Mapping Performance Studies in US Universities

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This essay contributes to interdisciplinary conversations about the positioning
and future of Performance Studies within US higher education. Through an
atypical research method for the field—content analysis—we provide an
alternative angle from which to view our collective work in this contemporary
moment. Our research includes coding and analysis of 650 webpages obtained
from official websites of four-year US institutions, producing a topographical
map of Performance Studies. Our findings suggest that PS is an interdisciplinary
field situated in multiple theoretical, institutional, and geographic locations that
features various tensions in focus and scope.

Keywords: Performance studies; higher education; interdisciplinarity;
undergraduate and graduate programs; content analysis

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Introduction

In her keynote reflections on the "Economies and Ethics of Performance" Conference,

D. Soyini Madison exclaimed: "It seems performance is being performed everywhere"

("That Was" 207). Judith Hamera similarly stated: "Yes, it does indeed seem like

almost everyone in the humanities and qualitative social sciences now thinks they do

performance studies" (203). Madison and Hamera are far from alone in expressing this

perception; our intra-disciplinary conversations have had this tenor for some time. But

just how ubiquitous *is* Performance Studies (PS), and in what ways? Where does PS

appear in US higher education, and how is it being used as a term, set of theories, and

pedagogical approach? This essay, following in the tradition of other "state of the

discipline" collections, conferences, and conversations in this journal and beyond (i.e.,

Colson; Corey; Dailey), provides the opportunity to begin answering these questions.

While PS scholars have told the history of PS many times, in varied spaces and

with diverse voices, there remains more to learn about the current positioning of the

field within institutions of higher education in the US. Because much of the above

conversation has come in the form of conference proceedings, book-length treatments

of the histories and trajectories of the field (e.g., Carlson; Jackson; Madison & Hamera;

McKenzie; Schechner, *Performance*; Taylor), and more recently, interviews with

scholars (e.g., Taylor & Steuernagel), we seek to approach this meta-conversation a bit

differently.

In this essay, we provide a contemporary snapshot of PS in the US—where it

has flourished, how it has been included in academic programs, and what ground it

covers. More specifically, we focus on which kinds of courses and programs seem to

most centrally attend to PS based in the way the latter is included in online descriptions.

As the landscape of higher education continues to shift, and as interdisciplinarity blends

with economic mandates and the continual devaluation of the arts and humanities, PS

educators will continue to have to explain and advocate for PS.[1] To do so with

specificity and rhetorical savvy, we need clear visions of the field. We aim to provide

one such vision through an analysis of online descriptions of PS programs. What we

provide is a topographical map of the field—a description of where PS exists, where it

is most and least prevalent (the peaks and valleys), what kinds of programs exist in

which places (the features of the landscape), and what kinds of ideas and theories are

featured (the experiences one might have within that landscape). Having thus surveyed

the land, we ask what our aerial view might mean for PS. Below, we outline the context

for this study, present our research questions, briefly articulate our methods, and

describe our analyses. Finally, we outline and interpret our findings, ending with

implications.

Surveying the Trajectories, Borders, and Discourse of Contemporary PS

In a now famous refrain, Strine, Long, and Hopkins argued that "Performance, like art

and democracy, is what W.B. Gallie (1964) calls an essentially contested concept,

meaning that its very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is, and that

the disagreement over its essence is itself part of that essence" (183). As many have

since argued, PS is also a contested concept, and has been since its institutional

beginnings. For one, it has a dual origin story.[2] Jackson and others have described "the

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[1]Indeed, this is a "wicked problem" of the sort Langellier outlined in her contribution to the Economies and Ethics Conference (215), and outlined by Gingrich-Philbrook in a recent call for a special issue: "Academic institutions ask practitioners to create work recognizable by their units and the disciplinary histories those units represent, but also to transcend disciplinary boundaries when preparing their scholarship so that its reception and citation might have international and interdisciplinary reach (n.p.)."

[2]We studied PS however it appeared in our data (not distinguishing between the NYU and Northwestern schools), but the dual beginnings may explain or moderate some of our findings. Though important, a focus on such a bifurcated origin story has an unintended

more oft-repeated origin story" as that of the New York University (NYU) "passage" of

PS (Jackson 8; McKenzie 47) attributed to Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, and

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (to name a few).[3] In the beginning, NYU's PS was described this

way in departmental materials: "The Department of Performance Studies offers a

curriculum covering the full range of performance forms," features "a wide spectrum of

performance traditions," and "is both intercultural and interdisciplinary, drawing on the

arts, humanities, and social sciences" (qtd. in Schechner, "1960s" 51). This passage,

which McKenzie calls the "Eastern passage," combined Schechner's theatre and

Turner's anthropology to form what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls "A postdiscipline of

inclusions" (43).

Meanwhile, the "Northwestern" [University] version of PS, also referred to as

the "Midwestern passage" (McKenzie 47) and/or National Communication Association

PS, grew out of shifts within Speech Communication. By the 1980s, Oral Interpretation

had held sway as a sub-discipline of Communication for several decades. Like many

disciplines, what was oral interpretation underwent a "cultural turn," which Strine

conceptualized for PS in relation to a "culture-performance matrix" that:

> directs us to the performative dimensions of less well codified forms, such as personal
>
> narratives, autobiographies, and oral histories; newer forms of expressive culture, such
>
> as performance art and the public art of living installations; and, within the spectrum of
>
> sociocultural representations and practices, widely variable public performances
>
> broadly understood as ritualized enactments of group identity ("Mapping" 7)

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exclusionary effect, leaving out key institutions external to these "passages", such as (for
e.g.), the University of North Texas or Arizona State University, which are included in our
study.

[3]For more definitions and discussion, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett; McKenzie; Schechner (among
others).

