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## Mapping Lumberjacks

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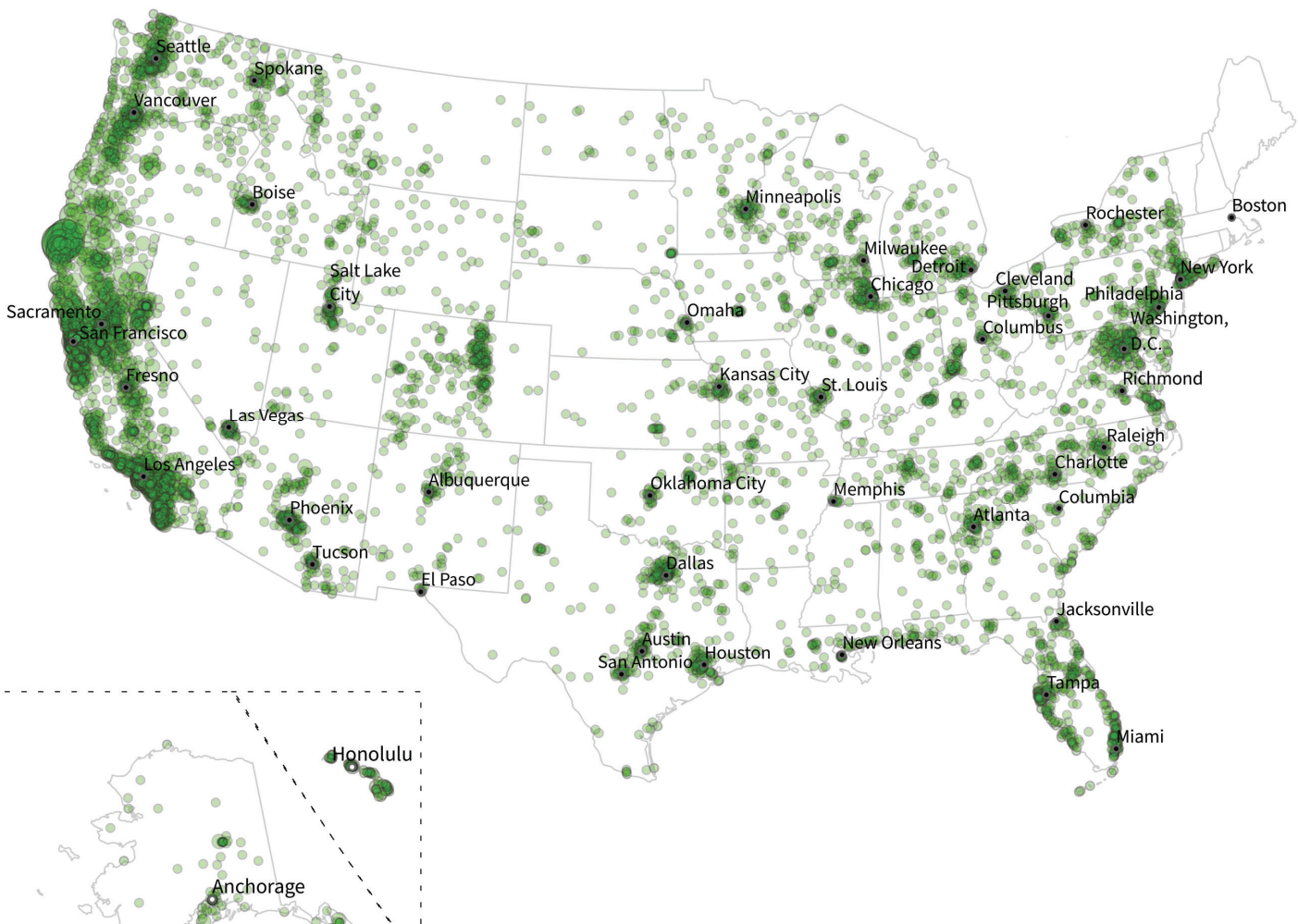
# Mapping Lumberjacks

dr. amy rock

Last fall, I was contacted by Marcom, Humboldt State University's marketing and communications department, about making a map of Humboldt alumni for a year-end publication. (I later discovered this was a calendar rather than a year-end report or magazine as I'd originally thought, so while I can't exactly say I'm a calendar girl, I can at least say my map may be hanging on walls across America...) I was sent a spreadsheet of alumni counts by zipcode. In past years, this map has been made using a technique called *proportional symbols*, which sizes the symbol to the number of alumni in that zip code.

When I tried that out, it looked like this:

The first thing I noted, with delight, is that Lumberjacks are all across the United States. The second was that California looked like a mess. As a part of the California State University (CSU) system (and really symptomatic of state universities everywhere), the vast majority of our students come from, and remain in, California. So, while this map shows a nice spread across the country, and clusters in pretty much every major city, it really hides the story of what is happening in our home state.



In light of this geovisual problem, I decided to try out a valuable statistical technique called *data binning*, which is intended for just such a situation. Data bins, in this case hexagons, are created uniformly across the surface, and symbolized by the number of data points that fall within each bin. Not only did this demonstrate more clearly how Lumberjacks are spread within the density of the West Coast, but it gave me the opportunity to work in our school colors, green and gold. If

the cartographers among you haven't tried this technique, I highly recommend it for dense data clusters. (Shameless plug: You can read more about how it works in my forthcoming article, "Home Tweet Home: Can Social Media Define a Community?" in an upcoming special issue of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*.) Fortunately, Marcom agreed with me, and the hex bin alumni map made its way into the calendar.

Go hex bins! Go Lumberjacks!

