

A Guide to Becoming an Historic Preservation Professional: The Work You Can Do, What Employers Want, and Educational Considerations

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Do you dream of someday getting paid for your passionate interest in historic buildings and places? Do you wonder what a career in historic preservation might look like? If this describes you, continue reading, because in this guide, I'll describe how to get from where you are now, with little or no education or experience in the field, to gainful employment. This guide, while informed from my own practice experience, is largely based on empirical evidence from various areas of practice within historic preservation and current literature that explores the future of the field. To my knowledge, it is the first and only such guide to thoroughly reference the kinds of skills historic preservation employers consistently seek and relate these skills to the field's future.

I've worked in all of the major areas of practice that I describe in this guide and, since 2011, have been teaching in an historic preservation program of some kind; I am currently an Assistant Professor in the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Maryland, where I specialize in preservation planning. I am also the co-editor (with Barry Stiefel) of *Preservation Education: Sharing Best Practices and Finding Common Ground* (University Press of New England, 2014) and *Human-Centered Built Environment Heritage Preservation* (Routledge, 2019). Through my professional experience and research, I will attempt to provide a rigorous explanation of the way in which the field is divided into specific sectors of practice, reveal the first census of the skills that historic preservation employers seek, and provide an overview of educational options that you should consider based on your specific interests.



Figure 1. Mission San Xavier del Bac in Arizona, built between 1783-1797, undergoing conservation work. While high style buildings from many cultural groups have always been a focus of preservation practice, today there is an increased interest in the everyday built heritage of non-dominant cultural groups whose heritage has been substantially underrepresented. (Photo by author.)

There are two things I need to explain before I begin. First, the phrase, “historic preservation”, is more closely associated with rules, laws, and regulations and a political movement than with a specific career path. This observation might seem odd, but while there are plenty of historic preservation laws, there are no job titles with the phrase “historic preservationist” in them. Calling oneself an “historic preservationist” can describe an advocacy as well as a sense of mind, a calling, and an ethical prerogative, but it won’t be in your job title. It’s therefore important to be clear that the way in which I use “historic preservation”

is quite specific in this article with a focus on career paths that involve, in a significant way, the identification, treatment, interpretation, and/or protection of older buildings, places, structures, and/or landscapes in the United States. My focus is therefore on old things that are very difficult or pretty near impossible to move. (Ever try moving a cultural landscape?) Technically, what I’m addressing is the conservation of immovable, tangible heritage, but that’s quite a mouthful, so I’ll stick with historic preservation for the sake of simplicity.

Second, I need to be clear that this document is heavily influenced by the current state of the field of historic preservation, which is to say that it is primarily driven by regulatory compliance and influenced by past practices that focused on the buildings and history of rich, white men to the exclusion of women and racial, cultural, and sexual/gender minorities. Today, we recognize that historic preservation needs to be broader and more inclusive of all people, regardless of sex/gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. The stories of the oppressed and marginalized need to be uncovered, recognized, and told to balance past injustices. To give you a sense of the magnitude of this issue, of the 95,214 properties currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (maintained by the National Park Service), which is the nation’s official instrument to recognize the historical significance of buildings, sites, landscapes, and archaeological resources:

- 2.00% are related to African American history;
- 0.42% are related to women’s history;
- 0.14% are related to Latino heritage;
- 0.10% are related to “Asian” history;
- 0.03% are related to LGBTQ history.

We need new people to enter the field who can broaden its diversity and focus on the historical and contemporary contributions of all Americans to our history and the vibrancy of our built environment and cultural landscapes. Much of this work will need to incorporate new methods to understand intangible heritage and its relationship to the built environment. While understanding the physical



Figure 2. Historic preservation is about more than just buildings. Its practitioners also focus on the full richness of cultural diversity in all kinds of settings in the built environment and cultural landscapes. (Courtesy of Eric Garcetti under a CC 2.0 license.)

characteristics of buildings and places will remain a core feature of historic preservation, future practitioners will increasingly need to understand and apply perspectives from the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology, urban and regional planning). Historic preservation is one of the only fields where you can combine the natural sciences with the humanities all within the context of making the world a better place for people. The brightness of our field’s future is therefore very much dependent on increasing diversity and inclusion in all forms in all contexts.

What kind of work do people do in historic preservation?

There has never been an attempt, as far as I am aware, to understand and analyze the historic preservation field from the perspective of employment numbers or activity. The federal government does not track data on historic preservation careers or employment and only recently does any data exist on the number of historic preservation majors in colleges and universities. Career advice in historic preservation is, therefore, largely anecdotal and not particularly reliable in many circumstances.

