

History of the world*

*According to Faculty Resources in US History Departments

Luke S. Roberts, UCSB, an unpublished essay written in 2005 and reflecting 2005 conditions

What is the shape of the commitment of history departments in the US to the study of humanity's history? History departments in the US devote over two thirds of faculty resources to the instruction of US and European history. Despite the growth in the teaching of world history on US campuses over the past half century and decades of academic debate over Eurocentrism in the humanities and social sciences, a survey of the largest UC system history departments shows that there has been remarkable stability in the percentage of faculty devoted to what I will call US/EU history and the remainder devoted to the rest of the world, while the smaller departments have shown some increase in diversity. This essay will lay out the facts of the distribution at present in various universities across the US and historically within one large university system, the UC system, and then briefly consider how this situation is related to and supported by widely held beliefs, student education requirements, and numerous institutional pressures.

I studied the current distribution of faculty resources by choosing 12 history departments of major universities, four from the East coast, four from the Central regions and four from the West coast, and surveying their faculty web pages to learn the number of regular faculty and their regions of specialization. I defined eight world regions according to current widely held notions of long-term broad cultural spheres. Although the specific nature, character and number of these regions is certainly open to debate, they serve as a rough and practical tool for addressing the spread of regional interest. While carrying out the survey I found that in almost all cases the assignment of faculty to one of these regions according to the specializations listed on the web pages was self evident, but in borderline cases I had to consult the actual teaching and publishing record of the faculty to make my judgment.¹ The twelve departments are all respected, substantial departments ranging in size from 26 to 93 faculty members and collectively represent 595 history professors, and are theoretically capable of covering all eight regions. The distribution is presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1**Area Distribution of Faculty in 12 major US University History Departments by faculty number²**

University	Total	US	Europe	Lat Am	Mid East	S. Asia	E. Asia	Africa	SEAsia Pacific
Berkeley	59	16	26	4	3	1	7	1	1
Chicago	41	10	20	2	2	1	5	1	0
Columbia	50	17	22	2	3	1	3	2	0
Duke	37	18	12	3	0	1	2	1	0
Harvard	53	16	22	3	4	1	4	2	1
Hawaii	26	6	7	0	1	0	7	0	5
Michigan	93	33	36	7	2	4	5	3	3
Oregon	28	9	10	2	0	0	5	1	1
Princeton	49	14	22	0	0	1	8	3	1
Texas	64	31	15	6	4	2	4	2	0
Washington	42	13	18	2	0	0	5	1	3
Wisconsin	53	20	18	4	2	1	3	3	2
TOTALS	595	203	228	35	21	13	58	20	17
PERCENTAGE	100%	34.1%	38.3%	5.9%	3.5%	2.1%	9.7%	3.4%	2.9%
		72.4%		27.6%					

This chart reveals a strong emphasis on the teaching of US and European history. On average 34.1 percent of faculty specialize in the history of the United States, and 38.3 percent in Europe. The next most common regions are East Asia with 9.7 percent of faculty and Latin America with 5.9 percent. Less than 4 percent each were devoted to the following regions (in declining order): the Middle East, Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia. Within the non-US/EU categories the prominence seems loosely associated with the wealth and power of the modern nations within each region, but proximity may play a part as well. At any rate, one divide is consistent and clear: The US and EU collectively represent the bulk of department faculty members with 72.4 percent of faculty while 27.6 percent specialize in the history of the remainder of the world. Of the twelve, only the history department at the University of Hawaii at Manoa is clearly different, with a US/EU versus Other distribution exactly even at 50 percent each. It is likely that Hawaii's physical location and cultural makeup account for its special character, making Asia

and Pacific of importance. The remaining continental departments each devote more than two-thirds of faculty resources to US/EU with Duke at the peak devoting just over four-fifths. The remarkable consistency in the hierarchy of resource distribution along this divide suggests that it is broadly representative of the realities of history education at larger universities in the US. With regard to the “shape” of world history referred to in the introduction, the Map in the Appendix is a cartogram that projects the regions of the world according to the weight of their importance in the history departments studied above. It arguably represents the image of the world produced in the minds and hearts of students passing through the history departments of US universities.

