

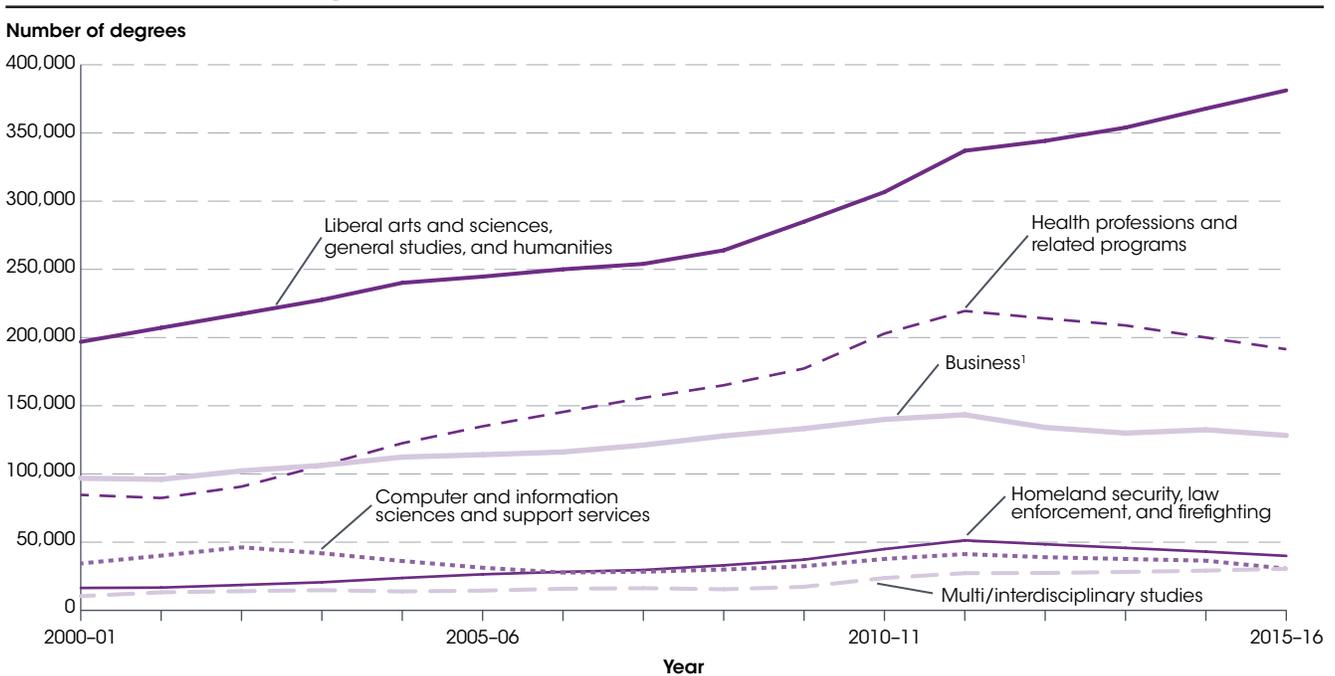
Undergraduate Degree Fields

In 2015–16, over two-thirds of the 1.0 million associate’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions were concentrated in three fields of study: liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (381,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (191,000 degrees); and business (128,000 degrees). Of the 1.9 million bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2015–16, over half were concentrated in six fields of study: business (372,000 degrees), health professions and related programs (229,000 degrees), social sciences and history (161,000 degrees), psychology (117,000 degrees), biological and biomedical sciences (114,000 degrees), and engineering (107,000 degrees).

In academic year 2015–16, postsecondary institutions conferred 1.0 million associate’s degrees. Over two-thirds (70 percent) of these degrees were concentrated in three fields of study: liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (38 percent, or 381,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (19 percent, or 191,000 degrees); and business¹ (13 percent, or 128,000 degrees). The three next largest percentages

of associate’s degrees conferred in 2015–16 were in the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (4 percent, or 39,900 degrees); computer and information sciences and support services (3 percent, or 30,600 degrees); and multi/interdisciplinary studies² (3 percent, or 30,500 degrees). Overall, 79,900 associate’s degrees (8 percent) were conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)³ fields in 2015–16.

