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ABSTRACT

An analysis of data on Black doctoral recipients was done to clarify the actual trends in Black higher education. Examination of data collected by the National Research Council on new doctorate recipients found that certain disciplinary trends skew the overall picture. This analysis found that Black American doctorate recipients are highly concentrated in the education field: 43 percent of Black doctorate recipients were in education. Thus employment and degree trends in this sector could have a disproportionate effect on the numbers of doctoral degrees earned by this group. In fact, a 12 percent drop in educational doctorates earned by Blacks from 1978 to 1988 did occur. When the data on Black doctoral recipients in education is separated out from recipient data in other fields, the remaining figures show that, despite the decline in education degree recipients, Black Americans earning doctoral degrees in other fields remained steady or increased. From 1983 to 1988 the number of Blacks earning doctorates increased in engineering, life sciences, and professional fields, and remained steady in the physical sciences and humanities and declined in the social sciences. (JB)

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DATA SOURCES

NRC Doctoral Data Indicates Drop in Number of Black Doctorate Recipients Not Uniform Across Fields "Education Effect" Primarily Responsible for Decline in Numbers

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One of the most pressing concerns of graduate administrators is the continued decline in the number of Black Americans earning doctoral degrees at U.S. universities. This decline has direct implications for the supply of minority scholars to the faculty, commercial, and governmental workforce as we enter the 1990s. An examination of data collected by the National Research Council on new doctorate recipients reveals, however, that the decline in Black doctorate recipients is not uniform across fields, and may be to a large degree a reflection of disciplinary trends.

As displayed in Table 1, Black American doctorate recipients are highly concentrated in the field of education. In 1988, 43 percent of Black doctorate recipients were in education, compared with 22 percent for the total cohort of

U.S. citizens and permanent residents. One consequence of this focus on education is that employment and degree trends occurring in education are likely to have a disproportionate effect on the numbers of doctoral degrees earned by Blacks each year. In fact, from 1978 to 1988, the overall number of doctorates earned in the field of education decreased from 7,194 to 6,349, a drop of 12 percent. As Table 1 shows, that drop in overall number was paralleled among Black doctorate recipients as well.

Because of the substantial impact education has on the numbers of Black doctorate recipients, it is useful to separate out this "education effect" from non-education disciplines. The accompanying table and figure make this separation, and illuminate the difference

this makes in the numbers of doctorates over time.

According to Table 1, the number of Blacks earning doctorates in the field of education dropped from roughly 600 in the beginning of the 1980s to approximately 400 in 1989. During the same period, however, the number of Black Americans earning doctorates in fields other than education generally remained steady or increased. From 1983 to 1988, the number of Blacks earning doctorates increased in engineering, life sciences, and professional fields, remained steady in the physical sciences and humanities and declined in the social sciences. The "education effect" can be seen clearly in the accompanying graph, which shows the drop-off in number of education doctorates in the 1980s in contrast

Table 1

Doctorates Earned by Black Americans, 1978 to 1988
(U.S. Citizens and Non-U.S. Citizens with Permanent Visas)

	Year of Doctorate										
	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Total	1,100	1,106	1,095	1,104	1,133	1,000	1,049	1,040	946	904	951
Male	644	598	558	575	562	481	506	495	427	435	432
Female	456	508	537	529	571	519	543	545	519	469	519
Physical Sciences	54	52	29	39	36	32	44	41	33	35	41
Engineering	13	20	18	19	20	29	15	34	24	25	31
Life Science	79	61	68	80	72	74	97	98	85	107	103
Social Sciences	212	220	222	223	244	199	222	205	191	168	195
Humanities	90	130	103	93	103	79	101	75	80	81	88
Professional Fields	54	51	53	59	52	69	61	81	70	73	85
Subtotal	502	534	493	513	527	482	540	534	483	489	543
Education	598	570	602	589	606	516	509	503	462	413	408

Source: NRC, Survey of Earned Doctorates

with the stable—and recently increasing—numbers in other fields.

There is no question, however, that from a national policy perspective all of these numbers are too small, and the number of Blacks—as well as members of other underrepresented groups—earning doctoral degrees needs to be increased in all fields. Nevertheless, it is clear that overall degree numbers can mask some very important trends. Considering the recent growth in non-education fields, we can be somewhat more optimistic about the trends for Black doctorate recipients. This analysis emphasizes the substantial impact that discipline trends can have and highlights the need to disaggregate by field whenever possible. Finally, it would be useful to subdivide further the ethnic data by both field and sex in order to address the troubling issue of the drop in numbers of Black men doctorate recipients.

