



WHAT OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

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WITH THEIR HISTORY DEGREES

ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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### TO THE READER:

**WE ASKED** our former students to tell us how their history degrees were helping them after graduation. In this booklet we are happy to share a sampling of their responses with you. We are proud of their accomplishments. You will see that our former students have pursued successful and rewarding careers in a variety of vocations — banking, communications, public relations, risk management, marketing, social work, fund raising, health care, arts management, film studies, historic preservation, teaching, the law, and many other fields. We are pleased to share these reports with you (edited for brevity), and we hope that these testimonials will illustrate the wide range of possibilities that are open to students who major in history.

— THE IWU HISTORY DEPARTMENT

## **MEGAN**, CLASS OF 2006, MARKETING

**MY FIRST JOB** after IWU was in marketing for a content development company — while there, I learned that the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, draw out the facts, and make sound arguments are highly desirable skills in the workplace. It wasn't long before I met executives at publishing companies who held Masters or Ph.D.s in history, so a year after working in Chicago, I

applied to a Masters program at the University of Oxford. At Oxford I honed these and other skills I developed at IWU such as conducting research, analyzing the findings, and completing an extended project. I am currently head of marketing for a business publisher in London, and I tap into these transferable skills — my historian's "tool-kit," so to speak — on a daily basis.

## **RACHAEL**, CLASS OF 2004, FUND RAISING

**IN THE 13 YEARS** since I graduated from IWU, I have cultivated a rich and fulfilling career as a fund-raising director for health and human service organizations across the Chicago area. I am currently employed as a Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations where I lead efforts to raise \$3.5 million in charitable grants and sponsorships for a major healthcare network that serves many of Chicago's most economically challenged communities. I am passionate about my work in this field, feel like I am making a significant contribution to the community, and am excited about my trajectory. My study of history helped me to develop vital critical thinking skills that have helped me throughout my career. I also developed the

ability to conduct research; craft clear, compelling arguments; and communicate well with a variety of audiences. I continue to use my critical thinking skills to this day, as I work with leaders across my organization to develop our strategic fund-raising program and make the case for funding to a wide range of donors. In addition, my history degree helped me develop the ability to assess the social, political, and economic dynamics within my organization and in the external environment. My education also helped me develop greater cultural sensitivity, which is especially important as I work in diverse communities that have a rich and overlooked history.

## **AMY**, CLASS OF 2014, MANAGEMENT AND SALES

**I CHOSE** to get a history degree because I wanted to learn skills that I would be able to use in any profession in life. The ability to read, write, research, think critically, and see the bigger picture are the most important skills I got with my history degree; and they have served me well. I worked for a non-profit after graduating. I started as an Administrative Assistant and eventually became the Operations Director. Not many 24-year-olds can say they were the Operations Director for a multi-million-dollar organization. The reason I was so successful at this job was because of those skills I got from my history degree. I wrote grants, researched legislation, and was able to bring major advances to the organization because I could see how each department worked and integrate them

on an efficient operational level. Never underestimate the value of knowing how to research. I now work at a start-up as their Sales Administrative Assistant. One of my main job functions is to analyze how the sales team operates and find ways to make it more efficient; that critical thinking skill really does come in handy. But none of that matters if I can't write it down well and turn my ideas into practice. That is where those writing skills come in. My history degree has helped me to get the kinds of jobs that truly make me happy and successful. I highly recommend that students learn more history because it will give them a versatile set of skills that can take them anywhere in life and are especially essential in today's competitive job market.

## **KELLY**, CLASS OF 2007, HEALTHCARE CONSULTING

**I'VE WORKED** as a consultant in the health-care space since graduating from IWU. I have had many roles at my firm, most recently leading analytics and technology strategy and development for one of our business segments. My experience as a history major was critical to my developing the skills to succeed as a consultant in a dynamic and complex industry like healthcare — I learned how

to communicate clearly in writing and speaking, how to build a compelling case for my perspective, and how to absorb information from many sources and think critically to draw the most important conclusions.... The critical skills I gained from my history education have taken me far and are highly valued by my clients and colleagues.

## **DEANNA**, CLASS OF 1994, RISK MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

**A HISTORY DEGREE** was a significant part of the liberal arts education I received at Illinois Wesleyan. I have worked in a public policy, government operations role for most of my career and am currently Director of Risk Management for Cook County, Illinois. With a span of responsibilities which range from employee benefits to workers

compensation, my history degree has provided a perspective through which to recognize patterns and trends. The ability to respect the interplay of people and places makes my work in public policy and government that much more enjoyable and productive.

