

*Offprint From*

# **Preservation Education & Research**

Volume Two, 2009



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ISSN 1946-5904

# The Status of Professional Career Openings in Historic Preservation in the United States

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This study of professional career openings in the field of historic preservation in the United States is designed to serve the interests of current and prospective students, preservation educators, employment counselors, and career advisors, as well as currently employed preservation professionals, employers, and policymakers.

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION CAREERS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For readers who are new to this topic, this section provides a short history of historic preservation to place this study in a historical context and to identify how the needs of the practice have evolved in the United States and beyond.

Before the 1950s, the endeavor that is now called historic preservation in the United States (and more appropriately called heritage conservation and architectural conservation elsewhere in the world) (Stubbs 2009) was generally more an avocation than a profession. With few exceptions, early preservationists were typically volunteers advocating for the protection of notable historic buildings as a civic service within a context of commemoration and aesthetic connoisseurship, with the objects of their attention identified by age, style, and associations with important historical figures or events. Often a leisure activity of more wealthy and socially prominent women and men, the pursuit was sometimes steeped in elitism, patriotism, antiquarianism, and patrimonial veneration. The approach was philosophically similar to the fine-art collecting of the time, based on a process of discovery, authentication, acquisition and “restoration”

to a “historic” appearance (often based on conjectural assumptions rather than on hard evidence) (Hosmer 1981).

Work on the buildings was typically carried out by contractors and trades workers, occasionally with the involvement of architects. Recognition was achieved through commemorative markers and/or public exhibition. Examples of this include: the saving of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1813; the restoration of Mount Vernon, President George Washington’s home in Virginia, by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, chartered in 1858 (Lea 2003); the founding of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1910 and the establishment of such quasi-preserved and recreated heritage sites as Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1926; Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, in 1929; and the Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont, in 1947 (Hosmer 1981).

The National Park Service and many state and local groups also have followed this approach and today administer a broad range of publicly accessible historic sites, with volunteers, docents, and interns providing much of the staffing. Some of the institutions that now maintain such collected and commemorative historic sites use graduates from academic programs in historic preservation, history, or museum studies as administrative employees or as consultants to plan and to manage building conservation and sites.

Charitable organizations have long played important roles in broad-based efforts on behalf of historic preservation and heritage conservation in North America and beyond. Examples include the National Trust for Historic Preservation, chartered by

the United States Congress as a nonprofit organization in 1949, and the many local, statewide, and regional nonprofit preservation advocacy organizations. Although many of these organizations were formed to acquire and preserve specific historic buildings or sites, most have now broadened their mandates to publicly advocate for historic preservation and heritage conservation by providing technical assistance and public education, by participating in community planning and regulatory reviews, and by offering policy advice to governmental entities. Some also work with property owners and businesses to help revitalize downtowns and communities. Many partner with donors or governmental agencies to offer grant programs or revolving loans. Others are working on rural preservation issues, including barn preservation, sprawl, and farmland protection. Nearly every state in the United States and most major cities have non-governmental preservation advocacy organizations with professional staff. Although volunteers typically play important roles, many of these nonprofit preservation organizations have paid executive directors, program directors, fundraisers, and field representatives who hold academic degrees in historic preservation or related fields.

The involvement of governmental bureaucracies in heritage protection and historic preservation started with mandates to acquire and protect specific natural areas and historic sites following the collection and commemoration model discussed above. In the United States, these functions were first handled on a limited basis by such public entities as the National Park Service, founded in 1916. Over the ensuing decades, governmental preservation responsibilities have grown to include identification and recordation of significant historic resources, protection of these resources through laws and regulatory review, and public education and incentives for the restoration or rehabilitation of historic properties (Lea 2003). As the needs of historic preservation and heritage conservation have expanded beyond the disciplines of history, architecture, and archaeology, graduates of historic preservation programs and related academic fields are being hired for a broad range of governmental positions in historic preservation, especially as professional staff

at state historic preservation offices, with state and federal transportation agencies, and with municipal planning offices.

