

Handbook for Graduate Students

Department of History
Boise State University

(2010/11)

Admission and Status

Admission to the Graduate Program

There are two components to the application to the masters program in the department of history at Boise State University.

One set of materials goes to Graduate Admissions (students should consult the Graduate Catalog for general admission information):

- an application form (found at <http://www.boisestate.edu/gradcoll/>)
- the appropriate fee
- official transcripts from every college or university that you have attended
- your GRE general test scores

When your file is complete in Graduate Admissions, a program admission recommendation (PAR) form is prepared and sent to the graduate program coordinator in the history department along with copies of your transcripts and your test scores.

The second set of materials goes to the history department:

- Letter of application: In this letter, you should explain why you wish to enter the graduate program, which field(s) you would like to study, why you think Boise State University can serve your needs, and which degree (see below) you find most appropriate. You may also wish to address any obvious deficiencies in your academic record.
- Two letters of recommendation: Ideally, these letters will come from people familiar with your work as a student, preferably from history professors. They should address your potential as a historian, your ability to work in a graduate program, and more generally your academic skills and qualities as a student.
- Writing sample: This should reflect your abilities as a writer and a researcher. There is no page limit, but we would like to see a research paper of at least 10 pages. It should have the full scholarly apparatus, including an analytical thesis statement, effective use of evidence, foot/endnotes and bibliography. The best sample would come from a history class, but other coursework can be used.

Once all of these materials are received by the history department, including the PAR form and attachments from Graduate Admissions, the

graduate program coordinator will circulate your file to three appropriate faculty members, who will evaluate it. Then, the department's graduate program committee will examine your file and the faculty evaluations, and then recommend to the graduate dean to admit with regular status, admit with provisional status, or deny admission. The graduate dean will make the final decision and notify you by regular mail. An admission decision can be made in the absence of GRE scores, but the decision can only be to admit provisionally or deny admission. If you are admitted with provisional status without GRE scores, you will be required to submit GRE scores before the end of the first semester following your admission.

Provisional Status and Promotion to Regular Status

Provisional status indicates that there were certain deficiencies in your record or in your application at the time you were admitted.

- The most common reason for being labeled provisional is that a student has not taken the Graduate Record Exam upon admittance. If you are in that category, you must take the GRE exam no later than your first semester in the program, or the Graduate College will not allow you to enroll for courses in succeeding semesters.
- Another common reason for provisional status is that a student does not have sufficient background in the discipline of history. We accept many excellent students whose educational background is in another field. We value such students for the expertise and varied perspectives they bring to the program, but require them to take coursework during their first semester or year (as spelled out in the letter of acceptance) that will enable them to work successfully as historians.
- Other students come to our program with great promise but a checkered academic background. Those students receive provisional status in order to give them the opportunity to demonstrate that they belong in, and can succeed in, our masters program. If you fall into this category, you should be aware that your status is not only provisional but *probationary*. In this case, your first semester of course work, as well as our required core courses, will be critical for you.
- Any student who has been admitted provisionally will receive a letter from the graduate coordinator spelling out exactly what he/she must accomplish to remove that status; when the student has done so, he/she will be granted regular status. If the student does not fulfill the conditions for advancement to regular status by a prescribed time, he/she will be dropped from the program.
- If your application is denied, you may reapply. You should

discuss with the graduate coordinator the advisability of reapplying.

Graduate Assistantships

The department has at its disposal several graduate assistantships per year. Each assistantship consists of a stipend and a full fee waiver for that school year. The stipends generally range from approximately \$8,000.00 to approximately \$10,000.00

Applicants to the graduate program will be automatically considered for a graduate assistantship as long as they get their materials in by January 15 for the following academic year. Continuing students must send a letter of application to the Graduate Coordinator, and arrange to have a letter of recommendation from their advisors submitted along with a copy of up-to-date, unofficial Boise State University transcripts by January 15.

Graduate Assistantships require recipients to work up to 20 hours per week for one or more faculty members during the school year. This work will involve research, assistance with course preparation, leading discussion sections, grading, occasional lecturing, but never actually teaching a course. If a student receives a partial assistantship, the work obligation will be cut back appropriately. Students receiving a full assistantship award must take at least 9 credits per semester during their tenure as a graduate assistant.

Receipt of a graduate assistantship one year is no guarantee that a student will receive it for a second year. A second-year applicant will be evaluated in the same way that all other applicants are evaluated; all else being equal, the student's assistantship will be renewed in full or in part. If an assistant has not made adequate academic progress towards the master's degree, and/or has not performed to the level expected, the assistantship will not be renewed.

Two Masters Degrees

Master of Arts in History: The Master of Arts in History prepares students to work in academic institutions/organizations or to continue in history doctoral programs. The degree culminates with the completion of a thesis, which is a written examination of a historical topic, based on primary source research, and defending a hypothesis that is original and compelling. The topic and scope of the thesis will be determined by the student in consultation with the advisory committee.

