

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby
History of Art
150 Years of Women at Berkeley Roundtable,
Townsend Center for the Humanities, April 21, 2021

**“An Ongoing Revolution.
Reflections on Gendered Struggles and Feminist Scholarship in the Humanities”**

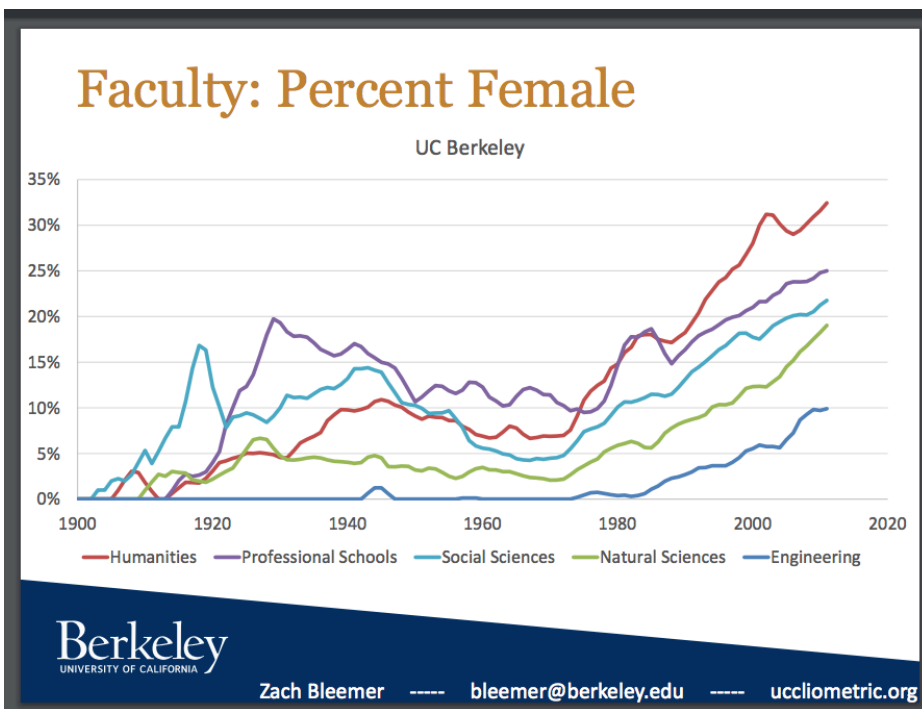
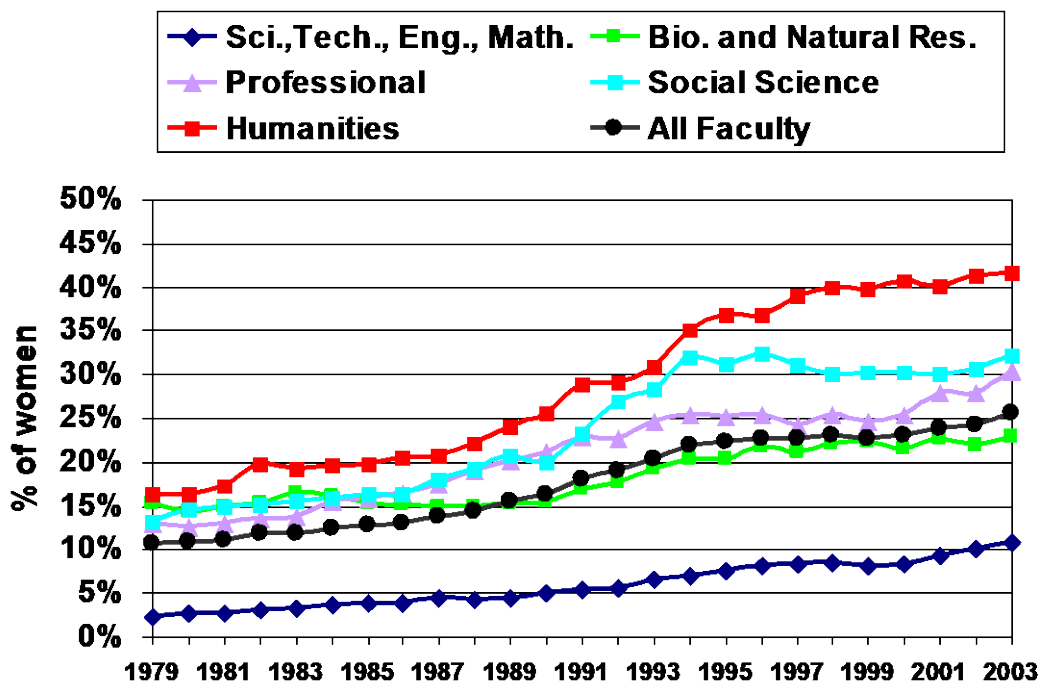
Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby is the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor in the Arts and Humanities and winner of the Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing. Born in the Panama Canal Zone, she was raised by her Panamanian single mother, who worked as a secretary at UC Berkeley. For her bachelor’s degree (1973-1978), she went to her local university (UC Berkeley) and has been a professor here since 1995. Grigsby specializes in 18th-through 20th-century French and American art and material culture, with a focus on the politics of race, slavery, and colonialism. She is the author of three books: *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (2002); *Colossal: Engineering the Suez Canal, Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, and Panama Canal* (2012); and *Enduring Truths: Sojourner’s Shadows and Substance* (2015). Her fourth book, *Creole: Portraits of France’s Foreign Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, is forthcoming. She is at work on a new project provisionally entitled *For Want of Color*, which examines the pervasive amateur practice of hand-coloring personal photographs from the 19th century to the 1950s.

