Higher education in the United States is arguably the best in the world, with doctoral education the “jewel in the crown,” attracting the best and the brightest domestic and international students. The doctorate recipients emerging from our graduate schools become the world’s leading researchers, experts, and innovators in the 21st century, working in universities, industrial enterprises, national governments, and many other areas around the world. If you would like to lead efforts to conduct cutting edge research, educate the next generation of students, explore new frontiers, discover new vaccines and cures, explore alternative energy sources, promote global civil and cultural interchange, or improve your community, then consider a doctoral degree. You will be at the forefront as we enrich the arts and literature, develop climate solutions, improve global communications and health care, document history, strengthen the global economy, and develop new technologies. It will be you – our doctorate recipients – who will lead us out of the “now” into a better future.

Doctoral students are typically funded through a combination of fellowships, tuition waivers, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, loans, and other sources of financial aid. Nearly two-thirds of all doctoral students in 2007-08 received financial support from their university. Among those who received aid, the average amount was $19,377. See the “Additional Sources of Information” section at the end of this flyer for more information about sources of financial support.

The number of doctorates awarded in the United States more than doubled between 1969-70 and 2006-07, increasing 103% from 29,866 to 60,616 (see chart), primarily because of the increasing numbers of women who earned doctorates. By 2017-18, a projected 75,000 doctorates will be awarded annually.

Doctorates are key for future employment and career advancement. The number of occupations that typically require a doctorate will increase by nearly 22% between 2006 and 2016, more than twice the rate of growth expected for all occupations. Although occupations requiring
doctorates are projected to increase rapidly, only 1.3% of the population 25 years of age and older in the United States held a doctorate in 2008.\(^4\)

A doctorate increases potential earnings and the likelihood of employment. Individuals with a doctorate typically earn more than those with lower levels of education. The median annual salary in 2008 for those with a doctorate was $80,860, compared with $50,856 for those with only a bachelor’s degree, and $30,732 for those with only a high school diploma (see chart).\(^5\) In 2008, among individuals 25 years of age and older, the unemployment rate for those with a doctorate was 2.0%, compared with 2.8% for those with only a bachelor’s degree, and 5.7% for high school graduates (see chart).

Doctoral education plays a key role in producing an educated citizenry that contributes to the public good of the United States at the national, state, and local levels. Individuals with a graduate degree have higher participation than those with lower levels of educational attainment in civic activities such as voting; are more likely to involve their children in community activities; to say that their health is good, very good, or excellent; to be leaders in business, government, and non-profit sectors; and to drive the innovation that will lead to sustained economic growth for the United States.\(^6\)

A highly trained workforce led by doctorate recipients is essential to America's prosperity. To continue our leadership in cutting-edge research; explore new frontiers in scientific, civic, and cultural areas; and expand the knowledge in all disciplines requires the leadership of a doctoral workforce. Doctoral education is not for everyone, but if you have a thirst for knowledge, are willing to devote significant time and effort, relish intellectual challenges, and want to search for new and better ways to advance the knowledge in your field, then doctoral education might be for you. You will grow professionally in your research area, advance up the career ladder, enhance your leadership ability, be a contributing member in a global society, and earn more money in the process. You will be a leader in your field. So, if you enjoy these challenges and rewards, “Open Doors with a Doctorate.” We all will benefit!

References

Additional Sources of Information

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