Department of History Policy on Exams and Theses

Comprehensive Examinations

Most students in the History M.A. program (Standard-Comprehensive, Standard-Specialized, History/Humanities [Fall 2010 admits and earlier]) will fulfill their culminating requirement by passing a comprehensive written and oral examination. For the comprehensive exam, students must pass a written essay exam in a major field (selected from departmental list and broad in scope) and in a minor field (narrower in scope) as well as pass an oral examination.

Prior to completing coursework, students will select one faculty member in each field to serve on their examination committee, and together the faculty members and the student will define the reading list upon which the examination will be based. In some fields, examining faculty members have adopted a semi-standardized core reading list upon which to build. In other areas, the entire list will be determined in consultation with the examining professor. Students are strongly encouraged to select faculty members with whom they have taken coursework in the examination field. A third committee member will also be assigned from the History Department Graduate Committee (in most cases, the Graduate Director). This person’s primary responsibilities are to facilitate the oral examination and to certify that the examination meets or exceeds departmental standards.

The department will schedule several written examination days in each the fall and the spring semesters. Examination dates will be announced by the beginning of the semester in question. Students may sign up to take the written portion of the exam on any of these days. The examination will entail a 3 hour written major field exam in the morning (closed book, handwritten or typed as students prefer), a break for lunch, and 2 hour written minor field exam that same afternoon. The examination committee will read and evaluate all of the exam essays and determine if the student has passed both fields, one of the fields, or neither of the fields. If a student fails one or both fields of the exam, he or she may repeat the concerned portion of the exam once and only once, after a waiting period of four months. Normally, students will receive their results on the written examination within two weeks. Students who successfully pass both fields of the examination will then complete a one hour oral exam with their entire examination committee. At the conclusion of the oral, the committee will assign to the examination (written and oral portions together) one of the following designations: pass with distinction, pass, or fail.

Major Field Exam Fields

Highly recommended for students seeking to teach in the community college system
U.S. history – colonial to 1865 (Suspended until new history faculty hires are approved by the administration)
U.S. history – 1865 to the present (Burke, Moore, Simpson, Palermo, Castaneda, Kluchin)
World history (Vann, Cohen, Numark, Dym, Gaston)
Ancient and Medieval History (Lazaridis, Gregory-Abbott)
Modern European History (Siegel, Lagos, Wilson, Cohen, Vann, Numark)
Other available major exam fields
Ancient Cultures (Lazaridis)  
Medieval Culture (Gregory-Abbott)  
Imperialism/Colonialism (Vann)  
Japan (Dym)  
South Asia (Numark)  
Modern Greece and Balkans (Lagos)  
Modern European Women/Gender (Siegel)  
Russia (Cohen)  
Modern Central Europe (Wilson)  
Themes and Issues in African History (Gaston)  

American West (Ettinger)  
U.S. Business/Economic History (Castaneda)  
African-American History (Moore)  
U.S. Urban History (Simpson)  
U.S. Women (Kluchin)  
U.S. Foreign Policy (Palermo)  
U.S. Cultural or Labor History (Burke)  

Minor Field Exam Fields
To be determined in consultation with the examining professor.

Thesis
Students may opt to write an M.A. thesis in lieu of taking comprehensive exams, provided that they meet the following conditions: 1) they receive a grade of A- or higher in HIST 209, and 2) they have an average GPA in the graduate program of 3.50 at the time of advancement to candidacy.* Students must complete their thesis within four semesters. Students who fail to do so will be required to complete comprehensive examinations in order to fulfill their culminating requirement.

The thesis committee shall consist of a primary reader and a secondary reader. Students should select faculty members who have expertise in their field of research. Different faculty members may have varying expectations about the process of mentoring a thesis candidate, so it is important for students to find out what their committee members require. Typically, the first reader will want to approve drafts of individual chapters, while the second reader may prefer to wait until an overall draft is complete. The thesis is considered complete when both readers are ready to sign off on the final draft and to assign it one of the following designations: pass with distinction or pass. Additionally, students will need to secure the signature of the Graduate Director, who will make an initial check for formatting and who ascertain that the thesis meets or exceeds departmental standards.

---

* It is possible that students will not know their grade in HIST 209 when they apply to advance to candidacy. In this case, students should complete a thesis petition on the assumption that they will qualify to write a thesis. Assuming that they do qualify, they will be asked to provide the Graduate Director with an unofficial copy of their transcript to verify the 209 grade before they will be enrolled in HIST 500. Students who intended to write a thesis but who did not receive the requisite grade in 209 will be required to switch to the comprehensive examination option.