

# Planning For and Completing the Master's Program in History at Illinois State University

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## Overview

The master's program in History offers two degrees, Master of Arts (MA) and Master of Science (MS). The sole difference between the two degrees is whether or not a student chooses to meet a foreign language requirement defined by the University in order to receive an MA rather than an MS. To meet the requirement, a student must complete a minimum of four semesters (or its equivalent) in one foreign language with a C or better, or with a Credit or Pass, in the courses at either the graduate or the undergraduate level. Alternatively, the student can meet the requirement by obtaining a satisfactory score on a University administered language examination approved by the Graduate School available in German, French, or Spanish at the University Testing Office. See the Graduate Catalog for more information about the MA.

Apart from the language proficiency requirement for the MA, the MA and MS programs in the History Department are identical. For students whose first semester as a degree student in the Graduate Program in History was prior to Fall 2011, there are three paths to completing the program: the thesis option, the two-seminar paper option, and the field of study option. Students whose first semester as a degree student was Fall 2011 only have two options, the thesis or the field of study, as the Department has discontinued the two-seminar paper track for completing the program.

Students should choose the option they want to pursue soon after entering the program. Different options have different requirements, so it is best to get started on meeting them sooner rather than later. **Students should therefore choose their path to completing the program**

**near the end of their first semester of study, at the latest. To help you to make a wise choice given your interests and goals, you should consult with your instructors and with the Graduate Director.**

## **The Thesis Option**

The thesis option for all students who entered the program in Fall 2011 or after consists of the following requirements:

- 32 total hours. This grand total must include HIS 496 (Philosophy of History and Historiography – 4 hours) and HIS 499 (Thesis – 4 to 6 hours), plus a minimum of 20 additional hours at the 400 level. HIS 496 and 499, in other words, do not count toward the 20-hour 400-level minimum, but they do count toward the 32 hour grand total needed to graduate. **See below for more information about courses that can and cannot count toward the required grand total and the required 400-level minimum.**

For students who entered the program prior to Fall 2011, the thesis option's requirements under the "old catalog" (the catalog governing the Graduate Program prior to Fall 2011) are the following:

- 32 total hours. This grand total must include HIS 496 (Philosophy of History and Historiography – 4 hours), HIS 497 (Research in History – 4 hours), HIS 499 (Thesis – 4 to 6 hours), plus a minimum of 16 additional hours at the 400 level. HIS 496, 497, and 499, in other words, do not count toward the 16-hour 400-level minimum, but they do count toward the 32 hour grand total needed to graduate. **See below for more information about courses that can and cannot count toward the required grand total and the required 400-level minimum.**

Given the differences between the thesis track under the old catalog and the new catalog (the one governing students who entered the program in Fall 2011 or later), students who entered the program prior to Fall 2011 and who are pursuing the thesis option should consult with the Graduate Director about their program.

## **Timeline**

Coursework in your first semester of study should include HIS 496, as that is a required course for all History graduate students, regardless of the option they pursue.

By the end of your first semester of study, you should decide whether or not to pursue the thesis track for graduation. Whether or not you choose to do the thesis option, it would be wise to

consider taking HIS 497 (Research in History), which is usually only offered in the Spring semester of the academic year. For a student doing the thesis option, HIS 497 might be a good way to develop ideas for a thesis topic or even get a head start on thesis research. For students who do the Field of Study option, HIS 497 is a required course (see more on HIS 497 below, under the information for the Field of Study option).

By the end of your second semester of study, you should identify and secure a faculty member to serve as your thesis advisor. Be prepared to discuss with the faculty member your tentative topic, your anticipated graduation date, and possible faculty members to serve on your Thesis Committee (you need at least one besides the advisor; you can choose to have more than one, as well as have committee members from outside the Department). You should also obtain and review the *Guide for Writers of Masters Thesis* and **familiarize yourself with the “Thesis Assistance” page on the University’s Graduate School Website**

(<http://grad.illinoisstate.edu/thesis/index.shtml>). This page contains vital information concerning the master’s thesis, including: a link to the Graduate School’s *Proposal Approval Form* (which must be completed before you start HIS 499) and a link for *Dates and Deadlines*.

Finally, you need to submit the History Department’s form, *Notification-Capstone Requirement*, to the Graduate Director. This form is found on the Graduate page of the History Department’s website, under “Forms.”

