



Insights in Graduate Education

Graduate education provides students with opportunities to build careers and expand the boundaries of knowledge. It is critical to producing the next generation of thought leaders, including scientists, engineers, researchers, teachers, and other important members of our nation's most highly-educated workforce. NORC provides vital information on graduate education, including what brings students to graduate studies, students' experiences during graduate school, degree completion rates, career and professional paths of graduate degree recipients, and other topics related to the success of students and the graduate education system.

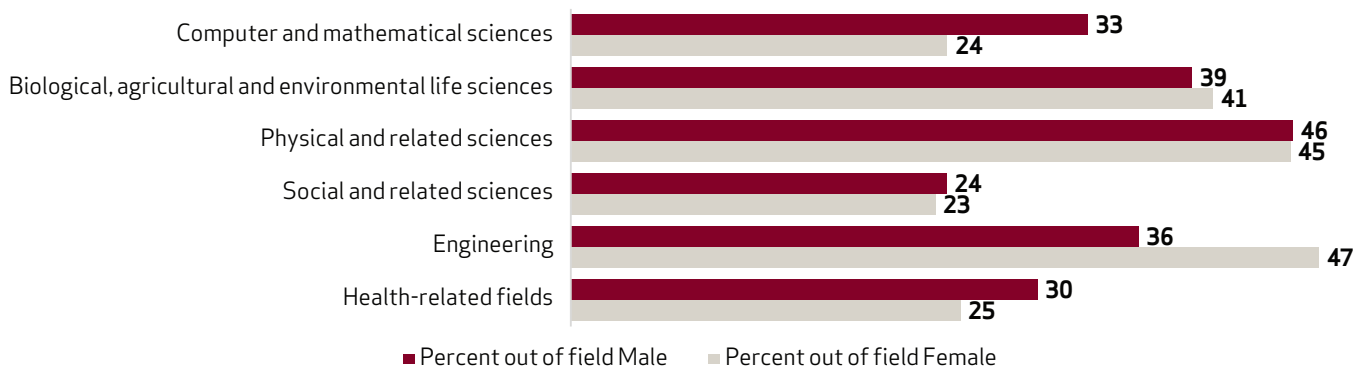
Career and Professional Pathways for Graduate Degree Holders

The journey of our nation's graduate students does not end with degree completion. Their education must prepare them for success in the workforce, and some workforce trajectories are different than what we may expect. The majority of PhD holders, for example, follow careers outside of academe, while others leave the U.S. entirely after graduation. NORC researchers track the career and professional pathways of graduate degree recipients to determine how they contribute to the workforce and society, both here and abroad, and how these outcomes change over time.

Campus Climate and Quality of Graduate Experience

Many factors affect graduate students' perceptions of the quality of their graduate school experience, from campus-wide factors to their relationship with their advisor and other professors.

Percent of U.S. residing SEH doctorates working outside their doctorate field, 2017



SOURCE: National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Survey of Doctorate Recipients, 2017.

Percentage working outside their doctorate field represents the proportion of men and women who reported working in a field that is "somewhat" or "not at all" related to their doctorate field. The overall rate of people working outside their field is 35%.

NORC assesses the experiences and opinions of graduate students across many dimensions including satisfaction with their program and institution, perceptions of diversity, views on campus sexual assault, and personal safety concerns. NORC's understanding of graduate education and our extensive experience in campus climate research enables us to craft effective questions on the most sensitive topics. Recent NORC studies involving graduate student experiences include campus and association-wide climate surveys and the Evaluation of NSF's Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP).

Managing Graduate Enrollment

Institutions have different approaches to how they manage graduate enrollment. Whether an institution has a highly centralized or more decentralized approach, graduate administrators must set strategic enrollment goals that account for both capacity and quality. Enrollment decisions affect many aspects of administering graduate schools, including supporting enrollees and retaining them through degree completion. They also affect graduate students' experiences while enrolled. Understanding how enrollment decisions affect these other aspects of graduate education, and how other factors such as marketing, recruiting, admissions, and financial aid affect enrollment, is critical to successfully managing graduate enrollment. NORC can provide information to graduate administrators to inform strategic decision making in this area.

International Student Experience

Understanding how the experiences and areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of international students differ from domestic students helps institutions better manage graduate enrollment and support students in obtaining graduate degrees and embarking on successful careers. The proportion of international students varies greatly by field of study and institution, and their experiences vary by country of origin, English proficiency, campus climate, and other factors. NORC can work with academic deans and administrators to identify how the experiences of international students differ to enable more effective recruitment and support of their international students.

Financing Graduate Education

The availability of funding for graduate education varies by degree program, field of study, and institution, and may be routinely available only for students in certain programs. Most graduate students are funded through a variety of sources, including research and teaching assistantships, private and public fellowship programs, and loans. Some students supplement this funding through jobs, contributions from friends and family, and other sources. NORC tracks the sources and amounts of funding utilized by students across disciplines, degree programs, and institutions to better understand how graduate students are financing their education. For example, the GRFP included a comparison of the funding sources used by fellows and similar non-fellows.

Graduate Student Debt

In addition to debt from undergraduate studies, many graduate students borrow in order to finance their graduate educations—whether for tuition or the cost of living during graduate school. Some potential enrollees factor their tolerance for accruing additional debt into enrollment decisions. It is important for university administrators to understand all of these components of graduate student debt to better understand their students and the choices they make. NORC studies can inform administrators about the reasons graduate students incur debt and the amount and sources of that debt by program of study and other salient factors.

Degree Completions

Once graduate students are enrolled, a number of factors impact degree completion rates and time to degree. NORC assesses what factors impact degree completion rates and times, as well as whether these factors differ by demographic factors and field of study. Informed by this research, NORC helps university administrators understand how to best support their students' educational trajectories and identify students who may need additional interventions to support their success.

Supporting Diversity in Graduate Education

Many initiatives to increase the representation of women and minorities in graduate education, particularly in STEM fields, are underway. These efforts seek to diversify our population of highly educated workers by providing a more diverse pool from which to recruit. Because representation varies by field, many initiatives are field-specific and target the groups that are most underrepresented in that field. NORC regularly collects both quantitative and qualitative data from graduate students, faculty, and university administrators on their perceptions of diversity within their programs, as well as how (and if) the representation of underrepresented groups needs improvement. For example, the GRFP included an assessment of how the fellowship impacted representation within institutions enrolling fellows.

Assessment of Graduate Programs

As graduate enrollment changes and new fields of study emerge, graduate administrators must be able to assess how well their graduate programs achieve their goals. NORC works with stakeholders to identify goals, develop research questions, implement research methods to collect and analyze data, and write and present reports that clearly summarize results. This holistic approach to identifying goals and measuring their achievement helps institutions understand the effectiveness of their graduate programs and identify both areas of success and areas for potential improvement.



NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, nonpartisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.

**Start a conversation.
Contact us.**

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