



Master's Program **Handbook**

Master's Program Handbook

Core Faculty and Staff

Department Chair is responsible for administering all aspects of the Department, including overseeing all faculty, staff, and students.

Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for the overall management of the MA/PhD in History. In consultation with the department's Graduate Committee and the Chair, the DGS has the authority to make exceptions to departmental regulations. The DGS does not, however, have the authority to make exceptions to Graduate School rules and policies. The DGS can petition on behalf of the student, but such exceptions, including extensions of time to degree, late completion of incompletes, or missing any other deadline of the Graduate School, are in the prerogative of the Dean of the Graduate School and the Graduate School staff.

Department Administrator (DA): The day-to-day administration of the department is the responsibility of the Department Administrator. Questions a student may have about rules, deadlines, grant opportunities, or minor bureaucratic problems should be directed to the DA. If the issue or problem requires faculty advice or approval, the Administrator will advise the student to talk either with her or his advisor or the DGS. The DA is also the communications center for the department.

Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Coordinator is responsible for the practical aspects of registration and all student services including paperwork: providing registration materials and the permission codes by which students officially register. The Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Coordinator helps maintain student records and information for the Graduate Program Office, including rosters, listservs and keeping the website up to date. Make sure that Coordinator has your current mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses. The Coordinator can also direct students to funding opportunities, job notices, and the like. The Coordinator will be your primary contact person for the graduate program.

[Please visit the Department of History's website to know who to contact.](#)

Welcome

Welcome to graduate study in history at the University at Buffalo! The Department of History is a community of scholars and students committed to the values and ethics of rigorous education in the humanities and humanistic social sciences. The Department is dedicated to research, teaching, and public outreach regarding humanity's vast and diverse past. The Department's interests span the globe and cover every epoch of human history. Its faculty members are equally acclaimed for their path breaking research, writing, and dedication to teaching and advising.

Program Overview

The Master's degree in history offers students graduate work that serves a variety of needs and purposes. A master's degree can be an end in itself for students whose personal and/or professional goal is an MA. The MA can also be a preparatory graduate degree en route to the doctorate. The MA can also advance other professional goals, from secondary education to museum work. Note that acceptance into the MA program does not constitute admission into the PhD program in History. Students who decide they want to pursue a PhD may later apply for admission to the doctoral program.

Courses

For a complete list of courses offered in the current semester, consult the Department of History's website. Although these courses are designed specifically for the needs of doctoral students, MA students may be admitted to them with the instructor's permission.

Diversity Statement

Historians study the diversity of human experiences over time. We recognize that many aspects of these experiences—race, class, gender, religion, and disability, among others—have particular historical significance because they have served as vehicles for the expression of, and resistance to, power, profoundly affecting people's daily lives and struggles for equality and justice. As a result, historians study not history but histories: the differences, congruences, and dynamic interplay between a diversity of human lives.

The Department of History acknowledges that these histories have not ended; we are still living them today. Any legitimate attempt to explore and understand the past thus requires the full, engaged participation of a diversity of perspectives and voices. We are committed to building an inclusive department by supporting members of our community across our rich differences of race and ethnicity, economic status, religion, politics, ability and disability, gender, sexuality, age, and citizenship status. Respect for and engagement with these differences is a shared and essential intellectual and community value.

We also acknowledge the many obstacles that challenge efforts to build such an inclusive and supportive community and believe that overcoming such obstacles through purposeful action is an urgent need, especially in a public university dedicated to serving a diverse public. For this reason, we are committed to recruiting faculty, students, and staff of varied life experiences; providing a full range of courses and pedagogical approaches that engage with a diversity of topics and learners; and cultivating an environment in which all feel that they belong, that they are valued, and that they can teach, work, and learn free from exclusions and inequities that inhibit the exchange of ideas. Through these and other actions history can realize its potential to bridge differences and contribute to a more just society.

The Department encourages students to explore the following diversity-related resources:

- Department of History [Awards and Scholarships](#)
- Student Life's [Intercultural and Diversity Center](#)
- [Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Department Communications

The Department maintains a listserv that is for graduate students only with the exception of the DGS, Department Chair and the Department Administrator. All graduate students may post to this list: history-graduates-list@listserv.buffalo.edu. Admitted students are automatically added to the list via their UB email addresses.

It is the expectation of the department that you will meet regularly with your advisor to ensure you are meeting the requirements of your degree. You should establish a schedule with your advisor as soon as you are able to do so.

The Graduate Lounge

There is a graduate lounge located in room 551 on the fourth floor of Park Hall. Graduate mailboxes are located there. In addition, there is a refrigerator, microwave, and coffee. If locked, you can ask any staff member to open the door. This is a space exclusively for graduate students. Please keep the place tidy!

The Graduate Student Association

The [Graduate Student Association \(GSA\)](#) is the representative body for graduate students at the University at Buffalo. Its two key purposes can be divided into representation and services. Its funds are derived from the Mandatory Student Fee and are used to pay GSA staff and fund numerous programs and services offered to GSA members.