Master of Arts in History	
Course Number and Title	Credits
HIST 500 The Nature of History	3
HIST 501 The Study of History	3
Approved History Electives.....21 OR Approved History Electives.....12 Approved Electives Outside of History.....9	21
HIST 593 Thesis.....6	6
TOTAL	33
Note: One year of foreign language is required for graduation; these credits do not count towards the required 33 credits for the degree.	

Master of Applied Historical Research: The Masters in Applied Historical Research gives students the opportunity to combine an existing expertise with the study of history. Possible emphases include public history, urban affairs, the environment, policy studies (local, state, or international), and applied cultural studies. The applied research project is the cumulative activity for the Master of Applied Historical Research. All projects, regardless the medium, must include a substantial written portion of no less than 5,000 words. The written portion must place the research in appropriate scholarly context. It must demonstrate scholarly competence in writing, research, analysis, and historical documentation.

Master of Applied Historical Research	
Course Number and Title	Credits
HIST 500 The Nature of History	3
HIST 501 The Study of History	3
HIST 502 Seminar in Applied Historical Research	3
Approved History Electives.....18 <i>OR</i> Approved History electives.....6-18 Approved internships and/or non-history electives.....0-12	18
HIST 591 (Project)	6
TOTAL	33

Master of Applied Historical Research	
<p>Note: One year of foreign language or a technical equivalent is required for graduation; these credits do not count towards the required 33 credits for the degree.</p>	

Coursework

All graduate students must take two core graduate courses. These courses are designed to be taken in the first year, with History 500 being offered in the fall and History 501 being offered in the spring. Students in the MAHR program must also take History 502.

- History 500: *The Nature of History*. The goals, means, and results of the various historical schools of thought are examined, as are the qualities that make for good historical research. You will hone skills for evaluating and producing historical research.
- History 501: *The Study of History*. History 501 rotates among department faculty and will have a different thematic emphasis every year: in the recent past, its focus has been "gender and sexuality," "urban history," "global human rights," "nationalism," "religion," and "war." Students from all fields take the class together, linking their particular field of emphasis with the theme of the course.
- History 502: *Applied Historical Research*. History 502 is a seminar on the use and abuse of history in nonacademic settings. Potential topics include the application of historical thinking and methods in foreign policy, business history, city planning, historic preservation, environmental assessment, library and archives, historic sites, and museums. This course is required for MAHR students, and can serve as an elective for MA students.

These courses will be the only definite opportunities for incoming graduate students to work together. Thereafter, your coursework will focus on your chosen field.

Other courses that graduate students will take fall into five categories: regularly scheduled lecture courses, Readings and Conference, Directed Research, Internships, and Thesis/Project credits.

- History 580/581/582 *Selected Topics: Graduate Seminar*. Courses with these numbers will nearly always be combined graduate/undergraduate courses. In these cases, you will be required to do work appropriate to graduate study, which may or may not include the requirements for the undergraduates in the course.
- History 585 *Selected Topics: Themes in History*.

Like Hist. 501, the topics and professors teaching them rotate each semester. The topics are usually global in nature, so can be applicable to students specializing in a variety of areas. Unlike Hist. 580/581/582, this class is reserved for graduate students only, so it provides the supreme learning environment. You may take as many 585 courses as you wish.

- History 590 *Internships* are available, and can be of immense value, depending upon your track and your field of study. See the internship director if you are interested. MA students may take up to 9 and MAHR students may take up to 12 credits in internships. You may register for internship credit until the sixth week of the semester.
- History 591/593: *Project/Thesis credits*. While working on your thesis or project, during your fourth semester, you will sign up for six thesis or project credits. There is no class time or coursework involved in these credits. When you finish your thesis or project, you will receive a grade of pass or fail for these credits. If writing a thesis, you must fill out and submit the "Application for Graduate Thesis" when signing up for thesis credits. You must register for thesis credit by the tenth day of the semester.
- History 594: *Workshop*. Workshops focus on particular and limited themes and methodological approaches to history. They are run in seminar style. In the past, workshops have been offered on oral history, archives, and other similar topics.
- History 595: *Readings and Conference*. This course can be quite beneficial. In it, you will read extensively on a relatively narrow topic, preferably one which fits directly with your thesis/project. You will meet regularly with the professor of record to discuss the readings. This course enables you to work on themes/topics that are not ordinarily covered by regular departmental course offerings. Feel free to approach a member of the department about arranging a Readings and Conference; you and the professor will fill out the appropriate contract. Please be aware that in any given semester, a professor, depending on his/her workload, may not be able to offer such a course. You may register for Readings and Conference credit until the sixth week of the semester.
- History 596: *Directed Research* is also an independent study course, but you will undertake a research project with a member of the department. It also requires you to complete a contract, and also is subject to the availability of the professor you wish to work with. *History 596 may not be used for work on your thesis*. You must register for Directed Research credit by the tenth day of the semester.
- History 597: *Special Topics* and History 598: *Seminar* are rarely offered, but are traditional courses with standard

historical content.

