

Student-Faculty Handbook

Master of Arts in History

2025-26

This handbook offers information on the requirements for completing a Master of Arts degree in the History Department at Western Kentucky University. The requirements are identical for online and on-campus students.

The M.A. program in History is designed to prepare students for the teaching of history on the junior and senior college level; to provide the initial graduate work for those who intend to pursue a doctoral degree; and to enhance the preparation of secondary teachers of history who desire to meet certification requirements through such a program.

The History Department offers two courses of study leading to the M.A. degree. The two plans have different requirements:

Plan A: Thesis Option (30 credits)

Plan B: Non-Thesis Option (34 credits)

All M.A. candidates must complete written and oral comprehensive examinations during their final semester in the program.

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Admission and Matriculation

1. Application to Program

Applications to the History Department's graduate programs are handled by the Graduate School office (www.wku.edu/graduate). Students must meet the minimum standards for admission set forth by the Graduate School.

Applicants must meet the following admission standards set forth by the History Department:

- Completion of at least 15 undergraduate credit-hours in history with a grade point average of at least 3.0 in history courses (on a 4.0 scale)
- An overall undergraduate grade point average of at least 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale)
- Applicants must submit application and supporting materials by June 15 (fall semester start) or November 15 (spring semester start)

Applicants must also submit:

- A brief (approximately 750 words) statement of purpose that discusses why they wish to pursue the Master of Arts degree in History;
- A sample research paper (at least five pages long) that is relevant to the field of History;
- A letter of recommendation from an instructor or supervisor who can assess the applicant's ability to succeed in an academic or work environment. This letter must be sent directly by the letter writer to the Graduate School (graduate.school@wku.edu) and should not be uploaded by the applicant.

The History Department will admit students on a rolling basis. Applications for admission are typically reviewed within a month of submission.

2. Matriculation and Finances

Successful applicants will receive information about how to register for class. Information about applying for financial aid can be found by contacting the Office of Student Financial Assistance (www.wku.edu/financialaid/). The Graduate School also publishes a detailed list of financial resources (<https://www.wku.edu/graduate/aid/>). Students who are employed as teachers in Kentucky (and certain counties in bordering states) might be eligible for reduced tuition through the Kentucky Educator Discount (www.wku.edu/cebs/educatordiscount/). Graduate Assistant positions are available on a competitive basis through the History Department.

3. Conference with Departmental Advisor

Upon acceptance to the program, and before courses begin, graduate students must contact the History Department's Graduate Advisor (Dr. Alexander Olson, alexander.olson@wku.edu) to review program requirements and plan a preliminary program of study.

Degree Requirements

Thesis Option

COURSE	TITLE	CREDITS
HIST 535	Historiography	3
HIST 536	Sources and Methods	3
HIST 599	Thesis Research/Writing	6
	Select 18 hours of HIST electives	18
	Total:	30 credit hours

Non-Thesis Option

Requirements

COURSE	TITLE	CREDITS
HIST 535	Historiography	3
HIST 536	Sources and Methods	3
HIST 598	Comprehensive Exam Preparation	1
	Select 27 hours of HIST electives	27
	Total:	34 credit hours

- GPA Requirement: Students must complete their program of study with a 3.0 average. Students who fall below a 3.0 average will be placed on academic probation and will have 9 credit hours to raise their GPA above 3.0 before academic dismissal.
- Comprehensive Exam: All students must complete the comprehensive exam. Students on the Non-Thesis Option must enroll in HIST 598: Comprehensive Exam Preparation. Please see page 6 for further information.
- Transfer Work: With approval of the Graduate Advisor, a maximum of 6 credits of graduate coursework may be transferred from another institution. Students also may be permitted to take up to 6 credits of graduate work in other departments at WKU.
- Independent Study: Students may enroll in a maximum of 6 credits of independent study (HIST 590) with a member of the History graduate faculty.
- Time Limit: All requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in History must be completed within a period of six years from the first term of enrollment.
- Application for Graduation: This application (www.wku.edu/graduate/documents/) must be submitted in the student's final semester in the M.A. program.

