



Cornell University  
Graduate School

## NRC Doctoral Rankings Release Announcement

The National Research Council (NRC) announced that the third Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs will be released on September 28, 2010. The study, which was originally scheduled for release in 2008, is intended to provide a comprehensive and data-driven assessment of doctoral program quality in American universities.

The NRC report will consist of descriptive text, spreadsheets, and analytic tables for 4,838 programs in 62 fields at 212 institutions. The NRC will release a report brief, an FAQ, and a methodology guide to accompany the final report.

The number of doctoral programs ranked in this analysis varies widely by area, from 122 ranked programs in psychology to 9 in Theater and Performance Studies, but not all programs in all schools were ranked. Out of more than 90 major graduate fields of study at Cornell, around 60 fields were included in the study.

The NRC set criteria and a taxonomy to establish which programs could be included under a given field. Each field at Cornell made the decision as to whether or not to participate informed by NRC-given definitions of the program area.

It is also the case that multiple programs within a university were sometimes grouped within a single NRC program. For example, the NRC program of plant science included five graduate fields from Cornell (horticulture, plant biology, plant breeding, plant pathology, and soil and crop science). The final list of Cornell fields included in the NRC study will be released with the third Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs.

The methodology of the current study is markedly different from that of NRC's earlier studies published in 1982 and 1995. The rankings will feature ranges rather than a single ordinal list, and will be derived from 20 key variables. (Table 1)

**Table 1: Twenty key variables (from the National Academies).** *Italic items are included only in the overall measure. Color-coded items comprise the dimensional categories: blue = research activity, red = student outcomes, and black = diversity.*

## The Twenty Key Variables used in the Rankings

- Publications per allocated faculty
- Citations (exc. Humanities) per publication
- Percent faculty with grants
- Awards per faculty
- Percent 1<sup>st</sup> Yr. Full Support
- Percent Completing in 6 yrs. or less (8 yrs. for humanities)
- Median Time to degree
- Students with Academic Plans
- Collects Outcomes data
- Percent Faculty Minority
- Percent Faculty Female
- Percent Students Minority
- Percent Students Female
- Percent Students International
- Percent Interdisciplinary
- Average GRE-Q
- Number of PhDs 2002-2006
- Student Workspace
- Student Health Insurance
- Student Activities

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The final report will display broad ranges for program rankings overall and across the dimensions of faculty, student, and program indicators. These ranges will look different from what is generally displayed in media stories about institutional rankings.

Each field will receive two different types of rankings – one based on faculty opinions of the relative importance of the various program factors and obtained via survey (S-rankings), and one based on a regression analysis linking reputational components to the program factors (R-rankings). Each of these will be given by a range of rankings (e.g., 32<sup>nd</sup> – 35<sup>th</sup>). The NRC reports that S- and R-rankings are very close to each other, but not perfectly correlated. These ranges will have a 90% confidence interval.

Thus, for example, considering “Student Support Outcomes” for the Ivy doctoral program illustrated in Table 2, the program in all likelihood falls somewhere between 8<sup>th</sup> best (at the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile) and 31<sup>st</sup> best (at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile) among all doctoral programs in that field in the United States . (Table 2)

**\*\*Table 2: Sample range of rankings for hypothetical graduate program alongside other programs, overall and dimensional rankings.**

Institution	Overall Measure: Regression (R)		Overall Measure: Survey (S)		Research Activity		Diversity of Academic Environment		Student Support Outcomes	
	5 <sup>th</sup> %tile	95 <sup>th</sup> %tile	5 <sup>th</sup> %tile	95 <sup>th</sup> %tile	5 <sup>th</sup> %tile	95 <sup>th</sup> %tile	5 <sup>th</sup> %tile	95 <sup>th</sup> %tile	5 <sup>th</sup> %tile	95 <sup>th</sup> %tile
Ivy University	32	35	30	36	31	32	37	41	8	31
University of State	43	50	45	54	40	42	42	50	45	46
Random University	45	56	45	56	38	42	47	51	43	47

Total number of ranked programs = 117

To collect and compile Cornell's data, the Graduate School worked closely with representatives from the fields of study to gather, interpret, and verify all information prior to releasing it to the NRC. Data were first obtained from the central university records and then submitted to the graduate programs for verification. Necessary adjustments to the data were made based on feedback from the graduate programs. Then, final reports were reviewed with the field representatives, department chairs, and associate deans prior to submission to the NRC.

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 results of the NRC Assessment of Research Doctorates will be made available to the Cornell community on a special website, [www.gradschool.cornell.edu/nrc](http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/nrc). The NRC data will be made available as an Excel spreadsheet allowing individuals to create custom reports around a specific field or interest.