

**Humanities**  
INDICATORS



State of the  
Humanities 2022

From **Graduate Education**  
to the **Workforce**

A REPORT FROM THE HUMANITIES INDICATORS PROJECT  
OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

AMERICAN ACADEMY  
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

136 Irving Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Telephone: 617-576-5000

Email: [humanitiesindicators@amacad.org](mailto:humanitiesindicators@amacad.org)

Website: [www.humanitiesindicators.org](http://www.humanitiesindicators.org)

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State of the Humanities 2022  
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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Prepared by the Humanities Indicators Staff:**

**Norman M. Bradburn**, Codirector

**Robert B. Townsend**, Codirector

**Carolyn Fuqua**, Program Officer

**Jessica Taylor**, Louis W. Cabot Fellow in Humanities Policy

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**Please direct inquiries to:**

American Academy of Arts and Sciences

136 Irving Street

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138-1996

Telephone: (617) 576-5000

Facsimile: (617) 576-5050

Email: [humanitiesindicators@amacad.org](mailto:humanitiesindicators@amacad.org)

Visit our website at [www.humanitiesindicators.org](http://www.humanitiesindicators.org)

# Contents

- 5 Introduction**
- 6 A Note on Interpreting the Information**
- 7 Graduate Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Degree Level, 1988–2020**
- 8 Graduate Degrees Conferred in the Humanities as a Share of All Degrees, by Degree Level, 1988–2020**
- 9 Master’s Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Discipline, 1988–2020**
- 10 Doctoral Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Discipline, 1988–2020**
- 11 Share of Graduate Degrees in the Humanities Conferred on Women, by Degree Level, 1988–2020**
- 12 Share of Humanities Degrees Conferred on Members of Traditionally Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups Over Five-Year Period, by Degree Level, 2016–2020**
- 13 Share of Graduate Humanities Degrees Conferred on Members of Traditionally Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups, by Degree Level, 2000–2020**
- 14 Median Number of Years from Start of Doctoral Program to Receipt of Degree, by Academic Field, 2004–2020**
- 15 Share of Humanities Departments Providing Career Preparation Opportunities to Master’s Students, by Activity Type, 2017**
- 16 Share of Humanities Departments Providing Career Preparation Opportunities to Doctoral Students, by Activity Type, 2017**
- 17 Share of Graduate Degree Holders Who Perceive a Close Relationship between Job and Degree, by Field and Level of Highest Degree, 2019**
- 18 Distribution of Graduate Humanities Degree Holders across Employment Sectors, by Level of Highest Degree, 2019**
- 19 Occupational Distribution of Graduate Humanities Degree Holders, by Level of Highest Degree, 2019**
- 20 Occupational Distribution of Terminal Master’s Degree Holders, by Field of Degree, 2019**
- 21 Occupational Distribution of Doctoral Degree Holders, by Field of Degree, 2019**
- 22 Share of New Doctorate Recipients in Humanities and Arts with a Definite Commitment of Employment or Postdoctoral Study, 1990–2020**
- 23 Academic Job Openings Listed with Scholarly Societies in the Humanities, by Discipline, 2002–2020**
- 24 Share of New Doctorate Recipients with a Definite U.S. Employment Commitment Entering an Academic Job, by Field of Degree, 1988–2020**
- 25 Employment Sector of New Doctorate Recipients in Humanities and Arts with a Definite U.S. Employment Commitment, 1988–2020**
- 26 Tenure Status of Early Career Doctorate Holders Employed as Postsecondary Faculty, by Field of Degree, 2017**

# Contents

- |    |  |    |   |
|----|--|----|---|
| 27 | Tenure Status of Humanities Faculty Employed by a Four-Year College or University, by Discipline, 2017                                   | 33 | Median Annual Earnings of Doctoral Degree Holders Employed Full-Time, by Field of Degree, 2018          |
| 28 | Number of Postsecondary Teachers, by Subject Taught, 2000–2020   | 34 | Job Satisfaction among Graduate Degree Holders, by Field and Level of Highest Degree, 2019              |
| 29 | Reasons for Working Part-Time among Humanities Doctorate Holders Whose Principal Employment is in Academia, 2019                         | 35 | Job Satisfaction among Doctoral Degree Holders, by Field of Degree and Academic Employment Status, 2019 |
| 30 | Work Activities on Which Terminal Master's Degree Holders in the Humanities Spend at Least 10% of Their Time, 2019                       | 36 | Job Satisfaction among Humanities Doctoral Degree Holders, by Employment Sector, 2019                   |
| 31 | Work Activities on Which Doctoral Degree Holders in the Humanities Spend at Least 10% of Their Time, by Academic Employment Status, 2019 | 37 | Conclusion  |
| 32 | Median Annual Earnings of Terminal Master's Degree Holders Employed Full-Time, by Field of Degree, 2018                                  | 38 | Endnotes  |

# Introduction

Given the recent decline in students earning bachelor's degrees in the humanities, a great deal of concern is focused on undergraduate education. But many of the questions received by the Humanities Indicators staff have to do with outcomes for those who earn a graduate degree in the field. This report explores several key topics related to graduate education, including degree trends, the demographics of degree recipients, the extent to which programs engage students in career preparation activities, and graduates' career outcomes. The report relies heavily on the high-quality data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, and also the National Science Foundation's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, several of whose surveys yield valuable information about graduate degree holders in the humanities.

The findings include a few surprises: 1) while most of the attention in the disciplines seems to focus on PhDs, the field conferred almost five times as many master's as doctoral degrees in recent years; 2) even so, the number of master's degrees conferred annually in the humanities has been in decline over the past several years and their share of all master's and professional degrees reached a historic low in 2020; 3) the number of humanities PhDs awarded each year was at a near-record high in 2020, but as a share of all doctoral degrees, they fell to a historic low; 4) while the academic job market for humanities PhDs has been depressed since 2008, there is no evidence that this is due to the substitution of adjunct for tenure-track positions; and 5) regardless of where they end up—either in academia or out—the large majority of graduate degree recipients in the humanities are satisfied with their jobs, despite earnings that are considerably lower than those of their counterparts from other fields.

This report reflects the ongoing mission of the Humanities Indicators, a nationally recognized source of nonpartisan information about the field. The Indicators website (<https://HumanitiesIndicators.org>) covers 121 topics and includes more than 340 graphs detailing the state of the humanities in schools, higher education, and the workforce; levels of support for research and other key activities; and the role of the humanities in the day-to-day life of the nation. The project draws on data sources that meet the highest standards of social scientific rigor, relying heavily on the products of the U.S. federal statistical system.

For those wishing to create custom visualizations or perform analyses beyond those described in the following pages, the values underlying the graphs—as well as a wide variety of related data points, including information about non-humanities fields—can be downloaded from [www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce](http://www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce).

# A Note on Interpreting the Information

## Definitions

For the purposes of this report, *terminal master's degree holders* are graduates for whom a master's is their highest degree. *Doctoral degrees* include only those classified as research doctorates and exclude medical doctorates. And *academic employment* encompasses only jobs in postsecondary education (with employment in K–12 education treated either as its own category or as work in the “government” sector).

Finally, this report draws on several national surveys, each of which classifies academic disciplines in a slightly different way. As a result, the actual composition of broad field categories shown in the graphs varies depending on the survey source. Visit [www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce](http://www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce) for information about the disciplines included in each category.

## Field Comparisons

The fields of study compared in this publication differ with respect to their graduates' demographics and other characteristics. When these characteristics are correlated with an outcome of interest, whether earnings or job satisfaction, they produce “compositional effects” on group outcomes. For example, degree recipients in the humanities are substantially more likely than degree recipients in engineering to be women. Thus, to the extent there is a gender gap in earnings, the median earnings of humanities graduates will be more affected by that gap than the median for engineering graduates.

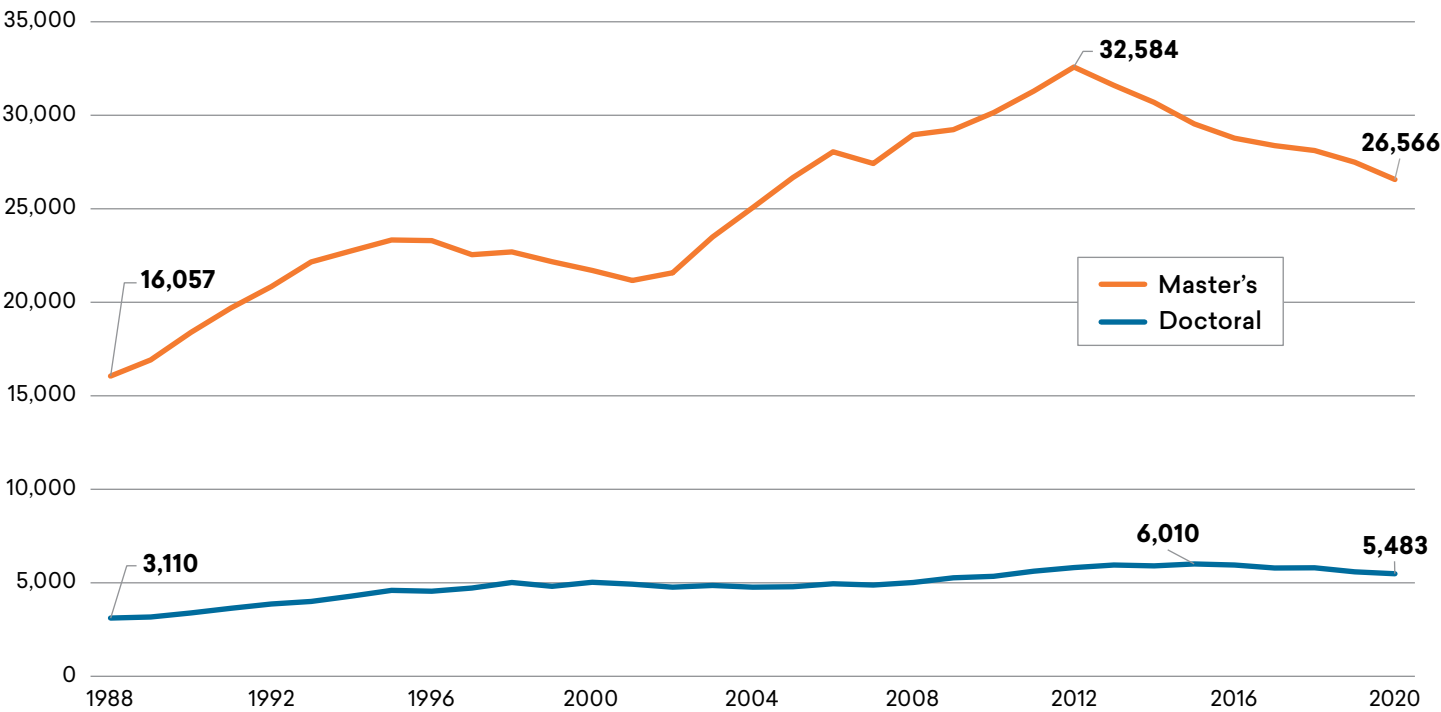
## Earnings

This publication reports median earnings rather than the more familiar mean (“average”) because of the highly skewed nature of the U.S. earnings distribution; that is, a small share of the U.S. population earns considerably more than the vast majority of Americans. The mean is sensitive to such extreme values and thus can present a distorted picture of the midpoint (or center) of the distribution. By definition, 50 percent of graduates in the field earn less than the median, while 50 percent earn more. It does not matter how much less or how much more, making the median indifferent to extreme values and thus a better measure of “typical” earnings.

All earnings estimates have been rounded to the nearest \$1,000.



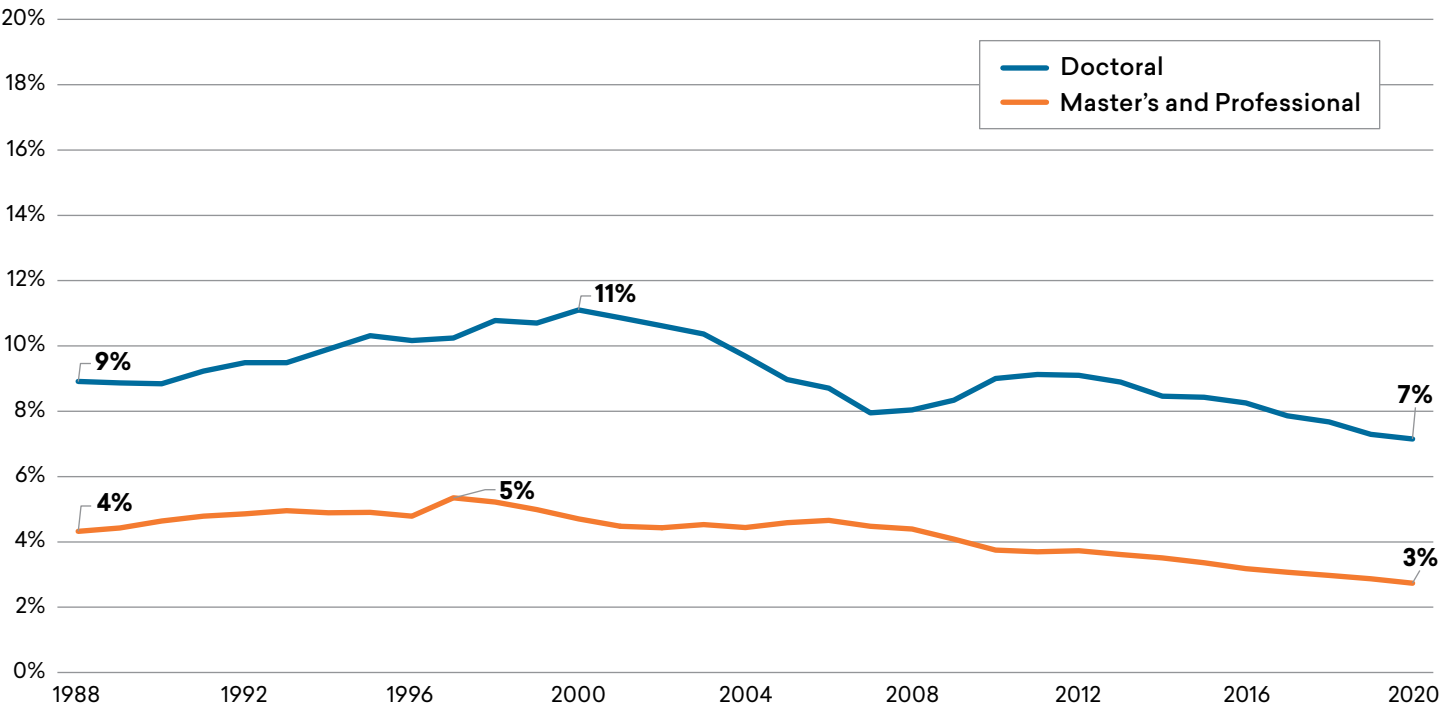
# Graduate Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Degree Level, 1988–2020



**THE NUMBER OF GRADUATE-LEVEL** degrees awarded annually in the humanities trended upward from the late 1980s into the early 2010s, but the number of master’s degrees peaked in 2012 (at 32,584), and the number of doctoral degrees peaked three years later (at 6,010). As of 2020 the number of master’s degrees had fallen by 18.5% from that

peak, while doctoral degrees fell by a more modest 8.8% from their peak in 2015.<sup>1</sup> But—and this is an important caveat—the number of degrees conferred is but one indicator of the comparative health of graduate education in the humanities.

