

History & Business

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, community, and 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 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 in business? Study of history prepares a student for the dynamics of business. 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 a business requires the establishment of objectives, directing their accomplishment, and 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. Business depends upon memory, and a mind trained to relate past experience with present needs.

Why business in history? American business enterprise, the engine of modern material wealth, has been a critical element in shaping national politics and international relations. Without an accurate understanding of the nature of business, one's view of the country's history is flawed. In addition, business provides a multi-disciplinary microcosm in which to study social, scientific, ethical, as well as economic, dimensions of history.

History is constantly invoked but rarely applied in business with professional rigor. *History & Business* identifies business opportunities for history graduates, demonstrating the benefits of an historian's perspective in business management. Six broad career tracks are set out for undergraduates. Each track leads to recommendations for additional undergraduate and graduate study. Focus then shifts to a typical business organization chart, where key duties are presented, linked to statements on the specific value conferred by history and the history graduate. The cycle is completed by indicating ways business may support history.

The mission of the Serenus Press is to promote the study and use of history and the liberal arts, demonstrating their application in nonacademic settings. We also encourage employers in all sectors of the economy to provide insight on how to strengthen education that connects good scholarship with professional success. To this end we publish Road Map Publications, freely downloadable material for educational distribution.

Serenus publications have many applications. They help students choose a college major, reinforce reasons for diligent study, and provide concrete career options. They also aid college administrators in recruiting high school students, and show parents as well as teachers the value of their children's liberal arts education. To date, our material has been used in nearly half the colleges throughout the United States, as well as numerous schools, historical associations, and libraries.

While many of our publications deal with history, we believe that history — rigorous history — can not be written, studied, or applied, without due regard to other core subjects: English, science, mathematics, and geography. Nor can mastery be achieved of English, science, mathematics, or geography without an attentive focus on history.

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ON BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

Businesses are generally organized by activities shown below such as “Production,” “Finance,” or “Legal”. The duties listed within these activities vary according to the industry within which it falls. Requirements are equally diverse. To the extent possible, research pertinent details on duties of interest prior to an interview.

PRODUCTION

Includes those directly concerned with producing the firm’s goods or services. Entry-level positions for history graduates in production may well require post-graduate studies in a specialized field.

History provides the broad educational background required as a base discipline by contemporary business. A sense of history empowers its students to review action in historical context, and analyze problems based the powerful engine of historical methodology.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Includes those who design and develop surveys. Analyze data, and present recommendations concerning the findings’ business implications. Collaborate with programmers and data samplers.

Advanced degrees in history provide the skills to analyze markets in their historical context, and present recommendations based on the probable cause and effect of political, economic, social, and military forces.

ARCHIVES & RECORD SERVICES

Includes: Archival Management, Information & Records Management.

Archival Management—duties: Produce well-indexed and accessible records concerning key aspects of corporate history, including major events, decisions, policies, strategies; financial and operating data. Appraise business records to determine value and retention. Organize and process files. Respond to reference requests. Develop criteria for describing material. Prepare database of resources. Provide information on holdings; facilitate access to collections.

History provides invaluable sources for corporate planning in all departments. Archival materials document patterns of success and of failure, and reveal processes of decision-making and management styles. Archives preserve the heritage of a firm, providing an institutional memory in the wake of mergers, acquisitions, and restructuring. An education in history trains students in the value and use of source material. Archivists are trained to manage information and records programs, establishing objectives, implementing space-saving retention and destruction schedules, and facilitating the retrieval of documents.

FINANCE & CONTROL

Includes: Accounting, Budgeting, Control, Credit & Collections, Finance, Financial Analysis, Internal Auditing, Political Risk Analysis/Assessment, Strategic Planning.

Strategic Planning—duties: Develop plans for resource utilization required to achieve financial, marketing goals. Set objectives, specifying appropriate timing and sequence. Interrelate products, markets, personnel, facilities and financing. Determine successes and failures of past planning and their relevance to proposed action. Identify emerging issues. Synthesize legislative, labor, economic, and environmental issues for management.

History provides both context and structure for monitoring business trends. As decisions become more complex, greater assurance is required in the accuracy of basic assumptions. In examining processes over time, historians are trained to question basic suppositions and determine distinctions between trends and isolated events. History graduates are trained to synthesize individual points of view to shape a cohesive summary of issues.

Political Risk Assessment—duties: Determine firm’s exposure to foreign political conditions. Evaluate the political process in host countries, assessing the political environment and potential impact of politics on the firm’s operations. Integrate risk assessment into decision-making process, showing effect on cash flows. Analyze financial effect of price controls, local ownership, repatriation of profits, currency devaluation. Recommend appropriate action.