Once all of the above has been done, you can get an override from the Graduate Secretary to enroll in HIS 499 (Thesis hours). Remember that at least 4 hours of HIS 499 must be completed to earn your degree; up to 6 hours can count toward your degree, though you can take more if you wish. You can also get to the minimum of 4 in any increment you and advisor prefer.

Completing the Thesis usually involves a series of steps worked out between you and your faculty advisor. These could include writing a formal topic statement, a “Prospectus;” locating and analyzing primary and secondary sources; submitting drafts; and writing the final draft. The Department in general expects a thesis to be at least 80 pages long, exclusive of notes and bibliography, and no longer than 150 pages. It is best to aim for 80 pages or so.

Early in your final semester of study, you must complete two forms: the *Masters Degree Audit*, to be submitted electronically to the Department’s Graduate Director, and the Graduate School’s *Application for Graduation* (and a \$30 fee). These forms are found on the Graduate School website, under the tabs for “Degree Audit” and “Graduation/Commencement.”

No later than three weeks prior to the defense of your thesis, you need to submit a draft of the thesis to the Department’s Graduate Director and to the Graduate School for a format check. You also need to schedule the “thesis defense” with your committee (see the Graduate School’s *Dates and Deadlines* for last dates you can defend). In the thesis defense, you will formally meet with your thesis committee to defend your work.

No later than seven days prior to the defense of your thesis, meet with the Graduate School Examiner and submit the *Right to Defend* form; deposit two examination copies of the thesis with the History Department.

Final Filing Deadline: See the Graduate School's *Dates and Deadlines*.

## **The Field of Study Option**

The Field of Study option consists of the following requirements:

- 39 total hours. This grand total must include HIS 496 (Philosophy of History and Historiography – 4 hours), HIS 490 (Readings-Field of Study – 4 hours), and HIS 497 (Research in History – 4 hours). Students must complete 20 hours of work at the 400 level; HIS 496 and 490 do not count toward this 20-hour minimum, but HIS 497 does count. **See below for more information about courses that can and cannot count toward the required grand total and the required 400-level minimum.**

### **Timeline**

Coursework in your first semester of study should include HIS 496, as that is a required course for all History graduate students, regardless of the option they pursue.

By the end of your first semester of study, you should decide whether or not to pursue the Field of Study track for graduation. If you decide to do so, you should take HIS 497 (Research in History) the next time it is offered as 497 is a required course for the Field of Study option; 497 is typically offered only in the Spring semester of an academic year. You should also begin thinking about possible topics for your directed readings in HIS 490 and potential faculty advisors. HIS 490 should be taken during your last semester of study.

HIS 497 is a seminar in which students are required to write a 25-30 page research paper (not counting the notes, bibliography, etc.). Usually one section of 497 covers some aspect of American history; the other section covers a topic in non-western or European history. Descriptions of the 497 sections should be posted in the Department around the midpoint of the Fall semester of the academic year, as registration for the Spring begins. Note: The Department expects that beginning in the academic year 2012-12, students will be able to take HIS 497 more than once and get credit toward their degree for doing so, as each section of 497 amounts to a distinct course.

No later than the final week of the semester prior to the semester you take HIS 490, you should identify and secure a faculty member to serve as your faculty advisor. You and the advisor then agree upon a topic for the 490 course and on a list of potential second readers for the 490 exam at

the end of the course. Once this is done, fill out and submit the History Department's form, *Notification-Capstone Requirement*, to the Graduate Director. This form is found on the Graduate page of the History Department's website, under "Forms." Once the Graduate Director and the Department Chair approve the form, you can get an override from the Graduate Secretary to enroll in HIS 490. You should also familiarize yourself with the *Dates and Deadlines* page on the University's Graduate School website (<http://grad.illinoisstate.edu/dates/index.shtml>). This page has important information about graduating from the program.

Early in the semester you are enrolled in HIS 490, the Graduate Director in consultation with the Graduate Committee and Chair will assign a second reader for your exam. You must also complete two forms: the *Masters Degree Audit*, to be submitted electronically to the Department's Graduate Director, and the Graduate School's *Application for Graduation* (and a \$30 fee). These forms are found on the Graduate School website, under the tabs for "Degree Audit" and "Graduation/Commencement."