Although professionals from a variety of disciplines including history, architectural history, architecture, and planning had been involved with the field now recognized as historic preservation, the development of this field as a specific profession within governmental service advanced in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, when it became widely understood that much of the surviving evidence of its cultural heritage was at risk. This awakening came in response to the huge urban renewal and highway construction projects underway across the country, which were altering landscapes, demolishing significant heritage landmarks and historic neighborhoods, and destroying the archaeological evidence of earlier cultures. To help save and protect these natural, historic, and cultural resources, it was recognized that along with the passage of new environmental protection laws and regulations, a corps of well-trained historic preservation professionals would be required to fill the scholarly, technical, and regulatory needs of new governmental agencies.

The National Historic Preservation Act, passed by Congress in 1966 and as amended, defined historic preservation planning and review roles for federal, state, and local governments and the Indian tribes. The act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to expand and maintain the National Register of Historic Places (administered by the National Park Service) and established State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs). It also established the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) as an independent federal agency authorized to advise the president and Congress on historic preservation matters. Section 106 of the act requires heads of all federal agencies and departments (including military branches) to take into account the effects that all federal or federally assisted undertakings may have on prehistoric and historic resources that are included, or are eligible for inclusion, in the National Register of Historic Places, and to provide the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation with reasonable opportunities to offer comments (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2009).

In 1976, Congress also passed the federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program to promote economic development in communities and to protect historic resources (Fowler 2003). To meet tax certification requirements, these rehabilitation tax-credit projects are reviewed by state historic preservation offices and the National Park Service. Historic preservation professionals generally assist developers with the planning for these projects to ensure compliance with federal preservation standards. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, this historic program has generated over \$45 billion of preservation activity. In 2007, projects approved through this program helped the national economy by creating more than forty thousand jobs overall (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2008).

The founding of the Association for Preservation Technology (APT) in 1968 by preservationists from Canada and the United States marked a significant step in the development of the profession of historic preservation and heritage conservation, especially due to APT's multidisciplinary, international approach to addressing the field's technical and philosophical needs. Although APT's membership reflects professionals from a wide range of disciplines, including historic preservation, heritage conservation, architecture, and engineering, APT does not review or certify the professional qualifications of its members as a professional association (Waite 1998).

Coinciding with the growth of professional positions in historic preservation in the public sector, many nonprofit organizations were founded during the 1960s and 1970s on the local, state, and national levels to advocate for the preservation of endangered historic properties. The missions of many of these organizations soon grew to encourage the economic revitalization of traditional community centers and the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods. The private sector also recognized the need for trained professional historic preservationists to provide technical expertise to property owners, developers, architects, engineers, and contractors, as well as to help guide projects through the regulatory review process.

During the 1960s and 1970s, several universities responded by developing courses and graduate-degree programs in historic preservation designed to prepare students for professional historic preservation careers in government service, nonprofit organizations, and in the private sector. The National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) was established in 1979 as a nonprofit educational corporation committed to the development of historic preservation education programs in the United States and elsewhere. It established criteria for the review and certification of degree-granting graduate and undergraduate programs in historic preservation (National Council for Preservation Education 2007) and now has more than fifty certified members.

In 1983, the National Park Service (1983) published the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualification standards in historic preservation and archaeology, codified in federal regulations under 36 CFR Part 61. These standards "define minimum education and experience required to perform identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities" with five areas of professional qualifications: history, archaeology, architectural history, architecture, and historic architecture. In the architectural history category of these professional standards, graduate and undergraduate degrees in historic preservation, architectural history, art history, or a "closely related field" with "coursework in American architectural history" are included as acceptable academic qualifications. In 1997, the National Park Service (2008) proposed revisions to these standards that would give clearer recognition to historic preservation as one of the qualifying disciplines.

As responsibilities of professionals in the historic preservation field have evolved over the past several decades, academic degree programs in historic preservation have updated their curriculums and course content to provide their students with the knowledge and skills suited to these new professional responsibilities. Although preservation educators have found support and program planning assistance from the National Council for Preservation Education, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the

Association for Preservation Technology, the National Park Service, state historic preservation offices, and other preservation organizations, routine studies of preservation job announcements also provide insights into changing needs in the field.

The recent advent of digital communications and new documentation methods has had a profound impact on professional historic preservation practice and instruction. The potential for using the internet was recognized with the establishment of the PreserveNet website in 1994 by Cornell University's graduate program in historic preservation planning with support from the National Council for Preservation Education (PreserveNet 2009). The National Council for Preservation Education (2009) also has published its *NCPE Guide to Academic Programs in Historic Preservation* on the web since 2000.

