

Factsheet: The UCSB History Major

1. Short description of UCSB's History program

The study of history opens the door to new ways of understanding the past and the present. By examining societies in other times and places, students gain an appreciation of the diverse beliefs, institutions, social arrangements, and technologies that have shaped human experience. Historians seek to understand the forces that drive historical change and the contexts that give such change meaning. History asks students to do much more than just memorize a set of facts. It asks students to solve intellectual puzzles, evaluate conflicting evidence, and assess the merits of different scholarly interpretations of the past. It asks students to think about big questions: How have different cultures and societies made sense of historical change? How have they adapted and changed in the face of dramatic transformations in the environment, belief systems, and political economies? How have they grappled with conflict and crisis? How have the meanings of concepts that might seem natural or timeless—concepts like “the family” or “race” or “gender” or “work” or “citizenship”—actually varied in time and place? Because every subject has a history, students might find themselves investigating anything from the intimacies of private life and the history of the body to more classic topics such as social movements, revolutions, and wars. History also invites students to reimagine the traditional ways we carve up geographical space by examining not just the histories of nations but also the histories of regions, trade, and cultural exchange. What history teaches is a way of thinking, a way of questioning, and a way of wondering about the world. After all, the past is never really fixed in stone.

2. Skills learned by History majors

The history major is particularly important for helping students to develop skills in critical thinking, clear and persuasive writing, and effective oral communication. In particular, students learn to analyze arguments and understand them within the contexts in which they were produced; evaluate varied evidence and interpret conflicting data; formulate persuasive arguments and write with grace and power; speak well and communicate successfully in group contexts; and become adept at understanding how historical change has informed the present.

3. Typical careers pursued by history majors

The history major prepares students for a wide variety of skills that are useful not only for the further study of history and other humanities disciplines, but for numerous other careers. The study of history teaches such crucial skills as critical reasoning; clear and persuasive writing; and effective public speaking. Therefore, history majors have gone on to excel in a large variety of careers, including:

- * Education, including university professors and teachers at every level;
- * Law, including attorneys, prosecutors, and judges;
- * Public historians and researchers, including museum & historic site curators, archivists and librarians;
- * Public service positions and elected officials, including diplomats;
- * Professional writers, including journalists, editors, film makers and authors;
- * Businesspersons, including entrepreneurs, executives, management consultants, and advertising;
- * Other professional career paths, such as physicians, police officers and investigators, military officers, social workers, and development officers.

4. **History Career Website**

This webpage by the premier professional organization of historians in the U.S. specifically addresses careers for history majors:

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/careers/Index.htm>

5. **Especially interesting courses in the History major at UCSB**

The following list of courses shows the breadth of coursework that students can pursue in the history major and the range of phenomena that can be studied. Historians believe that everything has a history, including very modern phenomena, and that understanding the past adds depth to comprehension of our own time:

Hist 5 “History of the Present” (lower-division)

Hist 108O “History of the Oceans” (upper-division)

Hist 115X “Medieval Scandals” (upper-division)

Hist 187S “History of the Samurai” (upper-division)

• **Examples of UCSB History Major Alumni Careers** (alphabetical)

Edouard de Courreges, 2006, Finance

De Courreges is currently a second year MBA student at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business with intended concentrations in finance and accounting. Over the summer, he worked with the global equity team at Oppenheimer Funds in New York. Before attending school, Edouard served as the commander of the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment in the US Army. Here is Ed being promoted to captain...underwater!

([http://www.army.mil/article/41509/Under Water Promotion/](http://www.army.mil/article/41509/Under_Water_Promotion/))

Faculty contact: John Lee

Karen Fisher, née Christenson, Novelist

Fisher’s historical novel, *A Sudden Country* (Random House 2005) was one of the five finalists for the Pen-Faulkner Prize. In 2012, she won one of thirty-eight Creative Writing Fellowships awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts (and excerpts from her book-in-progress can be read online at the NEA website).

Address and email: 4300 Center Road, Lopez Island, WA 98261; karen@asuddencountry.com

Laird Foshay, Publisher and Vintner

A product of one of the history department’s first senior honors seminars, Foshay became the youngest magazine publisher in the US. He currently owns a ranch in Paso Robles and is planning to open his own winery.

Contact: laird@foshay.com.

Frank J. Ochoa, Judge

After earning BA degrees in English and History from UCSB, he studied law at U.C. Davis School of Law, graduating in 1975. In 1980, he became the Executive Director of the Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County. In 1983, at age 32, he was appointed to the Municipal Court by Governor Brown, making him the youngest judge in the state at the time. He also became the court's first Hispanic judge in this century.

Greg Ponikvar, Teacher

Greg writes: I am currently in my fourth year at teaching history at Everest Public High School in Redwood City (an all-access heterogeneous charter school in RWC working to get all kids to college). Currently, I am teaching AP United States history to a very diverse group of kids (I actually use excerpts of a book we read in your [Alice O'Connor's] class, *Arc of Justice*, to teach about the 1920s!) It is a school that I helped open from day one, and I am watching my first class go to college (their acceptances are just starting to come in) this year.” Contact: gponikvar@everestphs.org

Janice Rocco, Deputy Insurance Commissioner

Janice Rocco is Deputy Insurance Commissioner at the California Department of Insurance where she oversees the regulation of health insurance and the Department's implementation of the Federal Affordable Care Act. Prior to joining Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones' executive team, Rocco spent twelve years working for the California State Legislature. She served as then Assembly member Hannah-Beth Jackson's Chief of Staff, then as Senior Consultant to the Legislative Women's Caucus and later became Assembly member Jones' Chief of Staff. Faculty Contact: Jane De Hart, emerita

Mackenzie Weinger, 2010, Reporter for *Politico*

Mackenzie writes: “I'd definitely be willing to have my name on the list [of alumni], especially since I owe my writing & research skills to being a UCSB history major.... After graduating, I moved to D.C. for a journalism internship and I now work as a reporter for Politico. I'm a media reporter for the publication, and I cover industry news & the intersection of politics and the media. I've been at Politico, which publishes both online and in print, for almost two years.” Contact: mackenzie.weinger@gmail.com

David Wight, 2007, Historian

Wight is now in the history PhD program at UC Irvine, studying the history of U.S. foreign relations. He is writing a dissertation on U.S. oil policy in the Middle East in the 1970s and early 1980s. David writes: “In 2007, as an undergraduate at UCSB, I took the History Senior Honors Thesis Seminar. The research and writing I conducted in that course was the basis for an article that has recently been published in the journal *Diplomatic History*, titled “Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon.” This article would not have been possible without all of the work that the entire UCSB history department does to provide an excellent education for its students, and I wanted to thank all of you [the faculty].” Contact: wightd@uci.edu

Honorable Joseph C. Wilson IV, 1971, Diplomat

Wilson worked for the foreign service from 1976-1998 and is best known for his 2002 trip to Niger to investigate allegations that Saddam Hussein was attempting to purchase yellowcake uranium.