PhD in History

The PhD program in history at the University of Missouri is governed by a number of rules, regulations, and expectations. What follows is an explanation of these elements of the program.

Degree Requirements

To obtain a PhD in history at the University of Missouri, a student must fulfill the following requirements:

1. residency
2. course work
3. foreign language and/or historical/research technique
4. comprehensive examination
5. dissertation and oral defense

Residency

A minimum of two semesters of full-time enrollment (9 hours each semester) or three semesters of part-time enrollment (6 hours each semester). Enrollment in all graduate courses requires the consent of the student’s advisor and the instructor(s) of the class.

Course Work

The minimum requirement for the PhD degree at the University of Missouri is 72 hours of graduate credit beyond the baccalaureate degree. A student’s advisor and committee may require more. Customarily, students in history have more than 72 hours when they defend their dissertations. If a student has earned an MA degree at another institution, with the approval of her/his advisor and committee, s/he may receive up to 30 hours of credit toward the 72 necessary for the PhD. If a student took additional courses beyond his/her MA degree at another institution, with the approval of her/his advisor and committee, s/he may receive up to a maximum of six hours of credit toward the PhD.

Graduate School regulations forbid the awarding of more than six hours. Two-thirds of the courses taken by a PhD candidate within the department prior to the comprehensive examination must be at the 8000 or 9000 level. These may, and probably will, include History 8085 (Problems), HIST 8410 (Independent Readings PhD Exam), but not HIST 9090 (Dissertation Research).

Every doctoral student who earned his /her master’s degree at another institution must take HIST 8480, Historiography, unless excused by the director of graduate studies. History 8480 is offered regularly.

Foreign Languages and Historical Research Techniques

PhD candidates must demonstrate abilities in foreign languages and/or historical research skills appropriate to the completion of a doctoral dissertation in their proposed field of research. There are four different ways a student may fulfill this requirement. Which one is chosen depends on the area of his/her research interest. The advisor and committee must approve the method for fulfilling this requirement.

Focus Areas

Ancient History Focus

Candidates planning to write a doctoral dissertation in ancient history must demonstrate their competence in Greek and Latin, together with at least two modern languages (usually French and German).

American History Focus

Candidates planning to write a dissertation in American history shall have a competent reading knowledge of one foreign language. Competence in a foreign language shall be demonstrated in the ways described above for candidates in European history.

Asian or Latin American History Focus

Candidates planning to write a dissertation in Asian or Latin American history shall demonstrate a competence in such languages as their advisory committee requires for their research. In addition, a candidate’s advisory committee may require the candidate to demonstrate competence in an historical/ research technique, as defined above in the American History section (3).

Developing a PhD Plan of Study

The committee will meet formally with the student to help the student to develop a major field, two broad historical fields, a historical field outside his/her area of major emphasis, and one field in a discipline other than history for the comprehensive examination. How s/he will meet the foreign language and/or historical research technique requirement (see below) will be defined and approved by the advisor and the committee. Members of the advisory committee shall meet regularly with the student to ensure he/she is making satisfactory progress.
Comprehensive Examination and Dissertation

Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination

In the department of history, each doctoral student must prepare five fields for the comprehensive examinations. The selection of those fields and the faculty who will be the examiners in each should be begun by the doctoral candidate and her/his advisor during her/his first semester at MU. The advisor will help the student prepare for examination in her/his major field. This will cover significant historical themes and historiographical trends in the specific period and area of the student’s prospective dissertation topic.

Two other members of the history faculty will help the student prepare for examinations in two chronological and/or geographical areas of historical study that are appropriate for his/her dissertation topic. A fourth member of the history faculty will prepare the student for an examination in a chronological, geographical, and/or thematic area of historical study that is not directly related to his/her dissertation topic. A fifth faculty member from a department other than history will prepare the student for examination in an outside field. This will cover the methodologies and research findings of another academic discipline.

Areas of Study and Dissertation Topics

What the student learns in this discipline should assist his/her understanding of and research on her/his dissertation topic. The student’s choice of a discipline to work in for his/her outside field is potentially as wide as the number of programs and departments in the university. That choice is not confined merely to departments in the College of Arts and Science. The student must have his/her advisor’s approval of the discipline and the outside faculty member. The Graduate School must approve these selections as well.

Within the department of history there are seven broad areas of historical study.

