

>> *Pro Path Guide* >> for History Majors & Graduate Students

“Public History”: Professional Paths Beyond Teaching

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Sources: Interviews with professionals in the field and research on professional websites listed on the more specific *Pro Path Guides*
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What is “Public History?”

Public history is the term used for the wide range of history related professional paths outside of teaching, from archivists processing collections and working with researchers, to National Park Service Rangers providing tours of historic monuments and placing them in their larger historical contexts. More professions are listed below. Such employment can be for a government cultural organization or agency (local, state, or federal), non-profit cultural organization, private sector business or corporation, or as an independent contractor. As the National Council on Public History put it, "In terms of intellectual approach... public history remains firmly in the discipline of history, and all good public history rests on sound scholarship.... public historians are more self-consciously interdisciplinary than traditional historians.... public historians routinely engage in collaborative work with community members, stakeholders, and professional colleagues, and some contend that collaboration is a fundamental and defining characteristic of what public historians do."

Examples of professional fields and employers

History Related

- Archivist
- Historic Preservation / City Planning - Most cities with buildings from the nineteenth century or before have a very active historic preservation office within the city planning department.
- Historic Sites: Park Ranger (Interpretation) for the National Parks Service (NPS) - A major part of the NPS is presenting history to the public through guided tours of historic monuments on their properties, as well as exhibitions & related outreach.
- Information Specialist (Librarian) – Employed by educational institutions, city & state governments, and large corporations (most of which have their own in-house information specialists). Includes paper and, increasingly, digital resources.
- Museum Curator / Exhibitions / Interpreter or Guide / Technologist / Preservation / Management – Museums range from small, local institutions to major urban ones, and the range of careers in them is wide.
- Public or private high school Social Studies Teacher

Non-History Related But Uses Skills Acquired by History Majors and Graduate Students

- Legal Profession – as an Attorney or Paralegal - History BA and/or MA is seen by law schools as *the* pre-law degree because we use evidence & make arguments in the same way that lawyers do.
- Non-Profit Sector
- City, State, and Federal Government Agencies
- Small, medium and large businesses – particularly human resources (helping employees), public relations, innovation / problem-solving, and research.

Is any additional training, education or certification/qualification required?

A professional master's degree is recommended (such as in public history, museum studies, or information/library science) but not necessarily required for most professions in the field. In many fields, having a master's degree in History as well (yes, a second master's degree), and in a few cases a History PhD, is increasingly required for job

advancement, and strengthens your employment opportunities across the board. See the Pro Path Guides in the fields of your interest for more specific information.

Is an internship or relevant work study as an undergrad recommended?

Relevant unpaid internships or work study are generally recommended. There are a fair number of internships for undergraduates but they are often competitive; you must have a strong GPA and references. Although they are unpaid they tend to pay off in graduate school admissions, occasionally graduate school funding, and particularly in employment offers down the road. In a few fields internships are reserved for graduate students. See Pro Path Guides in the fields of your interest for more specific information.

What is the typical career path?

Starting as an undergraduate or graduate student, most entry level positions will be volunteer, internship, seasonal, or part-time positions. In some fields there are paid summer positions. People with 2–3 years of relevant experience and an undergrad or graduate degree are more qualified for full-time positions. It is tremendously beneficial if you are willing to relocate nationwide for work.

What is the message to undergraduates?

Do well in your History BA and relevant internships then get a professional master's degree (*and* a history master's for many fields but not all) while getting in more internships and relevant entry-level employment whenever possible.

Percentage of history majors working per employment field

Federal government	22%
State government (excluding education)	15%
Local government (excluding education)	19%
Professional, scientific, & technical services	17%
Other	37%

Compiled from <https://collegegrad.com/careers/historians> accessed Dec. 2020

Pre-pandemic 2020 anticipated job growth in selected history-related fields in Colorado

Curator +19.9%

Museum Tech. +15.1%

Librarian +12.6%

Source: <https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/arts-humanities-careers/history/> accessed Dec. 2020

Anticipated nationwide job growth in history fields from 2019 to 2029

+3%

Source: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/historians.htm> accessed Dec. 2020

Average starting pay

Rate of pay depends heavily on the field you pursue and the cost of living where the job is located. See the Pro Path Guide in the fields of your interest for more specific information. Please note that the data below represents a snapshot in time and provides an average or general salary range.

2019–2020 Median nationwide average pay statistics by position

- National Park Service Ranger—Interpretation of historic sites: \$33,500–\$59,200/yr.
- Librarian/Information Specialist \$58,110–\$62,000
- Library Tech. \$37,000/yr.
- Curator, early career (1–4 yrs) \$33,680; experienced \$38,000–\$59,000/yr; advanced is often higher.
- Archivist, early career (1–4 yrs) \$46,500; experienced \$54,000–\$57,500/yr.
- Museum Technician \$44,320–\$48,000/yr.
- Social Science Teacher (high school) early career \$32,000; experienced \$61,000/yr.
- Historic Preservation: early career \$30,000–\$40,000; experienced \$46,000–\$64,000/yr.
- Lawyer \$115,000–\$145,000

- Paralegal or Legal Assistant \$48,000–\$55,000/yr.

Sources: <https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/arts-humanities-careers/history/>, <https://www.geteducated.com/career-center/best-jobs-for-history-majors/>, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/careers/history-majors/>, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#25-0000 accessed Dec. 2020

2020 Median wages by employer:

- Federal government (excluding Post Office) \$97,850
- Professional, scientific, and technical services \$65,060
- State government (excluding education) \$52,780
- Local government (excluding education and hospitals) \$31,450

Source: <https://collegegrad.com/careers/historians> accessed Dec. 2020

Are internships available to UNC undergraduate and/or graduate students?

UNC has limited internships to qualified students and job shadowing opportunities available in some of the fields listed above, based on local availability. Internships, which are usually unpaid, are competitive and highly recommended. They can be taken during the academic year for 1-3 credits or performed during the summer. Contact Dr. Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu

Are there paid positions for undergraduate or graduate students in this field?

Very rarely, those that are available are summer positions and require unpaid internship experience to be qualified. See Pro Path Guides in the fields of your interest for more specific information.

For more information....

See our other *Pro Path Guides* on more specific professional paths

OAH Career COACH (Organization of American Historians/OAH)

<https://www.oah.org/career-coach/>

Careers for Students of History (American Historical Association, the National Council for Public History, and the Public History Program of the University of South Carolina)

<https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/career-resources/careers-for-students-of-history>

Careers for History Majors (American Historical Association/AHA)

<https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/why-study-history/careers-for-history-majors>

National Council on Public History/NCPH

<http://ncph.org/>

“Career Paths in Public History” (2019). Report of the AASLH-AHA-NCPH-OAH Task Force on Public History... Employment

<https://ncph.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Career-Paths-in-Public-History-Report-of-the-Joint-Task-Force-on-Public-History-Education-and-Employment-March-20-1.pdf>

UNC History Department or other UNC contact for students interested in employment in this field

Professor Jacob Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu. If you do an internship, your supervisor or colleagues will be good sources of information.