In 1987, Pelias and VanOosting's *Quarterly Journal of Speech* essay marked and perpetuated the shift from Oral Interpretation to PS. They put forth an expansive view of performance and "aesthetic communication" and argued that the "renaming" they supported was significant: "While positioned squarely within the field of speech communication, 'performance studies' suggests clear links to theatre, ethnography and folklore, popular culture, and contemporary literary criticism" (228).[4]

Although PS scholars draw upon both passages (and beyond) and the strands have become intertwined in many times and places (an intertwining we aim to reflect here), they have not always shared academic space (in journals, books, or conferences). Learning the history of PS holistically is difficult. The many penned histories tend to reflect the assumptions of the authors' own origins within one or the other passageway. A holistic history is not the purpose of this essay, though we direct the reader to those already composed.[5] We are more interested in how and where PS is described contemporarily. While the two main trajectories share quite a few theoretical commitments and agree that "performance" and PS are difficult to define—Taylor goes so far as to characterize them by their "undefinability" (6)—the divergences can be particularly perplexing to outsiders. As Jackson states: "Performance and performance-inflected vocabularies have an overwhelming number of meanings, connotations, and intellectual legacies" (37). The separation can also make it difficult for scholars *within*

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[4]The fact that these shifts were associated with Northwestern University and Southern Illinois University led McKenzie to state that Pelias and VanOosting's "figure" of PS "marks the site where oral interpretation met anthropology, a site located somewhere in Illinois" (47). Notably, he does not mention communication, though oral interpretation was associated with English and Speech Departments, the precursors to our Communication Departments (Robb).

[5]See, for example, Bahn and Bahn; Harding and Rosenthal; Jackson; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett; McKenzie; Robb; Schechner, "1960s"; Schechner, "Performance"; Taylor. (Not an exhaustive list).

one strand to keep up with theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary trends within

the other, or to maintain a holistic understanding of the field. Worse, the differences can

divide us intellectually and professionally. Yet, as Madison explains in her

aforementioned keynote remarks:

> Where I am standing at this moment, turf wars are irrelevant and, moreover,
>
> unwinnable. Turf wars are an unhealthy concern. Now we need not waste our time
>
> and energy when academic departments in this neoliberal economy are being shut
>
> down and higher education is being quantitatively and qualitatively downsized,
>
> when teachers are cast out as corporate servants, and when intellectualism is under
>
> attack from ungodly rants in too many corners of the world. Our disposition now is
>
> to open more doors and let everybody with a good word and an unyielding purpose
>
> join us, and us them. (207)

To open the doors carefully, with a sense of what or who we are as well as a sense of

what or who might be waiting on the other side, we need to understand the features of

our own landscape and its (however porous) borders. This essay is an attempt to sketch

some of these designs, features, and desire lines in our landscape.[6]

In whatever ways PS scholars argue about precise definitions of the field, they

agree that it has expanded a great deal since 1980. As will become evident, the

discipline has spread to many universities in the US, with quite a few using the term

"performance studies" in nomenclature and descriptions of academic programming.

With prestigious graduate and undergraduate programs, a proliferation of research

articles and journals publishing PS research, and more scholars and artists claiming

space under its umbrella, PS has clearly made an impression in the academic landscape.

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[6]"Desire lines" is "a term borrowed from the field of architecture and urban design, which refers
to the path of least resistance across walked terrain" (Kelly, p. 203).

There has also been growth internationally, with universities outside of the US (e.g.,

Simon Fraser in Canada, the University of Bristol in the UK, and The University of

Sydney in Australia) featuring PS. This national and international presence is such that

scholars from other disciplines have become increasingly interested in the theory and

language of PS as well.

While one (potentially negative) consequence of this expansion and ubiquity is

the seemingly increased ambiguity of the meaning of PS, another (potentially positive)

is that it continues our tradition of interdisciplinary research and pedagogy. Whatever

the effects, the fact that the language of PS seems to be used across the US academy

leads to questions about how institutions of higher education are actually

communicating (about) PS.[7] At this historical moment, where (institutionally and

theoretically) is the field? How much does our actual landscape match our professed

character and promises? What are our maps and where have we created desire lines?

How can this kind of research help us in assessing our collective labor?

To answer these questions, we provide the following textual map of the field of

PS in US higher education. We focus on the US because it is the birthplace of PS as we

define it, though mappings of the Americas, Europe, and the larger world could be

useful as well. We analyze PS within higher education as PS has typically made its

home there (though its influences can be felt in other educational environments and

levels). It is also important to study the landscape of higher education because

universities are where future practitioners, scholars, and artists—those who will

continue to expand and shape the field and the larger culture of the arts—are trained.

The current topography of PS influences contemporary students and scholars, and their

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[7]These are similar to the questions asked by Gingrich-Philbrook in the call for a special issue,
though our research began well before the call.

understandings will shape the future of the field. Providing a basic map in the US

context can help us to explain PS to others, to dialogue more within ourselves, and to

purposely shape the field for generations of scholars and performers to come. What our

textual map shows is that the *language* of PS is widespread, with many programs

calling upon the term to name their content. This wide distribution, like our

interdisiplinarity, has multiply valanced implications for the ways we story ourselves as

a field.[8]

Methods for Sketching a Topographic Map

To investigate the communicated presence of PS in four-year US educational

institutions, we developed several research questions (RQ). At the most basic level, we

wondered (1) which US regions feature PS, as indicated by the location of institutions

that feature PS in their online materials? Of more theoretical relevance, we asked (2)

which courses, topics, and curricular tracks feature PS, and how is it featured? And (3)

which academic departments include PS as part of their programs of study?[9] In order to

flesh out these findings, we also paid attention to how PS was featured in programs

based on level (undergraduate or graduate), type of institution (public or private), and

disciplinary category (based in stated institutional divisions).

We conducted a content analysis of publicly available textual data to explore

these questions. Qualitative content analysis allowed us to blend the inductive, iterative

process of human-based qualitative research with the more deductive, linear process of

quantitative-leaning methodologies. Hseih and Shannon suggest that such a method

"goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose

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[8]We would like to thank Editor Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, for how his description of some of
these ideas influenced our language.

[9] We began with six questions covering these topics; based in our findings we have chosen to
highlight these three.

of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent

similar meanings" (1278). Researchers move through phases to proceed from research

questions to the presentation of results, creating "thematic categories through a series of

steps that function within the framework of the project and the texts" (Atkinson et al.

607).

After developing our research questions, we spent four months gathering our

textual data from four-year institutions of Higher Education in the US (Private and

Public Universities, and Colleges). While it is possible to locate PS within two-year

institutions, and perhaps secondary education, we limited our focus to four-year

institutions, as they are considered the norm in US higher education. We are interested

in PS as a field of theory and practice, and so sought data about both research and

teaching. In our experience, four-year institutions combine teaching and research at both

the undergraduate and graduate levels.[10]

We obtained our data from the official websites of four-year US institutions of

higher education, using two processes to find institutions that feature PS in their

programming. Namely, we conducted an internet database search for "performance

studies" in relation to "US Universities," and we searched for additional institutions

referenced by associations, organizations, and personal contacts related to PS. Once we

found the institutions' websites, we searched for and gathered textual data related to PS.

