

CU Denver History Graduate Student FAQs

Updated April 2015

Congratulations on your admission to the Graduate Program in History at CU Denver! The faculty all look forward to working with you and hope that your studies here will be both professionally and personally fulfilling.

So, now what? This brief handbook is intended to help you get started in the program and to guide you through the key steps in completing your degree.

What do I do first?

Your first task is to contact the History Department's Graduate Advisor. Talking with the Graduate Advisor will help you to orient yourself in the Department, think about a plan of study, select your courses during your first year, and find an advisor in your major field. We encourage you to check in with the Graduate Advisor at least once a year, and *always* several months before reaching any important stage in your program, such as planning for your comprehensive exams.

The Graduate Advisor will give you a plan of study document to help you organize and keep track of your progress in the program. Your Plan of Study is not a hard and fast contract, but it is a guide to help you in fulfilling program requirements and to insure that your course selections are appropriate to your major and minor fields as well as for your thesis or project areas. You can download the various Plans of Study from the Department's website.

How do I choose an advisor?

Your major field advisor, along with the Graduate Advisor, will be your main guide in your program of study, at least through your comprehensive exams. The Graduate Advisor will provide guidance for this process, and you should select an advisor in your major field by the time you have taken 9-12 credit hours.

What courses should I take?

Graduate courses are numbered at the 5000 and 6000 level. The 5000 level courses usually are paired with 4000 level courses. Graduate students enrolled in 4000/5000 courses do all of the work for the 4000 level course plus additional work assigned by the professor. It is very important that you take half of your credits at the 6000 level, as these courses are for graduate students only. The 6000 level courses consist of seminars, which may be research oriented or readings seminars, which focus on subject content and historiography. Topical 6000 level courses can usually fulfill requirements for any field, depending on the projects you develop for the courses. Please check with the Graduate Advisor if you have any questions about applicability of a particular course to your degree.

All graduate students must take History 6013, Introduction to the Professional Study of History. This course introduces students to the history of the profession and the evolution of

important ideas, ethics, and methods in the field. For that reason, the History Department requires that you take this course within your first 12 credits.

With one important exception, History 6013, your course work should focus on your major and minor fields. All MA candidates beginning in fall 2015 must take 37 credits. The specific number of courses you must take in the major and minor fields depends on which degree plan you choose to follow. Similarly, the number of seminar courses you must take depends upon your degree plan.

The History Department encourages you to do all or most of your coursework in regularly scheduled classes. However, you may take up to three hours of independent studies in place of a regular course. Independent studies usually involve focused readings projects or research projects. Students will not be allowed to satisfy the research seminar requirement with an independent study, and the Graduate Advisor *must* approve any independent study at the 6000 level.

What are comprehensive exams?

All graduate students must pass a comprehensive examination (“comps”) covering their major and minor fields. Comps consist of a written exam and an oral exam. The written portion consists of essay questions in the major and minor fields provided by your major and minor field advisors. You will answer two questions in the major field and one question in the minor field. The department expects each answer to take the form of a carefully written essay, formatted in accordance with the department’s style guide.

Because comps require you to demonstrate a high level of knowledge and skill in the subject matter and historiography of your major and minor fields, your coursework will NOT be the only basis for your exam preparations. You will be expected to demonstrate mastery of subjects and readings assigned by your major and minor field advisors in consultation with you. As part of the exam, you will be expected to sign an Honor Statement, which you can find on the Department’s website.

The Department has instituted a five-day comprehensive exam, which can include a weekend. There is a limit of 1800-2100 words, plus notes, for *each* of the three questions. For details, see the Graduate Advisor and the Department’s website. The oral exam, which lasts one-two hours, is a follow-up to the written exam. We intend it to be supportive and to allow students the opportunity to strengthen their answers.

Be sure to consult with the Graduate Advisor at the beginning of your preparations for the exam and, again, as soon as you have set a date for the exam. The sooner you begin to prepare for your comps, the better the experience will be for you.