Figure 1. Number of associate’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2000–01 through 2015–16

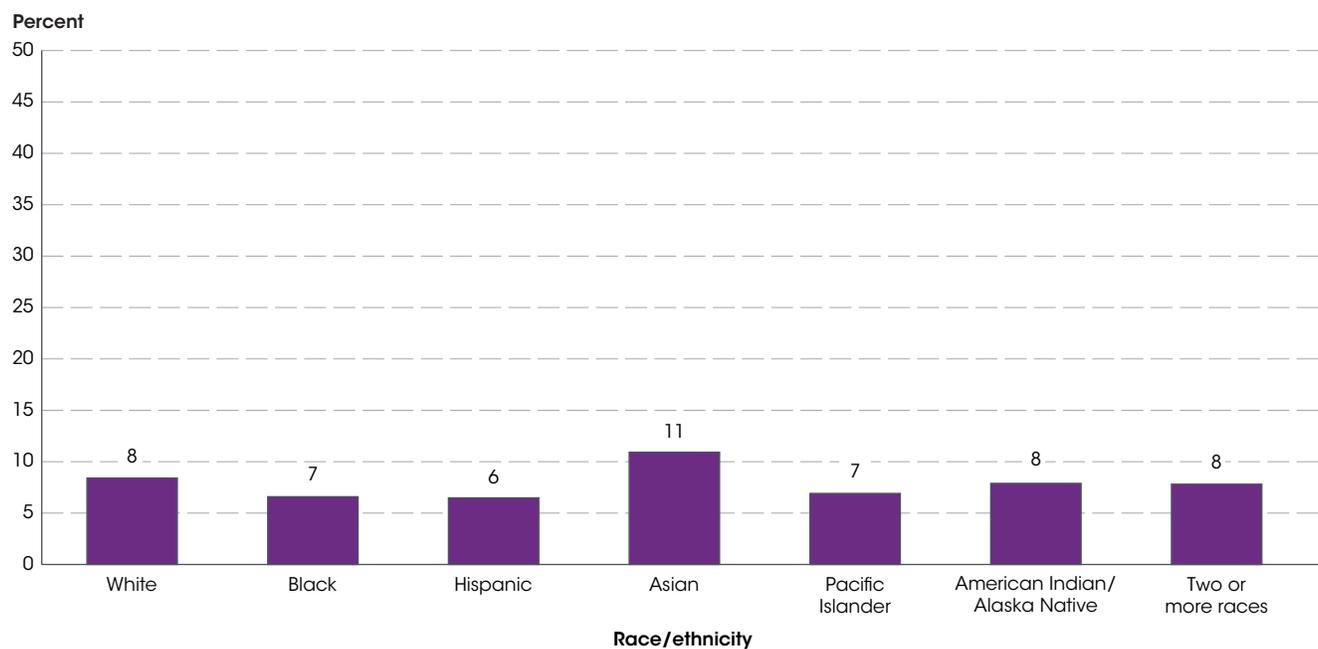


¹ "Business" is defined as business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as personal and culinary services, in order to be consistent with the definition of "business" for bachelor's degree data.
 NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of associate's degrees were conferred in 2015–16. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data have been adjusted where necessary to conform to the 2009–10 Classification of Instructional Programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2001 through Fall 2016, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, table 312; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 321.10.

Between 2000–01 and 2015–16, the number of associate’s degrees conferred increased by 74 percent, from 579,000 to 1.0 million. Over this time period, the number of associate’s degrees conferred in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities increased by 94 percent, from 197,000 degrees in 2000–01 to 381,000 degrees in 2015–16. The number of associate’s degrees conferred in health professions and related programs increased by 159 percent, from 84,700 degrees in 2000–01 to 219,000 degrees in 2011–12, and then decreased by 13 percent between 2011–12 and 2015–16 (191,000 associate’s degrees were conferred in health professions and related programs in 2015–16). The number of associate’s degrees conferred in business increased

by 48 percent, from 96,800 degrees in 2000–01 to 143,000 degrees in 2011–12, and showed no clear trend between 2011–12 and 2015–16 (128,000 associate’s degrees were conferred in business in 2015–16). Among other fields in which at least 10,000 associate’s degrees were conferred in 2015–16, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2000–01 and 2015–16 in the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (from 16,400 to 39,900, an increase of 143 percent); multi/interdisciplinary studies (from 10,400 to 30,500, an increase of 192 percent); social sciences and history (from 5,100 to 20,100, an increase of 291 percent); and psychology (from 1,600 to 10,600, an increase of 582 percent).

Figure 2. Percentage of associate’s degrees awarded in science, technology, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity: Academic year 2015–16



NOTE: STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Data are for degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.

