

Tracking the Career Outcomes of Graduate Center Alumni

The Graduate Center, Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

The Graduate Center (GC) is the focal point for advanced teaching and research at the City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest urban public university. Devoted exclusively to graduate education, the GC fosters pioneering research and scholarship in the arts and sciences, and trains students for careers in universities and the private, nonprofit, and government sectors. Since 1965, more than 13,500 individuals have earned doctorates from the Graduate Center, and they are now among the leaders in our nation's teaching and research efforts across the country.

As part of our ongoing institutional research and assessment, we embarked on a comprehensive effort to track doctoral graduates to determine where they are currently employed and how employment in various sectors compares to doctoral graduates nationwide. Between now and 2020, an estimated 2.6 million new and replacement jobs will require an advanced degree. It is projected that the number of jobs requiring a master's degree will increase by about 22%, while the number of jobs requiring a doctorate or professional degree is expected to increase by 20%. Not all of these jobs are tenure-track positions in academia, and we must ensure that graduate students complete graduate school with the preparation to meet the demand (Wendler et al., 2012).

In recent years, the value of an advanced degree has come into question, and the media has publicized debates about the costs and benefits of graduate education in a stressed economy (Wendler et al., 2012). According to the National Science Foundation Survey of Earned Doctorates (NSF, 2015), the proportion of 2014 doctoral recipients reporting definite commitments for employment or a postdoc position was at or near the lowest level of the past 15 years in science and engineering (S&E) fields, and reached 20-year low points in non-S&E fields. At the same time, estimates of the fiscal value of an advanced degree show substantial returns for the investment. Over a career, a Ph.D is worth \$3.3 million compared to \$1.3 million for a high school diploma and 2.3 million for a Bachelor's degree (Carnevale, 2016) and graduate degree holders are the least likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to individuals with less education (Carnevale & Smith, 2015). Yet, articles in popular media outlets with titles such as "12 reasons not to get a PhD" (O'Shaughnessy, 2012) provide fuel for those questioning the value of a doctoral degree.

The imperative of tracking doctoral graduate career outcomes

While definitive information about career placements of Ph.D. recipients is becoming increasingly important, only about one-third of graduate programs currently have an established process for documenting the career outcomes of their students, making it difficult to answer questions about the value of a doctoral degree (June, 2013; 2016). Employment data can help graduate programs and departments make decisions about how many students to admit, what courses to offer, and initiative discussions about alternative career paths and how to prepare students for a variety of job options (Patton, 2012). Perhaps more important, concrete data on doctoral graduate employment outcomes can make career pathways more transparent, and help

current and potential students make better informed decisions and set realistic expectations regarding their career prospects upon graduation.

Career outcomes of Graduate Center alumni

Savage et al. (1997) gathered data to examine the academic employment of GC graduates between 1965 and 1993, finding a marked decline in full-time academic employment over this time period, from 47% among 1965-1969 graduates to 23% among 1990-1993 graduates. The majority (65%) held positions in the greater New York metropolitan area. This study provides a baseline and context in which to interpret the results of the current study, which aimed to obtain a comprehensive and recent picture of the career outcomes of GC graduates. The current study focuses not only on academic employment, but employment in government, non-profit, private industry and business sectors. The current study was undertaken to answer the following questions:

- What are the career outcomes of GC graduates? What proportion of graduates are working in academia and outside of academia, and what proportion have tenure-track positions?
- Do the career outcomes of GC graduates differ by cluster/discipline?
- Have the career outcomes of GC graduates changed over time?
- How do the career outcomes of GC graduates compared to national trends and peer institutions?

Methods

Alumni data were gathered from a variety of sources. Personal and academic data on alumni (ID, name, gender, citizenship, program, graduation date, etc.) were drawn from the enrollment and graduation records maintained by the Graduate Center's Registrar's Office and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Data on alumni employment were collected from the Graduate Center's Exit Survey for the most recent graduates (2013-14), and an alumni survey that was administered five years after graduation to four of the ten alumni cohorts in the dataset (2004-07).

The Exit Survey is completed at time of dissertation deposit by nearly all graduating doctoral students. It includes items on immediate post-graduation plans, including job title and employer name/address (if applicable). The Exit Survey has a high response rate, but it only captures information at the time of deposit. The Alumni Survey also included items on job title and employer, but did not have a high response rate, and responses seemed to be biased towards those with academic jobs.

