

The Modern Languages in *The 2007–08 Humanities Departmental Survey*

The *2007–08 Humanities Departmental Survey* (HDS) marks a significant addition to the store of information about four-year college and university modern language departments. Chairs and faculty members will be able to use these data to understand their own academic units and will be able to draw on them for support when communicating with deans, provosts, and other institutional administrators. Findings from the survey allow us to compare English and foreign language departments with one another and with other disciplinary units in the humanities, especially history, art history, and religion.¹ We can compare the size of the faculty and student populations in these disciplines, as well as the distributions of faculty members by gender, tenure, and employment status. We can see revealing patterns of similarity and difference for different disciplines in the number of students who complete a major and—an important piece of information available from no other source—a minor. We can see the scale of faculty hiring and tenure activity and even gather a little hint to ponder whether it might be the case, for example, that the historians approach tenure and promotion differently than other humanities faculties.

The survey allows us to see how English and foreign language departments are embedded in the institutional system of higher education. When programs and departments are viewed through the lens of the Carnegie classifications, we can see how differently English programs are distributed across the postsecondary system than foreign language programs. Department chairs will also find answers to at least some questions for which they occasionally want authoritative, systematic information: What percentage of departments have freshman seminars? How many require a senior thesis or capstone course for majors? How many are engaged in planning for assessment of undergraduate student learning? What is the average number of graduate students enrolled in master's- or doctorate-granting departments?

By design the HDS canvassed a random sample of departments stratified by Carnegie classification and highest degree offered. Thus, the weighted findings can be cited as representing the universe of degree-granting departments in United States four-year, not-for-profit Carnegie baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate institutions. Hence, the survey report offers not just percentages but numerical estimates for the national faculty and graduate student populations, numbers of tenurings and denials of tenure, numbers of degree awards, and numbers of majors and minors. These are important points of information to have at our command.² The

¹ Linguistics departments are included in the HDS and could well be included here. I have bracketed them out for the purposes of this discussion because the departmental location of linguistics faculty and programs varies from institution to institution: for example, institutions that do not have a department of linguistics might place their linguistics faculty in their department of English or their department of foreign languages.

² *The 2007–08 Humanities Departmental Survey* did not attempt the difficult task of achieving a precisely apportioned accounting of how faculty members' time (and lines) are split among multiple departments or programs. The survey pursued a different goal: attaining an estimated head count of faculty members with instructional responsibilities in the departments canvassed during the reference period, fall term 2007. Also, as

Modern Language Association (MLA) has developed versions for some of them using data collected by the U.S. Department of Education in the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) and from the MLA's own research—most prominently the *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion* (MLA Task Force 2007) and the MLA's reports (published on the Web as part of the MLA's Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit) on departmental staffing practices and estimates of faculty populations in different employment and tenure statuses and their distribution across the institutional system (ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing 2008; Laurence 2008).

Using a spreadsheet and a dollop of ingenuity, one can probe the survey findings in illuminating ways. Immediately apparent is the large footprint of English and foreign languages, which are the most populous of the humanities disciplines, with twice and one-and-a-half times (respectively) the number of faculty members as the next largest field, history. With well over 1,000 departments each (English has 1,098 and foreign languages have 1,389; in addition, 156 “combined” departments house the two modern language fields together), English and the foreign languages are also the most broadly embedded disciplines across the system. The HDS estimates a total population of 57,370 faculty members in the 2,643 four-year modern language departments. History, with 929 departments, is the only other humanities discipline surveyed with a comparably pervasive systemic presence.

The HDS findings reveal interesting patterns of similarity and difference among English, foreign languages, history, art history, and religion. Especially notable are the differing distributions of departments and faculty members across the three major Carnegie institutional types. At least two-fifths of foreign languages and art history departments are located in Carnegie doctorate institutions, compared with one-fifth of English, history, and religion departments. By contrast, at least two-fifths of English and history departments are located in Carnegie master's universities, while half of all religion departments are found in baccalaureate colleges (see table 1).

