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A Profile of the Communication Doctorate II: The 2013 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.

In 2012, with the release of the 2011 *SED*, the National Communication Association generated “A Profile of the Communication Doctorate: The 2011 National Science Foundation’s *Survey of Earned Doctorates*,” which reported on the survey’s statistics about earned doctorates in Communication. This report was part of NCA’s ongoing efforts to meet 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.

“A Profile of the Communication Doctorate II: The 2013 National Science Foundation’s *Survey of Earned Doctorates*” offers updated data and information culled from the 2013 *SED*, publicly released on December 4, 2014.

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 include “Social Sciences,” “Education,” and “Humanities.”

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.

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.

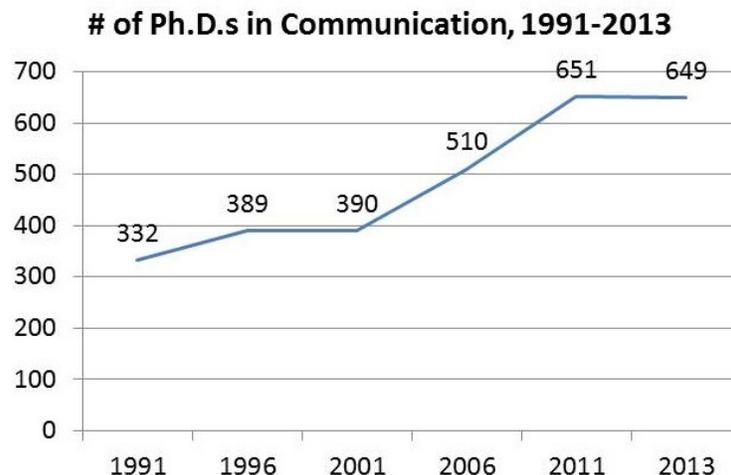
Respondents to the *SED* are asked to write the name of the “primary field” of their dissertation research and to select a code from a list of fields to classify their dissertation research. The broad field classification of Communication includes the sub-field designations of Communication Research, 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 doctorates in Communication 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*.

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 2013 *SED* included all individuals who received a research doctorate from an U.S. academic institution between June 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013. **This population consisted of more than 52,000 persons at 421 institutions. The response rate for the survey was 92%.³**

Of the 52,760 doctorates reported in the 2013 *SED*, 649 (1.2%) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This is a decrease of two doctorates since the 2011 *SED*, which reported 651 doctorates in Communication. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, Political Science produced 803 doctorates (up from 686 in 2011), Sociology produced 636 doctorates (down from 656 in 2011), and Anthropology produced 552 doctorates (down from 555 in 2011). In the humanities, History produced 1,149 doctorates (up from 1,066 in 2011) and Foreign Languages produced 701 doctorates (up from 646 in 2011).



Source: 2013 *SED*, Table 12. Available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab12.pdf>

³ See: <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/survey.cfm>

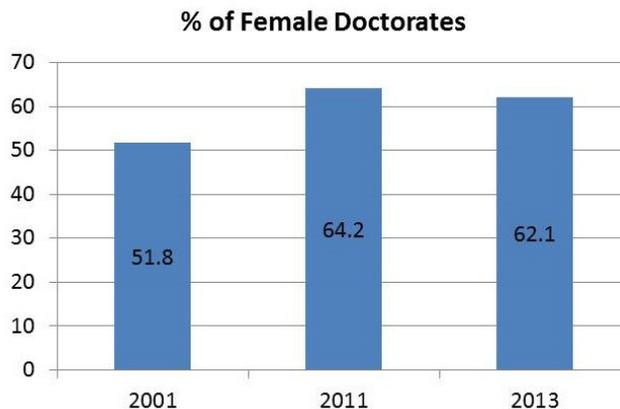
Of the 2013 doctorates in Communication, 157 (24%) were in Communication Research, 31 (4.7%) were in Communication Theory, 238 (37%) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 30 (4.6%) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 107 (16%) were in Communication/General, and 86 (13%) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 33 in 2013, a significant decline from the 165 reported doctorates in this category in 2011. While Speech & Rhetorical Studies accounted for 11% of the total doctorates in the Letters category in 2011, doctorates in this category constituted only 2% of all doctorates in Letters in 2013. Since 2011, the *SED* has added a new category to the Letters field—Rhetoric & Composition. The total number of doctorates in this category was 218 in the 2013 *SED*, or 33.5% of all doctorates in Letters.

