

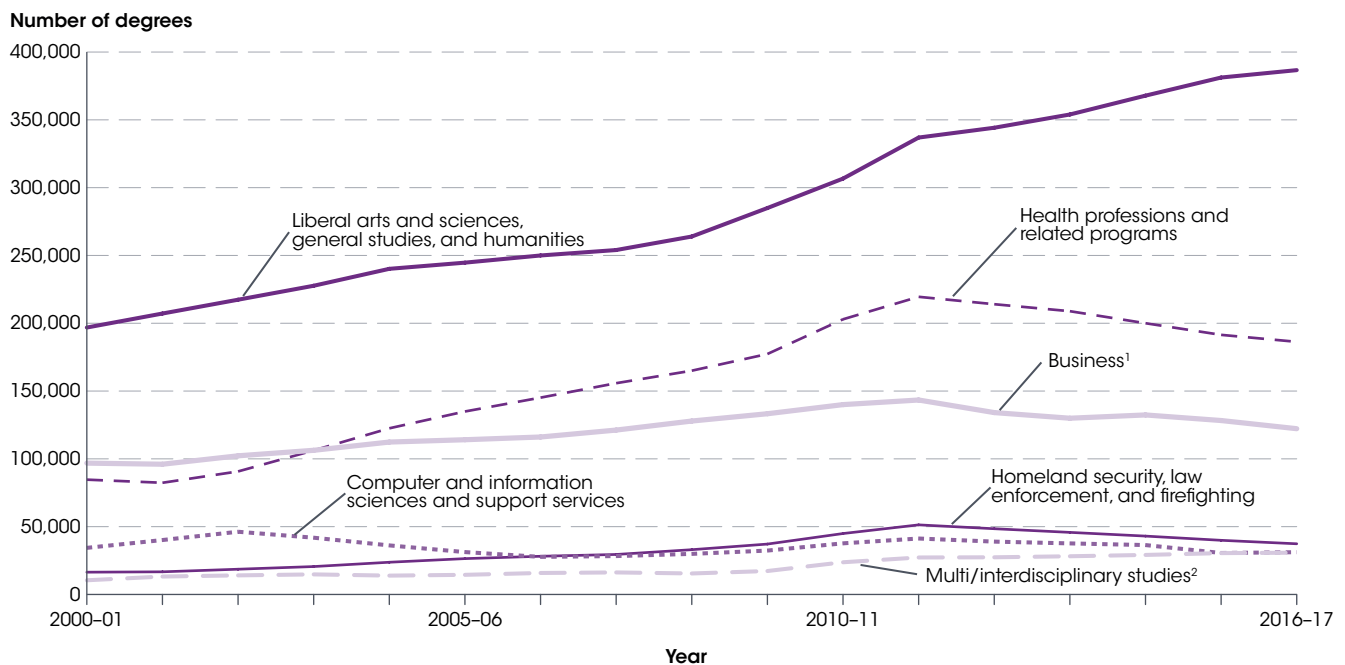
## Undergraduate Degree Fields

*In 2016–17, 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 (387,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (186,000 degrees); and business (122,000 degrees). Of the 2.0 million bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2016–17, more than half were concentrated in five fields of study: business (381,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (238,000 degrees); social sciences and history (159,000 degrees); psychology (117,000 degrees); and biological and biomedical sciences (117,000 degrees).*

In academic year 2016–17, postsecondary institutions conferred 1.0 million associate’s degrees. Over two-thirds (69 percent) of these degrees were concentrated in three fields of study: liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (38 percent, or 387,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (19 percent, or 186,000 degrees); and business<sup>1</sup> (12 percent, or 122,000 degrees). The three fields that constituted the next largest percentages of associate’s degrees conferred in 2016–17

were the following: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (4 percent, or 37,400 degrees); computer and information sciences and support services (3 percent, or 31,200 degrees); and multi/interdisciplinary studies<sup>2</sup> (3 percent, or 30,800 degrees). Overall, 82,300 associate’s degrees or certificates (8 percent) were conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)<sup>3</sup> fields in 2016–17.

**Figure 1. Number of associate’s degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2000–01 through 2016–17**



<sup>1</sup> “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.

<sup>2</sup> Multi/interdisciplinary studies are 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.

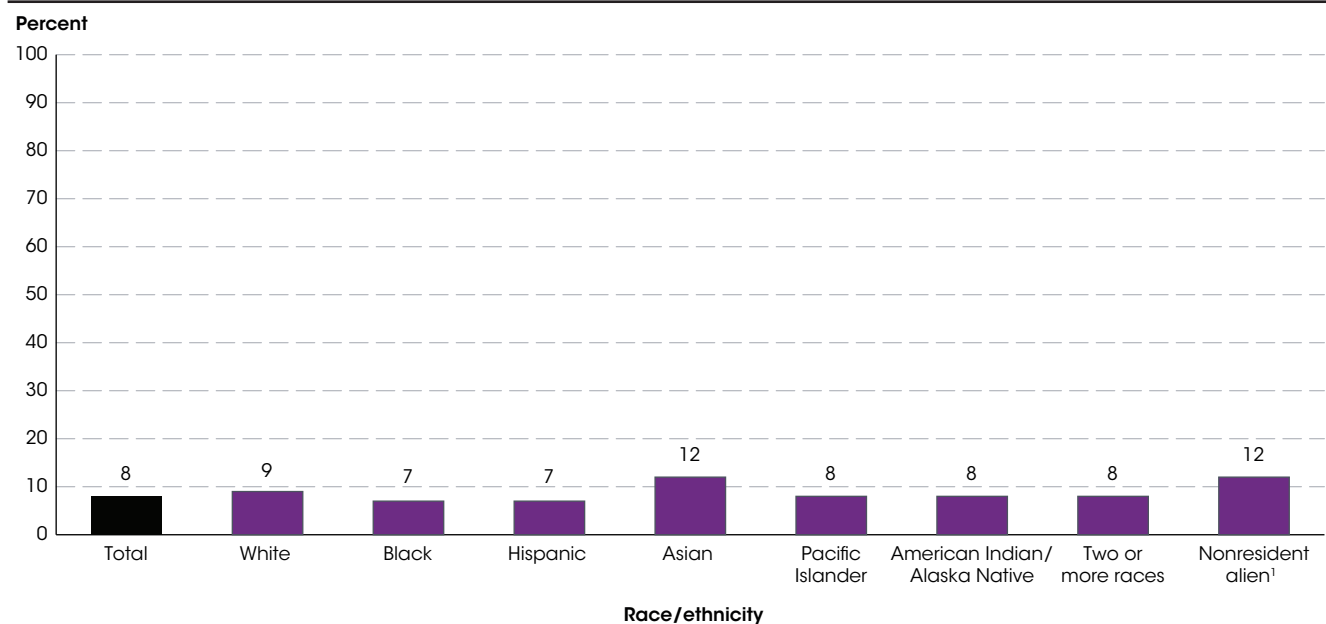
NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of associate’s degrees were conferred in 2016–17. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data have been adjusted where necessary to conform to the 2009–10 Classification 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 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, table 312; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 321.10.

Between 2000–01 and 2016–17, the number of associate’s degrees conferred increased by 74 percent, from 579,000 degrees to 1.0 million degrees. Over this time period, the number of associate’s degrees conferred in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities increased by 96 percent, from 197,000 degrees in 2000–01 to 387,000 degrees in 2016–17. The number of associate’s degrees conferred in health professions and related programs increased by 159 percent between 2000–01 and 2011–12, from 84,700 to 219,000 degrees, and then decreased by 15 percent, to 186,000 associate’s degrees, between 2011–12 and 2016–17. The number of associate’s degrees conferred in business increased by 48 percent between 2000–01 and 2011–12, from 96,800

to 143,000 degrees, and then decreased by 15 percent, to 122,000 associate’s degrees, between 2011–12 and 2016–17. Among other fields in which at least 10,000 associate’s degrees were conferred in 2016–17, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2000–01 and 2016–17 in the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (from 16,400 to 37,400 degrees, an increase of 127 percent); multi/interdisciplinary studies (from 10,400 to 30,800 degrees, an increase of 195 percent); social sciences and history (from 5,100 to 21,400 degrees, an increase of 317 percent); and psychology (from 1,600 to 11,300 degrees, an increase of 626 percent).