Do the above figures exaggerate the regional discrepancy? Certainly most of these universities have historians in area studies departments of, say, Middle Eastern Studies and East Asian Studies etc., whereas few universities have departments named European Studies or American Studies. However, we must first consider that the notion of “area studies” is actually a cultural term implicitly based on a we/they dichotomy that selectively identifies only non-US/EU programs. In this discourse US/EU programs are just “reality” rather than area. Conscious expression of the area focuses of many departments that are in reality US/EU area studies departments is generally absent. Medieval Studies, Classics, Philosophy, Asian-American Studies, Spanish, and English Departments etc. are all departments that teach about the areas of the US or Europe and many of these have historians in their faculty. Since there are a large number of such departments devoted to the US and European regions and at best only one department each for the other regions it is likely that a similar pattern of disparity is replicated throughout the humanities and social sciences, although measuring this would be exceedingly complex and is beyond the scope of this essay.

It is impossible to survey the past distributions using the departmental web pages of these universities, but I was able to investigate historic trends of this bias for some UC system history departments using old catalogues. The University of California has history departments at each of its eight general campuses. First I discovered the present situation through a survey of the departmental web pages. Collectively the eight UC system history departments devote 69.4 percent of faculty resources to US and European history as can be seen in Chart 2. This is a few percentage points lower than the average of the twelve schools discussed above, but can be accounted for by the displacement of three percent from US to Latin American history. The percentage devoted to European history is essentially the same as the national average, giving the lie to the oft-heard notion that the East coast of the US is more focused on Europe than the West coast. The UC system average is within the range of the continental universities

surveyed above. The UC system contains a variety of old and new history departments, and has a variety in department size ranging from 22 to 84 faculty members. The smaller, newer departments that were founded since the end of the 1950's tend to have a smaller US/EU percentage. One exception is UCSB, which is newer but is large and, indeed, has the largest US/EU percentage of the eight campuses. Counterintuitively, the departments with the most resources devote proportionately less attention to the world outside the US/EU sphere of history. This suggests that the problem is one of the configurations of power rather than a lack of resources. Where power intensifies, so does the focus on the US/EU region.

Chart 2

US/EU vs. Other Distribution of Faculty in UC History Departments Indicating Faculty Size and Percentage³

Campus	Total Faculty Number	US/EU%	Other%
UCLA	84	73.8%	26.2%
UC Berkeley	59	71.1	28.9
UCSB	49	77.6	22.4
UCSD	39	64.1	35.9
UCI	36	61.1	38.9
UCD	34	61.8	38.2
UC Riverside	24	66.7	33.3
UCSC	23	65.2	34.8
Total	350	69.4	30.6

In order to investigate the historic change in this distribution I found older catalogues from five UC system campuses, including those having the three largest history departments. The UC Berkeley general catalogue from 1947-48 reveals that 71.4% of history department faculty resources were then devoted to the teaching of US/EU history and 28.5% to the history of other regions of the world. This compares to a 71.1% versus 28.9% ratio in 2005, and suggests no significant change over the intervening half century. UCLA had a distribution of 78.6% of faculty resources devoted to US/EU education and 21.4% to the history of other regions in 1961-62. This compares to 73.8% versus 26.2% in 2005 reflecting a small five percent shift in emphasis toward the history of other regions over the four decades. UCSB's history department had 100% of its faculty devoted to US/EU history in its first year of existence in

1959-60, but by the 1964-5 academic year 70.6% of its faculty taught US/EU history and 29.4% taught other regional histories. In 2004-5 UCSB devoted 77.6% of its faculty resources to US/EU and 22.4% to the history of other regions, representing a shift of seven percent towards US/EU history over the intervening four decades. The average of the three examples reveals no change in the US/EU vs. the Other percentages over the past four to five decades in the three largest history departments of the UC system.⁴ By contrast, UC Santa Cruz devoted 86% of faculty to US/EU history in 1966-7 and only 65% in 2005-6, and UC Irvine devoted 90.5% as recently as 1985-6 but only 61.1% in 2005-6. I was unable to collect data on the historical change in the other UC campuses, but it is likely that they followed a trajectory similar to UCSC and UCI.⁵

