



June 17, 2008

Dear User of the Survey of Earned Doctorates,

In fall 2007 NSF's Division of Science Resources Statistics (SRS) in the context of heightened concerns about confidentiality/privacy completed a detailed review of its existing rules and procedures for protection of the data collected under a pledge of confidentiality in all its surveys. As a result of that review, SRS implemented more stringent procedures to protect the confidentiality of data provided by respondents to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED). The revised procedures resulted in suppressing more data cells with very small counts in tables in the 2006 SED Summary Report as well as in ones which individuals could special order from the survey contractor. The cells primarily affected were certain categories for the variables of race/ethnicity, citizenship and gender.

NSF received many complaints from the user community about the availability of less information from the SED than before, particularly for underrepresented minorities. A great deal of the concern related to the fact that SRS had implemented the changes without prior input from the user community. Users strongly suggested that SRS solicit user input as to how best to design the tables to meet a broad spectrum of user needs. NSF has listened to this concern. The following statement was released by NSF in early May.

SRS will be releasing the race/ethnicity, citizenship and gender data collected for the 2006 Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) as in previous years. There are privacy and confidentiality issues that must be addressed, particularly in the context of small data sets. The question of how to aggregate the data in future years will be addressed with the data user community over the next few months and new tables will be developed to release data from the 2007 SED.

Tables containing 2006 SED data with the same level of detail as in previous years for race/ethnicity, citizenship and gender can be requested through a link on the NSF/SRS website at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/2006/sed06data.htm>. The Baccalaureate-Origins of U.S. research doctorate recipients tables can also be requested through this site.

The same web page has a comment box requesting suggestions for ways to redesign the tables presenting the SED data so as to address issues of both privacy/confidentiality and the needs of data users. SRS is also asking interested parties to take part in a small web survey on the same topic that will be conducted in the near future. You can take advantage of both these opportunities to provide input to SRS' efforts.

In addition, SRS is engaging in a major outreach activity with users about the presentation of SED data and began meeting with users in early May. SRS welcomes your input as it engages in this redesign activity. Please let me know if you want to provide additional input or to set up a meeting.

Please note that the redesign of the tables for the 2007 SED Summary Report is likely to result in a delay of the 2007 report of several months until spring 2009. The Race/Ethnicity/Gender Tabulations are likely to be somewhat delayed as well. However, aggregate, national level 2007 SED data will be released as in the past in late fall in time for the annual Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) meeting, which has been a tradition. The exact nature of the late fall release is still under consideration but may involve a short report and a few high-level tables normally contained in the Summary Report.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Jaqui Falkenheim at jfalkenh@nsf.gov or Nancy Leach at nleach@nsf.gov