History provides a basis for gauging the stability of a host government’s political system and its commitment to the rule of law. Testing the effects of change requires a knowledge of history. Cause and effect must be monitored and historical precedent mastered, in order to establish degrees of risk.

Financial Analysis—duties: Join interdisciplinary team, representing finance, law, and engineering, to assess feasibility of new projects; review profitability of established activities. Interpret financial statements and prepare analyses of costs and benefits, including graphic and statistical evaluations. Determine risk and financial implications of action; present conclusions and recommendations to management.

Historians are trained to interpret the qualitative effect of experience over time, to formulate problems in terms of trend lines and time series, and identify factors which have caused anomalies. A history education helps assure objectivity. It trains students to examine abstractions such as benefits, which are difficult to quantify. It broadens the outlook to consider non-monetary factors, such as social trends, or legislation.

MARKETING

Includes: Advertising, Business & Commercial Intelligence, Marketing, Market Research, Sales Operation and Promotion.

Market Research—duties: Establish market opportunities, marketing goals, and profit objectives; identify market trends and customer needs. Design intelligence gathering systems. Develop and conduct product surveys, monitoring events which influence product acceptance. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data on products; assess competition and market share. Formulate sales and pricing strategies. Develop standards of performance; measure marketing accomplishments.

History provides a powerful lens through which to view markets and marketing practices, revealing relationships with the broader business environment. Marketing problems are frequently neither new nor unique. A study of history reveals forgotten details of past marketing systems, identifying innovations and helping to avoid a repetition of past errors. Contrasts between the stated preference of consumers and their actions are amplified by historical observation. Viewed over time, marketing theories may be tested against results. Controlling factors may be more clearly identified; demand patterns, competitive actions, production costs, and product benefits will form meaningful trends.

Business Analysis—duties: Scan the business environment: spot competitive trends, assembling information on competitor's products, capabilities, and intentions. Analyze Financial Statements, sales information, employment trends, advertising, new products, legal action, credit information, government reports; be informed of competitive information available under Freedom of Information Act. Present business decision scenarios to management quantifying risks and uncertainties.

History education hones research skills required for business analysis. It sharpens the ability to evaluate critically, to verify the relevance of selected data and facilitate organization prior to analysis. Oral history instruction facilitates the gathering and assessment of verbal information. The historian is trained to present and disseminate intelligence.

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.

Historians are proficient at selecting material for use in advertising or sales, determining appropriate themes based on a firm's history, efficiently drawing on the corporate archives for source material.

INFORMATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Includes: Customer Service, Data-Processing, Information Services Management, Library Services, Programming, Research Services, Systems Analysis.

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 database. Organize collection of published material.

History Education develops effective information managing, stressing the distinction between data searches and basic research. Students are trained to determine appropriate primary and secondary sources of information, to test the validity and inner consistency of documentation. They are taught to keep context sufficiently broad so as not to exclude relevant information. Historians, as educators, are able to show others how to solve research problems, and what information to look for.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Includes: Community Affairs, Corporate Communications, Government Relations, Public Affairs, Public Opinion Analysis, Public Relations.

Public Affairs—duties: Gather information on economic, scientific, technological, demographic, political, and social trends. Determine public opinion, isolating issues critical to corporate mission, and targeting potential opportunities and problems. Analyze public policy developments: identify key legislative issues and programs affecting business operations. Advise top management and manage information flow to all levels of the organization. Inform the public about corporate activities and policy, shaping public opinion and attitudes about the firm. Evaluate company support of civic functions, educational and charitable organizations.

Public Relations—duties: Systematically develop goodwill, informing 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.

Corporate History—duties: Effectively commemorate corporate achievement. Illustrate the effect of business accomplishments; reveal the rationale behind a firm's policies and practices. Discover and advantageously use primary and secondary source materials.

History clarifies public affairs issues. Historical perspective is needed to analyze how public opinion is formed and gauge its effectiveness. An historian's vision strengthens public policy assessment to anticipate or prepare rational responses to proposed legislative action, political and economic issues must be viewed in sequence, over time, and in their social context. Academic liaison provides a forum for the exchange of views among different fields.

HUMAN RESOURCE ADMINISTRATION

Includes: Employee/Employment Services, Human Resource Development, Industrial Relations, Manpower/Organization Planning & Development, Personnel Services, Training & Orientation.

Manpower Planning & Development—duties: Plan and implement comprehensive organizational diagnosis. Select appropriate diagnostic methods; direct interviews of employees and retirees. Analyze organizational strengths and weaknesses, identifying concerns, conflicts and failures in communications. Build planning model linking firm's strategic plans with staffing and skills inventory.