In order to address this lack of knowledge, from April of 2016 to May of 2017, I performed a census (as opposed to a survey) of all “historic preservation” jobs that meet the definition I described, above, and were posted to the indeed.com job aggregator.¹ For each job that I found, I performed a content analysis in order to understand, from the employer’s perspective, the specific skills, knowledge and abilities required. This process also helped me understand the field as a whole and major areas of practice, which I will refer to as sectors. Figure 3 shows the major sectors in historic preservation, which are, in order of most to least prominence: regulatory compliance, architecture and construction, historic sites and museums, preservation advocacy, and downtown revitalization. Now, let’s analyze the kind of work that each sector performs.

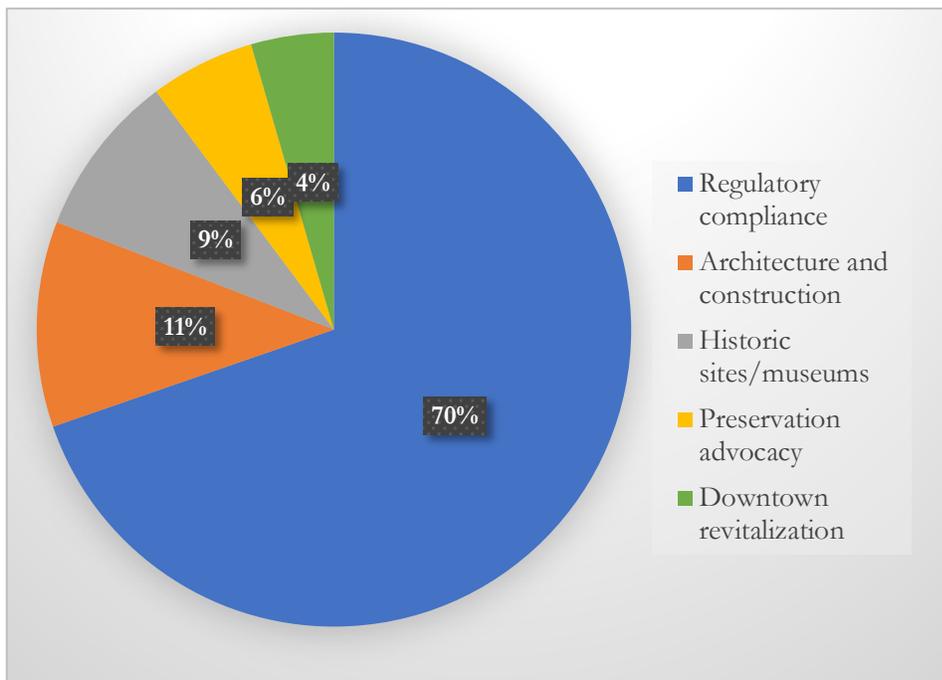


Figure 3. Percent distribution of historic preservation job postings in the US derived from a June 1, 2016 to May 31, 2017 census from indeed.com.

¹ For more specific details on this study, see J.C. Wells, “Challenging the Assumption of a Direct Relationship between the Fields of Historic Preservation and Architecture in the United States,” *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2018. See www.sciencedirect.com/journal/frontiers-of-architectural-research

Regulatory compliance

The majority of work in this area is performed by what are known as cultural resource management (CRM) companies and, secondarily, by local, state, and federal government entities. True to its description, nearly all activities done by employees in this area are driven by specific regulations, which are:

- 36 CFR Part 800 (the implementing rule of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act [NHPA]);
- 40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508 (the implementing rule of the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA]);
- state historic preservation statutes (varies, but often mirrors the NHPA);
- local historic preservation ordinances (varies, but typically design review of listed historic buildings and places by an historic preservation commission).

Each federal agency is required to have an “historic preservation officer” who is ultimately responsible for the agency’s compliance with Section 106. Similarly, in order to receive certain kinds of federal funding, the federal government requires each state (and dependencies of the United States) to have a “state historic preservation officer” (SHPO) who coordinates Section 106 work between federal agencies, the public, private parties, and consulting firms. Many recognized federal tribes also have a “tribal historic preservation officer” (THPO) that performs work in a fashion similar to a SHPO.

In a CRM firm, you will likely be called an “architectural historian” (employees with a title of “archaeologist” are also likely to do this work with appropriate training) and the kind of work you would perform includes:

- surveys of buildings, places, and landscapes to determine what is, and is not, officially historic according to the NHPA. This can involve extensive amounts of fieldwork such as photography and filling out of forms;
- determination of whether or not a building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places;
- “Section 106 review”, which in its basic form is determining if a federal undertaking (e.g., plan to change or demolish an historic building, the requirement for a federal permit that might impact an historic building) will have an adverse effect on historic buildings and places. If there



Figure 4. Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation public meeting on Saving Third & Fourth Avenue Corridors in New York. Working with the public is frequently required in most aspects of practice. (Courtesy of Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation under a CC 2.0 license.)

is an adverse effect, you would be part of a team consulting with stakeholders to come to an agreement on how the adverse effect should be mitigated;

- preparation of “Environmental Impact Statements” (EIS) and “Environmental Assessments” (EA) which look at how federally imposed changes to historic buildings and places affect the human environment. Typically, you’ll work in an interdisciplinary team with experts in ecology/biology who will determine if changes to the environment will have negative impacts on ecosystems as well.

