

Navigating the Digest of Education Statistics Reports (CAPE Section 6.b)

The narrative prompt in Section 6.b of the CAPE Program Self-Study Template asks programs to compare trends in degree conferrals to national trends over the last 5-10 years, and includes an embedded link to a set of reports produced by the National Center for Education Statistics. These reports show trends in conferrals for various fields of study relative to overall trends in degree production nationwide; separate reports are provided for different degree levels.

After following the link provided on the Worksheet, use the following guide to generate data for your program(s).



FAST FACTS

Most popular majors

Question:

What are the most popular majors for postsecondary students?

Response:

Of the 1,895,000 bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15, the greatest numbers of degrees were conferred in the fields of business (364,000), health professions and related programs (216,000), social sciences and history (167,000), psychology (118,000), biological and biomedical sciences (110,000), engineering (98,000), visual and performing arts (96,000), and education (92,000). At the master's degree level, the greatest numbers of degrees were conferred in the fields of business (185,000), education (147,000), and health professions and related programs (103,000). At the doctor's degree level, the greatest numbers of degrees were conferred in the fields of health professions and related programs (71,000), legal professions and studies (40,300), education (11,800), engineering (10,200), biological and biomedical sciences (8,100), psychology (6,600), and physical sciences and science technologies (5,800).

In recent years, the numbers of bachelor's degrees conferred have followed patterns that differed significantly by field of study. While the number of bachelor's degrees conferred increased by 32 percent overall between 2004–05 and 2014–15, there was substantial variation among the different fields of study, as well as shifts in the patterns of change during this time period. For example, the number of degrees conferred in computer and information sciences decreased 27 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10, but then increased 50 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15. In contrast, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in the combined fields of engineering and engineering technologies increased 12 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10, and then increased a further 30 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15. In a number of other major fields, the number of bachelor's degrees also increased by higher percentages in the second half of the 10-year period than in the first half.

For example, the number of degrees conferred in agriculture and natural resources increased by 15 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10 and then by 38 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15. The number of degrees conferred in health professions and related programs increased by 61 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10 and then by 67 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15. Also, the number of degrees conferred in public administration and social services increased by 17 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10 and then by 35 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15. Other fields with sizable numbers of degrees (over 5,000 in 2014–15) that showed increases of 30 percent or more between 2009–10 and 2014–15 included homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (44 percent); parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies (47 percent); and mathematics and statistics (36 percent). Some fields with sizable numbers of degrees did not have increases during the 2009–10 to 2014–15 period. The number of degrees in English language and literature/letters was 14 percent lower in 2014–15 than in 2009–10, and the number of degrees in philosophy and religious studies was 11 percent lower. The numbers of degrees in the fields of education, architecture and related services, and area, ethnic, cultural, gender, and group studies were each 10 percent lower in 2014–15 than in 2009–10.

Also, the number of degrees in foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics was 9 percent lower in 2014–15 than in 2009–10; the number of degrees in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities was 7 percent lower; and the number of degrees in social sciences and history was 3 percent lower.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2016* (NCES 2017-094) Chapter 3.

Related Tables and Figures: (Listed by Release Date)

- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 322.10. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970–71 through 2015–16
- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 322.30. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and field of study: 2014–15 and 2015–16
- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 322.40. Bachelor's degrees conferred to males by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and field of study: 2014–15 and 2015–16
- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 322.50. Bachelor's degrees conferred to females by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and field of study: 2014–15 and 2015–16
- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 323.10. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970–71 through 2015–16
- 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*. Table 324.10. Doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970–71 through 2015–16

Choose
Degree
Level

Once you choose a specific report, the data will show national trends in degree conferrals for that degree level for selected years since 1970-71. When discussing trends for your program, be sure to consider both the national trend in the most relevant field of study shown in the report, as well as the relationship to trends in conferrals across all fields of study over the past 5-10 years.

Table 322.10. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970-71 through 2015-16

