



The Master of Arts in History

Guide for Graduate Study

HISTORY DEPARTMENT
CAL POLY, SAN LUIS OBISPO

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[ Fully accessible – Text-only version 

[The Master of Arts in History](#)

Thank you for your interest in the M.A. Program at Cal Poly. We hope that this Guide for Graduate Study in History will answer the questions of both prospective and current graduate students.

I. A Few Words about the Program

Cal Poly's Master of Arts Degree in History is tailored to students who want to pursue further graduate studies and careers in public history, education, museums and local or state government.

This two-year program takes students deep into particular cultures and eras and hones their command of historical research and analysis. The program also develops students' critical thinking, written and oral communication, and their understanding of the rich diversity of human experience.

Students in the program work closely with faculty mentors and get unequaled experience in their research and study. An introductory seminar to graduate studies prepares students for graduate seminars on topics in American, European, Latin American, Asian, and Comparative History.

To finish their masters degree at Cal Poly, students undertake either original historical research, by writing a thesis, or deepen their expertise in two historical fields of their choice, through the comprehensive exams option.

The M.A. program focuses on rigorous historical methods while allowing students the flexibility to tailor their study to match their interests and meet their goals. The program's emphasis on practical application of skills and knowledge is reflected through the History Department's well-established internship program.

Cal Poly's M.A. History program supports lifelong learning and welcomes members of the community interested in continuing to study History.

II. Applying to the M.A. Program in History

Deadlines for applying to the History M.A. Program:

1 April for Fall Quarter

1 October for Winter Quarter

Returning M. A. candidates should consult the following website for details:

<http://admissions.calpoly.edu/applicants/returning/>

Before applying to the program, please visit the History Department website to familiarize yourself with faculty members' areas of expertise, course offerings, and contact information. If you are especially interested in working in one particular field, you may want to contact the professors offering courses in that field before making your final decision about applying to this program.

The [History Department's website](#) also offers detailed information about the application process.

A. Minimum Requirements for Admission:

- Possession of a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university.
- Grade point average of not less than 3.0 in the last 90 units of undergraduate course work.
- Previous coursework in History. (This may be waived at the discretion of the Graduate Coordinator.)
- Applicants whose preparatory education was principally in a language other than English, will need to demonstrate English proficiency. This is typically done through the TOEFL exam.

Applicants without the requisite GPA or sufficient coursework in appropriate disciplines may be accepted on a conditional basis. Individuals admitted conditionally may be asked to enroll during their first quarter in either History 303: Research & Writing Seminar or History 304: Historiography. Neither class can be taken for graduate credit.

B. How to Apply

Please submit your application and supporting materials via Cal State Apply. Please see the program website for detailed directions on how to apply. The application includes a statement of purpose, sample of scholarly writing, and letters of recommendation. If you have any questions about how to apply or about the status of your application, please contact the Grad Ed Office (grad@calpoly.edu; 805-756-2328).

C. Tips for Successful Applications

On Writing a Statement of Purpose: Begin with a brief paragraph to explain why you are applying to the History MA program and your post-MA program professional goals. Next, explain what you have done to prepare for this program, including classes taken, double-major or minors that you had as an undergrad that might contribute to your unique perspective of history, language skills, experience abroad, and relevant internship or job experience. Then, explain to the reader what your plans are in the graduate program: is there a field of study that you intend to

focus on? Is there a research project that you are particularly interested in pursuing? Is there a professor with whom you would like to work? Finally, explain to the reader how this MA program in History at Cal Poly will contribute to your professional goals.

On Choosing a Writing Sample: Select an essay that shows off your research skills and one that has a strong thesis argument that is proven using primary sources (preferably). This paper should be cited properly with footnotes or parenthetical citations that include a variety of primary and secondary sources. Be sure to choose a paper that makes--and proves--a strong argument and one that you feel is a good example of your best written paper. It is more important that it reflect your skill as a writer than it be precisely the suggested page length.

