

The Geography of Humanities PhDs

Dear John,

While you've been [convening your think tank](#), I've been engaged in a secret project. Surprise!

Did you ever wonder where (in the US) humanities PhDs are made?

Turns out English PhDs are made everywhere, which comes as little surprise—although a major caveat about what that means exactly below.

Less self-evidently, the maps I've generated reveal something of the way universities have been distinguishing themselves by supporting additional PhD programs, such as Film Studies, Religion, and Rhetoric.

It turns out to be remarkably easy, if a bit time consuming, to produce maps of this kind of thing using Google's Fusion Tables. I simply downloaded the relevant data from the NCES IPEDS Data Center, selected PhD "first" major completions from it, and then uploaded those to Fusion Tables as a csv file. Google's platform allows one to merge in other data—like the IPEDS information about institutional characteristics that includes the geographical coordinates of reporting institutions. It also allows one to filter and summarize the data in basic ways. It's not possible to save merged, summarized, or filtered data within Google directly, so any serious manipulation requires a process of downloading and the re-uploading the tables one creates. Once the geo-coordinates are in there, Fusion Tables can make a variety of simple maps, and one can combine them using the [Fusion Tables Layer Wizard](#). After learning a bit about how to add Javascript to posts on

our little site here—it's not perfect!—I can present:

2012 Total PhDs by State and Institution.

Click around in it! If it gets confused, refresh your browser.

It turns out, no surprise, that a map of English PhDs looks similar.

2012 English PhDs by State and Institution.

What's with Alaska? You'd think they'd be readers up there. In any case, English PhDs are minted pretty much all over the country and in roughly the same proportions as all PhDs. By "English PhDs" I mean those degrees counted in the two digit CIP 23, so it includes the creative writers and the rhetoric and composition scholars. (Readers wanting a crash course in CIPs can look at my post [here](#).)

Now it gets interesting. It won't surprise you that I next made this map of Film Studies PhDs (CIP 50.0601).

2012 Film Studies PhDs by State and Institution.

Many prominent PhD programs are notably absent here. To try to figure out why, I did some emailing around to colleagues and promptly discovered that most faculty members, even those who have held administrative positions as chairs or directors, have no clue how their institutions report degrees in their fields. This is all decided above, or at least beyond, the department level. Reaching the helpful people in Brown University's [Office of Institutional Research](#), I discovered that their Modern Culture and Media Studies PhD reports under

09.0102 or “Mass Communication/Media Studies” in CIP09 for Communications, which is not typically included in national aggregations for humanities degrees. PhDs in 09.0102 look like this:

2012 Media Studies PhDs by State and Institution.

This is interesting in that it clearly counts programs, like Brown’s, whose graduates think of themselves as Film and Media Studies scholars, while also counting programs, like the one at the University of South Carolina, in Communications proper. The two groups don’t mix as much as we should—we attend different professional conferences, for example. In combination, then, the two maps reveal confusion about how to count “Film and Media Studies” in that similar programs are being counted under different numbers. But they also suggest some kind of clarity in that no institution counts completions in both.

Interestingly, it doesn’t seem to be the case that institutions have decided to support either the more social scientific approach of Mass Communications or the more humanistic approach of Film and Media Studies. Six of the nine institutions producing PhDs under 50.0601 also report PhDs in the “09” Communications area—so they do both even though none of these six reported PhDs under both 50.0601 and 09.0102 specifically. It seems that among those making the selection these two CIPs are seen as alternatives to one another: pick one and place the degree in “humanities”; pick the other and define it as “communications.” The “error,” if we want to call it that, tends to be in the second direction. That is, programs that would probably not think of themselves as “mass communications” are being grouped in that way, but the reverse is unlikely to occur. There is some regional specificity to the pattern, since of the three schools that have 50.0601 PhDs

and 09 PhDs but no 09.0102 PhDs, two, UCLA and UC Berkeley, are in the higher education mega-state of California.

It bears emphasizing that the two maps combined certainly underreport Film and Media Studies PhDs—major programs at NYU and UT Austin don't show up in either list, for instance, and I've been unable to figure out how they are reported.

Of course, even if we mentally combine the two maps we get nothing like the saturation coverage of English. But that merged map might look kinda sorta like that of another relatively small humanities area, Religion/Religious Studies (CIP 38.0201).

2012 Religion PhDs by State and Institution.

With some intriguing differences, both Religion and Film/Media show concentration in the upper Midwest, in the South, New England, Texas, and California (can't get that Dead Kennedys song outta my head, you know the one). These are areas that also show the heaviest concentrations in the totals map with which we started. The big ed states are big no matter which PhD you look at. Since the Religion map is less filled-in, one could see this as the geography of a system that has historically seen PhDs in English and History as foundational "must haves." Institutions added other PhDs as they grew, but more selectively. Notably, there's not all that much institutional overlap between Religion and Film/Media. Of the thirty-eight institutions reporting PhDs in Religion, only eight show up on either the Film or the Media map. So one could say that institutions have chosen to invest in some humanities "extras" and not others.

Of course, this might all look very different if Film and Media Studies were counted in a consistent way. But on the other hand, English and History might look look more like

Media and Religion were subfield emphases broken out. Here, for example, is 23.1304, "Rhetoric and Composition."

2012 Rhetoric PhDs by State and Institution.

Many schools offering PhDs in this discipline probably report them under the more general English CIP 23.0101—probably some Film Studies PhDs are reported that way too! In any case, they will appear in an aggregation of CIP 23. But what if they didn't. In other words, if we freed our tabulation from the sedimented idea that "English" names a disciplinary and institutional unity and distinguished the various emphases and flavors lumped under that heading, would it any longer appear to have the kind of saturation it does in the second map above? Clearly our classification schemes (and to some extent our institutionalized imaginations) have been built on the English-and-History-first-then-humanities-"extras" model. But the drift of PhD programs over the last two or four decades has arguably been in the more selective direction indicated by the Film, Media, and Religion maps. To compete for students and distinction, institutions have sought to distinguish their particular strengths and flavors of degrees among offerings nationwide. It's probably impossible to wrest a map that would show that mosaic from the available data, maybe with a bit more table time...

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