WHY HISTORY?

History illuminates the human condition. As a field of study, history provides the context with which to define one's relationship with the world, a structure within which to study other disciplines. In portraying continuity and change, history offers a basis for understanding one's culture, one's community, and one's self. Without historical perspective, learning is incomplete.

While knowledge of the past provides a foundation for careers in any field, students would be advised to undertake the study of history for its own sake, not simply to acquire a vocational tool. Nor should the value of skills be distorted. History is a substantive discipline; while analytic skills are required for balanced reflection, past experience cannot be put to use without knowledge of details on which to reflect.

WHY HISTORY AT WORK?

Study of history prepares a student for the dynamics of business, government, or nonprofit careers. Historical scholarship trains the mind to think on many levels, to deal with partial evidence and with ambiguity. Historical knowledge provides details of past experience with which to test the feasibility of new solutions. It enhances the ability to recognize patterns in voluminous data; it supports valid comparisons and connections.

Managing any organization requires the establishment of objectives, directing their accomplishment, then measuring the results. Objectives cannot be set without reference to experience. Accomplishments cannot be directed without knowledge of details. Measurement cannot be accurate without objective review of past events. Organization depends upon memory and a mind trained to relate past experience with present needs.

PRACTICED OR APPLIED?

In considering your career, one of the first decisions to make is whether you wish to practice history directly, or whether you wish to apply the knowledge and skills you have learned in the study of history to any one of many fields.

The distinctions between such choices are highly personal: you might gain more career satisfaction from, say, being a feature writer for an international affairs monthly than from teaching high school history — or the reverse.

Some thoughtful reflection on your career goals is mandatory at this stage.

• HOW THIS CHART IS ORGANIZED •

SECTION 1 is an overview of positions for practicing historians and of positions in which the history student's knowledge and skills may be applied.
SECTION 2 is a diagram to help determine career opportunities. • SECTION 3 contains additional tips for recent history graduates seeking employment.
PRACTICING HISTORY

Here is where history is taught, written, recorded, filmed, preserved, interpreted and reenacted.

A teaching career may be at a public, private, or parochial school, at a community college, a four-year college, or a university. Teaching history also takes place in less formal settings in museums, historical organizations, and government agencies.

Researching, writing, editing, and recording history will probably be part of an academic career, especially at college level, but it also can be part of a public history career as an editor or publisher of historic documents, a consultant producing multimedia histories, or providing litigation support and expert testimony.

Historic preservation and cultural resource management careers are possible in many private, nonprofit, and public entities. They range from hands-on restoring of artifacts to state and national planning roles.

Interpreting and reenacting history may typically be practiced in a museum, an historical society or in a public agency such as the Interior Department. Archival, manuscript, and records management careers may also be found at these institutions.

Administrating historical organizations, museums, or agencies is a specialty that offers opportunity in all economic sectors.

To prepare for such careers, an advanced degree will be needed, undoubtedly an MA, very possibly a PhD. For specifics see your faculty and/or career advisor.

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POSITION OVERVIEW

Listed below and to the right are a few typical business positions in which graduates in history may apply their skills and knowledge. Note that most of these positions, whether in public relations, finance, or staff development are also required for the administration of historical organizations.

**Government Relations**

**Duties:** Analyze public policy developments, identifying key legislative issues and programs affecting operations. Persuade members of state and federal governments' executive and legislative branches about the worthiness of institutional activities and goals. Recommend appropriate legislation for tax relief, tariff protection, and other legislative interventions.

Knowing public policy history and understanding the historical causes and effects of legislation on a given organization is at the heart of government relations work. Command of history is necessary for successful advocacy.

**Public Relations**

**Duties:** Systematically develop goodwill; inform the public about corporate activities, policies, and personnel to shape positive opinions and attitudes. Advise management on issues relating to projecting favorable personal and institutional images.

Promoting an institution requires knowledge of its past. Corporate history is an effective tool to commemorate achievements, illustrating the effects of accomplishments. Historical vision helps explain the complex interrelation of business and society.

