

## Proposed Business and History Program

The purpose of this proposal is to outline a course of study emphasizing forensic history for business – the linking of historians’ methods to a variety of business procedures. In truncated form, such a program could be offered as a senior undergraduate History seminar or an addendum to existing Public History programs. Once developed, it could then become a stand-alone graduate program.

A word on definitions: The adjective “forensic” generally refers to the use of scientific knowledge or methods in solving crimes. Its uses vary. Forensic accounting is the study and interpretation of accounting evidence; other applications include forensic art, forensic anthropology, forensic interviews, and forensic document examination. But its definition need not be limited to law or crime. We propose the term “forensic history” to be the use of historians’ methods in the gathering, analyzing, and exposition of information relevant to business.

“Business” is defined as “private sector industrial, commercial, and professional operations of all sorts” – in other words, private enterprise.

The following pages present initial thoughts on the components of such a program. The intention is to teach habits of the mind that rigorously analyze information, draw on an historian’s ability to place events in time, seek validity, and report on facts.

Several groups of students could be targeted for such a program: One, those intrinsically inclined to historiography itself. Another, who value history but lack clear career goals, and little notion of how to apply their learning in a job. A third group, those who will enroll in graduate studies in areas such as law, journalism, or public service.

As for the demand for a program’s graduates, abundant evidence exists that business seeks literate, numerate employees, able to reason and apply substantive knowledge.

Your comments on any and all aspects of this proposal are welcomed.

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## A. Forensic History

We do not presume to offer more than passing comments on this unit. Interested History Departments may well have historiography courses to draw on. The intent here is to underline a new approach: focus instruction on applying historians' methods to business research. As shown below, sequence methodology instruction to a progression familiar to business: planning, gathering information, analyzing findings, presenting results, and archiving.

Use actual business case histories and current media reports for student exercises, not detective novels, as used in some historiography courses. Expand readings with discussions with business people on research and decision making. Devise teaching exercises that simulate the strict time restraints encountered in business. Suggested methodology texts are listed in **Bibliography** and **Appendices**.

— <i>Sequence</i> —	— <i>Sample Action</i> —
Plan, Collect, Store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Define objective(s) clearly</li> <li>· Probe: Who, what, why, when, where, <i>and</i> how much</li> <li>· Monitor current events for sources of information</li> <li>· Establish credibility of sources</li> <li>· Categorize necessary evidence: commercial, legal, scientific</li> <li>· Distinguish between primary and secondary sources</li> <li>· Interview, applying oral history techniques</li> <li>· Organize orderly, secure filing/saving</li> <li>· Verify – everything</li> </ul>
Retrieve, Organize, Analyze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Test accuracy, completeness of data and information</li> <li>· Determine cause, effect, risk, and probability</li> <li>· Clarify ambiguity, bias, distortion</li> <li>· Insure logic, reasoning of statements and arguments</li> <li>· Abstract relevant details from amorphous, voluminous data</li> <li>· Establish links between details and broad-based issues</li> <li>· Analyse correlations, trends, costs vs. benefits</li> <li>· Qualify assumptions</li> <li>· Quantify benefits</li> <li>· Evaluate significance and association</li> <li>· Derive supporting time series timelines and chronologies</li> <li>· Distinguish between symmetrical/asymmetrical patterns</li> <li>· Separate fact from opinion, deductions</li> <li>· Verify – again</li> </ul>
Compose, Present, Publicize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Draw valid analogies with past and present events</li> <li>· Be prepared to present findings in a variety of formats</li> <li>· Confirm conclusions, make recommendations</li> <li>· Edit sources to produce coherent, consistent style</li> </ul>
Archive, Reuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Archive, assuring availability for future inquiries</li> <li>· Establish adequate finding, retrieval aids</li> <li>· Assure security</li> </ul>

## B. Business History and Basics

This unit's objective is to teach students how to apply the methodologies they have learned to typical business problems. Also introduced are "functional activities" common to most businesses: accounting, quantitative analysis, information management, marketing, and communications. All of these subjects will provide students both relevant analytic tools and abilities for business careers.

Instructional material for the unit should be closely coordinated with Forensic History course work. Students should examine the media and business history texts assigned for errors, misleading statements, flaws in logic, erroneous attributions of cause and effect, or lack of meaningful historical perspective.

### 1. Historical Overview

Introduce business history with ties to major U.S. economic developments since the late 1700's. For instance, if selecting finance and transportation as major themes, study the evolution of the Bank of New York, the American Express Company, Wells Fargo, and the Union Pacific Railroad. Direct students to controversies involving the firms; have them analyze pros and cons using methodologies they have been taught.