- **Note: Aggregate Restriction** (see grad catalogue): MA students may apply no more than 9 credits and MAHR students may apply no more than 12 credits total of the following types of credits toward their degree: pass/fail, workshop, directed research, readings and conference, and internships. (Project and Thesis credits are excluded from this limitation.) No more than nine of these credits may be readings and conference and no more than six of these credits may be directed research.

Foreign Language or Tool Requirement

Masters students must complete one year of a foreign language, or in appropriate cases for students in the MAHR program, a tool requirement. Language courses taken as undergraduates count towards this requirement. Various fields within the Masters program demand knowledge in certain languages: Latin for the Ancient history field, Spanish for Latin America, European languages for European history, and others as appropriate. The tool requirement would consist of courses of a technical nature that would be integral to the project the student completes for the MAHR. Language and tool courses *will not* count towards the 33 units of Masters course work.

Outside Field

If you wish to incorporate an outside field into your program of study, you may take up to nine credits in that field; it is assumed that one member of your committee will come from that minor field. You must gain the approval of the chair of your committee and/or the graduate coordinator before you begin taking classes outside the History Department.

Grading

In the graduate program at Boise State University, traditional undergraduate grades take on slightly new meanings. Whereas as an undergraduate, you could probably receive a "C," "D," or "F" grade without unbearable consequences, in the graduate program they can be catastrophic.

- An "A," as always, indicates excellent work and excellent academic progress. A "B" indicates good work and good academic progress.
- "C" grades have negative consequences, because you cannot graduate with a GPA below 3.0. If your semester GPA falls below 3.0 twice, or you receive two "Cs" during your tenure, you will be withdrawn from the program. One "C" will result in probation. For students accepted provisionally, and already in a probationary state, one "C" could mean dismissal from the program.

- "D" grades are worse, of course. You may retake a course in which you received a "D" at the next available opportunity (which may not come for two or more years). If you do not raise your grade to a "B" or better during the first retake attempt, you will be removed from the program.
- Receipt of an "F" in any graduate course will result in your immediate removal from the program.
- Incompletes are not given to graduate students except in extreme cases. If you receive an incomplete, you may not be allowed to register for courses for the following semester; the incomplete must be replaced with a letter grade for you to continue graduate work.

Cheating

All graduate students should read the Boise State University Student Handbook on cheating. Plagiarism is the most common form of cheating at the graduate level, so be careful to do your own work. Another relatively common problem at the graduate level is that students turn in the same work for two different professors/courses. Unless you have explicit permission from both professors, that practice constitutes cheating. If you are caught cheating, you will receive an "F" in the course; an "F" at the graduate level means you will be removed from the program. *Don't cheat.*

The Process of Completing a Masters Degree

Creating a Supervisory Committee

First year students should immediately work toward the creation of their supervisory committee. This committee must have three faculty members; they may all be historians, but often it is appropriate to include a faculty member from another discipline. If the student intends to include a minor field, one member should come from the department of the minor.

The most crucial member of the committee is the committee chair (advisor), who will act as mentor to the student through the entire process of identifying a thesis or project topic. The advisor should be a faculty member with expertise in the given field, but he or she should also be someone with whom the student enjoys a positive and productive working relationship.

The other members of the committee should fulfill the same criteria, but in a department the size of ours, it could be impossible to have three members whose expertise directly bears on your work. Thus, other factors might be considered: for instance, there may be a professor in the department with whom you have a good working

relationship and whose interests are parallel to yours but in a different cultural, geographic, or temporal context (in other words, you and he/she are both working on rural history, but your topic concerns the American west and his/hers concerns Europe).

The main point is that you have the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of three faculty members, so choose them carefully, with the hope that they will all help you become a better historian.

You should speak as soon as possible to faculty whom you have identified as potential committee members. When you have their agreement, fill out the proper form on the graduate college website to make the committee official. If you ever need to change the composition of your committee, let the graduate coordinator know immediately. The department reserves the right to refuse to change a committee.