III. M. A. in History: OPTIONS

There are two tracks that a student may follow for the M.A. in History. Option One is open to all students. Option Two requires a minimum GPA of 3.7 in the History graduate program after completion of 24 units.

All students are encouraged to gain facility with a foreign language. Students working in a geographic area where English is not the language of the primary sources should have sufficient proficiency to read sources in their original language. The decision as to whether this is a requirement, rather than a desire, will be made by the student's M.A. Thesis Advisor, Examiner, and/or Graduate Director.

OPTION 1: Comprehensive Exams (48 Units)

- A. History 504 Graduate Study in History. 4 units.
- B. History Seminars (6 courses required, 4 units each). Each is repeatable up to 12 units.
Total of 24 units. Chosen from:

- HIST 505: Seminar in American History
- HIST 506: Seminar in European History
- HIST 507: Seminar in East Asian History
- HIST 508: Seminar in Latin American History
- HIST 509: Seminar in African History
- HIST 510: Seminar in Comparative History

- C. Graduate History Electives (4 courses at the 400 or 500 level). Total of 16 units.

Courses at the 400 level must be taken after student has received an undergraduate degree and may not repeat undergraduate courses or their equivalent, unless approved by the Graduate Director (See Section IV.B). With the Director's approval, courses outside of History may serve as electives (up to 8 units).

- D. Supervised Reading for Comprehensive Exams, History 512 (2 sections required, 2 units each). Total of 4 units.

Course is to be taken twice, once in each Field of Study for the comprehensive examination. Requires consent of the professor supervising the comprehensive field and the graduate coordinator.

Students choosing Option One for their M.A. Degree will be examined in two topics, chosen from two different fields of study. This will ensure that they acquire a wide expanse of knowledge. Comprehensive exams may be taken from topics within six general fields of study: American History, European History, East Asian History, Latin American History, African History, and Comparative World History.

Students enrolled in History 512 will be responsible for mastering a reading list agreed upon by both the student and the examining professor. Typically these lists include around twenty books or articles relating to the chosen examination field.

Each comprehensive examination consists of essay questions dealing both with the larger field of study and one or more topics of concentration.

A. Procedures for Comprehensive Examinations

You must, a quarter before you plan to take either of your field exams, do the following:

1. Make sure that your FORMAL STUDY PLAN has been approved by the Graduate Director.
2. Complete the form, REQUEST FOR GRADUATE EVALUATION, and submit it directly to the Graduate Programs Office (38-154).
3. Confer with the Graduate Director to ensure that s/he completes the form, ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY. Before advancement can be approved, you must have at least a 3.0 GPA. Moreover, you must have passed or received credit for the Graduate Writing Examination (see section VI.C), filed a Formal Study Plan, and met any additional requirements.
4. You must demonstrate to the Graduate Director, after review of these forms, that you are within one or two quarters of graduating. Hence, your Comprehensive Exams should be taken no earlier than your last or next-to-last quarters of graduate study.

After the Graduate Director approves your FORMAL STUDY PLAN, ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY and REQUEST FOR FORMAL EVALUATION, the forms will be sent by the Graduate Director to the College of Liberal Arts Dean's Office, Graduate Programs Office, and the Evaluations Office for final approvals. The Evaluation's Office will then send you a SUMMARY OF REMAINING MASTER'S DEGREE REQUIREMENTS.

PLEASE NOTE: All forms are available on Graduate Education's website.

EXAMINATION FIELDS

The fields of study for Comprehensive Examinations typically pursued are listed below. Some students, in consultation with their examining professor, focus on particular themes within these generally defined fields.

1. AFRICAN HISTORY
 - a. Pre-Colonial
 - b. Modern
2. AMERICAN HISTORY
 - a. Colonial Period
 - b. Middle Period
 - c. Modern Period
 - d. Intellectual
 - e. Gender
 - f. African-American
 - g. California and the West
3. ASIAN HISTORY
 - a. Modern China
 - b. Modern Japan
 - c. Modern Southeast Asia
4. COMPARATIVE WORLD HISTORY
5. EUROPEAN HISTORY
 - a. Early Modern
 - b. Modern
6. LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY
 - a. Colonial
 - b. Modern

B. Scheduling the Comprehensive Written Exam

You must meet with the Faculty Member who has directed your work in each of your History 512 (Supervised Reading for Comprehensive Exams). That Professor will set up a time and place, and procedures, for you to take your Comprehensive Exam. After you have completed the examination, it will be read by the Supervisor for that topic, as well as by the Graduate Director. After they have read the examination and consulted with one another, a grade will be assigned to the examination. Any grade below a “B” is failing. With the approval of the Area/Topic supervisor, students who fail may retake the examination no later than one-quarter after the failed exam. Students who fail a second comprehensive examination will be removed from the Graduate Program.

C. What does the Comprehensive Written Exam Entail?

Each Professor within a given area for the Comprehensive Exam will draw up her or his own exam. In general, at least two quarters before the examination, the student should ask the professor for the exam area for a READING LIST FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAM in that

area. This list will include books and articles that the professor expects the student to have mastered prior to the examination. In addition, the student should complete a Section of History 512 with the professor prior to the Comprehensive Exam. And, if at all possible, the student should have taken 400 and 500 level courses in the area of the Comprehensive Exam.

The examination will stress both understanding of the material and familiarity with central questions of interpretation, both within the geographical area and the specific topic. The typical format is a three hour closed-book examination held in the department.

OPTION 2: M.A. Thesis (49 Units)

Requires a minimum of 24 units with a minimum GPA of 3.7

- A. History 504 Graduate Study in History. 4 units.
- B. History Seminars (5 courses required, 4 units each). Each is repeatable up to 12 units. Total of 20 units. Any five can be chosen from:
 - HIST 505: Seminar in American History
 - HIST 506: Seminar in European History
 - HIST 507: Seminar in East Asian History
 - HIST 508: Seminar in Latin American
 - HIST 509: Seminar in African History
 - HIST 510: Seminar in Comparative History
- C. Graduate History Electives (4 courses at the 400 or 500 level). Total of 16 units. Courses at the 400 level must be taken after student has received an undergraduate degree and may not repeat undergraduate courses or their equivalent, unless approved by the Graduate Director (See Section IV.B). With the Director's approval, courses outside of History may serve as electives (up to 8 units).
- D. M.A. Thesis Supervision, History 599

Course is to be taken three times, over three separate quarters.
(3 units each). Total of 9 units.

Students choosing Option Two will, instead of comprehensive examinations in two areas, be required to write a thesis, in addition to completing all of the courses required under the Option Two Plan.

You must, the quarter that you take your second section of History 599, do the following:

1. Make sure your FORMAL STUDY PLAN has been approved by the Graduate Director.
2. Complete the form, REQUEST FOR GRADUATE EVALUATION, and submit it directly to the Graduate Programs Office (38-154).

3. Confer with the Graduate Director to ensure that s/he completes the form, ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY. Before advancement can be approved, you must have passed or received credit for the Graduate Writing Examination (see section VI.C), filed a Formal Study Plan, and met any additional requirements.

After the Graduate Director approves your FORMAL STUDY PLAN, ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY, and REQUEST FOR GRADUATE EVALUATION, the forms will be sent by the Graduate Director to the Dean of Liberal Arts Office, Graduate Programs Office and the Evaluations Office for final approvals. The Evaluations Office will then send you a SUMMARY OF REMAINING MASTER'S DEGREE REQUIREMENTS.

PLEASE NOTE: All forms are available from the Graduate Director, History Department, and online via the Graduate Programs Office: <http://rgp.calpoly.edu/gradpolicies.html>

A. Deciding on a Thesis Topic and Course Work

Students should, after a year of coursework, decide what area of history they want to research. The student will, in consultation with the professor with expertise in that area and the graduate coordinator, decide upon an acceptable M.A. thesis topic. The student should then sign up, for each of the next three quarters for HISTORY 599: M.A. Thesis Supervision (3 units). In this course, the student will research and write the thesis, with the professor assigning a grade each quarter based upon the quality and timely submission of work that the student has completed for that quarter.