It is surprising that there has been no change in the largest departments—the very ones that have substantial resources and saw much growth over the decades—because there are many phenomena that would lead one to expect a gradual expansion of non-Western historical studies since the end of WWII. Since the end of the war the US has significantly extended its influence and defined its strategic interests to lie in all of the regions of the world. The government has supported the creation of area studies departments and instituted numerous forms of fellowship and grant supports for Area Studies, most famously in the Fulbright and Foreign Language and Area Studies programs, with the interest of having academia produce specialists of numerous regions of the world.⁶ Furthermore, the formal colonial order largely disappeared in the two decades following WWII, and many colonies located in the regions of world in the Other category gained a political dignity and significance as nations. Because the modern and current profession of history is primarily organized around the research and creation of historical narratives of national relevance—stories of national selves and national others—one might expect a concomitant rise in interest.⁷ Thirdly, since the 1950's the cumulative effect of the civil rights movement in the US would seem likely to have led to greater interest in the histories of the originary regions of the non-European-originated peoples of the modern US. Finally, the emergence within academia of the fields of post-modern studies, post-colonial studies, multicultural studies, global studies and world history itself would all seem to encourage greater devotion of resources to research of and education about regions of the world outside of the US and Europe. Yet if the trend in the large departments of the UC system indicates national trends, then this seems not to have been the case at what are regarded as leading universities. History seems to have been steadily focused on the home nation and the originary regions of the hereditarily powerful members of the United States. Given the above mentioned conditions that might suggest an

increasing devotion over time to historical research and teaching concerning other parts of the world than Europe and the United States, what can account for the stability?

Certainly conservative cultural values play a role. Many people in the historical profession in the US believe that the history of the US and Europe is more important than that of other regions. Some conservative historians and pundits have even argued that the “decline” of a Eurocentric focus has brought about a general cultural decline and confusion of values in the US. The historian J.H. Hexter wrote an essay in 1985 devoted to exposing what he regarded as a decline of Western Civilization education, where he stated, “The consequence of the temporary—one longs to believe—collapse of parts of our curricula in high school and college has been that in terms of formal education we have effectively lobotomized a generation or so of our society. The operation has deeply impaired in that generation some of the important sensors by which men systematically orient themselves.”⁸ I put quotation marks around the word decline because, as my survey shows, there may have been no decline, and perhaps the use of the word is a rhetorical strategy designed to provoke fear and prevent change rather than a reaction to actual change. Indeed, Harvard, which Hexter mentions with disdain as having “given up” its duties appears twenty years later from Chart 1 not to be in any danger of careening off the road in a spasm of disorientation. I should here note that my impression as a faculty member of a UC history department and an active historian is that the majority of faculty profess that the histories of various places of the world are important as examples of human history, and perhaps even equally so. The dictums of pundits such as Allan Bloom, devoted to celebrating the histories of the ancestors of those people who have inherited and wield power in the US may be influential in broader society but do not hold the same degree of authority among the majority of the well-educated historians who have run the hiring decisions of history departments in recent years.⁹ Therefore, we should consider other reasons for the steady emphasis on US/EU history. Some of these are more institutional than ideological.

Having a professor teach, say, South Asian history might be intellectually interesting, but the faculty members in charge of hiring often consider that potentially low enrollments would hurt the department’s competition for resources within the larger university, or perhaps they might consider a pressing situation that there were not enough faculty to teach the heavily enrolled lower division Western Civilization course. It is impossible to say what students would choose if there were no area requirements guiding their choice of courses. However, it is clear that requirements at various levels of administrative competence heavily influence current enrollment distribution. The example of UCSB suggests that general education requirements, the requirements for history department majors, and

