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. Students can select one of two tracks of study: the Thesis option or Field of Study option.

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 Coordinator.**

The Thesis Option

The thesis option 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 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.
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 Coordinator. 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 thesis proposal, 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 75 pages long, exclusive of notes, graphs, illustrations, appendices, 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 Coordinator, and the Graduate School’s Application for Graduation (and a $40 fee). These forms are found on the Graduate School website, under the tabs for “Degree Audit” and “Graduation/Commencement.”
Several weeks prior to the defense of your thesis, you need to upload a complete draft of your thesis to Proquest via the Graduate School for a format check. You must also submit a Right to Defend form to the Graduate School at this time. (See the Graduate School’s Plan Your Defense page for details). 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. Once your Right to Defend form is approved, you can schedule your defense. Your defense must take place at least 7 days after your Right to Defend form is approved.

No later than seven days prior to the defense of your thesis, 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; 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.). Descriptions of the 497 section offered should be posted in the Department around the midpoint of the Fall semester of the academic year, as registration for the Spring begins.

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
should 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 Coordinator. This form is found on the Graduate page of the History Department’s website, under “Forms.” Once the Graduate Coordinator 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 page of the History Department’s 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 Coordinator 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 Coordinator, and the Graduate School’s Application for Graduation (and a $40 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 Coordinator 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 and any requirements preceding the exam 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 and a half hour exam (one question per hour, with two fifteen minute breaks). At least one question should concern historiography. All exams will be essay style, written in one or more large bluebooks or on a Department laptop computer in the Department conference room and proctored by the faculty supervisor. 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. One re-take of the exam is allowed.

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

**Additional Information for Students in Either Track**

**Required Hours of 400-Level Courses**

**Thesis option:** 20 hours of 400 level courses; 496 and 499 do not count.

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

Students may take 300-level courses for graduate credit to count toward their degree (with the exception of HIS 300 and HIS 390). Graduate students taking 300 level courses are expected to complete extra work in the class (see “Guidelines for 300-level courses”).

Independent study courses (HIS 400) can count toward the 400-level minimum under any option, with the approval of the Graduate Coordinator. 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 Coordinator. 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 Coordinator 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.