

# Postsecondary Bioethics Degrees Conferred in the United States, 2000-2013

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Study of Bioethical Issues  
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Lee LM, McCarty FA. Postsecondary bioethics degrees conferred in the United States, 2000-2013. *Hastings Center Report* 2015 (in press).

The findings and conclusions reported here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions of our home institutions.

# Background

- Bioethics has grown rapidly since its ‘birth’ in 1960s
- Debate regarding whether bioethics is a discipline, field, or something else
- Teaching competency has been a concern from the start

# Background

- The Hastings Center: *The Teaching of Bioethics*, 1976
  - Described scope of bioethics teaching
  - Handful of small-scale programs within philosophy and religion departments
  - MA, PhD unnecessary in late 1970s
  - Left door open for creation of formal degree programs

# Background

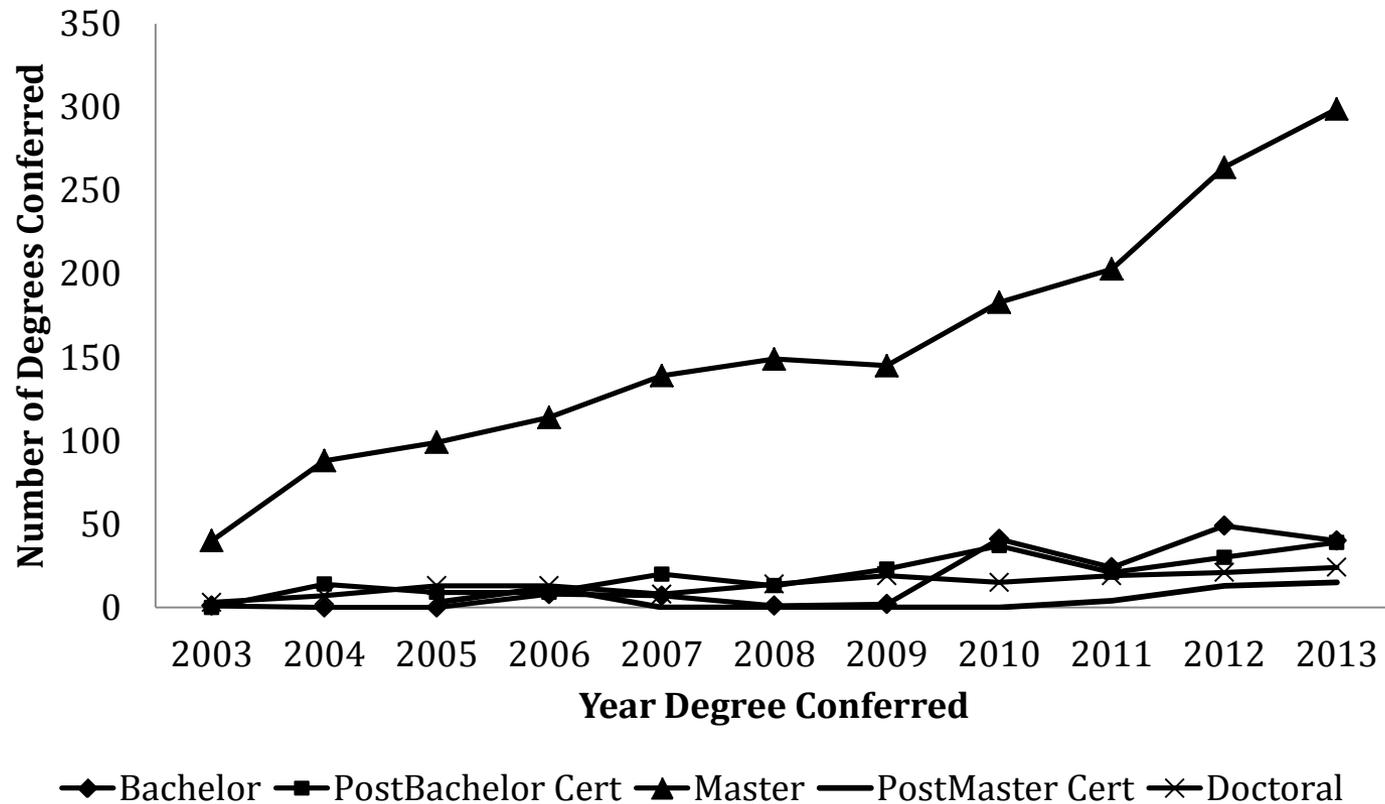
- Efforts over past decade to develop methods and theory
- Calls for integrated training and dual competence
- New programs enrolling bioethics ‘majors’
- Objective: To examine the number and types of US bioethics degrees and programs since 2000