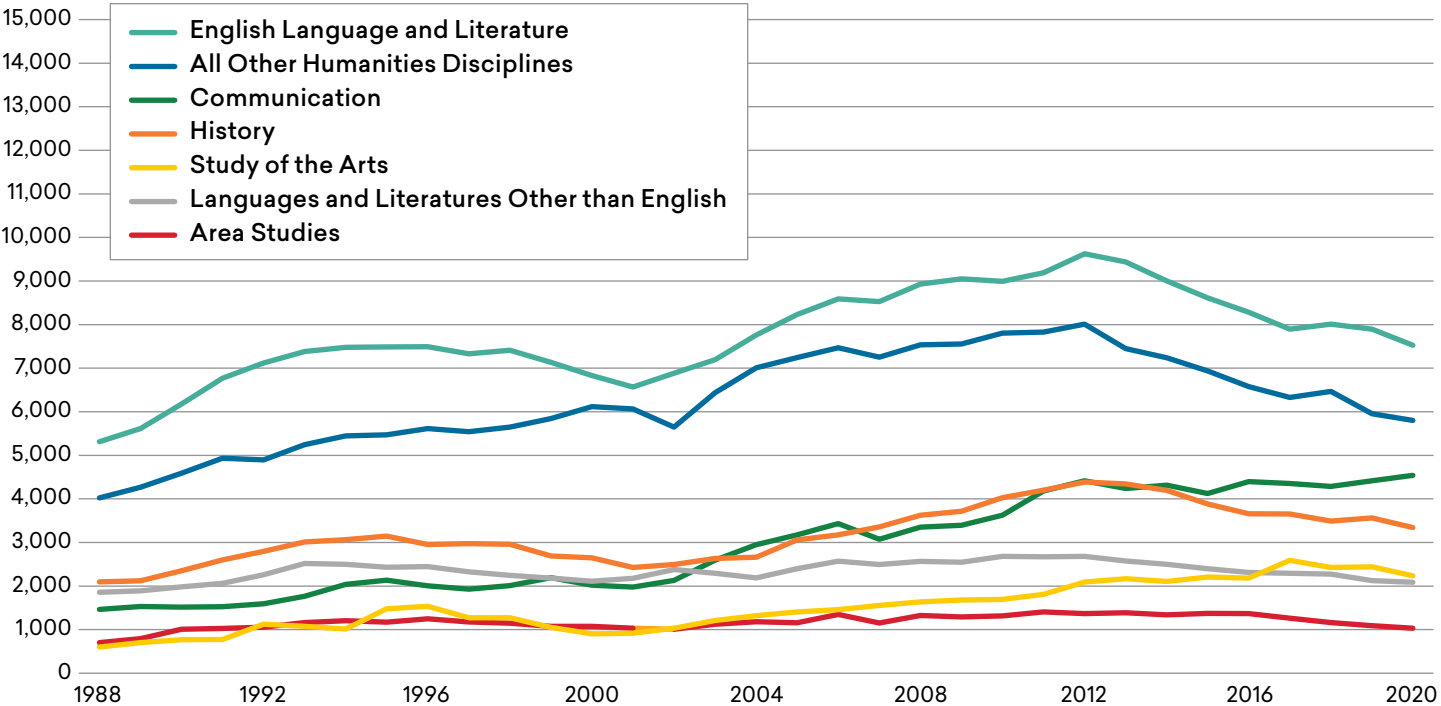
# Graduate Degrees Conferred in the Humanities as a Share of All Degrees, by Degree Level, 1988–2020



**VIEWED AS A PERCENTAGE** of all degrees conferred at each level, the humanities disciplines rose for a time after the late 1980s but then declined from their peak. The humanities' share of master's and professional degrees rose as high as 5% in 1997 but fell substantially over the next 23 years (to 3% in 2020). At the doctoral level, the share of humanities degrees rose to 11% in 2000, but by 2020 had declined to just 7% of all degrees awarded.

Despite the fact that from 1988 to 2020 many more master's than doctoral degrees were earned in the humanities, master's degrees in the field represented a markedly smaller share of all degrees granted at the corresponding level. (For those interested in a longer view, the Humanities Indicators website offers a time series extending back as far as 1948 for six of the largest humanities disciplines. In all but a few years, the share of graduate degrees awarded to that subset of the field from 1948 to 1987 was substantially higher than the levels now seen for the field as a whole.)<sup>2</sup>

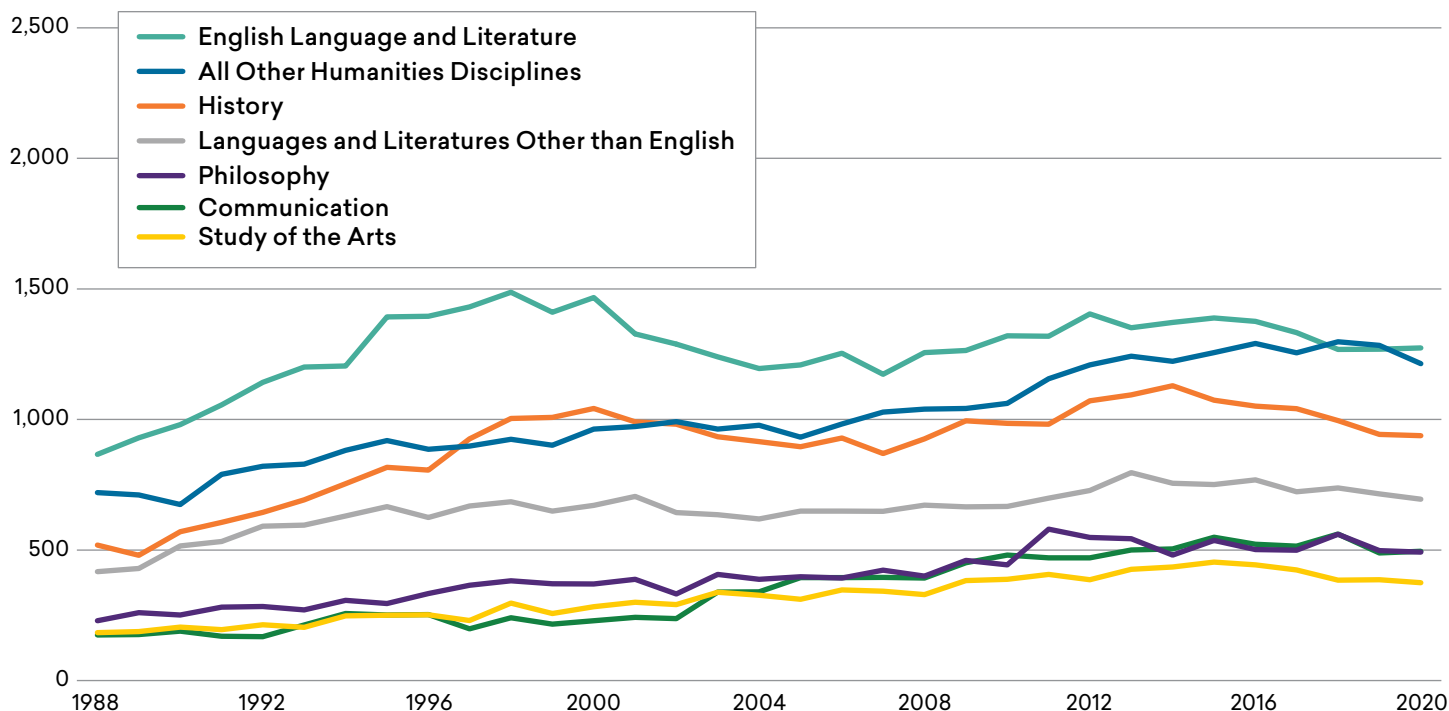
# Master's Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Discipline, 1988–2020



**FROM 1988 TO 2020**, six humanities disciplines (area studies, communication, English language and literature, history, languages and literatures other than English, and study of the arts) conferred approximately three-fourths of the master's and professional degrees awarded annually in the field. In all but two of those disciplines, the number of

degrees conferred fell 21%–25% from 2012 to 2020. Collectively, the smaller disciplines experienced a somewhat larger decline (28%). Communication and study of the arts were the exception to the larger pattern of decline, as the number of master's degrees earned in these disciplines increased by 3% and 7% respectively.<sup>3</sup>

## Doctoral Degrees Conferred in the Humanities, by Discipline, 1988–2020

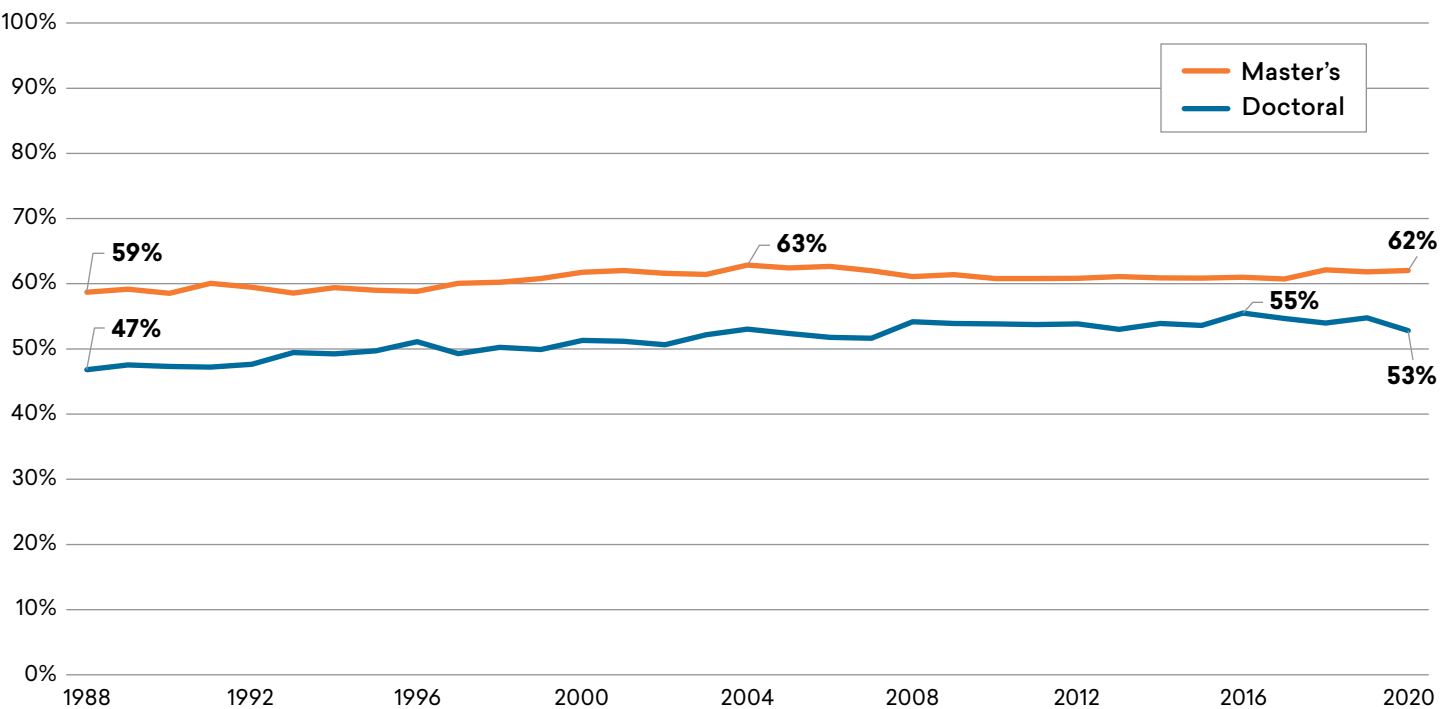


**SIMILAR TO MASTER'S DEGREES**, six disciplines (English language and literature, communication, history, languages and literatures other than English, philosophy, and study of the arts) accounted for most of the doctoral degrees awarded annually in the field from 1988 to 2020, representing 78% of humanities degrees in 2020.

In recent years, the number of PhDs awarded declined among all the large disciplines except communication (where it rose by 5% from 2012 to 2020), but the declines

were considerably smaller than for master's degrees. Programs in history and philosophy experienced the largest declines from 2012 to 2020 (falling 12% and 10% respectively). Despite the recent declines, the number of PhDs awarded in every discipline except area studies and religion was larger in 2020 than the number awarded in 2008—a year that will be relevant for later discussion about the academic job market (see page 23).<sup>4</sup>

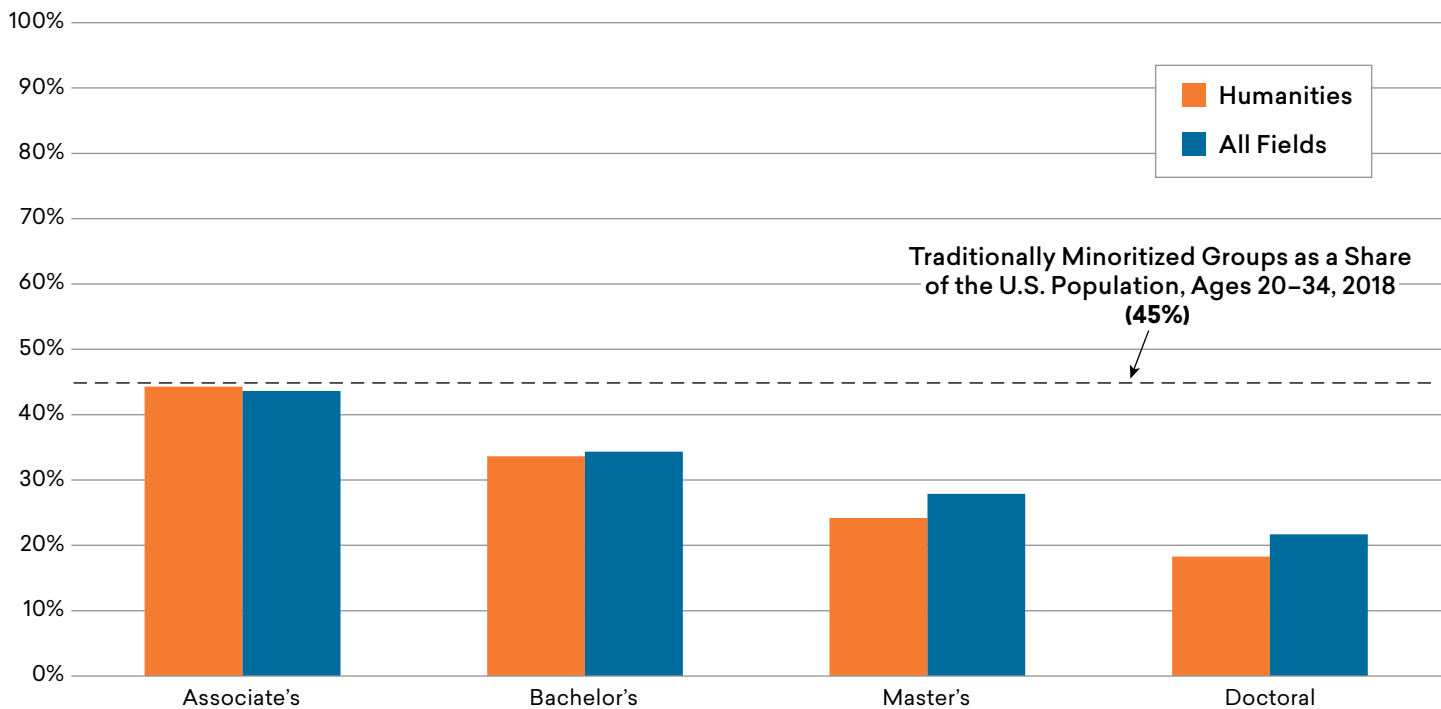
# Share of Graduate Degrees in the Humanities Conferred on Women, by Degree Level, 1988–2020



**FROM 1988 TO 2020**, the share of graduate degrees in the humanities that were earned by women increased at both degree levels. The larger increase occurred among those receiving doctoral degrees, in which the share of doctorates conferred on women rose from 47% to 55% in 2016, before slipping back to 53% in 2020. The change among master’s

degree recipients was comparatively modest, rising from 59% in 1988 to 62% in 2020. In recent years, women’s representation among humanities degree recipients was very similar to their representation among master’s degree recipients generally.<sup>5</sup>

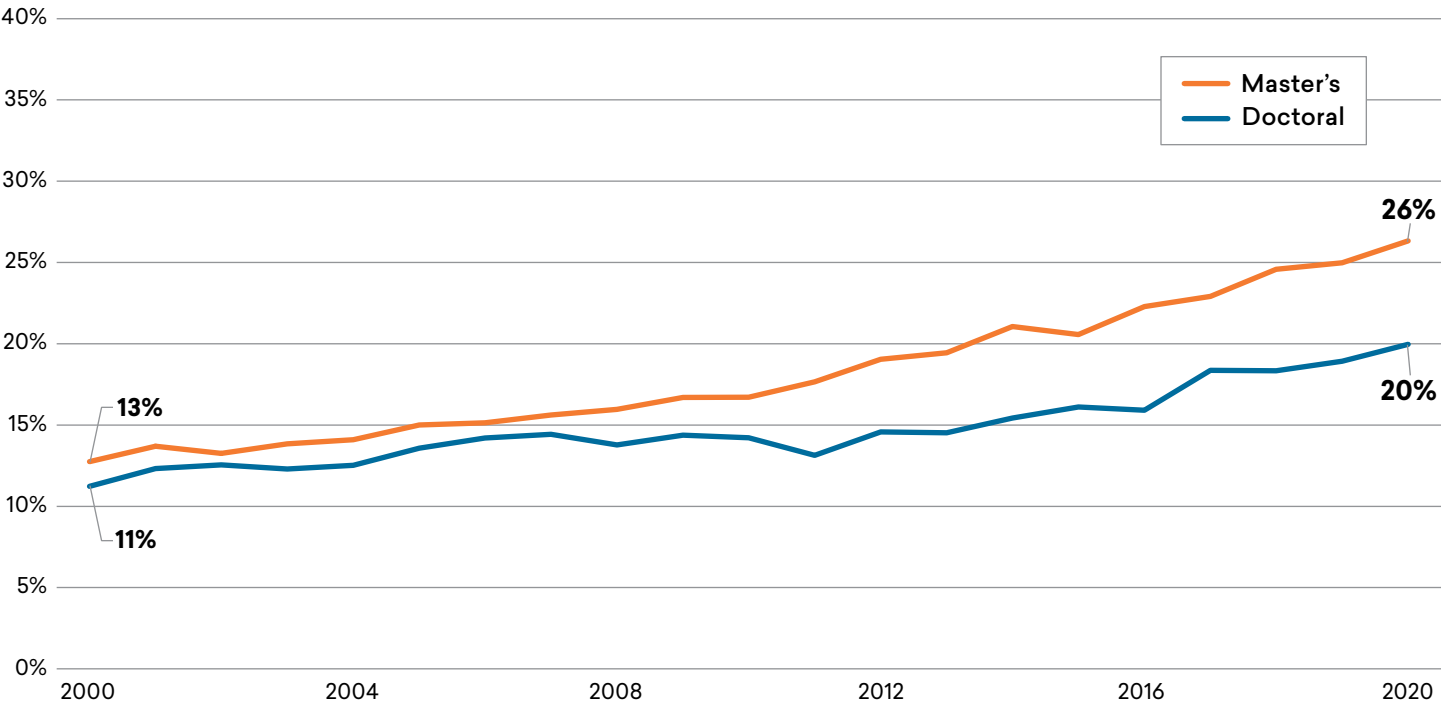
# Share of Humanities Degrees Conferred on Members of Traditionally Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups Over Five-Year Period, by Degree Level, 2016–2020