**Figure 2. Percentage of associate’s degrees conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity and nonresident status: Academic year 2016–17**



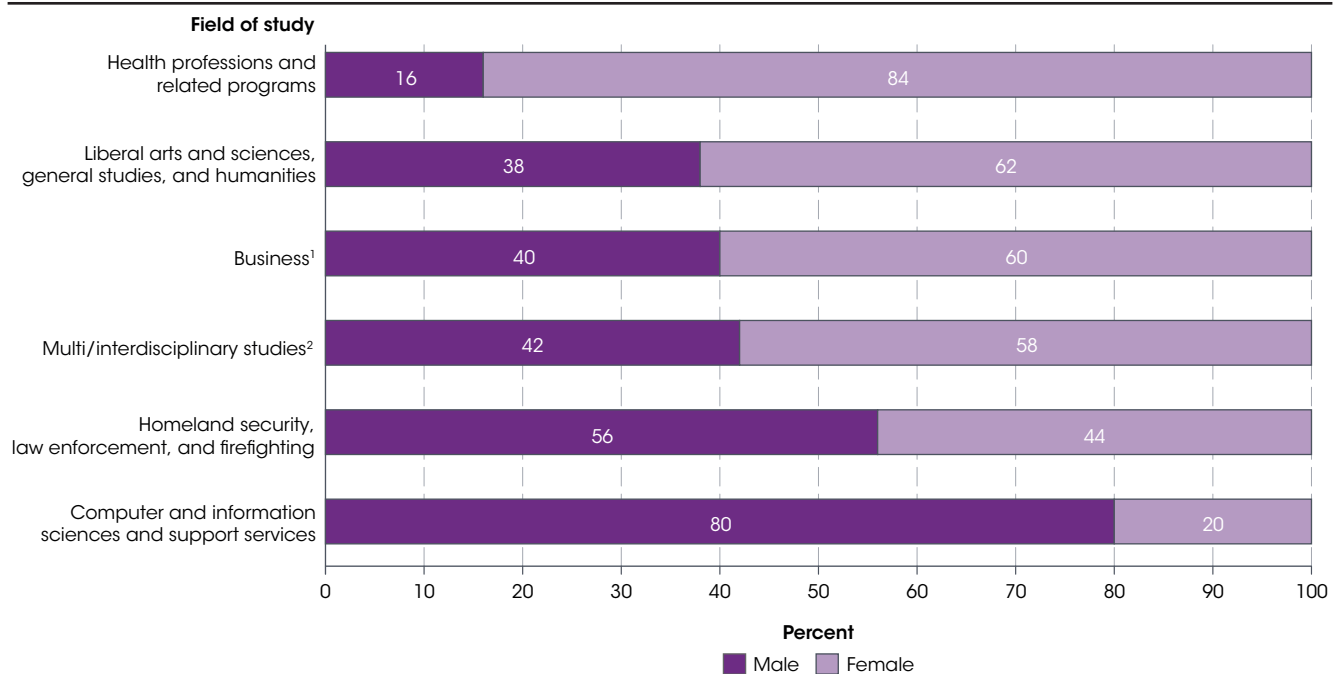
<sup>1</sup> In IPEDS, data for the nonresident alien category is collected alongside racial/ethnic categories.

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. Students categorized as “nonresident alien” are not included in other race/ethnicity categories. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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 2016–17, although the top three fields among nonresident alien<sup>4</sup> graduates were liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; business; and visual and performing arts. The percentage of associate’s degrees conferred in a STEM field varied

by race/ethnicity. Twelve percent of associate’s degrees conferred to both nonresident alien graduates and Asian graduates were in a STEM field, which was higher than the percentage for graduates who were White (9 percent), of Two or more races (8 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (8 percent), Pacific Islander (8 percent), Black (7 percent), and Hispanic (7 percent).

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of associate's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2016–17**

<sup>1</sup>"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.

<sup>2</sup>Multi/interdisciplinary studies are 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.

