

# A PROFILE OF THE COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE VII:

THE 2018 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 2018 *SED* was released in December 2019 and this report serves as an update to the previously released profiles of the Communication doctorate.

## 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-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 “Education” and “Humanities and Arts.”

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. The broad field classification for Letters includes the sub-fields of Speech & Rhetorical Studies and Rhetoric & Composition. 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.

Data about Communication doctorates should be read broadly, with the understanding that some doctorates may not be included (i.e., doctorates self classified as Letters), 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 2018 SED included all individuals who received a research doctorate from a U.S. academic institution between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018. This population consisted of 55,195 persons at 431 institutions. The survey response rate was 92.1 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Of the 55,195 doctorates reported in the 2018 SED, 631 (1.1 percent) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This represents an increase of nine doctorates since the 2017 SED, which reported 622 doctorates in Communication. In comparison, Political Science and Government produced 734 doctorates (down from 743 in 2017), Sociology produced 669 doctorates (down from 683 in 2017), and Anthropology produced 424 doctorates (down from 446 in 2017). In the humanities, History produced 948 doctorates (down from 1,058 in 2017), and Foreign Languages and Literature produced 617 doctorates (a decrease of one since 2017).

<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://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/report/data-source>.

## Communication Doctorates Conferred, 2009-2018



Source: 2018 SED, Table 13. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables>.

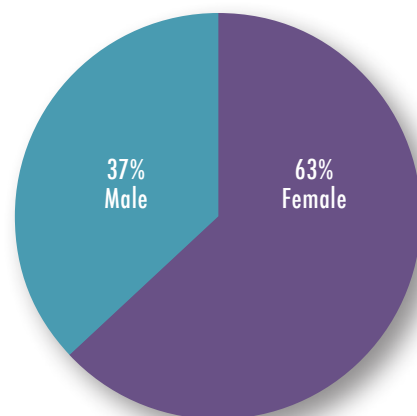
Of the 631 Communication doctorates conferred in 2018, 143 (22.6 percent) were in Communication Research, 26 (4.1 percent) were in Communication Theory, 228 (36.1 percent) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 16 (2.53 percent) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 155 (24.6 percent) were in Communication/General, and 63 (9.98 percent) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 42 in 2018, or 2.9 percent of all doctorates in Letters, and the number of doctorates in Rhetoric & Composition totaled 241 in 2018, or 16.7 percent of all doctorates in Letters.

The University of Texas granted the highest number of Communication doctorates in 2018, awarding 30. A total of five institutions awarded more than 20 doctorates each, while another six institutions conferred at least 15 doctoral degrees. The table on the right displays universities conferring 15 or more doctorates in 2018.

INSTITUTIONS CONFERRING 15+ COMMUNICATION DOCTORATES, 2018	
University of Texas at Austin	30
University of Missouri, Columbia	27
Pennsylvania State University, University Park and Hershey Medical Center	24
University of Wisconsin, Madison	22
Indiana University	21
University of Southern California	17
University of Maryland, College Park	16
Michigan State University	16
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	15
Ohio University	15
University of Pennsylvania	15

## Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

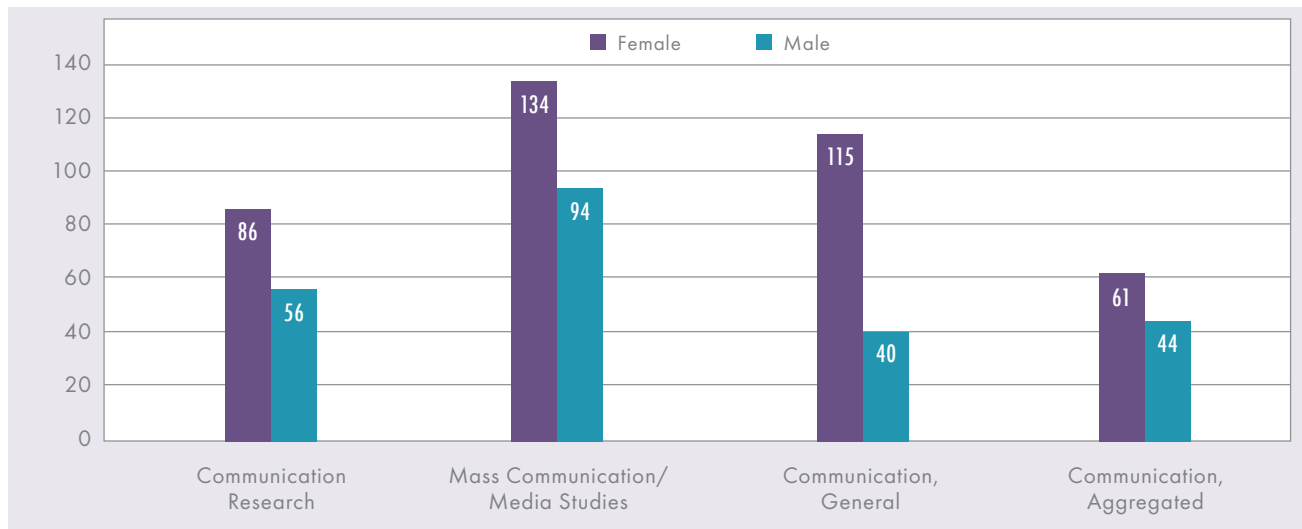
Nearly 63 percent of 2018 doctoral recipients in Communication were female. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, 41 percent of doctorates in Political Science and Government were awarded to females, while 63 percent of doctorates in Sociology went to females, and 70.3 percent of 2018 doctorates in Anthropology were awarded to females. In the humanities, 46 percent of History doctorates were awarded to females, and 59 percent of doctorates in Letters went to females.