To supplement the survey data, each doctoral program was contacted to find out what information they had on their graduates¹. After information was gathered from the Exit Survey,

¹ Dean Savage, Professor of Sociology, maintains information on almost all Sociology graduates, as well as graduates from other PhD programs at the GC, by searching for them online. He shared his data with us and we compared it to our data and added it to the dataset if it was information on alumni for whom we did not have any job information, or if it was more current information than what we had.

the Alumni Survey, and the programs, internet searches were conducted by graduate assistants over the course of two years to find the most up-to-date and detailed information on alumni employment. The most frequently used search engines were Google, LinkedIn, and SeeThroughNY. In many cases, a Google search of the graduate’s name would yield results that included faculty/staff/lab pages of universities. Using these sites, we could usually determine the graduate’s position in academia. Some graduates maintain their own self-named websites dedicated to their pursuits. To a lesser extent, sites that reported on scholarly publications (e.g., ResearchGate) and university teaching (e.g., RateMyProfessor) were also used, mostly to corroborate other findings. If the graduate is a practitioner (e.g., psychologist, audiologist, etc.), their Google search would often yield commonly used provider search/rating sites such as ZocDoc and HealthGrades. With the address information listed on these sites, we could usually find out if the graduate worked in a hospital, medical center, or private practice.

Table A1 in the Appendix lists and describes the data fields that were collected in this study, and information on how the data were coded. Employment information was collected for 3,725 or approximately 89% of the 4,168 graduates from 2003 to 2014². Additionally, a random sample of 10% of the Humanities students who left the Graduate Center before earning their PhD (“leavers”, N=90) was selected for comparison purposes³. Employment information was found for 57 of the leavers. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of alumni with employment information (i.e., alumni in the study), and the total number of GC graduates in each academic year.

Table 1. Number of Alumni by Graduation Year

Graduation Year	Alumni in Study	All Alumni	% in Study
2003-04	262	298	88
2004-05	266	298	89
2005-06	286	331	86
2006-07	275	303	91
2007-08	318	358	89
2008-09	325	369	88
2009-10	326	374	87
2010-11	407	448	91
2011-12	403	445	91
2012-13	421	464	91
2013-14	436	480	91
Total	3,725	4,168	89

² Excludes students with a Doctor of Physical Therapy.

³ The sample of “leavers” included only Humanities students to provide information for the steering committee and working group of the GC’s [New PhD: A Renaissance of Public Education project](#).

Results

What are the career outcomes of GC graduates? What proportion of graduates are working in academia and outside of academia?

Do the career outcomes of GC graduates differ by cluster/discipline?

As shown in Table 2, close to three-quarters of graduates (68%) work in education. About 20% of graduates work in private industry/business or are self-employed, while just over 10% work in either the government or non-profit sector. The vast majority of humanities graduates (81%) work in education, while it is extremely rare for them to take on positions in government. More than a quarter of science graduates work in private industry or business.

Table 3 indicates that the most common work activity performed by graduates is teaching (54.5%), followed by research and development (19%), and professional/technical services (15%). Professional/ technical services includes such occupations as curators, editors, lawyers, librarians, psychologists, and writers. Humanities graduates are much more likely to take on teaching as their primary work activity, compared to social science and science graduates. Science graduates are more likely than humanities and social science graduates to hold research and development positions, and unlike other graduates, sciences graduates are almost just as likely to hold research and development positions as they are teaching positions. Social science graduates are slightly more likely than other graduates to hold management, administrative, or professional/technical positions.

Table 2. Job sector of GC graduates by cluster

Job Sector	Cluster							
	Humanities		Sciences		Social Sciences		All	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Education	705	80.8%	673	59.7%	1,145	66.4%	2,523	67.7%
Government	7	0.8%	71	6.3%	76	4.4%	154	4.1%
Non-Profit	54	6.2%	72	6.4%	163	9.4%	289	7.8%
Private Industry/Business	40	4.6%	285	25.3%	192	11.1%	517	13.9%
Self-Employed	67	7.7%	26	2.3%	149	8.6%	242	6.5%
Total	873		1,127		1,725		3,725	