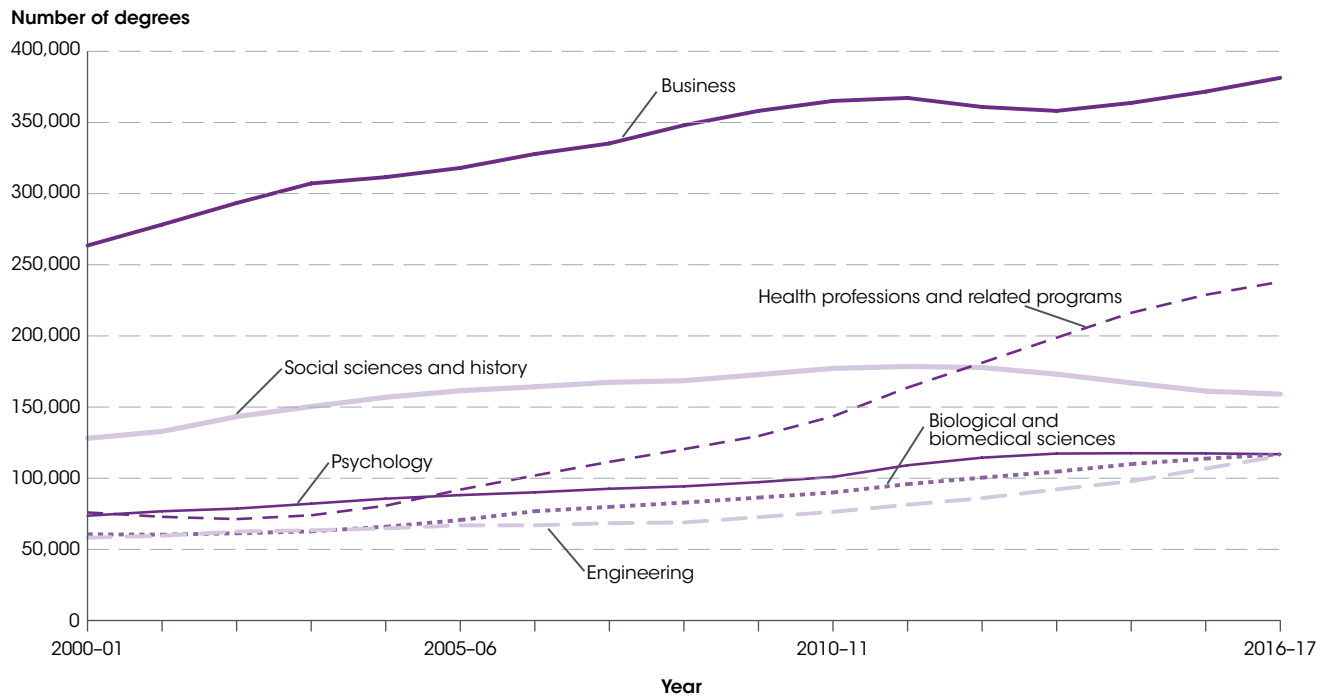
NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of associate's degrees were conferred in 2016–17. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 321.10.

In 2016–17, females earned 61 percent (611,000 degrees) and males earned 39 percent (394,000 degrees) of all associate's degrees conferred. Of the six fields in which the most associate's degrees were conferred in 2016–17, females were conferred the majority of degrees in four: health professions and related programs (84 percent); liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (62 percent); business (60 percent); and multi/interdisciplinary studies (58 percent). Males were conferred the majority of associate's degrees in computer and information sciences and support services (80 percent) and in homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (56 percent).

Postsecondary institutions conferred 2.0 million bachelor's degrees in 2016–17. More than half were concentrated in five fields of study: business (19 percent, or 381,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (12 percent, or 238,000 degrees); social sciences and history (8 percent, or 159,000 degrees); psychology (6 percent, or 117,000 degrees); and biological and biomedical sciences (6 percent, or 117,000 degrees). The fields in which the next largest percentages of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2016–17 were engineering (6 percent, or 116,000 degrees); communication, journalism, and related programs (5 percent, or 93,800 degrees); visual and performing arts (5 percent, or 91,300 degrees); and education (4 percent, or 85,100 degrees). Overall, 377,000 bachelor's degrees (19 percent) were conferred in a STEM field.