**COMPARING THE SHARE OF DEGREES** at each level earned by students from traditionally minoritized racial and ethnic groups (Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander) highlights a persistent challenge for the field. Forty-four percent of associate’s degrees conferred in the humanities from 2016 to 2020 were awarded to students from these groups, a share similar to their representation in

the population of young adults. At each subsequent degree level, however, this share decreases, with only 18% of doctorates conferred on students from these groups. At the associate’s and bachelor’s degree levels, the share of humanities degrees awarded to these students is similar to the share for all fields combined. At the graduate level, however, these students are less likely to be found among those earning degrees in the humanities.<sup>6</sup>

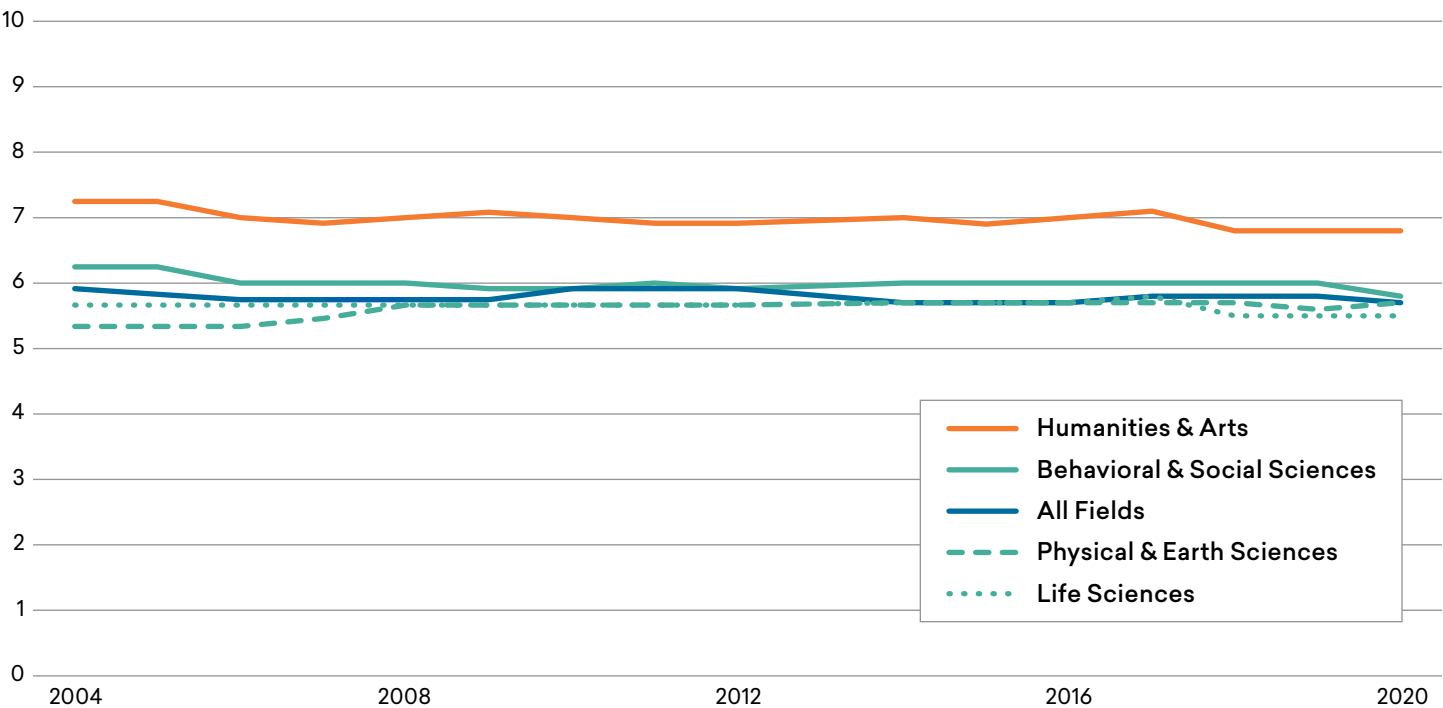
# Share of Graduate Humanities Degrees Conferred on Members of Traditionally Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups, by Degree Level, 2000–2020



**THE SHARE OF GRADUATE DEGREES** earned by members of traditionally minoritized ethnic/racial groups has been trending upward in recent years. At the master's degree level, the percentage increased from 13% to 26% from 2000 to 2020. And among doctoral degree recipients, the share increased from 11% to 20% over the same 20 years.

Much of this increase was attributable to the growing representation of Hispanic students among graduate degree earners. While the 2000–2020 time period saw an increase in the share of degrees earned by other traditionally minoritized groups, the Hispanic share of degree conferrals grew much more dramatically, over 100% at both the master's and doctoral levels.<sup>7</sup>

# Median Number of Years from Start of Doctoral Program to Receipt of Degree, by Academic Field, 2004–2020

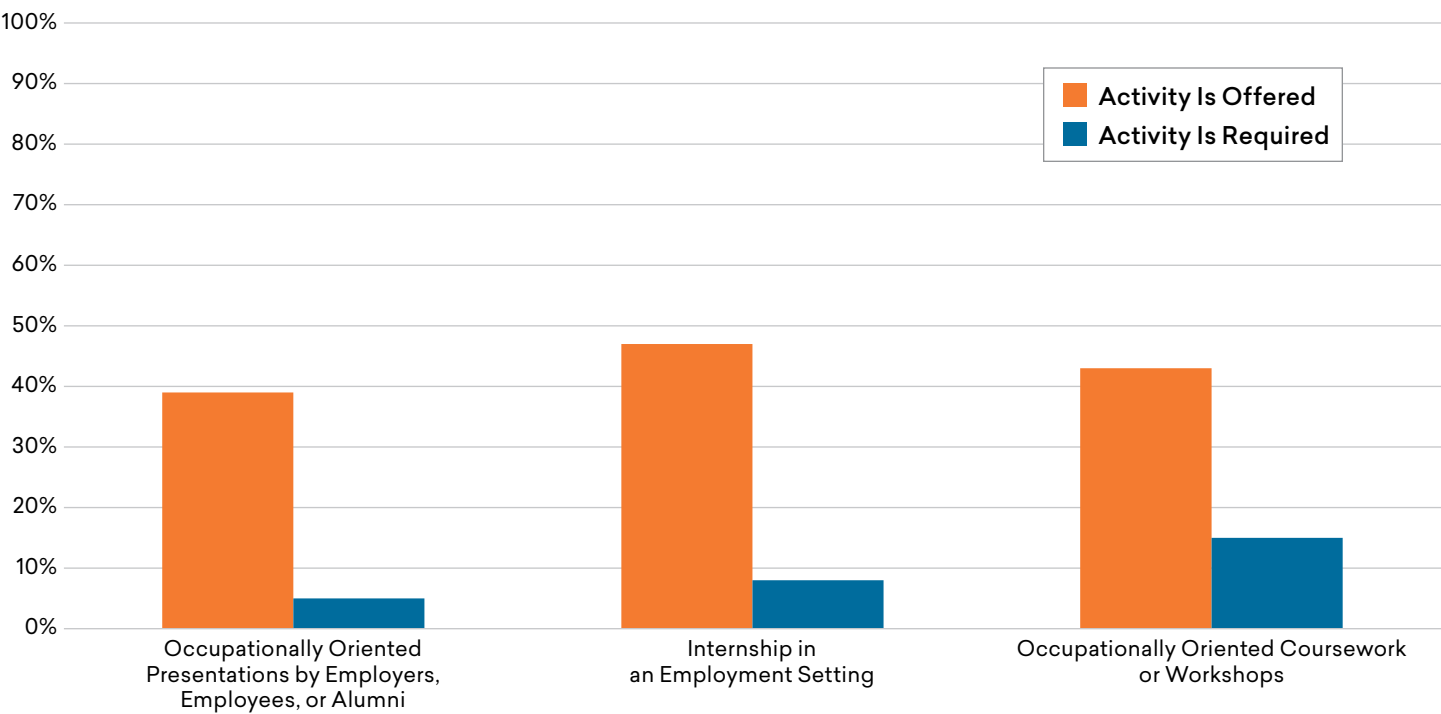


**LITTLE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE** about the amount of time spent in humanities master’s degree programs or how many do not finish their studies. For students earning a PhD, however, the federal government does gather information about the number of years to completion of a program. In each year from 2004 to 2020, the median for those who finished a doctoral degree was just under

six years among PhD recipients generally, but the median among those earning humanities and arts degrees (data are not available for each field separately) is a year or more longer than in most other fields. Humanities PhDs have consistently taken longer than doctorate seekers in any other field, though the time to earn a doctorate in the humanities fell modestly from 2004 to 2020 (from 7.2 years to 6.8 years).<sup>8</sup>



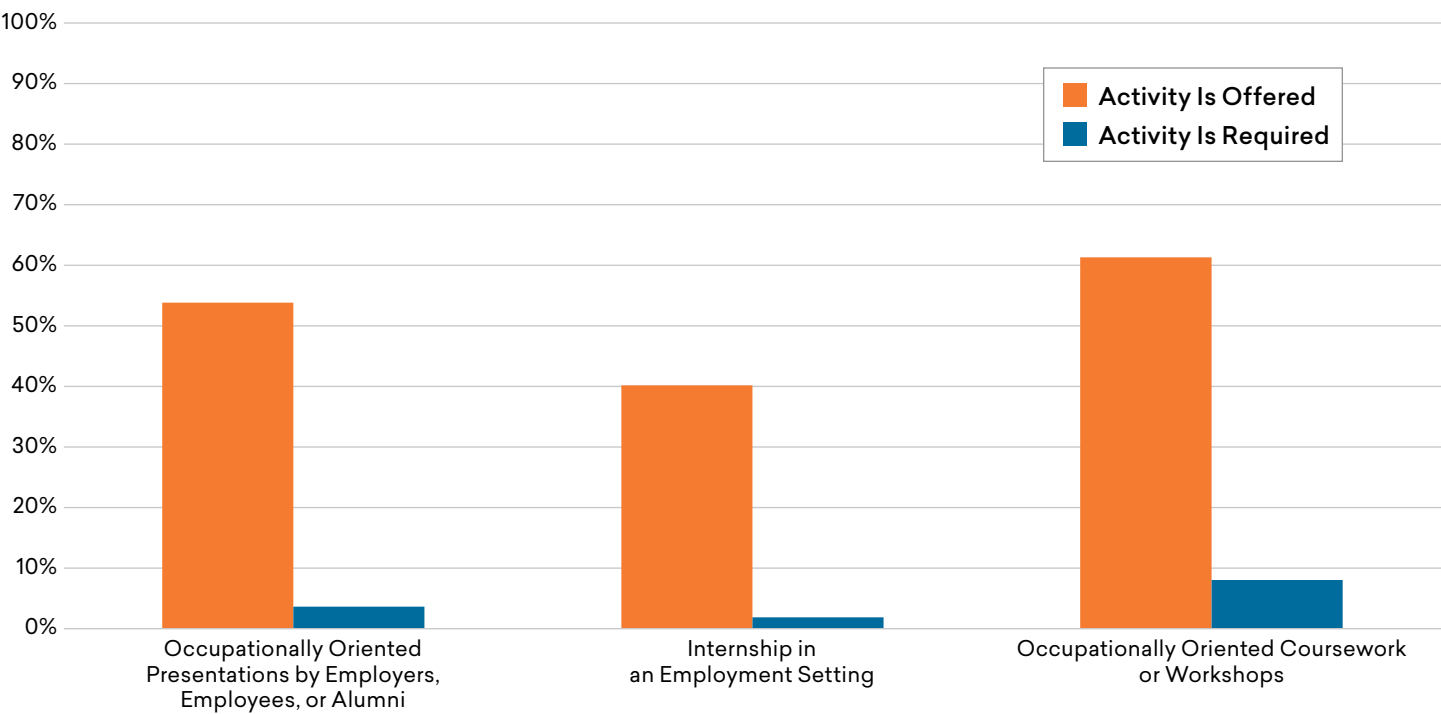
# Share of Humanities Departments Providing Career Preparation Opportunities to Master’s Students, by Activity Type, 2017



**JUDGING BY REPORTS** from scholarly societies, conceptions differ as to the purpose of a humanities master’s degree.<sup>9</sup> A review of the program catalogs for a wide variety of master’s degree programs in the humanities found some graduate departments offering programs designed for personal enrichment, while others focused on the training of students for digital and public humanities work or teaching. While some graduate programs are increasingly focused on preparing students for the workforce, a recent survey of

humanities departments found that the majority do not offer career preparation activities in the form of presentations, internships, or occupationally oriented coursework. An even smaller share of departments *requires* students to participate in such activities. Occupationally oriented coursework or workshops were the most widespread form of required career preparation, but only 15% of departments required this of their master’s students.<sup>10</sup>

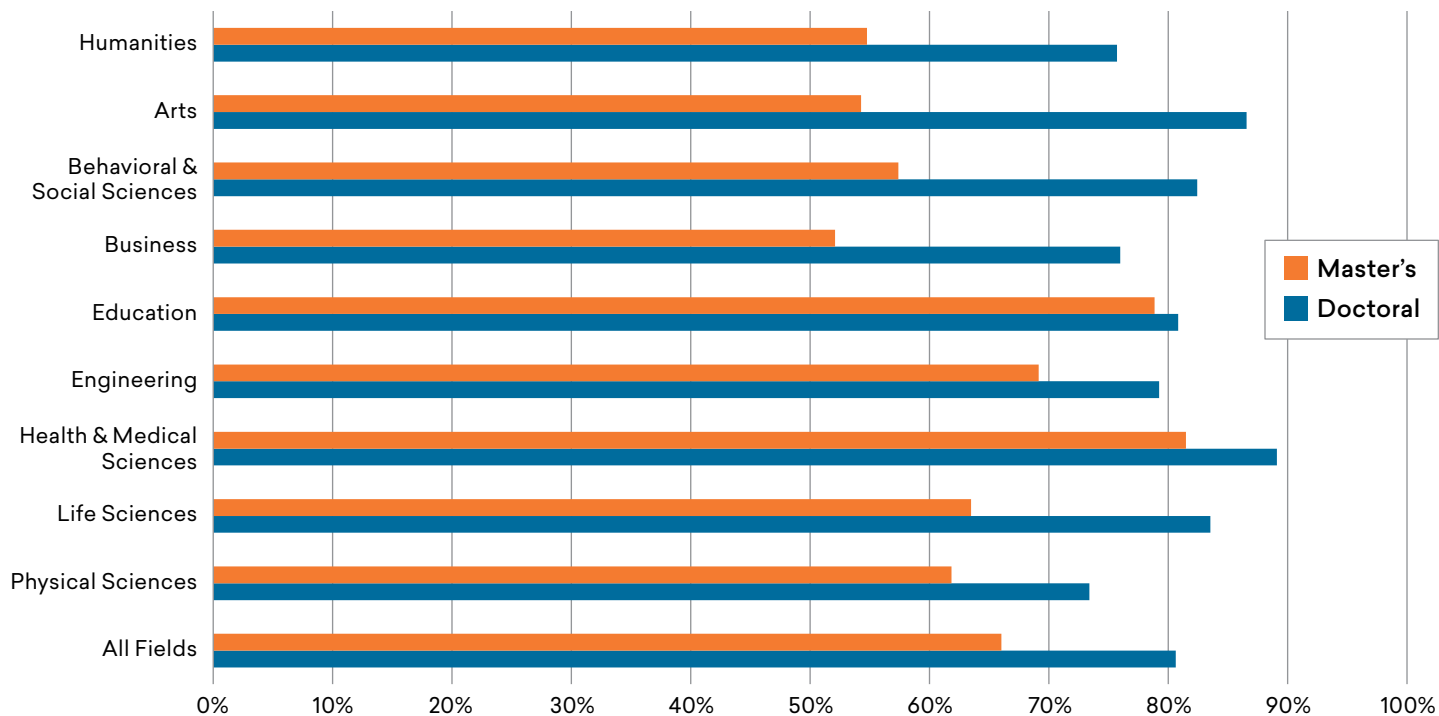
# Share of Humanities Departments Providing Career Preparation Opportunities to Doctoral Students, by Activity Type, 2017



**CERTAIN CAREER PREPARATION** activities were more likely to be offered to doctoral than master’s students. More than half of humanities departments offered occupationally oriented presentations. Occupationally oriented coursework or workshops were even more common, with over 60% of departments offering these to their doctoral students.