We sought out which undergraduate and graduate departments, syllabi, programs,

course descriptions, institutes, colleges, etc. included this term (i.e., as a course title or

key word in a description of a course or program). In order to qualify, a given set of

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[10] This helpfully limited our scope but means that we cannot attest to the presence of PS at two-year institutions or in secondary education. We know PS likely exists in these spaces, but they are beyond our particular focus.

textual data (and thus, institution) had to feature the complete term "performance studies." While there is debate about whether every use of the term is legitimate or refers to PS as those within the two primary strands of the field would understand it, our goal was to map, not evaluate or understand each use. We aimed for an understanding of where PS is located—intellectually and geographically—and set out to outline connections in the landscape of PS in the US. Wanting to integrate more than separate, we did not attempt to determine the specific lineage of each use of the term, and thus have not distinguished between the two primary origin stories.[11] The use of the more encompassing term was the prime qualifying factor. We limited our data to explicitly communicated uses of PS, although we encountered courses and descriptions that seemed to fit our understanding but did not use the term. One of the authors is a PS scholar from the NCA tradition, and so said understanding is biased in favor of that tradition. Though we have aimed to be inclusive, this is a limitation, and we make no claim to unbiased representation of the entire field in all of its diversity.[12] When an overall program clearly stated that courses belong to PS, or the term PS was included in some courses and/or definitions in the program text, we included those courses. Due to variations in currency of posted online information, our data is dated primarily within the last five to ten years.[13]

The data obtained, we moved to defining our categories and coding. We used NVivo10 to store, organize, code, and analyze our data. NVivo10 provides a file storage system that allowed us to search, locate, and classify 300 pages of data that answer our research questions, from the 650 included webpages. We developed an initial category

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[11] Such a task would require alternative data gathering.

[12] We question whether such an "unbiased" representation is possible.

[13] For this reason, we cannot make claims as to the history or the future of the field.

scheme based in our research questions. At this stage, we were interested primarily in

broadly surveying the landscape to see where PS programs were located. Some of these

initial (descriptive) categories included: state, category of institution (public or private),

graduate or undergraduate program, discipline (by which we meant Humanities, Social

Science, etc.), program description and course description. We coded the data according

to these categories, thus moving deductively from our questions to the data. During

coding, categories that were not initially identified emerged and we proceeded (as two

researchers) to engage in a coding comparison and peer debriefing for consistency in

these new emergent categories (thus also working inductively from the data toward

categorization). This coding process was informed by our extant knowledge of the field

(one author is a PS scholar), our reading of foundational texts for this project (the other

author is new to the field), and our general understanding of the structure of academic

organizations. Some of our emergent categories included, for example, Characteristics

(any language that described what PS is and what it includes), Techniques (phrases and

descriptions that illustrated how PS is taught and what methods seem to be used), and

Theories (any parts of the collected online text that pointed more to scholastic content).

"Theories" was by far our biggest category, necessitating coding within it for themes in

order to make sense of the many ideas circulating as part of PS discourse. Some of the

themes within this category included Named Disciplines, Elements of Performance,

Kinds of Performance (Mediums/Modes), Identity/Culture Based Ideas, Concepts, and

Practices (Methods). All categories and themes allowed us to sort and organize our data.

After coding and assigning attributes, we used NVivo to examine relationships and

possible thematic connections, querying our data in relation to our research questions

and exploring them through visual models. This is what allows us to say, below, which

level of program features courses that refer to certain theories or methods, for example.

Finally, we analyzed and interpreted our results based in the premises of our research questions and our understanding of PS literature (which is likely skewed toward the NCA/NU passage). We analyzed each original research question separately while also noting relationships across and among questions. We then thought across these separate analyses to sketch a narrative map of PS. Here, we outline these descriptive findings to map the use of the term PS by US four-year institutions of higher education. This work illuminates where and in which contexts PS is being deployed as a disciplinary term and provides a snapshot for those laboring to story PS in the US.

Sketching the Map

Our results support the perception that PS has spread within US higher education, though it remains a relatively small community. We found 96 institutions in 31 states that are concerned, in various ways, with PS. As of 2016, there were 3004 four-year degree-granting institutions in the US (National Center for Education Statistics n.p.), so these 96 represent 3.19% of the total number of universities and colleges in the country.

Our RQ (2), about which courses, topics, and curricular tracks feature PS, proved the most interesting. First, we found PS terminology frequently associated with undergraduate program descriptions and courses, with double the number of undergraduate courses (240) than graduate courses (128) in our data. At the undergraduate level, most of the courses seem to focus on an introduction to PS, with some examining many topics. Quite a few courses (22) are simply titled, "Introduction to Performance Studies" (or feature this phrase in a longer title), and several others feature "Introduction" somewhere in their names.[14] Most of the course descriptions mention being an introduction to PS, even if not titled quite this way. Courses at this

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[14] This amounts to over 10% of the courses *explicitly* naming their introductory level focus.

level focus most on or are most related to communication, dance, literature, theatre,

culture, and gender. Taken together, it is clear that undergraduate courses deal with

methods of PS (i.e., acting, directing, storytelling, playwriting, ethnography,

interpretation, creative methods, experimental methods, improvisation, solo

performance, etc.), *theories* (i.e., critical theory, cultural theory, literary theory,

performance theory), *different cultures and traditions* (i.e., African American, Popular

Culture, South and Southeast Asian, Visual Culture, Regional culture within America,

Latin American, Islamic, and World Culture), as well as a variety of *topics/issues* (i.e.,

identity–race, gender, sexualities, everyday life, games, play, politics, media, poetry,

ritual).

Course descriptions range from simple to complex and specific. Simple

descriptions go something like this: "Survey of key theories, practices, and criticism in

PS" or "This course explores the interdisciplinary field of PS in [Theatre] and/or

[Communication] and/or in relation to [everyday life] and/or [culture] and/or [a specific

issue/context]." In addition to the usual explanation of course goals and modes of

learning, the more complex descriptions often include questions, definitions of PS,

mentions of interdisciplinarity and/or multiple disciplinary influences, lists of contexts

or kinds of performances to be studied, examples of cultures or cultural contexts to be

examined, and examples of theories and methods to be engaged.

