

Trends in Social Work Doctorates

GADE 2019

Steve McMurtry, UW-Milwaukee

Patterns Across Disciplines and Degree Levels

- To understand trends in social work doctorates, data on graduates were collected from CSWE and the accrediting bodies in nursing, psychology, and public health.
- To add further perspective, data were also collected regarding bachelors and masters graduates as well as doctoral graduates.
- At present, the most recent data on which all four fields can be compared is from 2014-15.

Bachelors Graduates

Trends in Bachelors Graduates by Discipline

	2005-06	2014-15	% Change
Nursing	43550	122017	180
Psychology	88155	117557	33
Public Health	3060*	6144	99
Social Work	12845	19596	53

*2012-13 data; earlier information not available

Masters Graduates

Trends in Masters Graduates by Discipline

	2005-06	2014-15	% Change
Nursing	12099	36582	202
Psychology	19770	26773	35
Public Health	5883	11390	94
Social Work	17029	25883	50

Doctoral Graduates

Trends in Doctoral Graduates by Discipline

	Research Doctorate			Practice Doctorate		
	2005-06	2014-15	% Change	2005-06	2014-15	% Change
Nursing	437	709	62	74	4100	5441
Psychology	4346	5226	20	1358	1515	12
Public Health	574	1066	86	129	191	48
Social Work	332	300	-10	0	58	NA

Implications - The Good News

- In 2016-17, more than 1000 DSW students were enrolled in the 12 DSW programs that reported.
- In just three years total doctoral enrollment in social work grew from 2544 to 3204.
- This net gain of almost 700 students occurred despite a slight drop in the number of PhD enrollees.
- The advent of DSW programs is making doctoral education available to many more social workers.

Implications - The Bad News

- Social work attracts far fewer masters graduates into doctoral education than other fields.
- For example, in 2014-15:
 - Public health graduated one doctoral student for every nine masters graduates.
 - Nursing's ratio was one for every eight.
 - Psychology's was one for every four.
 - Social work's was one for every 72.
- This is despite the fact that social work has more research doctorate programs per enrolled student than any of the other fields.

Moving Forward

- Social work dramatically lags other fields in its number of doctoral-trained professionals.
- Among other implications, this means that social work has the most competitive recruitment environment.
- But recruitment is not a zero-sum game, where one program's success comes at the expense of another.
- The challenge is not to grow our own program's slice of the pie, but to grow the pie itself.