Departments were somewhat less likely to offer internships to doctoral students than to students studying for a master’s degree. As was true for master’s students, however, doctoral students were very unlikely to be *required* by their departments to participate in such activities.<sup>11</sup>

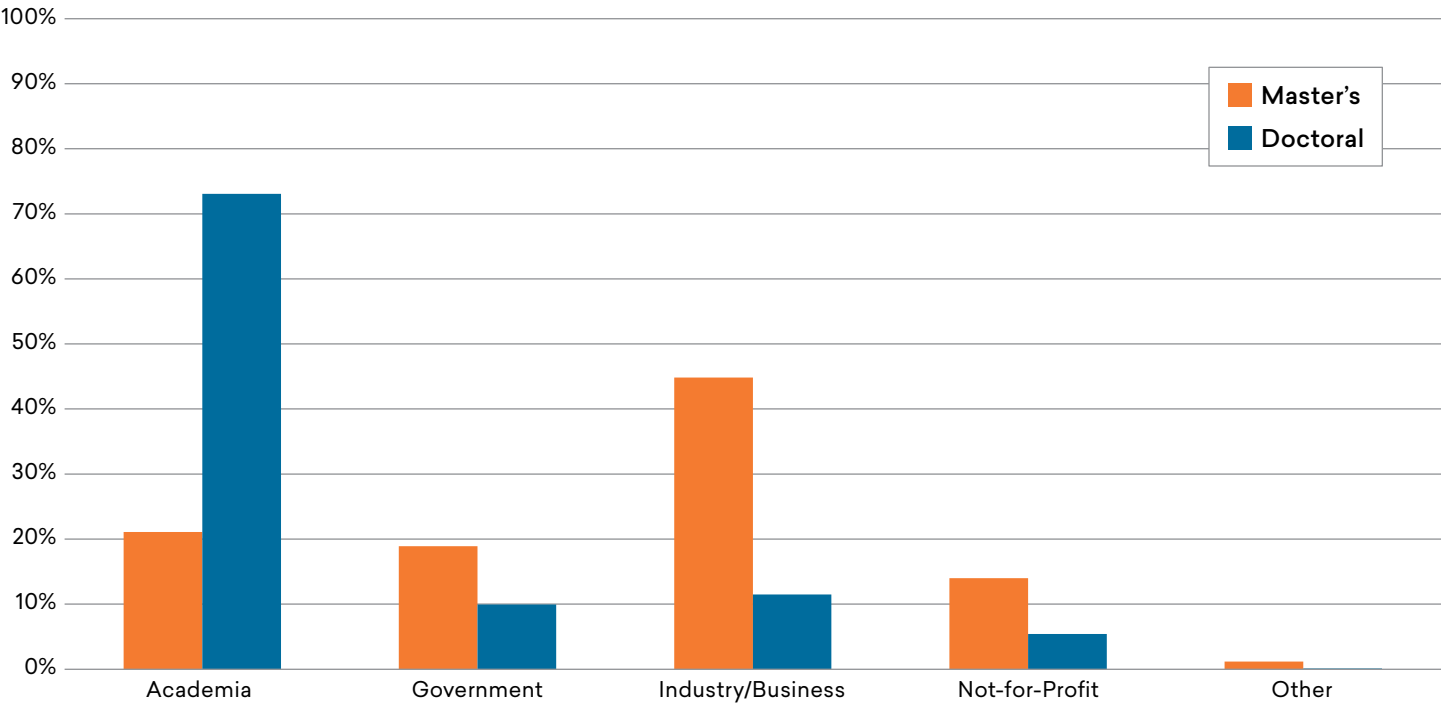
# Share of Graduate Degree Holders Who Perceive a Close Relationship between Job and Degree, by Field and Level of Highest Degree, 2019



**AMONG MASTER'S DEGREE RECIPIENTS,** 55% of humanities graduates perceived a close relationship between their job and their degree. While this was substantially smaller than the shares for some of the vocationally focused fields (education, engineering, health and medical sciences), it was similar to graduates from the arts, behavioral and social sciences, and business. Although not shown on the chart, approximately 23% of humanities master's degree holders believed that their work was *not at all* related to

their degree, a markedly larger share than observed in any other field, with the exception of the arts. Approximately three-quarters of humanities doctoral degree holders perceived a close relationship between job and degree. This was similar to business, engineering, and physical sciences graduates but a smaller share than for every other field. In contrast to master's students, only 3% of humanities PhDs believed their degree was not at all related to their job.<sup>12</sup>

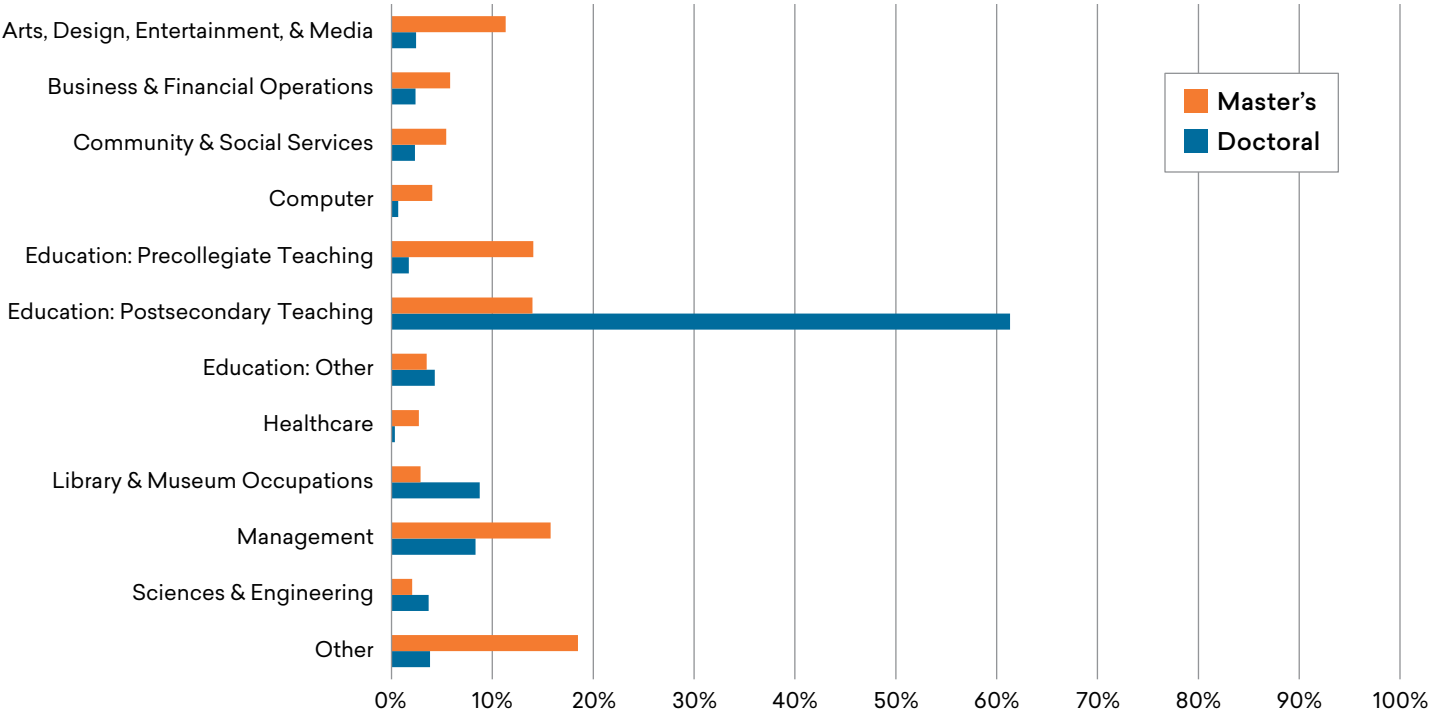
# Distribution of Graduate Humanities Degree Holders across Employment Sectors, by Level of Highest Degree, 2019



**VIEWED BY THE SECTOR** in which they are employed, recipients of master’s and doctoral degrees look rather different, but academic employment was significant for both of them. As of 2019, approximately 20% of employed terminal master’s degree recipients from the humanities and 70% of doctoral degree recipients worked in higher education.

Industry/business was also a substantial employer of those with terminal master’s degrees in the humanities (with 45% of degree recipients in that sector). Approximately a tenth of humanities PhDs were employed in this sector, with a similar share working in government.<sup>13</sup>

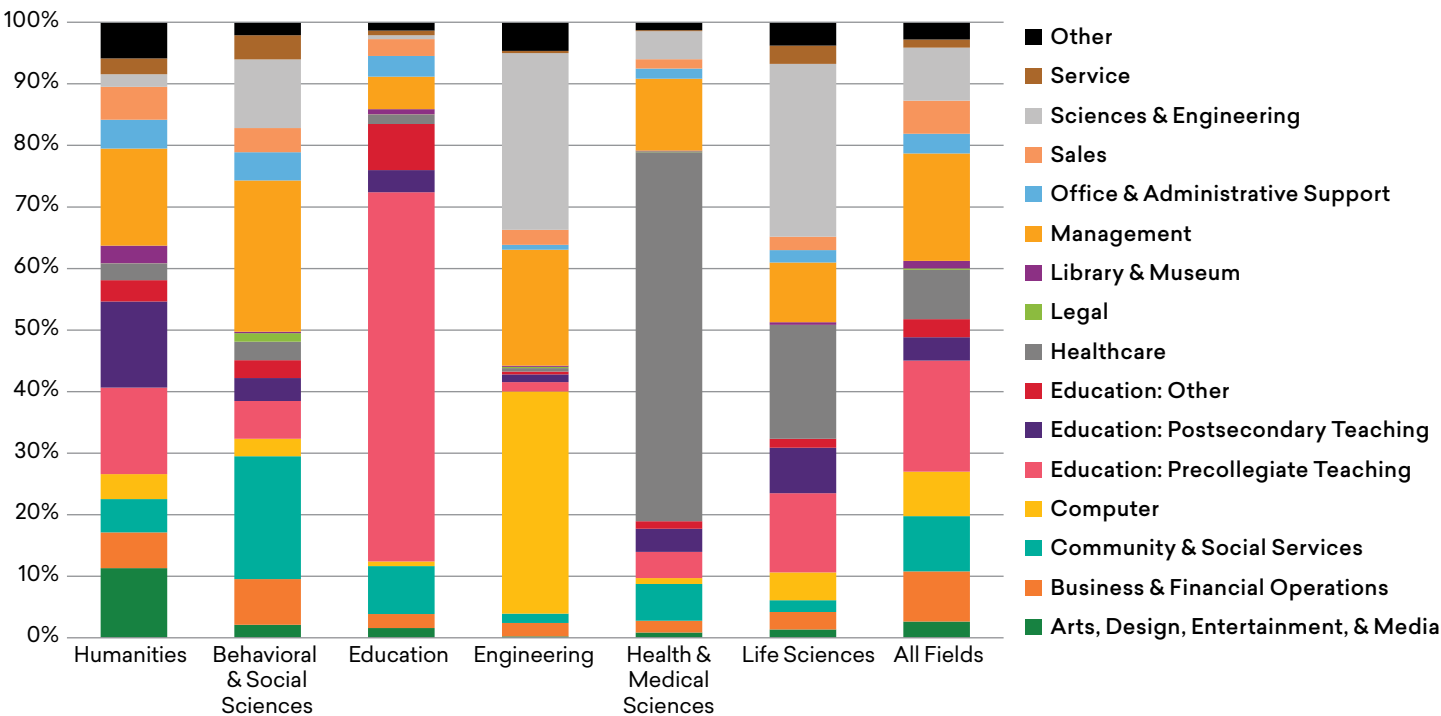
# Occupational Distribution of Graduate Humanities Degree Holders, by Level of Highest Degree, 2019



**WHILE THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR** for recipients of humanities graduate degrees provides one point of comparison between the degree levels, their occupations provide another. Just under a third of the employed humanities master’s degree recipients worked in education positions in 2019, with about half of that share working in K–12 education and half in postsecondary institutions. After education, the largest share of master’s degree holders was found in management jobs (16%).

More than 60% of humanities PhDs were employed in postsecondary teaching, with an additional 2% in K–12 teaching and another 4% in other types of education jobs (mostly administration). Beyond academia, 9% worked in library and museum occupations, and 8% were employed in management positions.<sup>14</sup>

# Occupational Distribution of Terminal Master’s Degree Holders, by Field of Degree, 2019

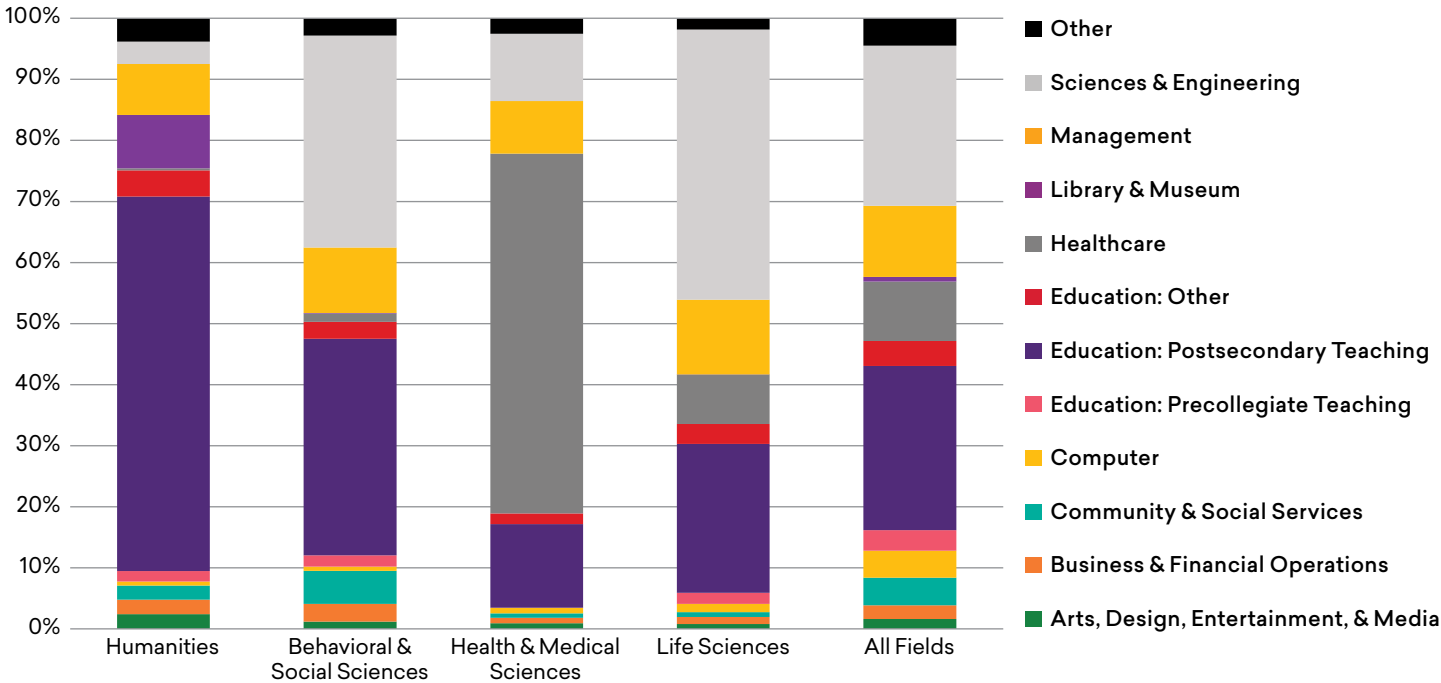


**HOLDERS OF A HUMANITIES** master’s degree were more evenly distributed across occupational sectors than recipients of a degree in other major academic fields. At the same time, recipients of humanities master’s degrees were particularly likely to be found in teaching jobs. Over 14% of humanities master’s degree recipients were employed as postsecondary teachers, compared to less than 4% of master’s degree recipients generally. Another 14% of humanities graduates were employed in precollegiate teaching, a larger share

than every other field except education. Outside of teaching, the largest share of humanities master’s degree recipients was found in management positions (16%), a share similar to that among master’s degree recipients generally (18%).<sup>15</sup>

Men’s and women’s occupational distributions were quite similar. Women with a master’s degree in the humanities were modestly more likely than men to be found in arts/design jobs and office/administrative support jobs, while men were somewhat more likely than women to work in computer and management jobs.

