

# A PROFILE OF THE COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE VI:

THE 2017 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 2017 *SED* was released in December 2018, 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.<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 “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. 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, thus, 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

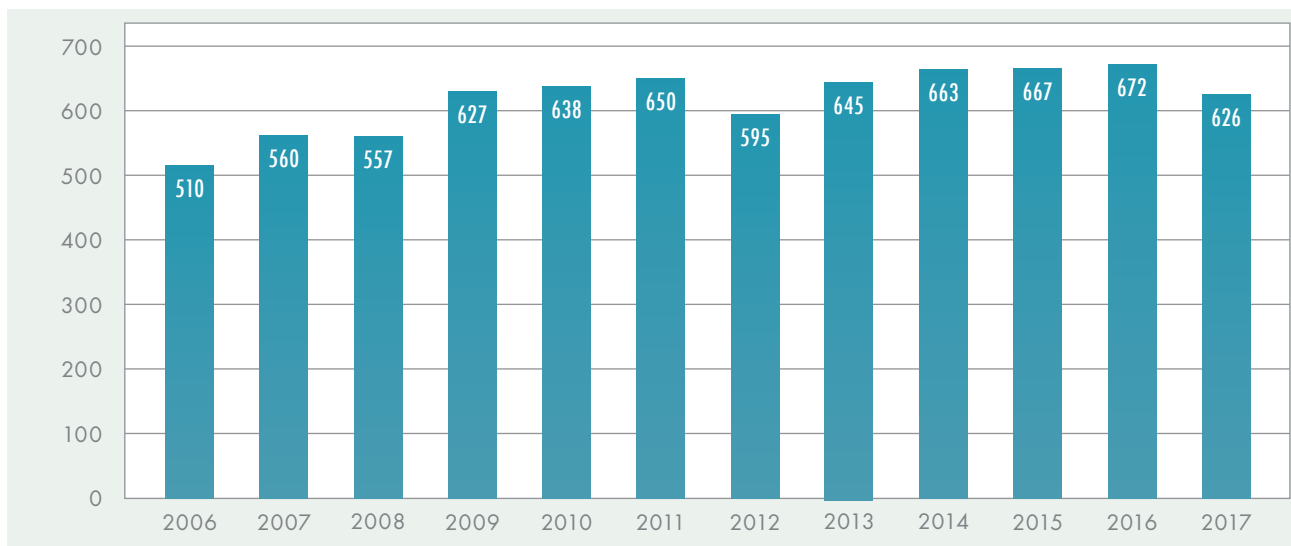
The population eligible for the 2017 *SED* included all individuals who received a research doctorate from a U.S. academic institution between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017. This population consisted of 54,664 persons at 428 institutions. The survey response rate was 91.4 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Of the 54,664 doctorates reported in the 2017 *SED*, 626 (1.1 percent) were classified as in the Communication discipline. This represents a decrease of 46 doctorates since the 2016 *SED*, which reported 672 doctorates in Communication. In comparison, Political Science and Government produced 752 doctorates (up from 745 in 2016), Sociology produced 689 doctorates (up from 615 in 2016), and Anthropology produced 455 doctorates (down from 460 in 2016). In the humanities, History produced 1,066 doctorates (down from 1,148 in 2016), and Foreign Languages and Literature produced 624 doctorates (up from 599 in 2016).

<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/nsf19301/survey-description>.

### Communication Doctorates Conferred, 2006-2017



Source: 2017 SED, Table 13. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

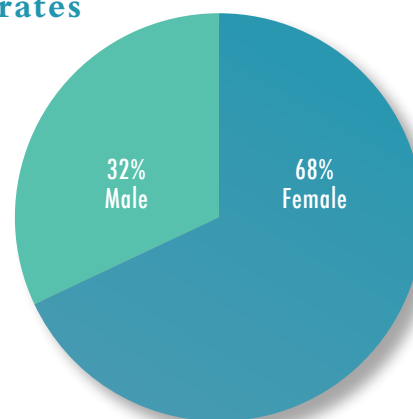
Of the 626 Communication doctorates conferred in 2017, 111 (17.7 percent) were in Communication Research, 34 (5.4 percent) were in Communication Theory, 231 (36.9 percent) were in Mass Communication/Media Studies, 34 (5.4 percent) were in Film/Radio/TV & Digital Communication, 146 (23.3 percent) were in Communication/General, and 70 (11.1 percent) were in Communication/Other. In the broad field of Letters, doctorates identified as Speech & Rhetorical Studies numbered 42 in 2017, or 2.8 percent of all doctorates in Letters, and the number of doctorates in Rhetoric & Composition totaled 227 in 2017, or 15.5 percent of all doctorates in Letters.

