



History

Understand the past, shape the future

“Studying history helps us draw connections not only between the past and the present, but between different events, places and ideas. Understanding those connections is important to our understanding of the past and can also guide our choices for the present.”

Elizabeth Thomas BA(Hons) LLB(Hons)
Senior Policy Advisor, Department of the Prime
Minister and Cabinet, New Zealand

Understanding the past provides a compass that helps you navigate the present and shape the future. Regardless of geographic area or time period, studying history provides an unrivalled basis for making sense of an increasingly complex and unstable world.

The analytical and communication skills that history teaches are also keys for entry to a wide range of rewarding careers. Many of these – such as research, teaching, journalism, public policy, diplomacy, and the heritage and museum sectors – are also among those least likely to be overtaken by historical change themselves, in the form of automation or artificial intelligence.

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James Smetham, The New Zealand Chiefs in Wesley's House, 1863, Hocken Pictorial Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin.

Why study History?

Above all, History investigates human societies across time and space – few things are more fascinating. Studying History is about questioning the past imaginatively. Historians take nothing for granted: they search behind the façade of the present to uncover multiple ‘truths’ about the past.

Yet History is also firmly grounded in the realities of daily life, and studying History helps prepare you for almost any conceivable career. In the rapidly changing world of the 21st century, it is more important than ever to understand human diversity and the complexity of social structures, and to understand why they change. Because of its broad-ranging nature, no discipline is better suited to this task than History.

The historian's skills of research, analysis, synthesis and communication are also essential in the modern job market. History graduates work in a range of exciting fields that are as diverse as history itself.

Background required

All students are welcome to study history at Otago. No prior knowledge is needed – all you need is curiosity about the past. Even if you don't choose it as a major, doing some history papers will help you understand the world, and complements virtually any other major.

Student exchange

You may be able to do part of your study overseas through the University's extensive exchange programme or as a postgraduate student. Even if you do not, chances are that your degree in history will significantly enrich any travelling you do in later life.

Career opportunities

Employers value History graduates for their ability to research, analyse and communicate. History graduates know how to deal with large amounts of information and sift out the essential. As well as becoming teachers and researchers, historians find jobs in areas ranging from journalism and public affairs to management and finance.

Examples of positions held by Otago history graduates include: Analyst, Wigram Capital Advisors; Diplomat, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Community Engagement Executive, Movember Foundation; History curator, Te Papa Tongarewa; Curator, Human History, Canterbury Museum; Digital Content Analyst, University of Canterbury; Historian, Waitangi Tribunal; Data Analyst, AgResearch; Event and Marketing Manager, Southland Chamber of Commerce; Social Media and Content Analyst, Bank of New Zealand; Freelance Book Publicist; Heritage Advisor, Heritage New Zealand, etc.

Practical internships

Work experience in the professional environment will help you stand out from the crowd in a competitive employment market. The History Programme offers a range of internships at many of Dunedin's most interesting local institutions. These papers are known as HUMS 301 and HUMS 401 and entry to them is competitive.

For questions about
History
otago.ac.nz/history



History at Otago

Consistently ranking among the top 100 departments worldwide, at Otago you will be taught by lecturers who are at the forefront of their research fields internationally. We are very committed to our students and are well-loved for the high levels of support we provide. We put a great deal of effort into preparing students for their working lives after university, and regularly offer career-oriented talks and social gatherings.

Add to this the historically rich city of Dunedin, boasting an unparalleled range of museums, archives, libraries and other cultural facilities, all in one compact, accessible, affordable, and extremely attractive city – and you can see why History at Otago is an unbeatable combination.

The Programme includes over 30 courses at the undergraduate level, covering diverse geographical regions and historical themes. At first-year level, the Programme offers broad courses which serve as an introduction to more specialised study at higher levels.

Possible areas of focus include:

- New Zealand, Māori and Pacific history
- European history (including Italy, Germany and Russia)
- British, Scottish and Irish history
- Asian history (especially Japan and China)

We also offer thematic papers in the following areas:

- indigenous history
- migration and the movement of peoples
- social history
- political history, including revolutions
- intellectual and cultural history
- patriotism, nationalism and war
- crime and punishment
- imperial and colonial history
- historical method (including comparative history and historiography)
- history of science
- religious history.

PROFILES

Mei Mackay Bachelor of Arts (History) Analyst, Wigram Capital Advisors Ltd

"It seemed fitting and entirely appropriate to study History at Otago, the country's oldest university.

I specialised in Asian history and now work as an analyst at an Asian-focused macroeconomic advisory firm, where I provide economic and policy analysis on the debates, people and organisations surrounding Asia-wide economies and financial markets.

My History degree helps me contextualise economic patterns and trends through an understanding of historical significance. I also apply the lessons learnt in my history degree – acknowledging that modern issues and politics can be explained by looking towards the past.

At some point we need to retrace our steps back to find the wider contextual significance behind modern events and issues."



Adam Linnell Bachelor of Arts with Honours (History)

Second Secretary at New Zealand High Commission, Pretoria

"After graduating, I spent a year travelling the world before settling into a career with MFAT.

I've worked across the Pacific, in the United States and now in South Africa, covering a range of trade and political issues at the New Zealand High Commission.

Studying History at Otago helped me learn to think critically and creatively.

Whether I'm based in Wellington or Pretoria, I draw on skills from my degree every day."

