

July 2011

2011–2013 Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering

OMB Supporting Statement

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A. JUSTIFICATION

This submission requests a 3 year reinstatement of the previously approved OMB clearance for the National Science Foundation's (NSF's) and National Institutes of Health's (NIH's) Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering (GSS). The GSS is an annual survey that was last conducted in fall 2010. The OMB clearance for the GSS will expire on October 31, 2011. With this clearance package, NSF requests approval to collect data for the 2011–13 survey cycles.

The GSS is the only annual national survey that collects information on the characteristics of graduate science, engineering, and health (SEH) enrollment for specific disciplines at the departmental level. It also collects information for graduate enrollment on race/ethnicity, citizenship, sex, sources of support, and type of support; information on postdoctorates (postdocs) by citizenship, sex, sources of support, and doctoral degree type and origins; and information on other doctorate-holding nonfaculty researchers (NFRs) (see Attachment 1 for screenshots of the GSS instrument). The GSS has been conducted by the NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) annually since 1972. Additional financial support is provided for the GSS by the NIH and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

The GSS is a census of all units (departments, programs, research centers, and health care facilities) in science, engineering, and selected health fields within eligible academic institutions in the United States with postbaccalaureate degree programs. The study collects aggregate information on graduate students enrolled in these units, as well as postdocs and NFRs working within these institutions. To improve coverage of postdocs, in 2011–13 the GSS will also survey Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) to gather information on the race/ethnicity, sex, citizenship, source of support, area of research, and counts of the postdoctoral appointments (see Attachment 2 for screenshots of the FFRDC survey instrument).

The GSS consists of two parts. In Part 1, the School Coordinator (SC) updates a list of all eligible units in the school and classifies each unit by its GSS code (field). For established GSS schools, this activity involves verifying the eligibility of units pre-populated from the previous survey round, confirming GSS codes, adding any newly eligible units, and deleting defunct units. All Part 1 activities are completed by the SC. In Part 2, data for each unit are entered or uploaded

by the SC or by designated unit respondents (URs), whom the SC may assign as needed. Part 2 requests details about graduate students, postdocs, and NFRs in each GSS-eligible unit.

Since April 2002, NCSES has been conducting extensive research and methodological testing to reduce the respondent burden, improve data quality, reduce survey costs, and improve processes that will result in a quicker release of the data to the public. The 2011 GSS reflects changes made to date as a result of the research and testing.

A.1 Need for Data Collection and Legislative Authorization

The authority to collect information for the GSS is established under the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, Public Law 507 (42 U.S.C. 1862), Section 3(a) (6), which directs NSF "...to provide a central clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data on scientific and engineering resources and to provide a source of information for policy formation by other agencies of the federal government..." Furthermore, Executive Order 10521 (March 17, 1954) states: "The Foundation shall continue to make comprehensive studies and recommendations regarding the Nation's scientific research effort and its resources for scientific activities, including facilities and scientific personnel, and its foreseeable scientific needs, with particular attention to the extent of the federal government's activities and the resulting effects upon trained scientific personnel."

The GSS provides a critical piece of the Foundation's information that is used to meet its responsibilities under the Act and the Executive Order.

A.2 How, by Whom, and for What Purpose the Information Is to Be Used

A.2.1 Federal Uses

Information on the number and characteristics of students currently enrolled in graduate SEH programs and engaged in postdoctoral programs is extensively used by NSF, NIH, and the DOE to assess future supplies of trained science and engineering (S&E) and health personnel. A variety of more general information needs are met through the annual release of data in paper and electronic format. NSF publishes a short *InfoBrief* and a set of detailed statistical tables in the online report, *Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering*, available on the NCSES website. A public release file is also available on this site.

Data from the GSS are also available on the Web through the WebCASPAR (Computer Aided Science Policy Analysis and Research) system (<https://webcaspar.nsf.gov>). WebCASPAR is an institution-based data system, and it contains institutional and summary data from all NSF academic sector surveys for all institutions offering graduate-level instruction and/or maintaining research and design (R&D) activity in SEH fields. Other data included in this system are those compiled from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) surveys of Completions, Fall Enrollment, and Finance, and the NSF Survey of Earned Doctorates. This online database is used routinely by NCSES and by program offices in many of the NSF's research directorates. Primary uses of the data include to review changing enrollment levels to assess the effects of NSF initiatives; to track student support patterns; and to analyze participation in SEH fields by targeted groups for all disciplines or for selected disciplines and for selected groups of institutions. Program officers check departmental and institutional records, including data from the GSS and NCES IPEDS surveys, to determine department eligibility for NSF programs targeted to special populations or instructional programs.

