the

history

major

At the University of Chicago
Although scholarship has largely focused on European youth activism in the years directly surrounding 1968, such novel forms of protest were by no means limited to these years. Indeed, the spirit of “1968” reverberated well into the 1970s and 1980s, giving rise to a wide variety of protest and countercultural movements, including: radical environmentalism, communes, urban squatting, and even terrorist groups such as the RAF.

To learn more see: Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980 (Berghahn Books, 2006).

Photo: Wolfgang Sünderhauf/Umbruch Bildarchiv
What will I learn as a history major?

Majoring in history will not only enable you to become a consumer of academic knowledge; it will also prepare you to become a producer of knowledge. Undergraduate history courses first train you to explore large-scale social, cultural, and political processes by defining concrete, researchable questions. Subsequently, as a history major you will be taught how to locate the primary and secondary sources necessary to posit answers to these large questions. Finally, faculty will assist you in transforming your research into elegant historical arguments that shed light on the multiple ways in which our world, our very reality, has transformed over time.

The first of a series of twentieth-century social revolutions, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) swept that country’s national territory with a violent armed struggle that resulted in, among other things, a radical new constitution, sweeping land reform legislation, and the rise of a more inclusive political class. Women labored in the armed struggle alongside their fathers, husbands, and brothers, traveling through the countryside to prepare food and help care for these soldiers. In some cases, these women, called soldaderas, participated in combat as well, as this iconic photograph so proudly conveys.

To learn more see:

A few history majors go on to become historians; the vast majority, however, do not. Studying history requires you to locate and analyze evidence, to formulate arguments, and to compose carefully written prose, skills that prepare you for a variety of careers. In addition to getting into top graduate programs in the United States and abroad, UofC history majors go on to become lawyers, politicians, policy analysts, museum curators, entrepreneurs, consultants, teachers, and community activists. History might be preoccupied with the past, but it can lead you to a bright future.

In what became known as the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572, the violent killing and dismemberment of French Protestants in Paris by French Catholics spread to other cities in France with word of the Parisian massacre. The mass killings were not orchestrated by the government, but were the result of spontaneous crowd violence in the wake of a political assassination. While this event is the most infamous of the civil and religious wars that took place in France from 1562-1629, violence by both Catholic and Protestant crowds against one another began soon after the Reformation appeared in France earlier in the century. These crowd actions were aberrant, but not senseless. Both Catholics and Protestants imitated legal or religious rites or rituals, seeking to cleanse their societies of what they each perceived as evil, or to heal them from social disruption.


Photo: The Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, painting by François Dubois (1529-1584).
After having been introduced to history through the Civilization sequences, you will continue your study in the more than 140 history courses that are offered each year to undergraduates. Some of these are introductory lectures; others are small seminars devoted to the intense study of a particular historical moment, theme, or event. In some you will find only other undergraduates, in others you will rub shoulders with graduate students.

Some recent courses offered by the department include:
- African Women in Chicago: Gender, Immigration, and History in the 20th Century
- The Arts of Language in the Middle Ages: The Trivium
- Thinking Total War
- Reading the Revolution: Chinese Social History in Documents
- History and Literature of Pakistan: Postcolonial Representations
- Baseball and American Culture, 1840-Present
- Economy and Society in Ancient Greece and Rome

As you progress through the major, you will be asked to declare a major concentration, which can include:
- Regional fields such as British History or African History
- Temporal fields such as Early Modern or Modern History
- Topical fields such as the History of Medicine, Gender History, the History of Human Rights, the History of Communism, or the History of Colonialism and Imperialism

In the decades that followed the Second World War, dozens of former colonial territories gained their independence, radically transforming the international political landscape in the process. Although this did not occur in the same way in every part of the world and its legacy remains uncertain, the end of formal European empire enabled formerly subject individuals to forge new types of alliances across the world, resulting in the rise of the Third World movement. Along with these tremendous political shifts, this era also saw a cultural flowering, as citizens of newly independent nations addressed their new reality through art, literature, and theater.

Students interested in the History concentration should contact the Undergraduate Coordinator as early as possible. The Coordinator can provide information about requirements and opportunities, and will enroll you on the concentrator’s listserv. Once you are signed up, you will be assigned to a member of the Collegiate Affairs Committee, who will serve as your faculty advisor until you have chosen a B.A. thesis topic and advisor.

12 Courses are required to complete the history concentration:

- **6 Courses in your Major Field**
- **4 Additional Electives**: These should be chosen to complement the main field, extend the range of your historical awareness, and allow you to explore varying approaches to historical analysis and interpretation.
- **A Junior Colloquium**: This course is designed to prepare you for the rigorous, primary source based analysis that will be employed while writing the B.A. thesis.
- **The B.A. Seminar**: Every History concentrator is required to write a B.A. Essay. The B.A. Seminar assists students in formulating approaches and developing their research and writing skills, while providing a forum for group discussion and critiques.

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While now regarded as a “traditional” entertainment for children in Japan, storytelling with illustrated picture cards actually dates only to the early 20th century. During the Greater East Asia War of 1937-1945, it was utilized by the Japanese government to inculcate children with national pride and to encourage an ethos of self-sacrifice. After 1945, the US occupation forces banned stories of wartime heroism and encouraged the production of new stories that promoted democratic values. In the mid-60s with the emergence of television the popularity of picture drama performances declined rapidly.

