



American Sociological Association  
*Research Program on the Discipline and Profession*

# Data·Brief

## **Graduate Department Vitality: Changes Continue in the Right Direction**

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Two indicators of graduate department vitality—new graduate student registrations and faculty growth—show changes in the right direction over the past three years according to a comparison of data from the newly available 1998 Graduate Department Survey with data from the 1995 survey. These findings are part of the ASA Research Program's on-going efforts to track and analyze the structure and development of sociology as a profession. The findings are from a data file containing information from 133 departments that responded to the survey in both years that was developed to control for fluctuations in departmental reporting when measuring change in growth.<sup>1</sup>

### Increase in Graduate Student Registrations

- Table 1 shows a small increase in the number of new graduate students registering in sociology. Although the number of applicants to departments with graduate programs dropped by three percent, the number of new students that actually registered increased by three percent. In academic year 1994-95, 51 percent of applicants to a particular department ended up attending graduate school in that department. By 1997-98, 53 percent of applicants attended. (Note that applicants tend to apply to more than one department, so the fact that they did not register in a particular department did not mean that they did not register in another department). The distribution of graduate students applying, getting accepted, and registering changed among types of programs within departments.
- Somewhat fewer students applied to MA/MS programs and somewhat more applied to PhD programs over the three-year period. (Note that since 1994-95 five fewer PhD granting departments admit new graduate students to MA/MS programs rather than directly into PhD programs).

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<sup>1</sup> This file may not be representative of all sociology departments. The response rate to the 1997-98 questionnaire was 62 percent. The 1997-98 file is somewhat biased toward PhD-granting departments. Of all the 158 responding departments, 63 percent were PhD-granting departments and 37 percent were MA/MS-only departments. Of the 133 departments in the matched file, 69 percent were PhD-granting departments and 31 percent were MA/MS-only departments.

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- The percent of applicants accepted into MA/MS programs increased slightly from 48 percent in 1994-95 to 55 percent accepted in 1997-98. The acceptance rate into PhD programs remained stable at fewer than three out of 10.
- More than six out of 10 applicants to an MA/MS programs in graduate department registered in that department in 1997-98, an increase from fewer than six out of 10 in 1994-95. The ratio of registrants to applicants to a PhD program in a graduate department stayed stable at four out of ten.

These findings suggest that departments are doing a better job of targeting MA/MS candidates because a higher percentage of those who applied, enrolled. In contrast, PhD candidates are likely to apply to a wider pool of departments and these departments are maintaining their care in selecting new students.

### Faculty Growth

Table 2 shows a sizeable increase in graduate departments that experienced faculty growth and a dramatic decrease in those that experienced faculty decline. The share of graduate departments that experienced growth in full-time faculty during the academic year prior to the survey increased by seven percentage points. (Growth was defined as when the number of faculty hired in the previous academic year was higher than the number of faculty that departed in the same year). In contrast, the share of departments that experienced a loss in faculty members decreased by 16 percentage points. (Faculty decline was defined as when fewer faculty were hired than faculty that departed in the prior academic year. The usual reason for departures was assistant professors leaving because they did not get tenure or full professors leaving due to retirement.) Although the largest group of graduate departments in each academic year neither gained nor lost faculty, substantially more departments experienced growth than experienced decline in 1997-98. This was not the case in 1994-95.

- In the year prior to 1994-95, 23 percent (or 29 departments) increased their faculty. By the year prior to 1997-98, 30 percent (or 39) of these same department experienced faculty growth.
  - In the year prior to 1994-95 more than one-third of responding graduate departments (46 departments) lost faculty. In contrast, in the year prior to 1997-98 only one out of five (27) of these same departments lost faculty. It should be noted that this measurement of decline is limited to one year. In the next year departments that lost a faculty member may well be allowed to hire a new one.
  - The percentage point increase in departments that experienced growth was somewhat greater among MA/MS-only departments than among PhD-granting departments. There was a 9 percentage point increase in
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departments with faculty growth among MA/MS-only departments compared to a six percentage point increase among PhD-granting departments.

- MA/MS-only departments were more likely to hire new faculty at the Assistant Professor rank only, while PhD-granting departments were somewhat more likely to hire full-professors and associate professors. More than nine out of 10 (94 percent) of new faculty hired in MA/MS departments were Assistant Professors in contrast to only eight out of 10 faculty hired in PhD-granting departments (data not shown).

The findings from this matched file suggest that after the chilly climate for Sociology in the mid-1980s, the climate has continued to improve. Over the last three academic years graduate registrations are up slightly. In addition, most graduate departments have stopped hemorrhaging faculty and an increased share have begun to grow.

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**Table 1: Applicants and Registration of Accepted Applicants by Type of Degree, 1994-95 and 1997-98**

	1994-95			1997-98			Percent Change (Total) 1994-95 to 1997-98
	MA/MS	PhD	Total	MA/MS	PhD	Total	
<b>Applied</b>	3,203	5,385	8,588	2,722	5,598	8,320	<b>-3.1</b>
<b>Accepted</b> (% of applicants accepted for study)	1,561 (48.7%)	1,520 (28.2%)	3,081 (35.9%)	1,508 (55.4%)	1,536 (27.4%)	3,044 (36.6%)	<b>-1.2%</b>
<b>Registered</b> (% of accepted applicants who registered in the accepting department)	901 (57.7%)	673 (44.3%)	1,574 (51.1%)	945 (62.6%)	671 (43.7%)	1,616 (53.1%)	<b>+2.7%</b>

*Notes:* These data are from departments responding to both the 1995 and 1998 surveys. Valid N=133 (42-MA/MS, 91-PhD in 1995; 41-MA/MS, 92-PhD in 1998). Departments admitting students to terminal MA/MS program: 104 in 1995; 99 in 1998. Includes data on terminal MA/MS programs within PhD granting departments.  
*Source:* American Sociological Association, Survey of Graduate Departments of Sociology (same sample file), 1995 and 1998.

**Table 2: Percent of Departments Experiencing Types of Faculty Growth by Department Type: 1994-95 and 1997-98**

	1994-95			1997-98			Percentage Point Change 1994-95 to 1997-98
	MA/MS	PhD	Total	MA/MS	PhD	Total	
<b>Faculty Growth</b>	18.4 (7)	25.3 (22)	23.2 (29)	27.5 (11)	31.5 (28)	30.2 (39)	<b>+7.0</b>
<b>Steady State</b>	44.7 (17)	37.9 (33)	40.0 (50)	57.5 (23)	44.9 (40)	48.8 (63)	<b>+8.8</b>
<b>Faculty Decline</b>	36.8 (14)	36.8 (32)	36.8 (46)	15.0 (6)	23.6 (21)	20.9 (27)	<b>-15.9</b>

*Notes:* These data are from departments responding to both the 1995 and 1998 surveys. Valid N=133 (42-MA/MS, 91-PhD in 1995; 41-MA/MS, 92-PhD in 1998). Departments admitting students to terminal MA/MS program: 104 in 1995; 99 in 1998. Includes data on terminal MA/MS programs within PhD granting departments.  
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