**Public & Community Affairs; Corporate Communications**

**Duties:** Gather information on economic, political, social, scientific, technological, and demographic trends. Determine public opinion, isolating issues critical to the corporate mission. Evaluate corporate support of civic functions, educational and charitable organizations. Keep the public informed about the firm's activities.

Researching and interpreting history is part of communications positions. Analyzing an organization's history and its effect on its community is central to addressing public opinion concerns.

**Market Research**

**Duties:** Establish market opportunities and marketing goals. Design intelligence-gathering systems that identify market trends and customer needs. Assess competition and market share. Develop performance standards to measure marketing accomplishments. Design and conduct product surveys; monitor events influencing product acceptance. Formulate sales and pricing strategies.

History can reveal forgotten details of past marketing programs, suggesting meaningful trends and helping avoid a repetition of past errors. Viewed over time, marketing theories may be tested against results.

**Commercial Intelligence; Business Analysis**

**Duties:** Scan the economic, political, and social environment to spot competitive trends. Assemble information on competitors' products, capabilities, and intentions. Analyze financial statements, legal status, employment practices, advertising, and products. Present business decision scenarios to management, quantifying risks and uncertainties.

Business analysis requires the research skills of an historian to gather, organize, and critically evaluate information. Oral history techniques strengthen interviewing skills; detailed knowledge of business and economic history are needed to assess competition.

**Advertising and Sales Support**

**Duties:** Establish standards of marketing performance against which to measure marketing performance. Write advertising and sales copy, formulating sales and pricing strategies. Develop multimedia aids for advertising campaigns and sales promotions. Assist in polling the public for data to frame advertising and sales campaigns.

Historical research teaches students effective methods to mine corporate archives for advertising source material and sales themes. It also teaches what questions to ask when polling the public for their opinions.

**Political Risk Assessment**

**Duties:** Evaluate risks in relevant foreign countries, assessing the economic environment and potential impact of policies on the firm's operations. Analyze financial effect of legislation, price controls, local ownership, repatriation of profits, and currency devaluation. Integrate risk assessment into decision making process.

History provides a sound basis for gauging the stability of a host government's political system, its commitment to the rule of law, and the ability to estimate risks and the effects of change.
2. Determining Career Opportunities

History graduates have many career opportunities. To determine yours, start here:

Do you wish to continue your education beyond an undergraduate degree?

(NOtE: Many positions require advanced degrees. Some also require certification from state or professional boards.)

YES

Consider graduate history programs specializing in:
- Archives
- Business history
- Contract work & consulting
- Cultural resource management
- Editing
- Historic preservation
- Historical administration

NO

First, study the broad setting (see listings at right):
- Nonprofit Sector
- Private Sector
- Public Sector

Next, focus your goals (see below):
- Positions that emphasize historians' knowledge & skills
- Positions that apply historians' knowledge & skills selectively
**TYPICAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT EMPHASIZE HISTORY**

- Archives
- Communications media (nonprint)
- Consulting & freelance assignments
- Historical associations and societies
- Historical projects
- Libraries
- Museums
- Publishing
- Research institutions
- Religious & philanthropic organizations
- Teaching

**SELECTED EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES**

- Cabinet-level Departments (especially the Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Department of State, Foreign Service)
- Independent executive units (National Endowment for the Humanities, Smithsonian Institution)
- Intelligence Services (Central Intelligence Agency; National Security Agency)
- Military Services (U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard & National Guard)
- Public Archives and Libraries (National Archives and Records Service, Library of Congress)
- State & Municipal Departments & Agencies
- Archives, & records centers
- Education institutes & offices
- Historical offices & heritage centers
- Libraries & museums
- Planning agencies & commissions
- State Historic Preservation Offices

**LEGISLATIVE**

- Historical offices, U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate; state legislatures
- Legislative reference & analysis services
- Elected officials

**JUDICIAL**

- Historical offices and projects in U.S. Supreme Court and other levels of federal, state, & county judiciary