Through the past several decades, the range of subjects and interests in historic preservation has been broadened to include an expanding appreciation of the cultural heritage embodied in vernacular buildings and neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the knowledge and skills required to meet the needs for professional services in this increasingly complex field have grown. For example, the practice of historic preservation has evolved to include community planning functions with designated historic sites and districts being surveyed and mapped for zoning and regulatory overview. To help students prepare for careers in these areas, some academic historic preservation programs are based in geography or planning. With advances in digital technologies, geographic information systems (GIS) have become important tools for preservation.

As the number of buildings considered historic and eligible for inclusion in resource surveys increases (especially as those built during the period of rapid economic growth of the mid-twentieth century meet a fifty-year threshold of eligibility), so, too, have there been increasing needs for historic preservation professionals with expertise in this area.

As the field moves into a more multidisciplinary phase to encompass the broad concept of conserving the environment, even climate change is becoming an important factor. With many historic properties located in areas prone to floods and storm damage, there has

been a demand for professional historic preservationists in emergency management positions. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for example, several recent graduates of historic preservation programs were employed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Mississippi and elsewhere around the United States. So too, is there an added interest in "green" rehabilitation and an increasing demand for professionals with expertise in planning sustainable historic preservation strategies using effective environmentally friendly materials and techniques for building-insulation systems, maintenance, and rehabilitation (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009).

Although fee-based contracted services provided by academic institutions have long met some scholarship and public-service needs in the field, informal employment surveys taken since the 1990s suggest an increasing amount of the research and professional work associated with the regulatory review of historic and archaeological resources in the United States is being handled through contracts with commercial consulting firms. When combined with the regulatory protection of historic and archaeological resources at federal, state, and local levels, this process is often described as cultural resource management (CRM). The bulk of this CRM work in the United States is transportation-related, although environmental impacts for such government-licensed activities as subsidized housing projects, the installation of cellular telephone antennas, and electrical generation and distribution systems, including wind and hydropowered sites, may also be subject to regulatory review. Professionals with graduate degrees in historic preservation, archaeology, and related fields are often sought for positions with these firms. Although larger firms may be expanding their share of the government contracting market, self-employed freelance consultants or small business partnerships also handle much of this work in some regions.

Historic preservation professionals also work with developers, architects, or engineers to assist with planning building rehabilitation projects, especially to take advantage of federal investment tax-credit

incentives, grants, and other subsidies. These consultants may provide technical assistance for preservation projects that require adherence to federal historic preservation standards.

Historic preservation consultants are also hired by property owners, developers, museums, historic sites, and educational and religious institutions to assist with preservation planning by conducting condition assessments, diagnosing deterioration problems, analyzing historic mortars and finishes, and developing maintenance plans and historic structures reports.

With an expanding range of knowledge and skills required to identify and respond to the complex range of today's historic preservation and heritage conservation needs, it is clear that multidisciplinary approaches to historic preservation education have become increasingly important as students prepare for future career opportunities.

## OBJECTIVES

For students and others considering or pursuing professional careers in historic preservation, it is hoped that this study will serve as a resource for identifying and evaluating potential career opportunities and for comparing courses and program curriculums at institutions that offer academic degrees in historic preservation and related fields. For educators and academic administrators, this information is intended to assist with the planning and review of courses and curriculums in historic preservation and related fields at degree-granting academic institutions. These findings are also offered with the hope of assisting educators who advise students. For employers hiring officials and administrators in the field of historic preservation, this study is intended to assist with the development of position descriptions and the drafting of job announcements, as well as planning for future staffing. Also, it is hoped that this information will be useful to historic preservation advocates and to the public servants responsible for ensuring that standards for professional qualifications in the historic preservation field reflect the current needs, knowledge, and skills required and that these findings

will encourage continued discussions about the status of historic preservation as a professional discipline in the United States.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION CAREER OPENINGS STUDY