## Methods

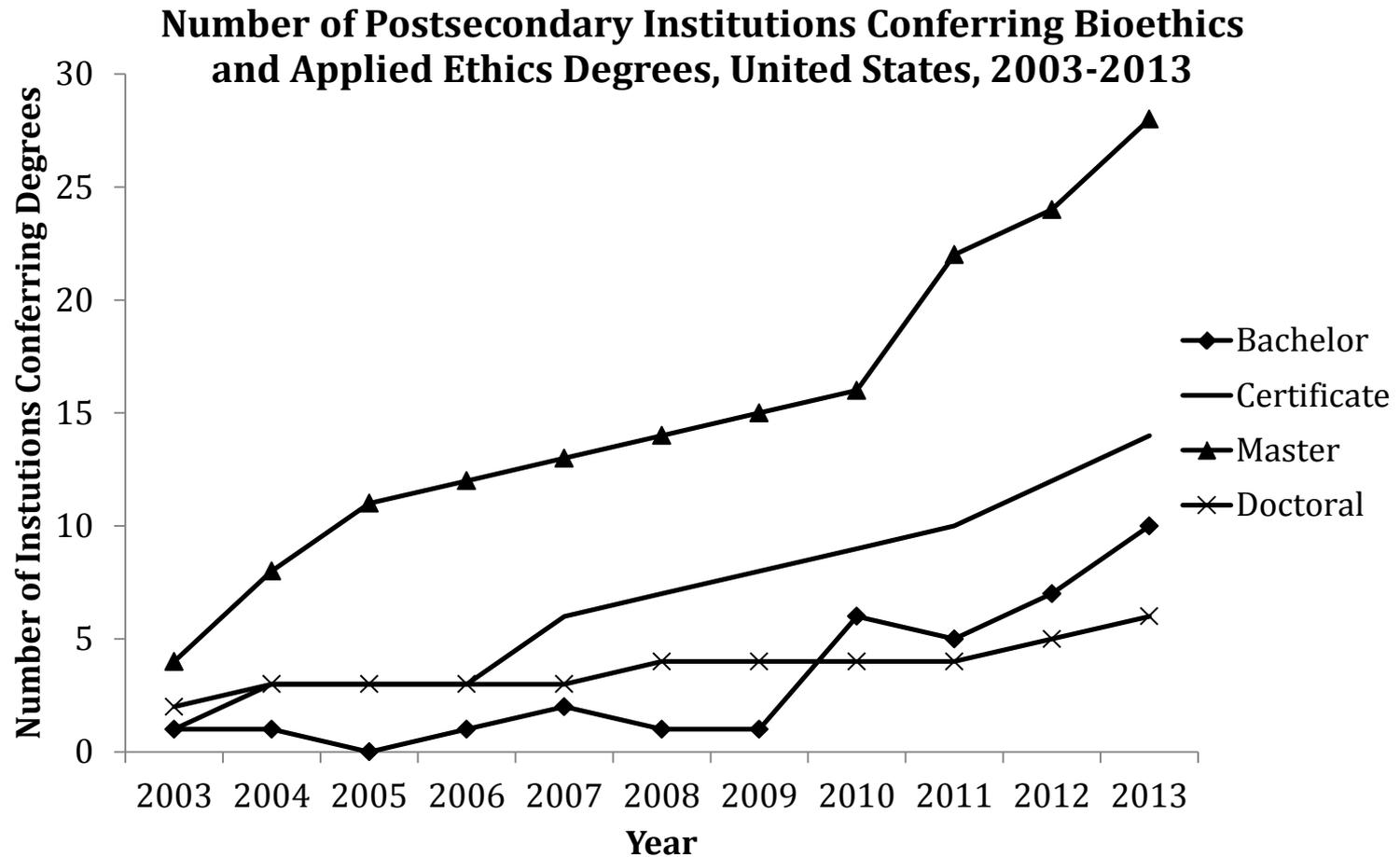
- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
  - National Center for Education Statistics
  - Requirement for institutions participating in federal financial aid program
- Degree coded by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) system
  - Four revisions since 1985, most recent in 2010
  - Bioethics (2000) and applied/professional ethics (2010)

# Results

**Number of Postsecondary Bioethics Degrees Conferred,  
United States, 2003-2013**



# Results



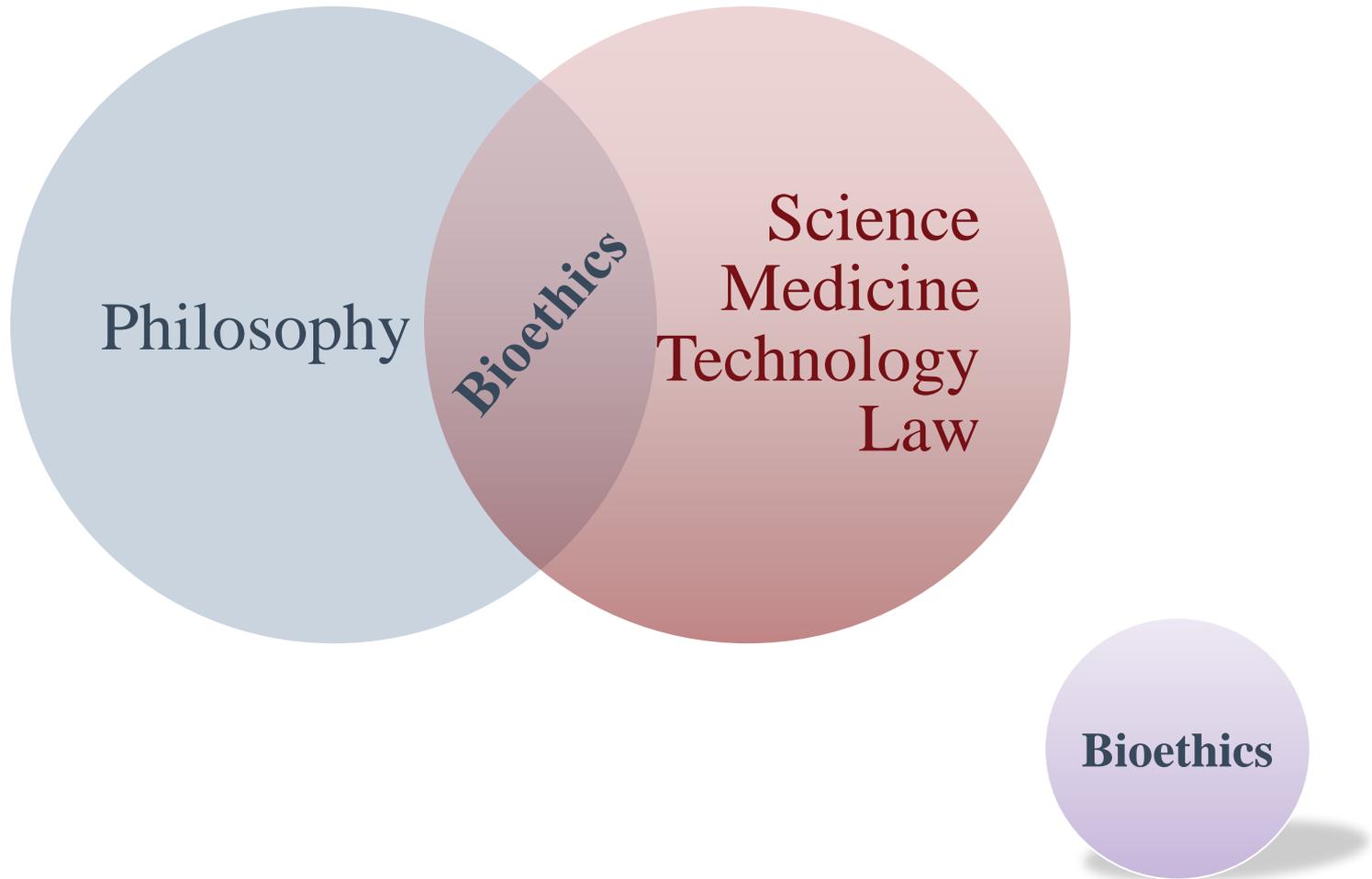
## Limitations

- Data likely underestimate both number of degrees and number of programs
  - Uptake of new codes takes 1-2 years
- Does not represent the number of bioethicists
  - Training of persons who consider themselves bioethicists varies
- Unable to assess consistency across programs

# Findings

- Since turn of century, number of degrees and degree programs has grown at both undergraduate and graduate levels
- Greatest growth in master's degrees and certificates
  - Indicates persons studying bioethics are prepared in other primary disciplines
  - Augmentation of professional disciplinary credentials

# Findings



## Possible Next Steps for the Field

- Accreditation standards and consistency across programs
  - What can one expect to gain from postsecondary training in bioethics?
  - What does it mean to have a master's degree in bioethics?
- Reflection on what it means to be a 'bioethicist'

**Thank you**