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**TYPICAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT APPLY HISTORIANS’ SKILLS**

- Management (general)
- Advertising
- Archival & record-keeping services
- Banking & investment services
- Insurance
- Law
- Market research
- Newspaper, radio & television journalism
- Paralegal services
- Public relations
- Staff training
- Travel & tourism

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**Whatever your goals, history can be your avocation. Ways to participate:**

- Contribute time, expertise, and funds to historical associations, societies, museums, and libraries
- Participate in historical reenactments
- Preserve, restore, and recreate historic resources
- Read, research, and write history
- Teach history as a volunteer
PRIVATE SECTOR

Many opportunities exist for history graduates to employ their knowledge and skills in the private sector. Only a few representative examples appear below; most require additional business oriented studies.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT EMPHASIZE HISTORY

Consulting & freelance assignments:

NOTE: Competence required in business administration, especially marketing and finance.

Archives/records management: Provide archival and records management services. Foster private and public efforts to research historical records.

Cultural resource management: Identify, research, and evaluate historic resources; assist in preparation of environmental impact reports. Nominate resources for legal protection.

Historical research/writing/editing: Research, write, edit, index, and publish historical works concerning individuals, families, institutions, or communities. Provide specialized services for genealogical research, oral history, and media projects.

Legal and policy research: Research and analyze evidence and policy issues. Provide litigation support, oral history, interviewing, and transcription services.

Preservation/restoration: Apply historic, artistic, technical, and manual skills to rehabilitate and preserve structures and artifacts. Research and publicize preservation issues, laws, and tax incentives.

Other historical services: Offer specialized services for museum administration, historic site interpretation, legal testimony, or public celebrations.

COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA (NON-PRINT)

Programming production: Research, write, and edit historical documentaries and narratives. Develop programming for radio and television, motion pictures, recording industries, and the Internet.

PUBLISHING

NOTE: Command of the English language — and the subject matter — essential. Typing/word processing and proofreading skills needed. Ability to spot consumer trends important. Knowledge of printing and production techniques helpful.

Editors (book): Evaluate manuscripts; assure accuracy, grammar, clarity, thoroughness, organization, and style. Secure publication rights; negotiate contracts. Research market to test demand for publication.

Editors (magazine): Research, write, and edit articles. Review unsolicited manuscripts; develop new ideas for publications. Host press conferences; seek out new material, information.

PUBLIC SECTOR

ARCHIVES

(FEDERAL, STATE & MUNICIPAL)

Preserve, arrange, service, and exhibit public documents and manuscript collections. Plan and select archival acquisitions. Develop state-wide records management and archival policy. Promote scholarly research in archival records.

DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION


DEPARTMENT OF STATE FOREIGN SERVICE

Analyze and report on foreign country's political, economic, and social conditions. Present U.S. policies and culture, and values to other nations.

FEDERAL AGENCY PRESERVATION OFFICES

Coordinate the federal agency's activities under provisions of National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Determine effect of the agency's projects on property in, or eligible for, National Register of Historic Places.

HISTORICAL OFFICES

General Write institutional and policy history. Prepare current issues studies, analyze policy performance, and identify long-range trends. Preserve and organize institutional records; provide archival and records management. Edit public records and documents.

Military Services Prepare institutional histories and policy related studies; lecture on military history. Direct historical editing projects; manage archival and records centers, museums, and artifact collections.

HERITAGE/CULTURAL AGENCIES

Supervise and administer historical documents, artifacts, structures, and parks; produce exhibit displays; provide research and publication services.
ORGANIZATIONS THAT APPLY HISTORIANS' SKILLS

Management (general) Analyze financial, economic, and political risk using historical models. Test operating procedures for historical analogies. Employ oral history for organizational diagnosis. Examine policy issues by drawing on historical sources and perspectives.

Advertising Select target audience for advertising campaigns; design surveys; analyze and interpret results. Review raw and published material. Spot trends, determine effect of advertising campaign.