These variations in the distribution of departments across the different institutional types should be studied against the quite different distribution of faculty members (see table 2). English, foreign languages, history, and art history each have a similar 15–18 percent of their faculty members located in baccalaureate colleges; religion, with more than 36 percent, stands apart. The concentration of a clear majority—60 percent or more—of foreign language and art history faculty members in doctoral/research universities is striking, as is the low percentage of these disciplines' faculty populations in master's universities (24.7 percent and 20.0 percent respectively) compared with English (39.0 percent), history (40.2 percent), and religion (34.1 percent).

The patterns of the institutional distribution of departments and the faculty populations they contain need to be understood by graduate students and their faculty advisors, as well as by faculty members in the colleges that hire new faculty members from the graduate universities. In English, the 21.1 percent of

Townsend (2010) observes in his essay accompanying the report, the HDS findings should be considered in the light of the report's methodology and its cautions about the sampling and estimation methods used.

departments in doctoral/research universities contain 45.0 percent of the discipline's faculty population, while the 37.7 percent of departments in baccalaureate colleges contain only 16.0 percent. In foreign languages, the 40.0 percent of the departments in doctoral/research universities contain 60.2 percent of the faculty population, and the 32.2 percent of departments in baccalaureate colleges contain 15.1 percent of the field's faculty members. (See figs. 1 and 2.)

Parallel calculations can be performed to show the distributions of departments (and also faculty members) by the highest degree the departments award. The data on the distribution of departments by Carnegie institutional classification and the highest degree the departments offer are cross-tabulated and presented in compact, tabular form in tables 3 (English) and 4 (foreign languages). In table 3, reading across the bottom three (total) rows, we can see that of all 1,098 English departments, 151 (13.8 percent) offer doctorates. Reading down the doctorate-degree column, we see that of the 151 doctorate-granting departments, 143 (94.7 percent) are located in Carnegie doctoral/research universities. And, reading across the doctoral/research university rows, we see that the 143 doctorate-granting English departments located in Carnegie doctoral/research universities represent 61.6 percent of all 232 English departments located in Carnegie doctoral/research universities. Table 4 presents parallel information about the distribution of foreign language departments.

These patterns suggest further questions for analysis. For example, how much does disciplinary variation in the distribution of departments by institutional type and departmental degree contribute to the differences, highlighted in table 7 of the HDS report, in the importance of publications in tenure decisions? That is, to what degree does the comparatively lower percentage of English and religion departments reporting publications as essential in tenure decisions reflect differences in departments' institutional locations rather than differences between the disciplines?

The HDS's accounting of tenure activity (table 5 of the HDS report) will attract attention in the light of recent concerns that assistant professors are being squeezed between institutional demands for publication that seem continually to rise and a publication system rumored to afford humanists fewer and fewer outlets for their work. The data on tenuring presented in table 5 of the survey report accord with those in the *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion*, showing high proportions of faculty members who come up for tenure receiving it—85 percent in foreign languages, 90 percent in English, art history, and religion, and close to 98 percent in history. The exceptionally high tenure rate for history, however, is offset by the high number of history faculty members who leave before coming up for tenure: history has a far higher ratio of such exits to tenure denials than any other field, with 13 exits prior to being considered for tenure to every one candidate denied tenure as compared with ratios of 2.2:1 for English, 2.4:1 for foreign languages, and 2.5:1 for art history. Have the historians made it a disciplinary practice to favor early exits over tenure denials? And how far might such a practice, if it is a practice, be related to history having an established professional career path outside of academe, in historical societies and museums?

The HDS's estimates of bachelor's degree awards, which are based on department chairs' reports, merit comment because these estimates are bound to be compared with information on degree completions published by the U.S. Department of Education. In foreign languages, for example, the *Digest of Education Statistics: 2008*, using Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data, reports that 20,275 bachelor's degrees were awarded in 2006–2007 (Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman 2009, table 285). The HDS estimates a much higher 28,710 degrees for the same academic year (table FL5). But when second majors are counted (as the IPEDS completions data file allows one to do; see IPEDS Data Center 2008), the number of foreign languages bachelor's degrees counted by IPEDS rises by 36 percent, from 20,275 to 27,577. The data published in the *Digest of Education Statistics* omit 7,300 foreign languages degrees, or more than a quarter of such degrees granted in 2006–2007.

