

The Westward Expansion of Williams College 1795-2005

The map below shows the center of population of the graduates of Williams College from 1795-2005. It depicts the evolution of Williams College from a regional school for New England gentlemen to a college of increasingly national scope. The concept of the “center of population” is akin to that of a balance point. That is, the point at which an imaginary, weightless, rigid, and flat map of the 48 states (and the District of Columbia)¹ would balance if weights of identical size were placed on it with each weight representing the home² of one graduate.³ The center of population for the class of 2005 was in Ashland County Ohio, 60 miles northeast of Columbus.



During the earliest years of the college, its graduates were centered in the New England states, mostly MA, CT, NY, and VT. Westward expansion took off in the late 1800's. An interesting blip in the westward trend is the inversion of 1970 and 1980 where the graduates of 1970 actually hail from more westward locales than do the graduates of 1980. I suspect this has something to do with oddities of the first years of coeducation.

The increasingly westward and southward origin of our students mirrors the westward and southward expansion of the US population as a whole but lags it considerably. The US center of population today is in Missouri. Indeed, Williams' center of population today is roughly where the US center of population was in 1870.

¹ International students and domestic students from AK and HI are excluded.

² For simplicity it was assumed that a graduate of a state “came from” the latitude and longitude of the state's capital

³ Method of calculation described at <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/cenpop/calculate2k.pdf>