DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

POLICY FOR MASTERS DEGREE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

*History Standard Program*

**The M.A. Exam**

M.A. exams are designed to test students’ content and historiographical knowledge in two of the fields in which they specialized while in graduate school. Exams are designed to be a challenging and rewarding culmination to students’ graduate career. If you are having trouble choosing whether to undertake an M.A. exam or an M.A. thesis, please consult the “Thesis or Exam Flowchart,” available at the History Office or on the History Department website.

**Examination Committee**

The examination committee shall consist of three faculty members: the major field advisor, who shall serve as the voting committee chair, the minor field advisor, and the Director of Graduate Studies or his/her designee. The committee chair shall coordinate all aspects of the examination, including the schedule for the written examinations among the committee members, and the scheduling and convening of the oral examination. **Students are highly encouraged to take one or more reading seminars or an independent study with their major and minor field advisors prior to enrolling in HIST 500.**

Candidates shall select their major field advisors according to their interests and in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies. The selection process shall be completed around the end of the student’s second semester (at the time of submission of the “Petition for Approval of Examination Committee”). The Director of Graduate Studies, who is a full voting member of the committee, shall ensure that all university and departmental procedures are followed.

**Major and Minor Fields**

**Major Field:**

Candidates shall define their major field with the approval of the major field advisor. The major fields shall be broad and synthetic and shall normally cover more than one History course. The fields may be topical rather than chronological in nature. The major field reading list shall usually consist of 15-20 scholarly titles.

*Examples*

American West, Gilded Age and Progressive Era, U.S. Women, 20th Century Europe, Comparative Nationalism

**Minor Field:**

Candidates shall define their minor field with the approval of their minor field advisor. The minor fields shall normally be outside the scope of their major fields, though they may be related topically or chronologically. Minor fields may be narrower in scope than major fields. The minor field reading list shall usually consist of 10-15 scholarly titles.

*Examples*


For a more extended list of fields, please see the handout and webpage: “Fields Commonly Offered for Masters Degree Comprehensive Exams,” available from the History Office or on the History Department website.
A record of past fields and book lists is available to consult upon request in the History Department office.

**Preparation for the Examination**

Candidates shall coordinate their coursework in the masters program with their preparation for their examinations. Normally a minimum of two courses and/or seminars in the masters program should be taken in the major fields and at least one course in the minor field. Students shall enroll in History 500 on a CR/NC basis the first or second semester prior to taking the examination, and shall spend at least one full semester preparing their examinations with their advisors. Students should arrange to meet regularly with both advisors over this period in order to prepare a synthetic and scholarly knowledge of their fields. Advisors are expected to help students focus their study on major questions within their fields, but should not give candidates the specific examination questions before the date of their examination.

**Comprehensive Examinations**

There shall be two written examinations and an oral examination.

**Written Examinations:**

Students may either type or handwrite their exams. In either case, they should make their choice known the Graduate Secretary at the time of scheduling the exams.

The **major field exam** shall consist of three essay questions covering major issues in the candidate’s major field. This exam shall be three hours. The major field must be passed before the minor field is attempted.

The **minor field exam** shall consist of two essay questions covering major issues in the candidate’s minor field. The exam shall be two hours long. The minor field must be passed before the oral exam is scheduled.

All three members of the examination committee shall read both exams and shall decide by a majority vote whether to proceed to the oral examination.

Failed examinations may be retaken after a reasonable additional preparation time (a minimum of one month). Examinations may only be taken twice. Examinations shall be available for reading by any department member.

The committee chairs shall have the responsibility for informing the candidate of the results of the written examinations and of the plans for remedying deficiencies in the written work or of proceeding to the oral examination.

**Oral Examinations:**

After the candidate has passed written examinations, the committee chair shall arrange a one-hour oral examination. All three members of the examination committee must participate.

Committee members may examine the candidate on the strengths and weaknesses of the written exams, and may also ask questions on subjects contained in the major and minor fields but not covered in the written exams. It is rare for candidates to fail the oral exams once the written exams have been passed.

After the oral examination has been passed, all three committee members sign the *Report of Comprehensive Examination*. The Graduate Coordinator is responsible for informing the University Graduate Studies office when the candidate has successfully completed all requirements for the Masters degree in History.
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

FIELDS COMMONLY OFFERED FOR MASTERS DEGREE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

*History Graduate Students are also free to design alternative examination fields, in conjunction with their examining professors.*