

Why Study History.

It is often frustrating to some students to study subjects that they see as having no practical value. And, of course, it is unlikely that a history course alone will land you a job. But it can help. How can it help? **What is the value of a history course, and how can it enrich your life?** Although many students like history simply because it is interesting, there are a number of solid, "practical" reasons for studying it. It is often said that we need to understand our past to live in the present and build the future. This is true on a number of levels. On the psychological level, identification with the past gives us a badly needed sense of continuity and order in the face of ever more rapid change. Indeed, one of the greatest lessons we learn from history is that everything changes. We see how change has occurred in the past and are therefore better prepared to deal with it in our own lives. On another level, it is important for us to know how political, economic, and social systems work and what benefits and disadvantages accrue from them. Further, we need to understand how historical experiences have shaped our own lives and views as well as those of others. Only then can we come to understand why we think the way we do and why the views of others differ from our own. Thus, history breaks down the barriers erected by provincialism and ignorance.

Perhaps the strongest reason for the study of history is that it recreates the big picture at a time when it is fashionable and seemingly prudent to be highly specialized and narrowly focused. We live in the Age of Specialization. Even our colleges often appear as trade schools, where we are asked to learn a lot about a little. As a result, it is easy to miss what is happening to the forest because we have become obsessed with a few of the trees. While specialization has undeniable benefits, both societies and individuals also need the generalist perspective and the ability to see how the entire system works. **History is the generalist discipline.** Everything has a history, and every profession draws on its own history and that of related fields to function and advance itself. **Looking at change over time**, history shows us how to take all the parts (politics, war, diplomacy, science, economics, architecture, sex, demography, music, philosophy, & much more), and put them together so that we can understand the whole. It is through a study of the interrelationships of the parts over the expanse of time that we can develop a vision of society. By promoting the generalist, or renaissance, perspective, history plays an important part on today's college campus.

Additionally, the study of history has a more personal and surprisingly practical application. It is becoming increasingly apparent to many employers and educators that neglect of the liberal arts and humanities by students has left them unable to **think and reason analytically and to read and comprehend effectively.** Overspecialized, narrowly focused education has left these students seriously deficient in **basic communication and intellectual skills**, placing them at serious disadvantage in the job market. Here is one of the many ways this major can help. It is universally recognized that studying history is an excellent means of **developing the ability to read and reason.**