Archival and record-keeping services Organize archives and records to serve as integral part of corporate information system. Develop retention, storage, and retrieval policies. Exhibit archival material and memorabilia to promote corporate mission.

Banking & investment services Research company financial and management history. Evaluate client financial status, analyze industries, forecast production and profitability. Model financial and economic conditions over time.

Insurance Search and evaluate historical records to construct insurance case histories. Establish risk factors based on historical research. Analyze legislative action relating to industry in depth.

Law Research public and private archives and records sources; develop support material from historical evidence. Apply oral history techniques for depositions. Write briefs.

Market research Design and code research questionnaires; manage information-gathering process for interviews and surveys. Analyze qualitative and quantitative data, applying math and statistical techniques. Edit, proofread, and report on conclusions to clients.

Newspaper, radio & television journalism Probe contemporary and historical records for source information. Interview, applying oral history techniques. Produce concise, accurate reports within stringent deadlines, placing current events in historical perspective.

Paralegal services Investigate, collect, organize, and manage information. Research laws, legal writings, and precedents. Interview clients; perform trial fact analysis. Manage computer data base systems.

Public relations Identify public trends; interpret corporate activities over time. Draw on archival material for organizational promotion, incorporating historical themes in advertising, publicity, and public relations material.

Staff training Incorporate corporate history within staff training programs. Relate the history of clients, cultures, and domestic and foreign markets, to institutional goals and operating policies.

Travel & tourism Inform public about the history of people, places, and material objects. Facilitate travel to historic sites. Plan conferences; guide tours. Promote the educational value of tourism.

INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

Employ historian's skills to gather and analyze economic, political, and social data; relate trends and precedents of the past to present and future events.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Manage historical sites and parks, studying their history and promoting their use. Conduct tours and classes; interpret site and park history to public.

LEGISLATURES

Administrative assistants: Research the history of policies and legislation; analyze costs and effectiveness. Respond to public inquiries on current political issues, laws, and procedures. Manage institutional records and publish bibliographic material.

Elected officials: Bring historical perspective to decision making process. Apply objective scholarship to the examination of political, social, economic, and military issues.

LIBRARIES & MUSEUMS

(FEDERAL, STATE & MUNICIPAL)

See Nonprofit entries for Libraries and Museums.

PLANNING AGENCIES

Provide urban and rural planning services to preserve natural and historical resources, foster environmental quality. Recommend, review, and enforce land use and development policies.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICES

Plan state preservation efforts; educate public concerning preservation. Conduct cultural resource surveys, nominate properties to National Register; administer historic, archaeological properties, and provide guidance on preservation legislation.

TEACHING

Teach history; develop curriculum, lesson plans, and classroom materials; prepare, give, and grade examinations; counsel students.

Additional duties - primary/secondary schools: Teach other social studies classes. Participate in parent conferences; supervise study hall; coach athletics and advise clubs.

Additional duties - college/university & adult ed: Teach interdisciplinary history-related programs. Participate in academic administration. Conduct research, write, publish, and consult.

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

Study and report on the development of topics, especially policy issues, over time. Fulfill contract research assignments. Edit historical documents. Coordinate interdisciplinary studies requiring historical perspective; determine significance, trends in computer-based data.

RELIGIOUS AND PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS

Apply historical studies to enrich an understanding of the organization's mission. Analyze issues over time, defining needs and programs with reference to historical context. Encourage the study of history.
THE STUDY OF HISTORY should teach you to ask the right questions, think critically, analyze dispassionately, and communicate with power and clarity. It also should empower you to better understand the human condition: who we are, where we came from, where we are going.

This won’t happen without effort on your part. Nor will the study of history assure you of employment. That’s your job. A few suggestions for approaching this task appear below. Planning for your career shouldn’t be put off until the last minute. From the time you seriously consider the study of history, be mindful of these points.

1 • TAKE INVENTORY

You have studied history, now look at your own recent life as an historian would. Compile the main events of your studies and other activities chronologically, in telegraph style. Include specific dates, names of schools, colleges, internships, employers, extracurricular activities, and noteworthy accomplishments.

