

What Can I Do As A History Major?

Many people don't realize that only a small percentage of undergraduate History majors go on to be professional historians. Instead, most become lawyers, librarians, businesspersons, writers, archivists, researchers, teachers, politicians, and even entertainers. Leaders in every industry -- from business and technology to the arts and entertainment -- can point to their training as History majors as the starting point for their success. The study of history plays an important part in creating intellectual development as well as valuable career skills in research, writing, argumentation, and documentation.

What skills would I learn as a History major?

One of the key ways of thinking about what a History major prepares you to do after graduation is to focus on the skills that you would acquire, including:

- Effective Writing skills: The ability to successfully and precisely communicate your ideas is vital to any job for which a college degree is a necessity.
- Critical Analysis skills: A key part of decision making for any job, critical analysis gives you the ability to analyze a situation and come up with creative and practical solutions.
- Research skills: Also vitally important to any job, research skills help you develop the ability to understand any issue, to learn about how the issue developed over time, to find new information, and to incorporate what you find into your analysis of an issue.
- Interdisciplinary Thinking and Training: In the 21st century, everyone needs to know how to think about an issue or 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: A desire to learn more, to examine reasons beneath issues, and to understand them as part of a continual, life-long, education process is an important skill for both professional and personal success.

What are some careers I might be prepared for as a History major?

An undergraduate History degree has many advantages that will prepare you for a variety of careers. For example, the job market for teachers in primary and secondary schools is strong here in Las Vegas and in many other locations, and students with a solid background in history will be well-suited to get teaching credentials in subjects such as social studies, government, political science, humanities, and general studies.

The research and writing skills that History majors learn also offer excellent preparation for careers in law, journalism, library science, public relations, technical writing, fund-raising, administration, domestic and foreign government service, to name a few. Increasingly, as more information is accessed online, the field of digital history is growing. In addition, trends in medical and business school admissions suggest that these professional schools are looking for students who possess training in humanities and social sciences. In an increasingly competitive market with growing competition, students who have completed something unique such as a History honors thesis or have a background in subfields such as the history of medicine might have an added advantage.

As a History major, you have many options. A degree in history gives you essential training in basic research and communication skills that are central to so many careers today. Here are a few of the options you can select:

Historians as Educators

Many History majors become educators, including 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 are docents, education directors, curators, guides, and interpreters. In addition, there are other forms of teaching such as working as a historical consultant, contract archivist, public historian, writer, and filmmaker.

Historians as Researchers

Many History majors go on to careers as researchers, emphasizing their skills in evaluating and analyzing documentary evidence. Their jobs include public historians as well as policy advisors who serve as planners, evaluators, and analysts for state, local, and federal governments. In addition, historians often find employment as researchers for museums and historical organizations, or 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 work as editors at a publishing

company or university press. 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 is the perfect preparation for law school. Historians and lawyers often do the same thing: they argue persuasively and use historical data to support their arguments. Many History majors become lawyers; others have careers in litigation support as paralegals. Others enter public service and become policymakers, serve as legislative staff at all levels of government, or serve as officers of granting agencies and foundations.

Historians as Businesspeople

Most people overlook the value of a History major in preparing for a career in business. Yet, historians track trends over time, an important skill for those developing products to market or who are 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 trends; thus, history majors have found their skills useful in extractive industries and in public utilities.

UNLV Department of History, www.unlv.edu/history. With thanks to University of California, Davis and Professor Catherine Lavender, Department of History, The College of Staten Island, The City University of New York.

Famous History Majors

Politics & Law

- John F. Kennedy: President of the United States
- Richard Nixon: President of the United States
- Joe Biden: Vice President of the United States
- Anthony M. Kennedy: U. S. Supreme Court Justice
- Sonia Sotomayor: U. S. Supreme Court justice
- Elena Kagan: U. S. Supreme Court Justice
- Newt Gingrich: Former Speaker of the House
- Bill Bradley: Former U.S. Senator and NBA Player
- George Mitchell: Special envoy to the Middle East
- Eric Holder: Attorney General of the United States
- W. E. B. DuBois: Writer, activist, co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- Robert Gates: former U. S. Secretary of Defense (under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama)
- Cory Booker: U. S. Senator from New Jersey

Business

- Robert Johnson: Founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET)
- Lee Iacocca: Former CEO of the Chrysler Corporation
- Carly Fiorina: Former president and CEO of Hewlett-Packard Ben Silverman: Co-chairman of NBC Entertainment and NBC Universal
- Martha Stewart: CEO and founder of Martha Stewart Living home design corporation
- Brian Moynihan: CEO of Bank of America

Entertainment and Sports

- Larry David: Actor; writer; comedian; producer; film director
- Conan O'Brien: Comedian; former host of "The Tonight Show" Steve Carell: Comedian; star of "The Office"
- Jimmy Buffett: Songwriter; singer; restaurant-chain owner; businessman
- Samantha Power: Writer
- Sacha Baron Cohen: Actor and comedian
- Steve Carrell: Actor and comedian

- Lauryn Hill: Singer and actress
- Kareem Abdul Jabbar: Basketball legend, activist
- Tony Danza: Actor
- Jackie Joyner-Kersey: Olympic track and field gold medalist, named one of the Greatest Female Athletes of the 20th Century

Journalism

- Wolf Blitzer: Journalist
- David Brancaccio: Host of PBS's "Now"
- Ray Suarez: Senior correspondent for the "PBS NewsHour"
- Charlie Rose: Host of "Charlie Rose"
- Chris Berman: Anchor of "SportsCenter"