

**HISTORY IN CONNECTICUT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING, 2009-2010:
A Recent Survey by the Connecticut Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History**

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(Drawn up for the CCCPH Higher Education Committee
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Across the board, undergraduate history teaching at Connecticut's colleges, universities and community colleges remains a vibrant enterprise, but it still faces difficult challenges. This is the finding of a survey conducted during the academic year 2009-2010 by the Connecticut Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History (CCCPH), a group comprised of the state's top academic historians, librarians, museum curators, historical consultants and historic preservationists. CCCPH performed the survey to ascertain how recent demographic, cultural, and fiscal trends have affected history teaching in our state's higher education institutions. Carried out via email, the survey canvassed history departments and programs offering history courses at twenty-nine institutions of higher learning in the state, and received back thirteen responses—eight from Connecticut's seventeen baccalaureate, master's and doctoral schools, and five from its twelve community colleges.¹ (CCCPH agreed to keep the identity of responding schools anonymous.) The survey inquired about the distribution of tenured, temporary and part-time instructors among the teaching faculty, the impact of increasing numbers of part-time instructors on history programs, the changes that have occurred in student populations, and the pedagogical strategies that departments nowadays use to teach history to undergraduates. The return yielded thought-provoking results. Responding departments cited

¹ The CCCPH survey adopted the American Association of University Professors' Institutional Categories as a guide to classify schools of higher education in Connecticut as either doctoral, master's, baccalaureate or two-year associate-degree granting community colleges. See <https://research.aaup.org/Help/InstitutionalCategories.htm>.

well-known achievements and difficulties, and revealed some important differences.

Importantly, they all articulated similar enthusiasms for what modern history education at the college level ought to consist of.

As expected, many responding schools reported increasingly heavy use of part-time lecturers to offer history classes, although this was not true for all types of institutions. In the survey, community colleges indicated that 83 percent of their history faculty members are part-timers, and two Connecticut State University master's campuses revealed that 38 percent of their history instructors are employed part-time. Connecticut's private baccalaureate, master's and doctoral institutions, however, divided sharply in their use of part-time adjunct faculty. Three private schools reported that 71 percent of their history teachers are adjuncts, while three others reported virtually no adjunct use, less than 4 percent of their total faculty, although one doctoral school reported that graduate students constitute a quarter of its academic staff in unspecified teaching capacities. Surprisingly, all responding departments disclosed employment of very few full-time temporary instructors in 2009-2010, a total of only four, one at a private institution and three at state universities. Recent reports of escalating "emergency appointments" in public schools during 2010-2011, however, imply that the number of temporary history faculty may be rising.

These statistics suggest that the widely-publicized national shift toward part-time and temporary "contingent" faculty has affected Connecticut institutions of higher learning unevenly. Whereas data from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that 49 percent of college and university instructors nationwide are part-timers today, and that another 20 percent are employed as temporary full-time instructors,² the responding Connecticut schools in the 2009-2010

² "Percentage of Faculty Members with Tenure, 2007," *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue, 2010-2011*, Vol. 57, No. 1, (August 27, 2010), 18.

CCCCPH survey show infrequent use of temporary professors and preponderant utilization of part-time adjuncts in public institutions and roughly half of private colleges and universities. Some private institutions, the CCCPH survey reveals, have better weathered the financial exigencies that have forced most schools to employ increasing numbers of contingent faculty, and have become an enclave where education by a traditional tenured faculty persists.

In terms of disciplinary specialization, schools across the board reported roughly equal numbers of U.S. and European historians among their faculty, with those focusing on non-western parts of world averaging about one-fifth of their departments. Respondents generally observed that this balance has changed little during recent years, although one state university history chair bemoaned the loss of an Asian specialist, while the history chair from a private master's-granting school remarked that "all new hires" in his department "have an eye to the wider world" and have enriched his program with new fields in science history, African-American studies, and intellectual history. Chairs also occasionally remarked that their departments or programs have employed a few more female and minority instructors than they did before, and one chairperson observed the increasing diversity brought by hiring two foreign-born professors in her program.

Only two state universities and two community colleges out of the thirteen schools responding to the survey indicated that they have specific courses on Connecticut history in their curricula. No school requires it. Indeed, only state university history departments reported that they have faculty on their staffs who regularly offer Connecticut history. Nonetheless, the history chair at a master's-granting private university indicated that "two or three" courses in his program touch on Connecticut history every year, and that "many of our U.S. history and some world history courses include material concerning [Connecticut]." Moreover, a state university

history chair reported occasional seminars or colloquia on state or local history in her department. It would seem, thus, that Connecticut history departments mostly neglect state and local history, and that to the extent that they do offer it, they do so (with at least one exception) in public institutions.

In terms of who teaches what, most responding schools testified that part-time instructors teach a large proportion of Western history and U.S. history survey classes—67 percent of those courses in three private baccalaureate and master’s institutions, 30 to 40 percent at state university campuses, and 55 to 64 percent at community colleges. Chairs at three other private master’s and doctoral institutions, by contrast, reported rare use of adjuncts in any courses, and an effort to keep adjunct usage low, although the instructional role of graduate students at doctoral schools remains unspecified. All institutions indicated that few if any upper-division classes and non-western courses go to adjuncts, with the big exception of community colleges. Indeed, one community college chairperson observed that hiring part-timers served his school well, because that practice allowed him to offer non-western and upper-division classes that his department’s tiny staff would not ordinarily be able to present. Overall, department chairs revealed mixed feelings about relying on teaching staffs comprised largely of adjuncts. On the one hand, chairs at some schools stated repeatedly that too many of their department members are adjuncts. That situation, chairs argued, increases full-timers’ duties to mentor part-time faculty, compromises the consistency of good teaching, complicates the measurement of Student Learning Outcomes, reduces instructors’ connectedness to campus, and weakens programs’ capacity to offer advanced courses, since 70 to 90 percent of such courses are still taught by full-time faculty. On the other hand, at community colleges that employ only two, one or sometimes

no full-time historians, chairs are happy to utilize the extra expertise that adjuncts bring to their programs so that they can offer upper-level classes not normally available.

