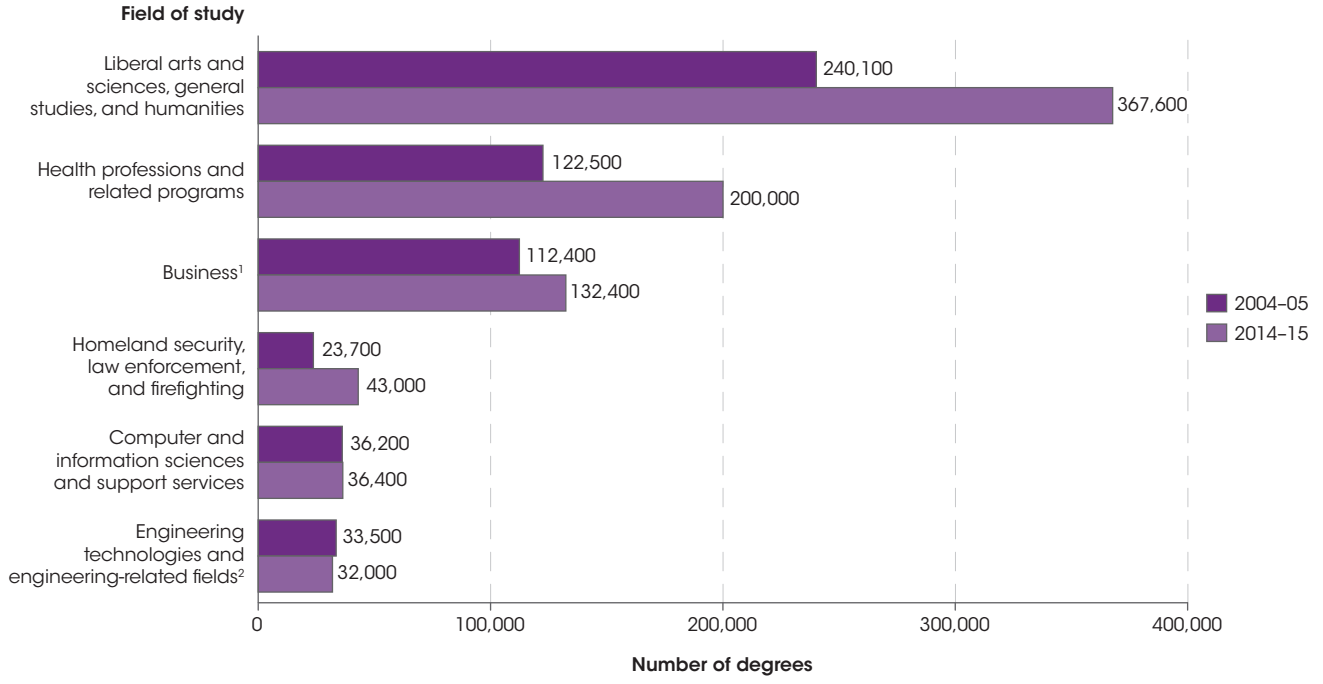
Undergraduate Degree Fields

For every racial/ethnic group, business was the most common field of study for bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15. Liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; health professions and related programs; and business services were the top three associate's degree fields of study for all racial/ethnic groups in 2014–15.

In academic year 2014–15, postsecondary institutions conferred 1.0 million associate's degrees. Of the associate's degrees conferred in 2014–15, about two-thirds (69 percent) were concentrated in three fields of study: liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities (36 percent, or 368,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (20 percent, or 200,000 degrees); and business[1] (13 percent, or 132,000 degrees). These three fields also accounted for the largest percentages of degrees conferred in 2004–05. In 2014–15, the three next largest percentages of associate's degrees conferred were in the following fields: homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (4 percent, or 43,000 degrees); computer and information sciences and support services (4 percent, or 36,400 degrees); and engineering technologies and engineering-related fields[2] (3 percent, or 32,000 degrees). More recently, between 2013–14 and 2014–15, the overall number of associate's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions increased by around 1 percent.