At the graduate level many courses are listed as seminars. We also found a high

frequency of introductory courses at the graduate level, though they make a much

smaller percentage of graduate courses than undergraduate, and the word "advanced"

also appears. One of the most common words related to graduate courses was "theory",

while the word "method" occurs twice as many times in graduate level data as in

undergraduate. It seems that, at the graduate level, importance is given to theory,

methods, and research. The phrase "theory and practice" is a common pairing, as are similar phrases like "theory, practice, and criticism," "theories and techniques," and "methods, theories, and practices," suggesting a relatively equal emphasis on theory and practice. The word "research" appears in at least 10% of the graduate course descriptions. Courses seem most related to theatre, history, culture, and communication. Descriptions include "investigating performance in/as culture," "performance theories, methods, and histories within the communication discipline," and "the ways in which cultural meanings are constructed, negotiated, and contested." Like at the undergraduate level, courses feature many different cultural emphases (i.e., African, American, Asian, European, Latin American, the West Indies, Popular Culture, The Americas, The United States, and the Third World). There is more of a global emphasis at the graduate level than the undergraduate, where the focus seems more centralized in the Americas. There are classes in African and Asian PS, for example, as well as content from "Japan, India, and Indonesia," and a focus on "postcolonial perspectives." One description suggests that students' work "may focus on any part of the world." The words "critical" and "criticism" also appear frequently, suggesting a critical lens within a significant portion of the programs. Students "critically engage," "critically examine," use a "critical lens," and "critical methods," and of course engage in "criticism." Graduate topics vary some from at the undergraduate level (i.e., identity didn't explicitly appear), and new topics appear, such as problems; crisis and conflict resolution; Queer theory; documentary; globalization; interpersonal; small group and intercultural communication; law and justice; postmodernism; and performativity. Many detailed graduate course descriptions begin with an explanation of PS itself, or of the approach to PS being adopted in the course. Some also include lists of key scholars, performers, theories, or performance traditions to be considered throughout the semester.

To contextualize our data and map PS conceptually as well as geographically, we coded for meaning in relation to what terms, phrases, theories, and concepts institutions use to communicate about PS. Most frequently occurring are: theatre, theor(ies), cultural, research, study, social, dance, history, introduction, critical, practice(s), art(s), field, gender, culture, communication, literature, everyday (life), ethnography, political, public, contemporary, and race.

Figure 1. Terms used to communicate PS

PS is not simply concerned with performances as objects of study, but also with the "how" of performance—these terms show that PS seeks to understand the processes, practices, and work by which cultural performances are enacted, and to do so from a critical lens. This is true at a broad level; as one description suggests: [In this course we will…] "examine how social, intellectual, and historical conditions shape human expression, and pursue the knowledge performance reveals about human experience and culture." It is also true in more specific contexts: [This course…] "explores how racial categories and ideologies have been constructed through performance and displays of the body in the United States and other sites." As this last example demonstrates, PS is concerned with political issues as well. Students learn "how performance can incite dialogue which may inspire sociopolitical change and investigate how ideologies affect race, gender, sexuality, class, technology and citizenship," and ask questions like: "How do the continually shifting scripts that guide our behavior give us insight into the nature of power and the way it plays out in public?" and "How have artists used the body in performance to imagine and enact culture, nation, otherness, selfhood, and the complex relations among them?" Course descriptions include references to "how performances

construct experiences of culture, everyday life, ritual, political protest, social belonging, and identity." In other words, PS in the US maintains a broad theoretical and practical focus, allowing for the inclusion of a wide variety of performances, processes, and political questions.

At a broader level, the nomenclature of departments makes it difficult to determine which most feature PS. It seems that PS courses are most often housed in departments whose main foci are "Theatre, Drama, Dance, Film, Media Studies and Performance Studies" and "Communication". This makes sense, given the origins of the field. Many of the other departments are "interdisciplinary" in some way, suggesting that PS plays a central role in various kinds of departments, including new(er) scholastic environments. Our analysis revealed a wide variety of these additional departments, including Dance, English, Media, Gender Studies, Literature, Film, Music, African American Studies, Drama, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, American Studies, History, and Latin American Studies, etc. Figure 2 provides a glimpse at department names and distributions.

Figure 2. Departments with a ps focus

Institutions label academic disciplines, like academic departments, in various ways. Anyone who works within the Communication Studies field, for example, (like one of the authors), knows that a Communication professor might be a faculty member in a college of Liberal Arts and Sciences, a school of Communication, a division of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, etc. This presented a challenge as we attempted to discern which academic fields and disciplines provide homes to PS. However, we were able to distinguish multiple terms related to academic disciplines and areas. As

expected, PS programs appeared most frequently in disciplines labeled "Arts and

Sciences" (mostly "Colleges"). A word cloud helps to visualize the frequency of certain

terms. The most frequent disciplinary words associated with PS programs are: Arts,

Sciences, Humanities, Liberal (as in "Liberal Arts"), Theatre, Fine ("Fine Arts"), Social,

and Communication. Again, this points to PS's foundation in the Arts and Humanities

while highlighting the interdisciplinarity of the scholarship and teaching taking place

under its label.

Figure 3. Word cloud of disciplinary terms

Being curious about where PS programs are located geographically, we also

categorized the universities by state and region. Though we found programs all over the

country, institutions that feature the term PS in their online communication are

decidedly concentrated on the Coasts and in the Midwest.[15] Some of the institutions

outside of these regions included in our data are the University of North Texas, Texas A

& M University, Louisiana State University, and Xavier University of Indiana. See

Figure 4 for a map of PS in the US.

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[15] Of the 96 total institutions, 84 (83.33%) are located in these three regions. There are 40

institutions (38.4% of the 96) in the East Coast region, 26 (27.08%) in the Midwest, and

18 (18.75%) on the West Coast. We included California, Oregon, and Washington as West

Coast states. We placed Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island,

Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North

Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida in the Eastern region. Finally, we included

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota,

Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin in the Midwest region.

Figure 4. Geographic distribution of institutions that include PS

Finally, we investigated which category of institution is more concerned with PS

and found that 55 (57.29%) of those studied are public institutions, while 41 (42.71%)

are private. This is interesting given that the two primary institutional birthplaces of PS

(NYU and Northwestern) are private. The most common departmental homes for PS in

public institutions seem to be departments that feature Communication (Studies) or

Theater. In addition, we found only 15 graduate programs in private institutions that

feature the term PS, but 38 in public institutions. The number of programs at the

undergraduate level is essentially the same for private and public (39 and 41,

respectively).