## **DEBORAH**, CLASS OF 1995, ARTS MANAGEMENT

**MY HISTORY DEGREE** gave me the solid liberal arts grounding upon which to pursue almost any career. I chose to combine the research, writing, and critical thinking skills that my study of history gave me with my passion for the arts and work in arts administration immediately upon graduation from IWU. From marketing and public relations to fundraising and general management, my history degree has served me well throughout my over 20-year career. Now, as the President and

Executive Director [of a college consortium in the arts], I've moved into the higher education side of the arts.... An understanding of the corkscrew nature of social progress developed through studying history, combined with the skill to form and articulate a cogent point of view, positions me well to share conversations with industry leaders, contextualize current events, and persuade academics and non-academics.

## **KYLE**, CLASS OF 2001, DATA SCIENCE AND SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

**I GRADUATED** from Illinois Wesleyan with a double major in history and English. Now I am a data scientist and software developer, and I couldn't be happier with my career choice. However, I wouldn't give up my educational path to this career. My background in the Humanities aids me immensely on a day-to-day basis. I see the hallmark skills of a history major to be close reading of texts, piecing together details to recognize broad patterns in human interactions across time, and effective communication. As a data scientist, I do all of these regularly. Finally, data scientists interface

with subject matter experts, end users, and other software developers; talking with those diverse audiences requires an ability to communicate on a number of different levels. In addition, good writing habits often transfer well into good coding habits. I think all good software teams need some skills from humanities-trained people to function optimally and ethically. If you're at all inclined toward math or writing code, I recommend taking a software or statistics class alongside your history curriculum. Your future career, whatever it is, may very well end up employing both.

## **AMANDA**, CLASS OF 2014, LAW

**I AM CURRENTLY** starting my career as a first-year associate at a large law firm in downtown Chicago. I have never doubted that my major in history at IWU has enabled me to get where I am today. A degree in history is powerful in many ways. First, the history program challenged me to constantly engage in critical thinking and assess the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of various sources.

The history department also forced me to become more proficient at reading and retaining key information — which is vital in law. Furthermore, history spurred me to develop my writing and organizational skills. I truly believe that being a history major helped me develop many skills that are crucial to being an attorney.

## **MARILYN**, CLASS OF 1979, BANKING

**AT IWU**, I was a history major planning to attend law school. I opted for working a few years before returning to school. In doing so, I fell back on the one area where I had experience from my summer job days — banking. Luckily, I was able to get into a large international bank with a solid career path for young professionals. These organizations often look for diversity of educational backgrounds, as they realize much of the business knowledge and skills to be developed will be acquired on the job. They look for young people who are articulate, big-picture oriented, and equipped with critical thinking attributes. Needless to say, all of these are characteristics of a liberal arts background. My career became nearly 40 years in banking and

consulting with roles such as commercial lender, product manager, finance manager, and leadership development manager, and commercial education manager. Throughout my career, I called upon what I learned in college courses countless times. I was always viewed as a thinking partner with managers, peers, and customers. I totally believe this was because of my liberal arts background. I have always been strong with analysis, understanding causes, outlining actions and consequences, verbal and written communication, and stepping back and looking at the big picture. Additionally, I have understood the skill of healthy debate and dialogue. All of these skills were taught at IWU, and especially in my history courses.

## **DAVID**, CLASS OF 1975, PROFESSOR OF LAW

**AS A HISTORY MAJOR** at IWU, I had drilled into me the importance of careful reading, rigorous analysis, and clear, well-reasoned writing. That training has served me exceedingly well in my career as I have gone on to graduate with honors from Harvard Law School, practice law, and

become a law professor. I have written one book, contributed to several others, and have authored over twenty scholarly articles. My IWU History Department education has been with me every step of the way.

## **DANIEL**, CLASS OF 1999, LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

**I ENTERED COLLEGE** knowing I wanted to help people but uncertain as to how I wanted to do that. I thought a history major might serve me well preparing for graduate work in a variety of disciplines, and in that I was correct, but not because it made me a quick and critical reader (which it did) and a persuasive and well-reasoned writer (which it also did), but because it made me a powerful

questioner and, more importantly, answerer of questions. With the training I received at IWU, I was able to hold my own with ease as a visiting student studying history at Oxford my senior year. I was able to sail through my graduate studies and quickly adapt to any writing expectations in every place I have been employed. But more importantly, I was able to adapt my questioning and answering

to my work with people. I discovered during my college internships that while I enjoyed policy concepts, my passion was for direct service with people who were suffering. After working in a variety of social service settings, I became a school

social worker and therapist in private practice.... My training as a history major taught me how to pass on the gift of questioning and answering. It has allowed me to empower at least 1,000 teenagers, and I hope reduce their suffering.

