



# The Academic Humanities Today

Findings from the 2024 Department Survey

A REPORT FROM THE HUMANITIES INDICATORS PROJECT  
OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

“Taken together, the surveys provide a better understanding of recent changes in the field and supply the data necessary for a substantive conversation about the humanities in four-year colleges and universities.

A REPORT FROM THE HUMANITIES INDICATORS PROJECT  
OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

# **The Academic Humanities Today**

## Findings from the 2024 Department Survey

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Prepared by the Humanities Indicators Staff:**

**Norman Bradburn**, Codirector

**Robert B. Townsend**, Codirector

**Carolyn Fuqua**, Program Officer

**Maysan Haydar**, Pforzheimer Foundation Humanities Policy Fellow (2022–2024)

**Sara Mohr**, Pforzheimer Foundation Humanities Policy Fellow (2024–2026)

© 2025 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0); licensing guidelines may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

ISBN: 0-87724-167-8

This publication is available online at <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/academic-humanities-today-findings-2024-department-survey>.

**Cover images:**

Clockwise from the top: [iStock.com/DmitriiSimakov](https://www.istock.com/DmitriiSimakov), [iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages](https://www.istock.com/monkeybusinessimages), [iStock.com/AnnaStills](https://www.istock.com/AnnaStills), and [iStock.com/Kong Ding Chek](https://www.istock.com/KongDingChek)

**Suggested citation:**

Humanities Indicators of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *The Academic Humanities Today: Findings from the 2024 Department Survey* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2025).

The American Academy's Humanities Indicators is a nationally recognized source of nonpartisan information on the state of the humanities, providing researchers and policymakers with better tools to answer basic questions about areas of concern in the field. Founded in 1780, the American Academy is both an honorary society that recognizes and celebrates the excellence of its members and an independent research center convening leaders from across disciplines, professions, and perspectives to address significant national and global challenges.

*The Academy gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Mellon Foundation for the work of the Humanities Indicators. Any views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Foundation or the Officers and Members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

**Please direct inquiries to:**

Robert B. Townsend, Director, Humanities, Arts and Culture Programs

Email: [rtownsend@amacad.org](mailto:rtownsend@amacad.org)

# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction  | 1  |
| 1. The Institutional Setting for the Academic Humanities          | 2  |
| 2. Humanities Faculty   | 4  |
| Changes in the Use of Adjunct Faculty                             | 5  |
| Recent Patterns of Hiring and Tenuring                            | 8  |
| The Demographics of Department Chairs                             | 10 |
| 3. Undergraduate Students: Enrollments, Degrees, and Other Awards | 12 |
| Assessing Student Enrollments                                     | 12 |
| Course Enrollments by Faculty Type                                | 13 |
| Majors and Minors   | 15 |
| 4. Graduate Students: Enrollments, Degrees, and Other Awards      | 18 |
| 5. Policies and Practices for Humanities Students                 | 20 |
| 6. Concerns About the Future                                      | 23 |
| Endnotes  | 28 |



# Introduction

The academic humanities have been beset by challenges over the past fifteen years: degrees awarded in most disciplines fell by more than 25%, colleges and universities shuttered departments and programs, and faculty hiring dropped to historically low levels.<sup>1</sup> A new humanities department survey (HDS) demonstrates both the challenges the field faces today and the resilience of many departments in the face of those difficulties.

The American Academy's Humanities Indicators (HI) developed the HDS in 2007 to fill gaps in the available data about the health of the field—particularly about course enrollments, the use of adjunct faculty, and departmental practices related to preparing students for future careers. The Academy has conducted four rounds of the survey, collecting data for the academic years (AY) 2007–08, 2012–13, 2017–18, and now 2023–24. Taken together, the surveys provide a better understanding of recent changes in the field and supply the data necessary for a substantive conversation about the humanities in four-year colleges and universities.

This round of the survey examined trends in 14 disciplines: American studies; anthropology; art history; classical studies; communication; English; history; languages and literatures other than English (LOTE); linguistics; musicology; philosophy; race/ethnic studies; religion; and women's/gender studies. Starting in early 2023, the HI staff worked with the leaders of the scholarly societies representing these disciplines to review and update the survey instrument, trying to balance ongoing interest in key benchmarks for each discipline—such as the number of enrolled students, recent graduates, and faculty of different types—while adding new questions to probe issues that had emerged in the years since the pandemic. Staff tested the revised survey instrument in a series of focus groups comprising chairs from a diverse set of disciplines and institutions. The survey was then administered to a sample of degree-granting departments at four-year colleges and universities in each discipline by AIP Research at the American Institute of Physics. AIP Research also performed the statistical weighting and analyses necessary to produce nationally representative estimates

for each discipline and, where possible, make comparisons to earlier rounds of the survey.

The following report focuses on six areas of interest to the field:

1. the number of departments granting degrees in each discipline;
2. the composition of the professoriate teaching in humanities departments;
3. the level of undergraduate enrollment and degrees granted;
4. the numbers of graduate students, graduate course enrollments, and new doctoral students;
5. policies and practices related to students; and
6. attitudes about the current and future health of the discipline.

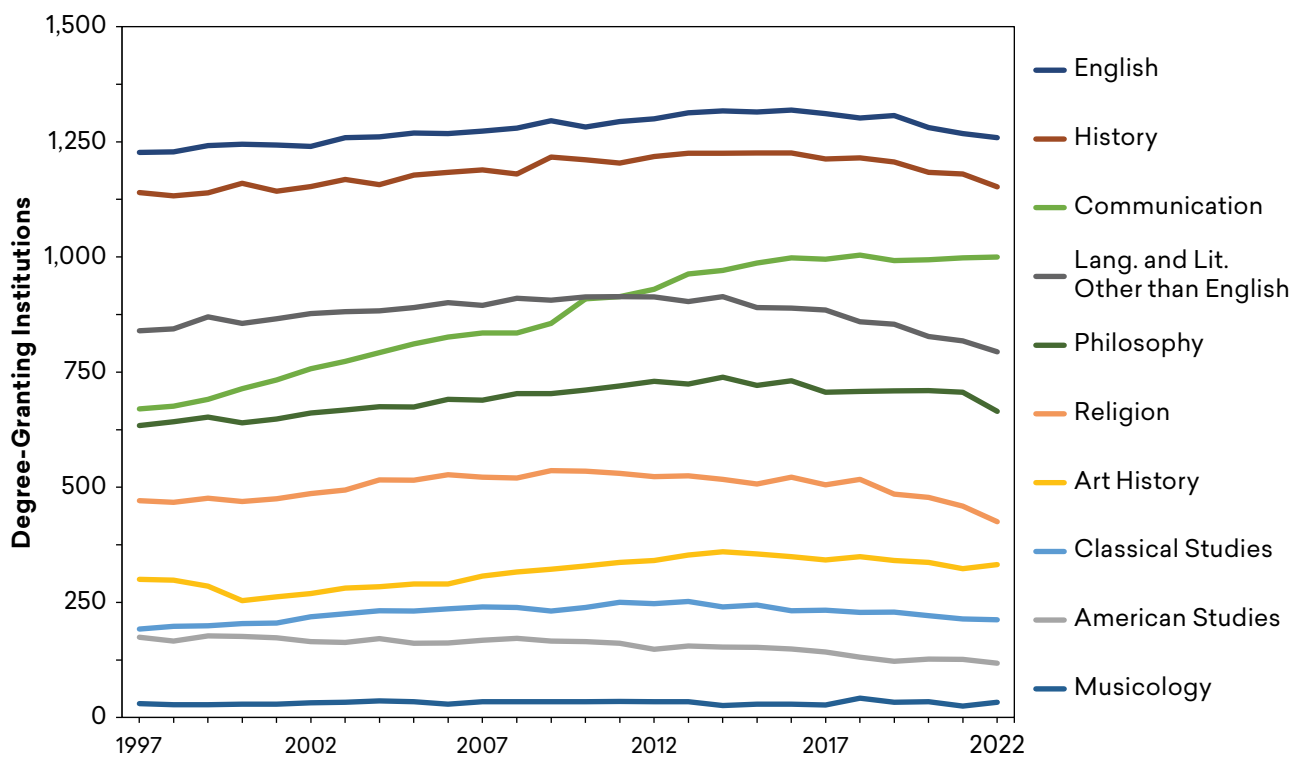
In addition to this analytical overview, the associated website for this round of the survey (at [https://bit.ly/HDS4\\_Intro](https://bit.ly/HDS4_Intro)) provides separate summaries of findings for each surveyed discipline. AIP Research's technical report is also available on the site, which includes the data tables that serve as the basis for the present report's narrative and figures; additional tables disaggregating the findings for each discipline by Carnegie type, highest degree, and control; and extensive information about the survey methodology.

Special thanks are due to the Mellon Foundation, which funded the extensive work necessary to develop, prepare, administer, analyze, and publish the results of the survey. Please note that the analysis that follows does not reflect the views or opinions of either the Mellon Foundation or the officers and members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

# 1. The Institutional Setting for the Academic Humanities

The HDS is a survey of degree-granting departments at four-year colleges and universities. A department was considered degree-granting if it reported at least one degree award to the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) during the five years leading up to the survey (2017–21). Data from the DoE provide a useful starting point for assessing current challenges in the humanities (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Institutions Awarding Humanities Degrees, by Discipline, 1997–2022**



In many humanities disciplines, the number of institutions awarding degrees increased from the first (2007–08) to the third (2017–18) round of the survey, then fell in almost every year since. For instance, 1,273 institutions awarded degrees in English in 2007, and that number had risen to 1,311 by 2017. However, as of 2022 (when the sample for this round of the survey was pulled), just 1,259 colleges and universities were awarding degrees in the subject—a decline of 4%

from 2017. The disciplines of American studies and religion saw the largest declines in the number of institutions awarding degrees in these disciplines over that time period (17% and 16%), but classical studies and languages and literatures other than English also had substantial declines (9% and 10%). However, several disciplines—primarily those in social science-adjacent subjects—experienced increases from 2017 to 2022. Musicology saw an increase of 22%, albeit from



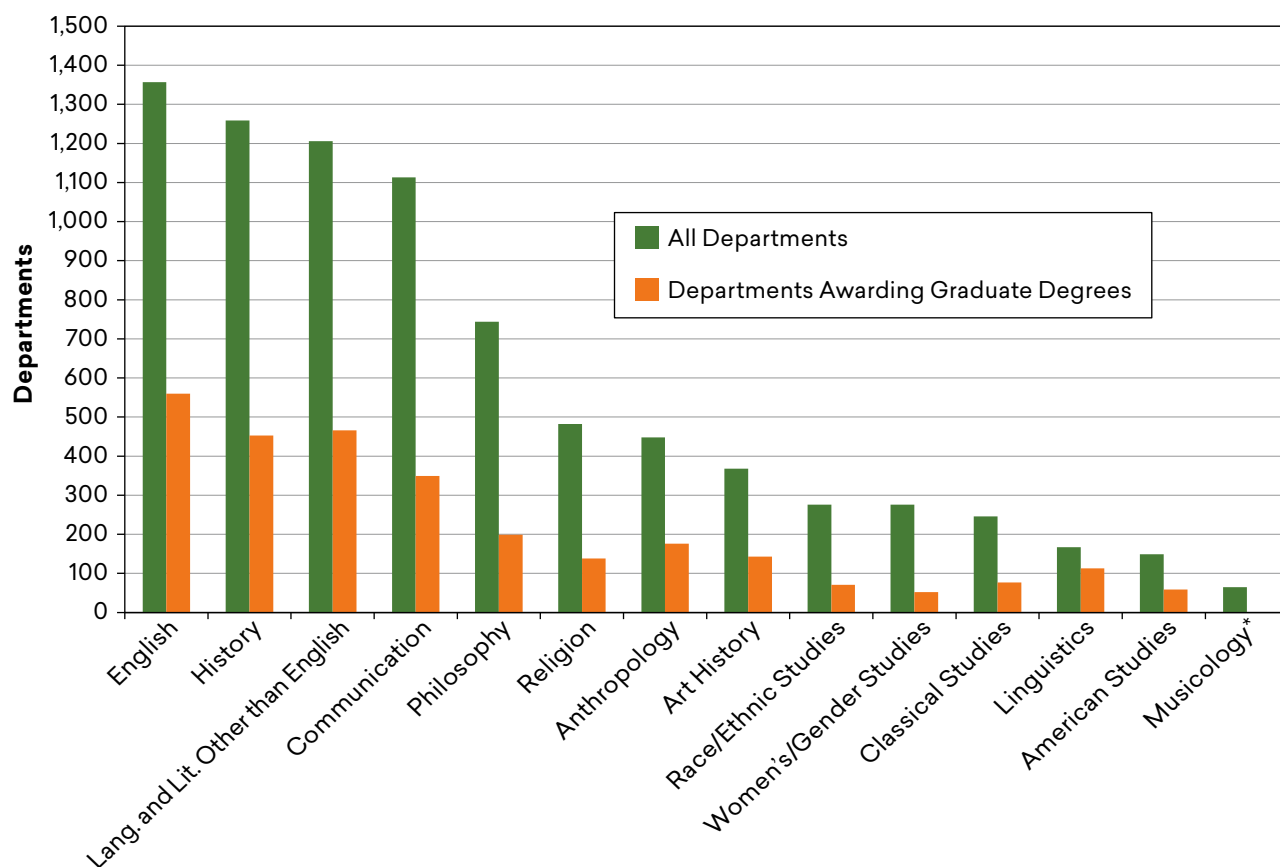
an unusual—and brief—trough in the mid-2010s, and the number of communication departments offering degrees grew slightly (.5%). Two other social science-adjacent disciplines experienced an increase in the number of institutions conferring degrees from 2017 to 2022 (not shown in Figure 1). Anthropology saw a 2% increase, while the number of institutions offering degrees in race/ethnic studies grew by 7%.

The DoE data on which Figure 1 is based served as the sampling frame for the survey. All of the findings presented below are based on a nationally representative sample of departments at those institutions. (For more on the survey methodology, see the technical report for the study, available at [www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/HDS4-Technical-Report.pdf](http://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/HDS4-Technical-Report.pdf).) The survey found that the number of departments in the 14 disciplines covered by the study ranged from 1,357 departments for English to 65 for

musicology (Figure 2). The estimated number of departments was slightly higher than the total number of institutions awarding degrees in the DoE data due to a small number of colleges and universities with more than one department awarding degrees in the disciplinary category (e.g., a history department and a history of science department, or separate departments for discrete languages or families of languages). With the exception of languages, duplications or disciplinary overlap of this sort are relatively rare and typically limited to research universities.

As shown in Figure 2, the number of departments awarding graduate degrees in each discipline was generally less than half of that discipline’s total number of departments. The only outlier was linguistics, where 68% of departments awarded graduate degrees. In most of the other disciplines, approximately 30% to 40% of departments awarded graduate degrees.

**Figure 2: Departments Awarding Humanities Degrees, by Discipline, Fall 2023**



\* The survey could not generate a reliable estimate of the number of musicology departments awarding graduate degrees because not enough departments responded.