Assign a daily business newspaper to be read by students. For instance: *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, or *Investor's Business Daily*. Also select readings from periodicals such as *Forbes*, *Barron's*, *The Economist* and *The Dow Jones Business and Financial Weekly*. Draw on business case histories, especially from Stanford's Graduate School of Business, MIT's Sloan School of Management, and the Harvard Business School. Have students critique their readings, orally and/or in writing.

### 2. Accounting & Finance

Accounting, said to be "the language of business," could equally be likened to a CAT scan for business. For students, a basic grasp of financial accounting is essential. When introducing the subject, begin with an understanding of financial reports – Balance Sheets, Income and Cash Flow Statements.

Examine accounting with reference to methods of financial analysis, evaluating capital and debt structure, unearthing hidden and disguised financial information, and identifying the effects of government laws and regulation. Clarify the purpose and pitfalls of internal and external audits. Provide students with sufficient accounting knowledge that they will have a solid basis for learning the details once on the job.

### 3. Quantitative Analysis

Students should be proficient in at least high school mathematics – addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division; master fractions and ratios, and able to perform all basic calculations independent of electronic aids.

Statistical theory should be examined, with attention to underlying mathematical concepts. Include instruction on sampling, measuring and describing; on significance, distributions, and variables. Clarify distinctions between probability and coincidences. Demonstrate how statistical theories relate to the historians' methods covered in unit A.

Discuss other quantitative techniques such as ratio analysis and cost-benefit analysis, noting that estimates of benefits are far more problematic than costs, requiring a strict evaluation of how they are derived. Review techniques of identifying and assessing risks. Explain how projections differ from forecasts. Emphasize the use and misuse of historical data in all analyses.

#### **4. Information Management**

Your students may be iPhone, internet, and social media experts, but deficient in specialized business information technology. Assure familiarity with word processing, database, and spreadsheet applications. Review statistical analysis applications especially those cited under **Quantitative Analysis**. Introduce new techniques such as the uses of “big data.” Include mention of presentation software and its misuse (think Powerpoint). Basics on file sharing and security procedures, hacking, and virus prevention are essential. Consider a discussion of Java Script, HTML, and computer languages in general. Make it a habit to regularly consult with successful practitioners in the field for updated information on this general field.

#### **5. Marketing**

Marketing includes market research, advertising, and sales. Remind students of the adage “we are all in sales.” They will find it useful. Review principles of marketing. Link discussion of quantitative and qualitative market research to both statistic techniques and forensic methodology.

#### **6. Communications**

Stress the importance of effective communications – oral, written, or visual – and the significance of listening. Oral History techniques are definitely appropriate in this section. Consider teaching note-taking procedures, whether Cornell, Outline, Mapping, Charting, or Sentence Methods.

Insist on accomplished writing skills. Grammar and spelling should be faultless. Editing and proofing skills are always useful. Include instruction on styles for writing brief memos, internal and external reports of varied length, emails, and blogs. For final presentations, consider teaching the use of basic layout techniques, typography, and the use of aids for electronic charts and graphs. Desktop publishing/page layout programs could be introduced as well.

Require students to make formal in-class presentations. Critique their content and delivery. Note tone, inflections, and timing. Forbid verbal tics such as such as ending all sentences with “you know,” or misusing phrases such as “...have a conversation with” when “discussion” or “negotiation” is called for. Prepare students for interruptions and for complex and troublesome questions from the floor. Have them practice delivery with no notes, as well as fluently reading from prepared scripts.

### **C. Staffing, Contacts, and Career Advice**

#### **1. Staffing**

Staffing for History and Business will require multi-disciplinary talent. Consider partnering with educators from a School of Business – swapping time so that the History teacher spends, say, three hours a week with the Business School teaching the value of history in return for a Business School’s professor teaching Business History, Accounting. Statistics or Information Technology. Non-academic contractual personnel may also be needed; try the limited use of expert volunteers.

#### **2. Contacts**

Cities, towns and rural areas across the country include individuals with knowledge and interest in history but no attachments to the academy. They may have majored in history at college, read assiduously, run historical societies and properties, or participate in local school boards. Some will have professional expertise needed for a History and Business program. They may be employers who might hire history majors, accept interns, and mentor students. Find them; ask them to support your program. Have your students research for names of likely volunteer prospects in your community. Then contact likely leads personally. Sell your goals and seek help to:

- a) Present a mini-course – following your guidelines – on a required course topic.
- b) Offer paid or unpaid internships to your students.
- c) Donate non-confidential research reports for classroom study.
- d) Furnish a list of skills and attributes required for entry-level jobs.
- e) Review student résumés, discuss work requirements, work rules, professional ethics.