Figure 1. Number of associate's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2004–05 and 2014–15



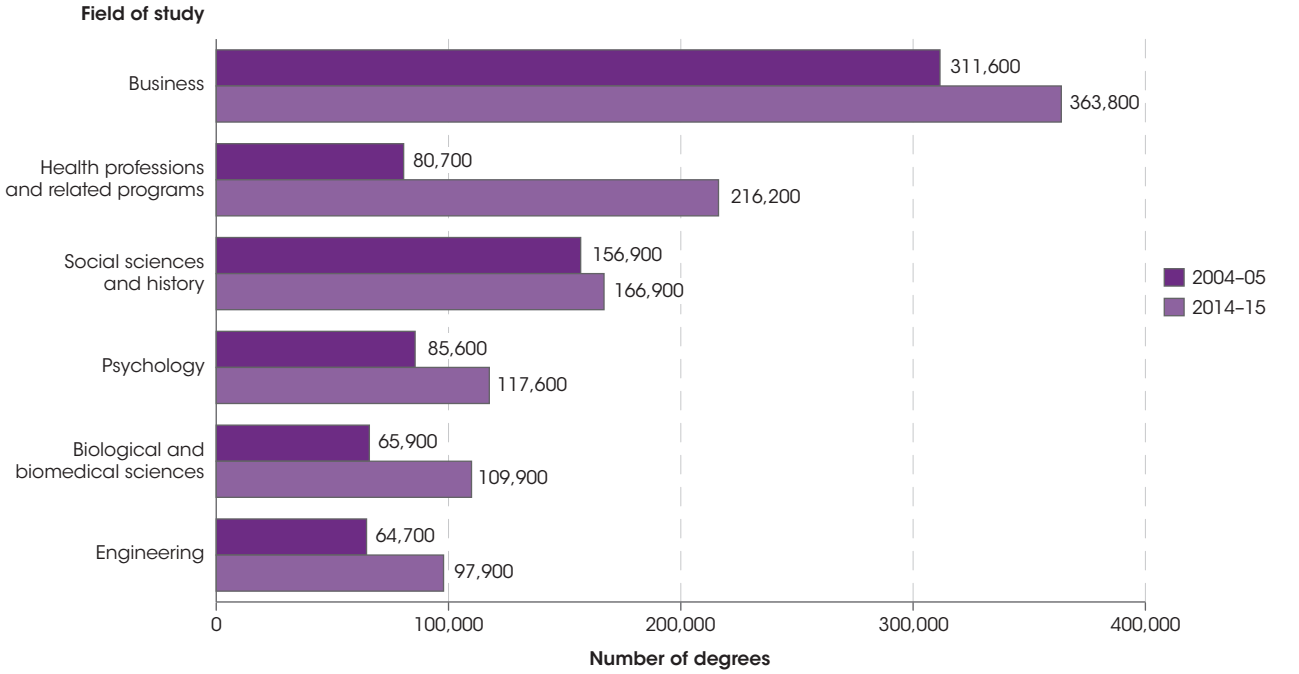
[1] "Business" includes personal and culinary services, to be consistent with how "business" is defined throughout the rest of the indicator.
[2] Excludes construction trades and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians.
NOTE: The six fields of study shown are those in which the largest number of associate's degrees were conferred from the 1,014,000 associate's degrees conferred in 2014–15. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The new Classification of Instructional Programs was initiated in 2009–10. The estimates for 2004–05 have been reclassified when necessary to make them conform to the new taxonomy. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2005 and Fall 2015, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 321.10.

Between 2004–05 and 2014–15, the number of associate's degrees conferred increased by 317,000 degrees, or 46 percent. Over this time period, the number of associate's degrees conferred in the fields of liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; health professions and related programs; and business (the three fields of study in which the most degrees were conferred) increased by 53 percent (from 240,000 to 368,000), 63 percent (from 123,000 to 200,000), and 18 percent (from 112,000 to 132,000), respectively. Of the top 20 fields in which the greatest number of associate's degrees were conferred in 2014–15, the largest percentage

increase in degrees conferred from 2004–05 to 2014–15 was in the field of psychology (350 percent, from 1,900 to 8,700 degrees). In addition, the number of associate's degrees conferred more than doubled over the period in the following fields: biological and biomedical sciences (from 1,700 to 4,900, or 186 percent); social sciences and history (from 6,500 to 17,900, or 174 percent); physical sciences and science technologies (from 2,800 to 7,600, or 168 percent); communication, journalism, and related programs (from 2,500 to 6,000, or 137 percent); multi/interdisciplinary studies (from 13,900 to 29,100, or 110 percent); and public administration and social services (from 4,000 to 8,400, or 110 percent).

Liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities; health professions and related programs; and business services were the top three associate's degree fields of study for all racial/ethnic groups in 2014–15. The distribution by race/ethnicity of associate's degrees conferred in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)[3] fields differed from the distribution by race/ethnicity of associate's degrees overall. The percentages of STEM associate's degrees conferred to Asian/Pacific Islander (7 percent) and White (61 percent) graduates were higher than their percentages among all associate's degree recipients (5 percent and 59 percent, respectively). In contrast, the percentage of STEM associate's degrees conferred to Hispanic graduates (15 percent) was lower than the percentage of associate's degrees conferred to Hispanic graduates overall (18 percent), while the percentage of STEM associate's degrees conferred to Black graduates (14 percent) was within 1 percentage point of their overall percentage among associate's degree recipients.

Figure 2. Number of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study: Academic years 2004–05 and 2014–15



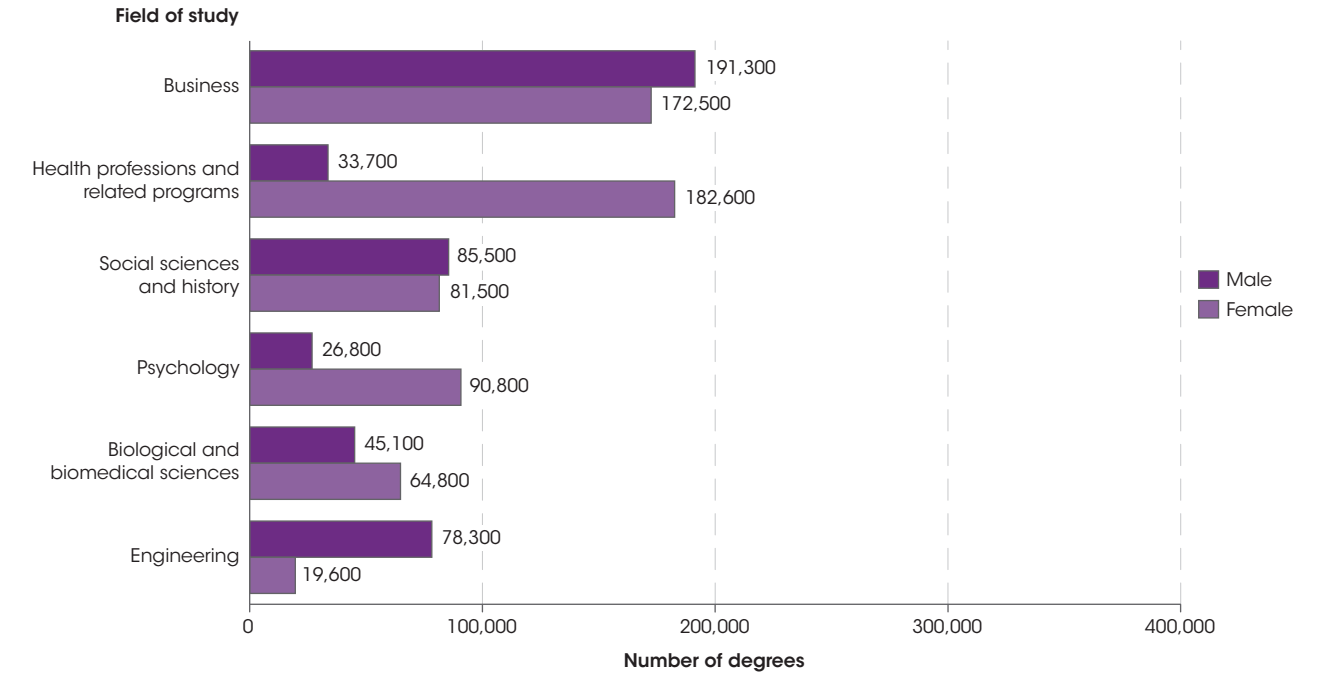
NOTE: The six fields of study shown are those in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred from the 1,894,900 bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. The new Classification of Instructional Programs was initiated in 2009–10. The estimates for 2004–05 have been reclassified when necessary to make them conform to the new taxonomy. "Business" includes business, management, marketing, and related support services, and personal and culinary services. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2005 and Fall 2015, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 322.10.

