

Advice from Industry Professionals

WHO MAJORED IN HISTORY

Hoping to gain some clarity about what careers you can pursue with your History major?

We reached out to alumni who majored in History to gather their professional advice and share thoughts on a variety of career pathways you could pursue.

We hope this will help Vanderbilt University Undergraduates majoring in History make plans and navigate their future planning with ease.

A special thank you to Abigail, Alexander, Connor, Deling, Erin, Henry, Jonathan, Laura, Mark, Tommy, and Walt!

Abigail Miller

Class Year: 2019

Current position/job/company: Teach for America Corps Member- Middle School Teacher in Dallas, Texas

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? The Career Center for History "jobs" (If you are interested in using your history degree in the corporate world. I was given a lot of help with Think Tank positions, for example, which I ultimately did not end up pursuing. USE YOUR HISTORY PROFESSORS, especially if you want to go into history further (PhD) or public history. It was thanks to a ton of connections in the history department that I interned at the Tennessee State Museum, and that I got a VUSRП research grant. Without them, I would not have been given either of those opportunities.

Depending on how things go for the rest of fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Communicate with your professors your professional and academic goals. Even if they do not have a connection for you now, they always want to help, and can connect you to other professors, and have you in mind when they hear of other opportunities. This is especially important when you are not in the classroom. Relationship building with professors is so important.

Alexander Nikas

Class Year: 2019

Current position/job/company: Master's candidate in Information Systems

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? Year after graduation

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Humanities offer so much value in the business world, but employers often overlook that for more technically qualified candidates. History is a strategic asset once you have the hard skills to match.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Develop your analytical skills. You have access to world-class faculty in math, finance, and computer sciences, among others. Fill up your electives with as many as you can! The Vanderbilt workload is exhausting, but you will never have opportunities to learn valuable skills like you do right now.

Depending on how things go for the rest of summer and fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Think long and hard about what kind of career interests you. Talk to professionals in those industries, not for getting a job, but to see if their jobs are actually interesting to you! If you have the luxury of identifying a career you want as an undergrad (I did not), take the time/classes to develop the skills valuable in that industry to maximize your value as a candidate.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? If you are interested in data science, look for a master's program rather than a boot camp. Boot camps are shorter and cheaper, but offer nowhere near the networking opportunities and comprehensiveness of a degree program.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Take computer science classes. Take finance classes. Take more computer science classes.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Your history major is simultaneously incredibly valuable and means almost nothing to most employers. You need hard skills (programming, finance, etc.) to succeed in the business world. Liberal arts majors with these skills out-earn their counterparts with only a STEM education.

Connor Kreb

Class Year: 2019

Current position/job/company: Assistant English Teacher at Spanish Public High School in Madrid, Spain

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? After spending a semester abroad, I knew I wanted to live abroad and improve my foreign language skills after graduation.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Resources in the Career Center and reaching out to older Vandy students and graduates.

Depending on how things go for the rest of fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Reach out to people in their desired industries asking them to chat to learn more about the industry and their experiences.

Deling Chen

Class Year: 2016

Current position/job/company: Columbia Law School, J.D. Candidate

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? I decided to pursue a law degree while I was a junior History major. Post-war Modern Japan, a course taken with Professor Igarashi, inspired my interest in legal history. After I graduated from Vanderbilt, I interned for a judge in China to further explore my interest and confirm my pursuit in legal education and career.

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Critical thinking, reasoning, reading and writing ability, the ability to think through varied perspectives.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? All history students could benefit from enrolling in the Honors program to improve their reading and writing skills, and to gain substantive experience in researching and time management.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? Having a rosy picture of what legal profession looks like. To avoid such a problem, try to build some connection with legal professionals and get more exposure to relevant internship or research.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Preparing for LSAT as early as possible; Think of a good reason to apply law school; Considering having some substantive work experience before going to law school.

Erin B. Logan

Class Year: 2017

Current position/job/company: Reporter - Los Angeles Times

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? I decided to pursue journalism at the end of my senior year. I interned at WPLN, did not hate it and decided to go to graduate school for journalism. This was the best decision I have ever made.

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? The best stories provide contexts for readers. Knowing the histories of white supremacy, government and policy helps inform the way in which stories are framed.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Knowing how to research and find information in historical records. Understanding public records, how they are maintained and where they are located dramatically expands the types of stories you are able to tell and the types of jobs you can do.

Depending on how things go for the rest of summer and fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Get as many stories published as you can. Clips are your lifeline in this industry.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? There is a lot of groupthink in this industry. Avoid it at all costs.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Intern at a local outlet, network as much as possible, get stories published.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Make your cover letters stand out by displaying action. Do not just tell people you are a great journalist, show them.

Henry Mayer

Class Year: 2019

Current position/job/company: Analyst - Bain Capital Credit

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? I have always enjoyed investing. I like the research/analytical aspects the most.

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Something different on a resume, interesting to talk about. Also could talk to the research, writing, and analytical skills it gave me.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Take your capstone seriously- it can become something you are proud of/interesting to talk about.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? Bad GPA

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: 1) Solid internships 2) keep up a good GPA 3) decide if it is actually something you want to do.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Practice, practice, practice (but ironically, do not be too rehearsed).

Jonathan Baker

Class Year: 2017

Current position/job/company: Incoming 1L at Northwestern Law School

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? I decided three years after undergrad because I felt like change could be better done in our society through policy.

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Employers knew I was analytical and could communicate extremely well.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Take a wide range of courses across different majors to broaden your scope.

