

2014–2016 Survey of Graduate Students  
and Postdoctorates  
in Science and Engineering  
  
OMB Supporting Statement

July 2014

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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 2013. The OMB clearance for the GSS will expire on October 31, 2014. With this clearance package, NSF requests approval to collect data for the 2014–16 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 and ethnicity, citizenship, sex, sources of support, and type of support; information on postdoctorates (postdocs) by citizenship, sex, sources of support, and type and origin of doctoral degree; and information on other doctorate-holding nonfaculty researchers (NFRs) (see Attachment 2 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.

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, the GSS also periodically surveys 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 3 for screenshots of the 2013 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 in GSS 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 2013 GSS, and proposed 2014 GSS, reflect changes made to date based on the results of the research and testing.

### **A.1 Need for Data Collection and Legislative Authorization**

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF) collects, maintains, and disseminates information on science and engineering resources in the United States. Specifically, Section 505 within the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 directs NSF as follows:

“(a) Establishment- There is established within the Foundation a National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics that shall serve as a central Federal clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of objective data on science, engineering, technology, and research and development.

(b) Duties- In carrying out subsection (a) of this section, the Director, acting through the Center shall--

(1) collect, acquire, analyze, report, and disseminate statistical data related to the science and engineering enterprise in the United States and other nations that is relevant and useful to practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and the public, including statistical data on--

(A) research and development trends;...”

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

## **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 of persons engaged in postdoctoral programs is extensively used by NSF and NIH to assess future stock of trained SEH personnel. A variety of more general information needs are met through the annual release of data in 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.

Data from the GSS are also available as public use files, and on the Web through the WebCASPAR (Computer Aided Science Policy Analysis and Research) system (<https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/webcaspar>). 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. 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.

NCES is also considering adding GSS data to its Data Lab PowerStats system.

#### *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 four NSF surveys whose micro data are combined into an integrated database to produce the publication *Academic Institutional Profiles*. The other three surveys are

(1) the Survey of Earned Doctorates; (2) the Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey; and (3) 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*.
- Data in specially prepared GSS tabulations are used by the 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 NCSSES 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 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, Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology, Computing Research Association, Council of Graduate Schools, Federation of American Societies for 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 the *New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other major national newspapers. A recent example of the use of GSS postdoc data is a New York Times article on December 22, 2013, entitled “Part-Timers Crowd Academic Hiring”.

### **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 website. During the past three cycles, all academic institutions have reported electronically. The majority of respondents have welcomed the Web version of the GSS for ease of submission and error resolution capabilities. Screenshots of the 2013 GSS Web instrument are included in Attachment 2.

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.

Respondents to the GSS have the option of uploading a data file, rather than completing the Web version of the questionnaire. In 2012, 47 schools supplied their data via file upload. Guidelines for the construction of the file are provided to respondents within the Web instrument, along with a document providing answers to frequently asked questions. A template to help coordinators construct a cross-walk between their internal unit codes and the GSS fields is also provided, so that they can use data that have been downloaded from their internal database systems. Coordinators may provide all of the data or a subset of the data via the upload function. Typically the coordinators create a comma separated value (CSV) file that is viewable in Excel.

The web instrument contains a help system that provides specifications on the format for each question and link are provided to these specifications from the file upload page. In addition, respondents can download a properly formatted CSV file pre-filled with their school's current information. When the respondent has created the file, he or she can click on the "upload" button and the data are automatically loaded into the Web instrument. If there are formatting issues with the file being uploaded, an error summary is provided to the user. This summary indicates the nature of the error, as well as the line in the uploaded file where the error exists. When the upload is complete, the respondent is then returned to the "unit status" page where any missing data, errors or inconsistencies in the data are displayed. After all information is completed and all issues are resolved, the respondent can submit the data.

#### **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 participate in a variety of NCES-related activities, including

serving on the 2010 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Working Group and Technical Review Panels. 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
  - Mechanism of major financial support
  - gender
  - citizenship
  - type of doctoral degree
  - doctoral degree origin
- For NFRs, aggregate counts by
  - gender
  - type of doctoral degree

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 location, 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 and NIH. Furthermore, no other surveys collect data on federal agencies' support of graduate students.

The IPEDS, for example, collects race and 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 and ethnicity category are not reported by the field and hence do not provide a viable substitute for the race and 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 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 787 institutions in 2012 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 had a response rate of 86%, with 675 schools responding. The survey collects data by fifty-one fine 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 grouped into ninety-seven fine fields of study on all SEH degree field 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 a study 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 information on the postdocs, including the foreign postdocs, in 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 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, the events of September 11, 2001, and the economic downturn in 2008. 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 appointments, 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 21, 2014 (see Attachment 10).