Implications

Content analysis can illuminate what exists, but not necessarily why or how what exists

could or should be different. Our goal, then, is not to provide suggestions for how PS

might be improved, nor to provide a best way forward. We make no critical claims

about the directions PS is moving in, though our data does point to questions to which

PS practitioners may wish to attend. Our goal is to provide a map of the extant

landscape so that PS scholars have new, concentrated textual and numerical evidence

through which to narrate the field. To that end, our analysis suggests several takeaways

for mapping contemporary PS in the US.

First, while PS exists in quite a few US institutions, that we found reference to it

in 3.19% of four-year institutions hardly suggests ubiquity and perhaps begins to

counter the fear that "performance is being performed everywhere" (Madison, "That

Was" 207). To be fair, the kinds of concerns Madison and Hamera have recently

referenced are more nuanced than a fear of ubiquity.[16] Hamera describes the concerns

more like encroachment, saying in one example: "Ethnomusicology, folklore, and

performance studies all claim performance ethnography and performance theory;

ethnomusicologists rarely cite either Dwight Conquergood or Victor Turner" (202-3).

(She goes on to show how "we" in the Northwestern tradition also fail to cite NYU

theorists). Madison states: "Some worry, as I did in 1999, that others have won the

performance turf wars and that our Communication—National Communication

Association—*Text and Performance Quarterly* turf is not known enough, or quoted

enough, or respected enough—by comparison" ("That Was" 207). We should also note

that some of these concerns about respect are linked to larger discourses of higher

education throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries. The Humanities seem constantly under

attack, there have been questions about the legitimacy of Communication as a

sufficiently academic or elite discipline from its modern beginnings, and Theatre has

had to fight uphill battles against a longstanding antitheatrical bias. In other words, PS

and its fields of origin have not enjoyed unquestioned inclusion within the borders of

academe. Though both Hamera and Madison argue that "turf wars" should not be our

focus, they articulate (some of) the discipline's fears well: PS scholars don't necessarily

fear ubiquity *per se*, but encroachment, dilution, and (perhaps) disappearance. The

percentage of universities with some reference to PS suggests that performance is not

everywhere, nor is it in grave danger (presently) of disappearing. Our map highlights

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[16] They're also not new concerns. Not only did Madison first mention them in 1999 (see

    Madison, "Performing"), but Strine referred to disciplinary-wide concerns at least as early

    as 1998: "Currently, multidisciplinary appropriations of 'performance' and

    'performativity' as analytical tools or critical tropes abound, giving the unsettling sense

    that work in performance studies is at the cutting-edge of post- or anti-disciplinary

    scholarship" (Strine, "Articulating").

that PS is alive and well throughout the US. It remains a distinct feature in the US

academic landscape.

We found PS undergraduate programs (80) to be more common than graduate

(53). The fact that PS is an important feature in the landscape of undergraduate

education is notable, and prompts questions. Has it been easier, more marketable, or

more feasible to teach PS at the undergraduate level? Does this suggest that PS is being

taught via a "scattershot" approach, with a sprinkling of undergraduate courses

throughout higher education in the US, but few whole programs? Illuminating how

many undergraduate programs call upon PS to communicate about and teach their

curriculum—or, to put another way, highlighting undergraduate programs as hills or

mountains in our topography—is a key finding, both heartening for the health of the

discipline and warranting a closer examination by future researchers.

Following upon the fact that there are more undergraduate programs, PS was

more often featured in undergraduate than in graduate courses. Interestingly, many of

the courses in our data, at both levels, seemed to be introductory courses. Does this

suggest that PS is reaching a lot of students at a basic level, but that few pursue it

further? That institutions and programs can find curricular space for only a few

foundational PS courses? From our data it is difficult to say, but the predominance of

introductory courses does suggest that PS's reach is perhaps broader than it is deep, at

least when one zooms out to a national level.

The impulse to introduce students to PS is also evident in the heuristic tone of

many undergraduate and graduate course descriptions. In many cases, the descriptions

themselves explain what PS is, along with what PS scholars study, through which

approaches, and even through which key figures and traditions. In other words, our

course descriptions do a lot of pedagogical labor. In our topographical map, the course

descriptions are akin to signs or labels with clear legends. They help people read the

landscape. Courses at both levels feature many topics, but at the graduate level, theory,

method, and research are more frequent terms, along with a more global/critical focus.

Even so, both graduate and undergraduate courses appear to focus on questions of

culture along with theories, methods, and in some cases more esoteric topics. Overall,

courses feature an understanding of performance as object of study, method of inquiry,

and mode of intervention. PS, it seems, has embraced Conquergood's tripartite

formulation: "We can think of perfor-mance [sic] (1) as a work of imagination, as an

object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of inquiry (both as model and method), as an optic

and operator of research; (3) as a tactics of intervention, an alternative space of

struggle" ("Performance" 152). The data suggest that we are, at least in this way,

practicing what we preach, and that there are consistencies within the difference and

interdisciplinarity of the field.

The terms institutions use to communicate about PS demonstrate this

consistency as well. We can see the dual birthplaces of PS featured/highlighted in

communication about PS through institutional websites. Theatre is one of the most

frequently utilized terms, while Communication, though not as frequent, also appears

often (the arts, history, and literature are also key features). (Of course, the dual history

of PS is more complex than this; we simply wish to highlight the traces of history

evident in disciplinary terminology). Theory and practice—oft heralded by PS

scholars—both feature prominently as well, demonstrating that PS values thinking and

doing equally. Culture—or, more precisely, cultural performance—including both

everyday life performances (i.e., daily interactions, performances of identity like gender

or race, collective performances like rituals or festivals) and artistic, staged

performances (i.e., theatrical productions, performance art, dance recitals, and more) are

the key objects of study for PS scholars, with anthropological influence showing

through the frequent mention of ethnography. This is in line with Carlson's now two-

decades old summary of the object of PS: "So we have two rather different concepts of

performance, one involving the display of skills, the other also involving display, but

less of particular skills than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior"

(4-5). Additionally, PS is not simply concerned with studying these cultural

performances at face value or as objects of study, but also with the "how" of cultural

performance—that is, these terms indicate that PS seeks to understand the processes,

practices, and work by which cultural performances are enacted, and to do so from a

critical lens. It is clear, as well, that PS is concerned with political issues past and

present. In other words, PS in US institutions of higher education maintains a broad

theoretical and practical focus, allowing for the inclusion of a wide variety of

performance forms.