The Program Development Form

The Program Development Form (see appendix) should be completed in consultation with your advisor as soon as possible (preferably by the end of your first semester). It records your *intentions* as you begin the graduate program. On this form, you will indicate your *degree*, your *minor* (if any) and courses that you will take to fulfill that minor, your choice of *foreign language* or *tool*, any courses taken before being accepted into the program that may apply to your degree, and the courses you plan to take to complete your masters. It must be signed by your advisor and the graduate coordinator. Nothing on this form is written in stone, because circumstances often force students to alter their plan. But, it is a plan, and it is designed to provide a clear focus for your graduate career at Boise State University. It also ensures that you have your advisor's permission to use those listed courses toward your degree. Advisors and the graduate coordinator reserve the right to reject application of any class toward your degree that was not approved by one of them.

The Prospectus and Its Defense

Before you begin work on a thesis or a project, you must present and defend a thesis/project prospectus to your committee. The prospectus should include:

- a description of your thesis/project topic
- your scholarly justification for choosing that topic
- a description of the source materials that you intend to use (and have confirmed as available to you)

This is your opportunity to defend your intended topic, but also to confirm that it is feasible. You should expect your prospectus to be met by helpful criticism from your committee members. *Note:* the content and form of a prospectus may differ from case to case; you

should discuss the content of your prospectus with your advisor as soon as possible.

The Candidacy Form

After completing 18 credits of graduate coursework, you need to apply for candidacy (see appendix). This form looks a lot like the "Program Development Form." The difference is that this one records what you have already taken and is intended to convince your advisor, your committee, and the graduate coordinator that you are on track to complete a coherent and academically defensible program. Once this form is filled out and signed, it is very difficult to change anything (for instance, if you decide later that you would like to change tracks, minors, committee members, etc.). Once it is approved, you can feel free to work on your thesis or project. The candidacy form is checked thoroughly by graduate admissions and by the registrar to ensure that all degree course requirements are complete prior to awarding the degree.

Applying for Graduation

You need to apply to the Graduate Admissions office (using the form titled "Application for Graduate Degree"; see appendix) for graduation during the semester in which you intend to complete your degree. You will pay a diploma fee at the same time. If you intend to graduate in May, for instance, you must apply by the spring semester deadline (which is in the official calendar each semester) and complete the defense of your thesis or project, or pass your exam, by the deadline for that semester (usually several weeks before the end of the semester). **The due date for this application is the first week of the semester - don't miss it!**

Thesis

Students in the MA program will write a thesis. A masters thesis should make a novel contribution to our knowledge of history. It can do so by either (a)examining a heretofore unexamined topic, using primary sources and defending a sound thesis; or (b)providing a new interpretation of a previously examined topic.

Project

Students in the MAHR program will produce a project. Over the years, projects have come in many forms, including educational cd-roms, documentary films, web pages, walking tours, agency reports, portfolios, and curriculum development packages. By its very nature the project is difficult to define beforehand, but it is generally similar to what is encountered in the professional workplace.

Defense of Project and Thesis

The thesis/project defense will be your opportunity to defend your work before your committee and others. The first part of your defense

(which includes your presentation and questions from the audience/faculty) is public, which means that anyone may attend. The second part of the defense (which includes the tougher questions from your committee) will occur between just you and the committee. Every semester, the Graduate College will announce the final date for defenses to occur; it is a week before the date by which a final copy of your thesis must be handed in to the Graduate College. *Keep in mind that you must place a final draft (i.e. the version that you will defend) of your thesis/project on display in the department office at least ten working days before you are scheduled to defend.*

When arranging your defense, keep in mind that this timing is not your decision alone. You and the chair of your committee must agree that your thesis or project is ready to be defended. It will likely have gone through several drafts and revisions by that point, based upon comments from the advisor first, and then your other committee members. The most important aspect of your relationship with your committee is clear communication. Also, be aware that while the faculty will do what they can to enable you to defend when you would like to, it is possible that due to leaves of absence, sabbaticals, or other professional commitments, your defense may not happen when you would like.

Know that you will need to be registered for at least one credit during the semester in which you intend to graduate.

Timeline (assuming full time status and a fall entrance)

- First semester: take History 500; form a committee and finalize it (and advisor selection) by completing proper paperwork; complete Program Development Form
- Second semester: take History 501; take History 502, if necessary; explore thesis/project topics; write/defend a thesis/project prospectus
- Summer: do primary source research for project/thesis
- Third semester: complete Application to Candidacy form; work on coursework and thesis/project
- Fourth semester: complete thesis/project; apply for graduation; arrange defense date; complete defense in time for spring graduation; fill out various forms required of graduate college with respect to thesis/project

Use our MA and MAHR advising checklists (located in History Dept. Office, in hanging form dispenser near chair's office) to keep yourself on track and ensure that you haven't missed a step. All deadlines will be listed on the graduate bulletin board in the history department.

Extensions

The student is allowed seven years to complete the program as measured from the date of the earliest course work applied to meet the degree requirements. If for some reason, the student needs more than seven years, he/she should submit a "Request for Extension of Time," with a letter of explanation for the request, to the Graduate Coordinator.