History, particularly oral history, provides managers with a solid basis for diagnosing organizational behavior. An historian is trained to evaluate experience, achievements, traditions and values by observing the effects of change over time, drawing connections to events or factors which have caused these changes.

Training & Orientation—duties: Produce publications and other instructional material for orientation of new employees. Instruct employees in corporate policies and culture. Prepare case studies to develop management skills, with emphasis on building teamwork.

History reveals the shared values to be perpetuated in an organization. Corporate restructuring and the elapse of time erases corporate memory; historians can recreate it. For penetrating international markets, knowledge of foreign cultures' history is essential.

ADMINISTRATION

Includes: Administrative Services, Facilities Management, Insurance.

Facilities Management—duties: Manage facilities; special collections. Analyze reuse of historic corporate buildings, coordinating efforts with local development efforts to revitalize commercial district. Conduct feasibility studies, supervise structural analyses, space layout. Prepare cost-benefit analysis comparing restoration with new construction.

Historic preservation can return both cultural and economic benefits. Original structures preserve traditions. Artifacts associated with the growth of a firm, such as trademarks or products, provide themes for advertising and promotion. They convey stability and familiarity with the public.

Management Trainee positions are available in many businesses. Trainees shadow and assist executives in any number of areas. Another route to management involves a time-honored method: start in whatever position one can, work hard, show initiative, and be capable.

SECRETARIAL & LEGAL

Includes: Compliance, Corporate/Stockholder Affairs, Legal, Secretariat.

Legal Support—duties: Assemble primary resources for legal research. Determine facts in support of legal claims; brief attorneys on underlying social, political, or economic reasons for past events and decisions. Develop and maintain information system of antitrust and regulatory proceedings; state and local government legislation.

Historians are not only expert researchers, they strengthen corporate legal resources by furnishing substantive knowledge of specialized subjects' historical settings — as varied as land development patterns, or the legislative history of enabling acts. History graduates are skilled at determining historical precedence, as well as in providing expert testimony. The historian is trained to inspect historical records for evidence, interpret for cause and effect, then present all the facts bearing on the issue, assuring a complete evaluation.

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 impact statements. Brief management on current legislation; prepare position papers detailing corporate response to policy issues.

Historical knowledge is required to frame corporate policy in its larger business and social context. To define and formulate policy, the historian's skills are needed to test analogies of past experience, determining their appropriateness in present circumstances. History provides the evidence needed to identify trends, then take remedial action before problems arise.

OTHER

Includes functions such as Distribution, Engineering, Materials Management, Research & Development, Transportation, and Warehousing.

Historians support these functions by providing research services. Corporate histories develop a sense of organizational pride.

Job requirements of typical business positions have been selected to illustrate opportunities for both graduates in history and historians. Note that organization charts vary according to business needs, size, and industry classification. Position titles—as well as activity areas and functions—also differ among firms. Research and analyze employment targets with care.

On Research and Reporting

Competence in research and reporting is essential for success in business. The knowledge and techniques learned in the study of history form a solid on-the-job foundation on which to build specialized requirements. Approach your work with this in mind:

A. Planning your work

- Outline your research objectives, the problems to be solved, your initial sources of information, and your deadline. Consider what unique value you can bring by performing original research as opposed to relying on existing information.
- The first question to be answered by your research is to determine the history—of an institution, enterprise, person, process, place, technology, or idea. Plan your research accordingly, as a history assignment, developing a chronology; analyzing strengths and weaknesses.
- Costs and benefits underpin business research. Comparing the two requires the ability to quantify benefits, generally expressed in qualitative rather than quantitative terms.
- In planning personal interviews, review oral history techniques. Prepare your questions with care. Brush up on well-organized note-taking.

B. Analyzing your research evidence for strengths and weaknesses will require answering questions

- What were your source's motives for providing information?
- Was the source in a position to see, hear, and judge the evidence clearly?
- Does the source have any predisposition to making partial or unsound judgements?
- Does your source have any physical or psychological limitations, any inability to comprehend or understand what was observed?
- What are your source's biases— what tendencies to favor the outcome of the event under observation or indications of having been either hostile or sympathetic to the matter under discussion?
- Is your source favorably recognized by other known authorities on the subject?
- Were the source's accounts both feasible and logical?
- Are there any other factor that would distort the source's observations?
- Can the evidence presented by your source be independently verified?
- If there are conflicting accounts of the same event, what convincing factors are there to accept one evaluation over another?