PS exists in many different institutional homes, though most commonly within

the Arts and Sciences and the Humanities, which demonstrates both its

interdisciplinarity and its grounding in Liberal Arts and Humanities values and

assumptions. Similarly, PS is found in varied academic departments, including but not

limited to Theatre, Communication Studies, and Interdisciplinary departments, again

suggesting a tension between founding disciplines and interdisciplinary impulses. The

importance of *having* institutional homes is not lost on us, nor on the larger PS

community. The existence of PS in these various departments and larger units is due in

no small part to the efforts of leaders like Wallace Bacon, Mary Frances HopKins,

Marion Kleinau, and Richard Schechner (to name a few), who literally and figuratively

carved out space for PS in their institutions and paved the way for programs to develop.

Like seeds carried through the landscape by the wind, students took PS with them to other institutions, creating programs or courses of their own.

The interdisciplinarity we found potentially also points to how scholars have integrated PS into their teaching within their various disciplinary homes. It gives some proof to the historical reality that PS has been kept alive and passed down in human lineages, through the charisma and force of will of particular PS educators, whatever their home departments.[17]

PS is a self-proclaimed interdisciplinary field and has been enriched, from the beginning, through the infusion of theories and methods from elsewhere. Interdisciplinarity and connections with other disciplines have catalyzed new trajectories and encouraged innovative theoretical applications. Cross-pollination and trade with other artistic traditions has opened the door to new (to us) performance and aesthetic practices. As Pelias eloquently states, "We have always looked beyond our boundaries for disciplinary enrichment" (18). Many would argue that interdisciplinarity is foundational to PS's existence. Schechner himself has repeatedly argued for a "broad spectrum approach" ("Performance"). At the same time, this interdisciplinarity presents a tension at the heart of our field—a tension that has contributed to our fixation on self-narration. Bowman articulates this tension as stemming, in part, from the impossibility of teaching everything (and so a critique of the broad spectrum taken to its full extent):

> The challenge, of course, is how to construct a disciplinary center out of a set of "studies" that, by their very nature, repudiate the monologic and authoritarian implications of a *discipline*—that see themselves not as *inter*disciplinary so much as *anti*disciplinary" (191)

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[17] We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers, who suggested that we include reference to this reality.

And so, we are faced simultaneously with Conquergood's "caravan—a heterogeneous ensemble of ideas and methods on the move" (crossing and dissolving borders) (34) and what Pelias calls our pursuit of "the 'center that holds.'" Pelias suggests that these are "competing desires"—"we want boundary stability to claim a place within the academy," but also "find replenishment from instability" (18). Thus, our goal in PS seems to have been to remain open to interdisciplinarity and cross-pollination while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of where we are standing and where the fault lines are in the landscape. We suggest that this tension remains unresolved.

Combined with the academic and geographic "spread" of PS, this interdisciplinarity inspires questions about the extent to which the field has gained greater visibility and legitimacy in the past few decades. Of course, such a wide swath of departments may *also* give credence to the argument that some uses of PS terms and theories are underinformed and/or part of merely a "fad" interest in performance. That is, while interdisciplinarity and decentralization are some of the facets that PS scholars praise as positive, they may be double-edged swords. While interdisciplinarity is valued in US higher education, having our courses and programs spread across many areas may contribute to perceptions that PS is unfocused and/or so broad as to be applicable to almost anything, which may in turn make it difficult to argue our unique contributions. From another angle, this interdisciplinary reach may account for the internal perception that PS is "everywhere" and being used by "everyone." Perhaps we have lost some of our ability to recognize ourselves, especially when we appear in unexpected places. Interdisciplinarity itself is not a problem, simply something to pay attention to. As Hamera states, "Good scholarship and good citizenship demand that we attend to one another's work, cite one another, and ensure that our vital cord in this braided tradition is visible even as it is interwoven with others" (203). Furthermore, there is a

relationship between interdisciplinarity and questions about whether PS should be seen

as a "field," "discipline," "post-discipline," "anti-discipline", or something else

altogether (i.e., Bowman; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett; Schechner, "1960s"; Strine,

"Articulating"; Taylor and Steuernagal).

Finally, it *is* the case that slightly more public institutions feature

communication about PS. This is interesting not only because of the private institutional

origins of named PS programs, but also because there are as many private institutions in

the US as public (in fact, many more). Interestingly, in their history of Oral

Interpretation, Bahn and Bahn state:

> Speech Education, either in specific courses or in extra-curricular activities, was offered
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> in a number of colleges, universities, and private schools. Some of the best work at this
>
> time [latter Nineteenth Century] was being done in the private schools [i.e., the Monroe
>
> College of Oratory, the Columbia School of Expression, the Curry School of
>
> Expression] (162)

Speech Education was tied to Oral Interpretation, which grew out of elocution training.

Elocution was taught in private specialty schools as well as public and private colleges

and universities throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[18] The "School

of Speech" was founded at Northwestern University by Robert McLean Cumnock in

1878 (Robb 181); but Speech only became a key part of the larger American curriculum

after the 1910s. Perhaps, as state university systems grew in the late nineteenth century

and throughout the twentieth, more public institutions developed Speech-related

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[18] Mary Margaret Robb lists many public and private institutions in her history of oral

interpretation of literature, including private universities like Harvard and Yale, but also

early public institutions like the University of North Carolina (see p. 79, for e.g.).

programs, leading to a tip of the PS scale toward public institutions.[19] Private

institutions may have also remained more specialized, and many have moved away

from Communication (one of PS's homes in public institutions). The difference was

starker at the graduate level; we found far more graduate PS programs in public

institutions than in private. Perhaps there is something about public institutions that

makes them more likely to develop Master and Doctoral level programs. It is worth

noting that by 1966, the field had only granted 85 Phds (Robb 219). Graduate education

in PS is a relatively new phenomenon and has grown extensively in just a half century.

Conclusions

To return to our questions, where is the field? Theoretically, PS pedagogy covers a

range of topics at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, though both levels are

skewed toward introductory courses. Graduate courses place more of a focus on global

questions, criticism, theory, method, and research. From our data it seems that, as a

broad field, PS remains focused on performance as object of study, method of inquiry,

and mode of intervention, and that Theatre and Communication have remained key

features in the landscape, even as other disciplines have moved in. We continue to place

high value on theory and practice as well as staged and cultural performance. PS also

stays alert to the political winds, remaining invested in contemporary issues of power,

privilege, societal structures, and the storms they may bring.