In regard to students, responding schools said little about changing demographics in terms of ethnicity, gender or race—although one chair at a master’s institution reported better gender and racial balance than in past years—but respondents at most schools wrote at length about declining student capacities for college work. While one history chair at a master’s-granting private school commented that student preparation “hasn’t changed appreciably from where I sit,” respondents elsewhere remarked that there has been a clear diminution in students’ verbal, reading and writing skills. According to department chairs, modern students need to take more remedial courses, arrive with thinner backgrounds in history, are less willing to read large assignments, and are less prepared to analyze documents and write papers according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* format. One private university chair commented that while student preparation has remained “fairly even” over the past five years, students exhibit “an increasing, and alarming, lack of interest in the printed word.” Another private baccalaureate college respondent remarked that “the ‘digital’ generation seems much more comfortable with Twitter than [with] more sustained reading, writing and reflection.” A community college department chair added that declining student preparation has forced instructors to devote more class time to guidance and direction. “Broad, open-ended questions and formal term papers,” this chair reported, “have been replaced with more narrowly-focused case studies and linked short-answer questions.” The one history department chair who reported encountering better-prepared students in recent years attributed that trend his private university’s rising admission standards.

Despite varying perceptions of student capabilities, responding schools evinced strong agreement over what constitutes good undergraduate history teaching. Virtually all stressed

good reading, writing and critical thinking skills in the form of papers, book reviews, reflection papers and senior essays. Most responding institutions, moreover, reported the incorporation of primary document analysis into history coursework for students. However, only a few private schools and state university history departments cited museum visits and archival use as regular parts of their history curricula. Most private school and all community college department chairs reported only spotty or “occasional” use of museum visits and archival work in history classes—for the courses of particular instructors, for upper-level research projects and honors work, for a local history course, and for extra credit. Meanwhile, most institutions reported that they have study abroad programs, except for one private baccalaureate school and all community colleges. For unclear reasons, the latter institutions have left study abroad as an uncultivated educational experience for history students. One community college chair cited a faculty exchange program that is never used, while another commented that study abroad is “one of the top items on my wish list.” Community colleges in other states do occasionally offer study abroad opportunities, raising the question as to whether such an experience ought to play a larger part of community college education here in Connecticut, especially now when such schools carry a growing share of the state’s higher education burden.

Looking to the future, history chairs at a couple of master’s and doctoral schools did not predict especially onerous problems, but everyone else very soberly articulated a generalized concern over the strain between diminishing resources on the one hand, and the increasing demands on the other hand of meeting the challenges of less prepared students, rising enrollments and a modernized history curriculum. “The general financial situation is not encouraging,” one department chair at a private master’s institution opined. Responding chairs outside of doctoral institutions added that recent Ph. D.’s are too narrowly trained for the broad

range of courses that modern history programs have to provide, that history programs cannot schedule the necessary variety of courses with underfunded skeletal teaching staffs, and bluntly that “[we] need more full-time faculty.” Among community college respondents, especially, department chairs observed that it is increasingly hard for them to satisfy a burgeoning number of history students, many needing remedial help, when the chairs have few full-time faculty members in their programs and face “flat funding and hiring freezes.”

The CCCPH survey thus indicates important trends that the state history educators will need to face in the future. Clearly, the widely-reported increase of part-time faculty is very real in most Connecticut history programs. While adjuncts are surely very professional in carrying out their duties, the comments of department chairs in the CCCPH survey attest to the severe limitations that such a system of staffing history departments imposes on Connecticut’s colleges and universities to deliver good history education. Clearly, also, the widely-discussed educational challenges of most modern college students in the digital age seem to be quite real in Connecticut’s schools of higher education. Whether or not students are simply “less prepared,” testimony by the CCCPH survey respondents shows unequivocally that most students come to college today with different skill sets than in the past. Those respondents infer consequently that modern instructors will have to adapt their teaching methods to new generations of students if they are to provide history education effectively in the future. Already, some respondents to the CCCPH survey have considered ways to make that adaptation. One school proposed more remedial courses to prepare students better for history classes. Another recommended an across-the-curriculum program to teach students basic skills in analyzing documents, writing historical papers, and communicating ideas verbally or in print. A final respondent suggested more “hands on” activities, such as building a World War I trench.

Not surprisingly, the CCCPH survey reveals that the needs of Connecticut history programs in higher education vary somewhat from institution to institution. A few history departments report that they enjoy a stable body of full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty, have the ability to provide a wide array of up-to-date courses and educational opportunities, and serve a steady flow of able students. Yet, the vast majority of department chairs at both public and private institutions disclose that they face ongoing struggles to maintain qualified teaching staffs, offer the courses they need with shrinking resources, and offer effective history teaching to a growing crowd of needy students. These observations suggest that Connecticut historians need to concentrate their future attention on the difficulties faced by the preponderance of schools across the board if they are to improve history education for most of the state's students.

The CCCPH survey's happiest revelation is the universal commitment of all responding history programs to teach students the craftsmanship of good reading, analysis and writing, and to encourage students' engagement with primary historical materials, including visits to museums, historic sites, and archives. Skills to "do" history and "know" history are for all Connecticut citizens, not just specialists. Educators do a great service to the people of the state by disseminating these capabilities to a broad range of residents. It is an important matter for public consideration that diminishing resources in these difficult economic times not be allowed to hinder Connecticut institutions of higher learning from carrying out this important mission.