# Occupational Distribution of Doctoral Degree Holders, by Field of Degree, 2019



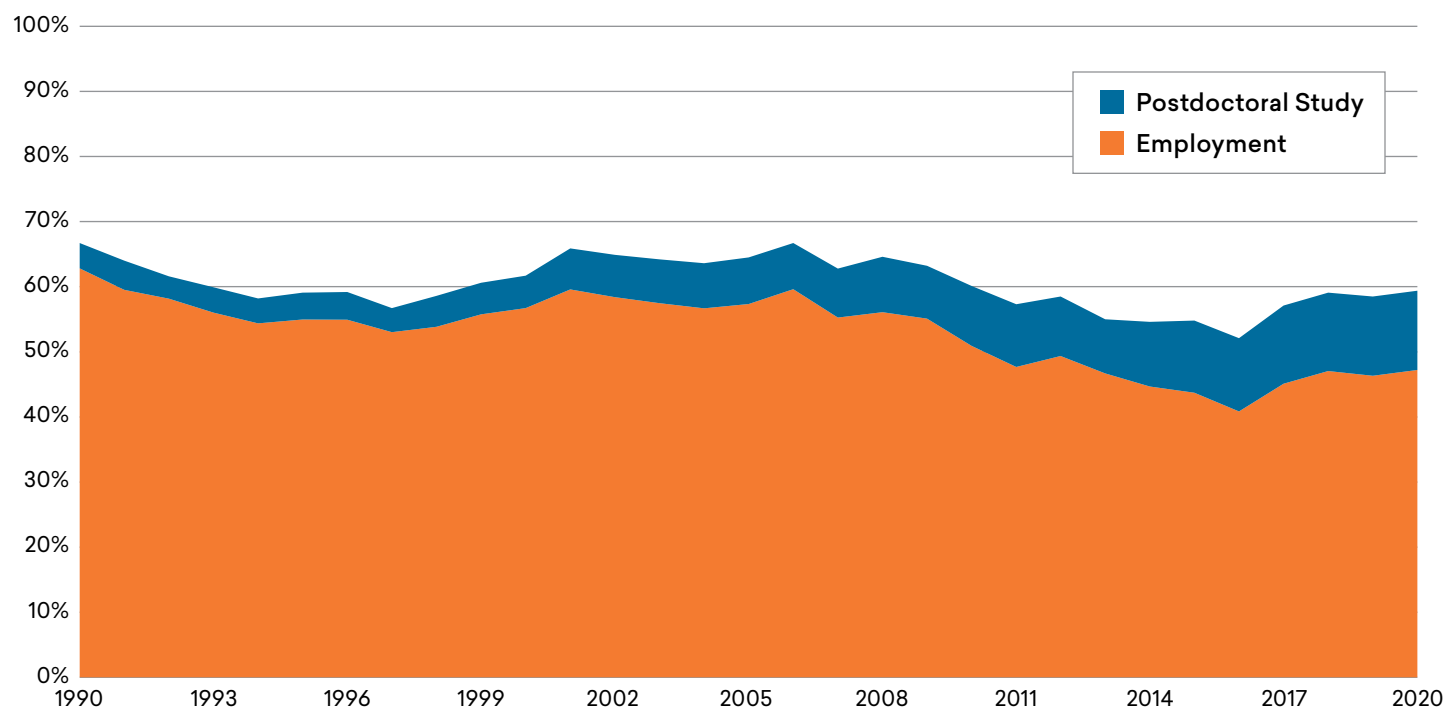
**SUBSTANTIAL SHARES OF PhDs** from every field were employed in postsecondary teaching, but the humanities stand out for the particularly large share of their graduates employed in such jobs. Among PhD recipients generally, 27% were employed in academic teaching jobs in 2019, compared to 61% of those with doctorates in the humanities.

A comparison with earlier surveys of doctoral recipients indicates that the share of humanities PhDs who work in higher

education has declined gradually since at least the 1980s, a phenomenon observed in most major academic fields.

As was the case with master’s degree holders in the humanities, the occupational distribution of humanities PhDs did not differ much by gender. The most notable disparity was in library/museum jobs, with women more likely than men to do this type of work (12% of women compared with 5% of men).<sup>16</sup>

## Share of New Doctorate Recipients in Humanities and Arts with a Definite Commitment of Employment or Postdoctoral Study, 1990–2020

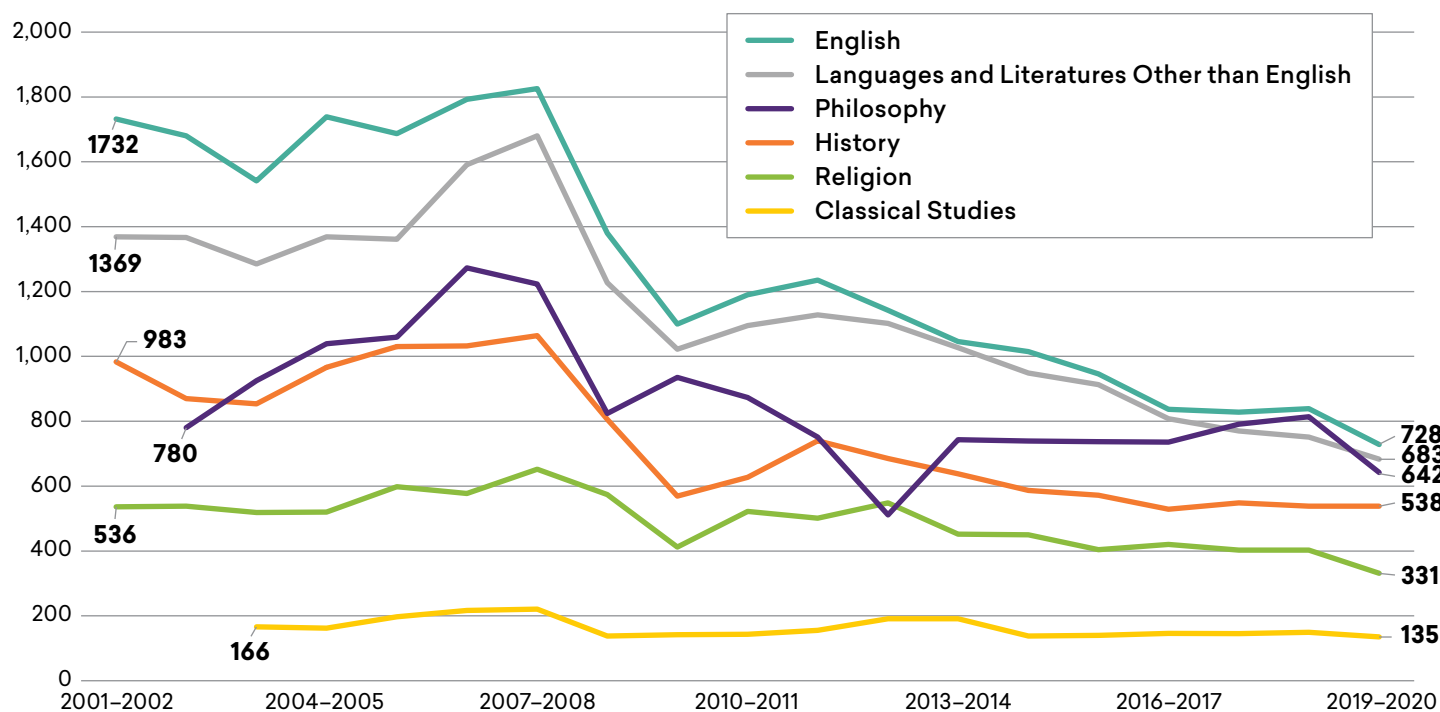


**IN 2020, NEW PhDs** in the arts and humanities (data are not available for the fields separately) were substantially less likely to report a definite commitment for employment upon graduation than their counterparts who graduated three decades earlier. The total share with a job commitment fell from 63% of the new PhDs in 1990 to 41% in 2016. Modest increases in most of the subsequent years, however, had brought the share up to 47% by 2020.

While the share of doctoral recipients leaving their graduate programs with job commitments declined for many years, the share with commitments for postdoctoral study grew slowly but steadily. In 1990, around 4% of PhDs leaving their programs had commitments for postdoctoral study. By 2020, the share was 12%.<sup>17</sup>



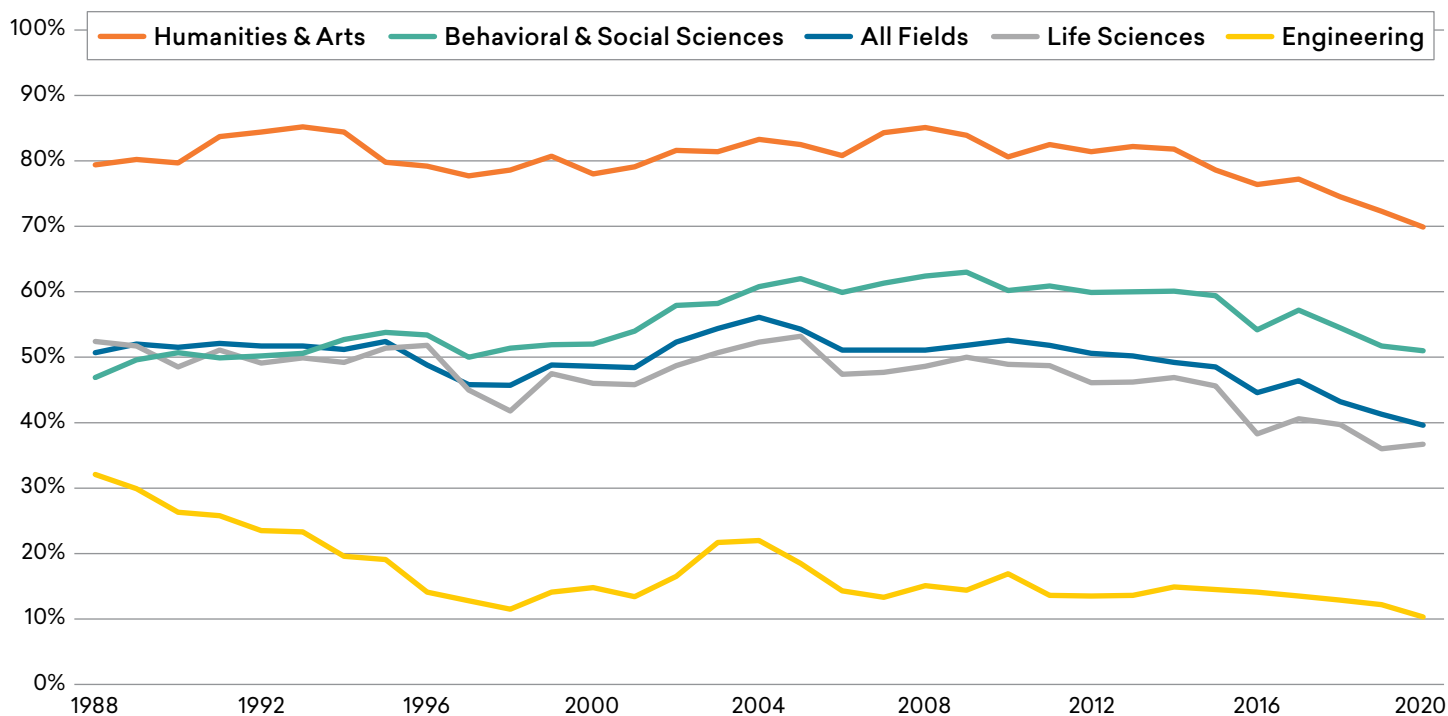
## Academic Job Openings Listed with Scholarly Societies in the Humanities, by Discipline, 2002–2020



**GIVEN THE MAJOR ROLE** academia has played as an employer of humanities PhDs, the state of the academic job market is a key measure of the condition of graduate education in the field. Data from the scholarly societies that publish most of the tenure-line job openings in the field report that after the 2007–2008 academic year, job listings fell by 36% or more within two years in every discipline except

philosophy (which experienced a drop of approximately a quarter). While some disciplines experienced modest increases in subsequent years, as of the 2019–2020 academic year, the numbers of jobs listed with the societies had still declined by 39% (in classical studies) to 60% (in English) from their peaks.<sup>18</sup>

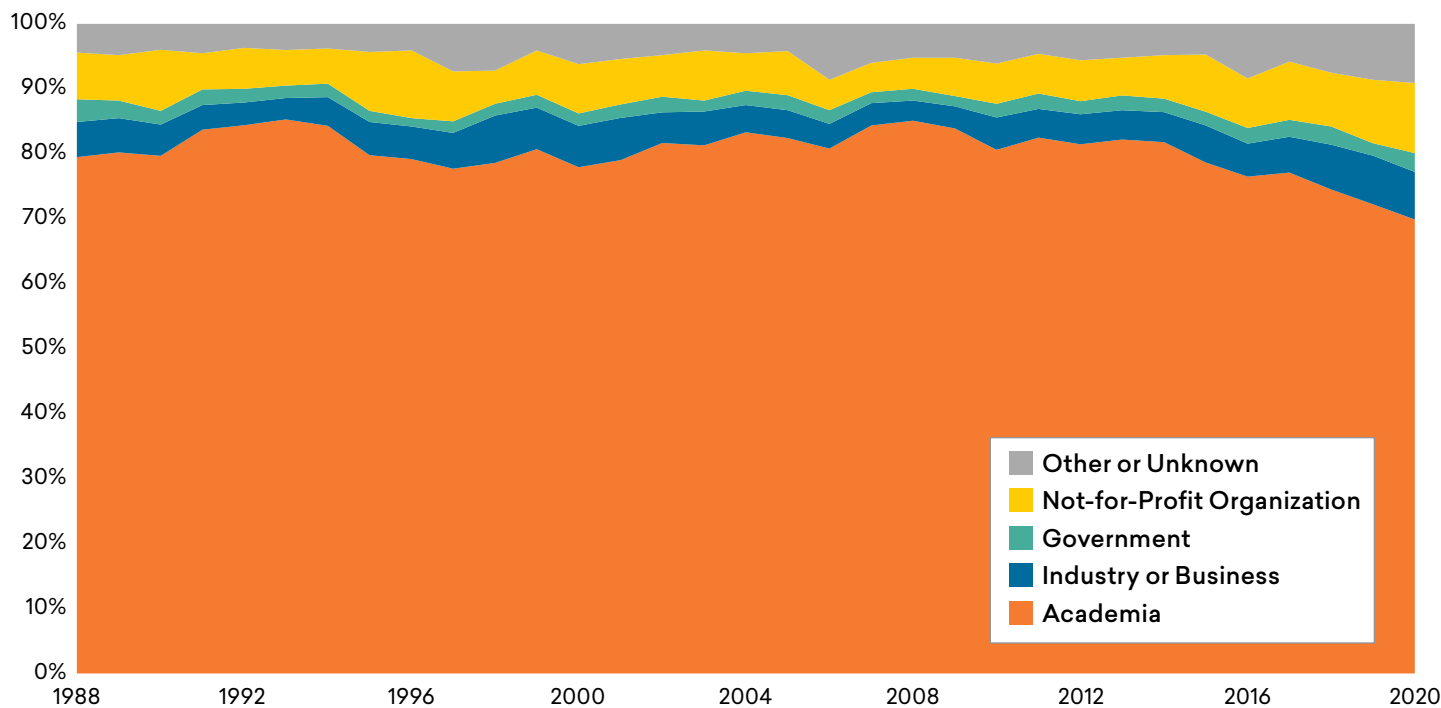
## Share of New Doctorate Recipients with a Definite U.S. Employment Commitment Entering an Academic<sup>19</sup> Job, by Field of Degree, 1988–2020



**WITHIN THE SHRINKING SHARE** of new humanities and arts PhDs with a definite job commitment, the share who were entering higher education also contracted in recent years. The recent peak occurred in 2008 (with 85% of those with a definite U.S. job commitment entering academia), fell to a slightly lower plateau until 2014, and then declined to the lowest recorded level (just below 70%) in 2020.