## **JENNIFER**, CLASS OF 2014, ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

**MY HISTORY DEGREE** has enabled me to travel the world, enjoy diverse experiences, and work in a field I love. The summer after I graduated from IWU, I interned at a historic cemetery in Washington, DC, where I fell in love with archives. I worked in a Chicago research library for a year before going to the University of Liverpool for my master's degree in Archives and Records Management. While in the UK, I made many wonderful friends and got to work in a medieval castle, go

behind the scenes at the UK National Archives and the National Gallery, and edit a 17th-century manuscript for my dissertation. Now I'm back in the States and have recently started a position at the National Archives in College Park, MD. My IWU history education was a gateway into my career, taught me the research and communication skills I needed to be successful in graduate school and in the workplace, and gave me an appreciation of the needs of researchers in the archives.

## **LINCOLN**, CLASS OF 1981, TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**I HAVE OFTEN** been asked to start new companies and, or new divisions. On the technical side of a very technical profession, my education has enabled me to learn the technical requirements utilizing the problem-solving skills that a history background has provided me. I have been called upon to sit with numerous engineering executives and discuss new markets and applications as we

launch a new satellite, install a new fiber optic network, or develop a new product for the public; and the history background has enabled me to think on my feet, utilize a historical approach, and pivot from the product world to the service world in a successful manner. I would not trade my degree in history for any other.

## **BRIAN**, CLASS OF 1995, LAW

**AS A HISTORY MAJOR** at IWU, I learned to think critically and express myself clearly and persuasively. These skills serve me well as an attorney, but they are valuable in any line of work. In our world of text messages and social media, written communication is a diminishing art. So is critical thinking. The study of history emphasizes and develops these abilities. In classes at IWU, I learned to identify patterns and themes from historical periods spanning decades or centuries, take a position, and then express and defend my arguments and conclusions. My professors challenged me to question the opinions of others: my classmates, the authors of our assigned books,

seemingly everyone. At IWU, with its small class sizes, no one can hide in the back row. While I certainly resented it from time to time, the class discussions drew me out of my shell and forced me to assert and defend my opinions. I arrived at IWU as an introvert who wouldn't raise his hand in class to volunteer whether the sky was blue. I left with the confidence to embark upon a career of public speaking and contentious debate. Nothing could have prepared me better than my history education.

## **GREGORY**, CLASS OF 2001, HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

**MAJORING IN HISTORY** at IWU equipped me with essential skills as well as an enhanced capacity for informed citizenship and critical thinking. The training I received there did not merely indulge my interest in past events and peoples; it taught me that seeing current political, social, and ethical problems in terms of their historical dimensions is a vital part of our capacity for making sense of society. The courses I took with my history professors deepened my critical understanding of what “thinking historically” means and helped me learn to navigate among

competing claims about the past. Their mentoring and instruction also prepared me well for graduate historical studies. A recently minted Ph.D., I have worked since 2015 as an historian for the U.S. Department of the Navy in Washington, DC. I constantly draw on my IWU training in history to evaluate large amounts of information, corral evidence out of diverse sources, and defend historical arguments. I could not recommend this major and this department’s faculty more highly.

## **MATTHEW**, CLASS OF 2006, PUBLIC HISTORY ADMINISTRATION

**CURRENTLY**, I work as a Program Development Specialist for the Minnesota Historical Society. My responsibilities include the development, implementation, and evaluation of public and school programs. I am also leading the program development work for the revitalization of one of Minnesota’s most well-known historic sites, Historic Fort Snelling. The training I received in History at IWU really laid the foundation for my work, and my instructors there inspired me to

follow my passion into a career in public history. Whether it’s conducting research, interacting with the public through a program, or advocating for public history projects to potential funders, the grounding in the discipline I received from IWU has been invaluable. I have really come to believe that not only is the study of the past interesting and valuable for its own sake, but it is essential if we’re going to move toward a more equitable and just future.

## **MALLIKA**, CLASS OF 2015, FILM STUDIES

**I DECIDED** to major in history in order to critically understand the present. As an IWU history major I learned to do that and more. I am constantly making use of the skills that I acquired as a history major, even as I transition into a more artistic line of work. The historiographical training taught me to evaluate sources of knowledge and build an evidence-based argument. As a graduate student in an interdisciplinary programme at New York University, I feel confident about conducting

research for my creative projects. I know what kind of questions to ask, and where to look in order to gain the information I need. I feel much more comfortable writing a project proposal or a research paper if the need arises. As a history student my focus was on intellectual traditions. While the knowledge I gained then has given me a great platform to learn about visual arts and cinema, the abilities that I developed have enabled me to be greatly adaptable across disciplines.