Encourage volunteers to be actively involved with your program – have them critique your curriculum, help prepare résumés, or find other ways to participate. Make sure instructors with non-academic backgrounds are thoroughly familiar with your methods and goals.

Consider forming a History Advisory Council to promote outside help. See related Serenus Press material in the **Annexes**.

### **3. Career Advice**

Your students will need career advice from employers, recruiters, recently employed graduates, retirees, family friends, anyone else they can network with. Introduce them to those who have volunteered to serve your program. Encourage them to take the initiative to make own contacts with potential employers, business associations, or individuals who could be helpful.

Have students talk to your college Career Service Office, but explain that even here they must sell their newly found skills and knowledge. Career Offices tend to know more about advising science and engineering majors than history graduates.

Also have students, on their own time, draft a résumé (see and revise “**Résumés for Graduates in History & the Liberal Arts**” in the **Annexes**). Encourage using the Internet and social media to research potential employers, encourage them to volunteer their services (even if menial) to businesses, and business or trade organizations. They will find a tough job market. It is up to them to find a path.

## **D. Options for Trial Programs**

Trial Business and History programs could evolve in various forms. As mentioned earlier, it could be started as a senior undergraduate course in historians’ methods as applied in business. If successful, it could then be built out to a one-year, independent program. As a variation, rather than pairing historians’ methods with business in general, the new program could focus on opportunities in a specific grouping familiar to Public History, say, editing, publishing, and archival practices. Once the trial period has been proved successful, a stand-alone graduate program in Business and History could be introduced.

To begin discussions, I would be grateful were you to send me the names and email addresses of those you believe would be interested in this proposal. I will send them this material for their criticism and revise the original proposal accordingly. Also, I would also be pleased to meet with anyone at the Annual Meeting for further comments and stand by to volunteer future help.

## E. Bibliography

The following is a list of relevant books found useful over a number of years. It bears revision for additions and updated editions.

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**Daily Business newspapers and periodicals:** *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, or *Investor's Business Daily*. Also select readings from periodicals such as *Forbes*, *Barron's*, *The Economist* and *The Dow Jones Business and Financial Weekly*. For **Case Histories**, see esp. Stanford's Graduate School of Business, MIT's Sloan School of Management, and the Harvard Business School.

## F. Selected Serenus Press Material

The Serenus Press promotes the study and use of history, making explicit its many applications in nonacademic settings. Our primary audience is made up of undergraduate students and teachers of history. By 2007 over 370,000 of our print publications had been used by nearly half the colleges in every state of the Union as well as schools, libraries, and historical and preservation associations.

*Careers for Graduates in History*, our first chart, was published in 1984 and has been revised four times since. Subsequently, we have written, produced, and marketed some more than 30 charts, booklets, brochures, as well as one educational video/CD-Rom. In 2008 we introduced a new series of freely downloadable publications on our website [www.SerenusPress.com](http://www.SerenusPress.com).

The following guides appear as annexes to this proposal. Produced some 10-30 years ago, most are adaptations of illustrated wall charts, and have lost details and graphic punch. Though we believe the central messages remain valid, all need revision.

**Accounting + History Timeline.** Presents key events in accounting practice set in historical perspective.

**Applying History.** Connects the study of history and historians' methods to nonacademic careers in private enterprise and public service.

**Business and History Potential.** Cites numerous business positions and their duties suited to graduates in History.

**Careers for Students of History.** Guides history students through career options; provides overview of appropriate positions and careers in all sectors, including tips on seeking jobs.

**Evaluating Media Messages.** Dissects critical reading of media reports. Includes: background analysis, reading "between-the-lines", deciphering questions and answers, and assembling valid conclusions.

**History Advisory Councils.** Explains why a history department should have an advisory board and how to establish one. Includes details activities, planning, direction, benefits, and checklist.

**History As a Literary Art.** Championing clarity, vigor, and objectivity, Samuel Eliot Morison offers advice on making history and writing come alive.

**Insurance & History Timeline.** Presents insurance in an historical context.

**Résumés for Graduates in History & the Liberal Arts.** Steps students through process of approaching potential employers. Includes work-sheet as well as tips on crafting, writing, and formatting a résumé.

### Business Acumen for Students

- Be prompt, always
- Meet deadlines
- Teamwork is important; leadership, vital
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Don't complain, overcome
- Learn a foreign language
- Speak clearly. No verbal tics (*You know...*)
- Take risks: "Chance favors the prepared"
- Make your business history relevant
- Remember: "We are all in sales"