## 2. Humanities Faculty

This survey was first developed in 2007 to provide disciplines and departments with national benchmarks for the number and composition of the faculty in an “average” department in each discipline, and that remains a core purpose of the research. The latest round of the survey, administered from October 2023 to June 2024, found that approximately 131,160 faculty members were employed in 8,156 degree-granting departments as of fall 2023. The number of faculty ranged from 590 in musicology departments to 36,290 in English departments.

For purposes of comparison, four disciplines could be characterized as *large* based on the total number of faculty. These were English, LOTE, communication, and history, with more than 17,000 faculty members each. Five were *medium* size relative to the rest of the field (anthropology, art history, philosophy, race/ethnic studies, and religion), at between 3,000 and 9,000 faculty each. The remaining five disciplines (American studies, classical studies, linguistics, musicology, and women’s/gender studies) were comparatively *small*, with fewer than 3,000 total faculty. This report uses those three size categories in its comparisons among fields, although this should not be interpreted as implying any qualitative judgment about the value of size. Simply put, similarities in the survey responses tended to align with these categories—and, where they did not, interesting insights emerged.

---

Approximately 131,160 faculty members were employed in 8,156 degree-granting departments as of fall 2023.

---

Among the surveyed disciplines, the average number of faculty per department ranged from a low of around 7.5 per department in classical studies and women’s/gender studies to almost 27 in English (Figure 3). Among the large disciplines, history had 14 faculty members per department, substantially lower than the other large disciplines (communication had 19 and LOTE had 20). The average ranged from 7 to 11 per department in the other disciplines.

Most of the disciplines for which it was possible to make a comparison to an earlier point in time experienced at least modest growth in the average number of faculty per department since their first appearance in the survey. (Comparisons could not be made for LOTE and English due to a change in the survey frame for these disciplines. See the technical report from AIP Research for details.) Given the collapse in the number of academic jobs posted with scholarly societies after 2009 (most of which are down at least 40% from recent highs), this growth will seem counterintuitive, but it fits with estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), suggesting that the estimated number of humanities faculty grew from 2007, when the first department survey was conducted, until 2020.<sup>2</sup> Only in the most recent three years of data (from 2020 to 2023) has the BLS reported a significant (nearly 10%) drop in the number of humanities faculty.

For most disciplines, the median number of faculty per department was substantially lower than the average—just 18 for English, 14 for LOTE, and 10 for history. The disaggregated findings for each of the disciplines (available in separate disciplinary profiles on the site) reveal that these differences are due to a few large programs, usually at research universities (using the Carnegie Classification), which skew the average upward. For instance, English departments at research universities had an average of almost 50 faculty members per department, compared to an average of 12 at institutions classified as primarily undergraduate. History departments also had a substantial gap—ranging from fewer than 8 faculty per department at primarily undergraduate institutions to 25 per department at research universities. Even in the

The average number of faculty per department ranged from a low of about 8 per department in classical studies and women’s/gender studies to almost 27 in English.

small disciplines, the departments at research universities were typically more than twice the size of departments at other institution types. In classical studies, for instance, departments at research universities had an average of 10 faculty, while departments at the other institution types had fewer than five.

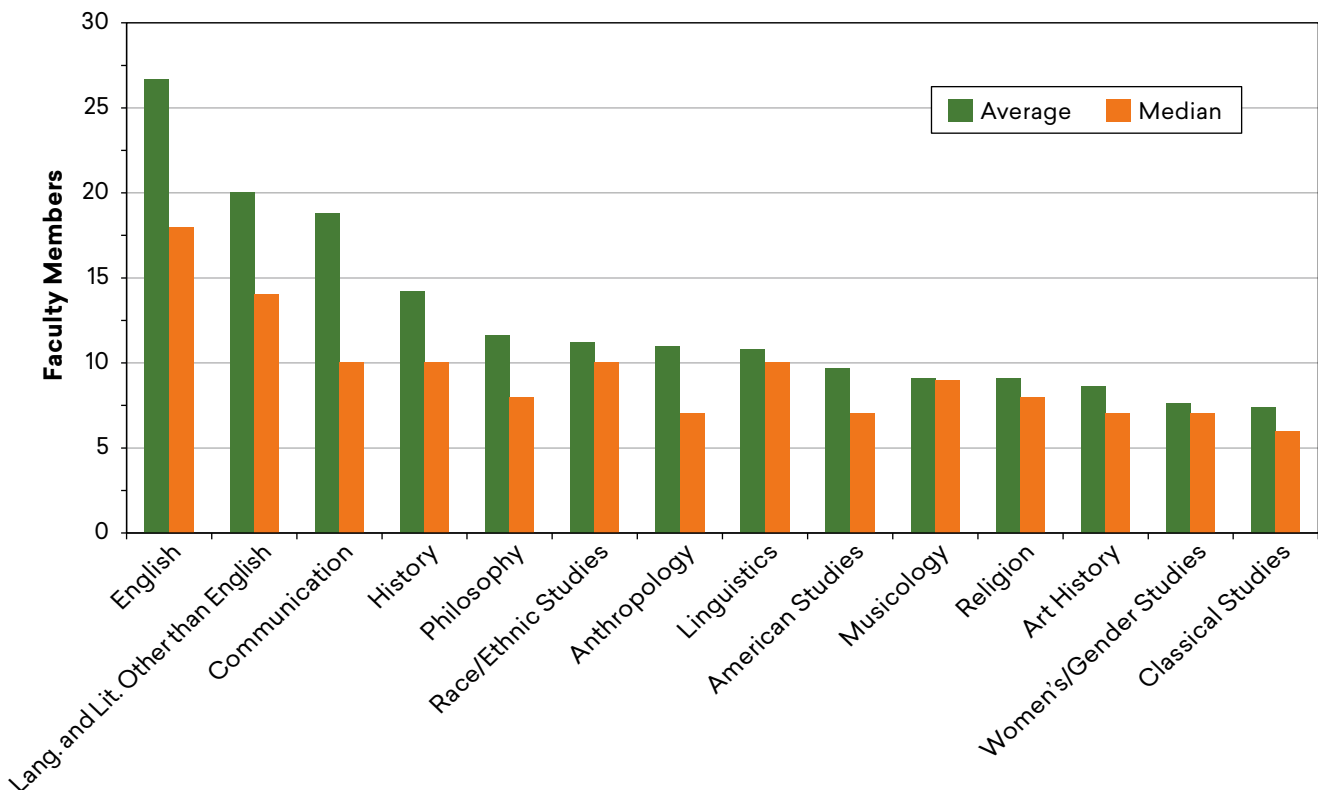
### Changes in the Use of Adjunct Faculty

The original impetus for the HDS was a desire to track the proportion of the humanities professoriate in nontenured positions, closing a data gap that

had originated with the DoE’s 2004 suspension of the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, a longstanding source of reliable information on the subject. For the first time in the four rounds of the HDS, the share of nontenure-track faculty in the surveyed disciplines exceeded 40% (Figure 4). When all disciplines in the survey were considered together, 46% of humanities faculty were found to be in nontenure positions (both full- and part-time), 42% were tenured, and another 13% were on the tenure track.

These overall percentages, however, mask a good deal of variation. The three largest humanities disciplines by faculty size had the largest shares of nontenure-track faculty (communication, English, and LOTE—each above 50%). Since only one of the larger disciplines had a majority of tenure-line faculty (either tenured or tenure track), the percentage for the whole field was pulled down substantially by the pattern in those three disciplines. Almost 60% of the faculty members in communication, for example, were employed off the tenure track, with 21% employed full-time off the tenure track and another 38%

**Figure 3: Faculty per Department, by Discipline, Fall 2023**



## 2. Humanities Faculty

employed part-time. History was the only large discipline to have a majority of its faculty members either tenured or on the tenure track, with 67% in such positions. All the small and medium-size departments had substantial shares in tenure-line positions, as even in the discipline that was closest to the overall percentage (women's/gender studies), a substantial majority of the faculty (60%) were employed either with tenure or on the tenure track.

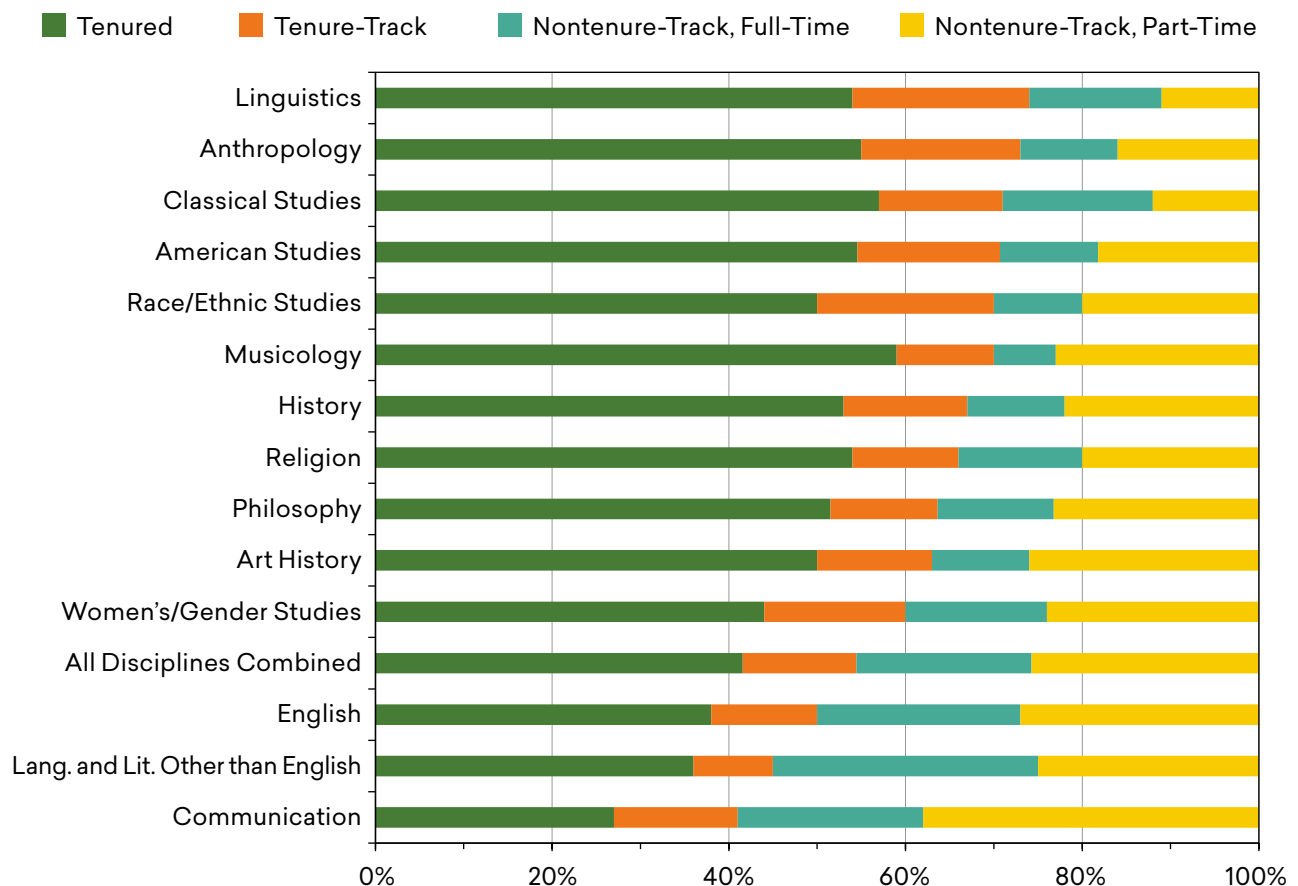
Many of the disciplines for which a comparison could be made to an earlier survey appeared to show at least a small decrease in their shares of tenure-line faculty.<sup>3</sup> For instance, 74% of the history faculty members in the 2007 department survey were in tenure-eligible positions; by 2023 that share had fallen to 67%. In art history departments, the share fell from 70% to 63%. In communication departments, for which data have been tracked only

For the first time in the four rounds of the HDS, the share of nontenure-track faculty in the surveyed disciplines exceeded 40%.

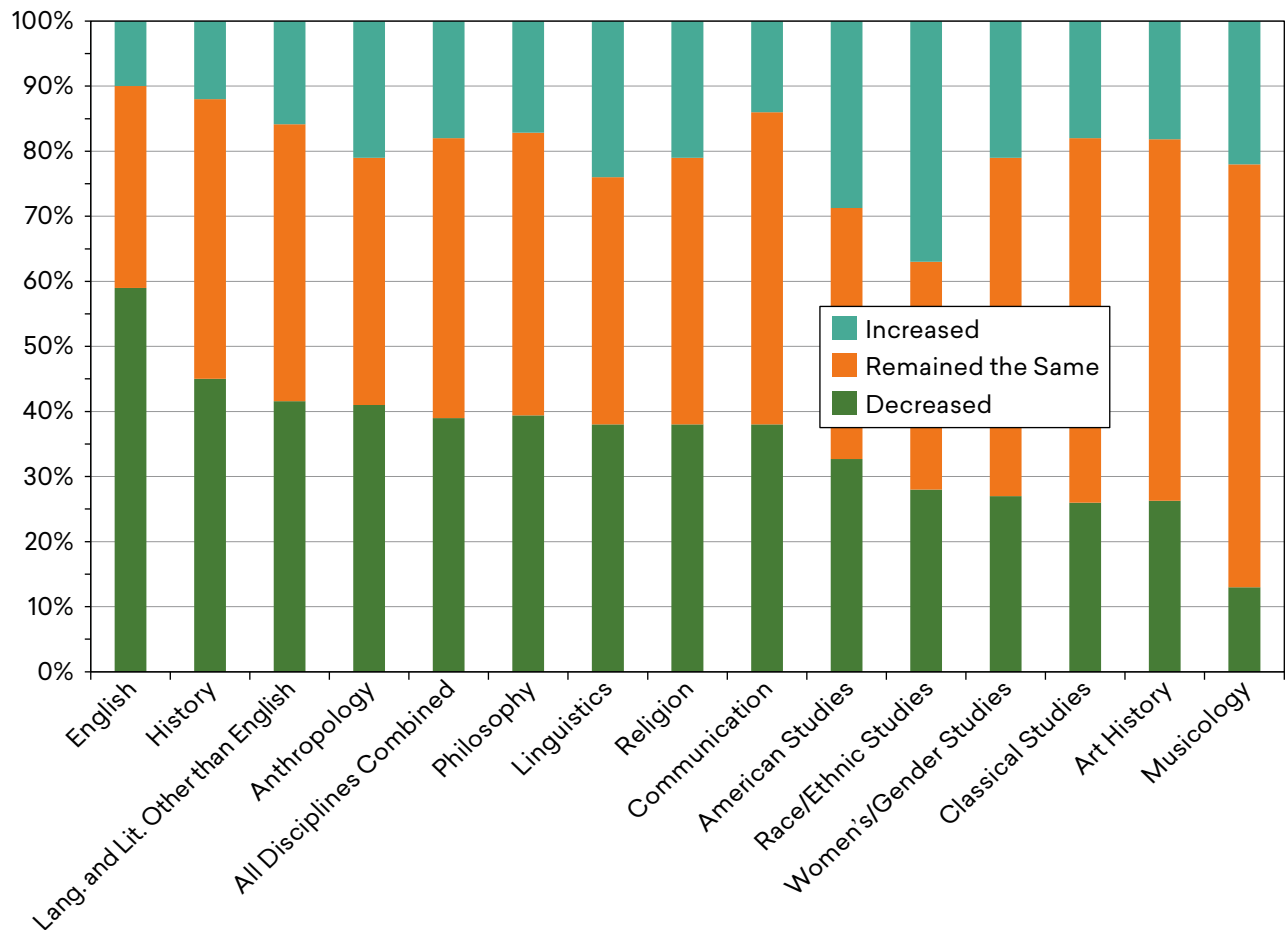
since the 2012 survey, the share fell from 50% to 41% over 11 years.