At the local level, you would typically work in a planning office for a municipal government providing staff support to an historic preservation commission. A very likely title would be “preservation planner”. Typical duties of this position are:

- reviewing proposed changes to privately owned buildings in local historic districts to determine if these changes will impair the authenticity of the building and the context in which it is located. You would either make an “administrative approval” of such changes or pass your recommendation on to an historic preservation commission for its decision. Historic preservation commissions consist of citizen volunteers who are typically appointed by a political body of some kind (e.g., city council, mayor);
- providing educational and logistical support for the members of a local historic preservation commission;
- reviewing proposals for the designation of buildings and local historic districts that you will then pass on to the historic preservation commission for its approval, followed by final approval by a city council (or equivalent).

Architecture and construction

In my more than fifteen years in working with students interested in historic preservation, one of the most common interests seems to be the rehabilitation of historic houses, *a la* “This Old House.” It’s also pretty clear that for many members of the public—including built environment professionals—there is an assumption that the most prevalent area of practice in historic preservation overlaps with architecture and construction. Yet, in my census of a year’s worth of job postings, few architectural or construction management firms were interested in hiring people with skills in historic preservation. And of these jobs, about half were with architecture firms with the remainder being a combination of construction management and architectural materials conservation companies.

Work in an architecture firm, where you might be called a “preservation architect” (if



Figure 5. The application of a desalination poultice to a building is a technique used in architectural materials conservation. (Photo by author.)

you are a registered architect) or a “preservation technician” (if you are not), is typically rather varied and consists of:

- documentation of historic buildings with photos, hand drawings, and/or measured drawings. More firms are using high tech equipment, such as laser scanners;
- ability to read architectural drawings;
- design for new and existing buildings using computer software such as AutoCAD, Revit, and SketchUp;
- creation of construction specifications (instructions for contractors and sub-contractors);
- ability to identify architectural styles and archaic building materials and systems.

Work in a construction management firm can be similar to an architecture firm, but more time will typically be spent in cost estimating and the management of sub-contractors, such as carpenters, masons, painters, etc. Knowledge of contemporary construction materials and systems is often required in this environment.

A highly specialized subset of this area of practice is the architectural materials conservator, comprising only 2% of all job postings. Work in this area requires the ability to understand how building materials decay over time and ways that this decay can be slowed down. Materials conservators specify ways to clean and repair buildings that minimize destruction to the greatest extent possible with an emphasis on compatible materials. Some materials conservators have skill sets similar to art conservators and have the ability to clean artwork and restore missing decorative building elements.

Historic sites and museums

If you’ve ever been to an historic house museum, you should have a sense for the work that takes place in this environment. These are usually, although not always, small, non-profit operations where one person wears multiple hats and is charged with everything from fundraising, site interpretation, docent training, and building maintenance to running events. This is a great environment if you enjoy autonomy and like entrepreneurship. A decent number of historic sites are run by local, state, and federal governments, and in the latter case, such as with the National Park Service, there is indeed the opportunity to specialize in any number of the areas associated with the management and interpretation of historic places for the public good. The fundamental expectation in this area of practice is the education of the public about history using buildings and places as interpretive materials. An increasing number of historic sites, however, are expanding into event planning—especially weddings—to supplement revenue, which adds to the complex skillsets associated with a professional working in this area.

Preservation advocacy

Also associated largely with non-profit organizations is preservation advocacy. Perhaps one of the most well-known examples of an organization that does work in this area is the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Much like the educational mission of historic site administration, organizations in this sector charge themselves with educating the public about the benefits of historic preservation and provide educational resources and funding to help facilitate this work. Most states in the country have a statewide preservation advocacy organization and many larger cities have their own preservation advocacy organizations as well. Work in this area of practice is also quite varied; small staffs are typical

as are the wearing of many hats. If you enjoy working with the public, fund raising, and events, this can be a rewarding career path.

Downtown revitalization

The last major area of practice has much in common with preservation advocacy, but focuses this advocacy on the revitalization of distressed urban areas that are characterized by the many historic buildings and places. The National Main Street Center, which is a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is perhaps the best example of work in this area. Jobs in this sector are also associated mostly with non-profit organizations along with a few government agencies. Staff sizes are typically quite small with the only paid staff person being an executive director or a “Main Street manager.” People who enjoy working in this area are often deeply



Figure 6. The Main Street Program in Las Vegas, New Mexico regularly hosts events in their downtown, such as this one in the main square that features local cultural traditions such as music and dance. (Photo by author.)

attached to their community, love working with a diverse array of people, and are vocal champions of all things historic, urban, and vibrant. In a typical day, a Main Street manager might work with a resident, business owner, politician, and a tourist. Hours can be rather long because of frequent evening meetings, but for those who love the work, this high degree of engagement with people can be quite energizing.