NSF Uses

Special tabulations from the GSS data constitute a key resource in meeting policy and program information needs of the Foundation. Major examples of GSS data uses are in the Foundation's two congressionally mandated biennial reports, *Science and Engineering Indicators* and *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering*.

The GSS is one of three NSF surveys whose micro data are combined into an integrated database to produce the publication *Academic Institutional Profiles*. The other two surveys are (1) the Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey (formerly known as the Survey of Research and Development Expenditures at Universities and Colleges) and (2) the Survey of Federal Science and Engineering Support to Universities, Colleges, and Nonprofit Institutions. As explained in the next section, these data are further integrated with institutional data from other NSF surveys and with surveys conducted by the Department of Education. Together these data provide policy makers with information on the role of higher education in the context of the national R&D effort.

Other Federal Uses

Data derived from the GSS are routinely provided to Congress and to various agencies of the Executive Branch. Data have been used recently in the following ways:

- Data on graduate SEH enrollment are provided annually to the Department of Education's NCES for comparison purposes and are published in the *Digest of Education Statistics*.
- Trend data on graduate SEH enrollments are published by the Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.
- Data in specially prepared GSS tabulations are used by the DOE and NIH to answer specific questions to help their agencies prepare budgets and conduct program evaluation studies.

A.2.2 Use by Academic Institutions

The surveyed institutions themselves are major users of the GSS data. Requests for the data are received from numerous individual institutions and from national academic organizations. The NCSES has been cooperating with the Association of American Universities' Data Exchange (AAUDE) Group to provide them with comprehensive GSS data. Institutions use the NSF's GSS data reports or the WebCASPAR system to study selected groups of peer institutions for planning and comparative purposes. They combine the NSF data with information from state and local governments on institutions in their geographic areas. Institutions also use the comparative data to review the strength of their own programs on the basis of factors such as support of students by various federal agencies and progress in reaching special target populations.

A.2.3 Use by the Carnegie Foundation

Data from the GSS are used by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in developing the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The foundation uses the GSS data on postdoctoral appointees and nonfaculty research staff with doctorates as one component of the "research activity" measure constructed for doctorate-granting universities (for more detail see: <http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/methodology/basic.php>).

A.2.4 Professional Societies Uses

Representative data users in this category include American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Association of Universities, American Chemical Society, American Council

of Education, American Geological Society, American Institute of Physics, American Society for Engineering Education, Association of American Medical Colleges, the Carnegie Foundation, Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology, Computing Research Association, Council of Graduate Schools, Federation of Associations of Experimental Biology, and the National Postdoctoral Association. Associations use GSS data to monitor trends in enrollment by field of study, and many are also interested in tracking the numbers of postdoc and NFRs.

A.2.5 Media Uses

Enrollment of graduate students in science and engineering fields, particularly those holding temporary visas, are well reported by the press, including CNN, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *Washington Post*, and other major national newspapers.

A.3 Consideration of Using Improved Technology

Since the fall 1999 survey, GSS respondents have had the option to submit data by either a paper form or through the World Wide Web. All academic institutions chose to report electronically in the fall 2010 survey. The majority of respondents have welcomed the Web version of the GSS for ease of submission and error resolution capabilities. Screenshots of the Web instrument are included in Attachment 1.

Reporting burden is stable or potentially reduced when the survey forms and questions are stable and do not vary from year to year. Most of the academic institutions have been in the GSS for many years, and some have established automated systems for assembling the requested data. Most of the data that GSS collects are required by the academic institutions themselves for other reporting requirements and for planning and evaluation purposes.

The Web version of the survey has a real-time monitoring system, allowing NSF to monitor data, response status, system problems, and comments from respondents. From the perspective of the respondents, the Web version is more convenient and simplifies the survey data reporting (e.g., by automatically checking totals). NSF benefits from the use of the Web version by receiving better quality data more quickly.