Table 3. Primary work activity of GC graduates by cluster

Primary Work Activity	Cluster							
	Humanities		Sciences		Social Sciences		All	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Management or Administration	70	8.0%	111	9.8%	264	15.3%	445	11.9%
Professional/Technical Services	118	13.5%	134	11.9%	306	17.7%	558	15.0%
Research and Development	35	4.0%	421	37.4%	236	13.7%	692	18.6%
Teaching	650	74.5%	461	40.9%	919	53.3%	2,030	54.5%
Total	873		1,127		1,725		3,725	

Table 4 shows that most graduates hold jobs within academia (65%), working at a higher education (post-high school degree-granting) institution either in the United States or abroad. Science graduates are slightly more likely than humanities and social science graduates to hold a non-faculty position within academia.

Table 4. GC alumni in academia by cluster

Academia/Non-Academia	Cluster							
	Humanities		Sciences		Social Sciences		All	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Job in Academia	678	77.7%	659	58.5%	1,082	62.8%	2,419	64.9%
Faculty	576	66.0%	421	37.4%	810	47.0%	1,807	48.5%
Non-Faculty	31	3.6%	155	13.8%	147	8.5%	333	8.9%
Non-U.S.	71	8.1%	83	7.4%	125	7.2%	279	7.5%
Job Outside of Academia	195	22.3%	468	41.5%	643	37.3%	1,306	35.1%
Total	873		1,127		1,725		3,725	

As shown in Table 5, approximately 21% of GC graduates are currently working in the CUNY system, while another 35% are working in New York City and the surrounding metropolitan area. Thirty percent of alumni are working outside of the state of New York, and 11% are working outside of the United States.

Table 5. Job location of GC alumni by cluster

Job Location	Cluster							
	Humanities		Sciences		Social Sciences		All	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
CUNY	201	23.0%	270	24.0%	300	17.4%	771	20.7%
Non-CUNY NYC	172	19.7%	266	23.6%	485	28.1%	923	24.8%
NYC Metro Area	73	8.4%	99	8.8%	199	11.5%	371	10.0%
Other NY State	43	4.9%	26	2.3%	50	2.9%	119	3.2%
All Other States	290	33.2%	336	29.8%	508	29.4%	1,134	30.4%
Non-U.S.	94	10.8%	130	11.5%	183	10.6%	407	10.9%
Total	873		1,127		1,725		3,725	

Have the career outcomes of GC graduates changed over time?

Figure 1 shows the distribution of alumni by job sector for the 11 graduation cohorts, showing that it has remained relatively stable. The percentage of alumni working in education has been consistent at about 65 to 72 percent.