Road Map for the Thesis

- 1. Identify a Faculty Mentor:** No later than the third semester prior to graduation, the student should ask a faculty member to serve as mentor during the thesis-writing process. The student must consult with the faculty mentor to develop an appropriate thesis topic. The mentor must be a member of the History Graduate Faculty and will serve as the student's thesis director.
- 2. Identify a Thesis Committee:** With the mentor's guidance, the student must also invite two other faculty to serve on the thesis committee. Students may select a scholar from outside the university to serve on the committee (but not as director). After three faculty have agreed to serve on the thesis committee, the student must submit the Thesis Committee Selection form (https://www.wku.edu/graduate/students/committee_selection.php) to finalize this process
- 3. Write a Thesis Proposal:** Before beginning work on the thesis itself, the student will provide each member of the committee with a five-page thesis proposal which (a) indicates the nature and scope of the proposed topic and (b) indicates the major sources of research materials which will be used for the study. See Thesis Proposal Guidelines on page 5 for more details.
- 4. Enroll in History 599 (Thesis Research/Writing):** When the thesis proposal has been approved, the student is eligible to enroll in HIST 599. Typically, the 6 credits for HIST 599 are split across the final two semesters in the History M.A. program.
- 5. Apply for Research Funding:** If you plan to travel for research, consider writing a research grant proposal for funding from the Graduate School, the History Department, or external funding sources for archival research travel. This step is encouraged but not required.
- 6. Engage with Historiography and Archives:** All thesis projects must involve engagement with both scholarly literature (historiography) and relevant historical archives. The thesis cannot be limited to secondary sources.
- 7. Write the Thesis:** The thesis director will work closely with the student as he/she completes each draft chapter of the thesis. The thesis varies widely in length from approximately 50 to 120 pages and is typically divided into 4-5 chapters. Each draft chapter should be approved by the thesis director as it is written. Other members of the committee read the full draft of the thesis upon completion, but students are encouraged to seek their guidance earlier in the process. It is strongly recommended that students begin drafting chapters during the first semester of HIST 599, when there is still time for revision and follow-up research.
- 8. Defend the Thesis:** A complete draft of the thesis is circulated to all members of the committee at least 30 days before the defense date. The thesis must adhere to the formatting guidelines set forth by the Graduate School. The oral defense is one hour in length. The student may not proceed to the oral defense until the final draft of the thesis has been approved by the thesis committee. Students are strongly encouraged to complete the oral defense at least two weeks prior to the graduate school's thesis submission deadline, since the oral defense often concludes with a list of required revisions from the committee.
- 9. Submit the Approved Thesis:** After the thesis committee has determined that the student has successfully fulfilled the requirements for the thesis, the student must submit the thesis (<https://www.wku.edu/graduate/students/thesis/index.php>) in accordance with the formatting guidelines of the Graduate School.

Thesis Proposal Guidelines

The thesis proposal must be approved by the student's thesis committee prior to enrolling in HIST 599 and commencing work on the thesis.

The thesis proposal serves two purposes. First, a thesis proposal defends the necessity of a research project and demonstrates that it is accomplishable. Second, it sets up a detailed plan for completing a thesis in a reasonable and realistic timeframe. A well-developed and argued thesis proposal is key to completing a successful thesis.

Abstract (200 Words): This should be a brief overview of the thesis topic and structure.

Background/Problem (300 Words): Gives an overview of the major historical events under consideration for a general audience, lists what new question(s) this project addresses, and defends why it is necessary to explore this topic.

Historiography/Methodology (500 words): Outlines the major secondary historical writings on the topic to date, contextualizes the project within those works, and explains the major methods that will be used to answer the questions, including the major influences on developing the methods used and how this methodology will be applied to the present research.

Sources and Research Plan (750 Words): Describes the major primary and archival source collections that will be used to complete this project and identifies when these will be consulted. Also describes the writing plan for the project, including when chapters will be handed to the thesis chair and a proposed date of completion.

Chapter Outline: (250 Words): Gives an outline of the major sections/chapters of the thesis and a brief (one to two sentences) summary of the main topics and questions that will be addressed in each section.

Short Bibliography: Provides a list the major secondary works (c. 10-15 articles and books) on the thesis topic. Use Chicago Style bibliography format.

Guidelines for Comprehensive Examinations

The written and oral comprehensive examinations must be completed in the final semester by all students (both thesis and non-thesis) in the History M.A. program.

6-9 months prior to exam

1. Select three fields of specialization: Each student must select three fields of specialization for the comprehensive examination. These areas must be drawn from courses that the student has taken in the graduate program. The instructors who taught these courses will comprise the exam committee. Students must secure permission from each faculty member before adding them to the committee. One member should be designated as committee chair.

3-6 months prior to exam

2. Prepare bibliographies for each field: Prepare a bibliography consisting of all works that the student has read in that field of specialization. Faculty may require additional books.

3. Register for HIST 598 and meet with faculty: Students on the non-thesis track must register for HIST 598 in their final semester. All students (thesis and non-thesis) must meet with each committee member to discuss expectations and practice answering questions. Students cannot proceed to the exam without meeting at least one time with each committee member.

5. Schedule the written and oral examinations: Students should contact all three members of the examination committee to schedule a day and time for the one-hour oral exam. Once a date for the oral exam is selected, the student should work with the Graduate Advisor to schedule the written exam, which is completed prior to the oral exam.

Examination procedures

Written Examination

Faculty: Each faculty member will submit a question for the student to the Graduate Advisor, who will administer the exam. The exam chair will also submit a question based on a primary source (or sources), the full text of which will be included with the exam prompt.

Students: Students write four essays (one essay per field and one primary source essay) over a three-day period. Students are allowed to consult notes and books. They may not consult other people or any sources on the internet.