GSS includes a file upload option that allows institutions to provide count data. In 2010, 39 of the responding institutions completely supplied their data via file upload.

A.4 Identification of Duplication

NSF staff consults regularly with other federal agencies and private organizations to prevent duplication of data collection activities and to stay abreast of changes in other surveys. Such consultations take place with the Department of Education's NCES, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), and others. Specific surveys conducted by these groups will be discussed below. In addition, staff of the NCSES participates in a variety of NCES-related activities, including serving on Technical Review Panels and serving on the 2010 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Working Group.

The routine data uses of the federal agencies described in Section A.2 have largely determined the content of the questionnaire. Only the GSS collects the following information at the level of detailed SEH fields of study:

- For full-time graduate students, aggregate counts by
 - Sources of major financial support (federal agencies, institutions, self-support, etc.)
 - Mechanisms of major financial support (fellowships, teaching assistantships, etc.)
 - gender
 - citizenship
 - enrollment status (full-time or part-time; first time)
 - race/ethnicity background of U.S. citizens
- For part-time graduate students, aggregate counts by
 - gender
 - citizenship
 - race/ethnicity background of U.S. citizens
- For postdocs, aggregate counts by
 - sources of major financial support
 - gender
 - citizenship
 - type of doctoral degree
 - doctoral degree origin

Because the data are collected from all eligible institutions with graduate SEH departments, data are available at the detailed field of study by institutional characteristics, such

as highest degree granted, geographical distribution, type of control (public or private), or any other special grouping (medical schools, historically black colleges and universities, land-grant institutions, etc.) as well as by rankings on various characteristics (foreign enrollment, minority enrollment, field-specific enrollment, etc.)

Some graduate enrollment data are collected by other organizations, either federal or private, but none of the other data collection efforts contain the detailed field distribution that is required for analyses and provides the necessary data for the NSF, NIH, and DOE. Furthermore, no other surveys collect data on federal agencies' support of graduate students.

The IPEDS, for example, collects race/ethnicity data every 2 years for nine selected fields, of which four are within the NSF definition of science and engineering (and at a more general level than is collected for GSS). The IPEDS annual fall enrollment data collected by race/ethnicity category are not reported by the field and hence do not provide a viable substitute for the race/ethnicity data collected in the GSS. No data are collected on source of support or on postdocs and NFRs. The categories used on the GSS are already in compliance with the OMB race/ethnicity guidelines.

The CGS conducts an annual survey of graduate enrollment in cooperation with the Graduate Records Examinations (GRE) Board, surveying 806 institutions in 2009 that were members of the CGS or one of the four regional graduate school associations—the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools, the Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools, the Northeastern Association of Graduate Schools, and the Western Association of Graduate Schools. The survey collects data by nine broad fields of study using the GRE discipline codes as its taxonomy, type of institutional control, and highest level of degree offered, but has no data on source of financial support. It also collects information on postbaccalaureate and post-master's certificates and applications to graduate schools. Only the GSS maintains detailed data on all SEH fields at all eligible institutions and institution-provided data on source of financial support.

A number of surveys are conducted by other professional societies or by groups of institutions, and are limited to a single field or group of related fields or to institutions that are members of the organization. These surveys may collect far more detailed data on the fields of interest to the organization conducting the survey, and may even collect data on topics not covered by the GSS (e.g., on undergraduate enrollment), but they do not provide compatible data

on all SEH fields, nor do they often address the issue of types and sources of financial support for graduate students.

For the past several years, NCSES has conducted an initiative to determine the feasibility of collecting data on the number and characteristics of postdocs in the United States. In 2009, NSF piloted an expanded postdoc section within the GSS, and based on the results, implemented the new section for all institutions in the 2010 cycle. For the foreseeable future the GSS will continue to collect the postdoc information for the academic sector.

A.5 Small Businesses Involvement

The survey universe consists entirely of U.S. universities and colleges that enroll graduate students and FFRDCs that have postdoctoral appointments.

A.6 Consequences of Less Frequent Surveying

A less frequent survey cycle would have several serious consequences. The first, of course, would be the loss of information. Because of the active-data uses described previously, biennial or less frequent surveys means that data users would be unable to access what is now current information. Minor shifts in enrollment trends are monitored as early indicators of likely future changes in the supply of SEH professionals.

