PRESS STATEMENT ON NRC REPORT

Princeton Ph.D. programs get high marks in national assessment

The majority of Princeton University's Ph.D. programs evaluated in a national assessment of research colleges and universities released Sept. 28 ranked among the best in the country.

Princeton was one of 212 research institutions that contributed data to the National Research Council (NRC) for its report, "An Assessment of Doctoral Programs in the United States," which was developed as a new national resource on graduate education. Twenty-one of Princeton's 35 programs evaluated in the assessment received rankings that were at or very near the top of their field.

The NRC assessment evaluated programs on two scales: survey-based "S-rankings," which reflect the degree to which a program is strong in the characteristics that faculty in the field rated as most important to the overall quality of a program; and regression-based "R-rankings," which compare the statistics of individual doctoral programs based on faculty evaluators' opinions about a sample of programs in that field. The number of evaluated programs within specific fields varied widely according to the number of institutions that provided data for their programs. For example, the number of psychology Ph.D. programs evaluated by the NRC was 237, while 74 programs were evaluated in operations research, systems engineering and industrial engineering.

According to the NRC data for Princeton:

- Fourteen of Princeton’s evaluated programs were very highly rated in both the S-rankings and R-rankings such that the ratings these programs received were entirely above the ratings received by 80 percent of the programs in their fields.
- Among these 14 programs, six of the programs -- those in applied and computational mathematics, psychology, electrical engineering, mathematics, computer science and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International affairs -- have top rating ranges among programs across the country, rating between 1 and 4 on both the S-rankings and R-rankings.
- An additional nine programs had top ratings on one of the two rating scales: Eight programs -- those in astrophysical science, civil and environmental engineering, ecology and evolutionary biology, economics, English, history, philosophy and sociology -- had S-rankings between 1 and 4; and one program -- French and Italian -- had an R-ranking between 1 and 4.
- Twenty-one out of 35 evaluated programs received S-ranking ranges of between 1 and 10.
- The majority of Princeton's evaluated programs within the humanities (six out of 11), social sciences (five out of seven), the natural sciences and mathematics (six out of 11) and engineering (four out of six) are very highly rated, receiving S-ranking ranges that fall between 1 and 10.
- The high-rated programs showed strength in the following highly weighted characteristics in the survey rankings: high faculty research activity on a per-faculty
basis; strong student financial and programmatic support; and good productivity of Ph.D.’s, including good completion rates and consistently low time-to-degree.

"Princeton is justifiably proud of the high quality of its faculty, its graduate programs and its graduate students," said William Russel, dean of the Graduate School. "We remain committed to providing relatively small programs that ensure a high level of engagement between faculty and students; guaranteed multi-year funding for doctoral students in all disciplines; a residential campus experience for graduate students; and vigorous intellectual exchange across departmental and divisional lines. We encourage prospective applicants to consider carefully which programs might best meet their specific needs, and we hope students find the NRC assessment a useful new tool in that process."

Princeton participated in the assessment in support of the NRC’s stated twin goals of helping institutions improve their programs and providing more information about specific graduate programs to prospective students. Since the report is based on data collected for the 2005-06 academic year, it does not reflect significant changes in the intervening years in the faculty and doctoral programs at Princeton and other universities, including the introduction of two high-quality Ph.D. programs at Princeton, in neuroscience and in quantitative and computational biology, that have been established since the study was conducted.

"The report should be a valuable resource for institutions across the country as a stimulus for motivating improvements in admissions processes, financial support, advising and mentoring, degree requirements, professional development and career advising, and ultimately completion," Russel said.

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