What skills, knowledge, and abilities do historic preservation employers want?

Now that you have a sense of the major areas of practice, what are the specific skills, knowledge, and abilities historic preservation employers are looking for in each of these five sectors? According to my census, the two major skills most frequently requested, regardless of area of specialization, are good writing and oral communication skills, at 38% and 32% respectively. This also matches work done by other researchers across all fields of professional practice in which these two skills are also most frequently requested. Beyond these two skills, however, the remaining skills are closely correlated to specific work in regulatory compliance, architecture and construction, historic sites and museums, preservation advocacy, and downtown revitalization. Let’s examine these areas in detail.

Regulatory compliance

Regulatory compliance employers are in three main areas: cultural resource management (CRM) firms, State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), and staff supporting the historic preservation activities within a local municipality’s planning department (usually associated with an historic preservation commission). Their top requested skills are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Top skills requested by employers in the regulatory compliance sector

Skill	Frequency
Section 106 (of National Historic Preservation Act)*	67.1%
National Environmental Policy Act*	61.9%
National Register of Historic Places*	47.1%
Environmental planning and policy	38.7%
Secretary of the Interior's Standards*	34.2%
Endangered Species Act*	25.2%
Graphical Information Systems (GIS)	25.2%
Design review	23.2%
Clean Water Act*	22.6%
Zoning/land use	20.0%
Historic resource survey	18.7%
Archival research	16.1%
Urban planning	13.5%
Architectural history	12.9%
Clean Air Act*	11.6%
Teamwork	11.0%
California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)*	11.0%
Read architectural drawings	11.0%

*Legal statute or regulation

Based on the earlier discussion, it should not be surprising that this list is dominated by laws and regulations. What might be unexpected to the uninitiated, however, is that employers of people who work in the historic preservation field and engage in regulatory compliance—mostly within cultural resource management firms, not local municipalities—also want familiarity with environmental protection laws. This might be explained though the way in which, at the federal level, historic preservation and environmental protection laws are often conflated into “environmental review” and such work happens in parallel and within the same firm.



Figure 7. Regulations are but one tool to avoid the outcome of demolition. (Photo by author.)

Architecture and construction

Employers in the architecture and construction sector broadly represent architectural firms and construction firms along with a small number of specialist architectural conservation firms. Their top requested skills are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Top skills requested by employers in the architecture and construction sector

Skill	Frequency
Read architectural drawings	68.1%
Make architectural drawings	61.7%
Autodesk AutoCAD**	59.6%
History of construction materials/methods	46.8%
Adobe Photoshop**	36.2%
Autodesk Revit**	36.2%
Building condition assessment	29.8%
Materials conservation	27.7%
Secretary of the Interior's Standards*	23.4%
Drawing/recording/documenting buildings	23.4%
Construction management	23.4%
Architectural history	21.3%
Google SketchUp**	19.1%
Adobe InDesign**	17.0%
Construction specifications	17.0%
Project management	14.9%
Contemporary construction materials/methods	14.9%
National Register of Historic Places*	10.6%
Photography	10.6%

*Legal statute or regulation ** Computer software

While employers in the architecture and construction sector are looking for familiarity with some historic preservation laws—especially the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards—this list tends to be dominated by skills related to analyzing the materials and methods from which buildings are constructed, understanding the material condition of buildings, and especially drawing and documenting buildings, including software tools that facilitate this work.

Historic sites and museums

Employers in the historic sites and museums sector are almost always non-profit or governmental organizations (local, state, or federal). Their top requested skills are listed in table 3.

Table 3. Top skills requested by employers in the historic sites and museums sector

Skill	Frequency
Interpretive programming	43.9%
Docent	39.0%
Budgeting	39.0%
Building maintenance	39.0%
Volunteer coordination	34.1%
Exhibit design	34.1%
Management of others	29.3%
Curatorial/collections management	29.3%
Fundraising	24.4%
Archival research	19.5%
Marketing	19.5%
Project management	14.6%
Teamwork	14.6%
Stakeholder engagement	14.6%
Events planning	14.6%

Noteworthy in the category of historic sites and museums is the absence of required knowledge of historic preservation laws and regulations and an emphasis on interpretation/exhibit design, collections management, and working with budgets and raising funds. These types of organizations are often small non-profits or state museums which rely extensively on grants to operate.



Figure 8. Living history interpretation of a textile mill at Slater Mill, Pawtucket, Rhode Island. (Photo by author.)

Preservation advocacy

Employers in the preservation advocacy sector are non-profit organizations at the local, state, or national levels. Their top requested skills are in table 4.