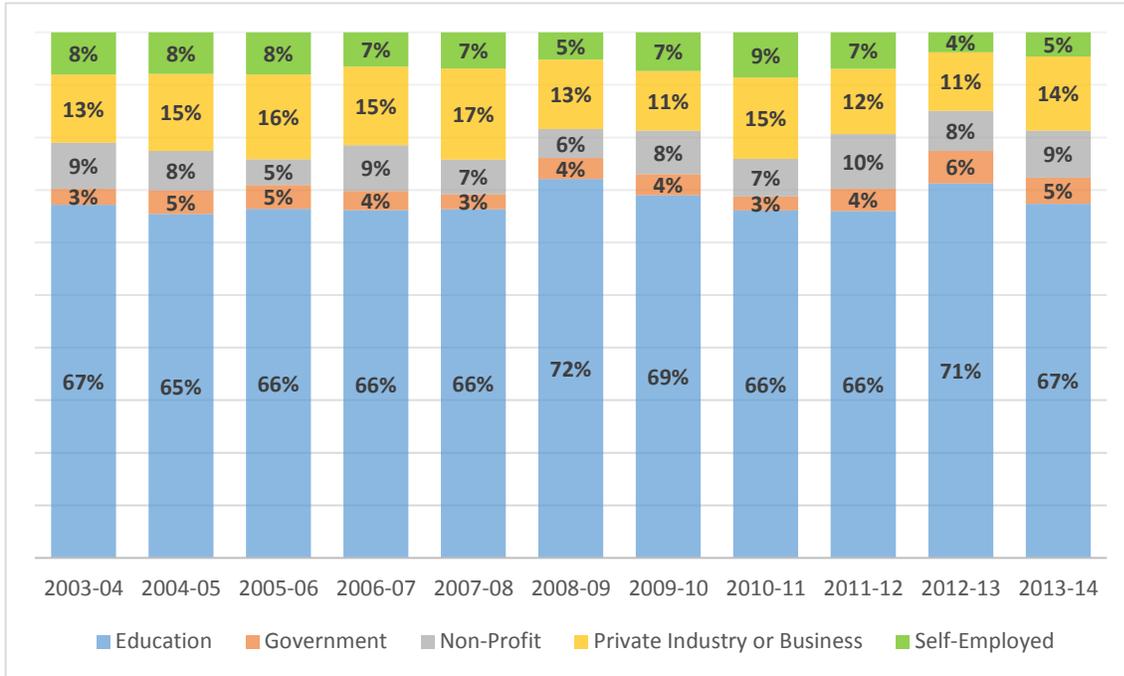


Figure 1. Percentage of Graduate Center alumni by job sector

However, as shown in Figure 2, the percentage of alumni whose primary work activity is teaching has decreased over time, from about 58% for 2003-04 graduates to 48% for 2013-14 graduates. At the same time, the percentage of alumni working in research and development steadily increased after 2009-10. The percentage working in management or administration decreased after 2008-09 and recently hovers around 10 percent. The percentage of alumni working in professional/technical services has varied over time.

Figure 3 details changes in the percentage of alumni working in academia, as well as the percentage holding tenure track positions. While the percentage holding faculty positions has remained relatively stable, there has been a stark decline in tenure track positions. This decline is directly related to the amount of time alumni have been in the workforce.