After each event jot down why these events have suited you for the career of your choice. This list will also serve as source material for the résumé you will have to prepare prior to any job interviews.

Academic scores are important, but by no means the only accomplishment to list. Nor do you necessarily have to be a straight A student to impress potential employers. But you must have positive, distinctive qualities that are in demand.

What did you accomplish during your stay that drew upon your academic knowledge or skills? How have your studies directly improved your usefulness to a future employer? Break your list down into two categories: knowledge of your major subject, and command of skills used in mastering this subject.

Specific historical knowledge: What is it you have learned about a particular people, historic period, or geographic area? How can this knowledge be applied in your chosen career? If you have studied Elizabethan history, what useful analogies can you draw to modern times? How have the incidents you studied changed the course of history — what was their cause, their effect? What useful lessons have you learned from your study of history?

Skills learned from historical methodology: Most jobs involve collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and reporting both in writing and orally. Most deal with qualitative as well as quantitative factors. All deal with people; “we are all in sales,” we all have to teach and persuade. What are the research methods you have learned that can be applied at work?

Other academic subjects: As a holder of a liberal arts degree, you are by definition a generalist, not a specialist. You are expected to have reasonable command of other key subjects.

What courses — or activities — have strengthened the following:

- Your logical, critical, and analytical thinking.
- The ability to express yourself in written and spoken English.
- Mastery of basic computer skills.
- Familiarity with economic history and microeconomics.
- Enough grasp of managerial accounting to read an Annual Report.

Personal attributes: Character matters, and personality counts. Worthy employers seek honest and reasonably outgoing associates. Everyone wants self-starting team players, hard-working individuals who are motivated and who can motivate others. Such attributes are under your control. Correct your deficiencies.

2 • RESEARCH YOUR TARGETS

Draw on what you (should) have learned in the study of history: how to research. Call up the organization. If it is publicly held, call the communications/public relations office. Request a copy of the last two Annual Reports. Ask if you could stop by and talk to someone on the professional staff who can give you background information on the organization. Look up their web site on the Internet. Read all their pages carefully, then double check with them and with related sites about job openings.

Get names of other professionals for job or information interviews. Network by asking for names of people — not just organizations — from friends, career counselors, and professionals you have some contact with at your bank, insurance company, newspaper, or Internet chat rooms.

Phone or e-mail for a brief meeting (a letter may well go unanswered). Do not ask for a job interview unless you are thoroughly prepared. By asking to meet for information you will have a greater chance of a friendly reception.

If anyone you talk to shows an interest in hiring you, they will let you know.

3 • REFIT YOURSELF

If you have difficulty compiling your personal inventory, talk to people in the careers you seek, talk to your teachers, talk to career advisors. Rethink what it is you have to offer employers. In particular consider whether graduate study in history or in some other field is advisable. Remember some employers may accept you in an entry level position and offer an incentive to help you complete your studies. Whatever your level of expertise, be prepared for a lifelong search for knowledge. Whatever your goals, your study of history is an excellent point of departure.
Applying Historians' Knowledge and Skills

Information/Research Services

**Duties:** Provide staff full range of technical information, bibliographical, and reference services. Scrutinize breaking news for items of significance to corporate mission. Analyze retrospective literature and financial data. Prepare technical reviews; select instructional and research materials; index and abstract reports. Develop and maintain data base. Organize collection of published material.

The study of history teaches students to solve research problems by selecting appropriate primary and secondary information sources, test the validity and inner consistency of documentation, and make conclusions based on facts.

Systems Analysis

**Duties:** Analyze user requirements, procedures, and problems to improve and automate information systems. Describe user needs and the steps required to implement feasible electronic solutions. Prepare work-flow charts and diagrams. Assist programmers to develop, test, and implement information systems.

Systems analysis requires the historian's ability to master a global view of issues, develop timelines from tangled webs of data, and effectively deal with ambiguity, interpreting cause and effect.