This study is based on an informal sample of online job announcements posted during the late summer and fall of 2008. The contents of ninety-one job announcements posted on behalf of prospective historic preservation employers on several sites on the internet were analyzed using keywords to identify employment sectors, position types, desired academic qualifications (including majors and degrees), skills requirements, job responsibilities, experience desired, salaries offered, and geographical region. The pool was drawn from historic preservation job-opening descriptions posted between July 18 and October 17, 2008. Sources of these included *PreserveNet*,<sup>1</sup> a joint web-based service of Cornell University and the National Council for Preservation Education; *MySpace* (2008), a popular commercial website; and the American Institute of Architects *AIA Career Center* website.<sup>2</sup>

To generate a profile of what employers were seeking, the job announcements were reviewed to answer the following questions:

1. Is the employer a business, a government office, a nonprofit organization, or an academic institution?
2. What academic degrees are desired?
3. What academic majors are desired?
4. What are the responsibilities of the position?
5. What skills and knowledge are desired?
6. At least how many years prior experience?
7. What salaries are offered?
8. What types of job titles describe the position openings?
9. Where were the jobs in this study located?

The texts of the job announcements were read, and answers to these questions were recorded in spreadsheets according to keyword criteria. The results were then tallied and analyzed.

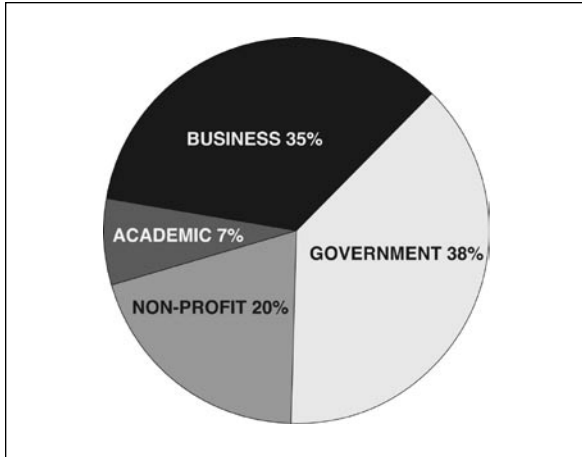


Fig. 1. Is the employer a business, a government office, a non-profit organization, or an academic institution? (All illustrations by author).

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION JOB STUDY FINDINGS

As seen in Fig. 1, at 38 percent, the highest proportion of professional historic preservation positions in this study were for government service. Of those remaining, 35 percent were with businesses, 20 percent were with nonprofit organizations, and 7 percent were from academic institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 86 percent of the job postings desired academic degrees. Of these, as is shown in Fig. 2, 33 percent mentioned either a master's or bachelor's degree. Most of these preferred a graduate degree, but would consider candidates with undergraduate degrees who had several years of preservation-related job experience. Thirty-two percent of the employers would consider only candidates with master's degrees. Thirty-one percent listed an undergraduate bachelor's degree as a sufficient academic qualification. Four percent sought candidates with either a Ph.D degree or a terminal master's degree, such as in architecture or historic preservation.

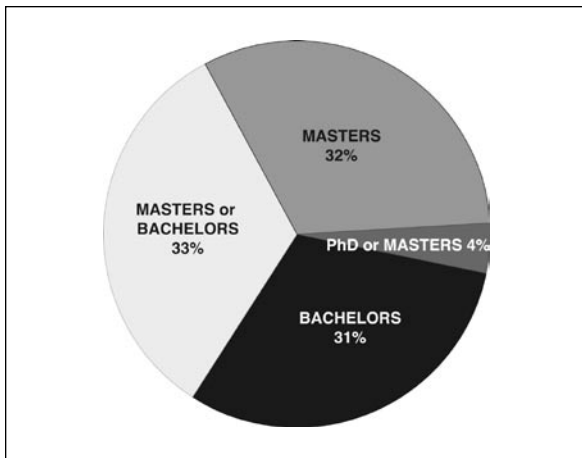


Fig. 2. What academic degrees are desired?

Seventy-eight percent of the postings for historic preservation positions in this study listed desired degree majors. Of these, historic preservation was mentioned by 62 percent of the prospective employers, as is shown in Fig. 3. Fifty-one percent of these announcements listed "or related fields," wording that matches the text of the federal professional qualification standards in historic preservation and archaeology discussed above.