Even with the recent declines, new PhDs with a degree in the arts or humanities with a definite U.S. job commitment were much more likely to be entering academic employment at the time they earned the degree than their counterparts in other fields. In 2020, barely half of new PhDs in the behavioral and social sciences with a job commitment at graduation planned to enter academic employment, and the share among all new PhD recipients with a job commitment that year was 40%.<sup>20</sup>

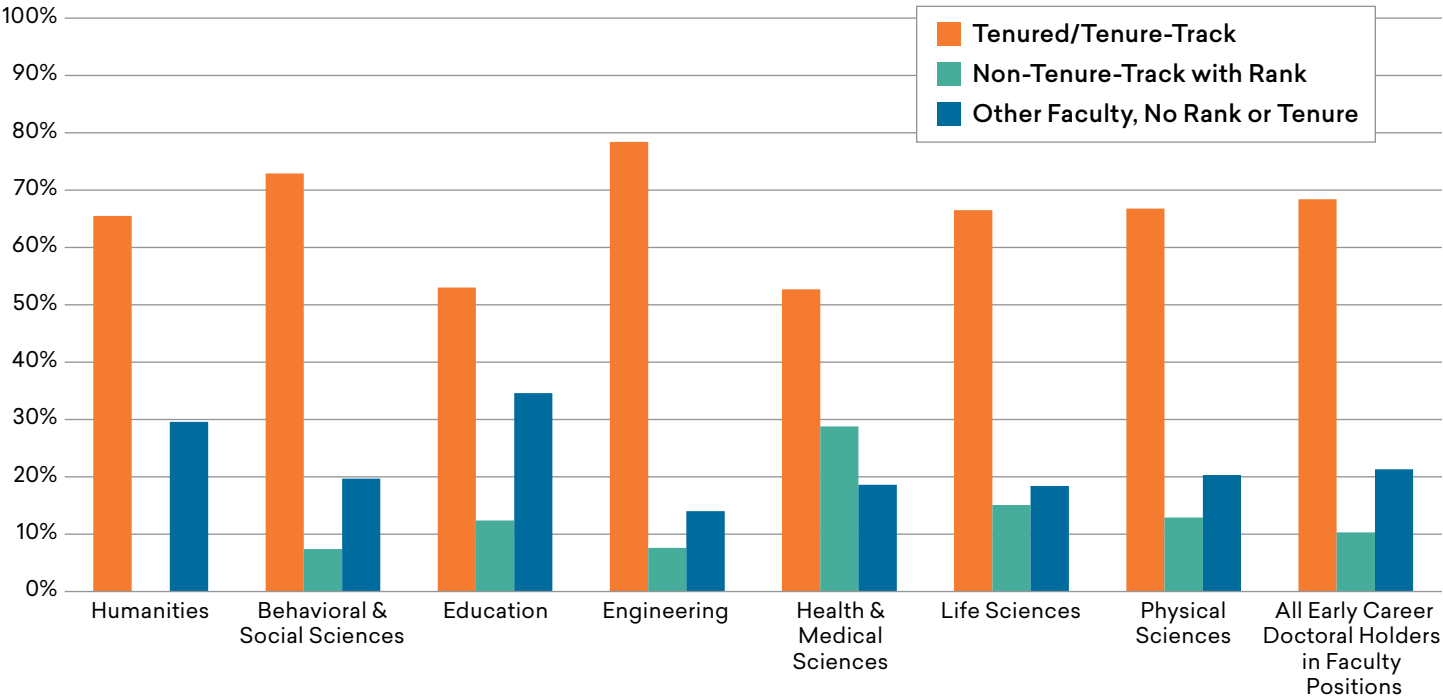
# Employment Sector of New Doctorate Recipients in Humanities and Arts with a Definite U.S. Employment Commitment, 1988–2020



**WHILE THE SHARE OF NEW** humanities and arts PhDs with a definite U.S. employment commitment who were taking an academic job decreased by almost 15 percentage points from 2008 to 2020 (the period during which listings of such jobs declined precipitously, as described on page 23), the share entering not-for-profit organizations increased 6

percentage points. Modest growth, of approximately 4 percentage points each, was also observed in the shares entering industry/business or employment in the “other or unknown” category, which consists largely of K–12 education jobs.<sup>21</sup>

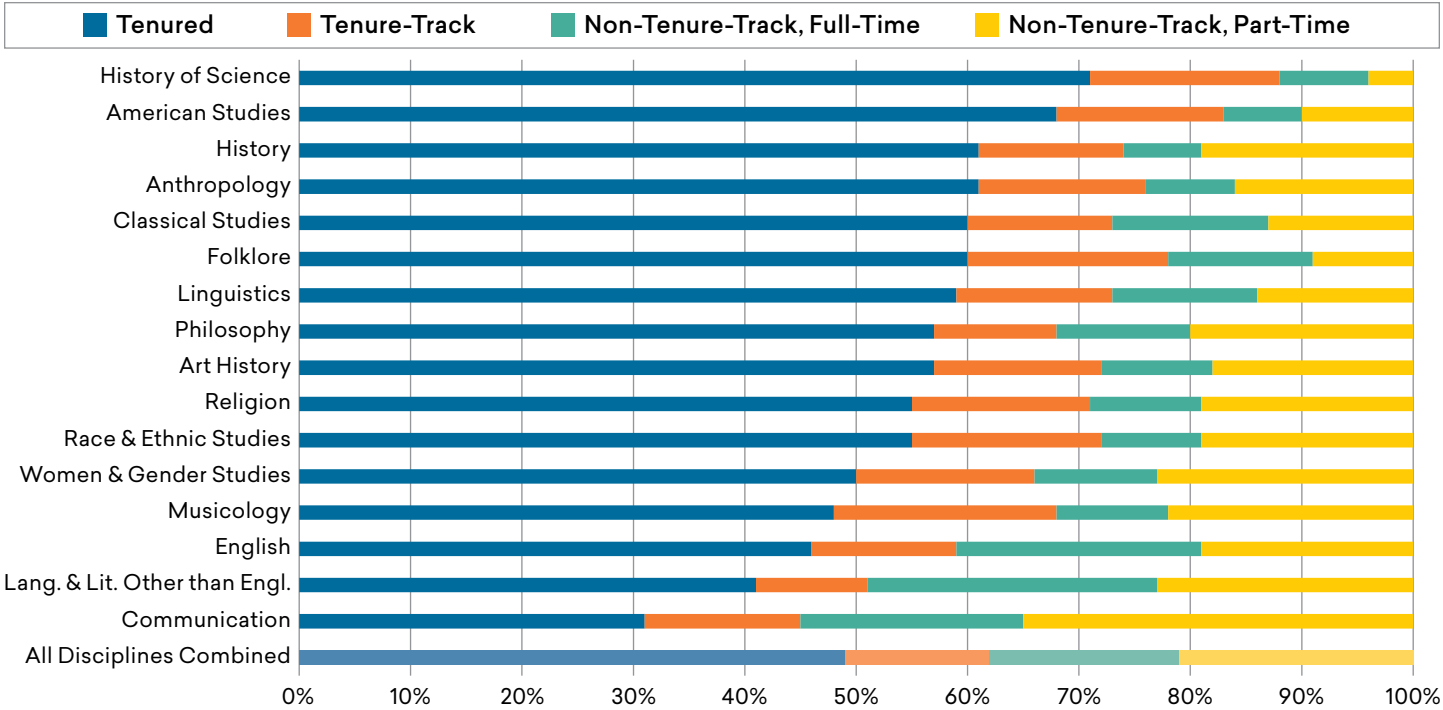
# Tenure Status of Early Career Doctorate Holders Employed as Postsecondary Faculty, by Field of Degree, 2017<sup>22</sup>



**A GREAT DEAL OF SPECULATION** in recent years has focused attention on off-tenure-track employment replacing tenure-track positions. A survey of PhDs who earned their degree in the past 10 years and work at higher education institutions found that nearly two-thirds of the humanities doctorate holders in faculty positions were either tenured or in tenure-track positions. This share was slightly larger than

the shares found in surveys of recent PhDs by the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association over the past decade.<sup>23</sup> The tenure/tenure-track share was also comparable to those in the life and physical sciences, but slightly below those for engineering and the behavioral and social sciences.<sup>24</sup>

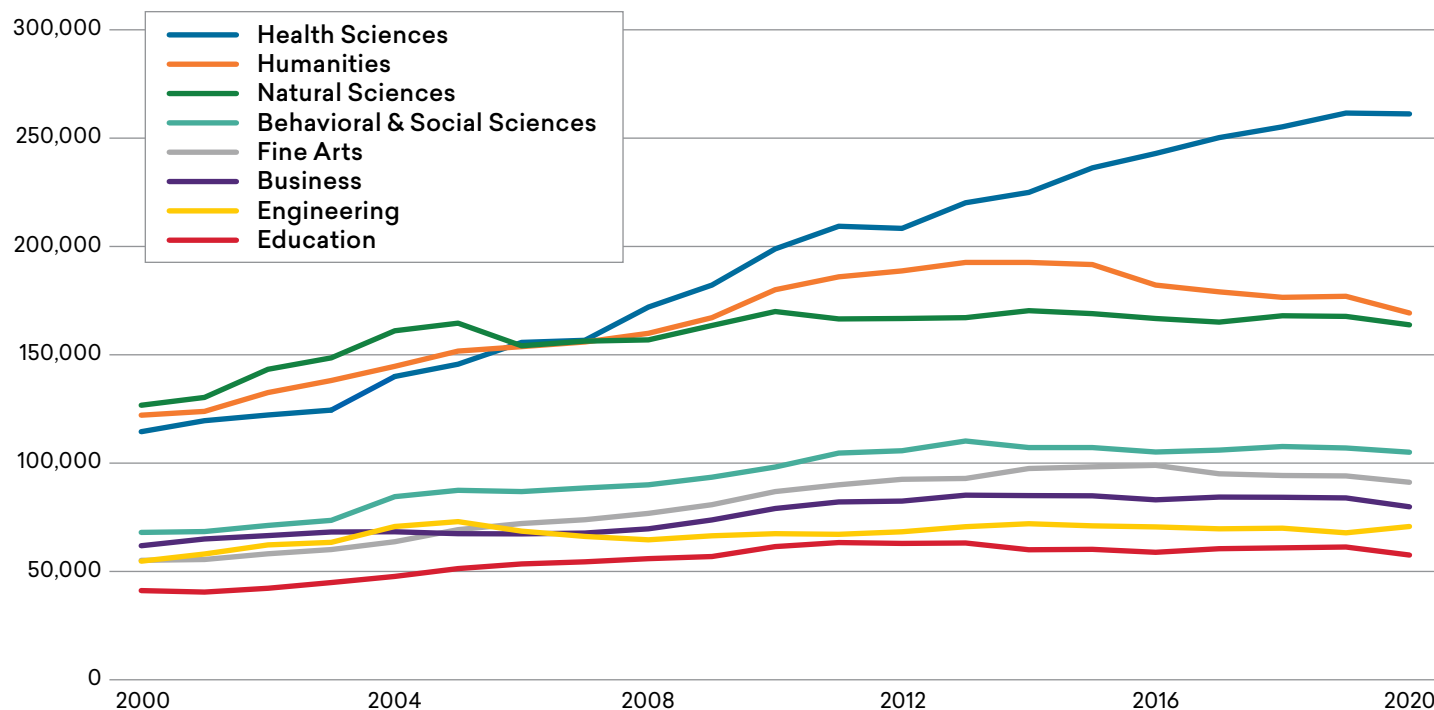
# Tenure Status of Humanities Faculty Employed by a Four-Year College or University, by Discipline, 2017



**SURVEYS CONDUCTED BY** the Humanities Indicators of departments at four-year colleges and universities found no evidence of a statistically significant decline in the number of humanities faculty from 2007 to 2012 or from 2012 to 2017. The same surveys also found no evidence of a shift from tenure-eligible lines to adjunct positions. Looking at the field as a whole, more than 60% of the faculty in humanities departments at four-year colleges and universities were either tenured or on the tenure track in 2017.

Some disciplines, however, did have considerably larger shares of tenured and tenure-track faculty than others. While over 80% of faculty in history of science and American studies were in these categories in 2017, less than 60% of faculty in English and languages and literatures other than English were of this type. Communication was the discipline with the smallest share—45%—of tenured/tenure-track faculty.<sup>25</sup>

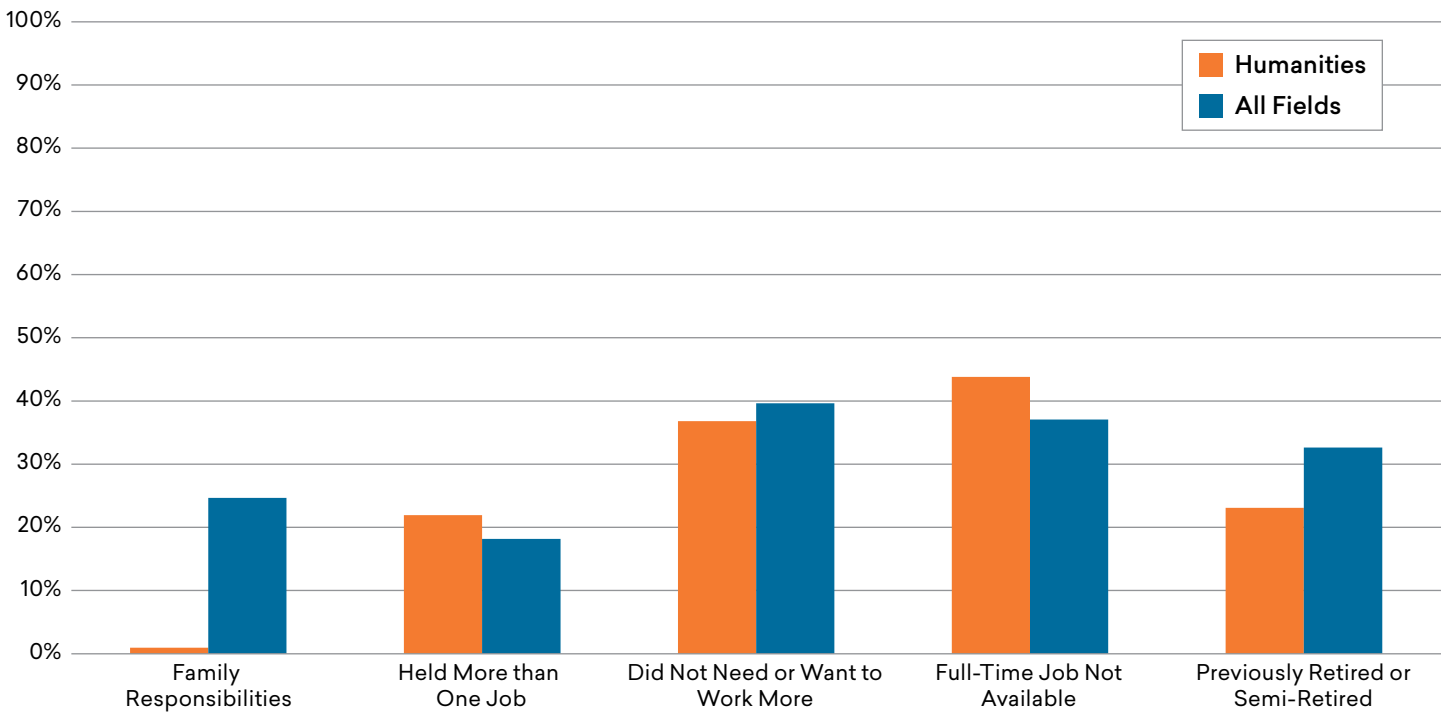
## Number of Postsecondary Teachers, by Subject Taught, 2000–2020



**AFTER INCREASING STEADILY** from 2000 to 2013, the number of humanities postsecondary faculty (working either full- or part-time) plateaued and then declined in virtually every subsequent year, bringing the total to 169,330 in 2020. While virtually every academic field experienced a reduction in the number of faculty from 2015 to 2020, the 12%

drop observed in the humanities was the most pronounced. The only major academic field to experience an increase in faculty over this time span was health sciences, with a faculty that increased by 11%. Despite the recent decline, the number of humanities faculty employed in 2020 was still markedly higher (by 39%) than in 2000.<sup>26</sup>

