

Higher-Education Teaching Venues and Cultures

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So you're a newly minted Ph.D.—or you're ABD with a defense date on the calendar. You feel like you're ready to hit the job market for teaching positions. Not so fast. Before you begin sending out resumes, it pays to spend some time thinking about the kind of institution you're looking for. Your day-to-day life as a college professor will vary significantly depending on the type of institution where you end up.

We historians earn our Ph.D.s in universities classified as doctoral/research universities. This experience often shapes our expectations for our own teaching experiences. The reality, however, is that most of us will not end up teaching in the types of institutions where we earned our doctorates. In January 2006, *Perspectives*, the newsletter of the American Historical Association, reported that fewer than half of the junior faculty jobs advertised in the publication the previous year had been in doctoral/research universities.¹ What's more, many institutions don't advertise in *Perspectives* at all. That means that more than half of the new history teaching jobs were in public and private teaching universities, in baccalaureate colleges, and in two-year colleges.

Teaching in each of these environments has its own satisfactions and rewards, but you should go in with your eyes open. As you plan your job search, you will want to be open to the various kinds of teaching opportunities that are available to you, and you may want to rule out the types of institutions whose teaching culture does not appeal to you. But you also need to know what these institutions expect before you interview for jobs. If you're applying to an institution that emphasizes teaching, you do not want to focus your cover letter on your research interests—or spend all the time in your interview describing your dissertation. By the same token, a search committee at a research university will not expect to see a detailed listing of the courses you can offer before you outline your research agenda. Finally, you will want to have some idea what to expect—and what is expected of you—before you begin teaching. So here's a brief summary of the variety of higher-education teaching venues and cultures that you'll find in the historical profession:

Research/doctoral universities.

- This is the environment with which new Ph.D.s are most recently familiar. Departments are large and highly specialized. Most (though not all) survey-level classes are taught by teaching assistants. Tenured and tenure-track faculty typically have relatively light teaching loads (often four or fewer courses per year), and they are most likely to teach upper-division undergraduates or graduate seminars.

¹ Robert B. Townsend, "Job Market Report 2005: Signs of Improvement?" *Perspectives*, January 2006, available online at <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2006/0601/0601new1.cfm>.

- The range of courses that you will teach at research universities is relatively small; you'll be asked to teach lecture courses and seminars that are closely related to your research specialty. Faculty at research institutions also spend significant amounts of time mentoring master's and doctoral students.
- These institutions have significant research expectations, so faculty members must balance a demanding research agenda with upper-level teaching and mentoring and with some service to the department and the university.
- Most undergraduate students at these institutions will be traditional-aged students, but graduate students will come from a range of ages and backgrounds. Typically admissions standards are rigorous, so you will be teaching some of the best-prepared students in the nation at these institutions.
- Although these institutions often value teaching, faculty performance evaluations and tenure-and-promotion decisions weight scholarly accomplishments more heavily than teaching prowess. The primary mission of these institutions is to produce fresh scholarship and the next generation of scholars.
- In these days of budget cutbacks, few universities are rolling in dough, but research universities are the elite institutions in higher education. They will generally have sufficient financial resources to support excellent teaching and a large quantity of faculty research.
- Although these are large departments, they are a minority of departments. According to the Department of Education, only 133 institutions conveyed doctoral degrees in history in 2004, compared to 1,166 that offered baccalaureate degrees.² The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies 6.7% of institutions as doctoral/research universities.³

Public and private teaching universities.

- The range of institutions in this category is enormous: branch campuses of flagship state universities, independent state universities that focus on technical fields, professional schools, or the liberal arts; metropolitan universities that combine a focus on teaching with strong partnerships with surrounding metropolitan communities; historically black state universities; private sectarian and non-sectarian institutions. These institutions offer baccalaureate and sometimes master's degrees in history. A few institutions in this category do not offer majors in history at all; instead history departments support the curriculum with general education offerings.

² National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2004*, available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>.

³ Julianne Basinger, "A New Way of Classifying Colleges Elates Some and Perturbs Others," *Chronicle for Higher Education*, August 11, 2000, available online at <http://chronicle.com/free/v46/i49/49a03101.htm#chart>.

According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, about 35% of institutions fit into this category.⁴

- Whatever the differences among teaching universities, what they have in common is their focus on teaching. You'll be evaluated first and foremost on the quality of your teaching.
- The teaching load at these institutions is often heavy—six or more courses per year. Most of the time, you'll have two or more sections of some courses, reducing your number of separate preparations. Faculty may or may not have the support of teaching assistants. Typically classes are large, and faculty teach a range of courses from surveys to upper-division or graduate seminars.
- Students may be traditional-aged undergraduates, but many institutions in this category have a large number of non-traditional students and/or first-generation college students. Admissions standards vary a great deal from institution to institution; as a result, the preparation level of students will vary. Many students may be juggling course work with part- or full-time employment.
- Some of these institutions are well-funded; others operate on a shoestring. Thus the resources available to support teaching and research vary a great deal from institution to institution.
- Faculty at teaching universities will also be expected to serve their departments and their universities by advising students, serving on committees, and working on special projects. Service may be a significant component of faculty evaluation.
- Though the focus at teaching universities is on teaching, most of these institutions also expect faculty members to engage in some scholarship. There may or may not be adequate funds to support faculty research.