Table 4. Top skills requested by employers in the preservation advocacy sector

Skill	Frequency
Project management	53.8%
Budgeting	46.2%
Critical thinking skills	38.5%
Teamwork	30.8%
Stakeholder engagement	30.8%
Ability to work with diverse people	30.8%
Fundraising	30.8%
Marketing	30.8%
Social media	30.8%
Conflict resolution	23.1%
Volunteer coordination	15.4%
Events management	15.4%
Graphic design	15.4%

It should be clear from the skills employers are requesting in the area of preservation advocacy that candidates with a strong background in non-profit management are desirable as well as experience working with diverse groups of people and managing conflicts. Of note is that these employers are not asking for any skills or knowledge relevant to historic preservation laws and regulations nor are they requesting knowledge relevant to historic buildings, such as architectural history or the ability to do cultural resource surveys or document buildings.

Downtown revitalization

Downtown revitalization employers that focus on historic areas are usually either affiliated with a local or state government or are a non-profit organization. They can be part of a “Main Street” program, community/economic development agency, or governmental department; public-private partnerships are common. These kinds of employers often justify their activities in the name of economic development, especially in urban areas that have experienced significant disinvestment. Their most frequently requested skills are in table 5. It is important to note that not all downtown revitalization organizations are interested in historic preservation, however, or want employees with skills related to historic preservation.

Table 5. Top skills requested by employers in the downtown revitalization sector

Skill	Frequency
Stakeholder engagement	63.6%
Economic development	63.6%
National Trust Main Street familiarity	45.5%
Historic preservation tax credits*	36.4%
Fundraising	36.4%
Design review	36.4%
Real estate development	36.4%
Marketing	36.4%
Social media	36.4%
Critical thinking	27.3%
Volunteer coordination	27.3%
Ability to work with diverse groups of people	27.3%
Events management	27.3%
Urban planning	27.3%
Conflict resolution	18.2%
Project management	18.2%
Secretary of the Interior's Standards*	18.2%
Teamwork	18.2%
Management of others	18.2%
Community development	18.2%
Budgeting	18.2%

*Legal statute or regulation

Much like the preservation advocacy sector, employers in the historic downtown revitalization sector are looking for candidates with non-profit management skills, but in the latter case, skills in community and economic development are additionally desired. Candidates are desirable if they have experience with the preservation tax credit (also called the “rehabilitation tax credit”) and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. These requirements are likely due to a strong interest in rehabilitating older buildings as part of an overall economic development strategy in which the preservation tax credit plays an important incentive role. Job advertisements looking for a “Main Street manager” for a Main Street program (as defined by National Main Street Center, which is a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation) are a frequent type of posting in this area.

Trends in historic preservation — looking toward the future

While the needs of employers today help to define the current state of the field, it is also important to discuss new trends in historic preservation because of their potential to impact future practitioners. The overall areas of practice in the field have remained rather consistent over the past several decades, including the requisite skill sets required by employers, but there are three trends that warrant discussion because of their likelihood of influencing future practice.

Diversity, inclusion, social justice and equity. Historic preservation traditionally has focused on the monumental buildings and places associated with wealthy, white men. Today, we need

motivated practitioners who have a deep commitment to collaborate with diverse, marginalized groups of people and who have an associated interest in cultural heritage. We also need a concomitant increase in the number of minorities who work in the field of historic preservation. There are efforts underway to help ameliorate this injustice, such as funding to recognize the history of racial, ethnic, and sexual/gender minorities on the National Register, broader efforts to recognize and celebrate the cultural heritage of marginalized groups, and scholarships to help minority students attend historic preservation degree programs. Examples of this work include special grants from the National Park Service to support research leading to the nomination of properties to the National Register, and the Mildred Colodny Diversity Scholarship and the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund from the National Trust. While these efforts are laudable, this is a large and systemic problem that will continue to need new tools that focus on intangible heritage, which the National Register is unable to currently accommodate. Fundamental issues the field will need to address in the future relating to social justice and equity include the links between climate change, funding to repair/protect historic property, and National Register eligibility (including the related fact that historic places associated with marginalized peoples often lack sufficient historical integrity) and difficulties articulating intangible heritage into the objective, fact-based system required by traditional property listing processes.

Climate change. It used to be that one of the largest threats to the survival of historic buildings, places, and landscapes was demolition or neglect; now we can add climate change to this list. As sea levels continue to rise, some of the most cherished historic places will increasingly be threatened in our older coastal communities, such as Annapolis, Charleston, New Orleans, and New York. Even with massive interventions, we cannot save all of these historic buildings and places, which means the future is fraught with some very difficult decisions. By necessity, this area will increasingly be one of the most



Figure 9. Downtown Laredo, Texas. The future of preservation lies in understanding everyday people's relationship with everyday places. (Photo by author.)

innovative places to work in historic preservation from a technical and planning perspective as new technologies are employed to protect coastlines and buildings from damage and affected community members are proactively engaged in decision-making to protect their own properties and places. Climate change will also affect the existing built environment through increased rainfall, wind, and temperature changes, causing stresses on communities and building fabric that will increasingly affect the sustainability of historic resources.

