

News Release

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National Research Council doctoral rankings highlight multiple UNC-Chapel Hill strengths

Multiple University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill doctoral programs spanning the sciences, arts and humanities, medicine, social sciences and public health are highly rated in a new assessment conducted by the National Research Council.

The rankings were part of the NRC's long-anticipated release of assessments for research doctorate programs at 212 U.S. colleges and universities, the first conducted since 1995 and only the third ever undertaken. The NRC evaluated more than 5,000 programs in 62 fields. The results were released today (Sept. 28). The NRC represents the national academies, which advise the federal government in all areas of science and technology.

"Overall, the NRC results affirm that Carolina is one of the nation's great research universities," said Steve Matson, Ph.D., dean of the Graduate School. "The quality of our doctoral programs contributes to the success of our undergraduate program and our overall excellence."

On balance, Matson said Carolina's programs performed well because the NRC assessment gauged national standing in all doctoral programs. "The results show Carolina values graduate education widely and is not focused on just one specialty area or field," he said. "One of our greatest strengths is the breadth of interdisciplinary expertise among the faculty. That really comes through in our analysis of the NRC results so far."

UNC submitted information about 53 programs as part of an NRC process dating back to 2006. The results include overall range of rankings – covering 90 percent of the estimated rankings for a program – as well as ranges along dimensional measures. The ratings are based on 20 key variables reflecting faculty quality and research productivity, student graduation rates, student activities, various demographics, Graduate Record Examination scores, among other categories. The NRC emphasized that the ratings are illustrative; it's impossible to associate a specific numerical ranking with a program. It can only be stated accurately by percentile ranges.

Using one NRC overall ranking method, the following UNC doctoral programs could fall within the top 10 percent of programs in their field or discipline nationally: **nutrition, pharmacology, religious studies, cell and molecular physiology, chemistry, history, genetics and molecular biology; computer science; sociology; pharmaceutical sciences; statistics; art history; materials sciences; and human movement science** (which involves UNC's exercise and sport science, physical therapy, biomedical engineering units and focuses on human movement, aging and preventing injuries).

By another overall ranking, the following UNC doctoral programs could fall within the top 10 percent of programs in their field or discipline nationally: **nutrition, pharmacology, religious studies, chemistry, history, genetics and molecular biology; computer science; toxicology; communication studies; English; pharmaceutical sciences; romance languages – Spanish; sociology; political science; epidemiology; cell and molecular physiology; classics; human movement science; statistics; and art history.**

For both overall rankings, the UNC units are part of the Gillings School of Global Public Health, School of Medicine, Eshelman School of Pharmacy and the College of Arts and Sciences.

The NRC also used dimensional categories designed to reflect one aspect of a doctoral program's quality: research activity, student services and outcomes, and diversity.

In research activity, these programs could fall within the top 10 percent of programs in their field or discipline nationally: **nutrition; pharmacology; religious studies; chemistry; history; nursing; cell and molecular physiology; computer science; pharmaceutical sciences; sociology; genetics and molecular biology; and materials sciences.**

In student services and outcomes, these programs could fall within the top 10 percent of programs in their field or discipline nationally: **human movement sciences; maternal and child health; public policy; communication studies; religious studies; genetics and molecular biology; political science; sociology; biochemistry and biophysics; nutrition; philosophy; microbiology and immunology; art history; and journalism and mass communication.**

In diversity, these programs could fall within the top 10 percent of programs in their field or discipline nationally: **materials sciences, maternal and child health, art history, and neurobiology.**

These programs are associated with the previously listed schools and the college, as well as the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the School of Nursing.

Looking at NRC results to include the top quartile of graduate programs in their field or discipline, then virtually all of UNC's doctoral programs could fall within the top 25 percent nationally in at least one of the NRC ranking methods.

Matson said the NRC results already are providing valuable feedback that will help make the University better and give future students more helpful information to consider as they make choices about graduate education.

“Our focus will be on using this information to help improve programs,” he said. “We don't view the NRC process as perfect, but it's a positive step forward for evaluating the quality of doctoral education in the United States. That is important because our doctoral program graduates are a critical part of the highly skilled workforce our nation needs to remain competitive.”

UNC's full NRC results are available on the Graduate School website, <http://gradschool.unc.edu/nrc>. The NRC's project website is available at <http://www.nap.edu/rdp>.

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