In your fourth year you will work closely with a faculty member in the department to produce a B.A. thesis. Students have been very imaginative and creative in their construction of B.A. topics, working in all periods and places and using sources ranging from printed primary texts found in the Regentein Library to pots in archaeological digs, to manuscripts in specialized libraries or archives, oral histories, paintings, musical scores and performances, and statistical series. Some funding is available for research travel both domestically and abroad.

Some examples of recent B.A. essay titles are:

“First Class Americans, Second Class Texans: the American G.I. Forum and the Politics of Citizenship in Post-World War II Texas”

“Japan as a Model, Mirror and Masterpiece in Russia’s Thick Journals, 1868-1905”

“Occupy Menorca: the Balearic Islands, Trade, and the Vandal Dream of a Maritime Empire in the Western Mediterranean”

“The Italy of Antique Rome in Flavio Biondo’s Italia illustrata”

Junior Colloquium

All history concentrators write a third-year pre-B.A. research paper, normally in the context of a junior colloquium. A minimum of five, faculty-taught, junior colloquia are offered each year on a variety of topics. They are capped at 12 students and allow for close contact between the History faculty and students, while providing an introduction to historical research based on primary sources. They give students an essential foundation for the longer and more ambitious B.A. essays they will write the following year.

Some recent colloquia include:

- The CIA and American Democracy
- Japan and the U.S.: 19th Century Encounters
- The European Family
- Life Stories of Russian Women
- Hyde Park and Chicago

If you who will not be on campus during your junior year, you should consult with the Undergraduate Coordinator about taking this course in your 2nd year, or completing an alternative requirement.
This photograph was taken in New Mexico during the Great Depression. The photographer, Russell Lee, was employed by the Farm Security Administration to document the poverty of rural and small-town working families in the South and West. Ironically, the photograph also records the penetration of mass culture into everyday American life, the Whinery family decorating their shack with a Coca-Cola advertisement and a hope for “refreshment.”


Photo: Russell Lee, “Jack Whinery, homesteader, with his wife and the youngest of his five children, Pie Town, New Mexico” (Sept. 1940), Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Collection 11671-24 (fsac 1a34170), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Some Basic Advice

A typical course of study in the program would commence with basic history courses (100-level) and move on to more advanced and specialized courses (200- and in some cases 400-level courses).

**Your first year:** Take core classes.

**Your second year:** Try to finish, or nearly finish, your core requirements and take your civilizational sequence. Take some additional history classes, seeking the advice of the Undergraduate Coordinator and the instructor.

**Your third year:** Take as many history classes as you can fit into your schedule. This allows you to get a sampling of a wide variety of history courses, prepares you to write your B.A. essay and makes it far easier to complete all of your history requirements with the classes you are interested in. You will also take a History Colloquium (Hist. 296) this year and start developing an idea for your B.A. essay in the Spring B.A. seminar.

**Your fourth year:** Take the 2nd quarter of the B.A. seminar, finish the handful of remaining history classes you need to take, take some electives, and enjoy your last year.

**Every year once you declare:** See your Faculty advisor quarterly to talk over your program.
History is a versatile field that accommodates various perspectives. In keeping with the University of Chicago tradition, history students incorporate a number of other disciplines into their study. Many students complement their history coursework with electives in fields such as anthropology, classics, English, languages, law, philosophy, political science, religious studies, and sociology. Many students also double-major in History and another discipline, or major in History while minor in another field.

Students planning to double major in history and another discipline are encouraged to do so, however, they should take note of the following stipulations:

- **Double counting**: courses that are cross-listed with another department may be used for both majors.
- **B.A. Essay and Seminar**: Double majors must fulfill the requirements pertaining to the B.A. essay, including taking part in the B.A. Seminar.

The History Department strongly supports study abroad. We have arranged the coursework requirement to make that feasible, but a little planning is required. If at all possible, it is best to study abroad during Fall and/or Winter quarters of your 3rd year. If a full-year study abroad experience is desired, however, that is also compatible with the History Major. (One section of the B.A. seminar will meet in Fall and Winter for 4th year students who have been abroad in 3rd year.) All History majors are required to be on campus for Fall and Winter of their senior years in order to complete the B.A. essay. Coursework taken abroad is eligible to fulfill requirements in the major, pending approval of a petition. Be sure to keep the course syllabus, description, and coursework.
The First World War unleashed unprecedented violence against children in Europe as well as new humanitarian efforts to save them. In the context of a “Total War” that targeted civilians as well as professional soldiers, new international organizations such as the Near East Relief mobilized to save children from violence, famine, and genocide. The Near East Relief evacuated these orphaned Armenian children to Marathon, Greece in 1915 or 1916, in order to escape the Armenian genocide. After World War I, the League of Nations created a special international commission to locate and “renationalize” Armenian orphans who had survived the war in hiding with Turkish families. A similar process of searching and reclaiming “lost children” would preoccupy Europeans after the Second World War.

To learn more see:


Photo: Near East Relief. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress