History, Ph.D.

The Department of History offers a doctoral program for students interested in earning a Ph.D. in history. Students interested in graduate work may obtain a copy of the current Guide to Graduate Study from the Department of History website. The guide is revised annually to include the latest faculty listings, research interests of faculty members, and other information for students.

Requirements

The Doctor of Philosophy program in history requires at least 72 s.h. of graduate credit. Students who have earned M.A. degrees can apply up to 30 s.h. of credit toward the Ph.D. degree.

Students must complete at least seven graduate-level history or related field courses numbered 6000 or above, earning 3 or 4 s.h. of credit for each course. The courses must be research seminars (minimum of two) and graduate readings courses (minimum of five). At least five of the seven courses must be completed before a student takes the comprehensive examination. Courses taken at the M.A. level may be counted toward this requirement. Students must complete all three required courses: HIST:6001 First-Year Graduate Colloquium, HIST:6002 History Research Methods, and HIST:6003 History Theory and Interpretation. These courses develop an understanding of the philosophy of history, historiography, and methods of historical research.

Students who have not previously earned an M.A. in history or a related field must complete a research essay, typically during their first year in the program. The essay must be based on original research and should be approximately 10,000 to 15,000 words long. It is completed under the guidance of a faculty supervisor and should emulate the character of articles in learned journals, just as the Ph.D. dissertation takes the form of a full-length scholarly monograph. Students defend the completed research essay in a qualifying examination before a committee of three faculty members.

The department has no general language requirement for the Ph.D., but the supervising faculty member may require a student to demonstrate a reading knowledge of one or more world languages and proficiency in the use of other study tools. Students may not complete the comprehensive examination until these requirements have been met.

The comprehensive written and oral examination cover three distinct fields, subject to approval by the comprehensive exam committee. The three fields must cover at least two major divisions of history. The third field may be chosen from a related department outside the Department of History. A student’s committee may define and delimit the individual fields for examination. Each student’s primary advisor sets the character of the written portion of the comprehensive examination, which may take the form of a syllabus, a critical bibliography, a topical paper, a portfolio, or any other form or combination that the advisor deems suitable. The second and third fields are each fulfilled by the completion of two courses and the submission of course work as defined by the committee. The oral portion of the comprehensive examination focuses on issues and problems arising from the written materials.

The candidate must submit to the dissertation committee a written prospectus for the dissertation no later than the semester following completion of the comprehensive exams. The committee consists of at least five members, including at least one member from outside the department. It considers the prospectus and may approve it, reject it, or require its revision. When the dissertation is completed in final form, the committee administers the final examination for the doctorate, a formal oral defense of the dissertation that usually lasts two hours.

Admission

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.

Applicants must submit academic transcripts and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores. They also must submit examples of original writing to the history department, such as a term paper, a seminar paper, or a master’s essay; letters of recommendation from three persons familiar with the student’s past academic work; and a one- or two-page personal statement of the applicant’s purpose for doing graduate work. Applicants submit their application online; see History (M.A. or Ph.D.) on the University of Iowa Graduate Admissions website.

All application materials are due by January 15 for entry the following August.

Career Advancement

Graduate study in history prepares students for occupations such as secondary or college teaching, publishing, commercial research, foundations and nongovernmental organizations, and government or other public service. With additional specialized training, students may become qualified for careers in historical site preparation and display, or archival, library, or museum work.

The University of Iowa’s history graduates who earn a Ph.D. have an excellent history of job placement, depending on their area of study. Graduate and Postdoctoral Career Services offers multiple resources to assist students in preparing for job opportunities upon completion of the program.