Postsecondary institutions conferred approximately 1.9 million bachelor's degrees in 2014–15. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred overall increased by 456,000 degrees, or 32 percent, between 2004–05 and 2014–15. The three fields of study in which the most bachelor's degrees were conferred—business, health professions and related programs, and social sciences and history—had increases during this period of 17 percent (from 312,000 to 364,000), 168 percent (from 80,700 to 216,000), and 6 percent (from 157,000 to 167,000), respectively. Among the top 20 fields in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred, the largest percentage increases between 2004–05 and 2014–15 were in health professions and related programs (168 percent, from 80,700 to 216,000); parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies (114 percent, from 22,900 to 49,000); and homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (104 percent, from 30,700 to 62,700). More recently, between 2013–14 and 2014–15, the overall number of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions increased by around 1 percent.

About 39 percent of the bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15 were concentrated in three fields of study: business (19 percent, or 364,000 degrees); health professions and related programs (11 percent, or 216,000 degrees); and social sciences and history (9 percent, or 167,000 degrees). Business and social sciences and history were also among the top three fields in 2004–05. Education, which was the field in which the third most degrees were conferred in 2004–05, dropped to eighth in 2014–15 (from 105,000 to 91,600). The three next largest fields of study among bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15 were in the fields of psychology (6 percent, or 118,000 degrees); biological and biomedical sciences (6 percent, or 110,000 degrees); and engineering (5 percent, or 97,900 degrees).

For every racial/ethnic group, business was the most common field of study for bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15. As with associate's degrees, the racial/ethnic distribution of graduates earning bachelor's degrees in STEM fields differed from the overall racial/ethnic distribution of bachelor's degrees. The percentage of STEM bachelor's degrees conferred to Asian/Pacific Islander graduates (13 percent) was higher than their percentage among all bachelor's degree recipients (7 percent). The percentages of STEM bachelor's degrees conferred to White (66 percent), Hispanic (10 percent), and Black (7 percent) graduates were lower than the percentages of overall White (67 percent), Hispanic (12 percent), and Black (11 percent) bachelor's degree recipients.

Figure 3. Number of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions in selected fields of study, by sex: Academic year 2014–15



NOTE: The six fields of study shown were those in which the largest number of bachelor's degrees were conferred from the 1,894,900 bachelor's degrees conferred in 2014–15. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. "Business" includes business, management, marketing, and related support services, and personal and culinary services.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2015, Completions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 322.40 and 322.50.

In 2014–15, females earned 1.1 million bachelor's degrees, representing 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees conferred. Males were awarded the remaining 43 percent (0.8 million degrees). Of the six fields in which the most bachelor's degrees were conferred in 2014–15, females were conferred the majority of degrees in the following three fields: health professions and related programs (183,000 vs. 33,700 for males), psychology (90,800 vs. 26,800 for males), and biological and biomedical sciences (64,800 vs. 45,100 for males). Males received the majority of the degrees conferred in business (191,000 vs. 172,000 for females), social sciences and history (85,500 vs. 81,500 for females), and engineering (78,300 vs. 19,600 for females).

Endnotes:

[1] Business includes personal and culinary services, to be consistent with how business is defined throughout the rest of the indicator.
[2] Excludes construction trades and mechanic and repair technologies/technicians.
[3] STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 318.45, 321.10, 321.30, 322.10, 322.30, 322.40, and 322.50

Related indicators and resources: Employment of STEM College Graduates, Employment Outcomes of Bachelor's Degree Recipients, Graduate Degree Fields, Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Conferred, Post-Bachelor's Employment Outcomes by Sex and Race/Ethnicity [*The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight*], *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*

Glossary: Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), Racial/ethnic group, STEM fields