Collecting the GSS annually increases the value of the data for monitoring trends, particularly the effects of dramatic changes in the larger context. Recent examples are changes in enrollment that correspond to the dot-com boom and bust and the events of September 11, 2001. Less than annual data collection may not capture such changes or reveal the inflection point of a changing trend. For the past few years, the release of the GSS fall enrollment data has been eagerly awaited to see the trends in SEH graduate enrollment in foreign visa holders post 9/11. Enrollment for this pool of graduate students did not drop immediately (i.e., in 2001), and the trends differed by several years for first-time enrollment and total enrollment. Those nuances would have been lost if the data had not been collected every year.

Most colleges and universities have automated record keeping systems, facilitating their ability to respond to the GSS on an annual cycle. These automated record systems considerably reduce the time required to assemble and report information needed for the GSS related to graduate enrollment by field, postdoctoral appointment, and sources and mechanisms of support,

etc. Thus, because the database and software are retained, kept current, and easily accessed, collecting consistent data annually considerably reduces respondent burden for academic institutions with automated data systems.

Annual collection also contributes to the continuity of contacts with the SCs within institutions. Having this continuity helps the SCs maintain their databases and, therefore, maintain the quality of the data.

A.7 Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances.

A.8 Federal Register Notice and Consultations with Persons outside the Agency

The Federal Register notice was published on May 11, 2011 (see Attachment 9). NSF received one public comment in response to the announcement as of the closeout date of July 11, 2011. The comment came from Jean Public via e-mail on May 12, 2011. Ms. Public objected to the information collection, and she suggested less frequent data collection of this survey. NSF responded to Ms. Public on May 26, 2011, describing the program and addressing the survey frequency and the cost issues raised by Ms. Public. NSF believes that because the comment does not pertain to the collection of information on the required forms for which NSF is seeking OMB approval, NSF is proceeding with the clearance request.

NSF regularly consults with the Department of Education's NCES and other federal agencies, such as NIH and DOE, professional societies, and university staff. NSF staff members maintain frequent contact with members of the data-using community as well as with major academic data providers through attendance at professional society meetings and consultation with institutional and agency officials. The GSS survey manager held sessions on proposed changes to the GSS at the Association for Institutional Researchers (AIR) Annual Forum each year from 2005 through 2010 to obtain respondent input.

NSF has also conducted meetings with users of the GSS data in 2008 and 2009, and asked for their feedback on proposed survey design changes and for user input on future data needs. In 2008, a meeting was convened with representatives of disciplinary and higher education associations, and in 2009, a meeting was held with respondents from graduate schools,

in conjunction with the CGS annual meeting. Their input has been used to adapt the survey and procedures.

A.9 Payment or Gifts to Nonrespondents

Not applicable. There are no payments to GSS respondents.

A.10 Assurance of Confidentiality

No pledge of confidentiality is given to institutions providing data to the GSS. Data collected in the GSS are aggregate counts of students, postdocs, and NFRs. Data are published only at the departmental summary level.

A.11 Sensitive Questions

The survey questionnaire does not contain any questions of a sensitive nature.

A.12 Estimated Response Burden

In the 2010 GSS, respondents were asked to report how long it took them to complete the GSS. There were approximately 13,984 reporting units in the 2010 cycle; the average estimated burden was 2.78 hours per unit, for a total burden of 38,876 hours. [Note: An organizational unit can be a department, program, research center, or health care facility.] The burden in 2010 was larger than in previous years because of the addition of a more detailed section on postdocs.

In keeping with prior experience, we estimate that the per unit burden will decrease slightly each year as respondents become familiar with the items in the survey, thus we estimate a burden of 2.7 hours per unit in 2011. We anticipate that the number of units reporting in 2011 cycle will include the units in 2010, plus approximately a 3% increase. In addition, we anticipate that another 500 units will be added as a result of the GSS frame expansion study currently being conducted. Finally, in 2011 we will again conduct the FFRDC survey on the postdocs. A total of 40,428 hours are requested for the 2011 cycle of GSS. These figures are presented in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. Burden Estimates for the 2011 GSS

Category	# of units	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2010 existing units	13,984	2.7	37,757
3% increase from 2010 reporting units	420	2.7	1,133
FFRDC study	40	4.7	188
Additional units from frame expansion	500	2.7	1,350
Estimated total	14,944	2.7	40,428

For the 2012 GSS, the total respondent burden is estimated at 40,099 hours, and the burden for 2013 will be 39,716 hours, as shown in Exhibits 2 and 3.