Accessing, respecting, and using local knowledge. Few would argue against the basic contention that historic preservation should benefit all people regardless of their expertise—a goal often expressed in the preamble of preservation laws—but, by design, the values and meanings of laypeople are excluded from its professional practice. The reason is fairly straightforward: architectural historians, social historians, and preservation architects designed a system for themselves in which art and connoisseurship are naturally some of its foremost values; the values and meanings of laypeople were simply not considered to be important to practice. To be sure, while the perspectives of these experts are undeniably useful in many contexts, their methods are incapable of accessing or understanding the meanings and values of laypeople, which is known as “local knowledge.” To access local knowledge, people who research and work in historic preservation are increasingly interested in applied social science approaches (e.g., from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and geography), and participatory methods (e.g., from planning and public health).

Gathering human-centered evidence and creating a dynamic feedback mechanism for revising policy. If we fully accept the premise that historic preservation is meant to benefit everyone, including laypeople, then we need to answer fundamental questions about how older places benefit and do not benefit people from a range of economic, social, cultural, and psychological perspectives. Policy should then be built on this foundation of



Figure 10. Flooding is a serious and increasing threat to historic buildings with few ready solutions. (Photo by Author.)



Figure 11. Members of the Boys and Girls Club of Central Illinois at the Civil Rights Act of 1964 anniversary program at the Old State Capitol State Historic Site. (Photo by the National Park Service.)

evidence. In order to maximize the impact of a policy, we need to also develop reliable ways to measure or assess its overall effectiveness, and then revise the policy using this new evidence. To be clear, this activity is not meant to justify existing practice, but rather to build a new kind of historic preservation practice from the ground up, using multidimensional empirical evidence in which existing rationalistic doctrine is no longer treated as received wisdom, but rather challenged from a human-centered perspective.

Technology. As with most fields, the requirement to be digitally savvy continues to increase in historic preservation. Skills that should be considered mandatory include graphical information systems (GIS), computer aided drafting (CAD), and digital photography (and associated graphic design software). Building information modeling (BIM) systems are increasingly being used in historic preservation practice as is 3-D scanning, the use of aerial drones for documentation, and digital photogrammetry. Depending on one's area of practice, fluency with social media is now essential for work that directly engages with the public as is the ability to do content analysis using massive online data sets. For those with an interest in building materials conservation, a great deal of innovative work is being done to create more affordable and portable scanning systems (e.g., terahertz radiation, FTIR, X-ray fluorescence, thermal, moisture) that can determine the elemental, chemical, state of decay, and construction system composition of buildings.

Educational options

Now that you have some sense of desired skills requested by employers and the general trends in the field of historic preservation, how you can acquire these skills? Your next step is to look at degree programs offered by colleges and universities. Unfortunately, this is where your options can get particularly confusing as it's not necessarily a clear trajectory from a degree to your desired professional career path, primarily because there are so many possibilities to consider.

Should you consider an associate's, bachelor's, or a master's degree?

In historic preservation, there are many degree programs you can consider at the associate's, bachelor's, and master's levels. Which one is right for you? Considering that nearly 60% of preservation employers require or prefer candidates with a master's degree, this educational goal would be a reasonable one. There are, however, many successful people in the field with only a bachelor's degree; but, if you want to maximize your competitiveness in the field, a master's degree would very much be to your advantage. For reference, none of the employers mentioned an associate's degree as an acceptable credential. If your interest in historic preservation is primarily with hands-on work in the trades, however, there are a number of vocationally-based associate's degree programs that when combined with an apprenticeship would position you well to work in the preservation trades, such as traditional carpentry or masonry. The Preservation Trades Network maintains a list of such degree programs at ptn.org/training.

What major should you consider?

Do you need to major in historic preservation to have a successful career in the field? The short answer is "no", but for a number of reasons, which I will explain, this could certainly be to your advantage because of the specialized coursework that is difficult to obtain elsewhere. Other options,

however, include considering a minor or a certificate in historic preservation that, depending on your career path, might be better choices.

Preservation employers do express specific requirements for degree majors. Surprisingly, across all employers, only 40% specifically requested a major in historic preservation, but it was the most frequently requested major. The other top three majors most frequently requested were architecture at 33%, urban/regional planning at 23%, and architectural history at 22%. Requested majors by historic preservation sector, however, are more useful; the top majors by sector are in table 6.