Small baccalaureate colleges.

- Most of the institutions in this category are private colleges. Some are church-affiliated, while others are non-sectarian.
- The primary mission of these colleges is outstanding undergraduate education, and faculty at these institutions are expected to be dedicated and outstanding teachers. Tenure and promotion decisions will weight teaching more heavily than any other category of performance.

⁴ *Ibid.* This statistic is the result of combining three Carnegie categories: specialized institutions, masters/comprehensive I, and masters/comprehensive II. For more on the definitions of Carnegie categories, see "How the Classification Was Developed: Text of the Category Definitions," *Chronicle for Higher Education*, August 11, 2000, available online at <http://chronicle.com/free/v46/i49/49a03501.htm>.

- The teaching load may be heavy—generally at least six courses per year, and often as many as eight courses.
- Faculty members will teach a range of courses, from surveys to upper-division surveys. If you are easily bored and like a lot of variety in your teaching, a small college is a good choice for you. For example, in addition to western- or world-civilization courses, many small colleges ask faculty members to teach far afield from their research specialties. An institution in this category might have only one Americanist, so if you were the American historian, you might teach upper-division courses in colonial America, the Civil War, and twentieth century U.S. in addition to your area of specialization. Sometimes a faculty member is asked to teach in a minor field from her graduate study—such as a non-Western course. Faculty at these institutions may also direct independent undergraduate research projects.
- A faculty member might have multiple sections of a single preparation but most often will have one section of each course each term. On the other hand, classes are usually small. Survey courses might have 20-25 students, while upper level seminars at baccalaureate colleges commonly enroll 7-12 students.
- Because classes and departments are small, in a baccalaureate college, you are likely to develop close and lasting relationships with individual students. A student may indeed be in your classes several times over the course of his or her academic career.
- Because departments are small, you will probably work closely with your departmental colleagues, but also with colleagues in other departments. You may find more opportunities for team and interdisciplinary teaching in baccalaureate colleges than in other teaching venues.
- Most of your students will be traditional-aged college students. As with teaching universities, admissions standards vary a great deal from institution to institution. Some baccalaureate colleges are highly selective liberal arts colleges; others are less selective. Nonetheless, because of small classes, average students can often do quite well at these schools.
- Some baccalaureate institutions are well-endowed; others operate on a shoestring. As with teaching universities, you'll find that the level of financial resources varies a great deal from school to school.
- You'll be expected to commit a large portion of your time to departmental and college service in baccalaureate institutions.
- Some baccalaureate institutions do not value research and scholarship (indeed, a few actively discourage activity that might divert your focus from teaching and service), but an increasing number of baccalaureate institutions expect faculty to be active scholars. Nonetheless, teaching will remain the primary focus at these colleges.
- According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, about 13.5% of institutions are baccalaureate institutions.⁵

⁵ Basinger, "A New Way of Classifying Colleges."

Two-year colleges.

- As with baccalaureate and teaching universities, faculty at two-year colleges are expected to be dedicated teachers. They are primarily evaluated on the quality of their teaching.
- Most two-year colleges are state-funded community and technical colleges. Some two-year colleges offer associate's degrees in history; most do not.
- Some two-year colleges have systems of faculty rank and tenure; others employ faculty members on term contracts.
- Although two-year colleges do not necessarily require a Ph.D. for history faculty, they increasingly look for professors with terminal degrees.
- Faculty at two-year colleges typically teach survey-level courses; only occasionally do they teach seminars or upper-level lecture courses. They will have a heavy teaching load—often eight to ten courses per year. Usually they will have multiple sections of a single preparation each semester.
- Students range in age from 18 to 80. Often these institutions have open admissions policies, so the preparation level of students may vary widely. As with teaching universities, students at two-year colleges are more likely than students at other institutions to be juggling course work with part- or full-time employment. Many are first-generation college students, and many are non-traditional students.
- Classes are occasionally large, but usually they are medium-sized—in the 35- to 50-student range.
- Many students at two-year colleges will go on to complete bachelor's degrees at other institutions, but a significant number will stop with two-year degrees in a technical or vocational field.
- Two-year colleges expect some commitment to departmental and college-wide service from their faculty.
- Although scholarly activity is not usually expected at two-year colleges, it is sometimes encouraged.
- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, says that 42.5% of all American institutions fit into this category.⁶ Clearly a significant number of teaching jobs are available in two-year institutions.

Other resources on career-related issues.

American Association of University Professors

<http://www.aaup.org/>

American Historical Association

⁶ *Ibid.*

<http://www.historians.org/>

Chronicle Careers—a service of the *Chronicle for Higher Education*

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/>

“Community College Historians in the United States: A Status Report from the Organization of American Historians' Committee on Community Colleges,” a special issue of *Perspectives: The Newsletter of the Organization of American Historians*, 1999, edited by Nadine Ishitani Hata

<http://www.oah.org/pubs/commcoll/index.html>

Community College Humanities Association

<http://www.ccha-assoc.org/>

H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences on-line

<http://www.h-net.org/>

History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>

Organization of American Historians

<http://www.oah.org/>

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