By the tenth day of the semester you are taking HIS 490, your reading list should be finalized and submitted to the Graduate Director for approval. Students will normally read at least one book per week or its equivalent in articles in new material. Reading lists may include additional material read in other courses. As you proceed through the reading list, you will periodically meet with your faculty advisor to discuss the readings; the exact schedule is up to you and your faculty advisor.

By two weeks prior to the end of the semester, the faculty advisor and the student should agree on a list of potential questions for the exam (six to eight or so). Typically, the faculty advisor selects three of those questions for the three-hour exam (one question per hour). All exams will be essay style, taken on university premises. Any student who fails to receive at least a "B" on the exam must retake it; a grade of "B" is required to pass HIS 490. The second reader's responsibility is to offer an independent and detached reading of the exam and to recommend a "pass" or "fail" evaluation to the faculty advisor.

In the fifteenth or sixteenth week of the semester, take the examination for HIS 490.

## **The Two-Seminar Paper Option**

**This option is only available to students who entered the program prior to Fall 2011.** This option consists of the following requirements:

- 39 total hours. This grand total must include HIS 496 (Philosophy of History and Historiography – 4 hours) and HIS 497 (Research in History – 4 hours). Students must complete 20 hours of work at the 400 level; HIS 496 and 497 do not count toward this 20-hour minimum under this option. **See below for more information about courses**

**that can and cannot count toward the required grand total and the required 400-level minimum.**

## **Timeline**

Early in your final semester, you must complete two forms: the *Masters Degree Audit*, to be submitted electronically to the Department's Graduate Director, and the Graduate School's *Application for Graduation* (and a \$30 fee). These forms are found on the Graduate School website, under the tabs for "Degree Audit" and "Graduation/Commencement." You should also familiarize yourself with the *Dates and Deadlines* page on the University's Graduate School website (<http://grad.illinoisstate.edu/dates/index.shtml>). This page has important information about graduating from the program.

No later than the second or third week of your final semester, you need to contact and reach an understanding with the professor or professors you will be working with regarding how each of your two seminar papers is to be revised. You can choose either the original professor you worked with on each paper, or a new one who is comfortable with the subject matter or the work. You can also submit an entirely new paper to a professor for review if you so desire and the professor agrees. Once you have secured your professors, you need to fill out and submit the History Department's form, *Notification-Capstone Requirement*, to the Graduate Director. This form is found on the Graduate page of the History Department's website, under "Forms."

By the tenth week of your final semester, submit the papers with approval forms (the same form as the *Notification-Capstone Requirement* form; simply attach another copy to each paper) to your professors. The final papers should represent an improvement over what had originally been submitted, and they should each be around 15 to 25 pages long.

By the twelfth week of your final semester, your professors should return to you the papers and the approval forms; you should then submit them to the Graduate Director for final approval.

## **Required Hours of 400-Level Courses**

### **Recap:**

Thesis option under the new catalog – 20 hours of 400 level courses; 496 and 499 do not count.

Thesis option under the old catalog – 16 hours of 400 level courses; 496, 497, and 499 do not count.

Field of Study option – 20 hours of 400 level courses; 496 and 490 do not count.

Two Seminar Paper option – 20 hours of 400 level courses; 496 and 497 do not count.

## **Other Courses, the 400-level Minimum, and Grand Totals:**

Independent study courses (HIS 400) can count toward the 400-level minimum under any option, with the approval of the Graduate Director. Note, however, that only a maximum of 6 hours of HIS 400 can be counted toward the grand total necessary for your degree.

Internships (HIS 498) and/or workshops (HIS 493), and up to three hours of Mentorship (HIS 407) can count toward the 400-level minimum under any option, with the approval of the Graduate Director. No more than 9 hours total from the courses 400, 493, 498 (and, as well, 393 and 397), however, can count toward the grand total necessary for your degree.

400-level courses taken in other disciplines or departments do not count toward the 400-level minimum under any option. Up to 8 total hours of either 300 level or 400 level courses in other disciplines or departments can count toward the grand total necessary for your degree, with the approval of the Graduate Director.

Transfer courses from other colleges or universities do not count toward the 400-level minimum under any option. Up to 9 hours of such courses can be credited toward the grand total necessary for your degree, with the recommendation of the Graduate Director and the approval of the Graduate School. Credits more than six years old at the time of first registration into the program are not transferable.

**For information concerning other aspects of the History Department's Master's Program, including information about graduate assistantships and tuition waivers, please see the *Guide to Graduate Studies in History* on the Department's website.**