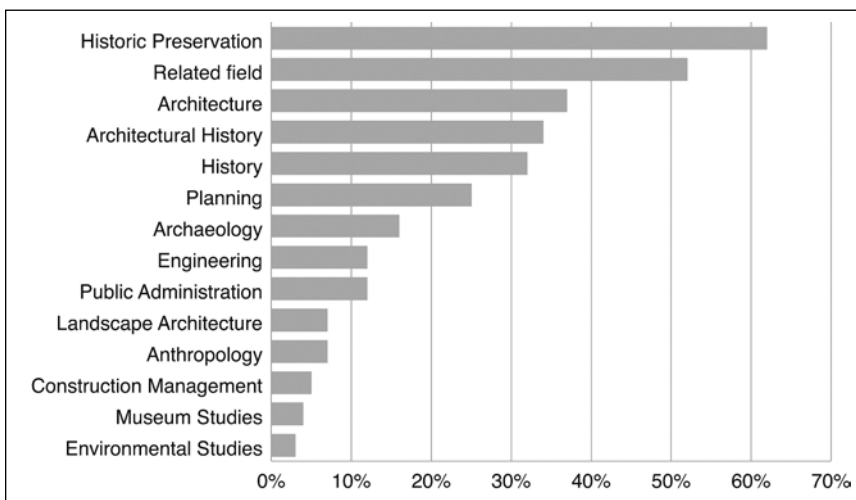


Fig. 3. What academic degree majors are desired?

Table 1. Academic majors mentioned in job announcements by economic sectors

<b>Economic Sector</b>	<b>Historic Preservation</b>	<b>Architectural History</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>Architecture</b>	<b>Planning</b>
Business	48%	45%	28%	21%	14%
Government	55%	35%	32%	42%	32%
Non-profit	69%	15%	31%	54%	23%
Academic	67%	0%	17%	50%	17%

A major in architecture was listed in 37 percent, architectural history in 34 percent, and history in 32 percent of these postings. Degree majors in planning followed at 25 percent. Also listed were degrees in archaeology at 16 percent, engineering at 12 percent, and public administration at 9 percent. Landscape architecture and anthropology majors were tied at 7 percent. Degrees in construction management, museum studies, and environmental studies were mentioned in 5, 4, and 3 percent of these job announcements, respectively.

The study also provides a profile of what degrees are being sought according to their economic sectors (Table 1). Many of the preservation job announcements included in this study in the business sector were with cultural resource management (CRM) consulting firms. Of the top five preferred degree majors mentioned by business employers, historic preservation and architectural history were sought nearly equally, followed by history, architecture, and planning.<sup>4</sup>

The historic preservation degree also led for government historic preservation job postings, followed by architecture and architectural history, with those in history and planning tied. Historic preservation was mentioned most often by nonprofit organizations, followed by degrees in architecture, history, planning and architectural history.

In the academic sector, historic preservation and architecture were mentioned most frequently, followed by history and planning, but these results may be skewed by the very small sample size and the choice of job advertisement venues that are intended mainly for historic preservation.

Historic preservation job descriptions were analyzed for keywords that would identify the responsibilities each position would entail. As is shown in Fig. 4, 40 percent of the announcements specified the production of professional reports. About a third included conducting reviews, and a third involved doing cultural resource management surveys. Twenty-nine percent required conducting

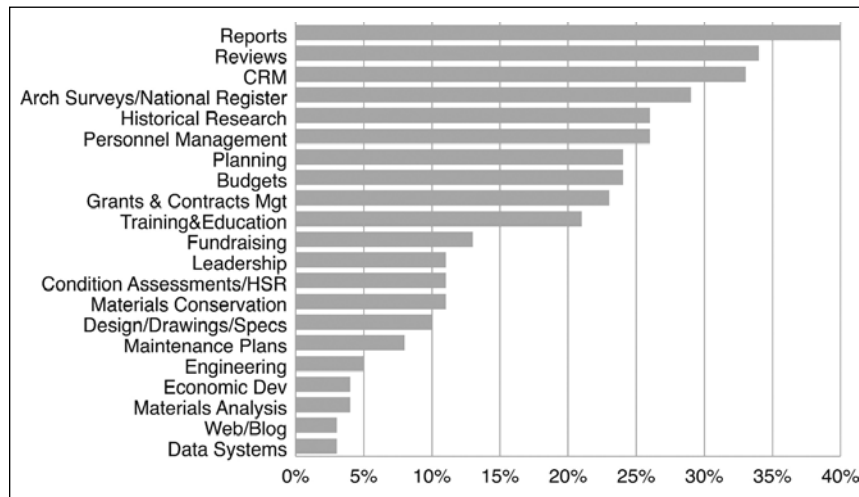


Fig. 4. What are the responsibilities of the positions?