## **JIM**, CLASS OF 1983, HUMAN RESOURCES

**I HAVE BEEN** a human resource professional for 20+ years. During that time I have been an investigator, a manager, a business partner, and most recently a consultant helping businesses work through the impact of acquisition. In each of these

roles, the ability to write clearly, to think about the implications of what you (or others) are doing, and to see patterns that help you sort data quickly and accurately have been critical to my ability to be successful. I would assert that those are all skills I

started honing during the time I majored in history at IWU. I would also assert that the ability to do strategic analysis is critical for any senior manager. I work with managers; invariably, the most effective ones are able to look carefully at a current state and discern ways to improve it. I believe that

skill comes from being curious about context, being sensitive to interdependencies, and being able to leverage effort effectively: all things that are a natural fit for persons interested in majoring in history.

## **CHRISTOPHER**, CLASS OF 1995, PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT HISTORY

**MY HISTORY MAJOR** at IWU is one of the decisions in my life I have never regretted! I initially planned to go directly to graduate school, but plans changed during my senior year, and instead I found a job as a Legal Assistant at an immigration law firm in Chicago. They hired me based on my writing ability — clarity of expression and developing an argument — my research experience, and my organizational skills, all of which were a direct result of the history classes I had taken. After three years at the law firm, I did eventually make my way to graduate school, to study the ancient Greek and Roman world: I received an M.A. from Chicago and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Although I was a

latecomer to the ancient languages, I often felt that my history degree gave me a distinct advantage in reading texts, processing information, and placing documents in their proper historical and cultural context. I am now a tenured professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Notre Dame, where I teach classes on ancient Greek history and Greek language. Everyday I try to help my students gain the skills which I learned from the History Department at IWU: critical thinking; a systematic approach to research; clear, concise, and persuasive writing; and, more generally, a curiosity about the peoples, places, and traditions of the world.

## **COLLEEN**, CLASS OF 2015, LIBRARY SCIENCE

**MY HISTORY DEGREE** from Wesleyan has assisted me immensely in both my graduate work and my career. During my Master's program at UIUC, I remember being assigned an eight page paper, which to me seemed mundane. I was shocked to discover many of my classmates had never written a paper of this length before. Getting a history degree from Wesleyan prepared me for

the type of work that is expected of students at a graduate level. Additionally, my history degree has aided me in my professional career as a librarian. Studying history requires a keen eye for evaluating the veracity and helpfulness of a variety of sources — something which has become exceptionally important in this political and digital age.

## **MICHAEL**, CLASS OF 2005, BANKING

**I WAS A HISTORY** and Business double major at IWU. Today I work in Commercial Banking in a specialty group that provides debt to highly leveraged and distressed businesses. While having a business education was certainly important, I feel that I draw on my History education every day, particularly when completing investment research, and when analyzing and underwriting transactions. My History education taught me to look at

everything in context and understand the complexity of the world. It also taught me to conduct historical research and to draw conclusions from research findings; to better understand how situations may evolve in the future, based upon historical precedent. I feel that having this education and background has provided me with an invaluable tool that has helped me greatly in my career.

## **STEPHANIE**, CLASS OF 2016, SECONDARY EDUCATION

**BOTH OF MY TEACHING** jobs after graduation have concentrated on general high school education where I help my students learn all subjects, not just history. My education from the history department prepared me for these occupations by giving me the skills such as: analytical thinking, writing, researching different topics, and creating persuasive arguments. I have therefore been able to pass these important and transferable skills down to my students to help them in different areas of study. I also manage to integrate

my knowledge on specific historical events when assisting with social science classes and teaching a class on current events. I am able to provide a whole picture for students when going through current issues and events because I am able to explain how we got to where we currently are. As a result of my education in history from Illinois Wesleyan University, I have been able to adapt the skills I was given to succeed in a career that I had not originally intended to be in and, in turn, help my students excel in their different areas of study.

## **ROBIN**, CLASS OF 2012, LAW

**I USE THE SKILLS** I developed as a history major at Illinois Wesleyan University every day in my legal practice. The history curriculum at IWU helps students develop both substantive critical analysis skills and practical writing skills. These are essential attributes for any attorney. Whether an attorney works in litigation or a transactional practice, he or she must review extensive amounts of information, analyze the important issues, and develop work product that clearly and concisely represents the needs of the client. IWU History classes such as the Senior Research Seminar similarly cause students to consume a great deal of

information, glean the key facts, and more importantly, produce a critical analysis that explains why those facts are relevant. Additionally, lawyers need strong writing skills to succeed in any legal field. Thankfully, the writing of history and legal writing share many similarities. When I entered law school, I felt ahead of my class in legal writing courses, because I previously learned writing techniques and citation rules in my history classes at IWU. I credit the IWU history department with helping me to develop these skills, and truly appreciate the enormous effect it has had on my career in law.