Not all humanities departments experienced decline. In religion departments, for instance, though the overall balance between tenure-line and adjunct faculty did not change significantly, the proportions of tenured and full-time nontenure-track faculty members *increased*, and the proportions of tenure-track and part-time nontenure-track faculty members *decreased*. Additionally, these developments occurred in the context of a contraction in

**Figure 4: Distribution of Faculty Members Across Tenure Status, by Discipline, Fall 2023**



**Figure 5: Share of Department Chairs Reporting a Change in the Number of Tenure-Line Faculty from Fall 2020 to Fall 2023, by Discipline**



the total number of faculty in the discipline. This serves as a useful reminder to read the numbers with care before assessing a particular change as “good” or “bad.”

The survey also asked departments for recent trends in their faculty numbers (comparing fall 2020 to fall 2023 numbers). As shown in Figure 5, substantial shares of the departments in every discipline reported a decrease of one or more tenure-line faculty over the previous three years. English departments stood out in this regard, with 59% of such departments reporting a decrease. More than 40% of history, anthropology, and LOTE departments also reported a decline in tenure-eligible faculty. A relatively small share of departments in every discipline reported at least a slight increase in tenure-line faculty in their departments, ranging from a low of 10%

---

**Substantial shares of the departments in every discipline reported a decrease of one or more tenure-line faculty over the previous three years.**

---

of English departments to a high of 37% of race/ethnic studies departments. However, in every discipline except English, a majority of departments saw their numbers hold steady.

Departments in every surveyed discipline were more likely to indicate that they had seen an increase of at least one nontenure-track faculty member in their departments than a decrease (Figure 6). (The survey did not distinguish between full- and part-time employment when asking this question, so the

## 2. Humanities Faculty

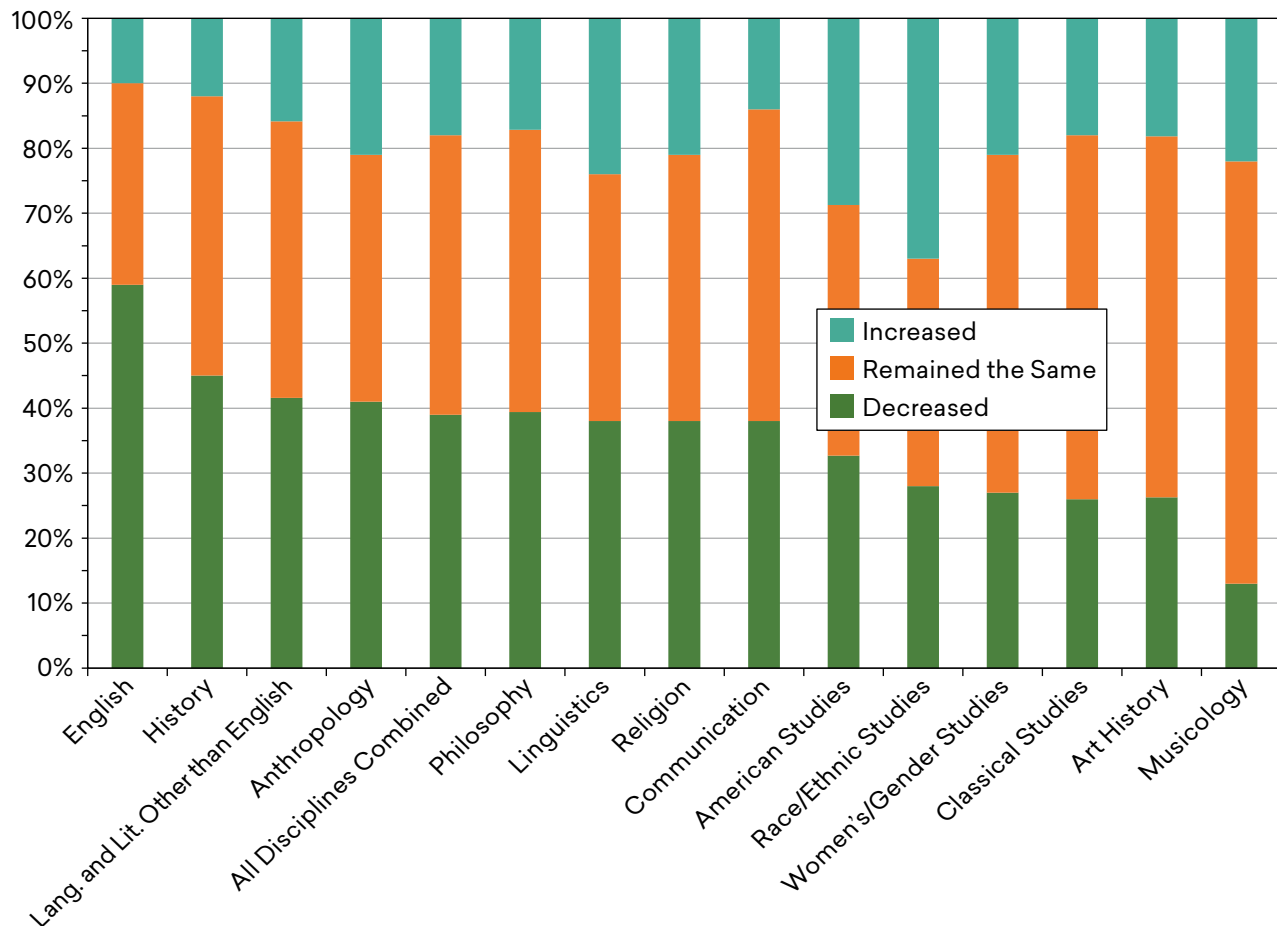
data do not indicate where growth is occurring.) Departments of race/ethnic studies were again among the most likely to report an increase (37%), but the same share of English departments also reported an increase in nontenure-track faculty. Departments of classical studies were the least likely to report growth in this category—but even there, one-in-five departments reported an increase.

Relatively small shares of humanities departments reported a decrease in the number of nontenure-track faculty, but English again had the largest share reporting a decline (27%) followed by communication (23%) and LOTE and American studies (each 21%). Two of the smaller disciplines—linguistics and musicology—were the least likely to report a decrease (9% each).

## Recent Patterns of Hiring and Tenuring

Alongside the questions designed to provide benchmark numbers and gauge expansion or contraction in the use of adjunct faculty, the survey also asked for a comparison between the number of faculty hired for the start of the 2023–24 academic year and the average number of faculty who left the department in each of the two previous years. (The survey uses the average to account for variations from year to year.) These data provide further evidence of a contraction in the number of humanities faculty (Figure 7). For almost every discipline, the number of faculty leaving each year was at least modestly larger than the number of new hires. Women’s/gender studies had the largest proportional difference

**Figure 6: Share of Department Chairs Reporting a Change in the Number of Nontenure-Track Faculty from Fall 2020 to Fall 2023, by Discipline**



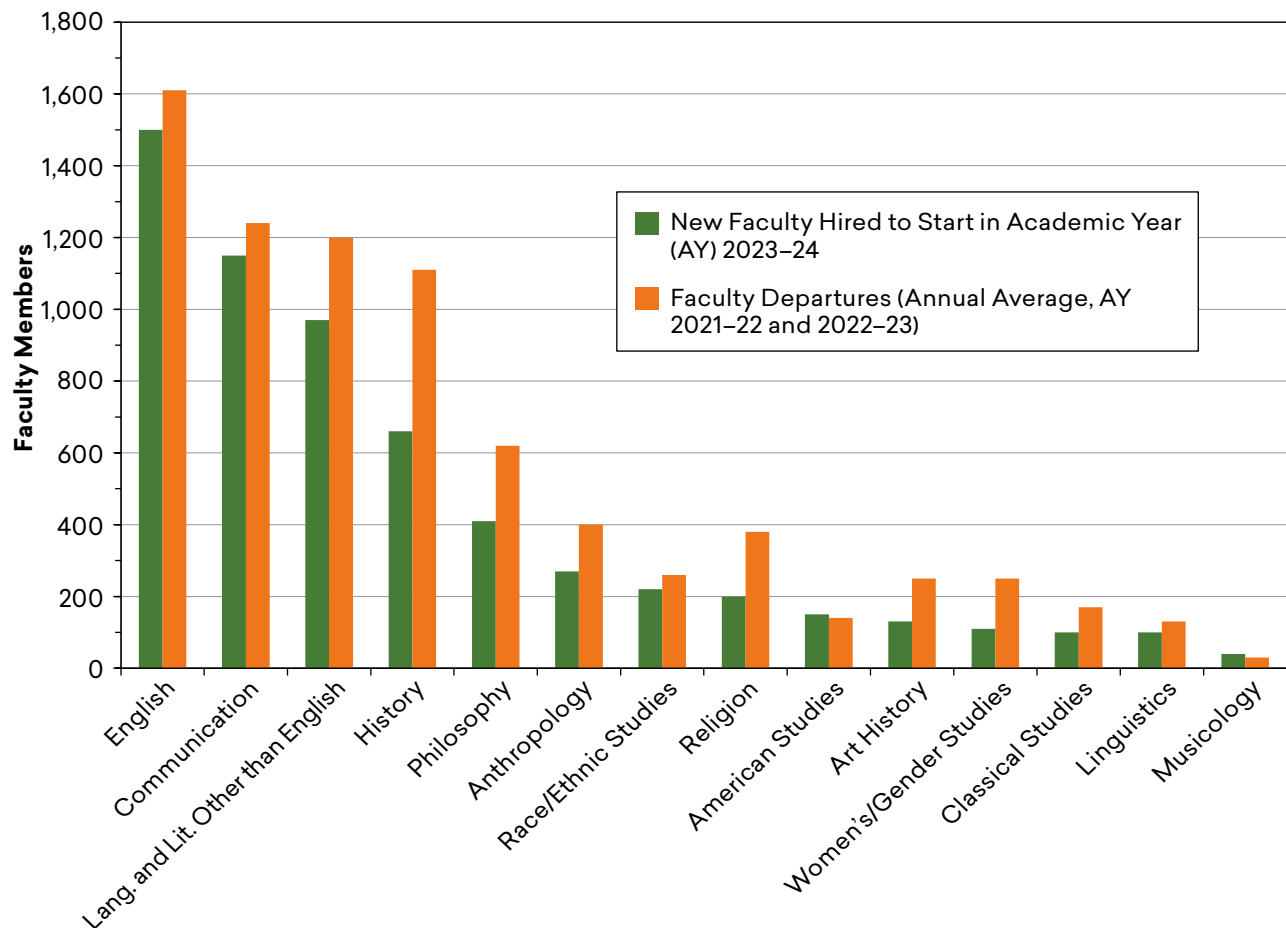
For almost every discipline, the number of faculty leaving each year was at least modestly larger than the number of new hires.

between departures and new hires, with the new hires accounting for less than half the number of departures. The number of new faculty hired in art history, religion, history, and classical studies was also substantially lower than the number of recent departures. Only American studies and musicology had a larger number of hires than average departures. This was in stark contrast to the previous surveys, where the number of hires was typically larger than the average number of departures.

English departments hired the largest number of faculty for the 2023–24 academic year (approximately 1,500 hires). For English and most other disciplines, the hiring rate was generally 4–5% of the total number of faculty. American studies was a notable exception, with an estimated 150 new hires, accounting for 10% of the total. Musicology and race/ethnic studies departments also had relatively high rates of hiring (7% each).

The survey also inquired about tenure activity in the departments. Looking at the most recent two years before the survey (2021–22 and 2022–23), English had the largest share of departments with some tenure activity, with 56% of departments reporting at least one faculty member coming up for tenure. This was to be expected, given the much larger number of faculty in each English department. However, the other large disciplines had substantially lower levels

**Figure 7: Faculty Hires and Departures, by Discipline**



## 2. Humanities Faculty

of tenure activity, with only 43% of communication departments and 42% of LOTE departments engaging in some tenure activity. History had the lowest level of tenure activity among the large disciplines, just 38%. That put history below most of the medium-size and small disciplines in the survey, where the tenure activity rate ranged from 34% (for philosophy) to 45% (for anthropology). The outliers were American studies (22%) and classical studies (26%).

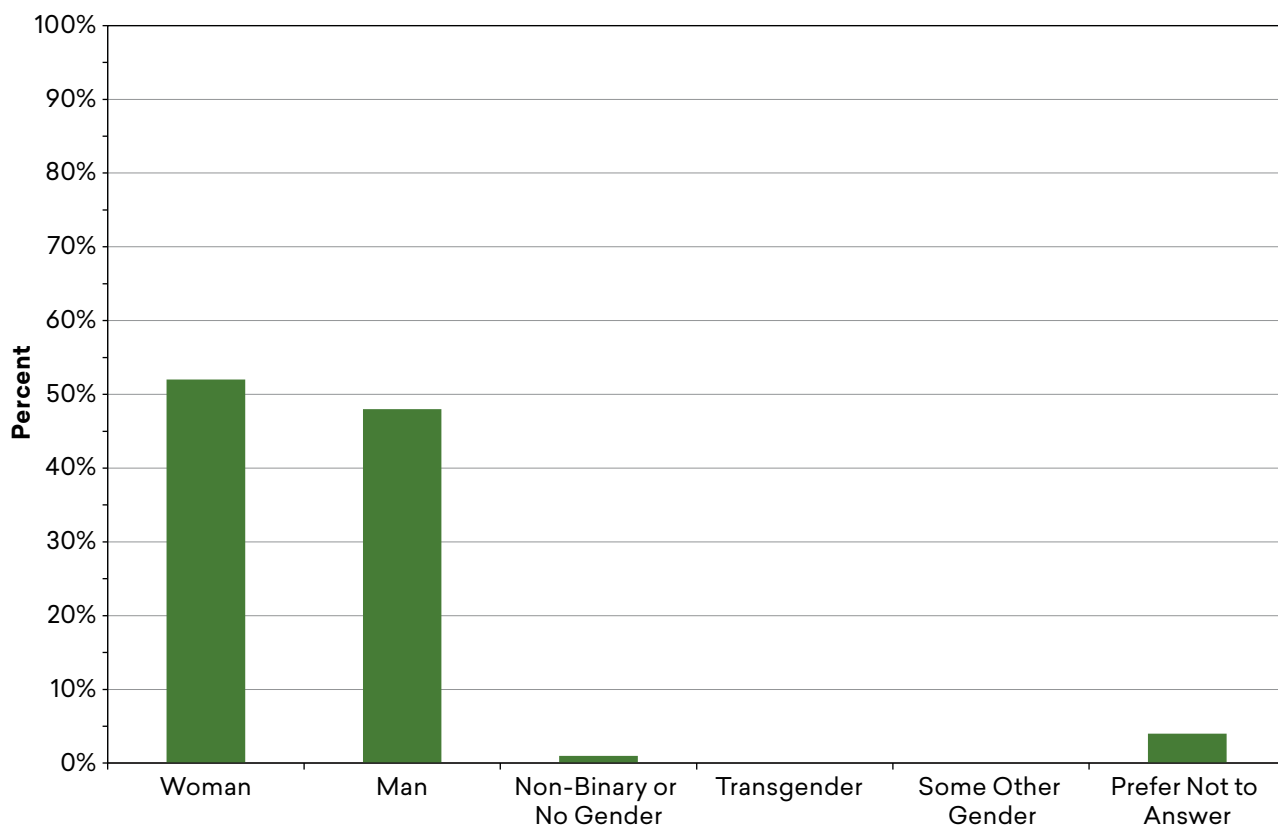
Regardless of the discipline, if a faculty member went through the tenure process, they generally received tenure. Among all the humanities and humanities-adjacent disciplines in the survey, 2,470 faculty members received tenure, and just 50 were denied tenure. Languages and communication were the only disciplines to report any tenure denials (30 in communication and 10 each for English and LOTE departments). However, in most disciplines, a substantial number of faculty members left prior to a

tenure decision (620 in all), with the important caveat that we don't know why they left at that time. Languages and communication had the largest numbers of faculty leaving prior to a tenure decision, while departments of race/ethnic studies and women's/gender studies had the highest *proportion* of tenure-eligible faculty leaving before a tenure decision (more than half as many faculty left early as received tenure).