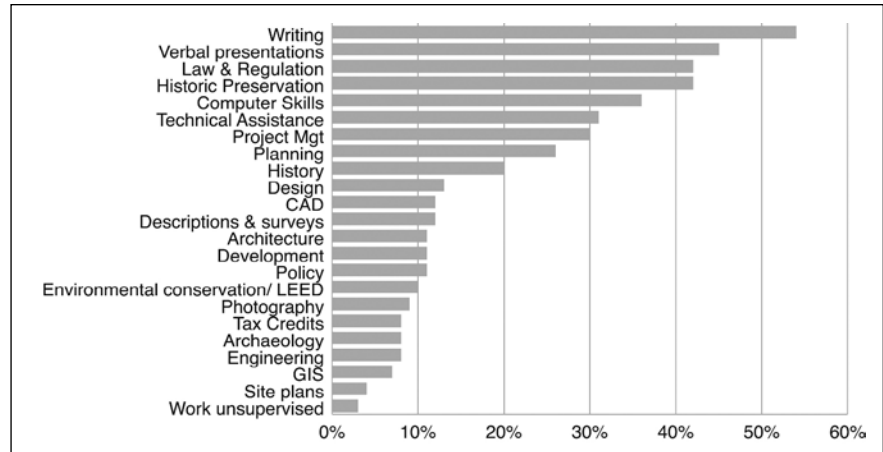


Fig. 5. What skills and knowledge are desired?

architectural surveys to determine National Register eligibility. About a quarter of the positions involved personnel management, budgets, planning, and grant and contract management. Training and educational responsibilities were included in about 21 percent of the jobs.

Thirteen percent of the jobs in the study involved fundraising, but of the eighteen announcements from nonprofit organizations, more than 55 percent mentioned fundraising. Eleven percent of the postings mentioned leadership responsibilities. Condition assessments and materials conservation were mentioned in about 11 percent of the position openings, and engineering responsibilities in 5 percent. Again this may reflect the venues selected for this study.

The 4 percent of the announcements mentioning economic development were mainly for positions with downtown development or Main Street revitalization groups. Also, 4 percent mentioned conducting materials analysis. Of the job announcements that listed maintenance plans, most also included condition surveys and fundraising. Several postings listed website and database maintenance, as many employers are now seeking employees with computer skills. Creating and maintaining web sites and blogs was mentioned in a few postings.

The historic preservation job announcements were also analyzed to determine what types of professional skills and knowledge are being sought by employers. As is shown in Fig. 5, writing and verbal skills led the list, followed by knowledge of historic preservation

laws and regulations and of historic preservation in general. Computer skills and knowledge of digital technologies ranked next. Of those jobs requesting skills with specific computer programs, the following applications were mentioned: Word (word processing), Excel (spreadsheets), PowerPoint (presentations), Access (database), CAD, and GIS.

About a third of preservation employers in the study were seeking those with skills in technical assistance or project management. Planning skills were mentioned in about a quarter of the postings, as were skills in doing historical research. The remaining skills being sought reflected the needs of specific jobs, as well as other general professional skills.

As shown in Fig. 6, most of the job announcements that required experience listed between two and five years of previous preservation-related work; three of the openings were clearly entry-level slots. Some employers would consider preservation-related academic studies as experience. Five of the employers were seeking senior staff with from eight to fifteen years experience. These openings were for state historic preservation officers, executive directors, and other top-level administrative positions.

The range of salaries closely mirrored the levels of experience. As the graph in Fig. 7 shows, of those announcements that mentioned salaries (mainly for government positions), most of the historic preservation job postings offered \$40,000 to \$60,000, with some entry-level positions in the \$30,000 range and with a few senior positions paying above \$100,000 annually.