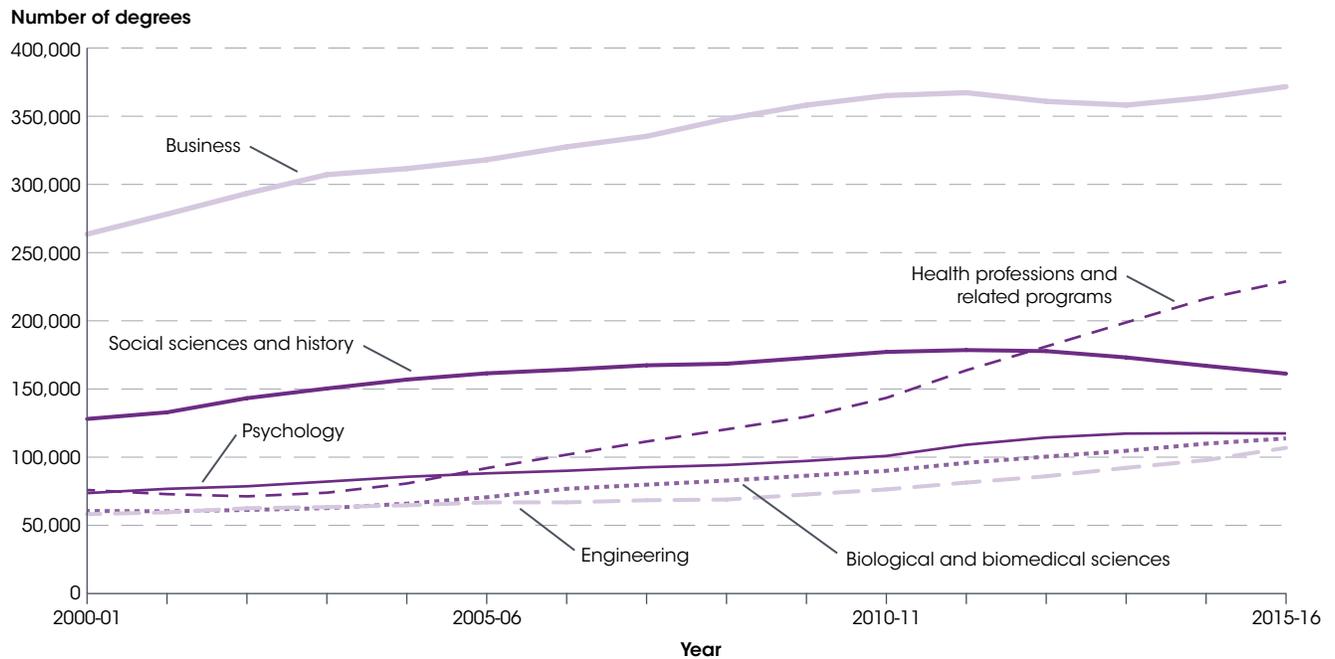
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2016, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 318.45 and 321.30.

Liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; health professions and related programs; and business were the top three associate’s degree fields of study for all racial/ethnic groups in 2015–16. The percentage of associate’s degrees conferred in STEM fields varied by race/ethnicity. Eleven percent of associate’s degrees conferred to Asian graduates were in a STEM field, which was higher than the percentage for graduates who were White (8 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (8 percent), of Two or more races (8 percent), Pacific Islander (7 percent), Black (7 percent), and Hispanic (6 percent).

Postsecondary institutions conferred approximately 1.9 million bachelor’s degrees in 2015–16. Over half

were concentrated in six fields of study: business (19 percent, or 372,000 degrees), health professions and related programs (12 percent, or 229,000 degrees), social sciences and history (8 percent, or 161,000 degrees), psychology (6 percent, or 117,000 degrees), biological and biomedical sciences (6 percent, or 114,000 degrees), and engineering (6 percent, or 107,000 degrees). The fields in which the next largest percentages of bachelor’s degrees were conferred in 2015–16 were visual and performing arts (5 percent, or 93,000 degrees); communication, journalism, and related programs (5 percent, or 92,600 degrees); and education (5 percent, or 87,200 degrees). Overall, 355,000 bachelor’s degrees (18 percent) were conferred in STEM fields.

Figure 3. Number of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2000–01 through 2015–16