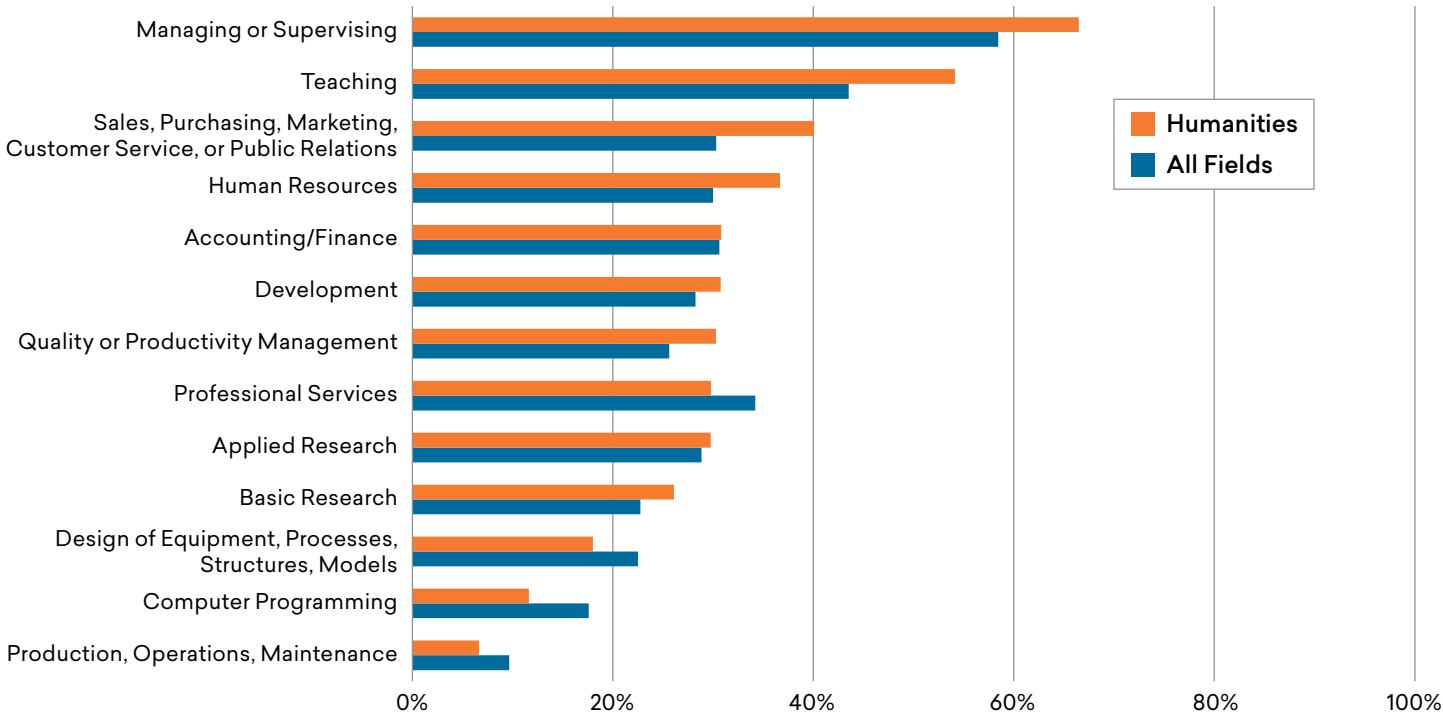
# Reasons for Working Part-Time among Humanities Doctorate Holders Whose Principal Employment is in Academia, 2019



**AMONG THOSE WORKING** in part-time positions in higher education, the reasons for taking such jobs can be complex and multilayered. In 2019, 44% of humanities doctorate holders whose principal employment was in academia, but who were working fewer than 35 hours per week, were doing so because a full-time job was not available, a

somewhat higher percentage than that for all fields combined. At the same time, over a third did not want or need to work more hours, and 23% were at least semi-retired. (Respondents could select all that applied, so the sum of the percentages is more than 100%).<sup>27</sup>

# Work Activities on Which Terminal Master’s Degree Holders in the Humanities Spend at Least 10% of Their Time, 2019<sup>28</sup>

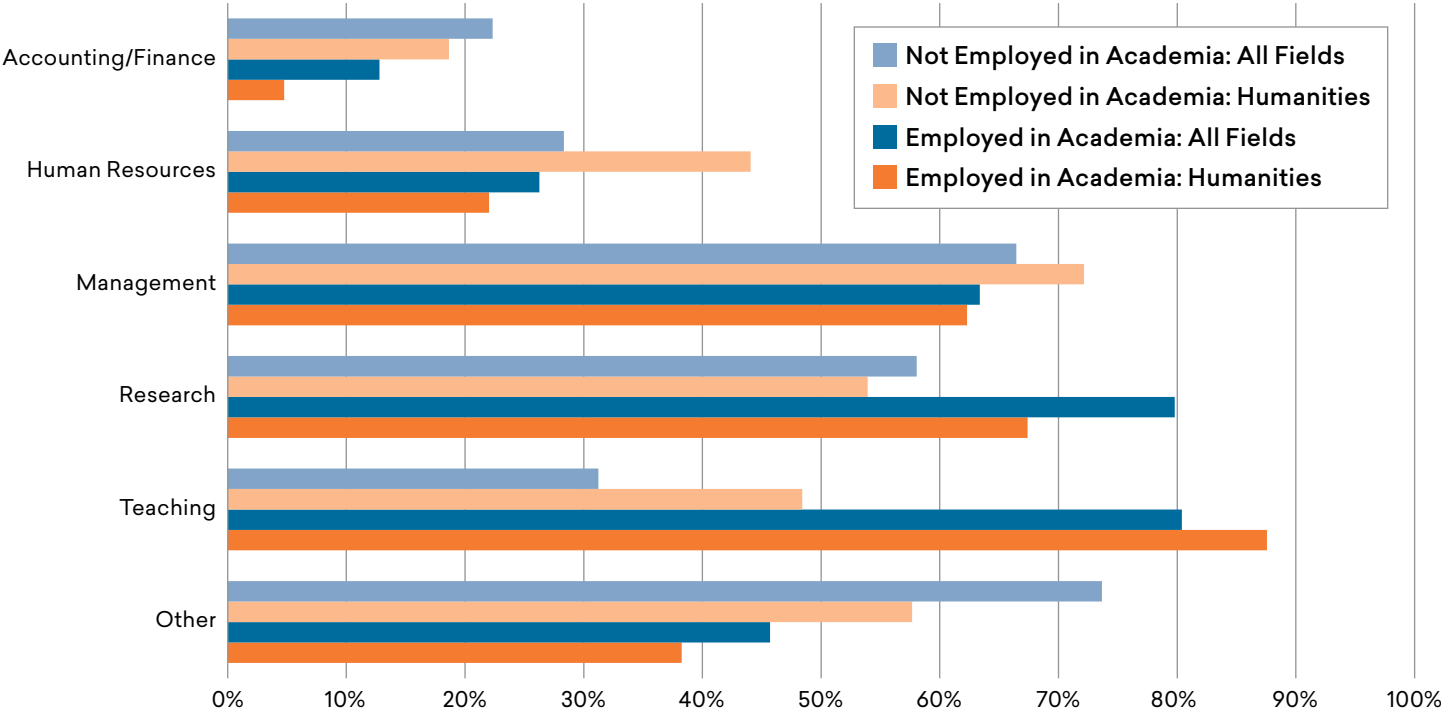


**BECAUSE THE MASTER’S DEGREE** can be oriented toward a variety of careers, it is perhaps unsurprising that those who hold the degree reported spending at least 10% of their work week engaging in a wide array of activities. Relative to all master’s degree recipients, those who hold the degree in the humanities were substantially more likely to

engage in managing/supervising, teaching, sales/marketing, and human resources activities. They were considerably less likely, however, than master’s degree holders in general to engage in activities related to the design of equipment, processes, structures, and models; computer programming; and production, operations, and maintenance.<sup>29</sup>



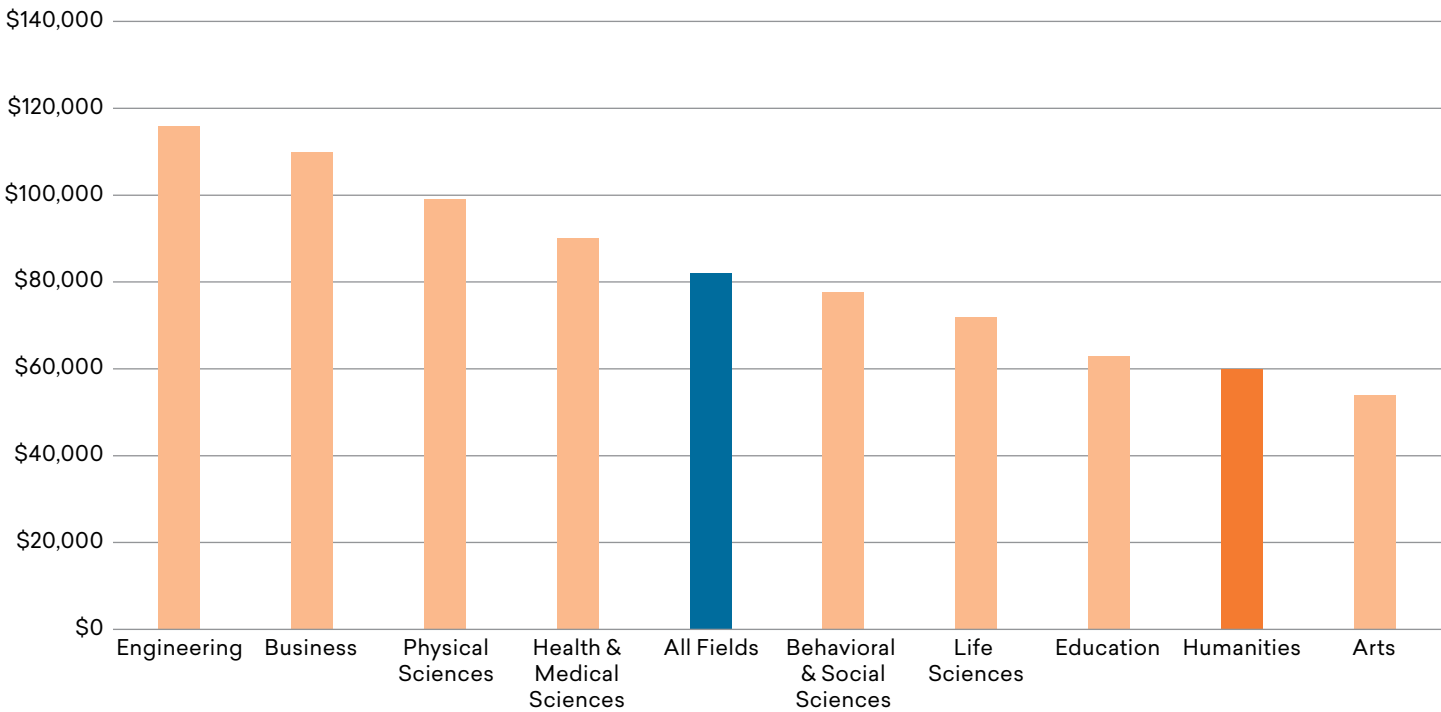
# Work Activities on Which Doctoral Degree Holders in the Humanities Spend at Least 10% of Their Time, by Academic Employment Status, 2019



**GIVEN THE SUBSTANTIAL SHARE** of humanities PhDs employed in academia, it is not surprising that they were much more likely to engage in postsecondary teaching than other fields (as described on page 21). However, almost half of those whose principal jobs were outside of higher education spent at least 10% of their work time teaching (though the survey does not distinguish between those who were doing it as part of their principal job or as part-time adjunct faculty).

And while one might think of the roles of academics as primarily teaching and research, more than 60% of academically employed humanities PhDs also spent some of their time doing management work, and 22% engaged in human resources activities. Research was actually much less likely to be an aspect of academic humanists' work than it was among academically employed PhDs generally.<sup>30</sup>

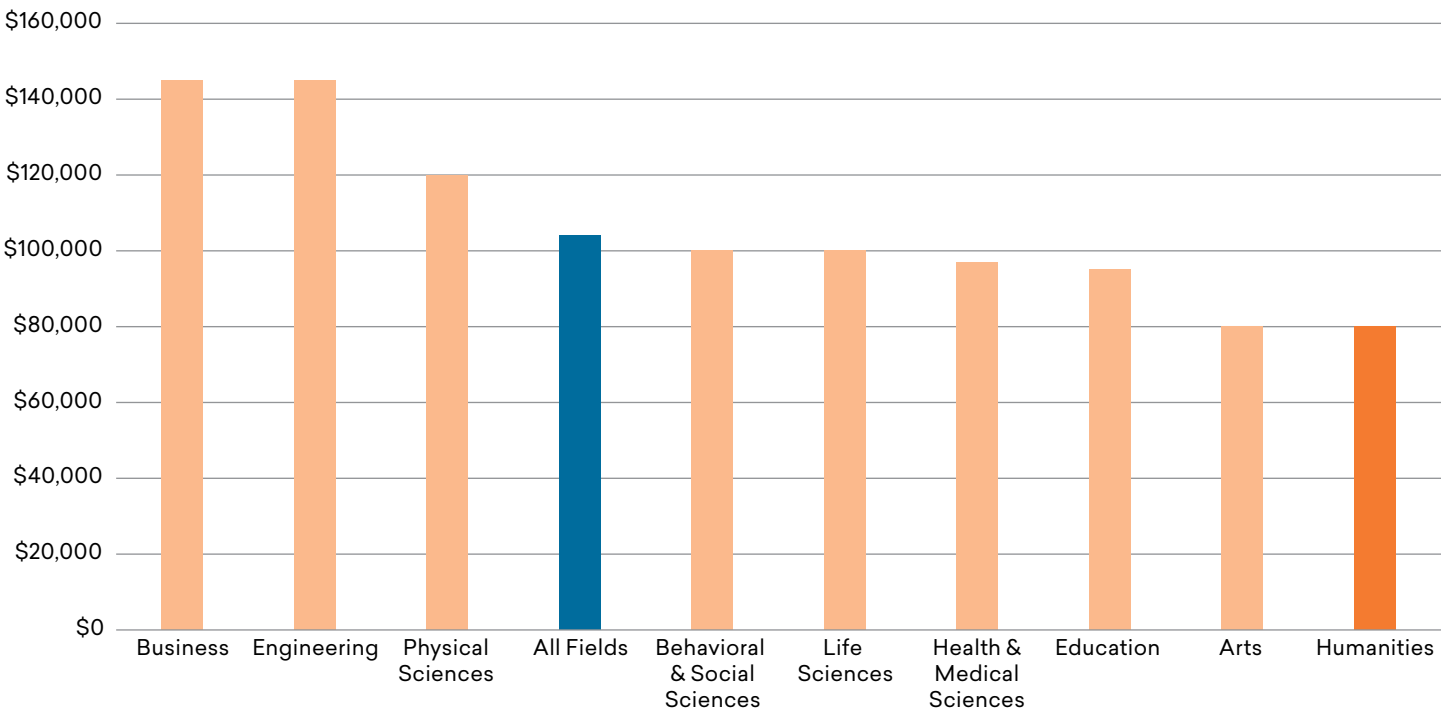
# Median Annual Earnings of Terminal Master's Degree Holders Employed Full-Time, by Field of Degree, 2018



**THE MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS** of those who hold a master's degree in the humanities (\$60,000) were very similar to those of workers whose highest degree was a bachelor's in the field (\$59,000) and below those of master's degree recipients from almost every other major academic

field. While slightly higher than master's degree recipients in the arts (\$54,000), humanities graduates' earnings were well below the median for master's degree holders generally (\$82,000) and approximately half of what engineering graduates earned (\$116,000).<sup>31</sup>

# Median Annual Earnings of Doctoral Degree Holders Employed Full-Time, by Field of Degree, 2018

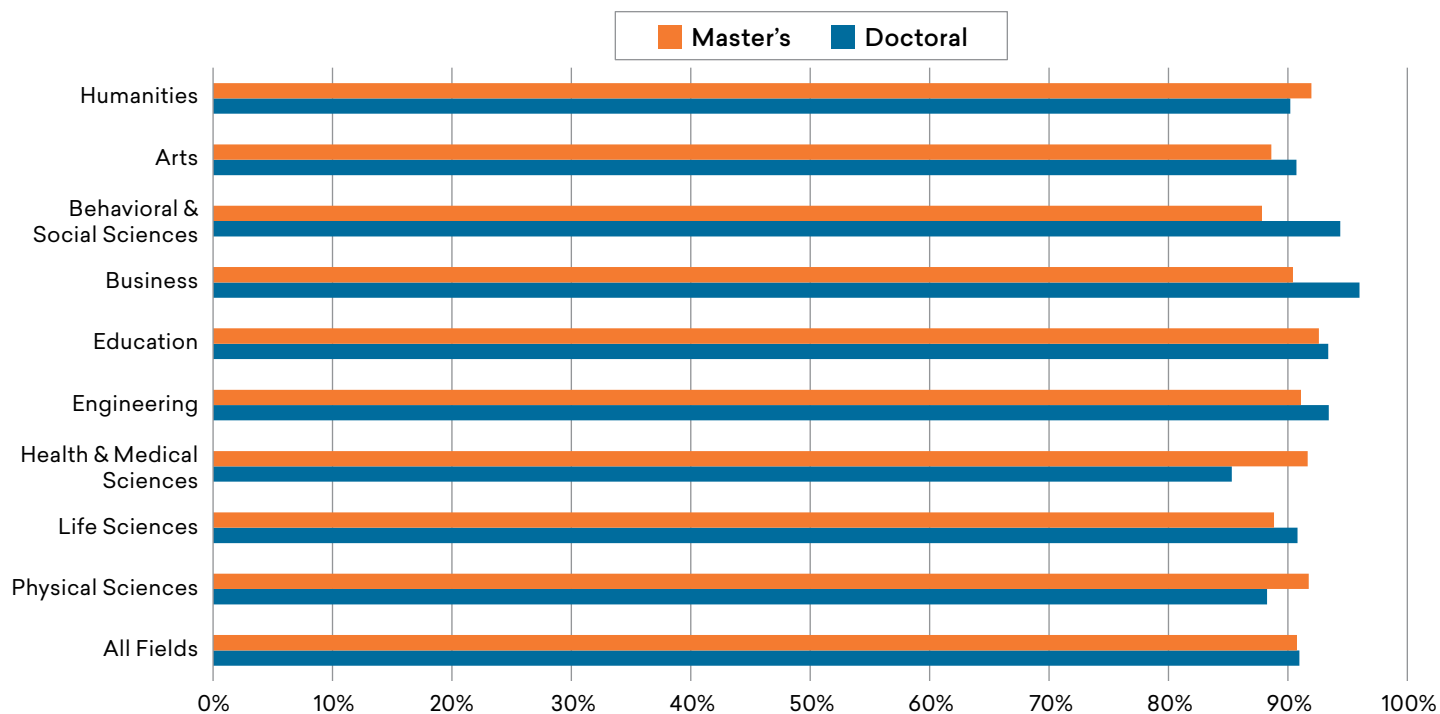


**AMONG THOSE WITH PhDs** in the humanities, median annual earnings (\$80,000) were \$20,000 higher than those of workers whose highest degree was a master's in the field. Median earnings for humanities PhDs were identical to those of arts PhDs, but they were \$24,000 below the median for PhDs generally and markedly lower than those of PhDs from business and engineering.