C. Reporting on research make sure you have:

- Tested and verified the accuracy of the data, considering opposing points of view, observations, and evaluations.
- Noted the significance of issues and events.
- Weighed uncertainty, indicating the degree to which outcomes are in your judgement probable.
- Evaluated your evidence in its context.
- Linked details to broad-based issues.
- Illustrated with appropriate graphs, timelines, or images, to focus or call attention to your central point.
- Identified your sources, giving them accurate and complete attribution.
- Differentiated between assumptions and statements of fact.
- Passed judgement fairly.
- Recognized and identified both cause and effect.
- Dealt logically with ambiguity, interpreting its meaning and significance.
- Recognized and explained historical patterns.
- Drawn valid analogies with past and present events.
- Discussed why your evidence is both credible and accurate.
- Quantified findings and converted them to numerical data, assuring that statistical inferences can be made and that complete sets of numbers exist, representing a valid sample. Identified what methodology will be used to subject the data to further statistical analysis.
- Described complex issues simply.
- Edited to produce coherent, consistent style.
- Double checked for accuracy, paying strict attention to detail.
- Answered: Who, what, why, when, where, and how much.
- Drawn conclusions and made positive recommendations for action to be taken, including mechanisms for future monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensured that the material has been placed in appropriately convenient electronic format (word processor, spreadsheet, database) so that it can be used as source material for other works.
- Produced a sound document that demonstrates command of the English language, rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

BUSINESS RESOURCES

To produce or distribute goods and services, a variety of resources are required. Five categories are described below, each pointing to a distinctive cluster of job specialties. Be aware that none of these resources are employed singly or in isolation; all are called upon to varying degrees in every business position. An understanding of the nature of business positions not only helps assess career choices, but adds a valuable dimension to the study of history.

Human Resources are, of course, the people who staff business at all levels. Dealing effectively with people is a central requirement in business; institutional history provides evidence of business organizations which have succeeded, and those which have failed. Motivation, behavior, leadership, and related qualities, mirrored by business history, are important in understanding social and economic development.

Physical Resources involve buildings, land, and equipment, as well as raw material and finished products. The history of science and technology reflects the contribution of physical resources to society's material development. Business structures and artifacts can also serve the more specialized interests of historic preservation, bringing practical benefits to their owners, and serving as springboards for community renewal.

Financial Resources are represented by funds and other forms of financial obligation. Generated internally from operations, raised externally as capital or contracted externally as debt, the management of a business' financial resources furnish case histories on which to base an investigation of diverse issues such as the creation of wealth, the effects of taxation, and the role of national interests in international trade.

Intangible Resources are customarily made up of assets such as copyrights, patents, trademarks, and good will. The concept is broadened here to include legal, ethical, and moral concerns, as well as matters dealing with attitudes, such as "corporate culture". Business practice, no less than business history, is defective without reference to morality, personal, intellectual and property rights and knowledge of customs and traditions.

Information Resources consist of recorded data used to conduct business. Information may be in the form of text, numbers, symbols, images, and sounds; it may be acquired, stored, transformed, and transmitted by a variety of media and technologies. Information management techniques support the study of history as well as the management of an enterprise. Binding other categories of resources together, information should be studied in multi-disciplinary context.

RELATED ACADEMIC STUDIES

To supplement core history requirements, consider elective studies which strengthen logical, critical, and analytic thinking. General knowledge of economics, and the ability to express oneself in written English, and orally, is no less essential. The more specialized options outlined below should be chosen to reinforce historical studies; they also provide a means to test individual interest connected to specific career goals.

Human Resources: Select subjects which focus on the human condition revealing patterns of behavior and of motivation. They may be found in comparative literature courses, ideally taken in tandem with a foreign language, and respective area studies. Other studies: social sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychology), business administration, human resource development.

Physical Resources: Knowledge of the physical sciences are of special significance for making rational decisions from competing claims of scientists and engineers; knowledge of the scientific process itself is essential. Other courses: life, or natural sciences, engineering. For more specialized interests: historic preservation, urban and regional planning, architecture.

Financial Resources: The language of finance is accounting; accounting bridges business and finance, conveying commercial transactions into their representation in terms of currency. Courses to study: accounting, finance, financial analysis; business administration; mathematical sciences (calculus, number theory, probability, statistics, and basic business mathematics).

Intangible Resources: Master the ethical dimensions of life in general (not restricted to "business ethics", or "computer ethics"). Study religion, then ethics, philosophy, and logic. Consider law in its historical context, with reference to the development of legal concepts upon which capitalism is founded. Study the nature and development of professional ethics.

Information Resources: The historian is the quintessential information manager. Archival and records management studies represent one end of the spectrum; computer, information and library sciences, another. English, communications, and courses emphasizing quantitative and qualitative analysis are also important. Art, marketing, communications and political science can each, in its own way, contribute to knowledge of conveying information.

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