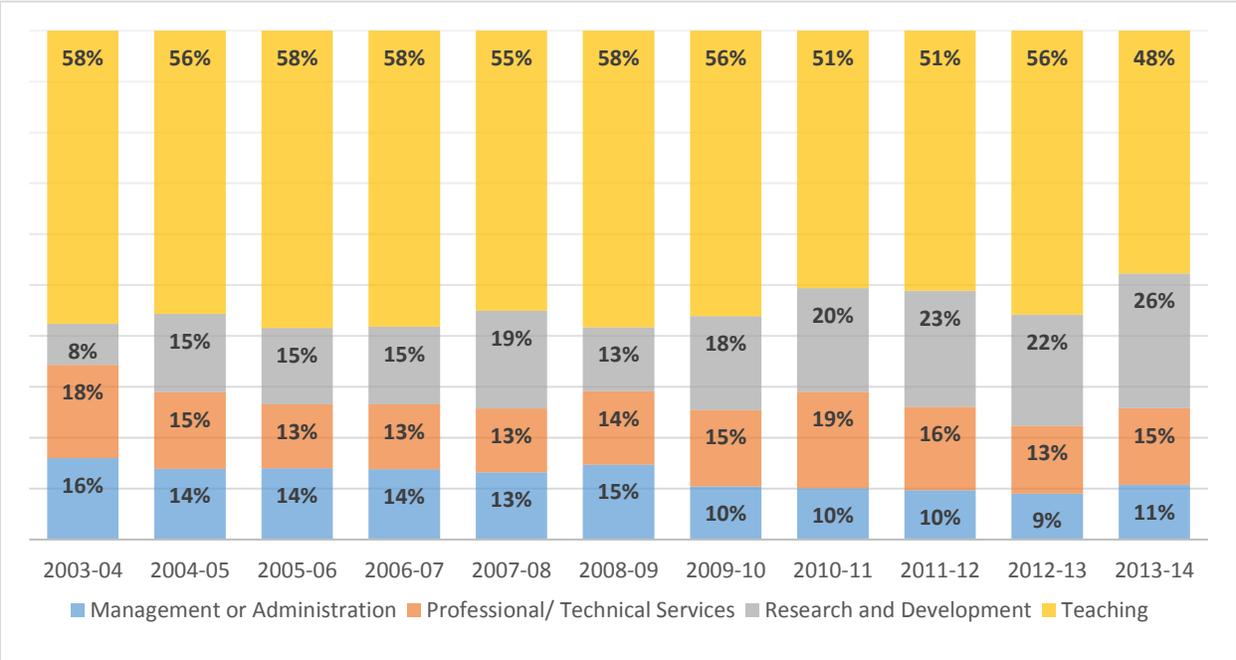


Figure 2. Percentage of Graduate Center alumni by primary work activity

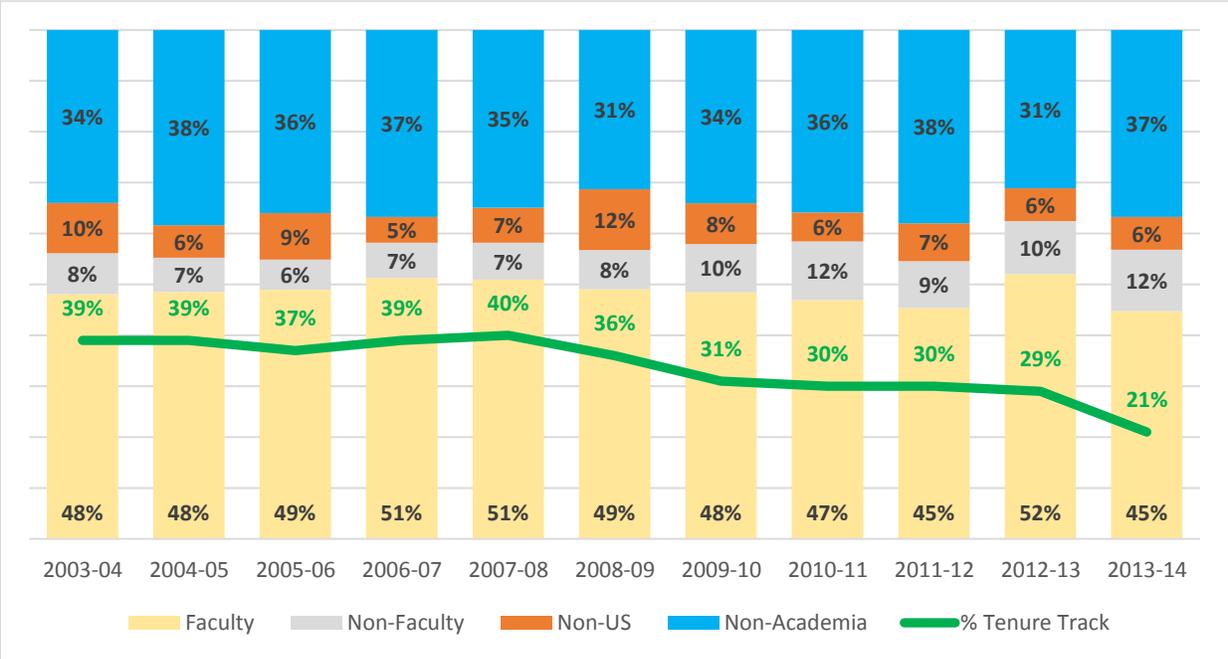


Figure 3. Percentage of Graduate Center alumni working in academia and those on a tenure track

How do the career outcomes of GC graduates compare to national trends and peer institutions?

According to the National Science Foundation Survey of Earned Doctorates (NSF, 2015), nearly half of all new doctorate recipients find initial employment in the academy, with the highest rates of academic employment in humanities and other non-S&E fields (near 80%). The lowest rates of academic employment are in engineering (15%) and physical sciences (29%). The percentage of GC humanities alumni across all graduating cohorts working in the academy is the same as the national percentage reported by NSF; however, among the most recent graduating cohort in the database (2013-14), only 57% of humanities alumni have a job in academia, reflecting the decline over time in academic positions. The proportion of GC graduates in the sciences with jobs in academia is higher than that reported by NSF (2015), both in the most recent cohort and across all graduating cohorts.

The Stanford Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support (2016) collected employment outcomes for 2,420 Stanford PhD graduates. The research collected employment data for students graduating in 2002-03 and 2003-04 (10-year cohort) and 2007-08 and 2008-09 (5-year cohort). For each cohort block, data were collected both within one year of graduation and in 2013. Among the graduates for whom employment information was available, 54% were employed in the academic sector, 39% in the business sector, 3% in government, and 4% in non-profit. For students in the 10-year cohort, the percentage working in academia was 58%, compared to 52% for the 5-year cohort. Looking at the results across both cohorts by academic area, 88% of Humanities graduates were employed by the academy, compared to 43% for science graduates (engineering, biosciences, natural sciences, and earth sciences) and 73% for graduates in the social sciences, education, and business. Comparing these results to the GC's employment outcomes, Stanford graduates in the humanities and social science have a higher rate of academic employment, and graduates in the sciences have a lower rate of academic employment.

