Marketable Skills of history majors

The undergraduate history curriculum is designed to teach our majors the knowledge and skills they need to become critical thinkers and informed citizens, to begin entry-level positions in the history profession, to enter graduate and professional school, and to continue lifelong learning. In particular, we aim to teach our majors critical reading skills, context and content expertise, effective communication skills, historical research methods, and historical analysis skills.

1. Critical Reading Skills—History majors should know how to comprehend and retain the material they read. They should be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, utilize appropriate reading strategies for different kinds of sources, identify a thesis, and assess the evidence in historical writing.

2. Context and Content Expertise—While the specific history courses our students take should be tailored to their individual needs and interests, history majors should also have a strong foundation in key events, turning points, and figures across a broad range of historical eras, cultures, and geographic regions. They should also demonstrate an understanding of evolving cultural, political, economic, and social forces (e.g., migration, modernity, colonization, revolution, and industrialization).

3. Effective Communication Skills—History majors should possess strong oral and written communication skills. They should be able to present their ideas clearly and effectively, using proper syntax and grammar, strong organizational structure (including an appropriate introduction and conclusion), a clear thesis, focused paragraphs and sentences, effective examples, and a suitable narrative structure.

4. Historical Research Methods—Majors should possess a basic understanding of the mechanics and methods of historical research and writing. This includes knowing how to frame historical questions and arguments, locate sources in relevant publications and databases, use the library, cite quotations and sources, use footnotes, and construct a bibliography.

5. Historical Analysis Skills—Building from these basic skills and knowledge, majors should be able to engage in sophisticated historical analysis. They need to be able to pose and answer probing questions of their own, to assess multiple viewpoints and conflicting interpretations, and to move beyond simply collecting information to developing their own analysis of historical significance. They should practice synthesizing a range of material into a coherent whole as well as assess the meaning of specific sources.