B. What is a M.A. Thesis?

The M.A. Thesis is an extended research paper, based upon extensive use of primary sources and comprehension of the existing historiography on the subject. Student theses should have an original interpretation or raise new questions about a subject. The thesis should be written in an accessible and compelling manner and will generally run between 50 and 100 pages, typed, double-spaced.

C. Thesis Defense and Final Copy

The finished M.A. Thesis will be read by the student's M.A. advisor, by the Graduate Director, and by a third faculty member. The third faculty member may be a professor in the department or outside, including professors from other universities who have special expertise in the student's research area. The student will meet with all of these individuals for a discussion and oral defense of the thesis that will last up to 2 hours. After the completion of the oral defense, the student will be told if s/he must make any changes to the thesis. These changes, if required, will then be reviewed by the student's advisor or the graduate coordinator. If everything is then found to be in order, the advisor will assign a final grade for the M.A. Thesis.

The M.A. degree will not be granted until the Thesis Editor in Graduate Programs has approved the thesis. Therefore, students should be certain that the Thesis is prepared in accordance with the GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING GRADUATE THESES AND REPORTS, available from the Office of Graduate Education's website.

Students must post their thesis to Cal Poly's Digital Commons:
<http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/>

IV. Courses

A. Graduate History Courses

The precise nature of graduate seminars is decided by individual professors. In general, there are two types of seminars offered. In Reading Seminars, the students will be assigned a host of works on a particular subject. The works may be secondary or primary, or a combination of both. Students will in these classes meet to discuss the works, and to reach a deeper understanding of the historiographical and interpretive issues involved with them. In these courses, in general, students will be expected to write regular papers on some of these works, and may also complete a comprehensive paper at the end of the quarter as well.

In Research Seminars, the students will read some materials in common, as well as work on a research project, decided upon through consultation with the professor. In general, these papers will be based upon both primary and secondary research. Students will probably present their findings to the other students in class and receive comments on their work from their fellow students. These papers will be in the range of 15-25 pages, typed, double-spaced.

Grades in these seminars will be determined on the basis of a student's written work and, in some instances, exams. In addition, students will be graded on the quality of their participation in the class. Students must have their written and reading assignments done on time. Students should come to class prepared with notes to help them discuss whatever reading or subject is assigned for that day. At the graduate level, shyness is no longer an excuse. Students are expected to participate with enthusiasm and to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject in both oral and written form. Repeating what other students have already said does not constitute useful participation.

Course Descriptions:

HIST 500: Special Problems for Graduate Students. Individual investigation, research, studies, or surveys of selected problems. 1-4 units.

HIST 504: Graduate Study in History. Weekly reading and discussion course on practical methods and theoretical approaches to the study and writing of history. Seminar format. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 505: Seminar in United States History. Intensive study of selected topics in United States history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 506: Seminar in Modern European History. Intensive study of selected topics in Modern European history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 507: Seminar in East Asian History. Intensive study of selected topics in East Asian history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 508: Seminar in Latin American History. Intensive study of selected topics in Latin American history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 509: Seminar in African History. Intensive study of selected topics in African history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 510: Seminar in Comparative History. Intensive study of selected topics in comparative history. Class Schedule will list topic selected. Total credit limited to 12 units. Prerequisite: Graduate standing in History or consent of instructor. 4 units.

HIST 512: Supervised Reading for M.A. Comprehensive Exams. Directed supervision of M.A. reading for comprehensive exams. Regular consultation between advisor and student. Prerequisite: HIST 504 and 12 units of graduate study. Variable course content. 2 units each, has to be taken two times. Total of 4 units.

HIST 599: M.A. Thesis Supervision. Directed supervision of M.A. thesis. Regular consultation between advisor and student. Prerequisite: HIST 504 and 12 units of graduate study. 3 units each, to be taken three times. Total of 9 units.