Comparison of career outcomes of humanities GC graduates and “leavers”

There are marked differences in the career outcomes of GC humanities graduates and “leavers”. As shown in Table 6, seven percent of the leavers work in CUNY, despite not graduating from the GC. While approximately three-quarters of GC humanities graduates are in teaching positions and 81% are in the education job sector, only about one-quarter of the leavers have teaching positions, with 35% in the education job sector. Most of the leavers are in professional or technical services or management/administration, and many work for private industry or business, non-profits, or are self-employed.

Table 6. Employment of GC humanities graduates and “leavers”

	GC Humanities Leavers		GC Humanities Graduates	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Location				
CUNY	4	7.0%	201	23.0%
Non-CUNY NYC	22	38.6%	172	19.7%
NYC Metro Area	4	7.0%	73	8.4%
Other NY State	2	3.5%	43	4.9%
All Other States	22	38.6%	290	33.2%
Non-U.S.	3	5.3%	94	10.8%
Primary Work Activity				
Management or Administration	14	24.6%	70	8.0%
Professional/Technical Services	25	43.9%	118	13.5%
Research and Development	4	7.0%	35	4.0%
Teaching	14	24.6%	650	74.5%
Job Sector				
Education	20	35.1%	705	80.8%
Government	2	3.5%	7	0.8%
Non-Profit	8	14.0%	54	6.2%
Private Industry or Business	17	29.8%	40	4.6%
Self-Employed	10	17.5%	67	7.7%
Total	57		873	

Conclusions

This report summarized the Graduate Center’s comprehensive efforts to track doctoral graduates to determine where they are currently employed, and to compare employment patterns and trends to those for doctoral graduates nationwide. The results will be used to inform ongoing discussions at the Graduate Center regarding the future of our doctoral programs.

As seen in the employment trends of PhDs nationwide, GC doctoral graduates are much less likely to secure tenure track positions in the academy now compared to a decade ago. However, the data does not account for the amount of time in the workforce. GC alumni graduating in 2003-2004 have a decade of career experience which could be associated with securing tenure-track positions. While our graduates in the humanities and social sciences have about the same or a slightly lower rate of academic employment compared to other institutions across the nation, our science graduates secure positions in the academy at a higher rate.

Based on our tracking of a small sample of leavers, Humanities students who leave the GC before earning their degree are much less likely to teach and work in the education sector. The data we collected on GC leavers suggest that many former students work in a professional or technical capacity in private industry or business, and many are self-employed.

These results confirm the need to re-examine the GC's doctoral program curricula and professional development to ensure that our students are prepared for the types of careers that will be available to them when they graduate.

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Table A1. Alumni Data Search Fields

FIELD	DESCRIPTION	CODING CATEGORIES
Job Title	Best approximation of the graduate’s primary job title, as identified by the majority of search results and/or the graduate’s self-report.	
Dept/Division/School	Optional, more specific department within the employer’s organization.	
Employer	Organization that employs the graduate. If the graduate is self-employed, the employer is identified as “self-employed”.	
Job City	City where the graduate works. The exact city is sometimes generalized to larger metropolitan areas.	
Job State	State of employment	
Job Country	Country of employment	
Email	Current email address	
Notes	Notes deemed useful by the researchers about the search for the graduate, including new marital/nicknames or additional employment.	
Search Source	Source of the data entered for this graduate: departmental/program surveys, graduate exit surveys, SeeThrough New York (public employees), and the Internet (e.g., Google, LinkedIn).	
Location	CUNY Non-CUNY NYC NYC Metro Area Other NY State All Other States Non-US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CUNY campuses, CUNY Central Office, Research Foundation of CUNY - Outside of CUNY System, within NYC - Outside of NYC, within 50 miles of the GC - Outside of NYC, more than 50 miles from the GC, within NY State - Outside of NYC metro area, outside NY state, includes US territories - Outside of the US
Primary Work Activity	Teaching Research and Development Management or Administration Professional/Technical Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Main work activity is instructional, including music lessons, private sessions for businesses or nonprofits, and classes at private and public institutions - Main work activity includes either statistical analysis, archival research, or laboratory operations; engagement in research and/or development of a project or lab - Main work activity includes the management of others or administrative tasks - Main work activity includes a specialized/trained skill not included in any of the prior categories
Job Sector	Education Non-Profit Government Private Industry or Business Self-Employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational institutions (includes medical schools, university/teaching hospitals, and university medical centers) - Organization or institution whose main goal is to further a social cause or advocate a point of view, rather than produce surplus revenue (includes some hospitals and schools) - Government agency or office in or outside the US (includes government- run hospitals/medical centers) - For-profit company or organization in or outside the US; includes private practices and businesses started by alumni. This does not include degree-granting educational institutions, but does include private language, music, and other schools that do not grant degrees. This also includes privately-run hospitals/medical centers, and established private practices. - Independent researcher, writer, scholar, historian, consultant, etc. Does not include established private practices