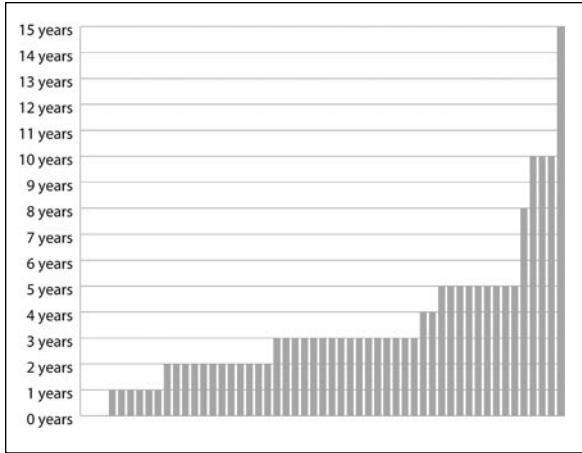


Fig. 6. At least how many years prior experience?

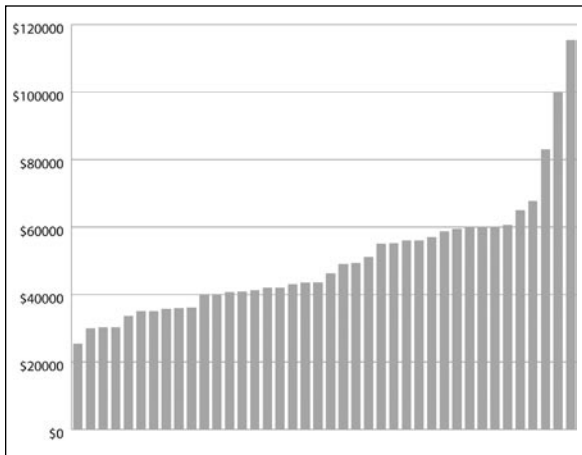


Fig. 7. What salaries are offered?

Job titles in the study pool were divided into four categories (Fig. 8), according to whether the title most closely identified a professional qualification, a management role, a work responsibility, or a faculty position. About 40 percent of the job openings were for positions with titles that identified the employee’s academic degree or professional license or certification. These positions were nearly evenly divided between government and consulting firms. Just one job with a professional title was offered by a nonprofit organization. The top two professional titles were planner and architectural historian. These accounted for 12 and 10 percent, respectively, of the 91 openings in the study pool. Ninety percent of the planner positions were with government offices. All of the architectural historian positions were with consulting firms. The professional job titles of architect

and engineer followed at 4 percent each. There were also openings for historian and archaeologist job titles.<sup>5</sup>

About 33 percent of the job titles described a management or supervisory role, such as preservation officer, director, manager, or coordinator. In this group, almost half were with nonprofit organizations; the others were nearly evenly divided between consulting firms and government offices. One position for a campus preservation officer was being sought by a university.

About 22 percent of the job titles described responsibilities rather than a supervisory role or a professional qualification. Many of these were for lower- or entry-level openings, such as specialist, consultant, or advocate. More than half were with government offices, a third with businesses, and the remaining with

nonprofit organizations. Faculty positions accounted for about 4 percent of the historic preservation job openings, ranging from assistant to full professor.

The job openings included in this study pool were distributed across the continental United States, coming from twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia. Fig. 9 shows about 34 percent of the openings were in the Northeast, 31 percent in the Southeast, 15 percent in the Central South, 15 percent in the Midwest and Plains, 13 percent in the Mountain region, and about 7 percent in the Pacific states.

**THE STATUS OF PROFESSIONAL CAREER OPENINGS IN 2008**

This study of historic preservation job announcements shows a need for employees who have strong professional abilities and technical skills, preferably with graduate degrees with majors primarily in historic preservation or closely related fields, such as architectural history, history, architecture, or planning.

The expanding range of knowledge and skills required to identify and to respond to the complex range of today's heritage conservation needs is reflected in this study. It shows that in addition to historic preservation generalists, some historic preservation employers are also seeking candidates with such specific professional qualifications as certification in professional planning associations or licenses in architecture or engineering. Salary levels closely correspond to years of professional experience. Also, historic preservation job openings are broadly distributed across the United States.