- US history to 1865 (including the colonial period)
- US history since 1865
- Ancient history
- European history from the fall of Rome through the Reformation
- European history since the Reformation
- Latin American history
- Asian history

The three history faculty who, together with the advisor, will help the student prepare for the comprehensive examinations, must each test him/her on material in a different broad area. Thus the student will be working on three different broad areas, plus the dissertation field. The three faculty members may, in consultation with the student, define the broad area as narrowly or as widely as they choose.

Documenting Exam Preparation

The advisor and the four other faculty members must explain how they want the student to prepare, what they want the student to master, and which criteria they will use to assess the examinations in their particular field. These explanations must be in writing, and copies of each placed in the student’s permanent file.

Comprehensive Examination Requirement

Students may take a comprehensive examination only after fulfilling their residency, course work and foreign language and/or historical research technique requirements. It will be administered by a committee consisting of his/her advisor and four other faculty members, one from a discipline other than history. These should be the faculty members who helped the student prepare for the examinations. Sometimes it may be necessary to find substitutes. The director of graduate studies and the Graduate School must approve any substitutions, and new committee members must describe their expectations in writing for the student and for his/her permanent file.

Comprehensive Exams Processes

The comprehensive exams are given in two stages. The first is a series of at least three written exams. The second is an oral examination, which is conducted if the student passes the written portion. A report of the decision, signed by all members of the committee, must be sent to the Graduate School and the student no later than two weeks after the comprehensive exam is completed. One of the written exams must be in the major field; the committee will determine the subjects of the other exams, and their number.

Special Note: All members can require the student to write on their areas of expertise. Therefore the written examinations could cover all five areas.

All members of the committee will read the written exams and discuss them within two weeks after their completion. If they determine the student has not successfully completed the exam, they will inform him/her immediately and discuss the results. Failure ends the comprehensive exam at this point. The committee must provide the student with an outline in writing of the weaknesses and deficiencies of his/her work.

A copy of this must be placed in the student’s permanent file. If at any time the student believes that parts of the exam are unclear, or the decision of the committee is incorrect, or the advice given by the committee is inadequate, s/he may send a written request for clarification and rectification to the committee. A copy of this request should be sent to the Graduate School as well. The committee must respond to this request in writing within two weeks and a copy must be filed with the department and the Graduate School.

At least 12 weeks must pass before a student who failed can take the comprehensive exams again.

If the committee determines that the student did satisfactory work on the written examinations, they will schedule an oral examination. This second stage of the comprehensive exams will cover all five fields. Each member of the committee will test the student. At the end of the oral examinations, the committee discusses the student’s performance on each field and on the entire examination. This discussion includes both the written and the oral parts of the whole process. Then they vote pass, fail, or abstain on the student’s total performance on the exam.

Criteria for Successful Completion of the Comprehensive Exam

To complete the comprehensive exams successfully, the student must receive a vote of pass from at least four of the five examiners. Should two or more votes be negative or abstentions, the committee follows the same procedure outlined above for failure to pass the written part. These students must repeat the entire examination, not just the fields failed, and not just the oral portion. If the candidate fails the second examination, the examining committee must enter on its report to the dean of the Graduate School a recommendation to prevent the student’s further candidacy.
Dissertation and Oral Defense

Soon after successful completion of the comprehensive examination, the student and advisor will form a dissertation committee of five faculty members. One member of the committee must be from outside the department. The student shall develop with her/his advisor and committee a dissertation topic and a plan of research. S/he should keep in regular contact with the advisor. Together they shall decide when written work will be read by other members of the committee.

Travel Funding

When students begin work on their doctoral dissertations, they may apply for departmental fellowships and travel grants to assist their research and writing.

Satisfactory Progress

The department requires PhD candidates to make satisfactory progress towards completion of their degree.

Annual Review

At the beginning of every Spring Semester, students must complete a “Progress Report” on the Graduate School’s Graduate Student Progress System. This report will be read by the student’s faculty advisor, who will then submit an “advisor Response.” In addition, the student and advisor should meet to discuss the student’s progress, confirm expectations for the coming year, and address any concerns either may have regarding the report.

This is an extremely important process for two reasons. First, the advisor determines whether the student is making satisfactory progress toward a degree. If s/he is not, the advisor informs the student what needs to be done to rectify the situation. The student then usually has a year to return to making satisfactory progress.

Failure to do so may result in loss of financial aid or dismissal from the program. Second, if the student is making satisfactory progress, the advisor and s/he decide together on what reasonable goals are for the next twelve months. These goals will define “satisfactory progress” at the next assessment meeting.

Appeals

The student may appeal any assessment to the director of graduate studies. If not satisfied, s/he may seek the remedies described in the Graduate School catalog.

