

History

What is the History major?

History is the study of the record of past human experience. Working with written, oral, visual, and artifacts, history majors examine the causes, contexts, and chronologies of historical events to understand how human experiences have both remained the same and changed over time. History studies past civilizations in order to understand the present, preserve our heritage, and appreciate the richness of human accomplishment. Almost every field—whether it be in the field of arts, science, or health—includes some study of its past. Therefore, many job opportunities in this field are in teaching. Other historians may work as archivists, genealogists, or curators. Some graduates use the critical-thinking skills they develop from history to go into administration or law.

Occupational opportunities

The history major prepares students for careers demanding knowledge, understanding, perspective, skills, and sensitivities gained through studying history. Such careers are found in business, government, non-profit agencies, and elementary and secondary schools. Graduate work in history leads to careers in teaching and the secondary and college levels, as well as in museums, archives, and historical and government agencies. The history major also prepares students for advanced studies in law, business, medicine, and other professions. Some of the career paths available to history majors include:

Government/Public Service

- Policy analyst
- Lawyer
- Legal assistant
- Politician
- Legislative aide/analyst
- Foreign service officer
- Intelligence officer
- Customs investigator
- Urban planner
- City manager
- Foundation administrator

Communications

- Writer/technical writer
- Journalist (print, broadcast, internet)
- Public relations representative
- Research/technical advisor (film/TV/radio)
- Editor (journals, trade books, magazines)
- Costume designer

Business

- Sales/marketing representative
- Financial analyst
- Corporate trainer
- Insurance agent
- Loan administrator
- Information manager
- Small business owner
- Corporate historian
- Management consultant

Education and Research

- Teacher/professor
- Archivist
- Museum curator/staff
- Genealogist
- Librarian
- Information specialist
- Biographer
- Historic preservation consultant
- Historic site administrator
- Historian

Career Snapshot: Museum Curator

A museum/art gallery curator acquires, cares for, develops, displays and interprets a collection of artifacts or works of art in order to inform, educate and entertain the public. The emphasis of the role is moving away from a purely academic research function towards a wider ranging career, which includes other aspects such as public relations, fundraising and handling inquiries. Curators do a variety of tasks including cataloguing acquisitions and keeping records, researching and writing catalogues, planning, organizing, interpreting and presenting exhibitions. Curators also plan financial budgets, supervise staff and/or volunteers and give presentations. Working hours are mainly nine

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to five, but extra hours may be necessary on occasions. Some posts may involve additional work to cover opening hours and evening meetings or other events. Jobs are widely available in mainly large towns and cities, although specialist museums exist in smaller towns and in rural areas. Demands such as meeting deadlines and complying with budgetary constraints may prove stressful. Generally, long-term career prospects are uncertain and flexibility, including geographical mobility, is necessary.

Skills and Abilities

Skills gained through the study of history include analyzing and understanding the impact of historical forces on societies and perceiving how groups cope with changing circumstances. Students concentrating in history develop and hone skills in areas such as critical thinking, organization of ideas and supporting documentation, writing, and analysis. The abilities may be applied to job responsibilities in a variety of sectors and occupational groups. For example, while a policy analyst, an underwriter, or a museum curator might use critical thinking for different purposes, each will probably use that skill on a daily basis. A sampling of representative skills and abilities follows.

Research

- Analyzing ideas/information
- Organizing ideas
- Compiling and evaluating information
- Comparing/contrasting ideas and information
- Adapting ideas
- Understanding and interpreting the present/past

Understanding society

- Analyzing impact of problems on society
- Knowledge of how societies cope with change
- Explaining the present by referring to the past
- Developing a world view

Project development

- Developing ideas and projects
- Planning/creating materials
- Organizing information
- Seeing relationships between factors
- Decision making

Communication

- Explaining and interpreting events/ideas
- Describing and evaluating issues/problems/events
- Observing and comparing people/data/things
- Compiling research

Additional Resources

U.S. Government's Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://stats.bls.gov/oco>

American Historical Association
 400 A Street SE
 Washington, DC 20003
 (202) 544-2422
www.historians.org

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
<http://www.Historynow.org>

American Association for State and Local History
www.aaslh.org

Society for American Archaeology
www.saa.org

The History Channel
www.historychannel.com

American Historical Association
<http://www.historians.org/>

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