

What Can I Do With a History Major?

History Program
Utah Valley University
CB Suite 303

What is History?

The discipline trains both the mind and the imagination of those who study it. History imparts the vital skills of discernment and synthesis through critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. In particular, History confronts students with worlds, times, places, and cultures – including their own – in ways they never before considered.

To study history is to affirm the commitment to exploring issues of diversity within both a national and global context. To study history is to engage intellectually in the confrontation of peoples, ideas, and values in part because the past, no matter the society, is a foreign country.

Leaders in every industry, from business to the arts, can point to their training as history majors as the starting point for their success. Below is a brief examination of the sorts of skills developed by the study of history and various career options available to history majors. History majors develop valuable career skills in research, writing, argumentation, and documentation.

What are the skills one learns as a history major?

One of the key ways of thinking about what a history major prepares you to pursue after graduation is to focus on the skills one acquires as a history student. These include:

- Research skills--vital to any job, research skills mean the ability to understand past practices and policies and to trace the roots of any issue, to find new information which bears on that issue, and to incorporate that information into one's analysis of an issue.
- Effective writing skills--vital to any job for which a college degree is a necessity, effective writing means the ability to successfully and precisely communicate one's ideas in text.
- Critical analysis skills--vital to the decision-making process for any job, critical analysis means the ability to analyze a situation and come up with creative and practical solutions.
- Interdisciplinary thinking and training--vital to any position, interdisciplinary thinking and training means the ability to think about a problem in a multitude of ways, to analyze it using multiple tools, and to provide solutions which draw from different traditions of thought.
- Curiosity and inquisitiveness--vital to any position, curiosity and inquisitiveness mean the desire to learn more and to continue learning, to examine reasons beneath issues, and to come to understand them as part of a continual, life-long, education process.

What are some of the careers paths which history majors commonly follow?

Historians as Educators:

Many history majors go on to become educators, focusing on the communication of their ideas. Educators include teachers in Elementary and Secondary education. They also include Higher Education on many levels, including teaching at community and junior colleges, undergraduate colleges, and universities. But educators are also important members of other educational institutions that you may not think of as immediately as schools. These include historic sites and museums, where history majors can become education directors, curators, guides, and interpreters. In addition, there are other forms of teaching than standing up in front of a classroom. These include work as historical consultants, contract archivists, public historians, writers, and even filmmakers.

Historians as Researchers:

Many history majors go on to careers as researchers, emphasizing their skills in evaluating and analyzing documentary evidence. Historians as researchers include public historians as well as policy advisors, who serve as planners, evaluators, and policy analysts, often for state, local, and federal governments. In addition, historians often find employment as researchers for museums and historical organizations, or pursue additional specialized training to become professionals in cultural resources management and historic preservation.

Historians as Writers and Editors:

Because success as a history major depends upon learning to write effectively, many historians become writers and editors. They make their living as authors of historical books, or more commonly, they work as editors at a publishing house. Many historians become print and broadcast journalists, and others become documentary editors who oversee the publication of documents such as those produced by government agencies.

Historians as Information Managers:

Because history majors must learn to deal with documents, many pursue a one- or two-year graduate program in library studies (commonly, a Master of Library Science, or MLS, degree) or archival management and enter careers as information managers. With this additional training, they enter the fields of archives management, information management, records management, and librarianship.

Historians as Advocates:

Many history majors find that historical training makes a perfect preparation for law school, as historians and lawyers often do roughly the same thing—they argue persuasively using historical data to support their arguments. Many history majors become lawyers; others undertake careers in litigation support as paralegals. Others enter public service and become policymakers, serve as legislative staff at all levels of government, and become officers of granting agencies and foundations.

Historians as Businesspeople:

Most people overlook the value of a history major in preparing an intelligent person for a career in business. Yet, historians track historic trends, an important skill for those developing products to market or engaged in corporate or financial planning. Many history majors enter

banking, insurance, and stock analysis. Historians also learn how to write persuasively, and this training gives them an edge in advertising, communications media, and marketing. Finally, many industries depend on an intimate knowledge of government policies and historical trends; thus, history majors have found their skills useful in extractive industries and in public utilities.

Related Career Titles

(Some of these jobs require education beyond the bachelor's degree.)

Anthropologist	Foundation Staffer	Museum Curator
Archeologist	Genealogist	Museum Tech. & Specialist
Archivist	Government Official	Park Ranger
Biographer	Grant Writer	Peace Corps/AmeriCorps Worker
Clergy	Historian	Political Scientist
Community Relations Dir.	Historic Preservationist	Psychologist
Congressional Aide	Historic Site Tour Guide	Public Relations Specialist
Consultant	Historical Society Staff	Records Manager
Consumer Advocate	Information Specialist	Research Assistant
Counselor	Insurance Agent/Broker	Social Worker
Criminologist	Intelligence Analyst	Sociologist
Demographer	International Relations	Teacher, Social Studies
Digital Humanities Specialist	Journalist	Technical Writer
Documentary Editor	Lawyer	Travel Agent
Economist	Lecturer	Urban Administrator
Editor	Legal Assistant/Paralegal	Urban Planner
FBI Agent	Librarian	Writer/Author
Foreign News Corresp.	Lobbyist	
Foreign Service Officer	Market Research Analyst	
	Media Consultant	

Some Employers of History Majors:

Administration & Legislation	Health and Human Services	Political Parties
Advertising	Housing & Community Development	Public Interest Groups
Broadcasting	Legislators	Research Foundations
Bureau of the Census	Library	Schools and Universities
Business and Industry	Media	Social & Welfare Services
Campaigns	Museums & Archives	State and Local Governments
Central Intelligence Agency	Non-Profit Organizations	Think Tanks
Corrections & Court Systems	Paralegal Profession	Transportation
Department of State	Parks & Recreation	Travel and tour services
Education	Peace Corps/AmeriCorps	
Federal Bureau of Investigation	Police & Fire Protection	

Related Major Skills

Explaining ideas
Interpreting events and ideas
Writing and presenting information
Examining evidence
Analyzing ideas and information
Developing a world view

Explaining the present by referring to the past
Decision making
Seeing relationships between factors
Oral & written communication

Job & Internship Search Links

UVU Career Development Center <http://www.uvu.edu/cdc/>

UVU Internship Services <http://www.uvu.edu/internships/>

Public History Job Links <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/career-resources/careers-in-public-history>

National Council on Public History Jobs Guide <http://ncph.org/cms/careers-training/jobs/>

Digital Humanities Jobs <http://digitalhumanitiesnow.org/category/news/job/>

American Alliance of Museums Job HQ <http://aam-us.org/resources/careers>

Museum Employment Resource Center <http://www.museum-employment.com/>

Government Jobs <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

AHA Career Center (mostly academic jobs) <http://careers.historians.org/jobs>

H-Net Job Guide (mostly academic jobs) <https://www.h-net.org/jobs/home.php>

Career Planning Links

Careers in History <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/careers/index.htm>

Careers for Students of History, by Constance Schulz, Page Putnam Miller, Aaron Marrs, and Kevin Allen (2002) <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/career-resources/careers-for-students-of-history>

Professional Associations Links

American Historical Association www.historians.org

American Association for State and Local History <http://www.aaslh.org>

Information prepared by Professor Catherine Lavender - Department of History, The College of Staten Island of The City University of New York and the Career Center at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. Revised and updated 9/2015, UVU History Program.