**Figure 4. Number of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2000–01 through 2016–17**

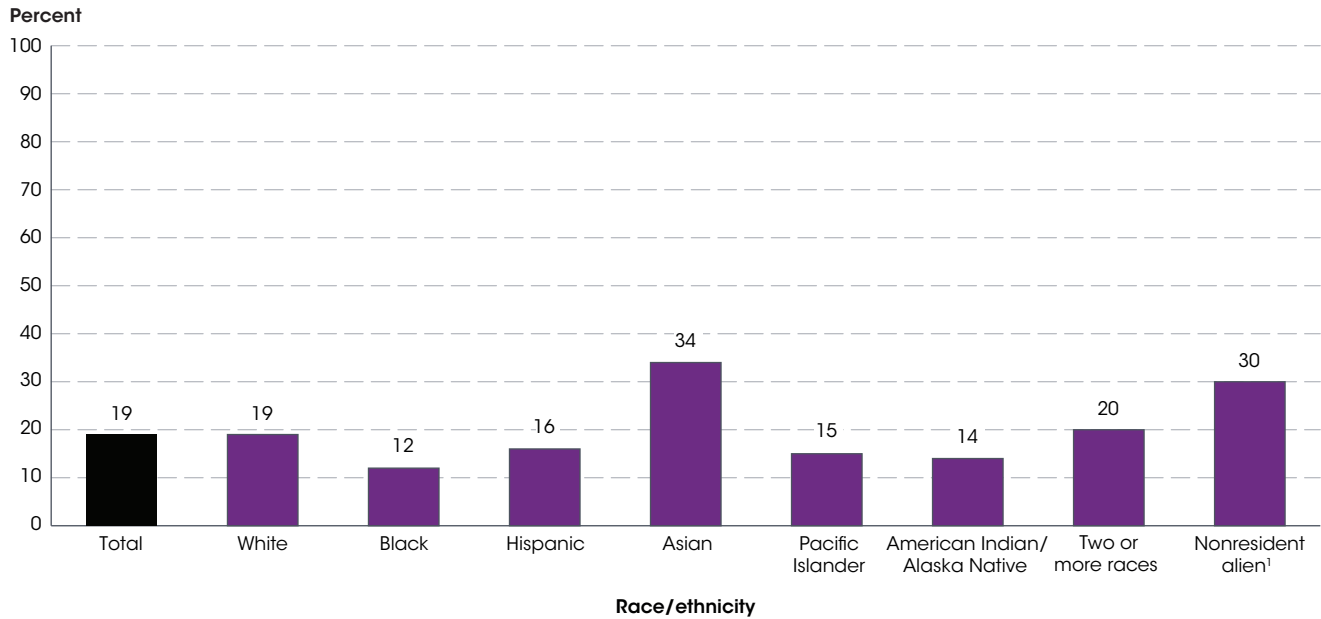


NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2016–17. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data have been adjusted where necessary to conform to the 2009–10 Classification of 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 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, table 313; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 322.10.

Between 2000–01 and 2016–17, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred increased by 57 percent, from 1.2 million degrees to 2.0 million degrees. Between 2000–01 and 2011–12, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in business increased by 39 percent, from 264,000 to 367,000 degrees, but there was no clear trend between 2011–12 and 2016–17 (381,000 degrees were conferred in business in 2016–17). The number of bachelor's degrees conferred in health professions and related programs increased by 213 percent between 2000–01 and 2016–17, from 75,900 to 238,000 degrees. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred in social sciences and history increased by 39 percent between

2000–01 and 2011–12, from 128,000 to 179,000 degrees, and then decreased by 11 percent to 159,000 degrees in 2016–17. Among other fields in which more than 10,000 bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2016–17, the number of degrees conferred more than doubled between 2000–01 and 2016–17 in each of the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (from 25,200 to 59,600 degrees, an increase of 136 percent); parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies (from 17,900 to 53,300 degrees, an increase of 197 percent); and mathematics and statistics (from 11,200 to 24,100 degrees, an increase of 115 percent).

