

## **American Academy of Religion Graduate Survey: Completion and Placement Results**

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There are four primary criteria by which graduate programs are judged:

1. Quality of students admitted
2. Completion/attrition rates
3. Time to degree
4. Placement

The AAR Survey of Graduate Programs in Religion and Theology collected information on two of these criteria, completion/attrition rates and placement.

### **Attrition and Completion, Fall 1995-Summer 2000**

The number of students who began doctoral programs between Fall 1995 and Summer 2000 was 2,095. Of these, 1,370 or 65% were male and 725 or 35% were female. During that same five-year period, the programs reported that 825 students completed their doctoral degrees. Of these, 532 or 64% were males and 295 or 36% were females. And during that same period, the programs reported that 247 students left their programs, with 146 or 59% being male and 100 or 41% being female.

Using these data can provide some picture of attrition and completion for the programs in this survey. It is important to realize, however, that these data cannot be used to derive exact completion and attrition data, because they are not derived from the same cohorts of students. That is, the students who completed their degrees between Fall 1995 and Summer 2000 were not necessarily the same students who began their doctoral programs during that period. And the students who left their programs during that time were also not necessarily the same students who began their doctoral programs between Fall 1995 and Summer 2000. However, if we assume relatively constant enrollment patterns by number and gender, and constant attrition and completion rates over time, we can consider these students as forming a synthetic cohort and construct completion and attrition rates for them.

If 2,095 students began their doctoral programs and 825 students completed their degrees, that represents a 39% completion rate. A summary study of completion rates by the Council of Graduate Schools estimates that completion rates for Humanities and Social Science programs is about 33%, with Natural Science programs about 75%. The completion rate of 39% in this survey, then, is somewhat higher than the average for Humanities and Social Science programs.

The 247 students reported as leaving their programs during the five year period represents only about 12% attrition, which seems surprisingly low. This number is necessarily an under-estimate because the response rate for 'students leaving the program' is 52%, while the response rate for 'students who began their doctoral program' is 60%, so 8% of the schools that reported enrollment numbers did not report attrition numbers. (Combining the 39% completion rate with the 12% attrition rate accounts for only 51% of the students.) Most of the other students we must assume are still pursuing their degrees; however some of the discrepancy must also derive from the use of these data as a synthetic cohort.

These numbers also imply that there are no significant gender differences in completion and attrition: male and female completion rates reflect the percentage of males and females that began their doctoral training, and the percentage of male and female students leaving their programs are only slightly different from the percentages that began doctoral training.

### **Completion 2001-2002**

The survey also collected completion data for the one year, 2001-2002. According to the departments reporting, 468 students completed doctoral degrees during that year. This seems like a large number of degrees for a single year in comparison to the 825 degrees reported in the previous *five* year period. However, much of the discrepancy must be due to the differences in response rate. The completion data of 468 students for the 2001-2002 year is based on a response from 82.5% of the schools; while the completion data of 825 students for Fall 1995-Summer 2000 is based on a response from 57.1% of the schools. Clearly, the completion picture derived from the 2001-2002 year is the more accurate data. By way of some comparison, the National Research Council reports that in 2001, there were 343 Ph.D.'s granted in Religion. The NRC study was restricted to departments of religion in research universities, so it does not include as wide a range of institutions as does the AAR survey, which would account for the higher number of degrees reported in the AAR survey.

In terms of race/ethnic distribution, half of these students, 51%, were white males and about a quarter, 23%, were white females. The total distribution was:

White males:	242
White females:	107
Black males:	28
Black females:	10
Asian males:	52
Asian females:	19
Hispanic males:	8
Hispanic females:	2
American Indians:	0
Total:	468

## Placement

Placement information data in the survey are based students in the 2001-2002 academic year, with a parenthetical in the question of “including recent graduates”, so the numbers of students in the placement data may be more than the number of students completing their degrees in 2001-2002. Such slippage in assessing placement data for any single year is endemic in all placement data.

The programs report that 396 students were on the job market in the 2001-2002 academic year, which is 85% of the 468 students reported as receiving their degrees that year. The response rate for students on the job market of 85.7% is only marginally higher than the 82.5% reporting the completion of degrees for that year. Most students intend to enter the academic job market, and the schools report little change in that intention during the last five years.

The survey asks for student placement in a variety of types of academic and non-academic employment. The response rate for this placement information was 74.6%, lower than the response rate for “students on the job market” and “completion of degree”. Overall, the programs reported that 342 students were placed out of the 396 students that were reported as being on the job market. This placement percentage of 86% is very likely an overestimate, since some unknown number of those placement were probably “recent graduates” not finishing in the 2000-2001 academic year, which means they were not reflected in the 396 students reported as being on the job market. Still, this indicates that the placement record of these doctoral students is very good.

In terms of type of employment, 252 out of the 342 students placed, or fully 74%, were in academic positions in universities, colleges, and community colleges. If we include the 73 students who were placed in divinity schools, then 326 out of 342 students, or fully 95% were in academic positions. The specific breakdowns are as follows:

Number of students completing degrees.....	468
Number of student reported on job market.....	396
Number placed in: Research Universities.....	66
Four-Year Colleges.....	86
Liberal Arts Colleges.....	97
Community Colleges.....	3
Divinity Schools.....	73
Administration.....	9
Rabbinic.....	2
Secondary Schools.....	6