On April 21, 2021, I was honored to participate in the Townsend Center for the Humanities roundtable, “An Ongoing Revolution. Reflections on Gendered Struggles and Feminist Scholarship in the Humanities,” part of the commemoration of 150 years of women at Berkeley (150W). I joined Francine Masiello (Comparative Literature and Spanish & Portuguese), Mary Ann Smart (Music), and Sophie Volpp (Comparative Literature and East Asian Languages & Cultures) to discuss how issues of gender and feminism have shaped scholarship and teaching. The event was organized and moderated by Catherine Gallagher (English). I thank our participants for their contributions and also Sheila Humphreys who has done so much hard work with Cathy Gallagher to raise our awareness of the history of women on this campus. I also thank Rebecca Egger, Kathryn Crim, Colleen Barroso, and Tim Hampton for their work on behalf of this event.

I presented the following pages as a powerpoint and improvised comments that I will paraphrase and/or elaborate in italics. I have also added some responses I received by email.

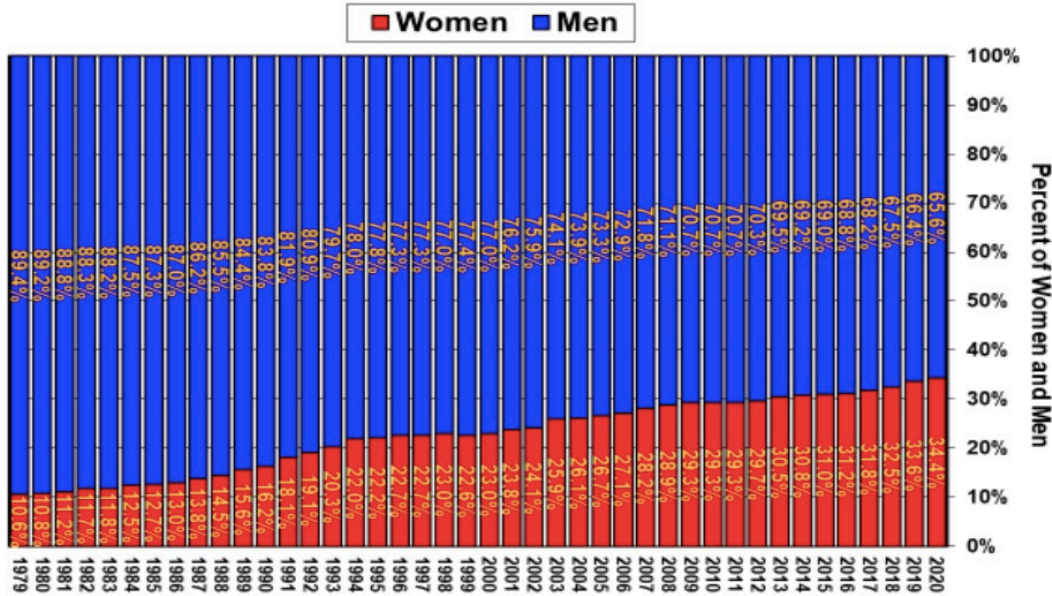
The Roundtable began with Professor Catherine Gallagher’s presentation of two slides.

Percent of Women among All UC Berkeley Ladder-Rank Faculty, By Major Disciplinary Groups, 1979-2003



NOTE: Both of the above graphs are visually deceptive because the vertical axes do not rise to 100% but only to 50% and 35% respectively. This third slide shown by Professor Gallagher makes the inequity appear more dramatic because the percentage of women is shown relative to 100%. When the vertical axis is 50% and 35%, the graphs successfully naturalize low expectations and make no room for the possibility that women could be the majority of faculty in any given field.

UC Berkeley Faculty Headcount by Gender, AY 1979-80—2020-21*



Source: UCB Faculty Personnel Records, AY1979-80—2020-21.

*2020-21 is preliminary, as of September 1, 2020. 2

MY BERKELEY CHILDHOOD



Panamanian immigrant Nora Esmeria Grimaldo Grigsby Lee Walters, my mother, with me (age 9) and my sister Lynne (age 6) in Berkeley July 1969.

My mother Nora was a secretary in the departments of Chemistry, Environmental Design, and Mathematics. There are still staff and faculty on campus who remember her fondly although she moved to England in 1987.

When I was a child, Professors and Graduate Students were white men whose dissertations my mother typed (with carbon paper copies) at night in order to earn extra money. These dissertations included complex diagrams and equations and corrections needed to be made on each copy.

The women I knew at U.C. Berkeley were staff: my mother's close African-American friends, Savannah and Ruthie; her Mexican-American friend, Connie; her Japanese-American friend, Lori; and her white friends, Susan, Vail, and Marnie, among others. She was also close to Russian Math Professor Marina Ratner, another single mother, who was hired in 1975.



Nora at a Mathematics Commencement organized by her with joy.

My sister Lynne Grigsby is now the first woman Head of IT at U.C. Berkeley.

My daughter Gregoria Grigsby-Olson is now completing her Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley.

My husband Todd Olson is a colleague in History of Art, the single male spousal hire in our department.

A family affair built on the back of a Latinx single mother and inspired by a very, very few exceptional women professors.

A few Concluding Remarks

After I gave this presentation, I realized that its narrative was directly informed by my experience in the classroom of Natalie Zemon Davis forty-five years ago when she distinguished between “women worthies” and the majority of women whose lives are absent from the archive (and most historical accounts before feminism). I am always astonished to hear from former students thanking me for courses they took with me years, even decades, earlier. Here I wish to thank Prof. Davis, now 92, for her teaching. She is an exceptional woman professor who called into question the focus on exceptionality. When I applied to graduate school at the age of thirty-one, she wrote me a letter of reference after asking me to send her a photograph. I remember her in the classroom almost half a century later.

Naively, I remain shocked by the inequity characterizing this University, the persistence of white male privilege, a gendered privilege now sometimes veiled by a focus on a genderless white supremacy, as if race requires the suppression of gender. Why is it so hard to think Gender and Race and Class at the same time? My personal history entailed all three forms of marginalization; all three made my success as a Professor less likely and more slowly achieved. Unlike privileged peers, after graduation, I needed to work for more than two years to earn the money to travel to Europe so that I could finally see the art I had studied. Upon graduation, I assumed that women like me were not meant to be professors. Because I aligned myself with my beloved mother, even aspiring to be a professor felt like a betrayal, a claim to superiority over her (although she herself did not share my primitive thinking). The University’s hierarchy had been deeply, cuttngly internalized by me. And by so many others. Then and now.

I also want to point out that the prominence of (heteronormative) spousal hires in our small department of History of Art is not arbitrary. The field attracts more women than men and the University prioritizes the recruitment of stellar (white) men in male-dominated fields such as mathematics, science, and history. These men have wives/partners who are more likely to have pursued fields in the humanities. Our department has repeatedly been solicited by the administration to appoint “wives” in recruitment and retention cases. We have benefitted greatly from these hiring opportunities, especially given so few positions have been made available to the entire College of Letters and Science. Our vitality as a department has been enhanced by such appointments. Still I must note the inequity here. Never has a stellar art historian compelled the administration to pressure male-dominated fields to appoint her partner (once we tried to no avail). More insidiously, hiring practices contribute to the gendering of fields. As the field of Art History becomes more equitable, our department risks being feminized and thereby diminished by an Administration committed to white male supremacy. Is this an inadvertent consequence of greater equity and greater openness to spousal hires? We must ask these questions even 150 years after women were first admitted to U.C. Berkeley.

Finally, I want U.C. Berkeley’s faculty in fields dominated by men to become embarrassed. Shame on you for not prioritizing the appointment of people who are unlike yourselves.

Some responses to this presentation:

From Gloria Bowles, Feminist Author, Ph.D. Comparative Literature, U.C.B., 1976; First Coordinator, U.C.B. Women's Studies Program (1976-1983). See her contribution to the Bancroft Library's newly created Women's Movement Archive, 2019: "Fortunately I didn't throw stuff away." [<https://www.dailycal.org/2019/11/03/bancroft-library-adds-womens-studies-movement-archive/>]:

Your talk was absolutely fabulous. I was so glad to hear someone who did not pretend it (equity) was DONE. I was the founding coordinator of WS [Women's Studies] Ph.D. in Comp Lit in 76.

From Marcus Norman, Black staff member, former Graduate Assistant for History of Art (and Film and Rhetoric):

I heard the group talk that you had with Mary Ann Smart and others on Wednesday. It reminded me of how easy it is to forget the inequality that persists to this day on campus. Berkeley's liberal reputation makes it easy to overlook this. I didn't realize how bad things still are. It reminded me of something that I noticed years ago when I had only been working on campus for a few years. I was working in the Registrar's Office and found a Daily Californian from the early 1960's. It was the early 1990's then and this old Daily Cal had a great article about some women who had been doing civil rights work. It seemed like impressive work, at least to me, but there was also something a bit disturbing about the article. There was a picture of the women with a caption that identified them only by their married name, Mrs. something or other. But also just with their husband's first name. As in, Mrs. Paul Grimes, or Mrs. Ernest Johnson, something like that. So then 25 or so years later, if someone wanted to talk to them about that work, it would have been very difficult to contact them. No first name, and they may have been divorced or widowed by then. Such a shame that they probably couldn't get later recognition for what they had done.

From Juliane Monroe, retired Letters & Science Adviser, U.C.B., who long worked with my mother. I too worked with Juliane when I joined the staff of L&S for four years after completing my B.A.:

Dear Darcy, Loved seeing the photo of your Mom. Her wonderful smile. Just like I remember her. Thanks for the shout out to staff. Much appreciated.