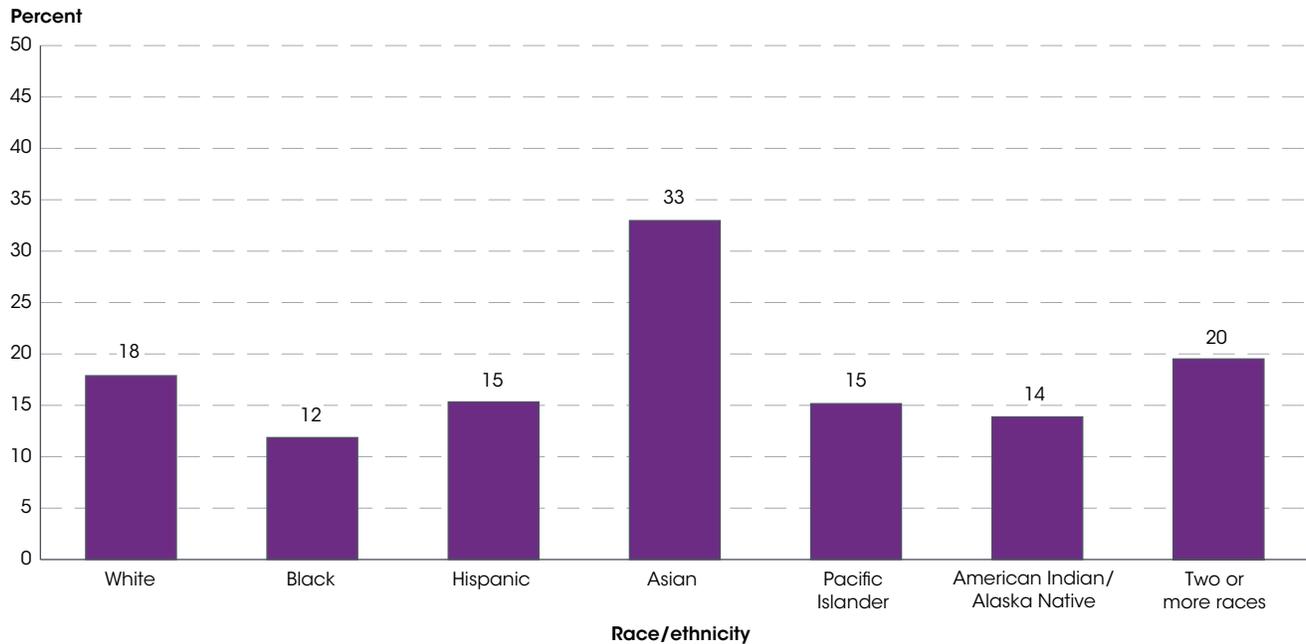
NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2015–16. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data have been adjusted where necessary to conform to the 2009–10 Classification of Instructional Programs. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2001 through Fall 2016, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, table 313; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 322.10.

Between 2000–01 and 2015–16, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred increased by 54 percent, from 1.2 million to 1.9 million. Over this time period, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in business increased by 39 percent, from 264,000 in 2000–01 to 372,000 in 2015–16. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred in health professions and related programs increased by 201 percent between 2000–01 and 2015–16, from 75,900 to 229,000. During the same period, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in social sciences

and history increased by 39 percent, from 128,000 in 2000–01 to 179,000 in 2011–12, and then decreased by 10 percent to 161,000 in 2015–16. Among other fields in which more than 10,000 bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2015–16, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2000–01 and 2015–16 in each of the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (from 25,200 to 61,200, an increase of 143 percent); parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies (from 17,900 to 50,900, an increase of 184 percent); and mathematics and statistics (from 11,200 to 22,800, an increase of 104 percent).

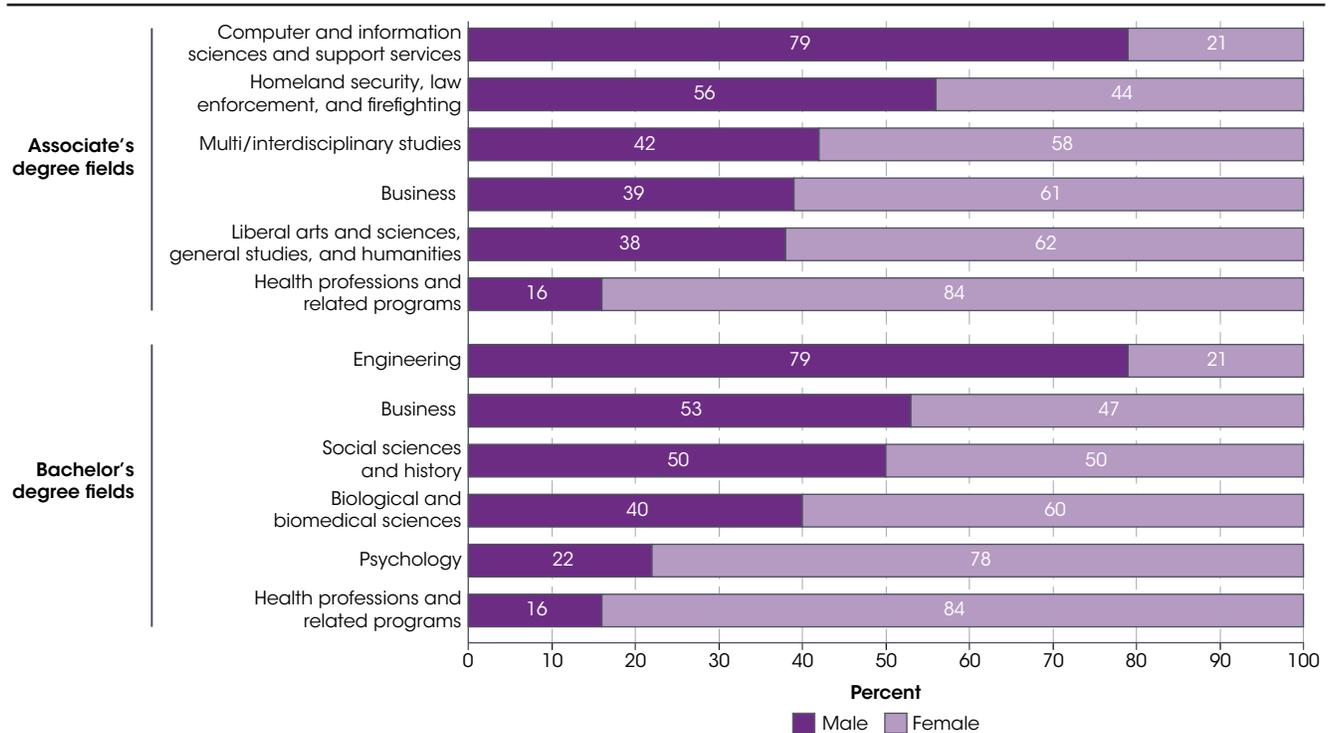
Figure 4. Percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded in science, technology, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity: Academic year 2015–16