Funding Impact of Incomplete Reports

Completion of the Graduate Student Progress System forms by both student (Progress Report) and faculty (Advisor Response) is mandatory to maintain eligibility for any form of financial aid from the department. Receipt of financial aid requires confirmation by a student’s advisor that s/he is making satisfactory progress. No student in the program who applies for or who is seeking renewal of financial aid will be eligible for aid without a complete and up-to-date Graduate Student Progress System Report on file.

Rate of Completion

A PhD student must successfully complete the comprehensive examination within a period of five years beginning with the first semester of enrollment as a PhD student. For an extension of this the student must petition the Graduate School by submitting a request to the advisor who, in turn, submits a written recommendation to the Graduate School. The director of graduate studies will also make a written recommendation. In addition, the dissertation must be successfully defended within five years of passing the comprehensive examination. On petition of the candidate and the candidate’s department, an extension of time may be granted by the Graduate School.

Admission Criteria

- MA in history strongly preferred
- Quality of master’s thesis or research seminar paper submission
- Official GRE score report, recommended but not required
- Minimum TOEFL scores (international applicants only):

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<th>Internet-based test (iBT)</th>
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Students who do not meet one or more of these criteria may enroll as non-degree graduate students. Contact the director of graduate studies for further details. All admissions of doctoral candidates who did not receive the MA degree from the department are provisional. These students must pass a qualifying examination. See below for information about the qualifying examination.

Application Deadline

Fall deadline: Mid-January (see departmental website for specific date)

Required Application Materials

To the Graduate School:

- All required Graduate School documents, including Graduate School online application
- One uploaded copy of each college transcript where a degree was earned or is pending (official transcripts required upon admission)
- Short essay explaining goals and expectations in graduate study, including the fields in which the student plans to specialize (upload to the online application)
- Substantial writing sample, such as a final research paper from a course (upload to the online application)
- 3 letters of recommendation (submission through the online application system strongly preferred, but postal mail submission directly to the department allowed)
- Official GRE score report, recommended but not required
- Official TOEFL score for international students

Note: Incomplete applications will not be considered. It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that all required documents have been received by the January deadline.

Admission Contact Information

Nancy Taube (tauben@missouri.edu)
101 Read Hall; Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-0250

Qualifying Examination

To be admitted to candidacy for a PhD in history, a student must have earned an MA in history or a related discipline and have passed a qualifying examination.

Students with an MA from the University of Missouri

Students earning their MA in history at this university may, with the approval of their advisory committee, combine their qualifying
examination with their MA thesis defense. Other students must take their qualifying examination no later than the beginning of their third semester in the graduate program at the University of Missouri.

Students Who Earned Degrees at Other Institution

All admissions of doctoral candidates who did not receive the MA degree from the department are provisional. These students must pass a qualifying examination no later than the beginning of their third semester of residence at MU. The exam will focus on a research paper the student wrote at MU.

About the Exam

The examining committee will be composed of the student’s advisor and at least two other history faculty members. During the consideration of prospective students, the committee on graduate admissions will consult closely with faculty best suited to advise them.

The basis for the examination will be a substantial research-based seminar paper written here. The exam will be oral, approximately one hour in length; the examiners will include the student’s advisor and at least two other members of the department. It is designed to ascertain the candidate’s intellectual capacity, aptitude, and preparation for PhD level work in history.

The committee reserves the right to reject otherwise qualified students if:

1. this department cannot provide the applicant with an adequate program in his/her area of interest
2. no faculty member is willing to supervise his/her work.

Advisor and Advisory Committee

A student will meet with his/her advisor no later than the semester following passage of the qualifying examination for students who earn their MA in history at the University of Missouri and prior to the qualifying examination for other students. The advisor and student together will plan the student’s class work up to the comprehensive exams. They will also choose other members of the student’s doctoral committee. That committee will ordinarily consist of the advisor, three members of the history department who are on the graduate faculty, and one graduate faculty member from outside the department. The advisory committee must be approved by the dean of the Graduate School.

Financial Aid from the Program

In this department, all applicants are considered for financial aid unless they indicate otherwise. Announcements of awards are made no later than April 1. Applicants may compete for Graduate School fellowships for entering students. Graduate School fellowships require departmental nomination. Interested students should consult with the director of graduate studies for further details.

The department provides qualified students the opportunity to gain college-level teaching experience as teaching assistants who conduct discussion sections in American and European history. Pending administrative approval and availability of funding, they earn at least $19,026 an academic year and carry nine semester hours. Each appointment is subject to annual review and may be renewed up to a maximum of six years.