The range of earnings of humanities PhDs was narrower than all other fields in 2018, with a gap of less than \$40,000

between the 25th and 75th percentiles in earnings. Workers at the 25th percentile made 63% of what their counterparts at the 75th percentile did (\$66,000 versus \$105,000). Among PhDs generally, the difference in earnings between the percentiles was \$87,000 (with lower-earning workers making only 44% of their higher-earning counterparts). See the report website for information about the earning ranges found among degree holders in fields other than the humanities.<sup>32</sup>

# Job Satisfaction among Graduate Degree Holders, by Field and Level of Highest Degree, 2019<sup>33</sup>

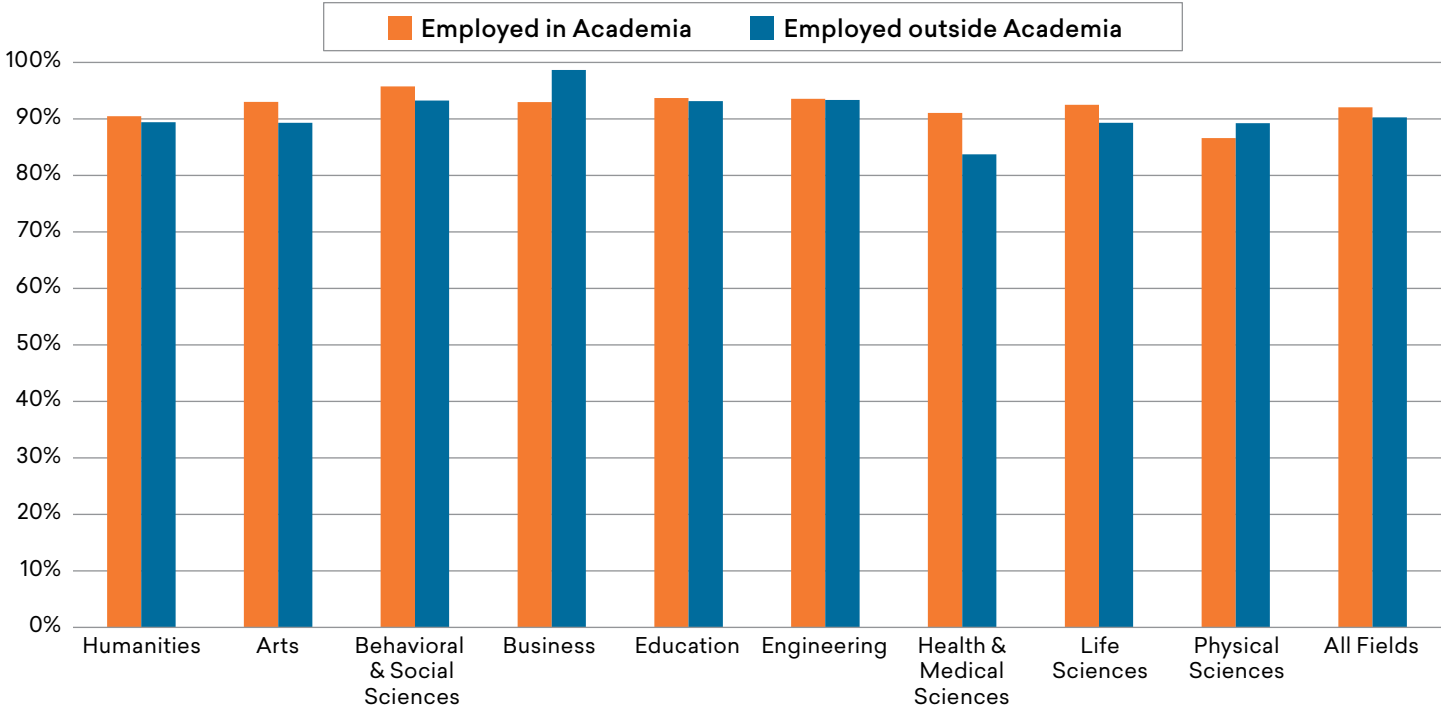


**DESPITE THEIR LOWER EARNINGS**, humanities graduate degree holders were just about as likely to express satisfaction with their jobs as their counterparts in other fields, with approximately 90% of master’s and PhD recipients describing themselves as at least somewhat satisfied with their employment.

Recipients of graduate degrees in the humanities were, however, somewhat less likely to report they were *very* satisfied with their jobs than their counterparts from other

fields. The gap was wider among PhDs, where just 43% were very satisfied with their jobs, compared to 51% among PhDs generally. With a rate of 59%, PhDs in the behavioral and social sciences were the most likely to be very satisfied with their jobs. (For details regarding the share of “very satisfied” for each degree level and field, please see the data tables posted at [www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce](http://www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-graduate-education-workforce).)<sup>34</sup>

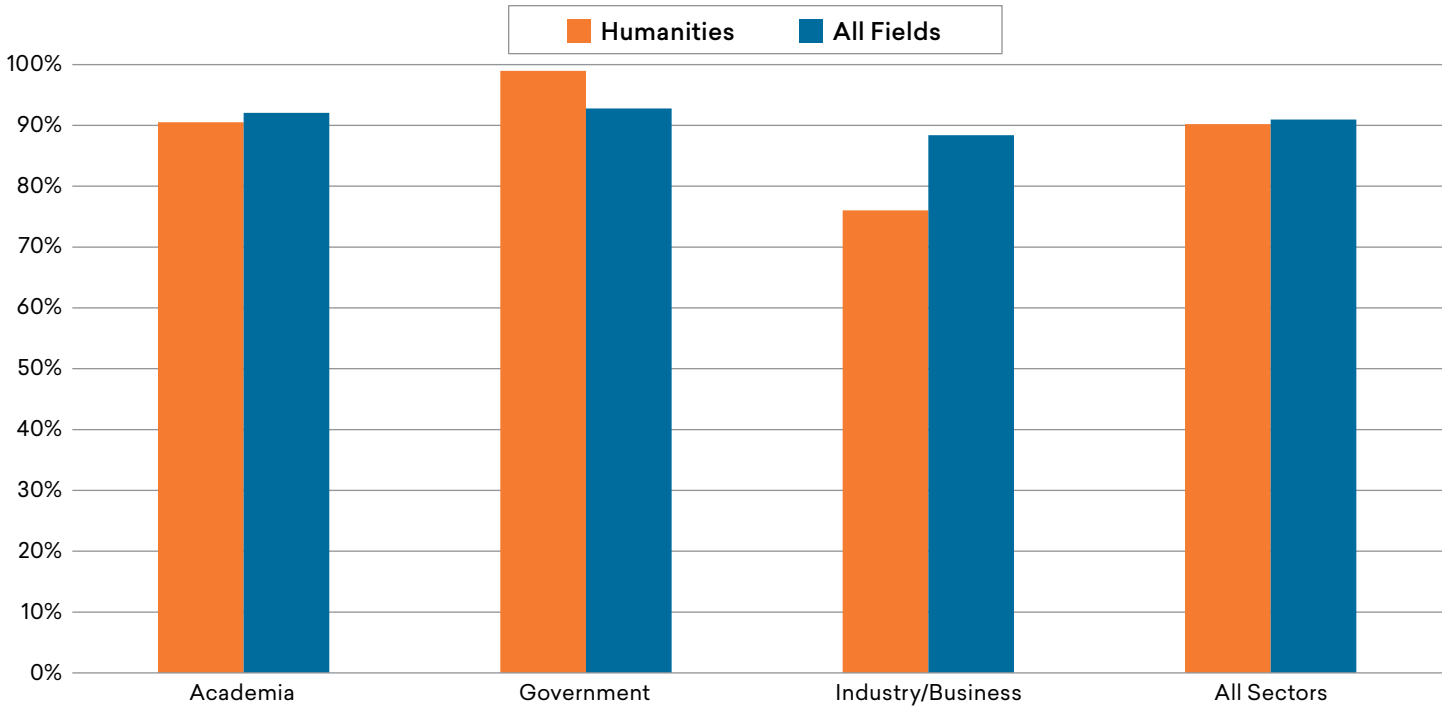
# Job Satisfaction among Doctoral Degree Holders, by Field of Degree and Academic Employment Status, 2019



**GIVEN THE CHALLENGES** of the academic job market, a key question in recent years has been whether humanities PhDs who are employed outside academia experience less satisfaction with their jobs than those who work in higher education. According to the National Survey of College Graduates, the difference between the two groups was

negligible, with both reporting close to a 90% satisfaction rate. Only among health and medical sciences PhDs were the academically employed appreciably more likely than their counterparts in other sectors to be satisfied with their work. Among business PhDs, those employed *outside* the academy were somewhat more likely to be satisfied with their job.<sup>35</sup>

# Job Satisfaction among Humanities Doctoral Degree Holders, by Employment Sector, 2019



**HUMANITIES PhDs WORKING** in industry or business were markedly less likely to be satisfied with their jobs than their academically employed counterparts. Humanities PhDs working in the commercial sector were also less likely to be satisfied than industry/business-employed PhDs generally. Humanities PhDs working in the government sector were the most likely to report job satisfaction.<sup>36</sup>

# Conclusion

Examining broad trends in humanities graduate education offers important insights into emerging patterns in who is earning the degree, some of the practices in graduate programs, and the outcomes for those who have already earned degrees in the field. But the available data leave many questions unanswered. For instance, it is not clear how the drop in job ads at the scholarly societies and the dip in the estimated number of faculty can be reconciled with the substantial, but comparatively modest decline in new humanities PhDs with job commitments in academia. And the data cannot tell us where these trends might be headed in the future. For instance, will the number of master's degrees continue to decline in the field, and, if they do, what are the implications for the viability of graduate programs that do not offer a PhD? Similarly, what will become of doctoral programs in the field if the path into traditional academic occupations remains narrow? Given the median seven-year time to PhD, it is challenging for anyone entering a PhD program to anticipate improvements or declines in the academic job market. We cannot put the trends on a balance sheet and calculate the risks and rewards for anyone entering a graduate program or advising a student thinking about entering one, but we hope this report can offer a clear-eyed view of the trends as they exist and some perspective for those who are preparing students and programs for the future.

# Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS). The master's degree count for some recent years includes a handful of what are categorized by the conferring institution as *professional-practice* doctorates (see below).

2. Ibid.

A *professional degree* is one classified within IPEDS as a professional-practice doctorate, which is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as a doctor's degree (requiring at least six academic years to complete, including undergraduate education) that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice; or, for earlier years, a *first professional degree*. The latter category included ten degree types: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Law (LL.B. or J.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Optometry (O.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., or Pod.D.); Theology (M.Div., M.H.L., B.D., or Ordination); and Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M. or V.M.D.).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. IPEDS offers institutions only two categories for reporting the gender of degree recipients: "men" and "women."

6. Ibid; and U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race, and "Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019 (NC-EST2019-ASR6H)," <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2019/national/asrh/nc-est2019-asr6h.xlsx>.

7. U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Data System.

8. National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), Survey of Earned Doctorates. The values

for time to degree for years 2003 to 2012 are derived from custom tabulations purchased by the Humanities Indicators in 2014. Starting in 2014, the Indicators' method for calculating time to degree (as time in doctoral program) was adopted by NCSES, but they did not include a value for 2013 in any of their published reports. For the purpose of the figure, the value for 2013 is inferred from the two adjoining data points.

9. Association of Departments of English Ad Hoc Committee on the Master's Degree, *Rethinking the Master's Degree in English for a New Century* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2011), <https://www.mla.org/content/download/25406/1164106/2011adhocrpt.pdf>. See also Philip M. Katz, *Retrieving the Master's Degree from the Dustbin of History* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2006), <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/retrieving-the-masters-degree-from-the-dustbin-of-history>.

10. American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Humanities Indicators, *The State of the Humanities in Four-Year Colleges and Universities (2017)* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017), [https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-05/hds3\\_the\\_state\\_of\\_the\\_humanities\\_in\\_colleges\\_and\\_universities.pdf](https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-05/hds3_the_state_of_the_humanities_in_colleges_and_universities.pdf).

11. Ibid.

12. Original analysis by the Humanities Indicators of data from the National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Survey of College Graduates.

13. Ibid. Jobs in "academia" are those in higher education. K–12 education jobs are included in the "government" category.

14. Ibid; includes all degree holders employed within the previous five years.

15. Ibid.



16. Ibid. For earlier studies on the employment of humanities PhDs, see the reports from the National Science Foundation's Survey of Doctorate Recipients, which tracked the humanities from 1970 to 1995.
17. National Science Foundation, Survey of Earned Doctorates.
18. *Classical Studies*: Classical Studies Association, Placement Services Reports, <https://classicalstudies.org/professional-matters/professional-matters-data-collection>. *History*: Dylan Ruediger, "The 2021 AHA Job Report," *Perspectives on History* (January 2021). *Languages*: MLA Office of Research, Tables and Figures on the MLA Job List, 2019–20. *Philosophy*: American Philosophical Association, "Number of Jobs Published by Year." *Religion*: Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion, "Job Advertisement Data 2019–2020."
19. "Academic" jobs include only those in higher education, not K–12. This is true of all subsequent graphs that use the term. Academic jobs are any job at an institution of higher education, including both faculty and nonfaculty positions.
20. National Science Foundation, Survey of Earned Doctorates.
21. Ibid.
22. The estimate of humanities non-tenure-track faculty with rank was suppressed by the data collector due to reliability issues.
23. L. Maren Wood and Robert B. Townsend, "The Many Careers of History PhDs: A Study of Job Outcomes, Spring 2013," American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/career-resources/the-many-careers-of-history-phds>; Dylan Ruediger, "Where Historians Work: An Interactive Database of History PhD Career Outcomes," American Historical Association, <https://www.historians.org/wherehistorianswork>; David Laurence, "Where Are They Now? Occupations of 1996–2011 PhD Recipients in 2013," *The Trend* (February 17, 2015), <https://mlaresearch.mla.hcommons.org/2015/02/17/where-are-they-now-occupations-of-1996-2011-phd-recipients-in-2013-2/>; and David Laurence, "More on the Career Paths of PhDs in English and Other Modern Languages," *The Trend* (August 28, 2018), <https://mlaresearch.mla.hcommons.org/2018/08/28/more-on-the-career-paths-of-phds-in-english-and-other-modern-languages/>.
24. Custom tabulation of data from the National Science Foundation's Early Career Doctorates Study (ECDS). Special thanks to Kelly Phou at the foundation for her generous assistance. The ECDS universe is composed of PhDs, irrespective of nationality, who earned their doctorate in the 10 years preceding the administration of the survey and were working at a master's degree or doctorate-granting U.S. academic institution during the week of October 1, 2017.
25. American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Humanities Indicators, *The State of the Humanities in Four-Year Colleges and Universities* (2017); and Susan White, Raymond Chu, and Roman Czujko, *The 2012–13 Survey of Humanities Departments at Four-Year Institutions* (College Park, Md.: Statistical Research Center, American Institute of Physics, 2014; sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), [https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-03/HDS2\\_final.pdf](https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-03/HDS2_final.pdf).
26. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics.
27. National Science Foundation, National Survey of College Graduates.
28. *Development* is defined by the data collector as "using knowledge gained from research for the production of materials and devices."
29. National Science Foundation, National Survey of College Graduates.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. The satisfaction shares depicted in this and all subsequent graphs include workers indicating they were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied.
34. National Science Foundation, National Survey of College Graduates.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid. The sample size was too small to produce a reliable estimate for humanities PhDs working in the not-for-profit sector.

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## Project Directors

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Robert B. Townsend, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

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