The University of Texas granted the highest number of Communication doctorates in 2017, awarding 31. The University of Illinois conferred 19 doctorates, and Regent University awarded 18 doctorates. The table on the right displays universities conferring 15 or more doctorates in 2017.

INSTITUTIONS CONFERRING 15+ COMMUNICATION DOCTORATES, 2017	
University of Texas at Austin	31
University of Illinois	19
Regent University	18
University of Southern California	16
Michigan State University	15

### Demographic Data—Communication Doctorates

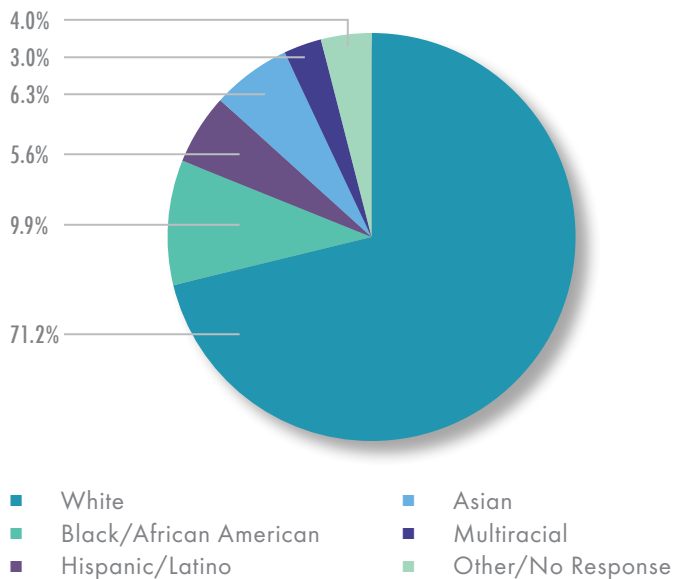
Over 68 percent of 2017 doctoral recipients in Communication were female. By way of comparison, among the social sciences, 40 percent of doctorates in Political Science were awarded to females, while 61 percent of doctorates in Sociology went to females. In the humanities, 44 percent of History doctorates were awarded to females, and 58 percent of doctorates in Letters went to females.



Source: 2017 SED, Table 16. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

Of the 626 Communication doctorates awarded in 2017, 19.3 percent (121) were received by “Temporary Visa Holders,” suggesting that one in five Communication doctoral recipients is an international student. Of the 463 doctoral recipients who were not temporary visa holders and who responded to queries about race/ethnicity, 71.2 percent (330) were classified as “White,” 9.9 percent (46) were classified as “Black or African American,” 5.6 percent (26) were classified as “Hispanic/Latino,” 6.3 percent (29) were classified as “Asian,” 3 percent (14) identified as being “more than one race,” and 4 percent (17) either reported being an “other” race (4) or did not answer race/ethnicity questions (13).