- [GSA By-Laws](#)

Graduate History Association

The [Graduate History Association \(GHA\)](#) is dedicated to maintaining, supporting, and strengthening the intellectual and social lives of our members. As such, the mission of the GHA is to foster inter-and intra-departmental interactions at UB that further critical historical and interdisciplinary engagement. We are continually striving to create a context through which students in our department can achieve success during their tenure at UB. In supporting such goals, the GHA wishes to build a graduate student presence in the department that creates a beneficial learning and teaching environment for all. Leadership is elected at the beginning of the school year. The GHA recommends graduate students to serve on departmental committees, including the Graduate Committee, the Speakers Committee, and the Diversity Committee. A student representative also attends monthly departmental meetings.

Phi Alpha Theta

[Phi Alpha Theta](#) is the national honor society for students in the field of history, with 860 chapters on college and university campuses across the nation. Membership is a mark of intellectual accomplishment and commitment. Phi Alpha Theta students also have the opportunity to present their research at an annual regional conference.

All graduate students who maintain a 3.5 GPA are eligible for membership after the completion of their first semester. Membership is not just prestigious. At UB Phi Alpha Theta hosts events such as game nights and field trips and more. For more information, contact the Phi Alpha Theta Advisor, Dr. Cari Casteel.

Annual Milton Plesur Graduate History Conference

The [Annual Milton Plesur conference](#) was named in honor of Dr. Milton Plesur. Plesur was a former professor in the Department of History between 1955 and 1987. During this time he had a profound effect on the students, faculty, and Department of History. The Annual Milton Plesur Conference is an opportunity for graduate students from UB and beyond to showcase and share their research.

Program Requirements

These requirements apply for all MA students.

Students need 30 credits (10 courses) to graduate. Full-time students generally take three seminars (500- or 600- level courses) per semester, for a total of 9 credits. In order to reach the SUNY requirement of 12 credits for full-time status, students may add HIS 599 (see below). In lieu of HIS 599, you might take a language course, for example, but be aware that the Department of History considers 3 graduate seminars to be a full load.

These seminars are required in order to complete the Master's degree:

- **HIS 500: Doing History.** Students considering doctoral work in the future may instead enroll in HIS 501 (Historical Inquiry), the introductory course for doctoral students.
- **Core seminars during your first year** corresponding to your area of specialty
 - For specialists of U.S., Latin American, and European history, the core is a two semester sequence. The Asian and Atlantic World cores are usually single semester courses, so students in those specialties must select an additional semester of a core seminar in another field.
- One research (600- level) seminar
- Four additional 500- level seminars of your choosing

Core seminars by area

HIS 502-503: American Core: I and II

HIS 504-505: European Core: Early Modern and Modern

HIS 506: North and South Atlantic Core

HIS 507: Asian Core

HIS 559-560: Latin America and the Caribbean (not offered every year)

Please note: we generally just offer one research seminar at a time and all students work on whatever scholarship they want to focus on (regardless of subject matter).

HIS 599 is not required and it does not count toward your degree. You can enroll in HIS 599 for 3 credits, enabling you to reach full-time (12-credit) status with the normal load of three 3-credit seminars. To receive credit, students must attend 4 events related to the intellectual life of the university or, in certain cases, of the community. These are generally scholarly lectures or conferences. You can find out about such events on the following websites:

- [Department of History Upcoming Events](#)
- [Humanities Institute Events](#)
- [Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy](#)

Or you might identify an event on your own. If unsure whether a certain event will be acceptable, ask the coordinator of 599, which in 2024-25 will be the Department Chair, Kristin Stapleton. Email her a brief description of the event and your thoughts on it within a week of the event.

Alternately, enrolling in or attending all six meetings of HIS 701 (Pro-seminar on Teaching) also fulfills the requirements for HIS 599. Again, email your thoughts on the 701 sessions to Dr. Stapleton.

Distribution Requirement

All MA students must fulfill a distribution requirement by taking at least one course in each of three major areas: U.S. and Canada; Europe; Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the case of transnational, thematic, or world history courses, students should consult with the DGS about whether it can fulfill the requirement for a particular area, and if so, ask to have a statement to that effect put in their file.

The Masters Project Requirement

In addition to seminar coursework, students must also complete a Master's Project. The project is an article-length paper of roughly 30-60 pages, based on primary research, placed within a historiographical framework, and executed under the guidance of a faculty member. If based on a previous seminar paper, it must be significantly reworked and/or expanded.

To complete the Master's Project, you will need an **adviser** who will guide, evaluate, and ultimately grade your work. **You should approach a faculty member about advising your project as soon as you have an idea of your research topic; at the latest, you should choose an advisor who agrees to work with you no later than the end of your second semester.** Typically, you will choose a faculty member who specializes in a relevant field (geography, time, approach, etc.) and with whom you have established some kind of connection (e.g., you have taken a class from them, and/or visited their office hours, etc.). In some cases, the best faculty member for your project may not have offered a course at the right time for you; you should take the initiative to visit their office hours and find out whether they would be a suitable adviser for your project. If you are having trouble finding an advisor, or are concerned about any aspect of the process, contact the DGS and he or she will be able to help.