NOTE: STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2016, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 318.45 and 322.30.

Within each racial/ethnic group, business was the most common field of study for bachelor's degrees conferred in 2015–16. As with associate's degrees, the percentage of bachelor's degrees that were conferred in STEM fields varied by race/ethnicity. One-third (33 percent) of bachelor's degrees conferred to Asian graduates were in

a STEM field, which was higher than the percentage for graduates who were of Two or more races (20 percent), White (18 percent), Hispanic (15 percent), Pacific Islander (15 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (14 percent), and Black (12 percent).

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of associate's and bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in largest fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2015–16

NOTE: Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The "business" field of study includes business, management, marketing, and related support services, as well as personal and culinary services.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2016, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 321.10, 322.40, and 322.50.

In 2015–16, females earned 616,000 associate's degrees, representing 61 percent of all associate's degrees conferred. Males were conferred the remaining 39 percent (392,000 degrees). Of the six fields in which the most associate's degrees were conferred in 2015–16, females were conferred the majority of degrees in four: health professions and related programs; liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; business; and multi/interdisciplinary studies (84 percent, 62 percent, 61 percent, and 58 percent, respectively). Males earned the majority of associate's degrees conferred in computer and information sciences and support services (79 percent) and in homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (56 percent).

In 2015–16, females earned 1.1 million bachelor's degrees, representing 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees conferred. Males were conferred the remaining 43 percent (0.8 million degrees). Of the six fields in which the most bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2015–16, females earned the majority of degrees in three: health professions and related programs, psychology, and biological and biomedical sciences (84 percent, 78 percent, and 60 percent, respectively). Bachelor's degrees conferred in social sciences and history were almost equally divided between males and females (50 percent each). Males earned the majority of degrees conferred in engineering and business (79 and 53 percent of degrees, respectively).

Endnotes:

¹ Personal and culinary services have been added to the definition of “business” for associate’s degree data in order to be consistent with the definition of “business” for bachelor’s degree data. Thus, for all data in this indicator, “business” is defined as business, management, marketing and related support services, as well as personal and culinary services.

² Instructional programs that derive from two or more distinct programs to provide a cross-cutting focus on a subject concentration that is not subsumed under a single discipline or occupational field. Examples include biological and physical

sciences, peace studies and conflict resolution, systems science and theory, and mathematics and computer science.

³ STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies. Construction trades and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians are categorized as engineering technologies in some tables to facilitate trend comparisons, but are not included as STEM fields in this indicator.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, tables 312 and 313; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 318.45, 321.10, 321.30, 322.10, 322.30, 322.40, and 322.50

Related indicators and resources: [Employment Outcomes of Bachelor’s Degree Recipients](#) [*web-only*]; [Graduate Degree Fields](#); [Post-College Employment Outcomes by Field of Study and Race/Ethnicity](#) [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*]; [Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Conferred](#); [Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Fields](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

Glossary: Associate’s degree, Bachelor’s degree, Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), Racial/ethnic group, STEM fields