Further, the HDS documents an estimated additional 51,670 students who completed a minor in foreign languages in 2006–2007. The figures for majors and minors in English are nearly the inverse of the figures for foreign languages: the HDS estimates that in 2006–2007 54,960 students completed a bachelor's degree in English and 27,710 completed a minor. These HDS data on minors illuminate the significantly larger role foreign languages play in baccalaureate education than a focus on bachelor's degree completions allows one to see. As fig. 3 makes apparent, when minors as well as majors are counted, greater parity exists between the modern languages and literature fields than has previously been supposed.

These remarks but scratch the surface of the HDS findings, which offer a source of disciplinary self-knowledge that will be of interest to students and faculty members and will prove especially useful to department chairs and other administrators as a fund of systematic information from which to harvest documentation salient to their own institutions and situations. Also valuable is the comparative perspective the HDS affords, the ability to see English and foreign languages together with their humanities disciplinary neighbors. Even in areas we thought we knew, like baccalaureate production, the findings offer information that significantly revises our understanding of the scale of educational activity in English and foreign languages.

In addition to the value of specific findings, the HDS demonstrates the power of data collection to illuminate significant institutional realities that would otherwise remain invisible. Once again, what we don't know we don't know turns out to be as potent an influence on institutional decision-making and disciplinary self-understanding as what we think we know. That general lesson tells us why devoting the resources necessary to institutionalize a humanities department survey, or something like it, merits strong consideration. As Robert Townsend (2010) notes in the companion to this essay, the need for timely, regular data collection about the faculty has become imperative given the current lapse of the NSOPF. Over four iterations from 1988 to its most recent administration in 2004, the NSOPF was our only source of systematic national data offering a significant level of detail about the faculty.³ The 2004 NSOPF ought to be only the latest and not the last cycle of that valuable information resource. Whatever information the humanities are able to collect through some ongoing

³ Data from all four iterations of the NSOPF are available from <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nsopf/>.

version of the HDS or other surveys, these efforts can at best supplement the NSOPF and the humanities' renewed participation in other relevant government data collection from which they are now excluded or are under threat of exclusion, such as the Survey of Doctorate Recipients and the National Survey of College Graduates. An ongoing HDS cannot, and should not be expected to, substitute for these government surveys. Along with the sciences, the humanities need to assume their rightful place in the established infrastructure of government-sponsored data collection about higher education and the nation's fund of intellectual resources.

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Table 1. Distribution of departments by Carnegie classification of institution

Carnegie Classification	English	Foreign Languages	History	Art History	Religion
Baccalaureate College	37.7%	32.2%	30.7%	28.9%	49.6%
Master's University	41.2%	27.9%	44.5%	26.7%	29.8%
Doctoral/Research University	21.1%	40.0%	24.9%	44.4%	20.6%
Number of Departments	1,098	1,389	929	329	544
All Departments	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages might not total 100.

Table 2. Distribution of faculty members by Carnegie classification of institution

Carnegie Classification	English	Foreign Languages	History	Art History	Religion
Baccalaureate College	16.0%	15.1%	16.5%	17.5%	36.3%
Master's University	39.0%	24.7%	40.2%	20.0%	34.1%
Doctoral/Research University	45.0%	60.2%	43.2%	62.5%	29.5%
Number of Faculty Members	30,680	23,320	15,360	2,800	5,010
All Faculty Members	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages might not total 100.