Table 6. Top majors (20% or higher) requested by employers by sector

<i>Sector</i>	Major	Frequency
<i>Regulatory compliance</i>	Historic preservation	50.3%
	Architectural history	32.9%
	Architecture	31.0%
	Urban/regional planning	30.3%
	Environmental science/studies	24.5%
<i>Architecture and construction</i>	Architecture	71.7%
	Historic preservation	21.7%
<i>Historic sites and museums</i>	Historic preservation	25.0%
	Museum studies	25.0%
	History	20.0%
<i>Preservation advocacy</i>	Historic preservation	23.0%
<i>Downtown revitalization</i>	Urban/regional planning	71.4%
	Business	51.0%
	Historic preservation	30.6%
	Public administration	30.6%
	Real estate	20.4%

Based on what employers are looking for in a major, if your intent is to work in the regulatory compliance sector, a major in historic preservation makes a lot of sense, especially given that the specialized content in preservation laws and policies that are usually a part of this major would be essential to your work. It is very unlikely that you'll find this content in other majors, and certainly not to the same degree of depth. An understanding of historic preservation theory and philosophy, which are also usually part of a preservation major as well, is fundamental to understanding how the laws and regulations should be applied as is coursework focused on cultural resource surveys, which includes the identification of architectural styles. In addition, you'll learn how to do archival research to reveal the historical facts associated with specific places in order to understand why they are historically significant. If your goal is to work in a cultural resource management firm, consider taking coursework from an environmental studies/science major, minoring in this area, obtaining a certificate, or undertaking a dual major/degree program in both historic preservation and environmental studies/science.

If your interest is in architecture and construction, I would recommend that you seriously consider becoming a licensed architect; this is especially relevant given that nearly 90% of the employers in this sector either require or desire a candidate to be a licensed architect. Pragmatically, although there are still a few bachelor of architecture programs, the architecture field has moved toward the master of architecture as the required entry-level degree to practice. What you will find, however, is that most architecture programs will not be able to provide coursework in the areas of traditional construction materials and methods, building condition assessments, architectural materials conservation, or the application of preservation standards in rehabilitation projects. Realistically, you will need to have this educational background to competitively work in this particular sector. Some possibilities to ameliorate this situation include obtaining an undergraduate degree in historic preservation prior to entering a master of architecture program; or finding a school that has both architecture and historic preservation coursework, and while earning the master's degree in architecture, 1) take additional historic preservation courses; 2) obtain a certificate in historic preservation; 3) undertake a dual degree program in architecture and historic preservation. In the latter case, many schools offer accelerated dual degree programs in which coursework can overlap between the two degrees to save the student time and money.



Figure 12. Graduate students at the University of Maryland studying historic preservation. (Photo by author.)

There are multiple educational paths towards a career centered on administering a historic site, house museum, or history museum. It is very common to find people successfully working in this sector with a museum studies or history major as well as historic preservation—these are also the majors that employers are seeking. The advantage that an historic preservation major would give you in this area is an understanding of historic buildings that would be advantageous in the interpretation of the building itself, including using archival research methods to understand a building's history; museum studies and history majors, for instance, often lack coursework on understanding the materials and methods from which older buildings are constructed or the history of interior decorative treatments and furnishings. On the other hand, many historic preservation majors don't, by default, offer coursework in collections management, which is essential for working in this sector. My suggestion would be to locate a school where you would be able to combine coursework in historic preservation and museum studies that could cover all of these areas, which could be accomplished through electives, minors, certificates, or a dual major/degree.

The preservation advocacy sector is dominated by non-profits, and employers in this area often want—before any kind of preservation expertise—experience or education in non-profit management. For this reason, it would be important to consider some combination of a major, minor, or certificate in both historic preservation and non-profit management, undertaking a dual major/degree, or

utilizing electives to make sure that basic non-profit management skills are covered, such as project management, development (fundraising), grants administration, and volunteer management.

Lastly, if your interest is in downtown revitalization, you'll also find an environment dominated by non-profits, but also governmental organizations. As with preservation advocacy, a background in non-profit management would certainly be advantageous, but based on what employers are seeking, education in real estate finance and development is highly desirable. Consider some mix of coursework, minors/majors, or certificates that would focus on historic preservation, non-profit or public administration, and real estate finance and development. This is a good place for someone with both a preservation ethic and an entrepreneurial spirit and would require some creativity to cobble together an effective educational program. It would be especially important to look for schools that include both historic preservation and real estate development programs so you could take advantage of both areas.

A good place to start in your hunt for an educational program is the National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) (www.ncpe.us) that lists most historic preservation degree programs in the United States along with some of their specializations. Make sure to broaden your search beyond the NCPE web site, however, as there are other degree programs with emphases in various preservation sectors that are also worth consideration. As you narrow your search, contact the director of the program and ask if and how the program covers the specific skills employers are looking for in your sector of interest and how the program is addressing future directions in preservation practice. For instance, if you're interested in social justice issues, make sure that this content is covered across the curriculum and represented in students' coursework; also ask for information about how diversity is represented by the students in the program. You can also ask to see course syllabi and examples of students' work so that you can understand, in more detail, the kind of material that is covered. Lastly, make sure that you understand your options for taking coursework from other majors relevant to your interests and the potential to pursue dual degree programs and certificates.

Organizations that can help you advance your future career

Remember that you are not alone as you pursue a career in historic preservation. Consider joining and participating in organizations that would support your particular interests. To this end, refer to table 7 for a list of organizations and their areas of interest, along with web site addresses.