Financial Analysis

**Duties:** Analyze financial statements and positions, reviewing profitability and assessing reasonableness of projections. Prepare and review budgets and internal projections, noting conclusions and recommendations of costs and benefits. Determine risk and financial implications of proposed corporate actions.

In analyzing financial data, history trains students to consider non-monetary factors, such as social trends, or legislation, and to identify factors that cause anomalies. It encourages objectivity, broadens outlooks, and trains students to search for bias.

Strategic Planning

**Duties:** Develop plans to achieve the organization's objectives, interrelating products, markets, personnel, facilities, and financing. Determine successes and failures of past planning and their relevance to proposed action. Identify emerging issues and their relation to legislative, social, economic, and environmental trends.

History provides both context and structure for monitoring business trends. In examining processes over time, historians are trained to question basic suppositions, determining distinctions between trends and isolated events and shaping a cohesive summary of the issues.

Compliance & Policy Analysis

**Duties:** Develop and maintain systems for monitoring compliance with federal, state, and local regulations as well as internal corporate policy. Draft environmental and related impact statements. Brief management on current legislation; prepare position papers detailing regulatory policy issues.

Framing policy issues in their larger economic, social, and political context requires knowledge of history. Historical methods train students to validate source material and locate documentary evidence needed for compliance review.

Training & Orientation

**Duties:** Produce publications and other instructional material for orientation of new employees. Instruct employees in corporate policies and cultures and train them as well as in research methods. Prepare case studies to develop management skills.

Corporate restructuring and the phased out of time erases corporate memory; historians can recreate it. For penetrating international markets, knowledge of foreign cultures' history is essential.

Manpower Planning Development; Organizational Diagnosis

**Duties:** Plan and implement comprehensive organizational diagnoses. Select appropriate diagnostic methods; interview employees and retirees. Analyze organizational strengths and weaknesses, identifying concerns, conflicts, and failures. Build and maintain planning model to link firm's strategic plans to staff and their skills.

The study of history teaches students to evaluate experiences, achievements, traditions, and values over time. It instructs them in oral history methods of providing managers with a solid basis for diagnosing organizational behavior.

Legal Support

**Duties:** Assemble primary resources for legal research. Determine facts in support of legal claims; brief attorneys on underlying economic, political, or social reasons for past events and decisions. Develop and maintain information systems of local, state, and federal legislation including antitrust and regulatory proceedings.

History graduates are trained to inspect voluminous sources for evidence, to appraise documents for their validity, and to present facts that have a material bearing on the issues – all basic elements of legal support.

Archival Management & Records Services

**Duties:** Create and maintain well-indexed, accessible records concerning key aspects of corporate history, including major events, decisions, policies, strategies, and financial data. Appraise organization's records to determine value; develop criteria for retaining, archiving, and describing institutional material. Organize data base of archival resources. Respond to reference requests.

Archives preserve an organization's heritage, providing an institutional memory in the wake of mergers, acquisitions, and restructuring. Archival materials document patterns of success and failure, revealing patterns of decision making and management styles.

Facilities Management

**Duties:** Manage facilities. Analyze reuse of historic property, coordinating efforts with local development efforts to preserve valued structures and revitalize commercial districts. Conduct feasibility studies, supervise structural analyses, space lay-out. Prepare cost-benefit analyses comparing restoration with new construction.

Historic preservation returns both economic and cultural benefits. Notable structures enhance communities and preserve traditions. Artifacts associated with the growth of a firm, such as trademarks or products, provide themes for advertising and promotion, conveying stability and familiarity to the public.

THE AVOCATION OF HISTORY

Just because you do not earn a living "doing" history does not mean you are shut out of the historian's preserve. Amateur historians can – and do – write history, practice historic preservation, monitor history teaching on school boards, participate in historical reenactments, sustain historical societies, collect historic objects and documents, and otherwise support the promotion of history.

Similarly, the study of history and historical methods is not bounded by one's past formal education. Opportunities abound to continue learning, by reading, formal courses, on-line instruction, or volunteering to assist in historical enterprises.