the requirements of other departments in the university have fostered an emphasis on US/EU historical study. First I will summarize a look at UCSB's History Department lower division major requirements based on a collection of handouts given to history majors since 1970.¹⁰ What we find is an *increasing* emphasis on US/EU history. Between 1970 and 1972 students had to take three courses of European history, two courses of either US history or Latin American history, and either History 19A (East Asia) or B (Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East). Between 1972-3 and 1984-5 students had to take three courses of European history, one course of Asian, African, or Middle Eastern History, one course of Non-European history (this might include U.S. history), and 2 lower division courses of choice. From 1985-6 until the 2000-1 academic year all majors were required to take the three-course lower division European history survey, the three-course US history lower division survey and a single one course survey of any other region of the world. It is no accident that this recent distribution roughly approximates the current faculty percentages in the department, and that as the requirements became more centered on US/EU history faculty percentages increased in that direction as well. A department needs appropriate numbers of faculty to teach the required courses, and hiring requests are themselves largely justified by "student demand," which in turn is maintained by the above requirements. Since 1985 when there was the addition of a US history requirement and a lessening of the requirement for non-US/EU study there has been the highest average of US/EU faculty in the department for any decade since 1965.¹¹ One may note that the majority of classes required for the history major--the remaining 11 upper division classes--have no area specialization, but the lower division introduction of history has by that point invested students into a path down the US/EU-centered road of knowledge. Since the 2001-2 academic year, history majors must take any two of the three lower division course series in European, US, and World history. These requirements have a logic of geographic hierarchy. They make one national history the equivalent of one regional history and also of the whole world. Although World history devotes substantial--and in some cases a preponderance of--attention to US/EU histories, still this change to including world history has potentially increased the scope of Other history by the portion of three World history classes devoted to non-US/EU histories for those students who choose to take World history. As World history enrollments rise, this may influence hiring decisions in the future in a search for more faculty willing to teach World history.

At any rate, whatever incremental changes the History Department might propose must be interpreted in a context of additional constraints on student freedom posed by requirements at higher levels and in other departments. Requirements from outside the department have clearly worked to increase enrollment pressure on the US/EU courses

