

Careers for Historians: Educators

By Beth Crist

You know basically what history teachers do: they teach classes, give tests, grade papers, hold meetings with parents, and have long summer vacations. But there's more to teaching. It takes planning, knowledge, practice, and patience. It's a great way to share your love for history, though. So if teaching appeals to you and you're up for the challenge, read on to find out more.

As a student, you see much of a teacher's job. However, you don't see what teachers do after school, on weekends, and during the summer. They make lesson plans, create and copy handouts and tests, choose what students will read, attend school meetings, and research teaching methods and history topics. Many teachers lead after-school programs. Teachers must also take courses every year to stay certified. This work takes a lot of time and effort, especially during the school year but also during the summer.

History teachers in North Carolina's middle schools teach European, African, Asian, and North Carolina history. High school history teachers cover world and United States history, economics, government, geography, world cultures, and sociology. Often high school teachers must teach more than one of these subjects.

College history professors have many of the same duties as schoolteachers. In addition to teaching, many professors conduct research and publish their findings in books or scholarly journals. Some professors act as advisers to students majoring in history.

But not all history educators teach. Some educators work in history museums and historic sites, developing programs and materials—like this article—for students and adults. Others serve as school administrators or write textbooks and create educational software and Web sites. Some host seminars and workshops for educators.

History teachers must have a bachelor's degree in history education; some have master's degrees in history or education. All teachers must be certified to teach in their state. Colleges and universities usually require that history professors have a Ph.D. in history. Educational requirements vary for history educators working in other fields, but at least a bachelor's degree in history is generally required. The job outlook for history educators, especially for schoolteachers, is good. If you are up to the challenge, teaching offers a rewarding way to share your love of history.

To learn more:

- Check out the following Web sites:

So You Want to Be a Teacher

<http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-925/want.htm>

Occupational Outlook Handbook: Teachers—Postsecondary

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos066.htm>

National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse: A High School Student

<http://www.recruitingteachers.org/channels/clearinghouse/audience/middlehigh/default.htm>

Future Educators of America

<http://www.pdkintl.org/fea/feahome.htm>

- Arrange an interview with a history teacher and/or a history professor. Come prepared with a list of questions: What do you do on a typical day? What subjects or courses do you teach? What is your favorite part of the job? How and when did you decide to become a teacher? What is your educational background? At what schools have you taught?

Try it out:

- Arrange to tutor a younger family member or a friend in history. Find out what topic he or she is studying and create a lesson plan. Present the lesson and answer questions. Assign homework if you like. Arrange a second tutoring session about a week later. In the meantime, grade the homework and prepare a short quiz. At the second session, return your student's homework and have him or her take the quiz. Go over the quiz with your student and answer questions. Then ask your student to grade you as a tutor.

Interview with Barbara Snowden

Barbara Snowden, a teacher since 1967, teaches United States history and advanced placement United States history at Currituck County High School. She also teaches a course on the history of Currituck County at College of the Albemarle. In addition to her professional duties, Snowden is adviser of the Couratucke Junior Historians (she has sponsored a THJHA club since 1977) and Currituck County's official historian.

Beth Crist: What is your educational background?

Barbara Snowden: I have a bachelor of science degree in history from Mars

Hill College, and a master of arts education degree and a certificate of advanced study in history from East Carolina University. I have done graduate work at Wake Forest University, the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and the University of Connecticut. I am also certified to teach gifted education.

BC: When did you become interested in teaching?

BS: I have always liked history, and it was the subject that I did best in. I have had some good history teachers who have made it fun and interesting. Back when I started teaching, female history majors were rare. At Mars Hill, out of thirty or more history majors there were only four or five females. As a female history major, it was just assumed I would teach. Now there are so many jobs in the history field.

BC: Have you had any other history-related jobs?

BS: I have not had any other paid jobs, but I have done history-related volunteer work. For five years I ran tours of a historic site, the Whalehead Club, on the Outer Banks. I did the research, wrote the script, and scheduled the tour guides for the tour. I helped do the research on the Currituck County courthouse and have written reports for the state historic register. I have researched and written articles on history for magazines. I have also spoken to various groups on my research.

BC: What do you do at work on a typical day?

BS: I teach three classes a day, which require preparation. I usually have one conference or meeting a day. Right now I am working on an article about boats. There is a lot of reading that goes with teaching. I find I spend a lot of time at the copier. I believe added material not from the textbook makes a class more interesting. I attend at least one night meeting a week in my small community as well.

BC: What do you like best about your job?

BS: I love the study of history. There is no way one person can know all there is to know. I like the way history fits together, the way it applies to today, and finally just how interesting the study of history is. I also like my students, especially the ones who get my puns. There is a special light that goes off in a student's eyes when they get it.

BC: What advice do you have for students who are interested in becoming teachers?

BS: Learn your subject. Students are always testing you, and they know the teachers who know what they are talking about. Keep on learning. Teachers must

be learners for life. Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself.

BC: How do your roles as THJHA adviser and Currituck County's official historian benefit you as an educator?

BS: Being Currituck County historian brings many different things into the classroom. The students find it remarkable that I am sometimes quoted in the paper or show up on local television or that people will actually pay to listen to me talk about history. The real advantage is the information that it allows me to bring into my lessons. Here are three examples from the first semester: When talking about the end of the American Revolution, I discussed Cornwallis's run for Yorktown. I then read to my students a letter from George Washington to a Major Phillips, telling him to slow Cornwallis down. Major Phillips's instructions were to make a stand at Tulls Creek, a local bridge. But we lost our place in the textbooks when Cornwallis went further to the west. When discussing slavery, I read them a letter to the Currituck slave patrol, telling them how many lashes to give any black found off his owner's place. This brings slavery alive to them. Finally, when discussing the Underground Railroad, I ask them the closest station to us. After many answers all over the place, I tell them of the activity in the Dismal Swamp, which is in our county. The quote "all politics are local" can be changed to "all history is local." If students can relate to what happened locally and see that as part of the big national picture, it is more real to them.

Working with my junior historian members is a way to train them in how to do history, not just read it. We have interviewed many people and published the interviews in a booklet. This allowed the students not only the chance to interview but also to work on their writing skills. We are working on a video of the Currituck County courthouse now. This is a new type of project for me, and I am learning a lot from the students. When I had my Currituck history class, I used the junior historian material, especially the magazine.