Oral Examination

The oral exam is one hour in length. During the exam, committee members ask questions about the essays submitted for the written exam. They may also ask questions to assess learning in any other aspect of the student's program of study. Following the exam, the committee will complete the comprehensive examination assessment form (see next page) and notify the Graduate Advisor of the outcome. The committee may fail a student who does not demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding of their fields. Students who fail the examination may re-take their M.A. exam two times. If a student fails to pass the exam after three attempts, the student will be dropped from the M.A. program.

Comprehensive Examination Assessment Form

Student Name:

Date of Exam:

Committee Chair:

Committee Member #2:

Committee Member #3:

Accounting for both the written and oral portion of the exam, the committee must arrive at a consensus about whether the student has passed the comprehensive examination.

Overall Exam (Written and Oral)—Please circle one:

Pass

Fail

Each committee member must also score the student's performance in the **oral portion** of the examination with regard to each of the three History MA program student learning objectives.

OBJECTIVE#1

Graduates will showcase broad knowledge of historical events/periods and their significance.

Committee Chair's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #2's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #3's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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OBJECTIVE#2

Graduates will effectively and accurately interpret primary sources and historical data.

Committee Chair's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #2's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #3's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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OBJECTIVE#3

Graduates will identify and describe the contours and stakes of conversations among historians within defined historiographical fields.

Committee Chair's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #2's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Committee Member #3's Score:	High Pass	Pass	Low Pass	Fail
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Program Learning Objectives

All coursework in the History MA program is organized around three core learning objectives. Students are expected to develop fluency in all three of these objectives, which constitute the criteria for evaluating the comprehensive examination.

1. Graduates will showcase broad knowledge of historical events/periods and their significance.
2. Graduates will effectively and accurately interpret primary sources and historical data.
3. Graduates will identify and describe the contours and stakes of conversations among historians within defined historiographical fields.

Course Offerings and Faculty

History Graduate Faculty

Dr. Sophia Arjana
 Dr. James Barker
 Dr. Dorothea Browder
 Dr. Kate Brown
 Dr. Jay Carroll (by courtesy)
 Dr. Robert Dietle
 Dr. Selena Sanderfer Doss
 Dr. Marc Eagle
 Dr. Anthony Harkins
 Dr. Audra Jennings
 Dr. Eric Kondratieff

Dr. Katherine Lennard
 Dr. Jeffrey Miner
 Dr. Patti Minter
 Dr. Bella Mukonyora
 Dr. Alexander Olson
 Dr. Timothy Quevillon
 Dr. Eric Reed
 Dr. Andrew Rosa
 Dr. Tamara Van Dyken
 Dr. Jennifer Walton-Hanley

Course Offerings

Required Courses

HIST 535: Historiography
 HIST 536: Sources and Methods
 HIST 598: Comprehensive Exam Prep
 HIST 599: Thesis Research/Writing (thesis track only)

Independent Study

HIST 569: Internship
 HIST 590: Advanced Individual Study
 HIST 600: Maintain Matriculation

Historiographical Seminars

HIST 501: European History for Secondary Teachers
 HIST 502: US History for Secondary Teachers
 HIST 505: Cultural Diversity in American History
 HIST 506: Approaches to World History

HIST 507: The Crusades
HIST 520: History of Sexuality
HIST 521: United States 1900-1945
HIST 522: United States since 1945
HIST 525: 19th C. US Social and Intellectual History
HIST 526: 20th C. US Social and Intellectual History
HIST 530: History of the US Civil Rights Movement
HIST 531: Cultural History of Alcohol
HIST 540: Colonial North America
HIST 541: American Revolution and Early Republic
HIST 543: US Civil War and Reconstruction
HIST 544: Gilded Age America
HIST 545: American Legal History to 1865
HIST 546: American Legal History since 1865
HIST 547: History of American Popular Culture
HIST 551: History of American Protest
HIST 552: American Urban History
HIST 554: Discovery and Interpretation of Local History
HIST 556: Kentucky History
HIST 557: The Old South
HIST 558: The New South
HIST 559: Immigrants in American History
HIST 563: The Atlantic World
HIST 574: History of Religion in America
HIST 581: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy
HIST 605: Seminar in Ancient History
HIST 606: Seminar in European History
HIST 608: Seminar in Public History
HIST 609: Seminar in Early Modern Europe, 1350-1750
HIST 612: Seminar in Modern Europe, 1750-present
HIST 613: Seminar in British History
HIST 615: Seminar in World History
HIST 616: Seminar in Middle Eastern History
HIST 617: Seminar in Latin American History
HIST 618: Seminar in Gender and Women's History
HIST 620: Seminar in African American History
HIST 621: Seminar in Environmental History
HIST 622: Seminar in Borderlands History
HIST 623: Seminar in Russian History
HIST 624: Seminar in Labor History
HIST 625: Seminar in Native American History
HIST 626: Seminar in the History of Science and Medicine
HIST 627: Seminar in Family History
HIST 628: Seminar in Disability History
HIST 630: Seminar in United States History
HIST 641: Readings in American History
HIST 642: Readings in African History
HIST 643: Readings in Asian History
HIST 644: Readings in European History
HIST 645: Readings in Public History