



National Center for Science and
Engineering Statistics

Survey Description

Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)

NCSES 26-010 | September 25, 2026

Contents

Survey Overview (2025 Survey Cycle)	2
Key Survey Information	3
Survey Design	5
Data Collection and Processing	6
Survey Quality Measures	7
Data Availability and Comparability	8
Data Products	9

Survey Overview (2025 Survey Cycle)

Purpose

The Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) collects data on the number and characteristics of individuals receiving research doctoral degrees from U.S. academic institutions.

Data collection authority

The information collected by the SED is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, and the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010. The Office of Management and Budget control number for the 2025 survey cycle is 3145-0019, expiration date 31 May 2026. The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) has reviewed this product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved its release (NCSES-DRN26-034).

Survey contractor

RTI International.

Major changes to recent survey cycle

None.

Key Survey Information

Frequency	Annual.
Initial survey year	Academic year 1958.
Reference period	Academic year 2025 (1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025).
Response unit	Individuals.
Sample or census	Census.
Population size	59,015.
Sample size	Not applicable.
Key variables	Key variables of interest are listed below. ● Academic institution of doctorate ● Baccalaureate-origin institution (U.S. and foreign) ● Birth year ● Citizenship status at graduation ● Country of birth and citizenship ● Disability status ● Educational attainment of parents ● Educational history in college ● Field of each degree earned ● Graduate and undergraduate educational debt ● Marital status, as well as the number and age of dependents ● Postgraduation plans (e.g., work, postdoc, other study or training) ○ Primary and secondary work activities ○ Source and type of financial support for postdoctoral study or research ○ Type and location of employer ○ Basic annual salary ● Race and ethnicity ● Sex ● Sources of financial support during graduate school

- Type of academic institution awarding the doctorate

Survey Design

Target population

The population for the 2025 SED consists of all individuals receiving a research doctorate from a U.S. academic institution in the 12-month period beginning 1 July 2024 and ending 30 June 2025. A research doctorate is a doctoral degree that (1) requires completion of an original intellectual contribution in the form of a dissertation or an equivalent culminating project (e.g., musical composition) and (2) is not primarily intended as a degree for the practice of a profession. The most common research doctoral degree is the doctor of philosophy (PhD). Recipients of professional doctoral degrees, such as MD, DDS, DVM, JD, DPharm, DMin, and PsyD, are not included in the SED.

Sampling frame

The total universe of doctorate recipients is created by first identifying all institutions that confer research doctorates and then identifying all individuals receiving a research doctorate from those institutions in the 12-month period ending 30 June 2025. The list of institutions is based principally on the institutions in the prior survey cycle augmented by any new institutions on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and other higher education resource databases. The list of doctorate recipients is created from administrative sources such as commencement lists from the institutions and commercial databases of doctorate dissertations. The frame of the 2025 SED included 59,015 persons from 460 institutions that conferred research doctorates.

Sample design

The SED is a census.

Data Collection and Processing

Data collection

Two modes of data collection are used in the SED: self-administered Web survey and computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). The self-administered Web survey is the primary mode of SED completion. The proportion of SED completions using the Web has increased steadily since it was introduced in 2001 and was 99.2% in 2025.

Nonrespondents are contacted by email, mail, and text messages to complete the Web survey. If the series of follow-up emails, mailings, and text messages is unsuccessful, the survey contractor attempts to reach nonrespondents to complete an abbreviated survey by CATI. Approximately 0.8% of SED completions were from CATI in 2025. At the end of the data collection phase, institutional coordinators were contacted to obtain information on a small number of critical SED data items for nonrespondents from their institution.

Data processing

The data collected in the SED are subject to editing and coding procedures. Imputation is not performed for missing survey data items except for the month value used in the calculation of the age at doctorate and time to degree variables.

Estimation techniques

The survey is a census of all recipients of U.S. research doctoral degrees with no sampling variability.

Survey Quality Measures

Sampling error

Not applicable because the SED is a census.

Coverage error

Due to the availability of comprehensive lists of doctorate-granting institutions, coverage error of institutions is minimal. Because the graduate schools identify degree recipients at the time of doctorate completion, coverage error for individual doctorate recipients is also minimal. In 2025, 17 doctorate-granting institutions declined to fully enumerate their doctorate recipients for academic year 2025. Information on the graduates for all of these institutions was found from other sources, such as ProQuest or published information. Comparisons of the institutions with research doctorate recipients covered by the SED that also report to the [IPEDS Completions Survey](#) confirm that there is minimal coverage error.

Nonresponse error

- *Unit nonresponse.* Of the 59,015 individuals granted a research doctorate in 2025, 91.0% completed the survey. A limited number of SED critical data items (doctoral institution, year of doctorate, field of doctorate, type of doctorate, and, if available, baccalaureate institution, master's degree institution, and sex) are constructed for nonrespondents from commencement programs, graduation lists, and other similar public records. Nonresponse was concentrated in a small number of institutions, with 19 institutions accounting for 50% of the total unit nonresponse.
- *Item nonresponse.* Among the 59,015 individuals who received a research doctorate in 2025, item nonresponse rates for the five key SED demographic variables—sex, citizenship, country of citizenship, race and ethnicity, and location after graduation—range from 0.0% for sex to 8.4% for postgraduation location.

Measurement and data processing error

Measurement error in the SED is attributable to several sources, including errors in respondent reporting and errors that occur during data collection or processing.

Data on doctorate recipients for previous years are updated with data received from institutions and respondents after the close of data collection for a given year. Updates and corrections to graduation dates can also change the overall counts for prior years. The published tables reflect these changes and thus may not match previously published data.

Data Availability and Comparability

Data availability

Each year's survey data are added to the Doctorate Records File (DRF), which includes cumulative SED data dating back to 1958; more limited information (sex, institution, field, and year of doctorate) is contained on the DRF for PhDs who graduated in 1920–56.

Data comparability

Because of procedural changes implemented during the 1990 survey cycle to improve the completeness of race, ethnicity, and citizenship data, the data from 1990 and later years are not directly comparable to data before 1990.

In 2021, the education history section was changed to a table format in which respondents can select all the postsecondary degrees received, up to nine degrees. Based on the degrees reported, follow-up questions asked about each type of degree, including any professional doctorate being earned.

Beginning in 2021, field of study and doctorate dissertation field data have been collected using a modified version of the 2020 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes. Therefore, the field of study data prior to the 2021 survey cycle may not be comparable to the data in subsequent years; see the working paper [Survey of Earned Doctorates Field of Study Taxonomy Changes in 2021 and Impact on Trend Data](#) for more information.

Data Products

Publications

The data from this survey are published annually in detailed tables and the report series *Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities*. Other products are also available at the [SED home page](#). Information from the survey is also included in congressionally mandated reports, such as *Science and Engineering Indicators*.

Electronic access

Access to tabular data on selected variables from 1958 onward is available in an NCSES [interactive data tool](#). Users can create custom tables of the number of doctorate recipients by academic discipline and institutional characteristics of either the doctorate-granting institution or the baccalaureate-granting institution of doctorate recipients. A limited set of demographic characteristics is available to create custom tables by academic discipline.

A more comprehensive set of analysis variables is available in the [SED Restricted Data Analysis System \(RDAS\)](#) for the data user to generate custom data tables in a secured platform.

Restricted access

Researchers interested in analyzing restricted microdata can apply for a restricted-use license by submitting a proposal through the Standard Application Process (SAP). The proposal will be evaluated based on the benefit to the sponsoring agencies, scientific merit, feasibility, and risk of disclosure. To learn more and apply for access, visit the [Standard Application Process](#).