Communication Doctorate Recipients by Race/Ethnicity, 2017

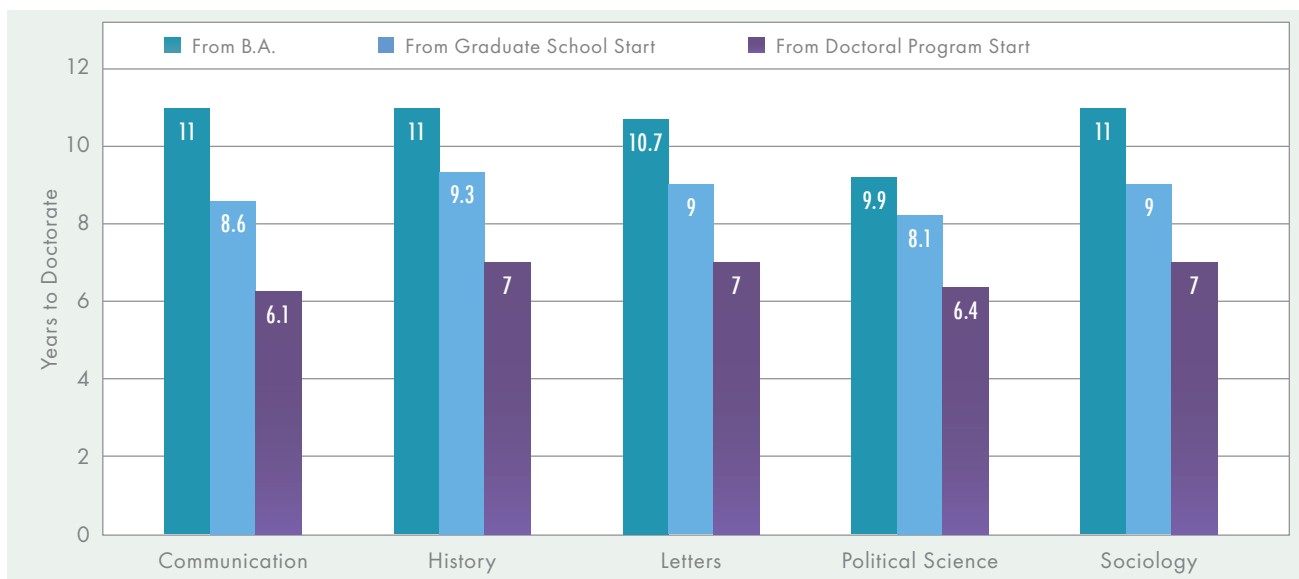


Source: 2017 SED, Table 22. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

## Other Information—Communication Doctorates

For the 626 Communication doctorates included in the 2017 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 11.4 years from the B.A., 9.3 years from entering graduate school, and 5.8 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 2017 time-to-degree figures were 11 years from the B.A., 8.6 years from entering graduate school, and 6.1 years from the start of the doctorate program. The chart below compares Communication doctorate time to degree with comparable social science and humanities disciplines.

Time to Doctorate, 2017



Source: 2017 SED, Tables 62, 68, & 70. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

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

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATION DOCTORATE RECIPIENTS, 2017	
Never Married	28.3%
Married	42.3%
B.A. in Same Field	42.8%
M.A. Earned	85.5%
Median Age at Doctorate	33.6 years

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

Note: Data on "Marriage-like relationship" and "Separated, divorced, or widowed" were suppressed in the original report to avoid disclosure of confidential information.

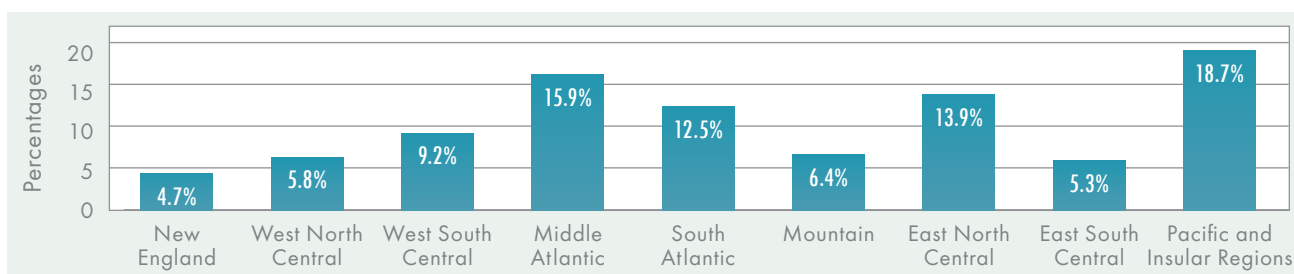
## Postgraduation Plans—Communication Doctorates

The *SED* asked respondents for an indication of their postgraduation plans. Of 626 Communication doctorates, 7.5 percent (47) reported "definite postgraduation study"; of that number, 95.7 percent reported receiving either a postdoctoral fellowship or a postdoctoral research associateship.

Another 49.8 percent (312) of the Communication doctorates reported "definite employment" as their postgraduate plans, an increase of 5 percent since 2016. Of those reporting definite employment, 88.8 percent reported employment in academe (an increase from 80.7 percent in 2016) and 6.7 percent reported employment in business or industry (steady with 2016 figures). More than 25 percent (159) of respondents reported that they were "seeking employment or study" at the time they answered the *SED*, a decrease of 3 percent from 2016. Another 2.8 percent (18) reported "other" as their postgraduate plans, a slight decrease from 2016.

Of those Communication doctorates reporting definite postgraduation plans, most (92.5 percent) planned to stay in the United States, with most graduates planning to locate within the Pacific and insular regions. The planned postgraduation locations of Communication doctorates are found in the chart below.

Planned Postgraduation Locations, Communication Doctorates, 2017



Source: 2017 *SED*, Table 71. Available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

### 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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