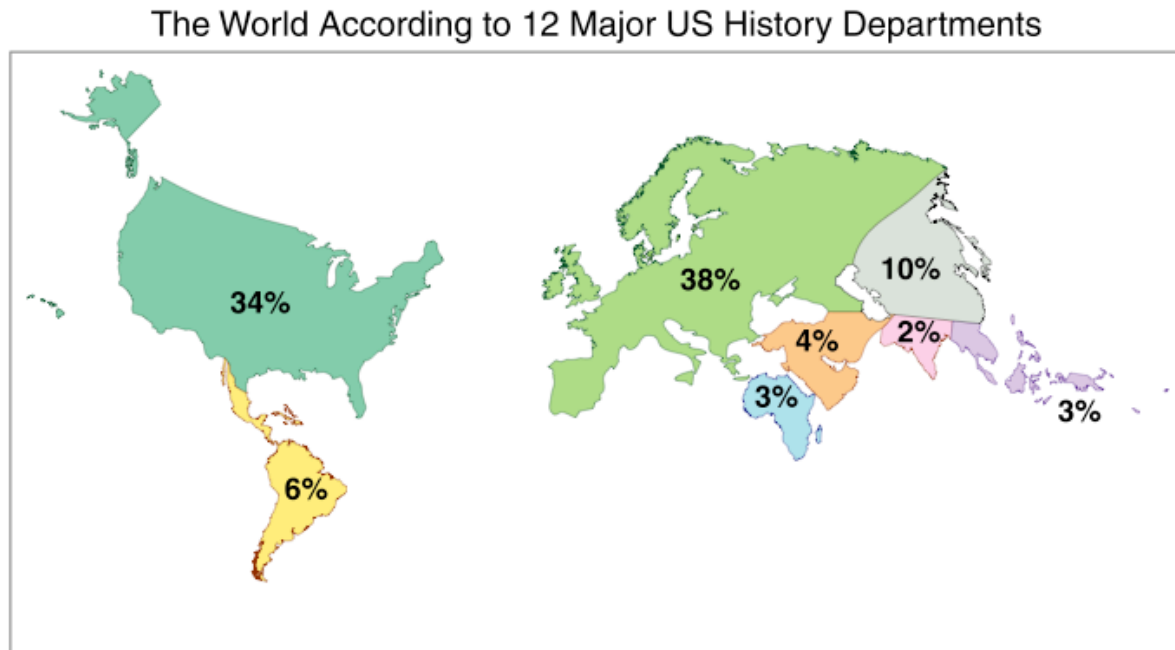
of the history department. There is for example a university system wide requirement that students take some course in American history and institutions. This leads students in history to take U.S. history courses, although it can be satisfied by courses in other departments as well. UCSB General Education requirements from 1985-6 until 2003-4 had all students take three Civilization and Thought courses, and at least two had to be Western Civilization courses while one could be either a Western Civilization or a “World Civilizations and Thought” course.¹² The only History Department option for the required two Western Civilization courses was the Western Civilization survey. These GE requirements had no specific provision for U.S. history, nor were students required to take a course devoted to ethnicity in the U.S., both of which had been required before 1985. This significant change may be the cause of the sudden appearance in 1985 of the U.S. history requirement within the History Department for its majors. Furthermore, in the early 1990’s a subject area “Ethnicity Requirement” that requires one course in the study of the experiences of excluded and oppressed racial minorities in the United States, appeared in the General Education Requirements. Because studies of ethnicity in other regions of the world does not meet this requirement, the available history courses to meet this requirement are all naturally in U.S. history. General Education requirements were changed again in 2004-5 leading to slightly less focus on Western Civilization. Discussions leading to this change reveal a long-term debate over the meaning and desirability of a Western Civilization requirement.¹³ The curious result was allowing the World History survey to fulfill a refashioned European Traditions Requirement of one course. Students are also required to take one course for the Non-Western Civilizations requirement, putting “the West” and “the Rest” so to speak on parity, making one region equivalent in value to the sum of all the other regions of the world. In this way students from outside the department have been variously encouraged by requirements to focus on US/EU education when they take history classes, and the same pressures have encouraged the choices of majors as well. Since 1985, GE has required only one course on somewhere else in the world. I would argue that this is naturally reflected in enrollments and ultimately in faculty distribution. Additionally some departmental major requirements outside of history encourage this same bias. For example although the discipline of sociology as such does not profess to be area specific, nevertheless the Sociology Department required for many years all of its majors to take the lower division survey of U.S. history, although now it requires just the 20th century portion of that history and a choice of either European or Latin American history. Africa and all of Asia and the Pacific are not required grist for the student sociological mind it seems. In another example, the Law and Society Program requires its students to take four courses from a range of departments and the History department options are either the lower division US survey or the

Western Civilization survey of the History Department. The Political Science Department requires students to take the Western Civilization course. Because such large majors as these require US/EU study there is certainly increased student investment in these two areas and enrollments in US/EU history courses. This ensures “student demand” that influences the area distribution of history faculty.

This essay has revealed that large History departments in the United States generally devote over two thirds of resources to the study of the United States and Europe. Whether such a focus is a good thing or not has long been the subject of debate in academia and the public sphere. Despite the debate and other historic forces that might have encouraged a change in the proportion of historical study of the rest of the world in US history departments, a survey of the history of the three largest UC system history departments suggest remarkable stability in the area distribution. This paper suggests that, in addition to conservative values, one important cause is a system requiring students to focus their study on the US and Europe, with any region of the rest of the world being studied as an add on or an Other. This three-part division of historical knowledge, making the history of one country equivalent to the history of one cultural region, and equivalent to “the Rest” creates a hierarchy of knowledge and identity in student historical consciousness appropriate to a century of national identity creation and also appropriate to the maintenance of current inherited hierarchies of social power and importance. One can see from this that the modern field of History is no more a dispassionate and objective study of humanity in its preoccupations than it has ever been in our world; that the practice of History is always deeply imbedded within its political and social present.