Source: 2018 SED, Table 16. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables>.

The chart below indicates that females received more Communication doctorates in the discipline's sub-fields as well. This difference is most noticeable in the Communication, General sub-field.

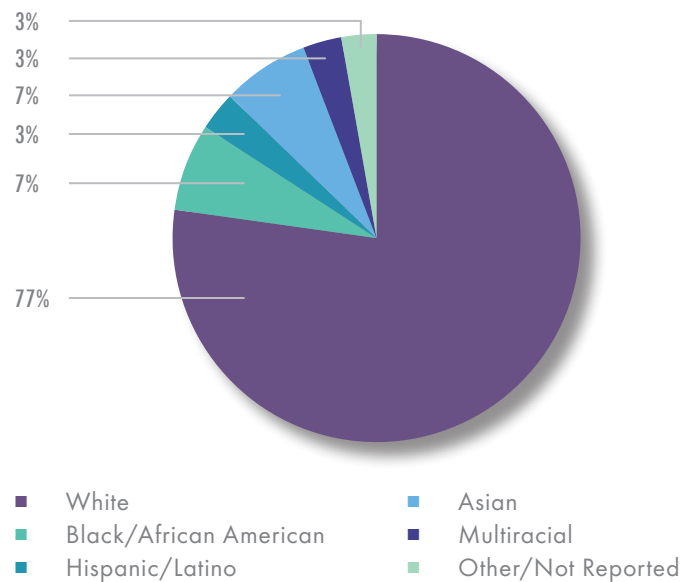
Doctoral Recipients by Sub-field and Sex, 2018



Source: 2018 SED, Table 16. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables>.

Of the 631 Communication doctorates awarded in 2018, 26 percent (165) were received by "Temporary Visa Holders," suggesting that nearly one in four Communication doctoral recipients is an international student. Of the 435 doctoral recipients who were not temporary visa holders and who responded to queries about race/ethnicity, 77 percent (333) were classified as "White," 6.9 percent (30) were classified as "Black or African American," 2.8 percent (12) were classified as "Hispanic/Latino," 7.4 percent (32) were classified as "Asian," 2.8 percent (12) identified as being "more than one race," and 15 (3.4) either reported "other race or race not reported" (7) or did not answer ethnicity questions (8).

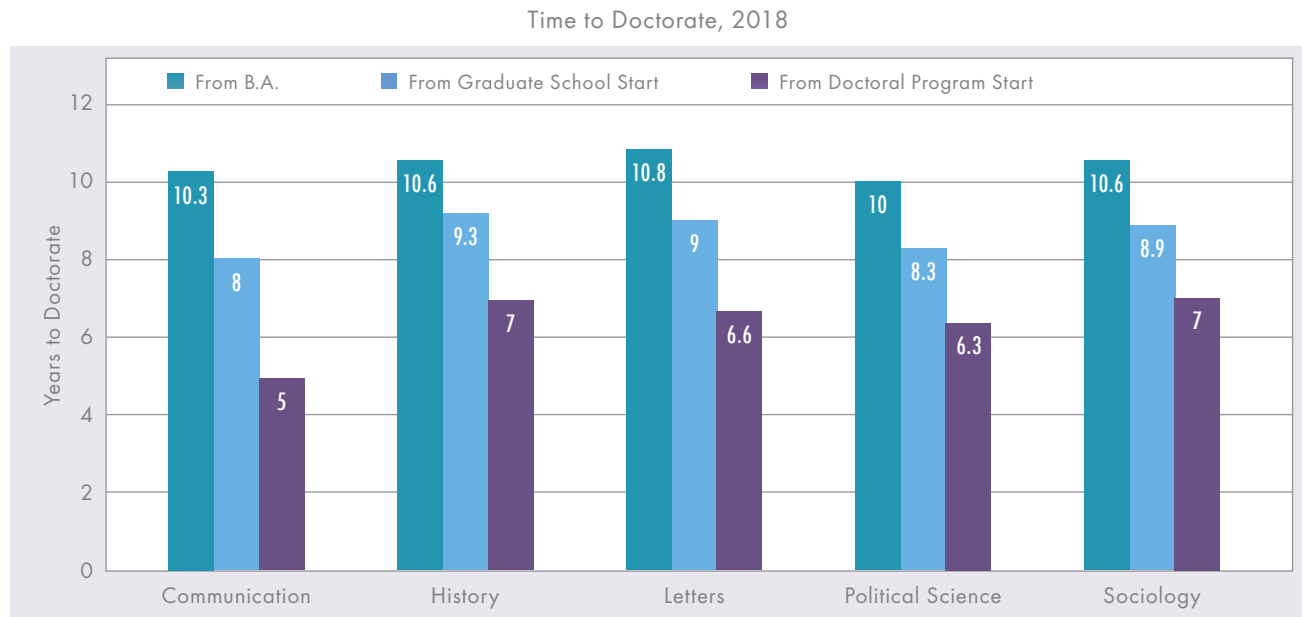
Communication Doctorate Recipients by Race/Ethnicity, 2018



Source: 2018 SED, Table 22. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables>.

## Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 631 Communication doctorates included in the 2018 SED, the time to degree was less than in most 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., 9.2 years from entering graduate school, and 5.2 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 2018 time-to-degree figures were 10.3 years from the B.A., 8 years from entering graduate school, and 5 years from the start of the doctoral program. The chart below compares Communication doctorate time-to-degree with comparable social science and humanities disciplines. As is noted here, the time-to-degree from both doctorate program start and graduate school start is lowest in Communication, and Communication trails only slightly behind Political Science in lowest time-to-degree from the B.A. degree.



Source: 2018 SED, Tables 62, 68, & 70. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables/#group7>.

Note: Time to doctorate from doctoral program start is based on master’s degree entry if the master’s degree was at the doctoral institution in the same fine field of study or was a prerequisite to the doctorate; otherwise, it is based on doctoral program entry.

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

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS, 2018	
Never Married	30%
Married	42%
B.A. in Same Field	47.5%
M.A. Earned	86.8%
Median Age at Doctorate	33.3 years

Source: 2018 SED, Table 70. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables/#group7>.

## Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

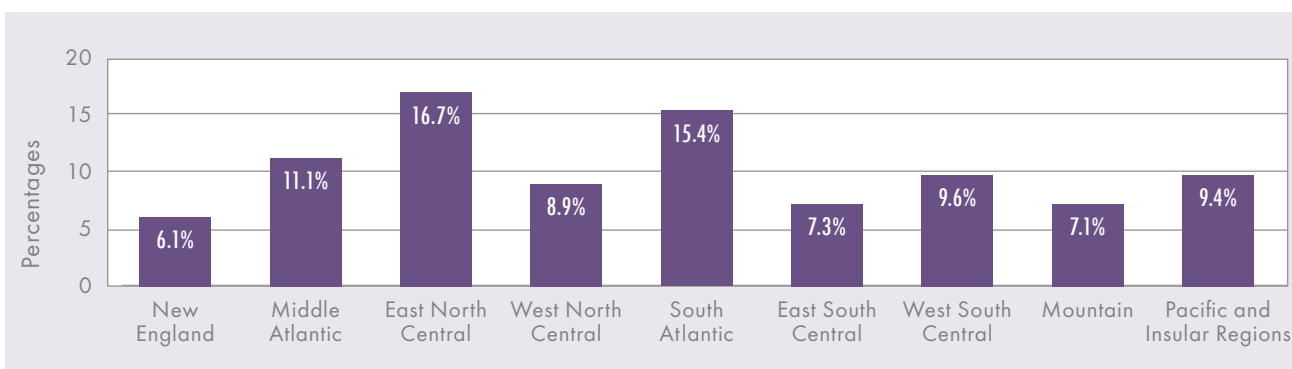
The SED asked respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. Of 631 Communication doctorates, 7.1 percent (45) reported “definite postgraduation study”; of that number, 93.3 percent reported receiving either a postdoctoral fellowship or a postdoctoral research associateship.

Another 55.5 percent (350) of the Communication doctorates reported “definite employment” as their postgraduate plans, an increase of 5.7 percent since 2017. Of those reporting definite employment, 84 percent reported employment in academia (a decrease from 88.8 percent in 2017) and 9.4 percent reported employment in business or industry (a 2.7 percent increase since 2017). More than 24 percent (154) of respondents reported that they were “seeking employment or study” at the time they answered the SED. Less than 1 percent (6) reported “other” as their postgraduate plans, a slight decrease from 2017. “Other” includes those who indicated that they did not plan to work or study, those who indicated some other type of postgraduation plans, and those who indicated definite plans for other full-time degree programs.

Female doctoral recipients reported higher numbers of both definite postgraduate study and postgraduate employment. Of the 45 respondents with definite postgraduate study plans, 64 percent of females reported definite postgraduate study compared with 36 percent of males. Of the 350 respondents with definite employment plans, 65 percent of females reported definite employment versus 35 percent of male respondents. More females (85.4 percent) also reported definitive employment in academia than their male counterparts (81.5 percent).

Of those Communication doctorates reporting definite postgraduation plans, most (91.9 percent) plan to stay in the United States, with many graduates planning to locate within the East North Central and South Atlantic regions. This differs from the 2017 SED, which highlighted the popularity of the Pacific and Insular and Middle Atlantic regions. The planned postgraduation locations of Communication doctorates are found in the chart below.

Planned Postgraduation Locations, Communication Doctorates, 2018



Source: 2018 SED, Table 71. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf20301/data-tables/#group6>.

### 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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