### The Demographics of Department Chairs

Previous department surveys asked about the gender demographics of faculty members. After thorough consultation, the HI staff decided that asking department chairs to assign gender, racial, or ethnic identities to their faculty was no longer appropriate. To provide benchmark information for the field, however,

**Figure 8: Self-Reported Gender of Department Chairs, 2023–24\***



\* Respondents were instructed to select all categories that applied. The percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.



**When asked for their racial/ethnic identity, 79% of the department chairs characterized themselves as white.**

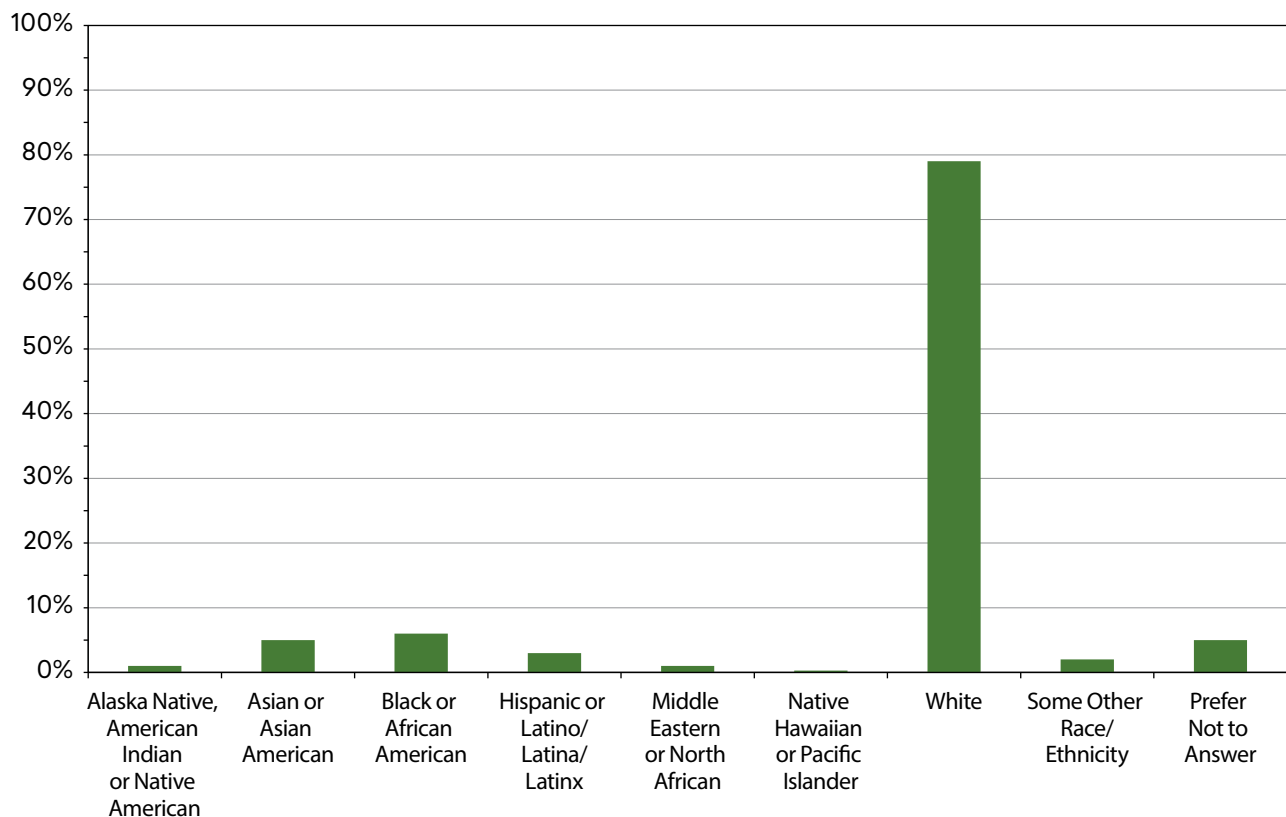
the survey asked department chairs to self-identify on those questions.

Across all the surveyed disciplines, 52% of department chairs identified as women, 48% as men, 1% as nonbinary or no gender, and less than 1% as either transgender or some other gender (Figure 8). Departments of women’s/gender studies were the most likely to be chaired by a woman (91%), while philosophy had the smallest share of women chairs, with just 23%. Women were a majority of the chairs in all but five of the other surveyed departments: English, religion, classical studies, musicology, and history. Notably, however, women

have earned more than 60% of humanities PhDs since 1998, and for much of that time women earned a majority of the PhDs in all but four humanities disciplines (classical studies, history, philosophy, and religion).<sup>4</sup>

When asked for their racial/ethnic identity, 79% of the department chairs characterized themselves as white (Figure 9). Respondents were able to select all categories that applied, with 1% identifying as Alaska Native, American Indian, or Native American; 5% as Asian or Asian American; 6% as Black or African American; 3% as Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx; 1% as Middle Eastern or North African; less than 1% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; and 2% as “Some Other Race/Ethnicity.” In all but one of the surveyed disciplines, more than 77% of department chairs identified as white. The exception was race/ethnic studies departments (20%).

**Figure 9: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity of Department Chairs, 2023–24\***



\* Respondents were instructed to select all categories that applied. The percentages therefore add up to more than 100%.

### 3. Undergraduate Students: Enrollments, Degrees, and Other Awards

The survey was also developed to provide information about undergraduate and graduate students that is not available from other sources, including level of enrollment in humanities courses and the number of minors awarded.

#### Assessing Student Enrollments

Starting with enrollments, the survey found that in fall 2023, total enrollment in undergraduate humanities courses was 5.6 million over the 14 disciplines included in the survey. Enrollment ranged from 21,470 in musicology to almost 1.6 million in English. (These are “duplicated” counts, so a student enrolled in more than one course in the subject would be counted in each course.) Notably, when measured by student enrollments, the communication discipline is not among the four largest disciplines. While English and history had more than a million enrollments in their fall 2023 courses and LOTE had slightly below a million, communication had total enrollments of only 433,660. This was below the 557,090 enrollments in philosophy courses.

Communication appears even smaller when viewed by per department average (Figure 10). Five of the disciplines in the survey averaged more than 500 undergraduate enrollments per department (English, history, LOTE, philosophy, and anthropology), and religion had an average of 450 enrollments per department. With an average of 390 enrollments per department, communication was similar to art history (which had an average of 386 enrollments). Women’s/gender studies programs had the smallest average, but still 269 enrollments per department.

Once again, a substantial gap was observed for most disciplines between the averages and the medians, indicating that a few large departments—typically at research universities—were skewing the averages upward. For instance, English departments at research universities had average undergraduate enrollments of 2,522 students, while primarily undergraduate institutions had an average of just 294. (English departments

at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, fell between the two types, with average enrollments of 970 students.<sup>5</sup>) None of the other disciplines had such a substantial gap between the largest and smallest institution types. For instance, among communication departments, the average enrollment per department at research universities was 657, while at the other institution types the average was around 248. Among LOTE departments, the highest average enrollments were found at departments in master’s institutions—not at research universities—though that was likely due to a tendency to cluster multiple languages in a single department at master’s institutions, while departments at research universities were more likely to focus on discrete languages.

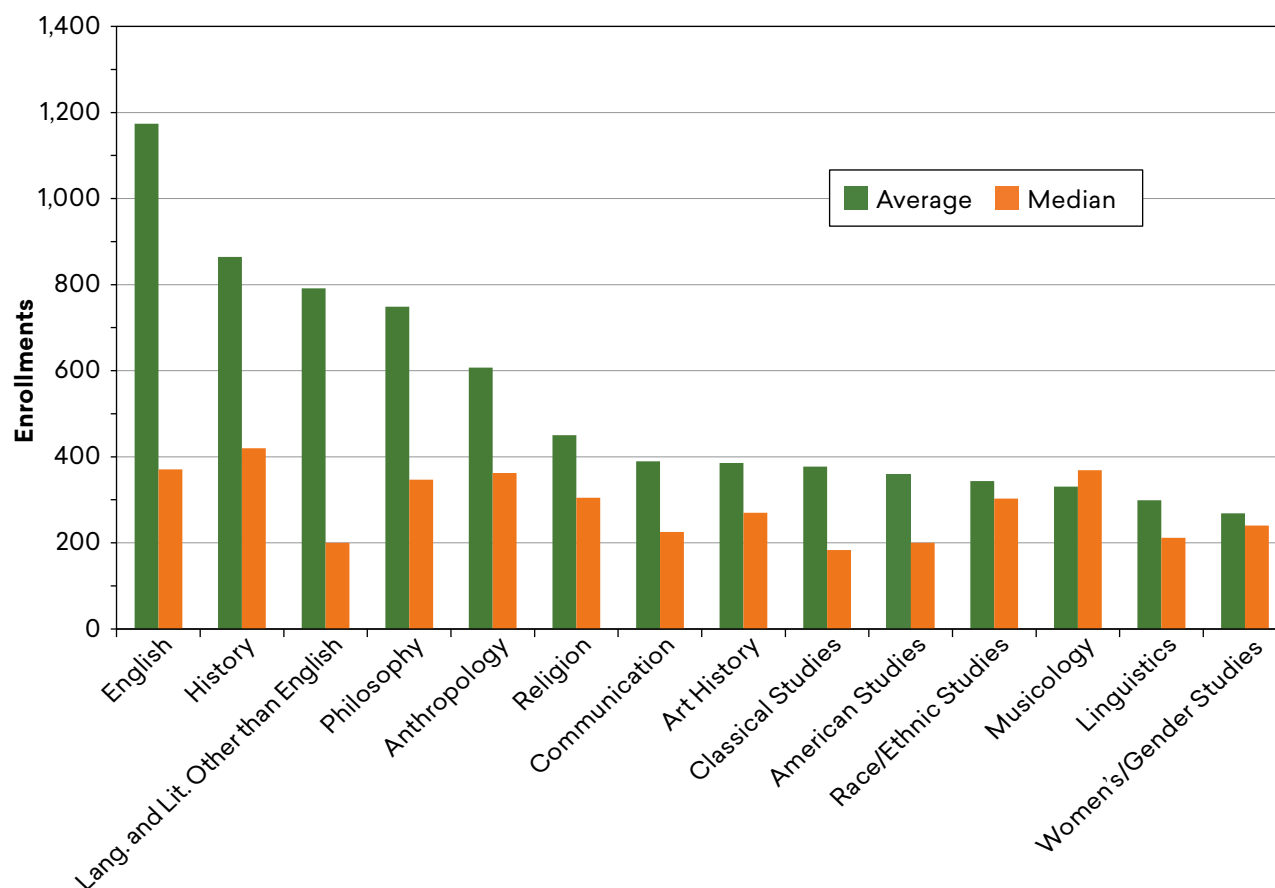
---

In fall 2023, total enrollment in undergraduate humanities courses was 5.6 million over the 14 disciplines included in the survey.

---

Sorting the disciplines by median enrollment, history had the highest per department enrollment (420), followed by English (371), musicology (369), and anthropology (363). All but one of the other disciplines had median enrollments of 200 or more per department, with the lone exception of classical studies, which had a median of 184. Departments looking to benchmark their own departmental enrollments against their peers should (a) look to the medians as a better standard for assessing their own numbers and (b) consult the discipline profiles, which provide enrollment estimates disaggregated by institution type and highest degree.

**Figure 10: Student Enrollments (Duplicated) in Undergraduate Courses per Department, by Discipline, Fall 2023**



Unfortunately, the survey had only mixed success asking about enrollments in the past (as a result of attempting to parse specific types of undergraduate courses), so a direct comparison to earlier surveys was not possible. But this round of the survey did ask chairs whether their enrollment numbers had increased, held steady, or decreased over the past three years. The data reveal that departments in the largest disciplines (measured by faculty size) were most likely to have experienced a decrease in undergraduate enrollment (Figure 11). A majority of LOTE and communication departments reported a decline of one or more undergraduate enrollments (54% each), and well over 40% of English and history departments saw declines. In all four of these disciplines, the departments reporting a decline were widely distributed across institution types, with one-third or more of departments in each Carnegie

classification reporting at least a small decline in enrollments. However, among all four disciplines, the largest shares of departments reporting declines were at the master's colleges and universities. This was true of most of the other disciplines in the survey, as well.

### Course Enrollments by Faculty Type

The survey was also designed to yield estimates of average teaching load by faculty type, as measured by undergraduate course enrollments.<sup>6</sup> The data indicate that in almost all examined disciplines, full-time tenure-line faculty had the lowest average undergraduate enrollment (Figure 12). This finding is probably to be expected given that these faculty tend to teach smaller upper-level and graduate courses,

### 3. Undergraduate Students

while adjunct faculty tend to teach larger general education courses.<sup>7</sup> What is notable here is that even the part-time faculty in most disciplines taught larger numbers of undergraduate students on average than the tenure-line faculty.