APPENDIX

MAP



Source: same as for Chart 1. Image created by Dottie McClaren for Luke Roberts

¹ “Borderline” cases represented less than five per cent of the faculty surveyed. “Jewish Studies” was one commonly encountered category that I assigned variously the Europe, Middle East or US according to publications. I assigned historians of Russia/ Soviet Union to Europe, and historians of “North Africa and Middle East” to the Middle East despite the ambiguities. Pre-20th century historians of science were easy to place in a region as were legal historians but a few of the 20th century faculty were the most difficult to decide for and somewhat arbitrarily placed in either U.S. and Europe. One faculty member of Duke University researches and teaches mostly concerning colonial Canada and somewhat the US and I assigned him to the US. I did not begin by ignoring Australia but the departments did.

I only included full, associate and assistant professors. I did not include affiliated faculty but did include those with actual dual department membership.

² Sources. The following web pages all visited on August 22, 2005: UC Berkeley, <http://history.berkeley.edu/faculty/> ; University of Chicago, <http://history.uchicago.edu/faculty/index.html#alpha> ; Columbia University, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/history/faculty/faculty_pbn.htm ; Duke University, <http://fds.duke.edu/db/aas/history/faculty/>; Harvard University, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~history/faculty.cgi> ; University of Hawaii at Manoa <http://www.catalog.hawaii.edu/academic-units/arts-sciences/departments/hist.htm> ; University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/history/facstaff/> ; University of Oregon, <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~history/faculty.html#regular> ; Princeton University, <http://his.princeton.edu/people/faculty/> ; University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/history/faculty/> ; University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/history/faculty/regular.html> ; University of Wisconsin, http://history.wisc.edu/fpdb/Faculty/faculty_fulllisting.asp

³ Sources. The following web pages all visited on August 22, 2005: UCLA, <http://www.history.ucla.edu/faculty/faculty.php> ; UC Berkeley, <http://history.berkeley.edu/faculty/> ; UCSB, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/facultydirectory.htm#c> ; UC San Diego, http://historyweb.ucsd.edu/pages/people/people_faculty2.html ; UC Irvine, <http://www.hnet.uci.edu/history/faculty/regional/> ; UC Davis, <http://history.ucdavis.edu/faculty.shtml> ; UC Riverside, http://historyweb.ucsd.edu/pages/people/people_faculty2.html ; UC Santa Cruz, <http://history.ucsc.edu/faculty/>

The same methods of identification were applied as for Chart 1

⁴ The combined number of faculty for the three early dates are 49 US/EU to 17 Other. In 2004-5 this number was 142 US/EU to 50 other. In both the ratio of 74% to 26% is nearly identical. Since the older catalogues did not indicate area specialization by the faculty member name, I deduced specialization from the courses they taught, sometimes having to check in catalogues of the previous or subsequent year for faculty on leave.

⁵ UCSC rose from 7 to 23 faculty over the interim, and UCI from 21 to 36.

⁶ Bruce Cummings, "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and After the Cold War" originally appearing in the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars , and viewed Jan. 5, 2005 at

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/cummings2.htm>. This is an interesting polemical piece that also provides an excellent survey of much of the literature on the subject.

⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism: Programme, Myth, and Reality, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Anderson, Benedict, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, London: Verso, rev. ed., 1991.

⁸ From p. 101 of “Introductory College Course in Non-American History: An Ethnocentric View,” pp. 98-103 in Ross Dunn ed., The New World History: A Teacher’s Companion (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martins, 2000).

⁹ Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students (New York, 1987). Certainly there are many passionately Eurocentric historians such as Hexter above and more recently David Landes (The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are So Rich and Some are So Poor, NY: Norton, 1998), but my impression is that they are not even near a majority.

¹⁰ Personal copies of those held in the History Department office at UCSB, with thanks to Mike Tucker for providing me with these.

¹¹ This statement is based on a survey of one UCSB General Catalogue for every five years beginning in the 1964-5 academic year.

¹² All information for this paragraph comes from UCSB General Catalogues for the appropriate years.

¹³ A website devoted to recording the process and discussions can be found at <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/projects/ge/> , and within this site is a page presenting a brief history of discussions on the Western Civilization requirement issue since 1985, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/projects/ge/WCivResponses022.htm>