The typical course sequence for an MA student

The following is a typical course of study (N.B.: if you begin in the Spring rather than the Fall there will be some alterations to this sequence; please contact the DGS briefly as you enroll each semester to make sure all requirements are met):

SEMESTER I

- HIS 500 or 501
- Core seminar
- Elective seminar (500- level)
- HIS 599 or some other class, if you need to be enrolled fulltime

SEMESTER II

- Core seminar
- Elective seminar (500- level)
- Research Seminar (600- level)
- HIS 599 or some other class

Select an adviser for your MA project and work out a plan for background reading over the summer.

SEMESTER III

If you have followed the above template for Semesters I and II, you will now need to take:

- 2 more 500-level seminars
- 6 credits of HIS 598 to cover the research and writing of your MA project.

If you intend for this to be your final semester, you should enroll in 2 seminars plus 6 credits of HIS 598. If you do not intend to complete your MA project this semester, you can enroll in 3 seminars plus 3 credits of HIS 598 on a continuing pass/fail basis.

SEMESTER IV (IF NECESSARY)

If you have not yet completed your MA project:

- 3 credits of HIS 598

Although you will only be registered for 3 credits, the Graduate School will consider you to be a full-time student because you will have already fulfilled all other requirements for the degree.

You must be sure, however, to [submit the paperwork](#) requesting full-time status to be sure you do not incur a penalty.

General Guidelines for Master's Students

Bureaucracy

If you are planning to switch between full-time and part-time status, to graduate, to take a leave of absence, or to otherwise change your status as a UB student, speak to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible. Paperwork often needs to be filed with the Graduate School well in advance. They can always answer your questions or refer you to somebody who can.

Managing Reading

Many students find this to be the most challenging aspect of graduate study. There is no single strategy for how best to make it through the massive amounts of densely written material assigned in seminars. Unless you are gifted with an uncanny talent for doing so, you will not retain every detail or point of information. It is important to read actively: Rather than expect passively to absorb the gist of what is being discussed, get in the habit of always trying to discern what the author is attempting to argue, how they support this argument, and whether this is persuasive. When you take notes, think of your notes not as a summary of the information from the book, but as a schema of how the author has constructed their argument. As you get better at this, you will find that you will read faster and more effectively, and that you can often skim certain chapters without losing the major points.

Resources

The best starting point for research is the UB Libraries website. From there, you can access the university library catalogue along with databases of scholarly articles (e.g., Historical Abstracts, EBSCO, J-Stor, or America: History and Life) and dissertations (Digital Dissertations), and the worldwide consortium of library catalogues (World Cat). If you identify a book or article that is not available locally, you can order it through Interlibrary Loan (ILL/Delivery +). The ILL service at UB is very reliable, but you still must begin your research in advance to be sure that the books and articles you need for a term paper arrive in time.

The Associate Librarian for the Humanities is Dr. Michael Kicey (makicey@buffalo.edu). He is the liaison librarian assigned to our department and is a fantastic resource. Throughout the academic year, he sends notifications on new databases and other new resource materials. Feel free to contact him as you plan your research.

Funding Opportunities

The department attempts to support as many graduate students as possible during their graduate careers, but the department has a limited number of student grader positions available. Each term an announcement will be made when opportunities are available. Students must be in good academic standing and receive approval from their advisor. There are also a limited number of scholarship, awards, and other research opportunities with faculty. The DGS will make an announcement when available.

Historiography

This term refers to the scholarly literature on a given subject. It can be general, as in, “French medievalist historiography,” or quite specific, such as “the historiography on attitudes toward

race during the Cuban wars of independence.” A standard seminar assignment is to write a historiographical review (sometimes called a review essay) of a given field. To do this, you choose several important and representative works by historians in that field, then critically review each one in a single essay. A good essay is one in which (1) the sources are well chosen and relevant; (2) the essay is greater than the sum of its parts, not stringing together critiques of each work one after the other but drawing out the overarching themes and trends in the overall corpus of literature; and (3) the essay is well organized and eloquently written. Many scholarly journals publish historiographical review essays, which can serve as good guides for learning a field and models for completing such an assignment.

Primary and Secondary Research

Primary research is research based on primary sources, or sources with direct historical significance. A primary source is anything created at the time being studied, whereas a secondary source is anything created after that time. Whereas a biography of George Washington might be a secondary source, Washington’s diaries would be a primary source. One imagines a primary source to be a dusty, crinkled document filed in an archive, but to continue with the present example, many of Washington’s diaries have been published and are available in libraries. And what if you were doing a research paper on representations of the Founding Fathers in American culture? In that case, that biography we otherwise regarded as a secondary source might become a primary source, suitable for comparison, say, with another example of the same genre published five decades before or after. A successful research paper, and, ultimately, your Masters Project, will combine primary and secondary sources, research, and historiography.

Life of the Department

Part of your graduate education is participating in the life of the department. This includes attending [speaker series events](#) whenever possible. The cohorts here are some of your best resources: take advantage of their expertise!

We are committed to your success at UB and are always available to help. Please reach out if you need anything! **Welcome to the Department of History!**