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 very human 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.
Why study History?
Above all, history investigates human societies across time and space and 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 doing history helps prepare you for almost any conceivable career. In the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first 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.

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 High Commission, Pretoria, South Africa; 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.

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.

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 care 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 Department teaches over forty courses at the undergraduate level, covering diverse geographical regions and historical themes. At first-year level, the Department 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 India and China)
- Indigenous history
- Migration and the movement of peoples
- Social history
- Environmental history
- Political, intellectual and cultural history
- History of gender and sexuality
- Imperial and colonial history
- Medical history
- Historical method (including comparative history and historiography)

Practical internships
Work experience in the professional environment will make you stand out from the crowd in a competitive employment market. The Department of History and Art History offers students majoring in History or Art History a wide 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.

Art History and Visual Culture
The Department also offers a programme in Art History and Visual Culture. History students are welcome to include Art History and Visual Culture papers in their degree.

For questions about History
otago.ac.nz/history