B. 400-level Courses for Graduate Students

Graduate students may take up to four 400-level courses for their graduate requirements. Professors in these advanced, undergraduate courses will generally expect higher quality work from graduate students. In addition to regular class participation, they may also require additional reading or writing assignments of graduate students. The graduate student should, before or immediately after the first class meeting, inform the professor that s/he has graduate status. The professor will then elucidate for that student the particular requirements.

PLEASE NOTE: Students may not take as graduate students the same 400-level course that they had as an undergraduate at Cal Poly unless the M. A. Program Director determines that the content or teaching of the course has changed sufficiently to warrant an exception to this rule.

A list of 400-level history courses is available online on the department website.

C. Teacher Education Courses

Present and prospective teachers are urged to take HIST 424 Organizing and Teaching History and EDUC 505 Seminar in Social Studies Curriculum and Methods. Students should also consider the following courses: EDUC 587 Educational Foundations and Current Issues and EDUC 589 Educational Research Methods. Courses outside of History can serve as electives (up to 8 units), as approved by the Graduate Director.

If a student accepted into the History M. A. program wishes to pursue the teaching credential, s/he must file a Postbaccalaureate Change of Objective form. The application process goes through the Graduate Programs Office (not through Admissions). S/he should also contact the History-Social Sciences credential advisor, Dr. Joel J. Orth (jorth@calpoly.edu) to discuss requirements for acceptance into the credential program.

HIST 424 Organizing and Teaching History Organization, selection, presentation, application, and interpretation of subject matter in history in secondary schools. 4 seminars. Prerequisite: Admission to teacher education program or valid teaching credential. Total of 4 units.

HIST 425 Social Sciences Teaching Practicum (CR/NC) Practicum for part-time and full-time student teachers in the Social Science Credential Program. Teaching techniques and strategies useful for addressing a wide range of issues that arise in grades 6-12 social science classrooms. Credit/No Credit grading only. Total credit limited to 4 units. 1 seminar. Prerequisite: HIST 424; concurrent: EDUC 469 or EDUC 479.

EDUC 587 Educational Foundations and Current Issues Historical, organizational, legal and philosophical characteristics of American education. Emphasis on the analysis of contemporary issues focusing on these characteristics. 4 seminars. Prerequisite: Graduate standing. Total of 4 units.

EDUC 589 Educational Research Methods Introduction to research methodologies, application of inferential and descriptive statistics, critical analysis of research designs and data collection techniques. 3 seminars, 1 activity. Prerequisite: EDUC 586. Total of 4 units.

VI. Additional Academic Policies

A. Continuous Enrollment

Graduate students are required to maintain continuous enrollment from the time of first enrollment in the graduate program until completion of the degree. Continuous enrollment is defined as being enrolled during Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters each year. Students can maintain continuous enrollment either by being enrolled as a regular student; obtaining approval for an education or medical leave prior to the quarter when such a leave would begin; or by registering in a special course designated for this purpose, during quarters in which they are not regularly enrolled. The special course, GS 597, is listed in the University catalog and is taken through Cal Poly Continuing Education. GS 597 is a one-unit course, at a cost of \$289 per unit, offered credit/no credit; credits in GS 597 do not count toward meeting degree requirements. Students who fail to fulfill this continuous enrollment requirement will be not be permitted to graduate—even if all degree requirements have been completed—until payment has been made for all quarters of non-enrollment. This requirement is not retroactive to terms prior to Fall 2009. In addition, ALL graduate students must be enrolled the quarter they graduate.

For further information on an education or medical leave, consult the Registration section of the current catalog, available online.

For the GS 597 registration form, visit the Continuing Education website.

B. Course Load

There is no easily defined optimal course load, especially since many students in the M.A. Program have full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Obviously, to remain in the program, as noted in the previous paragraph, you should take at least 1 course each quarter. Eight (8) units per quarter (at the 400 or 500) level is considered Full-Time, and will help you complete your course work in an optimal fashion.