The figure shows disciplines in descending order by the average enrollment per tenured/tenure-track faculty members, revealing that tenure-line faculty members in philosophy had the heaviest enrollment load (with an average of 55 enrollments in the fall 2023 term), while those in linguistics departments had the lightest (an average of 17 enrollments). Using those two disciplines as points of comparison, the contrast with adjunct faculty becomes apparent, as average enrollments for full-time nontenure-track faculty in philosophy were 101, while their counterparts in linguistics had an average of 75. The comparable

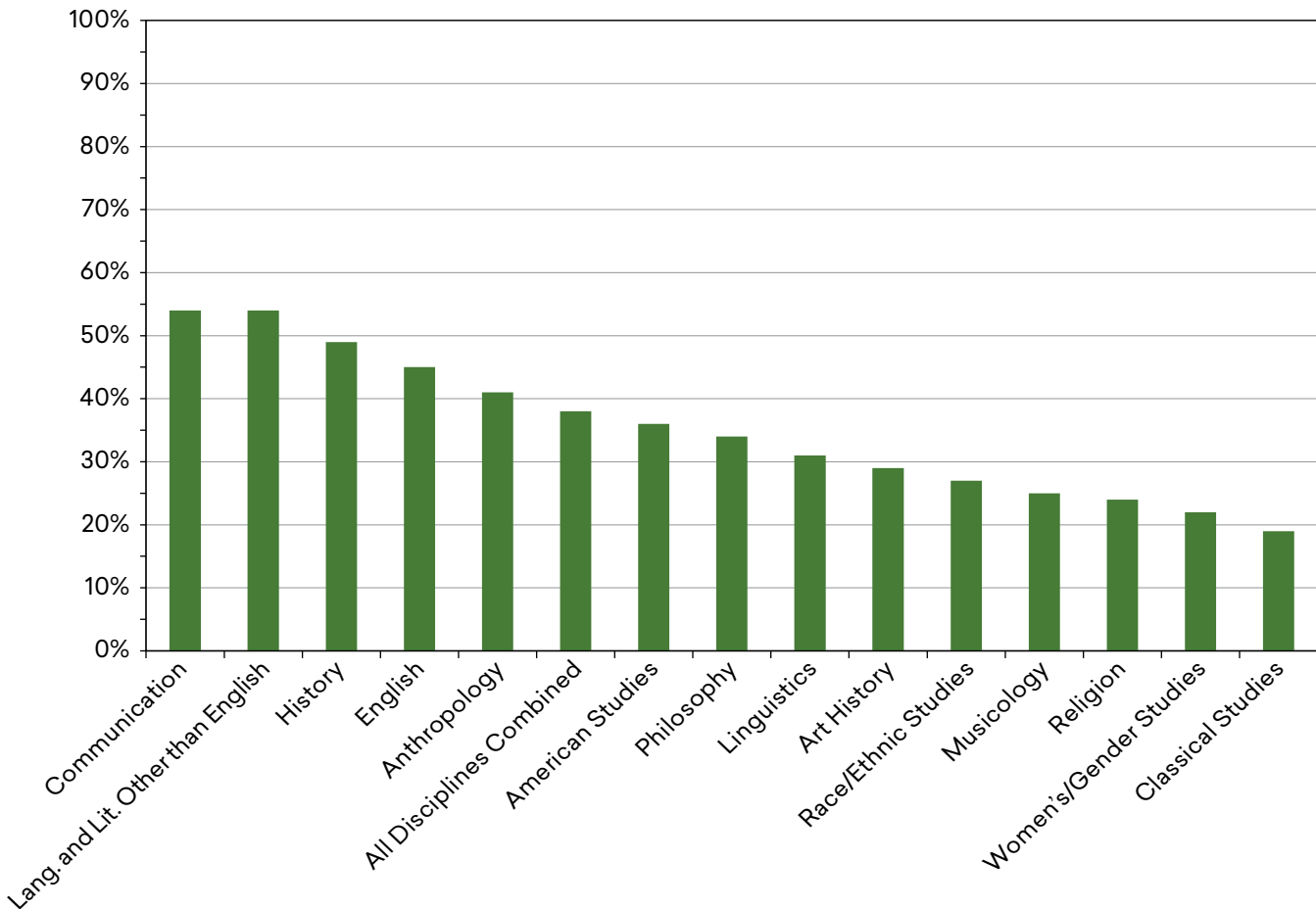
---

Even the part-time faculty in most disciplines taught larger numbers of undergraduate students on average than the tenure-line faculty.

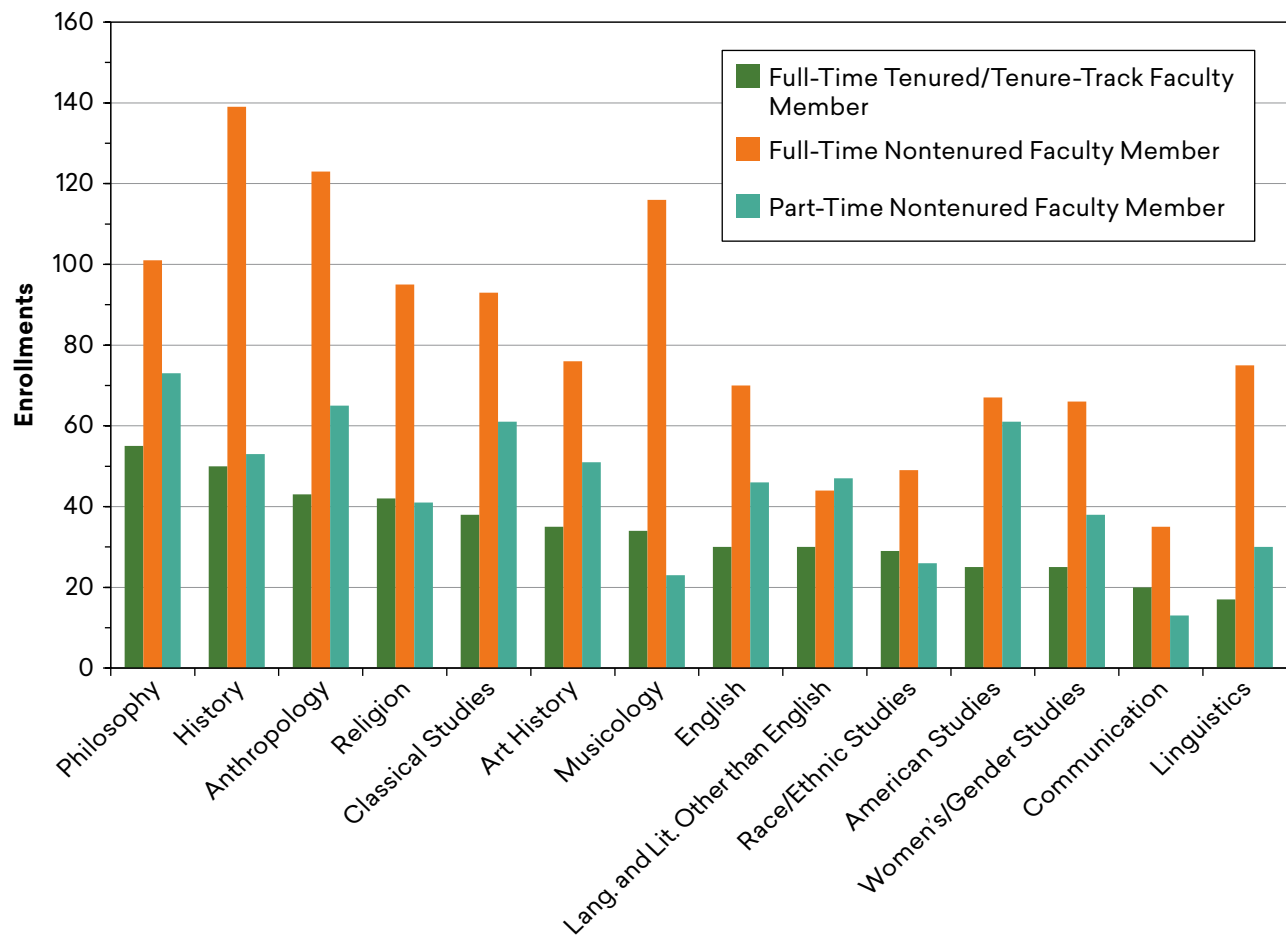
---

averages for part-time faculty were 73 in philosophy and 30 for linguistics. Among the other disciplines, LOTE had the narrowest gap in undergraduate enrollments between tenured/tenure-track faculty and their full-time nontenure-track colleagues, though the latter's average enrollments were still almost 50% larger. In only four disciplines (communication, musicology, race/ethnic studies, and religion) were average enrollments for part-time nontenure-track faculty lower than those of their tenured/tenure-track colleagues.

**Figure 11: Share of Chairs Reporting a Decrease in Undergraduate Enrollments from Fall 2020 to Fall 2023**



**Figure 12: Average Number of Enrollments per Faculty Member, by Tenure Status and Discipline, Fall 2023**



## Majors and Minors

Shifting the perspective from student enrollments to student majors surfaces a substantial difference between these two means of gauging the number of students served by a discipline's departments. While undergraduate enrollments in communication departments were small relative to the other large and medium-sized humanities disciplines, the discipline accounted for the largest number of humanities majors and students earning bachelor's degrees. The survey estimates that communication departments collectively had 128,290 juniors and seniors with a declared major in the discipline in fall 2023, and that they awarded approximately 56,700 bachelor's degrees in the 2022–23 academic year. English, which had three times as many enrollments as

communication (reflecting a much larger part of the general education curriculum), had a comparatively modest 91,490 majors and 43,080 bachelor's degrees awarded. The smallest discipline by this measure was musicology, with 260 declared majors and 140 degrees awarded.

Communication departments also had the largest median number of majors and bachelor's degrees awarded per department (Figure 13). Among communication departments, the median number of bachelor's degrees awarded was 19, and the number of declared majors was 36. With the exception of musicology, the medians for other disciplines ranged from 5 to 14 baccalaureate degrees awarded and from 10 to 30 majors. Musicology was the outlier, with a median of 2 undergraduate degrees awarded per department, and 2 majors.

### 3. Undergraduate Students

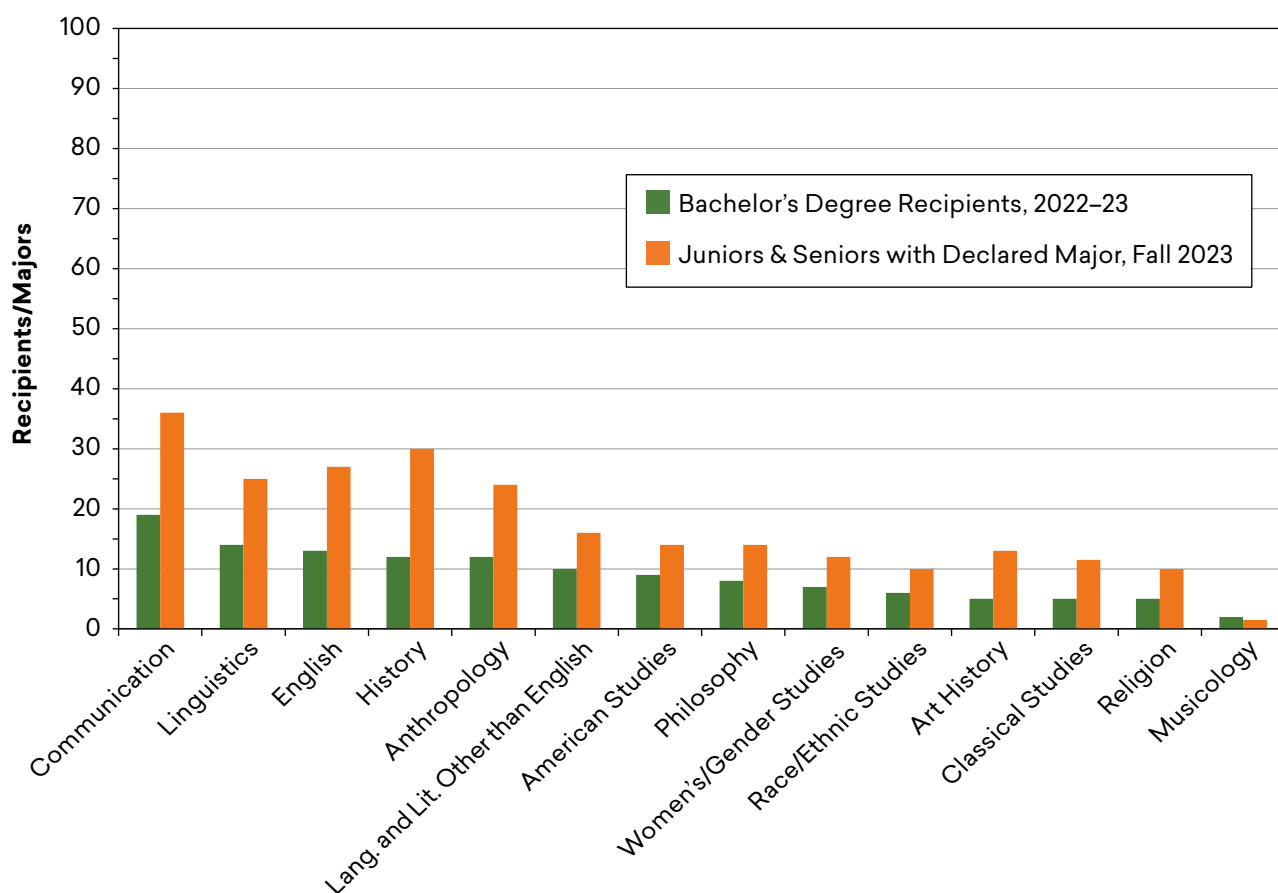
The median number of juniors and seniors with declared majors ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 times the number of bachelor's degrees being awarded (except in musicology, where there appeared to be slightly less than one major per graduate). However as the comparison in majors is to two classes of students (juniors and seniors), a greater than 2 to 1 ratio would seem preferable as a positive indicator of future growth, particularly at a time when most of the disciplines have seen degrees decline substantially in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Six of the 14 disciplines had medians with two or more majors for every one bachelor's degree awarded: art history, history, classical studies, English, anthropology, and religion.

The HDS is the only source of information on the number of minors, certificates, and other microcredentials awarded nationally in humanities disciplines. In the 2022–23 academic year, LOTE awarded the largest number of minors per department in the humanities,

with a median of 15 (Figure 14). With the exception of musicology, the other disciplines were fairly similar in the number of minors awarded. The social science-adjacent disciplines (anthropology, race/ethnic studies, and women's/gender studies) were at the high end, awarding 10 per department, while art history and religion were at the lower end, awarding 6 per department. Musicology departments were the outlier, awarding a median of just 1 minor per department.

