

# History WORKS



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Learning about  
21st-Century  
History  
Method

History  
In  
English  
Work!

Telling  
History  
Time

# Studying the Past, Understanding the Present, Preparing for the Future

History is not only intellectually stimulating but also eminently useful. On the most basic level, it allows us to recover and interpret the past, whether the period under consideration is Periclean Athens, Ming China, Revolutionary America, or modern South Africa. And yet our field holds the promise of more than that, too, since a familiarity with distant or even recent peoples and events can help us make better sense of our own times. To choose a single – but especially salient – example, look no further than the U.S.-Mexico border, the subject of an intense and ongoing debate over immigration and citizenship. Any discussion of these issues should be informed by an understanding that until the mid-nineteenth century, the American Southwest was actually the Mexican North, a fact that explains the enduring social, political, and economic ties that often frustrate the designs of officials in Washington, D.C.

But history also works in other – and more practical – ways for our students and graduates. In our classes here at SMU, undergraduates cultivate a set of skills that are of enormous consequence for their personal and professional development. The most important of these proficiencies we typically call “critical

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SMU is the home of leading initiatives in Videogame Design, Creative Computing, and Creative Computing (the e-paint and composition program). In each of these disciplines, the additional methodology and liberal arts. Students of history are analyzing documents from the past in digital format. They are becoming adept manipulators of spreadsheets, maps, and data, adding a new level of expertise in the use of digital tools to the study of history.

The Clements Department of History at SMU has been a pioneer in bringing the digital humanities to campus. Students began studying digital tools in Professor Kate Carté Engel's honors seminar on the founding documents of the United States in 2014. Students read eighteenth-century travel journals to create digital representations of the past, coding

maps based on travelers' journeys. They then transcribed documents, analyzed them, and put together a bibliography linked to the Texas social studies curriculum (TEKS) so that public school teachers can directly apply this to teaching religion and the American Revolution. Their website, "Religion and the Founding of the United States," still gets a significant number of hits (URL: <http://people.smu.edu/religionandfoundingusa>).

The history department has made strides towards growing a uniquely diverse program in the digital humanities through building a community of faculty who are constantly pushing each other to the cutting edge of methodology. For instance, I offered a text mining course in 2017, and invited other faculty to attend the class (including three history professors), as well as librarians, other SMU staff, and graduate students.

Some of those professors began to integrate text mining into their classrooms. Among their ranks was Bianca Lopez, our newly-hired assistant professor of medieval history and already a student of statistical analysis. Within a few months of the text mining class, Lopez had asked her graduate students to code the history of crime and plague in medieval England.

Students who take these classes have an opportunity to contemplate how relevant the study of history can be in an information economy, and faculty are energized by witnessing these connections. Lopez explains, "Going in, I wanted to introduce students to many of the exciting possibilities digital history has to offer. The field is going in all of these interesting directions, and I wanted students to feel free and confident enough to explore and experiment, and inevitably discover one or two favorite methods, tools, or topics that they could then use in their own work." Likewise, Engel notes that she "is thrilled at the way that digital history has expanded and germinated in lots of different quarters. I think that that's what's really exciting: it's not the province of any one department, but our students can

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These experiences provide students with the opportunity to cultivate skills beyond the classroom. For instance, in her internship at the Old Red Museum of Dallas County History and Culture, Julia Davis learned how to create and implement school group programs for class visits to the museum and

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We did. Next summer, you can too.

Students explored the world with SMU Study Abroad programs this year. SMU-Rome-Paris and SMU-in-Oxford, two programs directed and taught by history department faculty, studied on site, in museums, and at palaces and



# Alumni Profiles

A history major gives students the critical thinking, research, and writing skills needed to excel in diverse careers, including business, law, medicine, education, and more! Here two of our alumni explain how the history major prepared them for life beyond graduation.

## Greg Thompson '85

SMU: What career have you pursued since you graduated from SMU?

Thompson: I've worked in various roles, including as a business development manager for a technology company. I've also worked in the financial services industry, where I've been involved in investment management and risk management. My history background has been helpful in understanding the context of business and economic events.

SMU: How has your history major helped you succeed in your career, and if so, how exactly?

Thompson: My history major has helped me develop strong research and writing skills, which are essential in my current role. It has also given me a broad perspective on the world and the ability to think critically and analytically. These skills have been invaluable in my career.

SMU: Do you feel your history major has helped you succeed in your career, and if so, how exactly?

Thompson: Yes, my history major has helped me succeed in my career. It has provided me with a strong foundation in research and writing, which are key skills in my current role. Additionally, the critical thinking and analytical skills I developed through my history studies have been essential in understanding complex business and economic issues.

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Alan was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for the 2017-18 academic year to work on his book project about the quest for a Kurdish state between 1880-1925, when the creation of such a state emerged as a distinct possibility but then quickly unraveled.

Alan won a Manodharma Faculty Travel Grant to set up internships for students in India. She was also awarded a Leadership ISD Civic Engagement Fellowship to host Community Conversations events at Dedman College.

Alan received a Sons of the American Revolution Visiting Professorship from King's College London to advance research on a book manuscript that explores Protestantism during the American Revolution.

Alan won the Hans Rosenberg Prize from the Central European History Society for best book published

Alan was awarded a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Grant and a Dedman College Dean's Research Council Grant in 2018-19 to conduct archival and oral history research for her second book project, "The Burden is Heavy, We Need the Men": Gendered Knowledge in the 1959 Rebellions in South Africa," which examines gender and ethnicity during anti-apartheid resistance.

Alan won the 2017 PROSE Award for best Biography or Autobiography given annually by the Association of American Publishers.

Alan received the inaugural Coleman Family Faculty Research Award, generously established by departmental

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alumn Walter Coleman ('01). She used the fellowship to visit archives related to New Year's Eve broadcasts from Times Square for her book project "Time's Touchstone: The New Year in American Life."

Alan won a 2018 Dedman College Linking Fellowship, which will enable him to acquire GIS skills in order to support his research and teaching on American economic history in the nineteenth century.

Alan was named an Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, the highest award for teaching at SMU, in 2017. She also received the Laurence Perrine Prize, which recognizes professors who embody the ideals of a liberal arts education, from the SMU Phi Beta Kappa Chapter. In the fall of 2018, she holds the Center for Presidential History Writing Fellowship to finish a book manuscript titled "Hijacking History: How the Christian Right Teaches World History and Why It Matters."





