Data Reporting Brown Bag: How & Why the Graduate School Counts Students?

I. How does the Graduate School categorize students?
At Cornell, graduate study is organized using a “field” structure. Fields are composed of faculty members from one or more departments who come together around a shared intellectual interest, and may draw from different campuses or colleges. Graduate students are admitted to fields of study.

By design, graduate study at Cornell is cross-disciplinary and integrative. Students experience considerable flexibility, freedom, and independence in their academic programs. Students take an active role in defining their academic pursuit under the guidance of a faculty committee.

a. **Graduate Field (primarily)**
   i. the unit a prospective student applies, and is admitted, to
   ii. academic plans (i.e., the degree programs) are individually mapped to graduate field
   iii. academic and administrative “home” for each graduate student

b. **Other**
   i. **GS College** – the Graduate School assigns each graduate student into the college associated with the primary appointment of his or her special committee chair (or advisor, for professional master’s students)
   ii. **Degree Type** – the Graduate School administers graduate research (doctoral and master’s) and professional (master’s) degrees
   iii. **Discipline** – the Graduate School organizes fields in four fields of study: Arts & Humanities, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Engineering, and Social Sciences

II. Why do we categorize students as we do?

a. **Internal reasons;** including:
   i. academic flexibility, collaboration and community
   ii. field faculty have jurisdiction over graduate work via the advising relationship or special committee structure
   iii. the ”GS college” approach aligns with the need to understand faculty effort
   iv. programming, opportunities, support and services often offered at field level
   v. funding allocations

b. **External reporting;** including:
   i. Council of Graduate Schools
   ii. National Science Foundation
   iii. US News and World Report
   iv. Petersons

Remember:
The answer depends on the question, and context is key--Cornell is large and complex and for all the right reasons, “student” can be counted in myriad ways!