

THE BENEFITS OF

WHAT CAREERS DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH A HISTORY DEGREE? IF YOUR FIRST THOUGHT IS “PROFESSOR,” “LAWYER,” OR “HISTORIAN,” YOU’RE RIGHT: MANY HISTORY MAJORS DO GO ON TO THOSE CAREERS. BUT AS YOU’LL SEE HERE, STUDYING HISTORY ALSO INSTILLS RESEARCH, WRITING, AND REASONING SKILLS THAT WILL BE AN ASSET IN ALMOST ANY CAREER.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

by Julia F. Bernstein

I majored in history at Dartmouth because I loved to read. I spent many Sunday afternoons tucked away under the eaves of Baker Library, surrounded by books about British history. I thrived on the challenge of crafting a thesis, building the supporting evidence base, and writing a compelling paper that brought it all together.

After Dartmouth, I took a position at McKinsey & Company, a management consulting firm that helps big companies solve strategic problems. While the assignments were now “What market should we go into” instead of “Why did country X lose war Y,” I was using many of the same skills I developed in college. The difference was that I was writing PowerPoint presentations, not term papers.

After a few years at McKinsey, I went back to school to get my MBA at Stanford, where my favorite classes were those where I could do data- and research-driven storytelling. Four years of writing term papers in college turned out to be great preparation for transforming the output of financial models and analysis into something that made a compelling case for an argument or idea.

Now I work at the intersection of health and technology. My job focuses on business development, which is a combination of strategy, research, relationship-building, and sales. My years studying history gave me three key skills that have been most important for me in this role:

- **Asking the right questions.** When you’re breaking down a prompt in a history class, you have to be able to figure out what you need to know and where to find it. It’s a similar process when I’m talking to a potential partner or client. I have to be able to listen, reflect, and ask the right questions to get the information I need. I may be talking to my clients, their customers, and industry experts, and each source requires a different approach.
- **Connecting the dots between sources.** Combining secondary and primary research is important when you’re writing a paper. Similarly, when I’m learning more about a market or working to understand a client’s needs, I might need to integrate Internet research, financial statements, expert interviews, news stories, and one-on-one conversations. Being able to see connections—especially if they’re not obvious—is a valuable skill.
- **Selling through storytelling.** The best historians are effective storytellers who know how to engage and persuade. The same is true of those who write business proposals. The ability to craft the story around what a client needs is key.

Rudyard Kipling once wrote that “if history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.” For me, studying history provided skills to think critically and tell stories—skills which can be a foundation for a variety of careers.



Julia F. Bernstein received her AB from Dartmouth College and her MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. A healthcare executive with a passion for digital health, she is currently the Vice President for Business Development at San Francisco’s Institute on Aging.

MAJORING IN

History

CHEMISTRY

by Kaustabh Basu

I'll start with a confession: I am a chemist, currently working toward a Ph.D. Though my four years at NYU prepared me equally well as a scientist and a historian, I'm pursuing a career as the former. It might seem strange that a scientist would study history, or tell others to do so, but the plain truth is that history is an incredibly interesting and useful subject to students in all disciplines.

For me, history courses were not only a refreshing complement to my chemistry coursework and research, they taught me to analyze problems in a different way than my science courses. Many problems in science and mathematics are solved in a particular framework: The basic rules of calculus, or the equations governing the behavior of gases, will solve questions that come up in a particular class. The proper study of history, however, involves applying many different frameworks to the same question, each revealing a new perspective on an issue. There is no single book that can define the story of the Roman Empire; with each new book, and each new historian, a different layer of the story is told. History isn't about facts and memorization. It's about perspectives, and theories, and it forces students to acquire incredible mental flexibility.

For my history degree, NYU required that I cover different regions and times, from the ancient to the modern. Though four years are hardly enough to delve deeply into the study of any particular society, a history major offers everybody, even a science student, a chance to get acquainted with a wide range of cultures across the ages.

It's a chance I may not get again for a while—I'll be spending the next several years getting deep into chemistry, so I'm more grateful than ever that I studied history while I could and gained the many skills that it alone could teach me. Studying history doesn't lock you into a certain field; instead, it expands your options and makes you a strong candidate for a variety of careers. It's a decision I'm very glad I made, and I urge everyone, no matter what their passion or intended career, to study history while they can.



Kaustabh Basu earned a B.A. in history and a B.S. in chemistry at NYU. He is now in his first year of graduate study in chemistry at Stanford, where his research focuses on probing and modifying biological processes at the molecular level, with a focus on medicinal applications.

VETERINARY MEDICINE

by Jennifer Kasten, DVM

Two fortunate things led me to the path of being a history major. First, I came from a family that strongly supported a liberal arts education regardless of what I wanted to do. No one ever asked, "What are you going to do with that major?" Instead, I was encouraged to study what I loved. The second was that I attended Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Surrounded by the pageantry of history as presented at the Smithsonian Institution, I wanted nothing more than to learn the story of the American people.

Because I was studying something I enjoyed, my history courses, although reading- and writing-intensive, were tremendously fun. Even though I thought I knew American history, there were always new stories to learn, perspectives to read, and primary documents to interpret. The greatest challenges came from the research side of my studies. My research questions were sometimes too ambitious for the time-frame I had and my primary sources didn't always tell the story I expected them to. The discipline and stamina required to get through these challenges helped me grow in ways I never could have anticipated.

When I graduated, I took a job as a legal assistant in a Washington law firm. In my spare time, I volunteered at the local animal shelter, where I soon discovered my passion: caring for sick animals. I prepared to apply to veterinary school by taking post-baccalaureate coursework. Four years later, I became a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

The connections between my study of history and veterinary medicine may not be obvious, but they are real. On a daily basis, I search for facts from complex and fragmented stories in order to make diagnostic and treatment plans for my patients. During rounds, I rely on communication, critical thinking, and reading skills. The literature-searching techniques I acquired are used to inform my clinical practice, as well as my research. The writing skills I developed are fundamental to my job as a veterinarian: I write medical records, discharge summaries, research abstracts, and journal articles. All of these tasks are easier because I am so comfortable writing.

Beyond work, I am always looking for ways to learn new histories, whether it's taking a MOOC or visiting a museum. Although it has been more than 10 years since graduation, my inner history major has never left me.



Jennifer Kasten is from Cincinnati, OH. Following veterinary school, she pursued advanced training in equine practice and anesthesia. She currently works on canine infectious disease. She shares her home with a retired research cat and rescued border collie.