

# NIH CORRESPONDENCE # 262688

ES REFERRAL DATE: 3/4/11

ES DUE DATE:

ACTION OFFICE

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CONGRESSIONAL REPORT: Training of Graduate Students for Doctoral Degrees

## REMARKS/SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

OER prepared the attached report for Dr. Collins as required by the NIH Reform Act. This is the second annual report. The Act does not require that the report be sent to OS or Congress.

*Be sure this is considered by the  
Rocky - Tilghman Aed*

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2011 MAR -7 PM 5:28

NIH EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

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2011 MAR 11 PM 3:42

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DATE TO IMOD  
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(DATE STAMP)

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**Time to Degree and Completion Rates for Graduate Students Supported  
by National Institutes of Health Research Training Grants**

**Second Annual Report to the Director, NIH  
Prepared by the Office of Extramural Research  
March 4, 2011**

## Background

The National Institutes of Health Reform Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-482), signed on January 15, 2007, and further amended by the Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-85), established new reporting and information disclosure requirements for institutions receiving NIH awards for the training of graduate students for doctoral degrees through institutional training grants.<sup>1</sup> Section 403C of the Public Health Service Act now requires these institutions to annually report to the Director of the NIH the following information for graduate students that have been supported by NIH training awards:

- The percentage of such students admitted for study who successfully attain a doctoral degree, and
- The average time (not including any leaves of absence) between the beginning of graduate study and the receipt of a doctoral degree.

Institutions must also provide this same information to all applicants to doctoral programs supported by NIH training awards.

## Implementation

NIH implemented these mandates through Graduate Student Reporting and Assurance requirements in the DHHS Public Health Service Grant Application (PHS 398) and the DHHS Public Health Service Noncompeting Continuation Progress Report (PHS 2590), beginning October 1, 2009.

As a result, in completing applications and progress reports for NIH training grants that support graduate students, institutions are now expected to include program statistics on Ph.D. completion and time to degree.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with commonly used benchmarks in doctoral education, institutions are instructed to calculate the “percentage of students admitted for study who successfully attain a doctoral degree” based on trainees who began graduate studies in the program 10 years prior to the reporting year. Time to degree is to be calculated from the time of entrance into graduate school or a dual-degree program. Upon submission of an application or progress report, these program statistics are considered by reviewers and Institute and Center program officials.

To facilitate the reporting and analysis of these statistics at an NIH-wide level, the Office of Extramural Research (OER) utilizes a combination of NIH data on training grant appointments and National Science Foundation (NSF) data on Ph.D. achievement. Specifically, NIH calculates Ph.D. completion and time to degree for trainees across the NIH by matching training records from the NIH IMPAC II information management system with data from the latest edition of the Doctorate Records File (DRF). The DRF contains records on virtually all research

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.nih.gov/about/reauthorization/HR6164EnrolledVersion.pdf> and <http://olpa.od.nih.gov/legislation/109/publiclaws/reformact06.asp>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/datatable12a.doc>

doctorates graduating from U.S. universities since 1920; since the late 1950s, it has also included the results of the annual Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), coordinated by the NSF on behalf of a number of federal agencies, including the NIH. Because SED responses are supplemented with data from institutional and public sources, the DRF's records on Ph.D. achievement are close to fully complete. Calculating time to degree, however, relies on responses to multiple survey questions; for NIH trainees, the combined response rate to these questions in the most recent survey year was 95.9%.

## Results

As calculated by OER, overall completion rates and time-to degree for graduate and dual-degree students supported by NIH research training grants receiving their degrees in FY 2009 were as follows:

Graduate Students Attaining a Doctoral Degree within Ten Years: 74.9%  
Median Time to Degree: 6.3 years

These results were comparable to FY 2008, when 74.4% of NIH trainees completed doctoral degrees within ten years and their median time to degree was 6.2 years.

To place these results in context, it should be noted that the Council of Graduate Schools has reported ten-year completion rates in the life sciences at 62.9% and in the social sciences at 55.9%.<sup>3</sup> For 2009, NSF reported that the median time from the start of graduate school to a Ph.D. was 7.0 years in the life sciences and 7.7 years in the social sciences.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.phdcompletion.org/quantitative/PhDC\\_Program\\_Completion\\_Data.xls](http://www.phdcompletion.org/quantitative/PhDC_Program_Completion_Data.xls)

<sup>4</sup> National Science Foundation, *Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2009*, NSF 11-306 (Arlington, VA, December 2010). See <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf11306/appendix/pdf/tab28.pdf>.