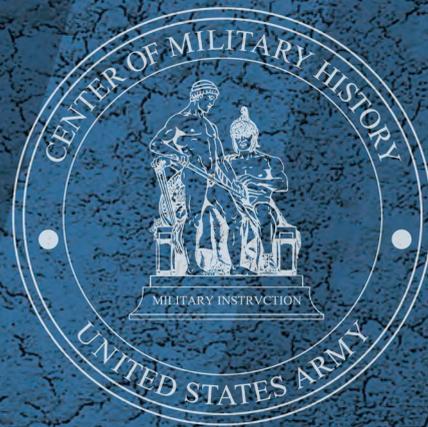


Graduate students in history preparing to enter the academic job market should consider the many career opportunities in the history programs of the federal government. The Department of Defense, the Department of State, Congress, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Park Service, the intelligence community, and the National Archives are among the federal activities, museums, and agencies that employ historians. The duties range from teaching, processing and preserving documents, and tracking lineages and organizational histories of military units to writing books and monographs. Those who are completing graduate study in history might well find their scholarly preparation in research, writing, and the historical method to be of great value to one of these programs.

In particular, new history professionals should explore career opportunities with the Department of Defense. The Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps all employ a large number of historians in a variety of tasks. The Army alone has almost a hundred fifty historian positions worldwide, with additional opportunities in its museum system.

A career in federal history can be rewarding. The range of historical work is broad. Subject areas are as diverse as the missions of the federal agencies themselves. Historians in the federal government enjoy considerable leeway to express conclusions that are supported by available research, contrary to ill-informed accusations of being "court historians." Competitive pay, the security of the Civil Service system, travel, professional advancement, and the opportunity to influence national decisions are all benefits of service as a federal historian.

However, those interested still face a notable challenge along the way to reaching that status: the federal personnel hiring system. The system may be hard to navigate, but with considerable patience and an ability to adjust to its quirks, the applicant should be able to find his or her way and achieve that inesti-



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**Considering a Career
as a Historian in the
Federal Government**

A Quick Guide

mable goal of a secure, remunerative job in a field he or she loves: history.

Each federal agency uses slightly different procedures for hiring. Here is some advice on how to apply for a historian position with the Department of the Army. The Army's hiring process begins with vacancies posted on USAJOBS (<http://www.usajobs.gov/>); they can also be accessed through the Army Job Search tab on the Army Civilian Service Web site (<http://www.armycivilianservice.com/>). The potential applicant should go to one of these Web sites and search for vacancies in the 0170 (historian) job series. Museum positions are identified by either the 1010, 1015 (curator), or 1016 series; and archivist positions are in the 1420 or 1421 series. Be sure to use the search criteria "U.S. Citizens." The other choice is if you already work for the federal government. You should note that each vacancy is typically posted for no more than fourteen to thirty days, so you will need to move expeditiously with your application. Applications cannot be accepted after the closing date. You might want to set up alerts in the system to notify you of new vacancies as they are posted.

Once you have identified a vacancy, read the announcement carefully, noting the description of, and requirements for, the position and what items you are expected to furnish for your application. You will probably be asked to submit a resume and to respond to a questionnaire that will survey your qualifications for the position. You may also be asked to submit an undergraduate transcript and other materials.

Careful preparation of a resume is essential. Do *not* submit your curriculum vitae untouched and assume it will serve the purpose. Chances are, the first cut will be made by software or by a personnel specialist who knows little about what a historian does. You should use the duties and qualifications in the announcement to rework your resume, explaining your experience and skills in full detail, employing key words and phrases from the announcement. If you are applying for an archivist position, for example, use the word "archival" to describe your background; do

not just state that you have abundant experience with research. Especially note any announcement sections on specialized experience and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). For example, you might see a section like the following:

Specialized experience: To qualify, applicants must possess one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-11 level. Specialized experience is defined as:

- 1) Experience planning, researching, and writing historical products on the history of the U.S. Army in peace or war.
- 2) Experience in arranging and conducting interviews with participants or other firsthand observers in order to gather historical information.
- 3) Experience analyzing complex events and constructing and testing theories regarding the causal and other relations among them.
- 4) Experience preparing and presenting scholarly papers and articles in your area of expertise.
- 5) Experience of having written at least one historical book-length manuscript, either published as a book or prepared in a dissertation.

If you see this section, your application should clearly state your specialized experience in research, writing, and interviews (do not assume that the software will know that "oral history" and "interview" refer to the same skills), especially stressing the dissertation. This may be crucial to documenting your abilities and contrasting your specific skills with others who may claim to have all of the skills in the questionnaire, but do not have the really critical skills and abilities needed to be a writing historian for the government.

The questionnaire is a particularly significant measuring tool used by personnel specialists to evaluate applications. Be sure to answer all questions specifically and indicate what part of your education or experience shows that you have this skill or ability. Do not be too shy or too humble, but make clear why you think you have the requisite preparation in this specific area for the position. Also, do not be too literal. You might not ever have formally supervised the work of another author, but you

might have served as a teaching assistant with grading responsibilities that might equate at some level to the desired experience.

Once you have attached all of the relevant data to the announcement and hit the submit button, be prepared to wait. The applications first go to a civilian personnel center, which rates them and sends the best qualified to the hiring agency for interviews and selection. Selectees will first be notified by the personnel office with a tentative job offer. After the necessary paperwork has been completed, the personnel office will extend a final job offer.

By law, the hiring agency must give preference to veterans over non-veterans applying from outside the federal government. The rules are too complex to summarize here. If you are a veteran, that might earn you a higher place on the referral list. If not, do not be discouraged. Given the system, is it even worth your time to apply for positions in the field of history, especially if one is not a veteran? Yes! Each hiring action is different. It may be that your credentials are rated higher than those of any veteran applicant or that no qualified veteran will apply for the particular position in which you are interested. In addition, you should look at other positions that might not be exactly what you are seeking but will be the first step in your career as a historian in the federal government. The next time you apply for a vacancy, you will be considered a "status" candidate, and the selecting agency could hire you without regard to veteran's preference.

In sum, despite constant revisions to federal personnel systems, navigation of the federal hiring process remains difficult for applicants, their advisers, and the selecting officials. But it can be done! Read the position announcement carefully, use the right words that clearly describe your skills for that position, and remain patient and persistent, and the odds are great that a rewarding and challenging career as a federal historian will be within reach.