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Education

Most with college STEM degrees go to work in other fields, survey finds



By **Wesley Robinson** July 10

People with bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering and math are more likely than other college graduates to have a job, but most of them don't work in STEM occupations, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report released Thursday.

Nearly 75 percent of all holders of bachelor's degrees in STEM disciplines don't have jobs in STEM occupations, according to a survey that reached 3.5 million homes, said Liana Christin Landivar, a sociologist with the Census Bureau. The bureau's American Community Survey is the largest household survey in the nation.

About half of those who have degrees related to

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engineering, computers, math and statistics do get a STEM job, the survey found.

The survey also found that men still have most of the jobs in STEM fields, especially in engineering and computers. Researchers cite access and opportunity as reasons women and minorities are underrepresented.

The report comes at a time when national educational initiatives and funding are focused on increasing participation and graduation rates in the STEM disciplines, in part because of a belief that the United States is losing ground internationally.

The Census Bureau data shows that most of those who dedicate their college years to STEM subjects veer into other fields.

[Use the Census Bureau's interactive tool](#)

Click above to see an interactive tool from the U.S. Census Bureau that shows where college graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) end up working. According to the Census Bureau, 74 percent of them do not go into STEM fields.

Landivar said there are many reasons students don't get STEM jobs, including that STEM degrees provide a range of career options. Landivar noted that some biology majors, for instance, will go to medical school and become doctors. Because of the way the Census Bureau classifies

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jobs, doctors are not listed among STEM professionals.

Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, said STEM degrees are becoming “universal degrees.”

Carnevale said the report is not an indication of an oversupply of STEM graduates. He said STEM students are securing jobs in supply-chain management, inventory control and quality control — fields in which technical knowledge is required. He said there is a broad market for people with the right credentials, even though STEM jobs make up less than 6 percent of employment.

“If we’re overproducing STEM, why aren’t wages down?” Carnevale said.

Michael S. Teitelbaum, senior research associate in the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School, said certain fields do have good job prospects, but he cautioned against blindly guiding students into STEM disciplines.

“The STEM acronym is increasingly misleading rather than informative,” Teitelbaum said. He said that studies have found that nearly 20 percent of all jobs should be considered STEM-related, based on the technology used. The workers involved could include heating and air-conditioning installers, carpenters and automotive technicians, whose careers require technical knowledge but not a STEM degree, he said.

Teitelbaum said data indicate that there are at least twice

as many people entering the workforce as there are jobs in STEM fields for those with a bachelor's degree.

“If we continue to make career paths so bad for recent grads in science, math and engineering ... depending on the sub-field, it can be really bad,” Teitelbaum said.