Mapping the U.S. Scientific Training Ecosystem: New Data, Methods, and Evidence*

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Abstract:

How many PhDs does the U.S. produce in key fields, where are they trained, and who pays for their training? Many U.S. PhD graduates are foreign-born—how many remain in the U.S. after 5, 10, or 15 years? What happens when funding for PhD training declines? In this paper, we develop new data and methods for evaluating questions such as these about the U.S. scientific training ecosystem. We demonstrate that it is possible to do so using non-governmental and commercial data sources—especially information from PhD dissertations, later-in-life career outcomes, and natural language processing. Using these data, we examine how many PhDs are produced in specific critical technology areas, and by which universities; how doctoral education is financed, and the effects of changes in public investment on PhD production; and how many graduates subsequently move abroad, where, and what the consequences may be for the U.S. innovation system. These methods complement existing data collection efforts by national statistics agencies, producing information which is otherwise costly to collect or not systematically observed.

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