab22.pdf>.

Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 673 Communication doctorates included in the 2016 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 12.3 years from the B.A., 10 years from entering graduate school, and 5.7 years from the start of the doctoral program. 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, the 2016 time-to-degree figures were lower than for the broad field category, with 11 years from the B.A., 8.0 years from entering graduate school, and 5.7 years from the start of the doctorate program, in median years. The chart below compares Communication doctorate time to degree with comparable social science and humanities disciplines.

Time to Doctorate, 2016



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>.

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

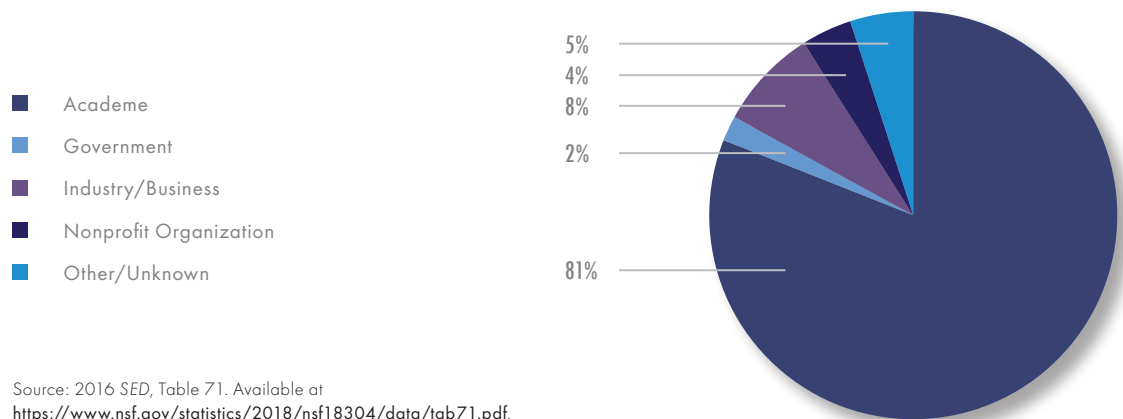
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS, 2016	
Never Married	28.4%
Married/Marriage-Like Relationship	51.2%
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	6.4%
B.A. in Same Field	40.4%
M.A. Earned	87.7%
Median Age at Doctorate	34 years

Source: 2016 *SED*, Table 70. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/data/tab70.pdf>.

Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

The *SED* asked respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. Of 673 Communication doctorates, 6.8 percent (46) reported “definite postgraduation study;” of that number, 100 percent reported receiving either a postdoctoral fellowship or a postdoctoral research associateship.

Another 44.5 percent (300) of the Communication doctorates reported “definite employment” as their postgraduate plans; of those, 80.7 percent reported employment in academe and 8.3 percent reported employment in business or industry. Nearly 28.3 percent (191) of respondents reported that they were “seeking employment or study” at the time they answered the *SED*, while another 4 percent (27) reported “other” as their postgraduate plans. These data are largely unchanged from the 2015 *SED*, with the exception of employment in academia, which decreased from 89 percent.



Source: 2016 *SED*, Table 71. Available at <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2018/nsf18304/data/tab71.pdf>.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

The National Communication Association 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. NCA supports inclusiveness and diversity among our faculties, within our membership, in the workplace, and in the classroom; NCA supports and promotes policies that fairly encourage this diversity and inclusion.

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