Institutionally, PS exists at both public and private institutions, primarily in Arts

and Sciences as well as Humanities divisions. Though PS holds space in many different

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[19] Robb states, of the mid-twentieth century, that "There was a general belief that oral
interpretation made a significant contribution toward strengthening the arts and humanities
in the educational program of the United States" (232).

departments, the most common are Theatre, Communication (Studies), and

Interdisciplinary departments, which speaks both to our origins and our status as a

border discipline. Geographically, it can be found primarily, though not only, along the

Coasts and in the Midwest.

Though it is difficult to assess, from this wide-angled lens, the extent to which

our programs have fulfilled our "perpetually promissory character" as a field (Gingrich-

Philbrook), it is true that we continue to communicate about our courses *as if* we are

committed to social justice, and that cultural and social justice *issues* flow throughout

our programming. In other words, the signage is correct and the infrastructure strong,

but it is impossible to tell, from such a height, exactly what is happening within our

territories. Despite fears that PS has moved far afield from our points of origin, it seems

PS has remained quite close to the NYU and Northwestern schools—geographically

and theoretically, settling on the Coasts and in the Midwest, continuing to champion

many of the values embedded in the field at its founding.

Perhaps the most important lessons from this topographical map-making have

come from the unexpected and perhaps unplanned features of the scenery. Maybe we

have made the landscape by walking it, creating desire lines for those coming after us to

follow, and adapting to changing needs. Some of these features include: 1) the relatively

small percentage of institutions claiming PS (the topography is a bit more sparse than

we expected); 2) the dotting of the landscape with many undergraduate programs and

standalone courses, but fewer graduate programs; 3) the centrality and challenges of

interdisciplinarity (it is one of the features most sections of our map have in common);

and 4) the comparative ubiquity of introductory courses (if PS programs are topographic

elements, our map has a lot of hills and ponds but fewer mountains and lakes).

Through this essay, we have demonstrated that atypical research methods (like content analysis) can provide alternative angles from which to view the field of PS—angles that may aid in assessing how well our research, pedagogy, and service match our vision(s) of ourselves. Our goal was to create a large-scale textual map or snapshot of where the field of PS stands in this contemporary moment and to provide this representation to readers of *Text and Performance Quarterly*. We have limited our scope to this wide angled representation of PS in the US as stated in online materials, and thus cannot make claims about what is *actually* happening in PS classrooms or between the strands of the field. We invite other scholars to further this work at varying scales and in various regions. Perhaps, through combining mapping strategies, we can produce a clearer image of PS, which can in turn aid in crafting rhetorically savvy narrations of the field for future generations. Together, we can adjust to the changing climate and react to the storms as they come, insuring our land remains hospitable and fertile well into the future.

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Figure 1. Terms used to communicate PS

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Figure 1. Terms used to communicate PS

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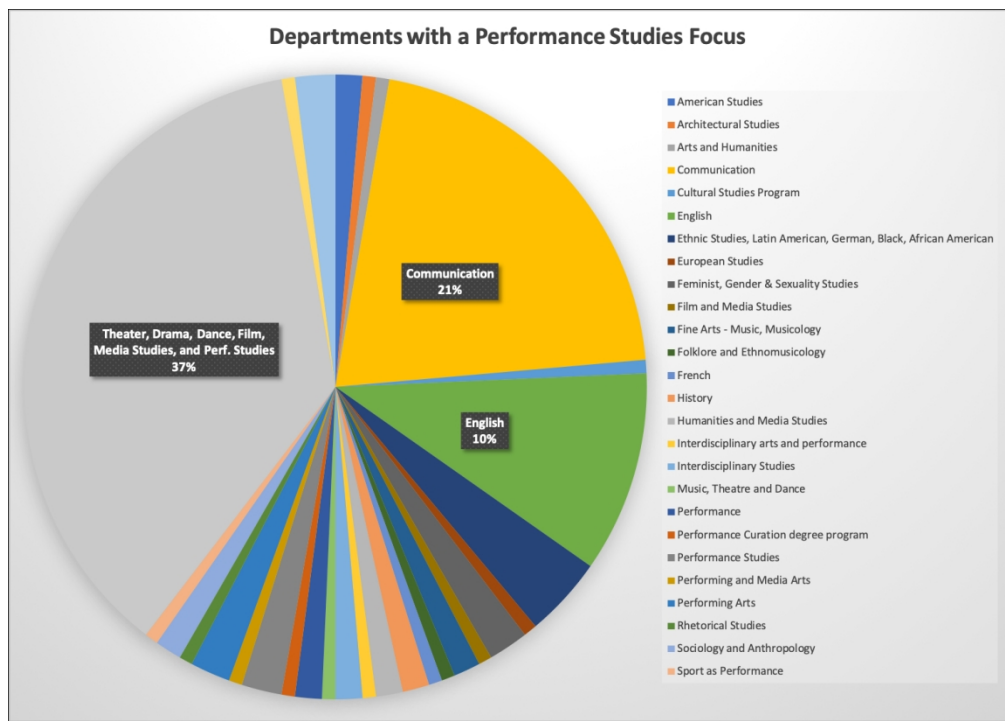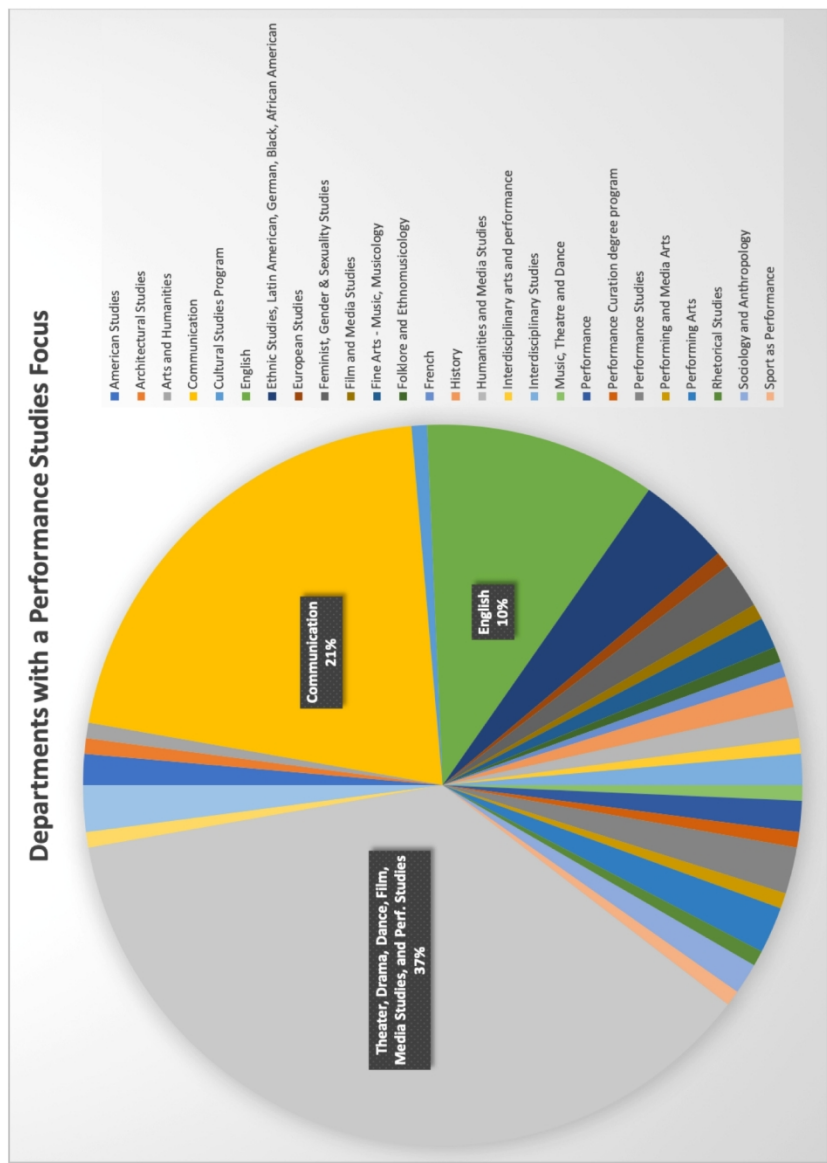51
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Departments with a Performance Studies Focus