Table 7. Historic preservation organizations and their interests

Organization	Areas of focus	Web site URL
Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (AHLP)	The AHLP represents professionals working with historic landscapes, especially landscape architects.	www.ahlp.org
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)	AAM represents professionals working in any museum environment (history, natural history, science, etc.).	www.aam-us.org
American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)	The AASLH represents a wide variety of professionals working in the area of public history, including historic site administrators.	www.aaslh.org

Organization	Areas of focus	Web site URL
American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA)	ACRA represents professionals working in cultural resource management.	acra-crm.org
American Folklore Society (AFS)'s Folklore and Historic Preservation Policy Working Group	The AFS folklore and public policy working group focuses on historic preservation policy to better integrate folklorists and their perspective within US historic preservation policy.	www.afsnet.org/page/histprespolicy
American Institute of Architects (AIA) Historic Resources Committee	The AIA has a specialty group of architects interested in historic buildings and structures.	network.aia.org/historicresourcescommittee
American Institute for Conservation (AIC)	AIC represents (scientific) materials conservators of all kinds (paper, architecture, art, etc.) and has an architecture specialty sub-group.	www.conservation-us.org
Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS)	ACHS is a network of scholars and researchers working in the broad and interdisciplinary field of heritage studies. The primary aim of ACHS is to promote heritage as an area of critical enquiry.	criticalheritagestudies.org
Association for Preservation Technology (APT)	APT represents professionals who are interested in the broad application of "technology" in the interventions of buildings and structures; there is a great deal of overlap with the AIC. The AIC is more materials based, while the APT is often more focused on broader systems (e.g., structural), engineering, and sustainability.	www.apti.org
Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA)'s Historic Environment Knowledge Network	EDRA's Historic Environment Network connects scholars and practitioners with an interest in research that addresses the intersection of environmental perception and valuation with built heritage and cultural landscapes.	edra.org
International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), US chapter (US/ICOMOS)	US/ICOMOS fosters heritage conservation and historic preservation at the national and international level through education and training, international exchanges of people and information, technical assistance, documentation and advocacy.	usicomos.org
Latinos in Heritage Conservation	Latinos in Heritage Conservation is a national organization dedicated to promoting Latino leadership and engagement in historic preservation.	www.latinoheritage.us

Organization	Areas of focus	Web site URL
Main Street America	Main Street America caters to professionals working in the "Main Street" program, such as Main Street managers and downtown revitalization specialists.	www.mainstreet.org
National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC)	NAPC represents preservation planners in local or regional governments.	napcommissions.org
National Alliance of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO)	NATHPO represents professionals working for a tribal historic preservation office.	www.nathpo.org
The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO)	NCSHPO represents professionals who work in state historic preservation offices.	www.ncshpo.org
National Council on Public History (NCPH)	NCPH is a membership association dedicated to making the past useful in the present and to encouraging collaboration between historians and their publics.	ncph.org
National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE)	NCPE represents educational institutional members who meet the basic requirements for historic preservation education established in 1988. They maintain a list of these institutions and their degree programs on their web site.	ncpe.us
National Trust for Historic Preservation	The Trust provides support to professionals through their Preservation Leadership Forum on all areas of practice.	forum.savingplaces.org
Preservation Trades Network (PTN)	PTN represents professionals involved in the traditional trades or crafts related to historic buildings and structures.	ptn.org
Society for American Archaeology (SAA)	SAA represents archaeologists, including historical archaeologists.	www.saa.org
Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA)	SHA promotes scholarly research and the dissemination of knowledge about the archaeology of the modern world (A.D. 1400-present).	sha.org
Society of Architectural Historians (SAH)	SAH is an international not-for-profit organization that promotes the study and preservation of the built environment worldwide.	sah.org

Where to go from here

Historic preservation is deceptively simple on the surface, but now that you've had a chance to understand its depth, hopefully you now have a better sense of where your interests align with areas of practice. Educational options, while abundant, can also be equally as varied, so it pays to do some careful research. Along the way, don't forget to talk with practicing professionals in the field as well as current students and alumni from the degree programs you are investigating. Enjoy the search, which will offer an exciting series of discoveries as the field unfolds before you.

The last thought I will leave you with is to impress how important it is for new people, who have not traditionally considered this career path, to enter the field. We are challenged on multiple fronts by static regulations, climate change, and a serious need to address issues of inclusion, diversity, and social justice. To address these challenges, we need new perspectives, ideas, and methods that can more fully recognize, celebrate, and capitalize on the multiple heritages that represent our amazingly diverse country. Most people won't get rich working as an historic preservationist, but where else can you work in a field that fundamentally impacts people's identity, wellbeing, and sense of place.



Figure 13. Historical center of Recife, Brazil. Historic preservation is an international activity, with international options. Names used internationally include heritage conservation, *conservación del patrimonio* (Spanish), and 遺產保護 (Chinese), among many other possibilities. (Photo by author.)