



## Revised NRC rankings:

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1. [How are the revised rankings different from the original rankings in the Sept. 2010 report?](#)
2. [What do the revised rankings reflect that the previous ones do not?](#)
3. [How did Cornell's rankings change?](#)
4. [Are the rankings reliable?](#)
5. [What do the rankings mean for the Cornell graduate fields; do they make Cornell more attractive to prospective students?](#)

### 1. How are the revised rankings different from the original rankings in the Sept. 2010 report?

A> The revised ratings reflect corrections to four of the variables used to rank research doctorate programs. The NRC discovered errors in the data and calculations for the following:

- **Awards per allocated faculty member.** The NRC had undercounted honors and awards.
- **Percent with academic plans.** The measure for this variable was changed to reflect the percent of students who find employment in an academic or postdoctoral position after graduation. The variable was re-calculated to reflect the new definition.
- **Percent of first-year students with full financial support.** In the previous version, the NRC used a "0" if there were no first year students. They changed the "0" to an asterisk; when no data were reported, there is an N/D. The NRC recalculated the results.
- **Average citations per publication.** For non-humanities fields, publications from 2002 had been mislabeled, and the field, citations per publication, was re-calculated.

These corrections resulted in small changes for most fields. For some fields, the changes were more dramatic. The Chronicle of Higher Education article cites Cornell's field of French language and literature as making particularly large gains.

### 2. What do the revised rankings reflect that the previous ones did not?

A> The revised rankings reflect a more accurate picture of the four variables. For instance, the previous version penalized programs that did not have any first-year students when the data were collected, by indicating "0" regardless of whether they usually fund first-year students. This correction will help those fields.

### 3. How was it decided which Cornell fields would participate?

A> Please visit the following sites for a complete breakdown of how Cornell's graduate fields were ranked.

- [Cornell's NRC Rankings Chart - updated 4/29/11 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Cornell's NRC Percentiles Chart - updated 4/29/11 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Field-specific reports and data \(prepared by Cornell's Institutional Research & Planning and Cornell's Key Performance Indicators project\)](#)

#### 4. Are the rankings reliable?

A> The NRC Report attempts to measure the quality of research doctorate programs by taking into account numerous complex variables believed to reflect academic and programmatic quality. Different fields have expressed varying degrees of confidence with the NRC's ability to track quality based on the data collected.

At the Graduate School, we believe the value of the NRC study may lie less in the specific rankings and more in the ability to compare programs across multiple variables to understand how to improve graduate study. Cornell's NRC rankings should be viewed within the proper context taking into account the following:

- NRC data reflect a snapshot of the 2005-2006 school year. Graduate study at Cornell has changed since the data were collected.
- Cornell faculty has changed considerably since the NRC data were collected. 17% of faculty members present in 2005-2006 have left the university due to retirement or other reasons. These departures were largely replaced by new hires. As a result, there was an increase of 2% each in the number of women and minorities.
- University funding of graduate students (from both assistantships and fellowships) increased 5% between Fall 2005 and Fall 2008.
- The NRC data compilation process helped us to identify areas for improvement in graduate education at Cornell. For instance, the Graduate School received a grant from the Council of Graduate Schools to enhance Ph.D. completion rates and reduce time-to-degree across the Graduate School. While some of our most visible programming focused on the humanities and social science fields, our efforts spanned all disciplinary areas at Cornell.
- Over the past five years, construction of numerous facilities in support of research, teaching, and graduate education have been approved. These include Joan and Sanford I. Weill Hall (life sciences and interdisciplinary studies), the new Physical Sciences building, and the Paul Milstein Hall (arts and humanities).
- Since 2005-2006, Cornell has increased support for the social sciences. The Social Sciences Initiative aims to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration by expanding opportunities for researchers and students to work together across disciplines through the central resource of the Institute for Social Sciences.

The revisions did not affect the factors listed above. With or without corrections, Cornell has changed since the data were collected.

#### 5. What do the rankings mean for Cornell's graduate fields; do they make it more attractive to prospective students?

A> Overall, Cornell did exceptionally well in the NRC Report. In the rankings released in September 2010, half the participating Cornell University Graduate School and Weill Cornell Graduate School of

Medical Sciences graduate fields were included within the top 10 range of rankings on an overall measure, and more than 75 percent are included in the top 20 range.