

>> *Pro Path Guide* >> for History Majors & Graduate Students

Museum Professions

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Sources: Interviews with professionals in the field (Sarah Saxe, Museums Manager; Katie Ross, Curator of Collections; and Holly Berg, Curator of Exhibits, all with the Greeley Museums) and research on professional websites.
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Overview of the Professions

Museums require a wide range of professionals, including archivists, curators (in charge of collections and exhibitions), preservation staff, a registrar, tour guides, development/fundraisers, and managers/directors. Museum curators are responsible for the hands-on care of objects in a museum's collection. The primary curatorial activities are maintenance, preservation, study, and display of collection components. Curators often determine the subjects of new exhibits, gather the relevant objects, design and built exhibition displays and create signage and marketing materials as needed. Curators also help in the fund-raising activities of the museum and add to or alter a museum's collection by trading with other museums, purchasing new pieces or acquiring items on loan from the public. Curators often have assistant curators (a professional position) and curatorial assistants (often a non-professional or entry-level position).

Registrars keep track of the museums holdings and handle loans.

Is any additional training, education or certification/qualification helpful?

Yes. In addition to your History BA, you should think of a minor or double major in Anthropology or Art History, internships in nearby museums, and often (but not always) a professional master's degree in Museum Studies. There is currently debate in the field concerning a PhD. Some employers have indicated that such a highly specialized degree can be a detriment because they need people comfortable with breadth, others find it attractive.

Are internships during undergrad necessary or recommended for employment in this field?

A track record of unpaid internships then entry-level employment is of the utmost importance to employers. Contact Dr. Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu

Description of the typical career path

Entry level positions are temporary, unpaid seasonal internships, followed by temporary paid positions. Getting a permanent position often requires tenacity. Be willing to relocate and/or take any type of opening at the type of organization you want to work for. Entry level job openings in smaller towns or rural areas can be the place to start. Smaller museums have very limited staff, so employees perform a variety of jobs within the organization.

What is the message to undergraduates?

Do well in your History BA and relevant internships (unpaid) or low-level employment, and get a professional master's degree.

What are chances for employment in this field?

Competition is steep for the small number of jobs available, which means that the path to a full time, permanent position is long and made up of temporary and lower level positions.

Average pay

- Curator: early career (1–4 yrs) \$33,680; experienced \$38,000–\$59,000
- Museum Technician \$44,320–\$48,000

NOTE: Part-time entry level positions may pay minimum wage. Many entry level workers find that a second job is necessary. Full-time curators at larger organizations can earn \$40k–\$70k /year.

Sources: <https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/arts-humanities-careers/history/>, <https://www.geteducated.com/career-center/best-jobs-for-history-majors/>, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/careers/history-majors/>, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#25-0000 accessed Dec. 2020

Professional associations and websites related to this field

Note: Several of the below have job postings.

Colorado Wyoming Association of Museums (CWAM). They offer student membership. <https://www.cwam-us.org>

Mountain-Plains Museums Association. <https://www.mpma.net/>

National Emerging Museums Professionals Network – they have regional chapters. <https://nationalempnetwork.org/>

American Association for State & Local History – has online career center with nationwide job listings <https://aaslh.org/>

American Alliance of Museums. <https://www.aam-us.org/>

See also:

- Connecting to Collections Care webinar archives website: <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/archives/>
- Books by Nina Simon, including *The Art of Relevance* (2016)

Are internships available to UNC undergraduate and/or graduate students?

UNC has limited internships to qualified students and job shadowing opportunities available. They can be taken during the academic year for 1–3 credits or performed during the summer. Contact jacob.melish@unco.edu

Are there paid positions for undergraduate or graduate students in this field?

Limited number of possible available positions may include jobs like project-based paid internships or research assistant positions.

UNC History Department, alum, or other UNC contact for students interested in employment in this field

We're working on it. If you do an internship, your supervisor or colleagues will be good sources of information. If you get a position in the field, let us know! In the meantime, you can contact Professor Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu.