

Careers for History Majors

Many people think history degrees are only for future teachers. Educators are vital to society, but history skills suit many careers besides teaching and academia. Analyzing information, formulating arguments and narratives that explain this information, and communicating complex ideas are essential to *every* profession. The discipline of history often teaches these skills better than other disciplines do. Even majors on the teaching track should be aware of these alternative careers; someday you're going to have to convince your own students of the value of history!

Museums and other venues for public history rely closely on historical skills, but so do law, business, politics, publishing/journalism, advertising, or any number of other fields.

If you are thinking about doing something with your history degree besides teaching, plan your work in the History Department to prepare you for your career and appeal to potential employers. Here are some suggestions for how to do that.

1. Consult with the Cal State LA Career Development Center early on. A lot of students wait until they're about to graduate to visit the CDC, but it has a number of services designed to help you identify careers most suited to your interests. Take advantage of career counseling early and you can start to shape your course of study to best prepare you for that career.
2. Be strategic in your course selection. The courses you take at Cal State LA are not interchangeable; by selecting them strategically you not only construct a skill set tailored to your career choice, you demonstrate your planning abilities to employers. This selection can begin with your general education courses; your GE theme, for instance, can be chosen with an eye towards your career objectives. At the department level you have a number of additional options:
 - a. Geographic field. The Cal State LA History Department studies the entire world. If you're interested in working in a specific part of it, with people from a specific part of it, and/or in the many ways the US is connected to the world, you can develop an expertise in that area by concentrating your study, especially your electives, on courses related to that region, and by taking History of Globalization (HIST 4010).
 - b. Career specialty. Certain courses in the major relate directly to subsequent careers. A student interested in a legal career, for instance, should take HIST 4790: Constitutional History of the United States. Those interested in business should take HIST 4760: Economic History of the United States; those interested in advertising, HIST 4820: History of U.S. Popular Culture, and so on. HIST 4900 seminars, whose subjects change each quarter, may feature topics which relate to your area of interest as well. Consult with faculty members in your area of interest to learn when the courses you want to take will be offered.

3. Take advantage of opportunities to develop applied skills. The department has a number of classes and extra-curricular opportunities that emphasize applied skills that are used all the time in organizations and companies. These opportunities will help “fill out” your resume by giving you experience that transcends the classroom. They include:
 - a. HIST 4970: Editing and Publishing Perspectives. The class built around the department’s student journal teaches editing and publishing skills applicable to a wide variety of jobs
 - b. HIST 3050: Public History seminars. These courses vary in topic and scope, but they all involve applying the field of history to the public sphere, and as such teach skills in communication and organization that can be of use to a wide variety of fields.
 - c. Internships (HIST 4940 or HIST 4990). The department has made arrangements with a number of organizations that offer internships in the field of public history. The bulletin board outside the department office has a section devoted to these opportunities. These internships can help you develop work experience that will be useful in many fields in addition to public history. You can, of course, consult the Career Development Center and other resources for additional internship opportunities.
4. Consider a minor. A minor in another field related to your career goal can help you become familiar with the terms and concepts of the field, and it demonstrates that you’ve taken an active interest in that subject. A history major with a business minor, for instance, will stand out to business employers who want someone who is both comfortable with economic concepts and capable of the advanced analytical thinking that a history major provides. The Labor Studies minor (overseen by the History Department), for instance, can be invaluable to a student pursuing a career in union organizing.
5. Develop your language skills. In an increasingly globalized world, language skills are becoming more and more valuable. Taking classes to learn a new language or brush up on one spoken by your family will distinguish you from many of your competitors in the job market.
6. Apply for a Scholarship, and join Phi Alpha Theta. Cal State LA offers a number of scholarships to history majors; information and application procedures are kept in the Financial Aid office. Applications are usually due towards the end of the fall quarter. Phi Alpha Theta is the national honors society for historians; applications and information on its activities are available in the department office. Although these opportunities do not apply to specific fields, they do constitute evidence of motivation and success for employers. And PAT is a primary conduit of information for new internships, scholarships, and other resources made available to the department.