U.S. Institutions Conferring 16+ Communication Doctorates, 2013	
University of Texas	27
Ohio University	21
Howard University	19
University of Florida	19
University of Maryland	18
Northwestern University	17
Michigan State University	16
The Pennsylvania State University	16
University of Wisconsin	16

The University of Texas granted 27 doctorates in Communication in 2013, while Ohio University conferred 21 Communication doctorates. Howard University (19), the University of Florida (19) and the University of Maryland (18) rounded out the top five institutions in number of doctorates conferred. The top six institutions in doctorates conferred in 2011 were the University of Texas (26), the University of Missouri (20), the University of Southern California (19), Ohio University (18), Michigan State University (17), and the University of North Carolina (17).⁴

Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

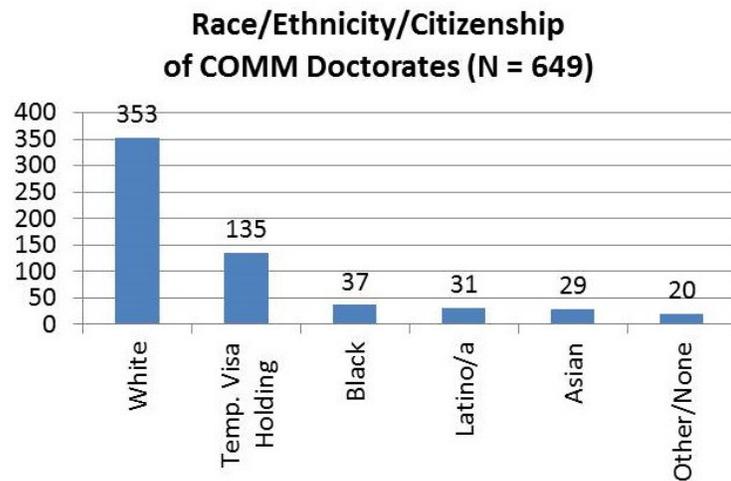
Communication saw the largest percentage growth among all the disciplines surveyed in the *SED* in female doctorate recipients over the ten-year period from 2001-2011. In 2001, females comprised 51.8% of doctoral recipients. By 2011, that level rose to 64.2%, a change of 12.4%. By 2013, the percentage of female doctorate recipients in Communication was 62.1%, a slight decline from 2011.



Source: 2013 *SED*, Table 16, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab16.pdf>

⁴ 2013 *SED*, Table 8, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab8.pdf>.

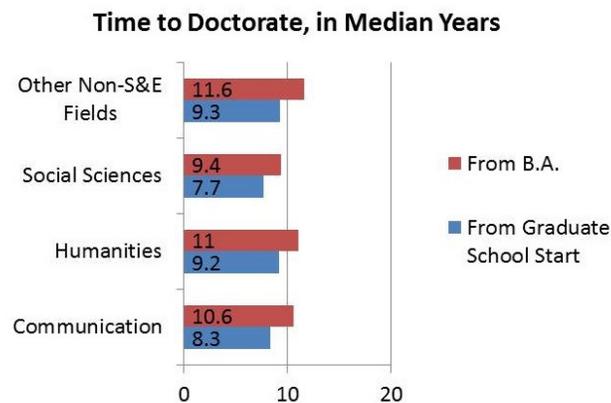
20.8% of all doctorates in Communication in 2013 (135 of the 649 Communication doctorates) were received by “Temporary Visa Holders,” suggesting that one in five of all Communication doctoral recipients are international students. Of the remaining 470 doctoral recipients, 75% (353) were classified as “white,” 7.8% (37) were classified as “Black,” 6.5% (31) were classified as “Hispanic,” and 6.2% (29) 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: 2013 *SED*, Table 22, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab22.pdf>

Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 649 Communication doctorates included in the 2013 *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 11.6 years from the B.A., and 9.3 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 2013 time-to-degree figures were significantly lower than for the broad field category—10.6 years from the B.A., and 8.3 years from entering graduate school, in median years.



Source: 2013 *SED*, Tables 31 & 68, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab31.pdf> and <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab68.pdf>

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

Selected Characteristics of the COMM Doctorate Recipient, 2013 (N = 649)	
Never Married	28.5%
Married or Marriage-Like Relationship	55.8%
B.A. in same field	46.2%
M.A. earned	89.7%
Median age at doctorate	33.5 yrs.

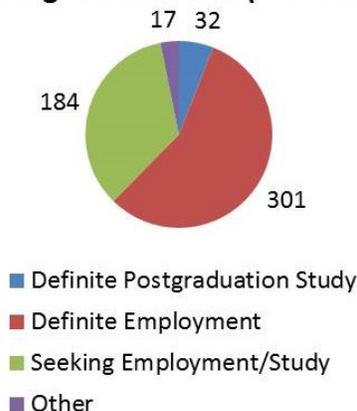
Source: 2013 *SED*, Table 68, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab68.pdf>

Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

The 2013 *SED* asked its respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. 5.9% (32) of the 534 Communication doctorates answering this question reported “definite postgraduation study”; of that number, 56.3% reported receiving a postdoctoral fellowship, while another 43.8% reported receiving a postdoctoral research associateship.

56.3% (301) of the Communication doctorates reported “definite employment” as their postgraduate plans; of those, 87% reported employment in academe, 3.7% in government, and 3.7% in business or industry. 34.4% (184) of respondents reported that they were “seeking employment or study” at the time they answered the *SED*, while another 3.1% (17) reported “other” as their postgraduate plans. These data are largely unchanged from the 2011 *SED*.

Postgraduate Plans (# of 534)



Source: 2013 *SED*, Table 69, available at <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/2013/data/tab69.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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