Table 3. Distribution of English departments by Carnegie classification of institution and highest degree the department offers

<u>Carnegie Classification</u>	Data	<u>Highest Degree Department Offers</u>			All Degrees
		<i>Bachelor's</i>	<i>Master's</i>	<i>Doctorate</i>	
Baccalaureate College	<i>Number</i>	397	9	8	414
	<i>Row pct</i>	95.9%	2.2%	1.9%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	57.7%	3.5%	5.3%	37.7%
Master's University	<i>Number</i>	260	192	0	452
	<i>Row pct</i>	57.5%	42.5%	0.0%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	37.8%	74.1%	0.0%	41.2%
Doctoral/Research University	<i>Number</i>	31	58	143	232
	<i>Row pct</i>	13.4%	25.0%	61.6%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	4.5%	22.4%	94.7%	21.1%
All Institutions	<i>Number</i>	688	259	151	1,098
	<i>Row pct</i>	62.7%	23.6%	13.8%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages might not total 100.

Table 4. Distribution of foreign languages departments by Carnegie classification of institution and highest degree the department offers

<u>Carnegie Classification</u>	Data	<u>Highest Degree Department Offers</u>			All Degree Types
		<i>Bachelor's</i>	<i>Master's</i>	<i>Doctorate</i>	
Baccalaureate College	<i>Number</i>	424	23	0	447
	<i>Row pct</i>	94.9%	5.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	50.2%	11.2%	0.0%	32.2%
Master's University	<i>Number</i>	314	65	8	387
	<i>Row pct</i>	81.1%	16.8%	2.1%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	37.2%	31.7%	2.4%	27.9%
Doctoral/Research University	<i>Number</i>	107	117	331	555
	<i>Row pct</i>	19.3%	21.1%	59.6%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	12.7%	57.1%	97.6%	40.0%
All Institutions	<i>Number</i>	845	205	339	1,389
	<i>Row pct</i>	60.8%	14.8%	24.4%	100.0%
	<i>Col pct</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages might not total 100.