Despite considerable talk in recent years about the potential value of certificates and other microcredentials for the field, they remain relatively rare in almost every surveyed discipline. English, communication, and LOTE departments awarded the largest numbers of certificates and other microcredentials (ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 in the 2022–23 academic year). Aside from history (where almost 3,000 were awarded), all the other disciplines awarded considerably

**Figure 13: Median Number of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in AY 2022–23 and Declared Majors in Fall 2023 per Department, by Discipline**

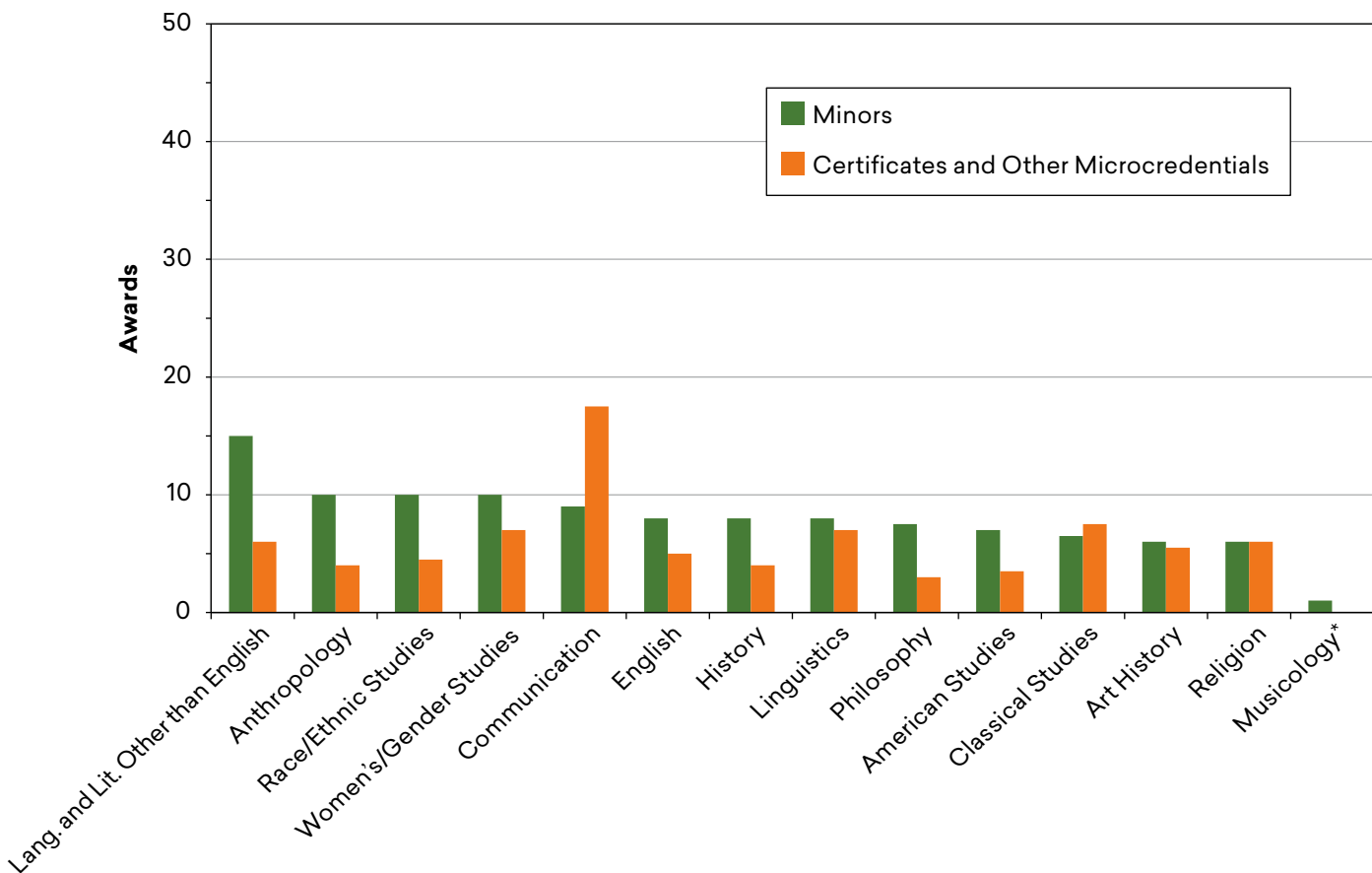


The HDS is the only source of information on the number of minors, certificates, and other microcredentials awarded nationally in humanities disciplines.

smaller numbers. However, some of that difference appears largely a function of the smaller numbers of departments in those other disciplines, as on a per department basis the numbers appear much more similar. With the exception of communication (where the median number of certificate and other microcredential awards was 18), all the other disciplines had medians ranging from 3 to 8 per department.

While the awarding of minors appeared fairly ubiquitous across all humanities disciplines—and generally followed patterns seen in the relative numbers of bachelor’s degrees awarded—the awards of certificates and other microcredentials varied widely across and within disciplines. In English and history, for instance, these awards were largely limited to colleges and universities with graduate programs. However, in disciplines such as philosophy and religion, certificates and other microcredentials were more likely to be awarded by departments that did not award graduate degrees. Given those variations, the nature and purpose of these awards in the humanities merits further study.

**Figure 14: Median Number of Minors and Certificates/Other Microcredentials Awarded per Department, by Discipline, AY 2022–23**



\* The survey could not generate a reliable estimate of the number of certificates and other microcredentials for musicology departments awarding graduate degrees because not enough departments responded.

## 4. Graduate Students: Enrollments, Degrees, and Other Awards

Among the humanities disciplines, English departments had the largest number of graduate students enrolled in their programs in fall 2023 (21,570), followed by departments in history (15,070), communication (13,610), and LOTE (11,010). The medium-size disciplines (anthropology, philosophy, art history, religion, and linguistics) had 3,000–7,000 graduate students. The smallest disciplines (classical studies, American studies, musicology, race/ethnic studies, and women’s/gender studies) had 500–1,200 graduate students in their programs.

When measured by the median number of graduate students per department, however, the relative sizes of disciplines are rather different (Figure 15). Communication had the largest median number of graduate students per department (40). English and anthropology were the only other disciplines with medians above 30, while history, linguistics, and philosophy had 26. Musicology departments had the smallest median number of graduate students (8).

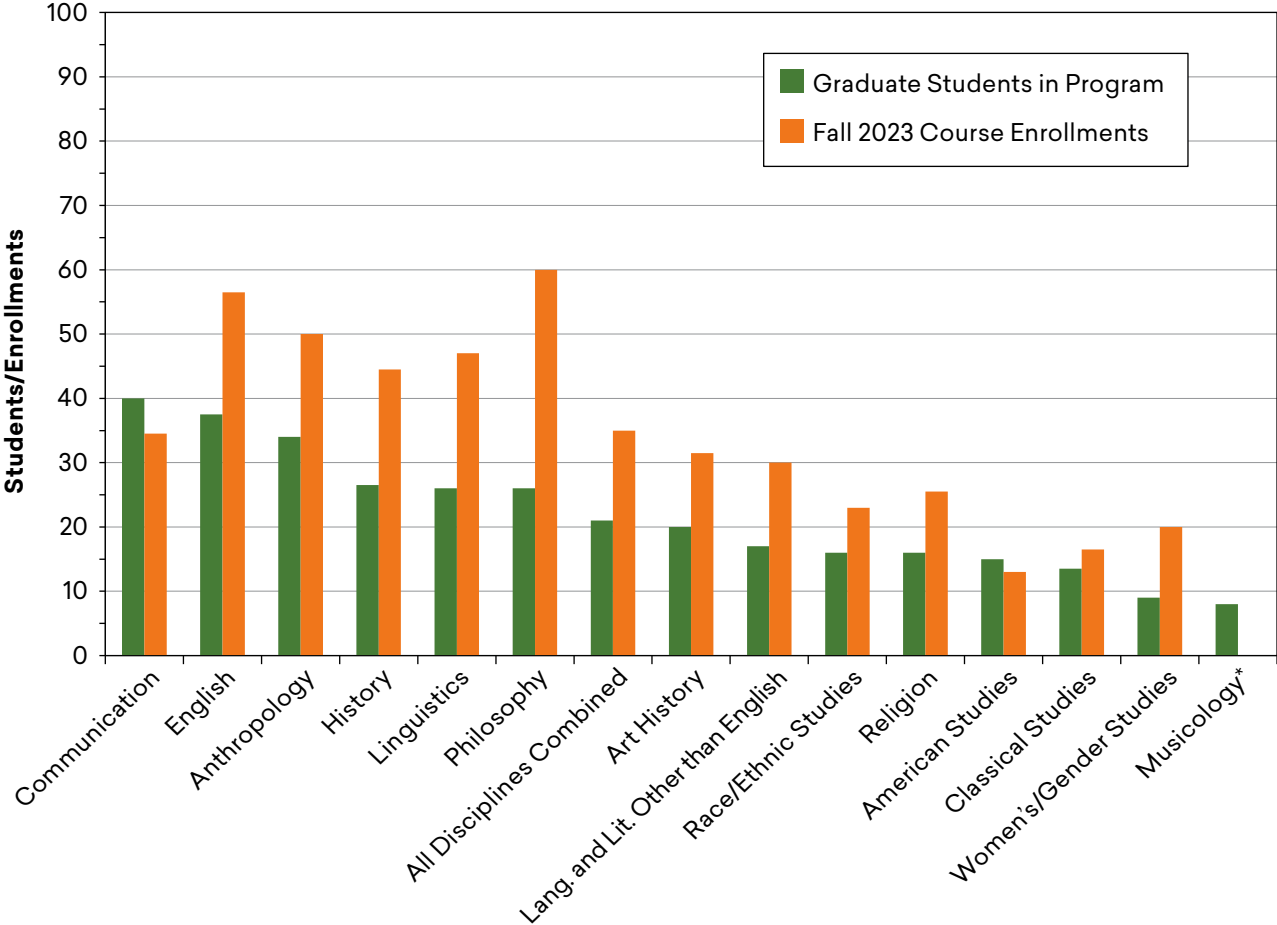
Using the median number of student enrollments in fall 2023 graduate courses as a measure of size yields a somewhat similar distribution. The enrollment count was likely lower than the total number of students earning graduate-level course credits because students in independent studies, practicums, or writing a thesis or dissertation were not included in the numbers. Communication and American studies were the only disciplines where the median number of graduate course enrollments were (slightly) lower than the median numbers of graduate students in the program, while philosophy was the only discipline where median enrollments were substantially

higher (more than double) than the median number of graduate students. Philosophy also had the highest median number of graduate course enrollments (60), modestly above the median for English (57). Most of the other disciplines had median course enrollments that ranged from 30 to 50.

The counts of graduate students do not distinguish between doctoral students and those working toward master’s or other advanced degrees, but the survey did ask about the number of doctoral students starting in their programs. Communication and English had the largest average number of new doctoral students per program (estimated as slightly over 10). The averages for the other PhD programs ranged from 3 in American studies to 7 in linguistics. The four large disciplines (English, history, communication, and LOTE) each had approximately 1,000 or more new doctoral students in fall 2023, while five other disciplines (anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, art history, and religion) had added 300–720 new doctoral students. The remaining disciplines each added 250 or fewer students.



**Figure 15:** Median Number of Graduate Students and Course Enrollments per Department, by Discipline, Fall 2023

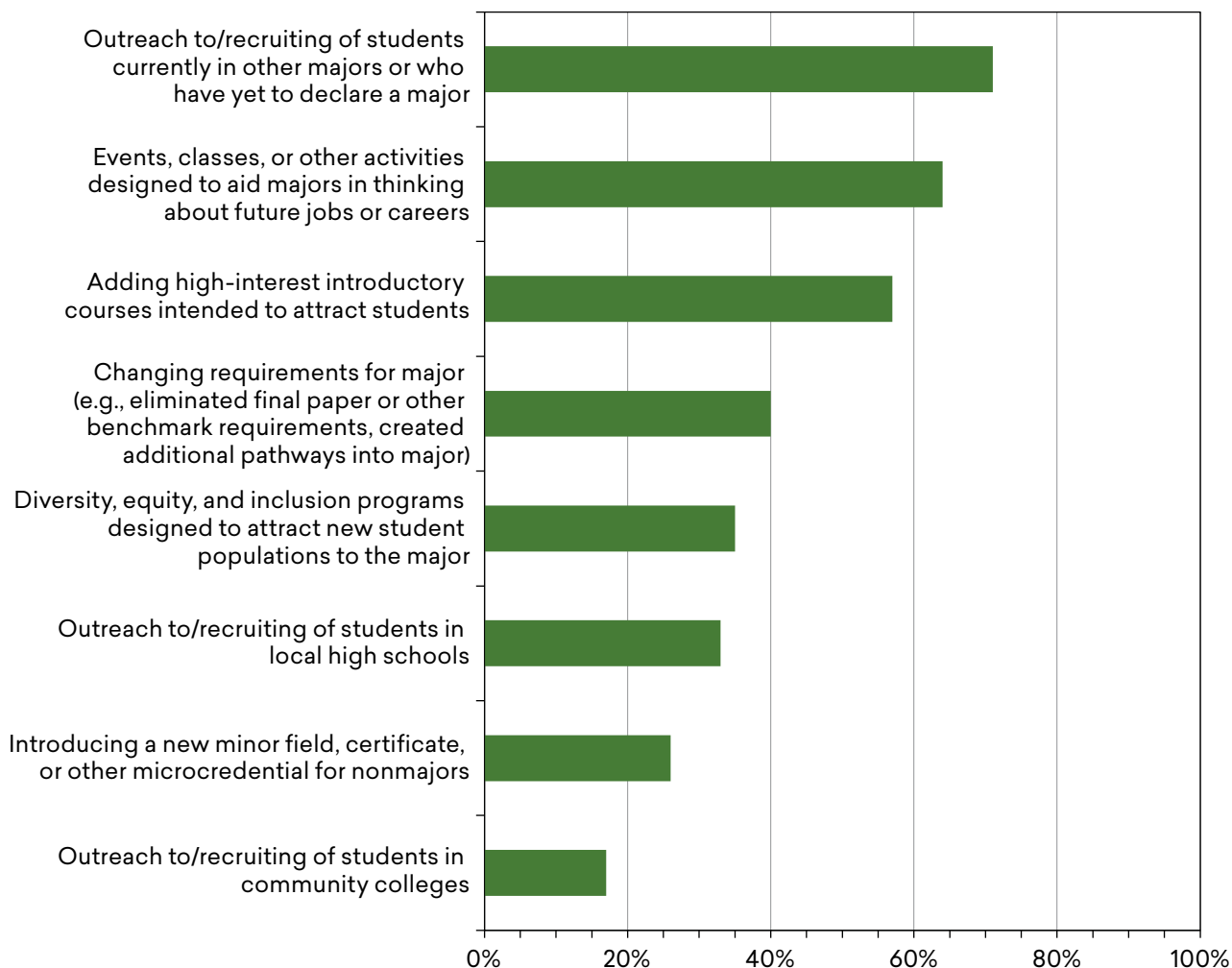


\* The survey could not generate a reliable estimate of graduate course enrollments in musicology departments because not enough departments responded.

## 5. Policies and Practices for Humanities Students

In addition to seeking benchmark numbers for faculty and students, the survey was also designed to shed light on departmental practices related to student recruitment and employment. Humanities stakeholders have been keenly interested in the strategies used by departments to draw more students into their programs. In consultation with department chairs and scholarly societies, the HI staff developed a list of possible recruitment practices for the survey. Almost all of the departments were engaged in one or more student recruitment strategies identified by the project’s stakeholders, with substantial shares of departments employing each of the approaches (Figure 16).

**Figure 16:** Share of Departments Employing Various Strategies to Attract Undergraduate Students, Fall 2020 to Fall 2023



---

---

Almost all of the departments were engaged in one or more student recruitment strategies identified by the project’s stakeholders, with substantial shares of departments employing each of the approaches.