How do I choose my comprehensive exam committee?

The comprehensive exam committee includes your major field advisor, your minor field advisor—both of whom write questions for your exam—and a third faculty member who will also read and evaluate your answers. You will select the third reader in consultation with the major and minor field advisors. As you prepare for your exam, you should consult with your third reader as well as with your major and minor field advisors, although your third reader will not prepare questions for the exam. Talk with the Graduate Advisor to help make these decisions.

How do I prepare for comprehensive exams?

Your major and minor field advisors will be your main guides in your comps preparations. You and your advisors will develop lists of core readings for your major, minor, and the concentration within your major. See the website for lists of the field ad concentration options. Your advisors will also evaluate your course and research work to identify areas of strength and weakness. Based on that evaluation, they will assign additional readings. You should plan to meet with your advisors several times during your comps preparations to ensure that you are doing all that you need to do to be ready for your exams.

When do I take comprehensive exams?

Students usually take their comps when they are finished or nearly finished with their course requirements. For students in non-thesis plans, this is often during or just after the last semester of coursework. Thesis plan students may take comps during the last semester of course work before beginning intensive research and writing for the thesis. There is a one-credit “course” for which students must register to take their comps, HIST 6940.

What if I fail comprehensive exams?

In the event that one of your exam answers is not satisfactory, you will be permitted to retake that portion of the exam. If you fail more than one question, your committee may require you to retake the entire exam. You may retake all or part of the comprehensive exam only once. Failure to pass any portion of the exam on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the Master’s program.

What is the Master’s thesis?

Bigger than a term paper, smaller than a book. Students pursuing the thesis plan must submit a Master’s thesis for six 6000-level credit hours. The Master’s thesis is a major, original scholarly project, based largely on primary source research. Students develop the thesis topic, design and carry out research, and write the Master’s thesis with the guidance of the major thesis advisor and two other thesis committee members. The form of a thesis manuscript must meet Graduate School requirements.

How do I choose a thesis advisor and committee?

The thesis advisor often, but not always, is your major field advisor. In any case, the thesis advisor should be a faculty member whose teaching and research specialties are related to the proposed thesis topic. It is helpful, but not as important, for the other thesis committee members to have some scholarly interest in the thesis topic.

What is the thesis defense?

The thesis defense is similar to the oral part of a comprehensive examination, but it focuses on the thesis itself. Usually lasting an hour or more, the defense is the student's opportunity to present the thesis and engage in a scholarly discussion of its quality and merit.

What is the Public History project?

Public History majors must prepare either a thesis or a project, which is a three-credit 6000-level course. Projects, which are usually conducted in collaboration with a public history organization, may entail creating an exhibit, organizing a museum or archival collection, conducting a preservation survey, or similar activities. Students are also required to prepare a scholarly paper describing the process and results of their project.

What is the Advanced History Curriculum Development?

Teachers or people intending to become teachers who are enrolled in the History graduate program may choose to complete a curriculum development capstone project of three credits. Students arrange curriculum development projects with a sponsoring faculty member. Generally, students are expected to develop and submit a complete course curriculum plan for the three credit project. Projects need to show evidence of familiarity with the relevant historiographies and primary sources.

A couple of final points:

If you encounter problems in your graduate studies, they usually will be easier to solve if you bring them to your advisors' attention sooner rather than later. More to the point, problems rarely just go away by themselves. The faculty's job is to help you get through your degree program. Talk to them!

Graduate school is not just more college. You will find the volume and the pace of your course work to be greater and faster. Remember, too, that graduate school is professional education. Whether your professional goal is to teach, engage in research and publication, or work in the challenging fields of public history, our goal is to help you to build the intellectual tools you will need to be a successful member of the history profession and the history community.

Finally, be sure to check your university **email** account frequently. The Department and the University will send out messages regarding requirements and other announcements, and you are responsible for any such information.