Depending on how things go for the rest of fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Start searching early! The early bird gets the worm.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? They should know there is a wide range of opportunities for history majors.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: 1. Communicate well. 2. Stay on top of current events. 3. Be open.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Do not be afraid to network and reach out!

Laura Grove

Class Year: 2018

Current position/job/company: Sr. Archives Associate at the Archives of American Mathematics, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History and Student at the University of Texas School of Information

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? My sophomore year at Vanderbilt I did a research project for a history class that required me to spend a lot of time at Special Collections. I loved the experience and realized that working in an archive could be a potential career path for me. I reached out to library staff and eventually got a job working in Special Collections and fell in love with archival work!

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? As a history major, I naturally had a lot of experience researching in archives. Understanding how archives work, how researchers use them, and why they are so important are, of course, a must. Additionally, being a content specialist in the collecting area of a particular archives/institution can give you a big leg up!

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Get to know your history professors. The faculty in the history department are amazing! I still keep in touch with a few of them today! They can provide invaluable academic, career, and life advice. Getting to know the staff at Central Library and in Special Collections was also invaluable to me. The library/archives community is close-knit. Networking is really helpful!

Depending on how things go for the rest of fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Conduct informational interviews with people in your field of interest! This is an invaluable way to learn more about jobs you might be interested in and network. Keep in touch and these can turn into internships or even jobs down the road. I did this with the staff at Central Library and weeks later, they contacted me about a job opening. Coding skills also really make you stand out on the job market. I would recommend taking some online classes if you have extra time. Python is a great place to start.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? Working in libraries and archives is not just for people who love books and old artifacts. It is about preserving information and narratives and making them accessible to the public. You have to study more than just history and archival theory. To really succeed, you need to understand how broader information systems operate and stay on top of the latest developments in digital archiving tools.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: - Get to know the staff at Central library. Jason Shultz would be a good person to reach out to first.
-Consider pursuing a Master's in Information Studies/Library Science/Information and Library Science (they are all basically the same).

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? If you know of an organization, you would like to work at, just reach out to them. Even if they do not have any openings now, they may think of you later. If nothing else, ask to set up a call to learn more about their company/career. Most people are happy to talk about what they do.

Mark Pickett

Class Year: 2019

Current position/job/company: 2L Student at Georgia State University College of Law

When and how did you determine your career pathway was the right fit for you? I always had the idea I wanted to go to law school but taking classes with Professor Kim Welch about legal history piqued my interest even further.

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? History majors gain incredibly valuable research skills through the capstone and other writing courses. Learning how to do self-sufficient research has proved invaluable in law school and in internships.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? The professors and the ability to take classes on subjects that interest you. Taking a wide range of history classes has allowed me to dive further into historical topics post-grad and continue learning about my major!

Depending on how things go for the rest of summer and fall 2020, what could current history students do at home that would help prepare them for an internship next year? Learning new skills. As a history major, I had a hard time explaining in interviews how my major would be useful in a job. By learning a new or unique skill, history majors can bring a more well-rounded resume into an interview or job position.

What pitfalls should a history student avoid if they want to work in your industry? Do not forget that you may need a letter of recommendation (or two or three), so build a relationship with professors you like and who know you well enough to write a compelling letter about you.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Study for the LSAT, take the LSAT, and remember the LSAT is just a test and not the most important thing in the world or a testament to any one person's capabilities.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Look for a job you are passionate about. If you like the idea or the mission of a company/nonprofit/etc., you will be more fulfilled in the long run.

Tommy McGrath

Class Year: 2017

Current position/job/company: Private Equity Associate - Five Arrows Capital Partners

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Although working in a finance alongside colleagues who mostly had undergraduate business degrees was intimidating, I believe the my history major provided me a unique skill set that others I worked with may have lacked. Reading, writing, and thinking critically are crucial parts of just about any job, and this is especially true in an investing role. Additionally, when working in an investment role, you have to do a ton of research, formulate theses, and then defend and articulate those theses to others - a history major clearly prepares you well for that process.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Connect with Vanderbilt alumni - they have proven to be an extremely helpful network for me. Additionally, if you want to go into finance, supplement your classroom education with more career specific education. I took a few online accounting / modeling classes in college, and I completed a business program one summer.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Network with alumni, supplement classroom education with career specific resources, do as much industry research as possible.

Walt Baker

Class Year: 2017

Current position/job/company: Incoming Associate Attorney at Vinson & Elkins

What value did your history major provide you as you were seeking internships and/or a job post-graduation? Being a history major was a huge boon as a law student. Some of the texts you read in law school are as obscure as anything you would come across in a class about the Tudors or the Ottoman Empire. Having the ability to parse huge amounts of complex source material and distill it to its purest essence is a crucial part of success as both a history major and as a lawyer.

What resources should history students take advantage of while they are still an undergraduate? Going to office hours and establishing relationships with professors is hugely important. It is something I regret not doing as a freshman and sophomore. I saw many benefits once I began meeting with professors about paper topics and general questions as an upperclassman.

A graduating senior who is seeking a role within your industry should definitely do these three things prior to graduation: Intern at a law office of some kind. Take the LSAT while still in school - you may not think so, but you will never have more time to prepare. Forge relationships with your classmates and be someone they can count on. They may be clients or colleagues in the future.

If you had to offer 1 or more key pieces of advice to a current history student navigating the internship and/or job search process, what would it be and why? Do not let anyone tell you that you cannot get a job by majoring in something you are passionate about. So much of the work of the History major is analytical, and, more fundamentally, storytelling. The skills you learn and the manner in which you present yourself are far more important to your career prospects than whether or not you choose the "right" major for your chosen career path.