With recent global financial uncertainties and the changing political landscape, it is hoped that these findings will provide a yardstick from which future trends may be measured, especially as new opportunities may develop in a historic preservation field that fosters economic development, environmental conservation,

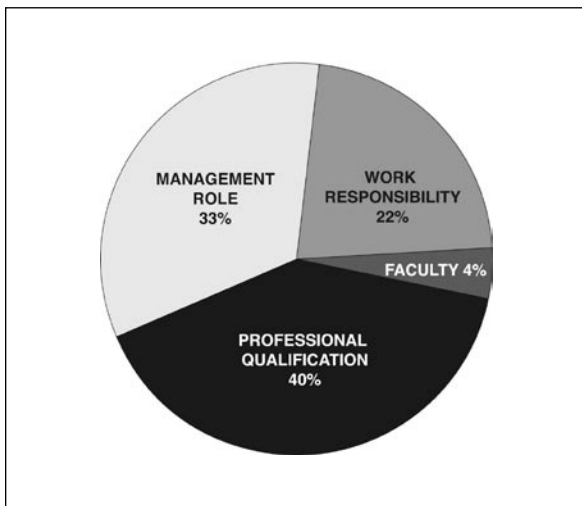


Fig. 8. What types of job titles describe the position openings?

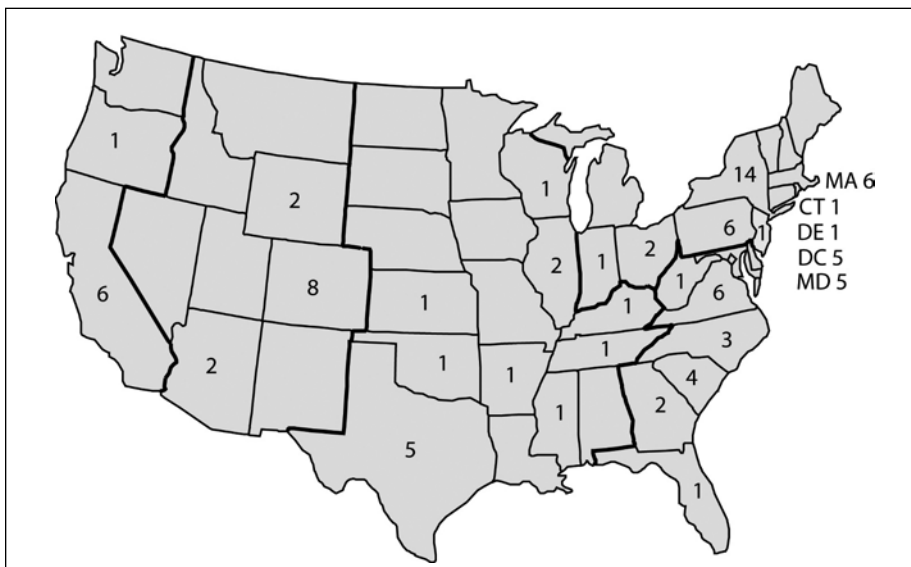


Fig. 9. Geographical distribution of historic preservation job openings in the study.

and sustainable rehabilitation strategies. It is further hoped that this study will provide guidance to those considering careers in historic preservation and offer a useful framework for educators advising their students and reviewing and updating courses and curriculums in historic preservation and related academic fields.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. A search of the internet with the Google search engine using the keywords "historic preservation jobs" listed PreserveNet as the top search hit at the following web address: <http://www.preservenet.cornell.edu/employ/index.cfm>. It should be noted that links to other sites with historic preservation job listings are included on the PreserveNet website.
2. The *PreserveNet* web site was accessed for this study during July to September 2008 period. No filtering was necessary for the listings as all the posted announcements were intended for historic preservation jobs and thus all postings were included in the study pool. To broaden the coverage of this study, *MySpace* and *AIA Career Center* job boards were selected from the top tier of Internet search results generated by a *Google* search using "historic preservation jobs" as a search term. Job listings provided by these two sites, from mid-July to mid-August, were then gathered for this study by conducting keyword searches within their databases for "historic preservation" (as neither offered this as a predefined search category). Search results that were not deemed professional historic preservation jobs or those that were already posted the previous month were excluded.
3. We should be careful not to assume that these proportions reflect the entire population of preservation-related job opportunities in the United States, as each listing venue inevitably captures only a subset of the whole.
4. As mentioned above, this study provides a profile based on the constraints of the sources, thus it should not be considered to be a statistically accurate representation of the entire pool of historic preservation career opportunities available in the United States.
5. It should be noted that this study did not target archaeology positions, as they are generally considered to be in a separate professional field from historic preservation.

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