---

---

Slightly more than 70% of departments indicated that they were engaged in “outreach to/recruiting of students currently in other majors or who have yet to declare a major.” As a separate research brief from the HI reported recently, humanities and social/behavioral science departments draw in unusually large numbers of students from other programs, which would appear to validate this as a successful strategy.<sup>9</sup> However, the student population appears likely to shrink in coming years as the population of young people of traditional college age shrinks, and thus this strategy may yield diminishing returns in the future.<sup>10</sup>

A majority of the departments are also engaged in a variety of other strategies, such as offering “events, classes, or other activities designed to aid majors in thinking about future jobs or careers” and adding “high-interest introductory courses intended to attract students.” Making a change in requirements for the major was also a common strategy, with 40% of departments indicating they had adopted this practice. In addition, approximately 35% of departments had introduced diversity, equity, and inclusion programs designed to attract new student populations to the major. The other practices about which the survey asked were selected by no more than one-third of departments. When invited to share “other” strategies, a small number of departments indicated they were engaged in outreach through social media, live social events, discipline-specific clubs, or student ambassadors.

Disciplines differed with respect to their uptake of each practice. Around 80% of the departments in classical studies, race/ethnicity studies, and women’s/gender studies indicated that they were trying to attract students from other departments at their own institutions, while 80% of religion departments prioritized outreach to students from community

colleges—the only discipline to make that approach such a high priority. Most of the larger disciplines (English, history, and LOTE), as well as anthropology and art history, on the other hand, made a greater priority of offering events, classes, and other activities designed to support their students’ future careers.

In view of parent and policymaker interest in student employability, the survey also asked departments what they were doing to assist their students in preparing for future careers. The survey found that a majority of departments offered three types of programs to help their undergraduate and doctoral students prepare for future careers (Figure 17).

In every case, though, relatively small shares *required* participation. For students at the undergraduate level, the most widely adopted practice was to offer internships in a work setting, with 72% of departments providing that opportunity to their students. More than 60% of departments offered their undergraduate students occupationally oriented presentations by employers and alumni. Strikingly, however, the share of departments requiring participation in such activities was only 5% and 10% respectively. A smaller share (just 53%) offered workshops related to careers for their undergraduate students, with only 8% of the surveyed departments requiring participation.

---

---

The survey found that a majority of the departments in every discipline offered three types of programs to help their undergraduate and doctoral students prepare for future careers. In every case, though, relatively small shares required participation.

---

---

Notable differences in the prevalence of these activities were observed among the disciplines, however. The larger disciplines were the most likely to offer these programs, with 70% or more of the departments in communication, English, and history (plus anthropology) offering or requiring each of these activities. Among smaller departments, art history was a standout, with occupationally oriented presentations and coursework/workshops offered by 70% of

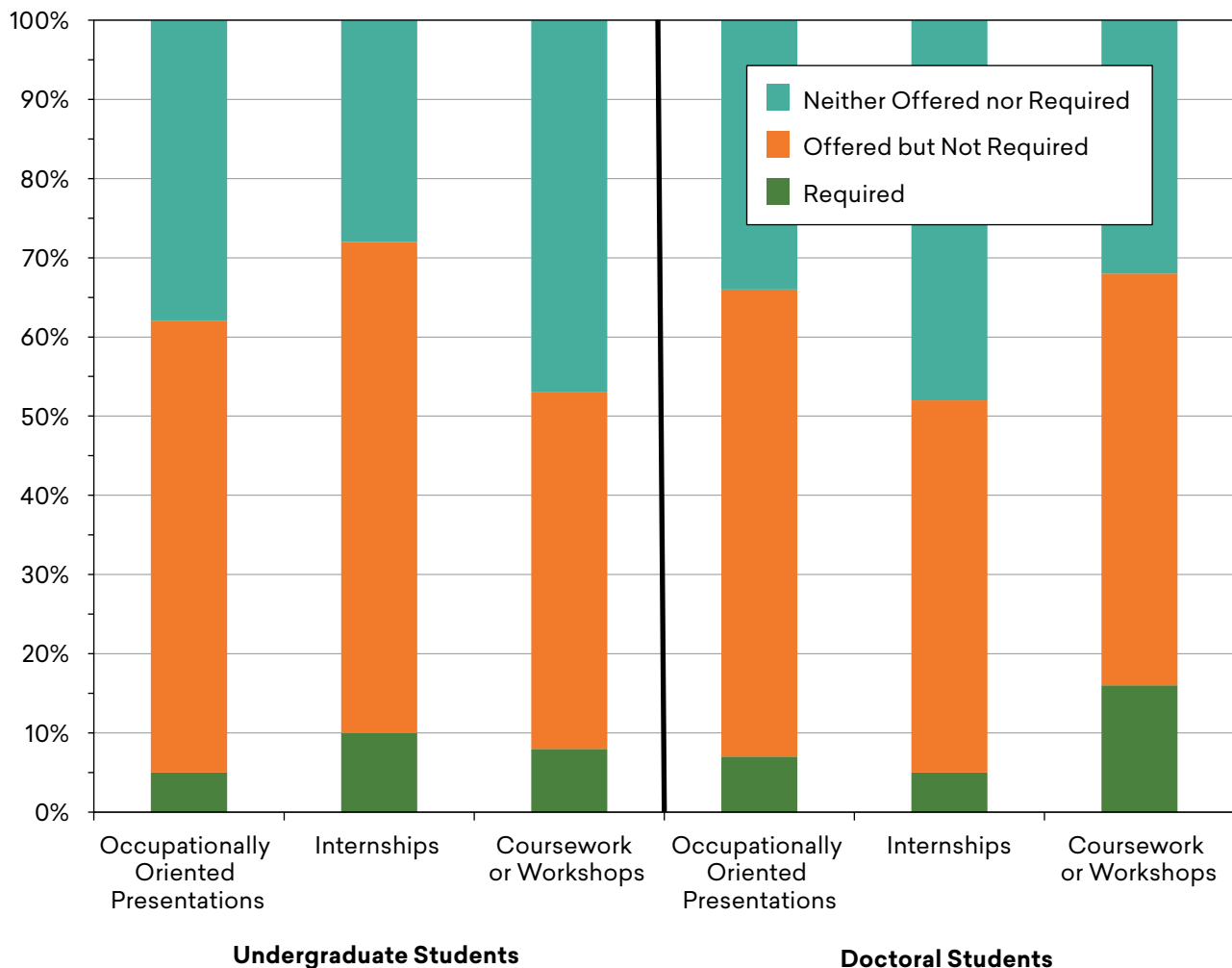
## 5. Policies and Practices for Humanities Students

its departments, and a full 94% of departments offering internships. Some disciplines were much less likely to offer these programs to undergraduate students. Fewer than half of philosophy departments, for example, supported any form of career-related programming, with only 42% offering an internship, 36% offering presentations by employers or alumni, and 21% offering career-oriented courses or workshops for undergraduates (the smallest share, by a wide margin, among all the disciplines).

Departments were somewhat more likely to offer occupationally oriented presentations and coursework to doctoral students than to undergraduates, but at the same time were *less* likely to offer internships to doctoral students than undergraduate

students. In communication, art history, and history, at least 70% of departments offered all three types of programming to doctoral students. The philosophy discipline was again one of the least likely to offer this sort of programming to their doctoral students. Occupationally oriented courses were also offered by only 46% of race/ethnic studies departments to doctoral students, and presentations and internships were offered by an even smaller share (about one-third). The study did not explore why some disciplines were so much less likely than others to provide their doctoral students with these opportunities, making this a ripe subject for future investigation.

**Figure 17: Share of Departments Offering Various Occupationally Oriented Activities, by Target Student Population, AY 2023**



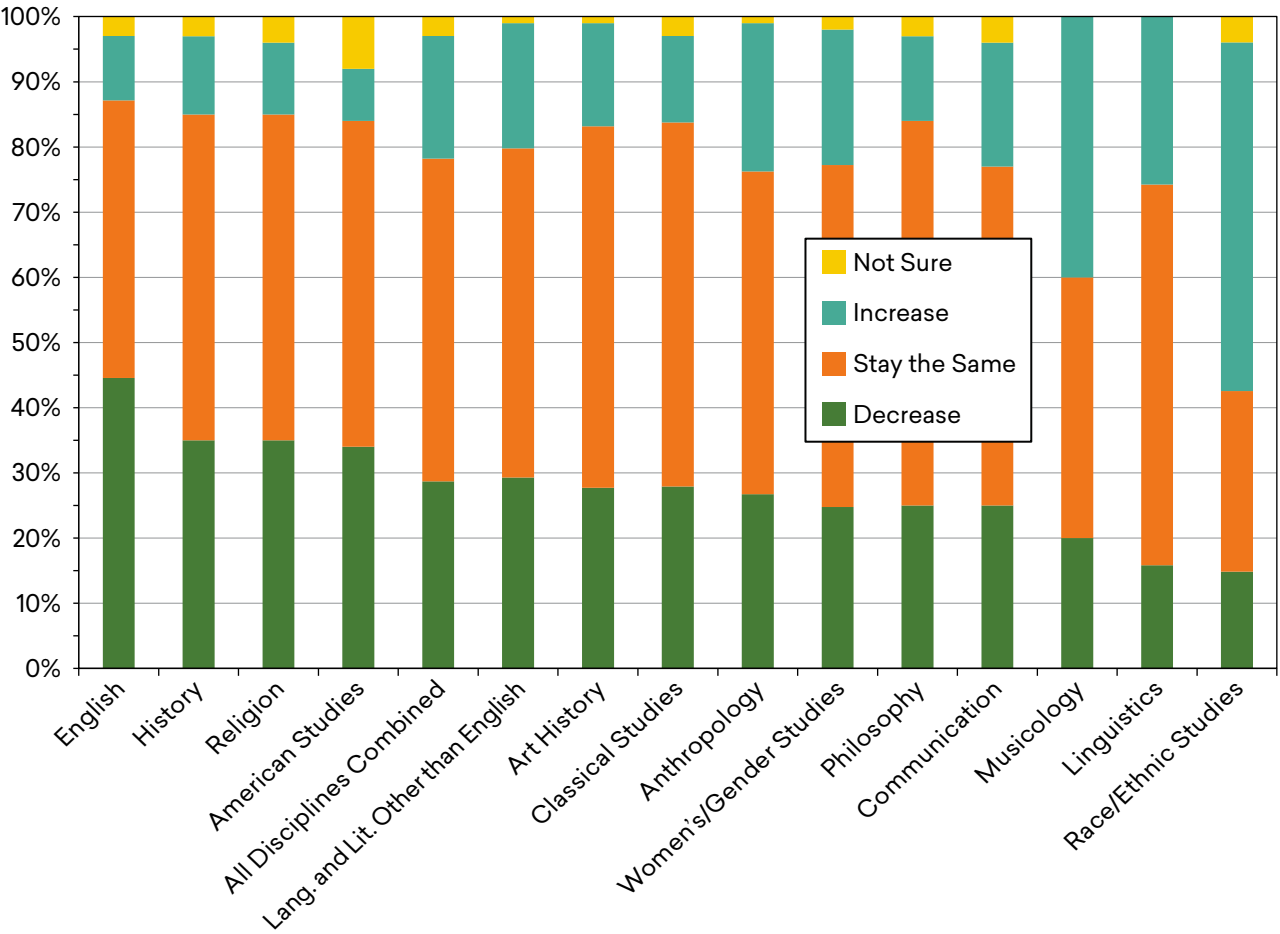
# 6. Concerns About the Future

Given recent trends in the field, this round of the survey asked chairs to offer forward-looking assessments of their departments: specifically, faculty size, academic freedom, and the health of the discipline at their institution. Respondents offered a decidedly mixed set of views about what the future holds for the field.

Most department chairs believed that the number of tenured/tenure-track faculty members in their departments would either remain the same or increase (Figure 18). The chairs of linguistics, race/ethnic studies, and musicology programs were the most optimistic, with 80% or more chairs projecting that the size of their tenured/tenure-track professoriate would hold steady or grow over the next three

years. In several other disciplines, chairs were far less sanguine. In history, religion, American studies, and English, only 53% to 62% of the department chairs believed their faculty numbers would remain steady or increase. English chairs were the most pessimistic, with 45% believing that they would lose some tenure-line faculty.

**Figure 18: Department Chair Beliefs About the Change in the Number of Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty over the Next Three Academic Years, by Discipline, 2023–24**



## 6. Concerns About the Future

The survey also found that one-in-four department chairs had concerns about academic freedom for their faculty members (though the survey was administered prior to the recent national election). Such concerns were more common among chairs at public institutions, with 31% of these chairs expressing discomfort. At private institutions, only 19% of chairs were concerned.

However, the survey did turn up substantial differences among the disciplines. The race/ethnic studies and women's/gender studies department chairs appeared the most anxious about academic freedom for their faculty members, with almost half of the chairs in each discipline expressing concern (Figure 19). Nearly one-third of the chairs in American studies and English were similarly concerned. Conversely, in six disciplines (art history, philosophy, LOTE, linguistics, classical studies, and communication),

---

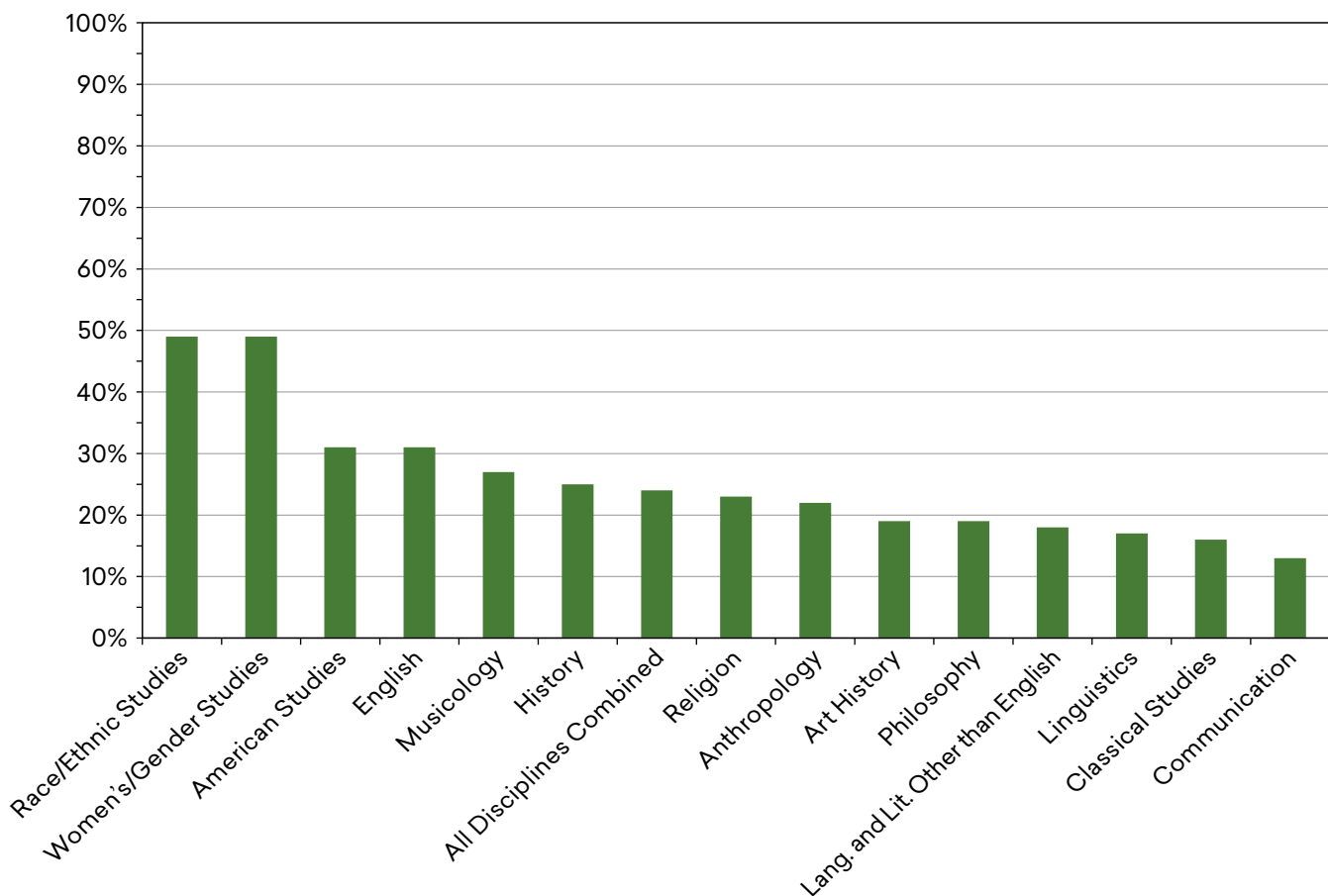
Race/ethnic studies and women's/gender studies department chairs appeared the most anxious about academic freedom for their faculty members, with almost half of the chairs in each discipline expressing concern.