## **DOUGLAS**, CLASS OF 1991, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**I MOST DEFINITELY** have used my history degree (along with my political science degree) from IWU in my career. I am currently on the faculty in the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California. I write on issues of historical memory, defined instrumentally as the use of history for contemporary political purpose. My own research tends to focus on history as identity in a constructivist model for

foreign policy analysis; history as public diplomacy, including legitimation discourses on foreign policy (for example, my current project focuses on Russian use of history to justify the seizure of Crimea; and memory as arenas of conflict over history (think Charlottesville). So the foundation I received in history from IWU is invaluable in this research.

## **TONY**, CLASS OF 1991, EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

**I BELIEVE** my experience with the history department at Illinois Wesleyan played a pivotal role in both securing my first job as well as contributing to the success I have enjoyed in my other

professional roles. I can easily connect my studies in history to honing my ability to connect with all types of individuals, both in my professional and personal life. Studying history has provided me

with a better understanding of the world, how it has developed, and how individuals and their decisions help influence outcomes. Studying history helped me develop a “big picture” approach to problem solving, taught me to assess any situation from multiple perspectives, and understand how my actions could have a variety of effects on different individuals. My communications skills, both speaking and writing, were also greatly enhanced through both position and research papers as well

as classroom discussion. Assessing and solving a problem is only the first step. One needs to then be able to communicate thought into action. Since graduating from Illinois Wesleyan, I have always carried a confidence that my education prepared me to pursue any professional endeavor or overcome any significant challenge, and the Illinois Wesleyan University history department deserves much of the credit.

## **RON**, CLASS OF 1980, LAW

**I HAVE PRACTICED LAW** for 34 years and still use the abilities acquired as an IWU history major. It is axiomatic that the study of history teaches sound writing and analysis. Indeed, I honed those skills as a history major. Yet there are many lawyers who are fine technicians, but not the leaders of the profession. What is more important, and oft overlooked, is that law is a profession of mediating the interactions of people. I am

constantly evaluating human behavior to achieve the best results for my clients. Wisdom is acquired by either study or experience. The hard way is certainly experience. The study of history provides a gateway to wisdom without the pain. As a lawyer you meet both the scoundrel and the altruist. As someone who has studied history it's very useful that you've met them before.

## **MAGGIE**, CLASS OF 2005, HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS DESIGN

**HISTORY TENDS** to get a bad reputation for being the study of innumerable dates, places, battles, and atrocities. Folks on the outside looking in wonder, “How could any of that possibly be important in the ‘real world?’” As far as I'm concerned, my history degree from Illinois Wesleyan has prepared me more for the “real world” than any other degree might have. I remember a precious few pieces of trivia from my history courses. What I learned there was how to think. I learned how to analyze texts and think critically about how leaders made decisions and why; and what might have happened had they pivoted in another direction. I learned how to write clearly, concisely, and with a style that is consistently lauded by colleagues and friends. In the corridors and offices of IWU's History Department, I also learned the value of mentorship. As a result,

I have enjoyed a fulfilling career mentoring and challenging students as a higher education administrator. I have also proven adept at educational program development, marketing, and assessment in the nonprofit sector. Finally, as of a few months ago, I have secured and excelled in a position as an Instructional Designer at a Boston, MA tech company. There, the curricula and trainings my team and I design reach thousands of employees in seven offices across the globe--some in areas where my history degree has provided me the cultural, social, and historical context needed to equip our employees to engage meaningfully with customers. My history degree has helped me derive meaning from each and every learning experience, and it has made me an adept and compassionate leader in a very real, and fast-paced world.

## **A. G.**, CLASS OF 1978, LAWYER AND JUDGE

**I AM ALMOST FORTY** years removed from history at IWU and over thirty-six years into the practice of law, the last sixteen as a judge. Undoubtedly, in our 140-character world, the need for careful reading, clear and succinct writing, and logical thinking is greater than ever. In the precincts of the law, the sloppy, casually slangy, and ungrammatical lawyer is the unemployed lawyer.

Studying and writing about history curbs these unthinking bad habits by constantly reminding one that persuasive communication is a learned discipline. Even more important, I've found, is that an education in history at IWU provides a constant reminder that our world, so immediate and momentous to us, is only a waypoint and not a destination, and that is a lesson for a lifetime.

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