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 in History from the Department of History website. The guide is revised annually to include the latest faculty listings, research interests of faculty members, detailed regulations on study toward advanced degrees, and other information for students.

Requirements

The Doctor of Philosophy program in history requires at least 72 s.h. of graduate credit. Students must maintain a UI cumulative g.p.a. of at least 3.33. Those 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. Courses taken at the M.A. level may be counted toward this requirement. Students must complete a required course sequence their first year: HIST:6002 Introduction to Graduate Studies in History: Historiography and 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 must complete a qualifying research essay before the end of their third semester in the program. The essay must be based on original research and should be approximately 7,000 to 9,000 words. It is completed under the guidance of a faculty advisor 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. The essay must be approved by the faculty advisor and a second faculty member in order for a student to continue in the program.

The department has a basic world language requirement for the Ph.D.; however, the supervising faculty member may require a student to demonstrate a reading knowledge of one or more 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 examinations cover three distinct fields. The primary field is defined thematically and geographically in consultation with the advisor. The secondary field is defined with a field supervisor; it must have a different thematic and/or geographic focus than the primary field. Both of these fields are based on core sets of readings created together with advisors. There are two options for the third field—a teaching option and a non-teaching option. In either case, the parameters are set by the student’s advisor, and the required work must be completed prior to the written examinations. The written portion of the comprehensive exams consists of two questions for each field, each answered over two days during the comprehensive exam period. The oral portion of the comprehensive examination focuses on the submitted written examination.

In most cases, the candidate submits a written prospectus for the dissertation to the faculty advisor before the comprehensive exams, and the student defends the prospectus within two weeks of passing the oral portion of the examination. The examination committee considers the prospectus and may approve it, reject it, or require its revision. When the dissertation is completed in final form, a dissertation committee made up of five faculty members administers the final examination. A formal oral defense of the dissertation typically 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 on the Graduate College website.

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 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.