- American Studies
- Architectural Studies
- Arts and Humanities
- Communication
- Cultural Studies Program
- English
- Ethnic Studies, Latin American, German, Black, African American
- European Studies
- Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies
- Film and Media Studies
- Fine Arts - Music, Musicology
- Folklore and Ethnomusicology
- French
- History
- Humanities and Media Studies
- Interdisciplinary arts and performance
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Music, Theatre and Dance
- Performance
- Performance Curation degree program
- Performance Studies
- Performing and Media Arts
- Performing Arts
- Rhetorical Studies
- Sociology and Anthropology
- Sport as Performance

Theater, Drama, Dance, Film, Media Studies, and Perf. Studies 37%

Communication 21%

English 10%

Figure 2. Departments with a ps focus

Figure 2. Departments with a ps focus

215x279mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 3. Word cloud of disciplinary terms

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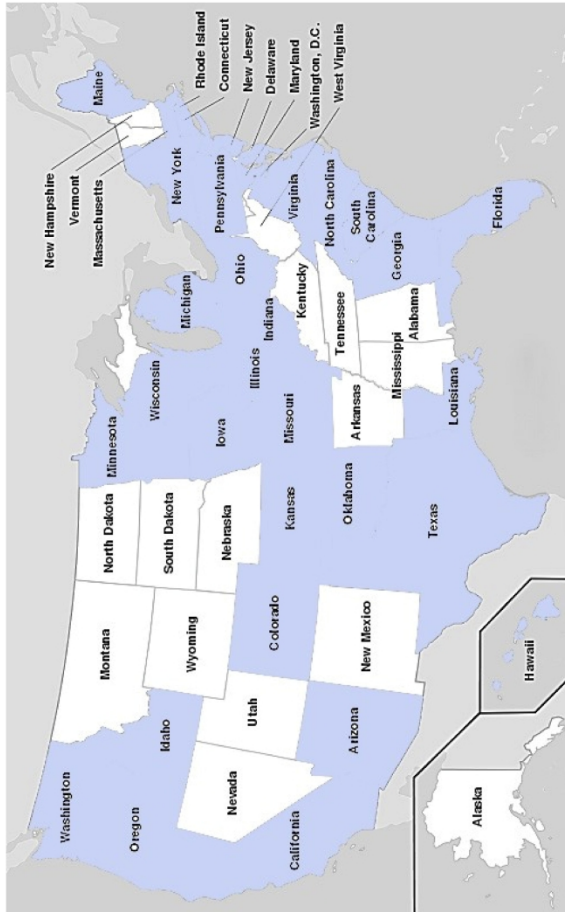Figure 3. Word cloud of disciplinary terms

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Figure 4. Geographic distribution of institutions that include PS

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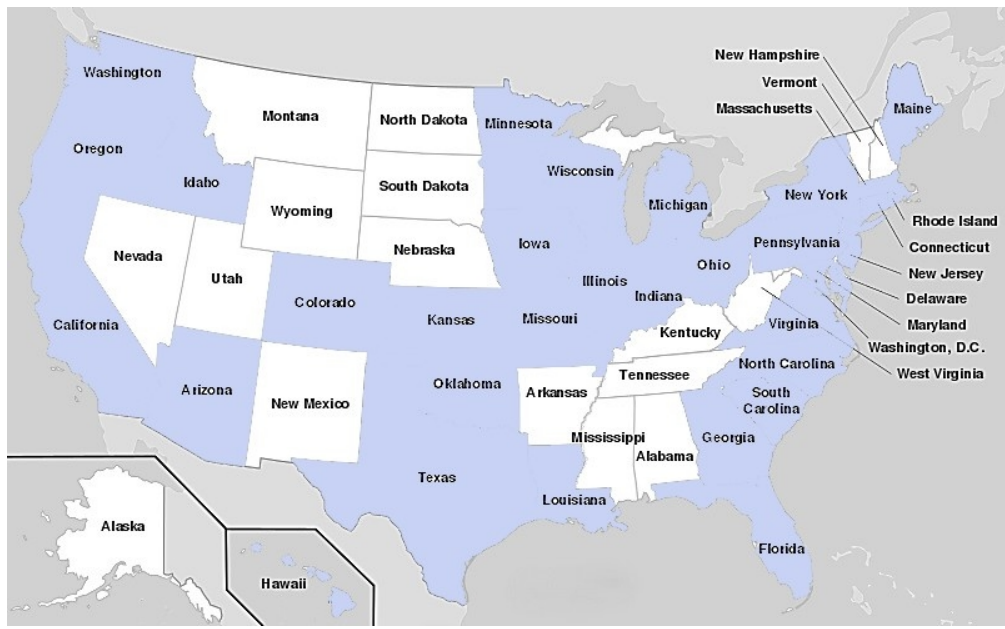51
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Figure 4. Geographic distribution of institutions that include PS

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