---

fewer than 20% of chairs were worried about academic freedom for their faculty.

Looking at the field as whole, department chairs who expressed concerns were most likely to point to the hierarchy within their institutions, either the academic administration (selected by 62% of the chairs with concerns) or boards of trustees (cited by 57%; Figure 20). For chairs in seven of the disciplines (anthropology, art history, classical studies, history,

**Figure 19:** Share of Department Chairs Concerned About Their Faculty's Academic Freedom, by Discipline, 2023–24



Department chairs who expressed concerns were most likely to point to the hierarchy within their institutions, either the academic administration or boards of trustees.

LOTE, religion, and women’s/gender studies), the administration at their institution was the most cited source of concern about academic freedom, while boards of trustees were most likely to be cited by chairs in four other disciplines (American studies, communication, linguistics, and philosophy).

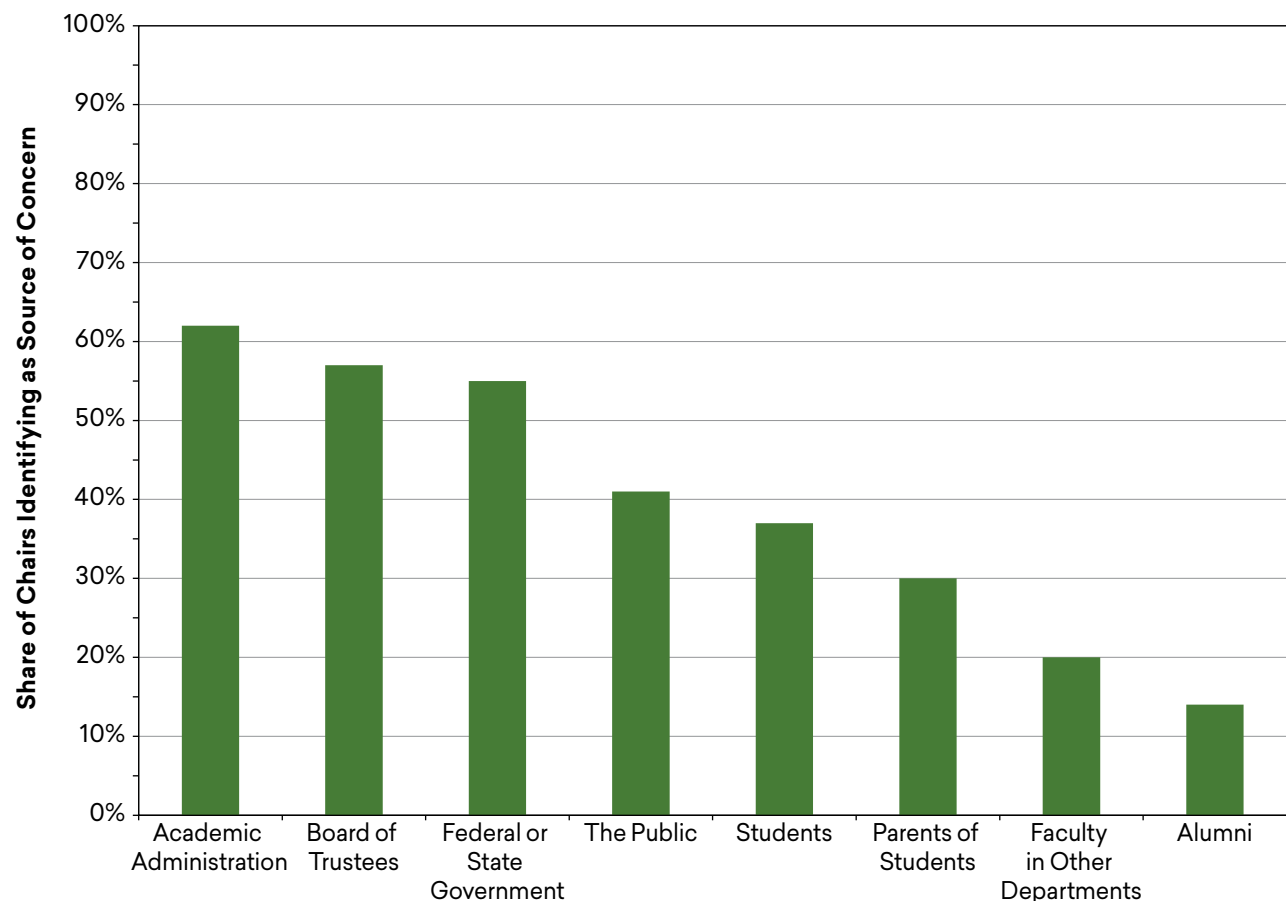
A majority of the chairs with concerns also pointed to federal or state governments as a source of worry (55%). For four disciplines (English, musicology, race/ethnic studies, and women’s/gender studies), it

was the most cited source of concern. (Women’s/gender studies was also the only discipline to have such large shares citing two different sources of concern.)

Other sources of concern (which had been proposed by department chairs and scholarly societies in the development phase of the study) were substantially less cited, though more than one-third of chairs indicated that the public and students posed a threat to academic freedom. A few department chairs wrote in other sources of concern, including donors, media (both “right wing” and “mainstream”), and specific political actors (extending from conservative political groups to “faculty in my own department who are ideologues”).

A final question asked chairs whether they were optimistic, pessimistic, or neither/not sure about the future of the discipline at their institution (Figure 21). In only linguistics (61%), musicology (60%), and race/ethnic studies (57%) did a clear majority of

**Figure 20: Source of Department Chair Concern About Their Faculty’s Academic Freedom, 2023–24**



## 6. Concerns About the Future

departments indicate that they were optimistic about the future of the discipline at their institutions. In none of the disciplines were a majority of departments pessimistic about their futures, but at least one-quarter of the departments in history, women's/gender studies, LOTE, American studies, English, and philosophy expressed some pessimism about their discipline, with the largest share of pessimists found among history department chairs (38%).

Differences in outlook between departments at public and private institutions were negligible. A greater difference was observed among Carnegie classifications. While a slight majority (51%) of departments at research universities expressed optimism about the future of their discipline, only 29% of chairs at master's institutions were optimistic—and more than one-third were pessimistic. Among English and history departments at HBCUs, a majority of chairs (54% for English and 50% for history) were either pessimistic or “not sure” about the future of the discipline at their institutions.

The chairs' responses to these questions about the condition of the humanities at their institutions

---

While a slight majority (51%) of departments at research universities expressed optimism about the future of their discipline, only 29% of chairs at master's institutions were optimistic—and more than one-third were pessimistic.

---

---

In only linguistics, musicology, and race/ethnic studies did a clear majority of departments indicate that they were optimistic about the future of the discipline at their institutions.

---

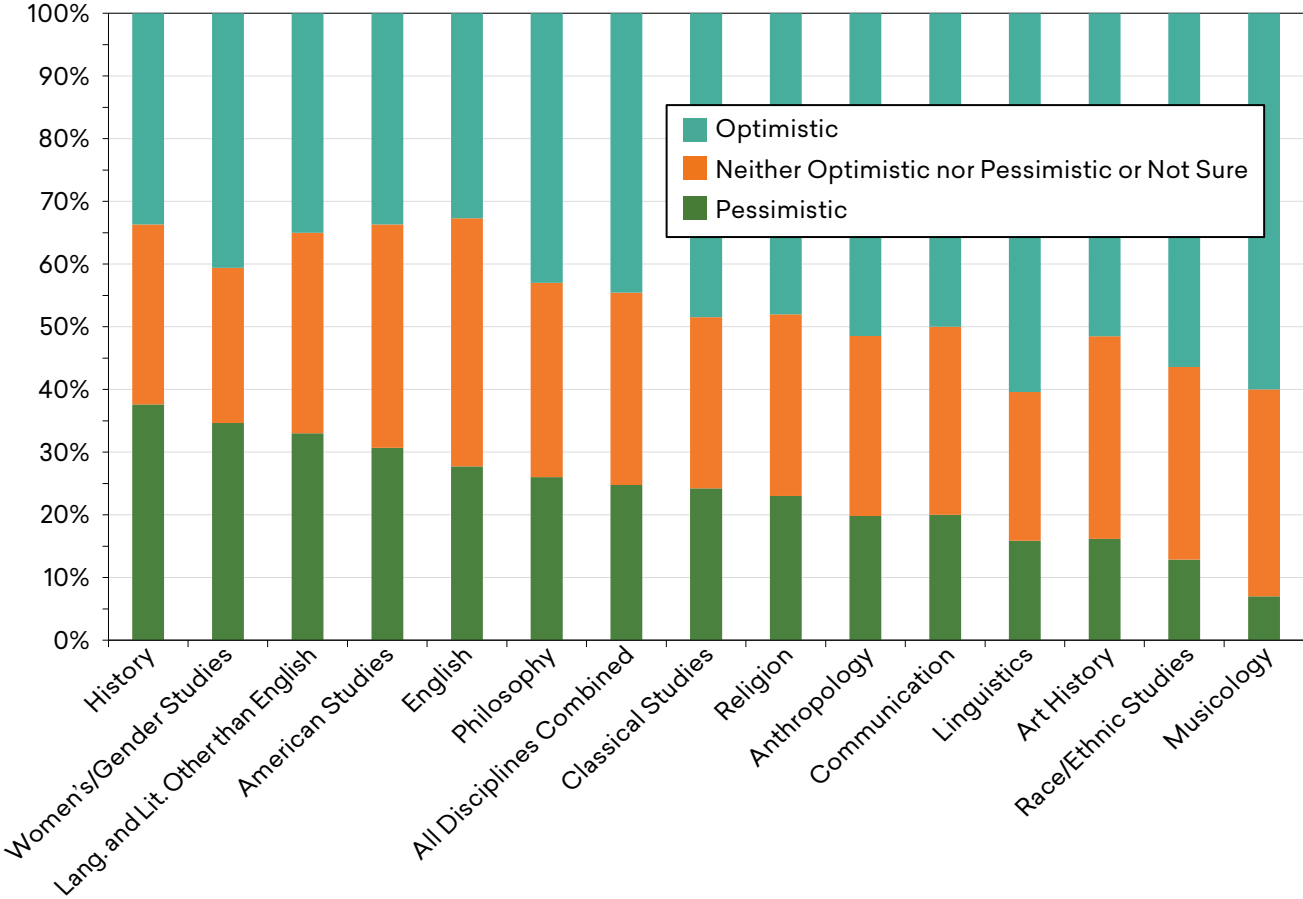
revealed a mixed state of affairs. The mood was captured by one chair who observed:

While I am not completely pessimistic and may be even somewhat optimistic given the specifics of our department right now, the position of the humanities at our institution is fragile. We have seen many retirements go unreplaced, with the number of faculty in humanities departments shrinking. This has required that existing faculty teach courses in new areas or leave central areas uncovered in the curriculum. The possibility of program closure has been in the air as well, making it stressful for all of us.

As is true of all surveys, only so much can be asked of respondents before fatigue begins to compromise data quality. The HDS only begins to describe the condition of the humanities at the nation's colleges and universities. Fortunately, the Mellon Foundation has funded the HI to conduct a series of focus groups with chairs in the coming year to help both expand and deepen understanding of these issues. Anyone interested in these questions—or who has questions about this study specifically—is welcome to contact the HI staff via the codirector of the program, Robert Townsend, at [rtownsend@amacad.org](mailto:rtownsend@amacad.org).



**Figure 21:** Share of Department Chairs Feeling Optimistic or Pessimistic About the Future of Their Discipline at Their Institution, by Discipline, 2023–24



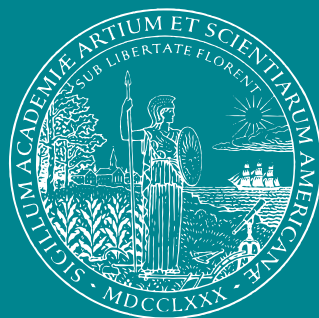
# Endnotes

1. For previous Humanities Indicators work in this area, see American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *State of the Humanities 2021: Workforce and Beyond* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021); American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *State of the Humanities 2022: From Graduate Education to the Workforce* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2022); and Humanities Indicators, Research Brief 2: *From Matriculation to Completion: How Do Humanities Majors Compare?* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, February 2025).
2. See American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *State of the Humanities 2022*, 23–28.
3. See Table 2a of the Technical Report.
4. Humanities Indicators, “Gender Distribution of Advanced Degrees in the Humanities,” <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/gender-distribution-advanced-degrees-humanities>.
5. The survey sought to oversample departments at HBCUs for comparison, but due to small numbers of departments in most of the surveyed disciplines and relatively low response rates, we were able to obtain statistically reliable estimates only for English and history.
6. To provide a fuller sense of teaching load one would also want to consider the number of courses taught, as each course, regardless of the number students, requires a syllabus and other preparation. Every previous round of the HDS has attempted to obtain the necessary course counts, but seemingly unavoidable confusion regarding teaching sections has prevented us from arriving at reliable estimates. In the absence of such information, course enrollments are the best measure of teaching load.
7. It was not possible to collect data on enrollments in co-taught courses. Such enrollments accounted for only 1% of all enrollments.
8. Humanities Indicators, “Bachelor’s Degrees in the Humanities,” <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities>.
9. See Humanities Indicators, Research Brief 2: *From Matriculation to Completion: How Do Humanities Majors Compare?*
10. Discussion about a coming “enrollment cliff” began with Nathan Grawe’s study, *Demographics and The Demand for Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018) and has continued into the present in articles such as Dan Bauman, “Colleges Were Already Bracing for an ‘Enrollment Cliff.’ Now There Might Be a Second One,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 7, 2024).



# Humanities INDICATORS

HumanitiesIndicators.org



AMERICAN ACADEMY  
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

[www.amacad.org](http://www.amacad.org)