FIELD	DESCRIPTION	CODING CATEGORIES
FT/PT Status	Full Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One main job with consistent employment throughout the year - Includes graduates with one part-time position or multiple part-time positions, even if added together the multiple positions equal full-time working hours⁴
	Part Time	
Institution Type	US Preschool, Elementary, Middle, High School or Other School System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not include higher education institutions
	US Two-Year College	
	US Four-Year College	
	Non-US Educational Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not include US schools with campuses abroad
	US Medical School, University Hospital or Medical Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher education institution that grants medical degrees, university/teaching hospital, university medical center, or other hospital/medical center (nonprofit, private, or government-run)
	Non-Profit Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (see description under Job Sector)
	US Federal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government office or agency at federal level
	US State Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government office or agency at state level
	US Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government office or agency at local level (city, county, district, or borough)
	Non-US Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government office or agency outside of the US or US territories
Private Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For-profit company or organization in or outside the US, businesses started/founded by alumni, for-profit institutions, not including medical centers or educational institutions, and consultants employed through a third party 	
Private Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alumni who are practitioners with their own business or part of a group of practitioners (for-profit), including audiology, psychology, and social work 	
Self-Employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alumni who identify as being self-employed and/or mainly employed through their own means, including independent researcher, writer, scholar, historian, consultant, etc. Does not include established private practices 	
Carnegie Classification	R1: Doctoral Universities	
	R2: Doctoral Universities	
	R3: Doctoral Universities	
	M1: Master's Colleges & Universities	
	M2: Master's Colleges & Universities	
	M3: Master's Colleges & Universities	
	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	See http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php
	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	
	Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges: Mixed	
	Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges	
	Associate's Colleges	
Special Focus Two-Year		
Special Focus Four-Year		

⁴ Full-time/part-time status could not be determined for many alumni who are self-employed.

FIELD	DESCRIPTION	CODING CATEGORIES
Rank	Administrator Adjunct	- Administrator with some additional teaching responsibilities, never held a teaching rank higher than adjunct, administration is primary work activity (experience as administrator)
	Administrator Faculty	- Administrator, but also holds or has held at least lecturer/instructor rank, has previously taught as main work activity, might still teach. This includes administrators who also hold a tenure-track faculty position (experience as faculty)
	Administrator Staff Adjunct	- Administrator only, no current or previous teaching responsibilities
	Assistant Professor	- Takes on teaching roles at one or more universities without full or permanent status
	Associate Professor	- Does not include adjunct, visiting, or substitute assistant professor roles
	Lecturer or Instructor	- Does not include adjunct, visiting, or substitute associate professor roles
	Non-US Professor	- Full-time position, but not tenure-track
	Postdoc	- A position at an institution of higher education outside of the US or US territories
	Visiting or Substitute	- Does not include adjunct, visiting, or substitute professor roles
	Other	- A "postdoctoral" or "postdoc" position at universities, nonprofits, and government institutions (US only)
Tenure Track	Yes or No	- The graduate and/or the associated university include in their rank identification the terms visiting or substitute. This position usually warrants full-time hours but employment is temporary, often for only one or two years at the university
		- A position at an educational institution that is not covered by the above categories
Academia	Faculty	- The graduate has or has not obtained a position at a university where he/she will be eligible for tenure review
	Non-Faculty	- The graduate has obtained a position at an institution of higher education he/she has taught at least one class in the past year
	Non US	- The graduate has obtained a position at an institution of higher education where he/she has no teaching responsibilities/assignments
		- The graduate has obtained a position at an institution of higher education outside of the U.S., not including U.S. territories