



OSAMA SIDDIQUI

What is your current position?

Last year, I decided to return to school for graduate study. I am currently a second-year PhD student in the History department at Cornell University, where my research field is the history of the British Empire in South Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

What History program did you take at Western? What year did you graduate?

I took the Honours Specialization in History, and graduated from Western in 2009, along with an honours business degree from the Richard Ivey School of Business.

How did your History degree prepare you for your current position?

After graduation, I went for further study at the University of Cambridge, and then returned to Toronto to work for the Ontario Public Service in the field of government communications.

My History degree has been immensely useful in both my academic and non-academic careers. Previously as a public service employee, and now as a PhD student, I have constantly used skills that I developed as a history student at Western.

In the public service, my role often involved creating and implementing strategies to communicate government policies to the public. This consisted of collecting and analyzing data and information from a variety of sources, and then communicating it clearly and persuasively to different audiences. As a history graduate, I felt well-equipped to do this work because, in broad terms, it was similar to the process of writing a research essay, in which one is also collecting information from different sources, analyzing it, and then constructing an argument.

As a PhD student, I rely on my history degree from Western even more, both in terms of course content and skills. The wide range of history classes I took at Western all introduced me to key historical texts, narratives, and ideas that I draw upon constantly as a graduate student. More importantly, the history degree taught me skills that I'm finding incredibly useful in my graduate work. Whether it is analyzing primary sources or writing historiographical essays, I feel that the program has prepared me well to undertake demanding graduate-level work.

What would you tell an incoming History student?

I would tell current and prospective students that a degree in history will be useful regardless of whether you choose an academic or a non-academic career. If you are interested in an academic career or further study, you should feel confident in knowing that Western prepares you to perform well in the most competitive graduate and professional programs worldwide. On the other hand, if you are considering non-academic careers, the history degree will help you to develop key skills in which employers from a variety of sectors are interested.

But, setting aside the question of career utility, I also want to suggest that studying history can help us to become better readers, more informed citizens, and more critical consumers of ideas. A history education helps to develop a critical and creative imagination. In an age in which we are constantly bombarded with information, the skills we learn as history students teach us to read more carefully and evaluate ideas more critically. In this way, studying history can have lasting impact on one's personal development.

Any other thoughts or comments?

I would like to thank the department for an incredibly rich learning experience throughout my time there. I hope history students at Western know that they have access to a great department with wonderful faculty and resources, which they should take advantage of!