Field of study	1970-71	1975-76	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96	2000-01	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Total	839,730	925,746	935,140	987,823	1,094,538	1,164,792	1,244,171	1,485,242	1,524,092	1,563,069	1,601,399	1,649,919	1,716,053	1,792,163	1,840,381	1,870,150	1,894,969	1,920,718
Agriculture and natural resources	12,672	19,402	21,886	16,823	13,124	21,425	23,370	23,883	23,133	24,113	24,982	26,343	28,630	30,972	33,592	35,125	36,278	37,005
Architecture and related services	5,570	9,146	9,455	9,119	9,781	8,352	8,480	9,515	9,717	9,805	10,119	10,051	9,831	9,727	9,757	9,149	9,090	8,823
Area, ethnic, cultural, gender, and group studies	2,579	3,577	2,887	3,021	4,776	5,633	6,160	7,875	8,194	8,454	8,772	8,620	8,955	9,228	8,850	8,275	7,783	7,840
Biological and biomedical sciences	35,705	54,154	43,078	38,395	39,482	61,014	60,576	70,607	76,832	79,829	82,828	86,391	89,984	95,850	100,397	104,657	109,904	113,749
Business	115,396	143,171	200,521	236,700	249,165	226,623	263,515	318,042	377,531	335,254	348,056	358,119	365,133	367,235	360,887	358,132	363,741	371,694
Communication, journalism, and related programs	10,324	20,045	29,428	41,666	51,650	47,320	58,013	73,955	74,893	76,382	77,984	81,280	83,231	83,771	84,818	87,612	90,658	92,554
Communications technologies	478	1,237	1,854	1,479	1,397	853	1,178	2,981	3,677	4,666	5,100	4,782	4,858	4,983	4,987	4,991	5,135	4,824
Computer and information sciences	2,388	5,652	15,121	42,337	25,159	24,506	44,142	47,480	42,170	38,476	37,992	39,993	43,066	47,406	50,961	55,271	59,586	64,405
Education	176,307	154,437	108,074	87,147	110,807	105,384	105,458	107,238	105,641	102,582	101,716	101,287	104,008	105,656	104,698	98,838	91,596	87,217
Engineering	45,034	38,733	63,642	77,391	62,448	62,168	58,209	66,841	66,874	68,431	68,911	72,657	76,356	81,371	85,987	92,169	97,852	106,850
Engineering technologies	5,148	7,943	11,713	19,731	17,303	15,829	14,660	14,565	14,980	15,777	15,493	16,078	16,741	17,283	17,010	16,807	17,253	17,159
English language and literature/letters	63,914	41,452	31,922	34,083	51,064	49,928	50,569	55,096	55,122	55,038	55,465	53,229	52,754	53,765	52,401	50,464	45,851	42,795
Family and consumer sciences/human sciences	11,167	17,409	18,370	13,847	13,920	14,353	16,421	20,775	21,400	21,871	21,906	21,832	22,438	23,441	23,930	24,689	24,584	25,389
Foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics	20,988	17,068	11,638	11,550	13,937	14,832	16,128	19,410	20,275	20,977	21,169	21,507	21,705	21,756	21,647	20,332	19,493	18,427
Health professions and related programs	25,223	33,885	63,665	65,309	59,875	86,087	75,933	91,973	101,810	111,478	120,420	129,623	143,463	163,675	181,149	198,777	216,228	228,896
Homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting	2,045	12,507	13,707	12,704	16,806	24,810	25,211	35,319	39,206	40,235	41,388	43,613	47,600	54,091	60,264	62,416	62,723	61,157
Legal professions and studies	545	531	776	1,223	1,827	2,123	1,991	3,302	3,596	3,771	3,823	3,886	4,429	4,595	4,425	4,513	4,420	4,243
Liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities	7,481	18,855	21,643	21,336	30,526	33,997	37,962	44,898	44,255	46,940	47,095	46,963	46,717	46,961	46,790	45,281	43,645	43,661
Library science	1,013	843	375	155	90	58	52	76	82	68	78	85	96	95	102	127	9	85
Mathematics and statistics	24,801	15,984	11,078	16,122	14,393	12,713	11,171	14,770	14,954	15,192	15,507	15,029	17,182	18,841	20,449	20,987	21,856	22,777
Military technologies and applied sciences	357	952	42	255	183	7	21	53	168	39	55	66	64	86	105	185	215	188
Multi/interdisciplinary studies	6,324	13,709	12,986	13,754	17,774	26,885	26,478	30,583	32,111	34,174	35,376	37,711	42,473	45,717	47,658	48,392	47,516	48,194
Parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies	1,621	5,182	5,729	4,623	4,315	12,974	17,948	25,490	27,430	29,931	31,683	33,332	35,934	38,998	42,628	46,047	49,018	50,918
Philosophy and religious studies	8,149	8,447	6,776	6,396	7,423	7,541	8,717	11,985	11,961	12,257	12,448	12,503	12,830	12,645	12,792	11,999	11,071	10,157
Physical sciences and science technologies	21,410	21,458	23,936	21,711	16,334	19,716	18,025	20,522	21,291	22,179	22,691	23,381	24,705	26,664	28,053	29,307	30,042	31,477
Precision production	0	0	0	2	2	12	31	55	23	13	29	29	18	37	36	37	48	50
Psychology	38,187	50,278	41,068	40,628	58,655	73,416	73,465	88,134	90,039	92,587	94,273	97,215	100,900	109,099	114,446	117,312	117,073	117,440
Public administration and social services	5,466	15,440	16,707	11,887	14,350	19,849	19,447	21,986	23,147	23,493	23,852	25,421	26,799	29,695	31,950	33,483	34,864	34,432
Social sciences and history	155,324	126,396	100,513	93,840	125,107	126,479	128,036	161,485	164,183	167,363	168,817	172,782	177,169	178,534	177,767	173,132	166,971	161,230
Theology and religious vocations	3,720	5,490	5,808	5,510	4,799	5,292	6,945	8,548	8,696	8,992	8,946	8,719	9,073	9,304	9,385	9,642	9,713	9,804
Transportation and materials moving	0	225	263	1,838	2,622	3,561	3,748	5,349	5,657	5,203	5,189	4,998	4,941	4,476	4,661	4,588	4,730	4,529
Visual and performing arts	30,394	42,138	40,479	37,241	42,186	49,296	61,148	83,297	85,186	87,703	89,143	91,751	93,939	95,800	97,799	97,414	98,841	92,979
Not classified by field of study	0	0	0	0	13,258	1,756	783	0	377	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

NOTE: Data through 1990-91 are for institutions of higher education, while later data are for postsecondary institutions that participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The new Classification of Instructional Programs was initiated in 2009-10. The figures for earlier years have been reclassified when necessary to make them conform to the new taxonomy. To facilitate trend comparisons, certain aggregations have been made of the degree fields as reported in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). "Agriculture and natural resources" includes Agriculture, agriculture operations, and related sciences and Natural resources and conservation; "Business" includes Business, management, marketing, and related support services and Personal and culinary services; and "Engineering technologies" includes Engineering technologies and engineering-related fields, Construction trades, and Mechanic and repair technologies/technicians. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred" surveys, 1970-71 through 1985-86; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Completions Survey" (IPEDS-C-91-99); and IPEDS Fall 2000 through Fall 2016, Completions component. (This table was prepared August 2017.)

Compare Trends