NSF regularly consults with the Department of Education's NCES and other federal agencies, such as NIH, 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. GSS sessions are typically held at the Association for Institutional Researchers (AIR) Annual Forum each year to obtain respondent input.

**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

Each year, when respondents reach the end of the web instrument, they are asked to report how long it took them to complete the GSS. The average burden per unit in GSS decreased from 2.8 hours in 2011 to 2.6 hours in the 2012 GSS. In the last OMB clearance request, we had estimated 2.7 hours in 2011 and 2.6 hours in 2012, which is very close to the reported burden hours. We had also estimated a slightly higher number of units for the survey so the total reported burden hours for those years were lower than the burden hours approved by OMB.

In keeping with prior experience, we estimate that the per unit burden will be stable or decrease slightly over time as respondents become familiar with the items in the survey, thus we estimate a burden of 2.6 hours per unit in 2014. We anticipate that the number of units reporting in 2014 cycle will include fewer units than 14,429 units in 2013 due to deletion of 655 units that will no longer be eligible based on the new NCSES Taxonomy of Disciplines (see Section B.1.2), plus approximately a 1% increase. A total of 36,171 burden hours are requested for the 2014 cycle of GSS. These figures are presented in Exhibit 1.

### Exhibit 1. Burden Estimates for the 2014 GSS

Category	Respondents (# of units)	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2013 existing units less 655 units deleted due to new NCSES Taxonomy of Disciplines	13,774	2.6	35,812
1% increase from 2013	138	2.6	359
Estimated total	13,912		36,171

For the 2015 GSS, the total respondent burden is estimated at 35,268 hours and the burden for 2016 will be 35,481 hours, as shown in Exhibits 2 and 3. The 2015 GSS burden hours also includes the hours for the Survey of the Postdocs at FFRDCs. This survey was last conducted in 2013 and is currently scheduled to be conducted bi-annually.

**Exhibit 2. Burden Estimates for the 2015 GSS**

Category	Respondents (# of units)	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2014 existing units	13,912	2.5	34,780
1% increase from 2014	139	2.5	348
Survey of Postdocs at FFRDCs	40	3.5	140
Estimated total	14,091		35,268

**Exhibit 3. Burden Estimates for the 2016 GSS**

Category	Respondents (# of units)	Burden/unit (hours)	Total burden (hours)
2015 existing units	14,051	2.5	35,128
1% increase from 2015	141	2.5	353
Estimated total	14,192		35,481

In addition, NCSES is requesting 360 burden hours over 3 years for future methodological testing needs. Exhibit 4 summarizes the burden estimates for the next 3 years of the GSS. The estimated average annual burden across the 3 cycles is 2.54 hours per unit.

**Exhibit 4. Total Burden Estimates for 2014–16 GSS**

Category	Respondents (# of units)	Total burden (hours)
2014 GSS	13,912	36,171
2015 GSS	14,091	35,268
2016 GSS	14,192	35,481
Future methodological testing		360
Total burden	42,195	107,280
Average annual burden	14,065	35,760
Average annual burden per unit		2.54

### **A.13 Cost to 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**

The total estimated value of the contract is \$9.5M to conduct the four survey cycles of GSS from 2014–17; the average estimated cost for the each cycle included in the contract is \$2.4M. The total cost of the GSS to the federal government is \$2.7M per cycle. Exhibit 5 presents more detailed information on this estimate.

#### **Exhibit 5. Annual GSS Survey Federal Government Estimated Costs**

GSS resources and activities	Total (\$)
Data collection and processing contract	2,375,000
GSS survey manager (1.0 person year)	150,000
Other NCSSES staff (program manager, statistician, editor, etc.)	210,000
Publication Web posting, printing and mailing costs	1,000
Estimated total	2,736,000

For the 2013 GSS, NIH contributed \$368,835 (15%) of the annual contract costs. It is assumed that NIH 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 remain fairly stable in 2014, but will decline slightly by 2016 as respondents' familiarity with the instrument increases and as more institutions take advantage of the data upload feature. At the current time, NSF does not anticipate adding new items to the survey during the 2014–16 survey cycles.

### **A.16 Project Schedule for Information Collection and Publication**

The project schedule (Attachment 4) 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 April of the following year. An InfoBrief is published in the end of that year. Detailed data tables, with a description of the

survey methodology, are posted on the NCSES website (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/gradpostdoc/>) shortly after release of the InfoBrief. 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 reference purposes (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.