**Figure 5. Percentage of bachelor's degrees conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, by race/ethnicity and nonresident status: Academic year 2016–17**

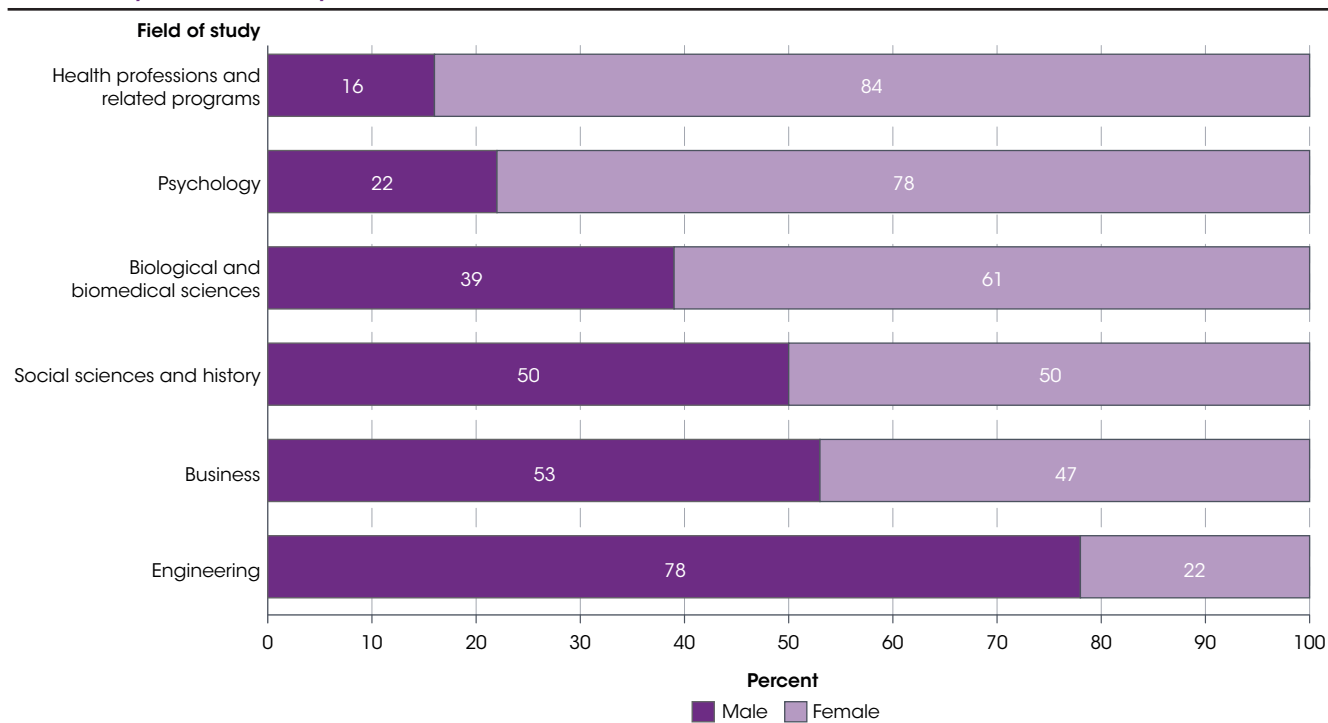
<sup>1</sup> In IPEDS, data for the nonresident alien category is collected alongside racial/ethnic categories.

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. Students categorized as "nonresident alien" are not included in other race/ethnicity categories. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 318.45 and 322.30.

Within each racial/ethnic group and for nonresident alien graduates, business was the most common field of study for bachelor's degrees conferred in 2016–17. As with associate's degrees conferred in a STEM field, the percentage of bachelor's degrees that were conferred in a STEM field varied by race/ethnicity. One-third (34 percent) of bachelor's degrees conferred to Asian

graduates were in a STEM field, which was higher than the percentage for graduates who were nonresident aliens (30 percent), of Two or more races (20 percent), White (19 percent), Hispanic (16 percent), Pacific Islander (15 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (14 percent), and Black (12 percent).

**Figure 6. Percentage distribution of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2016–17**

NOTE: The fields shown are the six programs in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2016–17. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2017, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, tables 322.40 and 322.50.

In 2016–17, females earned 57 percent (1.1 million degrees) and males earned 43 percent (836,000 degrees) of all bachelor's degrees conferred. Of the six fields in which the most bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2016–17, females earned the majority of degrees in three: health professions and related programs (84 percent); psychology

(78 percent); and biological and biomedical sciences (61 percent). 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 (78 percent) and business (53 percent).

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Multi/interdisciplinary studies are 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> In IPEDS, data for the nonresident alien category is collected alongside racial/ethnic categories.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, tables 312 and 313; *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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](#); [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