

# Report: African-Americans still underrepresented in the physical sciences

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African-American students remain underrepresented in physical science and engineering disciplines, according to a new report from the American Institute of Physics (AIP) Statistical Research Center (SRC).

The report shows that while the total number of bachelor's [degrees](#) obtained in the past decade by African-Americans has increased each year, this growth is not mirrored by increased representation in the [physical sciences](#) and engineering.

"More African-Americans are getting college degrees in all subjects, but this growth is not seen in science and engineering," said Laura Merner, a principal research associate at AIP and author of the new report. "At current growth rates it would take over 100 years before African-Americans would be equally represented in the physical sciences and engineering," she added.

Merner and her colleagues analyzed data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, a database maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The report explores trends across 15 sub-disciplines in the physical sciences and engineering.

Overall the last decade has seen a boom of degrees granted in some disciplines. Undergraduate degrees in physics that are granted to people of all races have increased 58 percent since 2003 in the United States. At the same time, the number of physics degrees earned by African-

Americans remained stagnant. African-Americans also remain significantly underrepresented in the fields of astronomy, materials science and engineering.

In the much larger field of engineering, the number of bachelor's degrees earned during this period by African-American students in the United States increased by 10 percent, which was significantly lower than the overall 29 percent increase in engineering degrees seen across all U.S. bachelor's recipients.

Of all the disciplines analyzed in this report, engineering technology is the only field in which African-Americans are earning bachelor's degrees at the same proportion as all U.S. bachelor degree recipients. The authors found that the greatest increases for African-American students were in the earth sciences, atmospheric sciences and civil engineering.

"This report shows that African-Americans continue to increase representation among bachelor's degree earners; however, significant gaps remain in the physical sciences and engineering," said SRC Director Rachel Ivie.

**More information:** The full report, part of a series on underrepresented minorities in physical sciences and engineering, can be viewed online at [www.aip.org/statistics/reports ... nces-and-engineering](http://www.aip.org/statistics/reports...nces-and-engineering)

Provided by American Institute of Physics

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