Exhibit 2. Burden Estimates for the 2012 GSS

Category	# of units	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2011 existing units	14,904	2.6	38,749
3% increase from 2011 reporting units	447	2.6	1,162
FFRDC study	40	4.7	188
Estimated total	15,391	2.6	40,099

Exhibit 3. Burden Estimates for the 2013 GSS

Category	# of units	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2012 existing units	15,351	2.5	38,375
3% increase from 2012 reporting units	461	2.5	1151
FFRDC study	40	4.7	188
Estimated total	15,851	2.5	39,716

In addition, NCSES is requesting 360 burden hours over the 3 years for future testing needs. By adding the burden estimates for the three survey cycles and the testing, the total respondent burden is 120,603 hours. Exhibit 4 summarizes the burden estimates for the next 3 years of the GSS.

Exhibit 4. Total Burden Estimates for 2011–13 GSS

Category	Total respondents (# of units)	Total burden (hours)
Total burden for 2011	14,944	40,428
Total burden for 2012	15,391	40,099
Total burden for 2013	15,851	39,716
Future testing (across all 3 years)	n/a	360
Estimated burden for all 3 years (2011, 2012, 2013, plus testing)	46,186	120,603
Estimated average annual burden	15,395	40,201

A.13 Cost of Respondents

This survey does not require the purchase of equipment, software, or services beyond those normally used in universities as part of customary and usual business.

A.14 Cost to the Federal Government

NSF is in the first year of a 5-year contract with a survey research firm to collect the GSS data. The total value of that contract is \$7,951,179 to conduct the GSS from 2010–13; the average estimated cost for the each of the four survey cycles included in the contract is \$1,987,795 (only three cycles are included in this clearance request). The total cost of the GSS to the federal government is \$2,328,795 per cycle. See Exhibit 5 for how this estimate was derived.

Exhibit 5. Annual GSS Survey Federal Government Estimated Costs

GSS resources and activities	Total (\$)
Data collection and processing contract	1,987,795
GSS survey manager (1.0 person year)	130,000
Other NCSES staff (program manager, statistician, editor, etc.)	210,000
<i>InfoBrief</i> Web posting, printing and mailing costs (estimated)	1,000
Estimated total	2,328,795

For the 2010 GSS, NIH contributed \$323,238 (13.9%) and DOE provided \$60,000 (2.6% of the annual contract costs. It is assumed that both agencies will continue that level of support. The NSF funds the remainder of the annual costs to the federal government.

A.15 Changes in Burden

NSF expects that the respondent burden, per unit, will decline slightly in 2011–13. Respondent burden declined between 2007 and 2009, as respondents became familiar with the requirements of the study. The burden per unit increased in 2010 because a new series of items on the postdocs was added. We expect that as respondents become familiar with these items, the expected burden would decrease again. At the current time, NSF does not anticipate adding new items to the survey during the 2011–13 survey cycles.

Total burden is expected to increase in 2011, compared to 2010, because of newly eligible institutions added to the study. These institutions have been identified during the past several years and a special methodological investigation is being conducted to determine how many of those units will become eligible for the GSS. For the purposes of this clearance request, we have estimated that approximately 500 units in the 200+ new institutions will be eligible.

A.16 Project Schedule for Information Collection and Publication

The project schedule (Attachment 3) for the entire project from questionnaire design to final publication is similar each year. Institutions are contacted to confirm the SCs in September, and the survey is launched in October, with a final closeout date in May of the following year. An *InfoBrief* is published in late fall of that year. Detailed statistical data tables, with a description of the survey methodology posted on the NCSES website (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/gradpostdoc/>) approximately 3 months later in the winter of the following year. There are no complex analytical issues, except imputations for nonresponse (see Section B.2.1).

A.17 Displaying the OMB Expiration Date

The OMB expiration date appears on the GSS Web survey login page and on worksheets provided to respondents for preliminary data gathering (these worksheets are no longer used for data submission).

A.18 Exceptions in Item 19 on Form 83-1

Not applicable. There are no exceptions.