

Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of History (2016)

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The study of history is at the heart of liberal learning and lives at the foundation of education in a democracy. Attracting, preparing, retaining, and continuing to develop well-educated and effective teachers of history at all levels is of critical interest to the American Historical Association and the historical profession that it represents. The AHA, therefore, is committed to increasing the numbers of skilled and highly qualified history teachers by ensuring that beginning teachers have a deep understanding of history, its content and methods, and the knowledge and skills needed to teach history to students in meaningful ways. Further, the organization recognizes the value in helping to provide ongoing professional improvement of practicing history teachers (K–16) and contributing to a richer knowledge base for history teaching.

For these reasons the AHA advocates:

- I. Attracting People to History Teaching.** Historians play a potentially critical, though too rarely exercised, role in promoting teaching as a profession for history majors. Previously, some professors exclusively promoted the virtues of research in history and were dismissive of strong history students considering a K–12 teaching career. This is counterproductive. Raising the quality of precollegiate history instruction *begins* with recruiting better teachers, and history departments can be far more active in that enterprise by developing a strategy or program to encourage history majors to consider teaching as a profession.
- II. Preparing Teachers' Content Knowledge in History and Related Disciplines.** Robust knowledge of history and its disciplinary practices are essential and necessary characteristics for effective history teachers. At minimum, K–12 teachers of history or social studies should have majored in history, including relevant national, transnational, and global courses, and have substantive experience framing historical problems, analyzing historical evidence and sources, and using their analysis of evidence to construct historical narratives, explanations, and/or arguments. In short, not only must teachers develop a deep understanding of national and global history, but they must also become familiar with the ways historians read, write, and think, and with the various features of historical literacy. They should also be conversant in the methodologies and concepts that other disciplines use to study the human condition.
- III. Preparing Teachers to Teach History to Students.** Knowledge of history is necessary but is only part of the preparation for becoming an effective history teacher. Helping students deepen their historical understanding and learn how to think like historians requires teachers to (1) understand the multiple ways diverse students learn history and learn in general, (2) acquire and employ a repertoire of pedagogically sound instructional strategies to develop students' historical understanding, (3) develop a familiarity with effective, disciplinary-specific resources and methods of assessment, and (4) practice these in classrooms under the guidance of skilled teachers of history

and/or historians. In addition to targeted coursework to ensure prospective teachers learn the above, an effective program also requires *formal* and *consistent* collaboration among history departments, historians, education departments, teacher educators, and teachers in K–12 schools to provide prospective history teachers with opportunities for structured and reflective practice.

- IV. Providing Professional Development to Practicing Teachers.** Like all professional pursuits, teaching history demands continual renewal and growth, and departments of history can play a major role in furthering teachers' knowledge and skills. Over the past 15 years, largely through federal and related grants, the AHA and other professional organizations have increased the work they have done with teachers in schools through workshops, graduate courses targeted to practicing teachers, and collaborations with education departments, public history institutions, and museums. Continuing these efforts is a key feature in retaining good teachers and improving instruction.
- V. Preparing Future Faculty.** K–12 teachers of history not only learn history in university history classes, but they learn *how* to teach history from the ways they are taught in those courses. Thus prospective teachers should have opportunities to interact with their subject matter in ways that reflect the elements of disciplinary practice, such as framing historical problems; analyzing sources and evidence; developing narratives, explanations, and arguments; and evaluating others' historical arguments. Departments of history, therefore, must help future faculty understand the diverse ways students learn history, acquire and employ a repertoire of instructional strategies to develop students' historical understanding and thinking, and develop a familiarity with effective, disciplinary-specific resources and methods of assessment. In some instances, this may mean that department faculty will need support in acquiring an understanding of these pedagogical issues.
- VI. Contributing to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.** Encouraging and expanding the systematic study of teaching and learning history is also a key feature of improving teacher preparation. Programs committed to the effective preparation of history teachers should study and then share the results of their curricular and pedagogical models and encourage their graduates to do the same.