C. Graduation Writing Proficiency Exam

Some students will have passed the Graduation Writing Proficiency Requirement as undergraduates at Cal Poly. Students from another Cal State University or University of California campus usually receive an automatic waiver; however, it is their responsibility to confirm this. Students who graduated from another U.S. college or university may request a waiver if they can demonstrate that they have passed an equivalent course at their undergraduate institution. Alternatively, they may opt to take the GWR exam. For more information please consult the University Writing & Rhetoric Center's website.

D. Incomplete Grades

Students will, as per university policy, have up to one year to remove an "RP" (Report in Progress) grade. However, a graduate professor may ask the student to sign a contract stipulating when the work must be turned in.

Students may not have more than two "I" (incomplete) grades on their record at any time. If they do, then they will be required to see the Graduate Director to draw up a contract for the completion of the work in question.

E. Academic Probation and Disqualification

The M.A. will not be awarded to any student with a final grade point average for graduate level courses listed on the Formal Study Plan below 3.0.

Academic Probation: If you fall below the minimum 3.0 GPA, you must meet with the Graduate Director before enrolling for the next quarter and sign a probationary contract designating which courses you will take and the minimum grades that you must receive in order to remain enrolled in the graduate program. You will have two quarters to raise your GPA to the acceptable level.

Academic Disqualification: Failure to adhere to the exact provisions of the probationary contract will result in the student's dismissal from the program.

Administrative Academic Disqualification: In addition to failure to maintain the minimum 3.0 GPA, students may be disqualified by campus authorities for repeated withdrawal from classes, noncompliance with an academic requirement, or other actions preventing them from making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

For additional information on these and related policies, please consult "General Policies Governing Graduate Studies" in the Cal Poly Catalog.

F. Deadlines for Completion of Degree Requirements

Students have 7 years to complete the M.A. program. The clock begins once they have taken their first class counting towards the graduate degree.

Students may receive up to 8 units for work completed as an undergraduate in courses that are included in the Graduate Study Plan. However, these courses can only count if the units were not used as courses required for graduation, either in the major or in the school. Also note, if course work taken as an undergraduate is included among the student's courses for the M.A., then the 7 year limit for when the degree must be completed begins at that moment.

Students who were in a M.A. program elsewhere, without receiving a degree, may transfer 13 quarter units of coursework into the program at Cal Poly. Their clock for completion of the degree will begin from the time the first of those courses was taken. Students must complete at least 32 units at Cal Poly to be eligible for their M.A. degree.

Students doing a written thesis have up to three years to complete it. The clock on the thesis begins when they take their first section of History 599, Thesis Supervision.

G. Graduation with Distinction

Students pursuing either option may graduate with distinction if they have a GPA of 3.75 or higher. In addition, students in Option One, M.A. Comprehensive Exams, must also be graded as distinguished on those examinations. Students in Option Two, M.A. Thesis, must be deemed to have written a distinguished thesis. If both requirements are met, then the student will graduate with distinction.

H. Academic Integrity

Students are required to follow university policies on academic integrity as set out in the Standards for Student Conduct. All instances of academic dishonesty are reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. The department strictly follows the definitions and procedures set out in Faculty Senate Resolution AS-722-10, dated November 16, 2010. In addition, the History Department maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward plagiarism and cheating in the graduate program. Cheating or plagiarizing in a comprehensive examination or master's thesis is grounds for expulsion.

G. Professional Standards

All successful applicants to the History M. A. program are expected to familiarize themselves with the American Historical Association's Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct available at:

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm>

Students enrolled in the Cal Poly History M. A. program are expected to maintain a professional code of conduct in the classroom and in the program as a whole.

VII. Financial Aid, Research Awards, & Other Graduate Resources

Graduate students will find information on financial aid, non-resident tuition waivers, research awards, and graduate facilities at the Graduate Education Office's website, under the "Resources" tab.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

We welcome your interest and participation in this program. If you have additional questions please direct them to the current Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Kate Murphy, at ksmurphy@calpoly.edu or (805)756-2839.