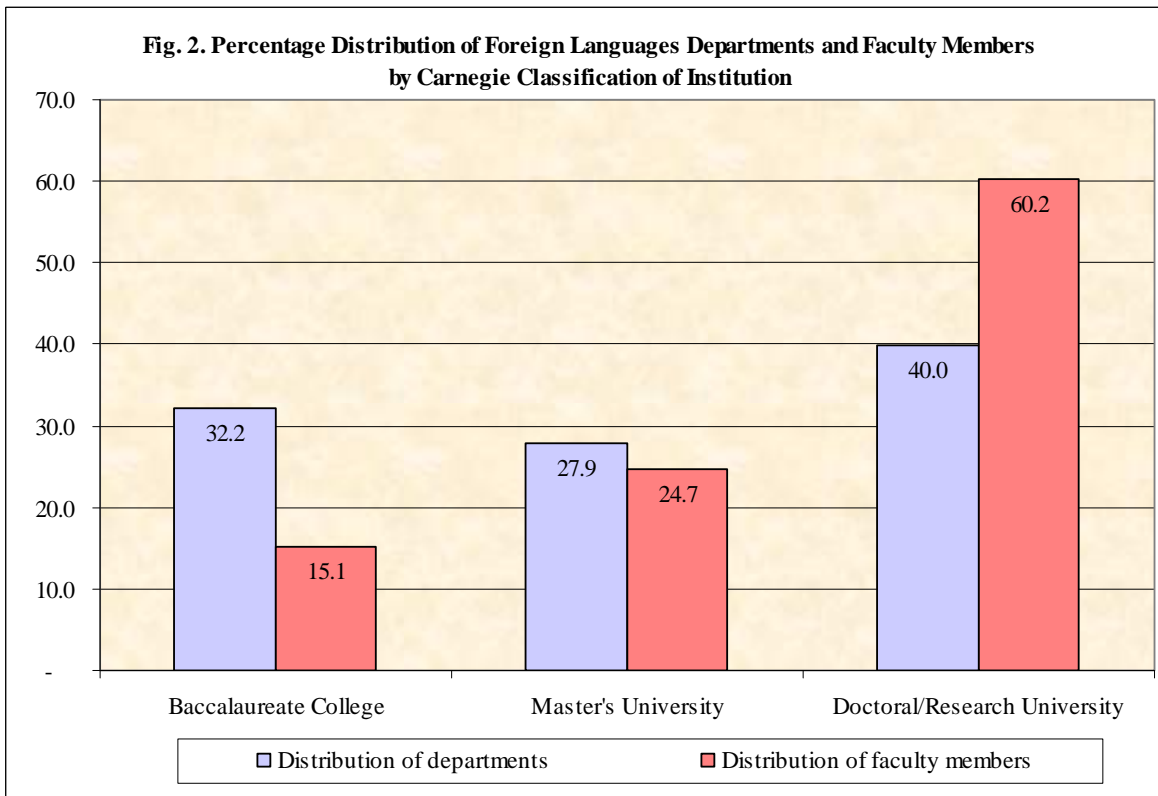
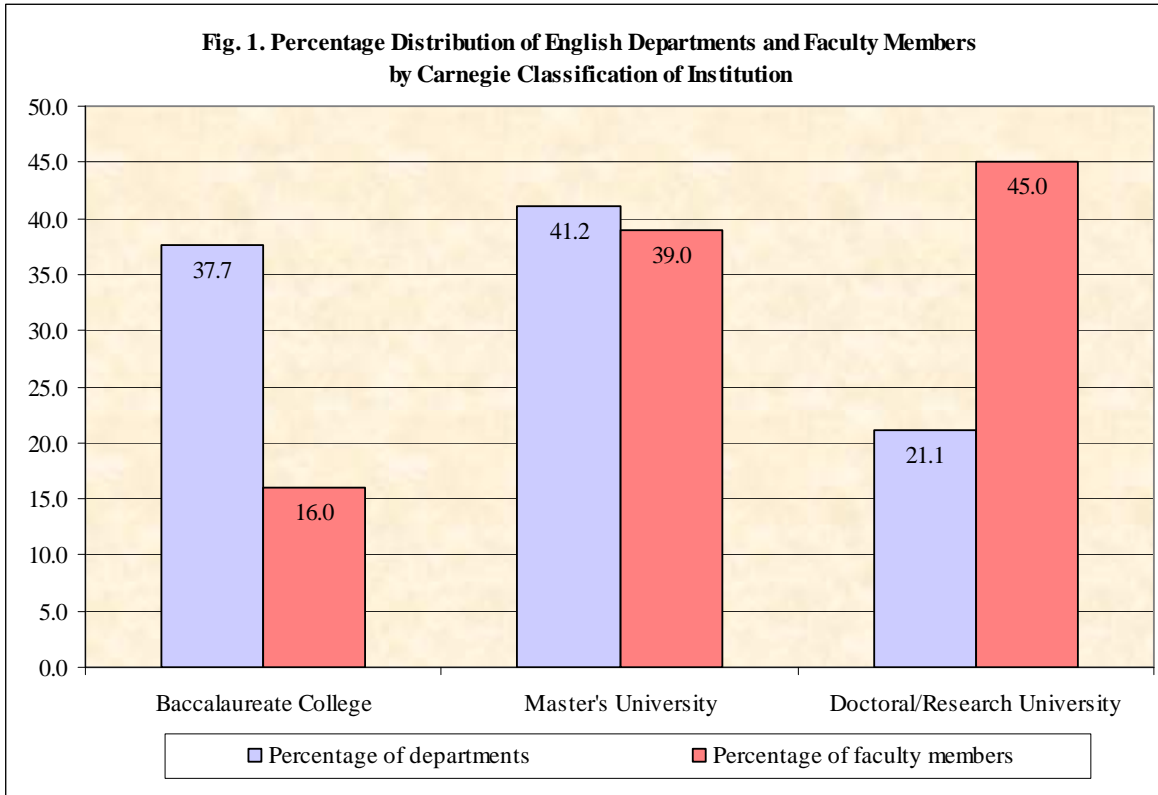


Fig. 3. Bachelor's Degrees and Completed Minors, 2006–2007

