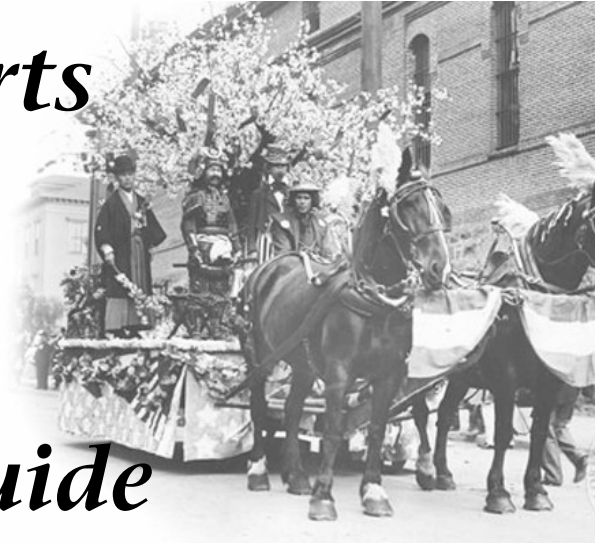


Master of Arts in History

Information Guide



Japanese float appearing in a Portland Rose Festival Parade, 1908; Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society

Department of History
Washington State University Vancouver

2007-2008

Washington State University Vancouver
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<http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/programs/history/histMA.html>

“History is not what you thought. It is what you can remember.”
Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876)

In Fall 2003, Washington State University Vancouver began to offer the Master of Arts degree in History with access to discipline-based training, methods, and information in the field of history, while preparing students to address local and global concerns. This unique MA program is the only history graduate program in SW Washington and the only program in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area with historical research university faculty (i.e., faculty that train Ph.D. students). Through cooperation with Portland State University (PSU), the degree will offer Vancouver students the opportunity to also access the broader range of faculty research and expertise areas available in the wider Washington State University system and at PSU.

Washington State University Vancouver has a mission to provide students with the critical skills for making complex decisions in a diverse world. History is in an excellent position to provide these skills, as it has been increasingly characterized by its multicultural and comparative approaches to the study of the human condition.

The Master of Arts degree in History is consistent with the mission of Washington State University Vancouver in that it provides access to discipline-based information. The degree provides a high quality history graduate degree to place-bound students in Southwestern Washington and the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. Washington State University Vancouver also has a mission to provide students with the critical skills for making complex decisions. History is in an excellent position to provide these skills as it has been increasingly characterized by its multicultural and comparative approaches to the study of the human condition.

The Master of Arts degree in History emphasizes public history and world history tracks. In public history students are encouraged to extend their research to educational and public programs and to use historical theories, methods, and concepts in museums, archives, historical societies, and cultural sites. The world history field is increasingly key to public school teacher training and to the general understanding of contemporary society in a global context. Faculty and graduate students collaborate with local institutions, supporting Washington State University Vancouver's mission to be responsive to practical concerns of the community. Faculty members also supervise history-related internships and field studies programs through the Center for Columbia River History, the Old Town History Project, the National Park Service, Oregon Historical Society, Clark County Museum, the Vancouver Historic Reserve, school districts, and other public education and service organizations.

The primary goal of the Master of Arts in History is to offer students a structured and coherent course of historical study. The degree emphasizes historical

training, consisting of 30 credit hours beyond the bachelor's degree in at least two fields of history, at least one seminar and two field courses, a general historiography course, and a final oral examination. Students select a thesis or non-thesis option. Public history candidates serve an internship of at least one summer in duration. A rigorous program of historical study also reinforces transferable skills such as writing, research, and critical analysis. Training in the theoretical and methodological aspects of the discipline gives students the intellectual skills necessary to identify and address real-world problems – an especially important consideration given the increasing use of historical methods, research training, and communication skills in both business environment and public sectors. Most important, an MA in History introduces students to the diversity of the human experience and the processes of historical and cultural identity that prepare them for an ever more culturally complex workplace.

The Master of Arts in History requires courses in at least two fields of history (Vancouver faculty can supervise the following fields: United States, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, Africa, World, Women's and Public History). The degree seeks to serve students who may or may not seek additional graduate (Ph.D.) training in history, as well as students who seek careers in education and as public historians, and for whom the MA is their final training in history.

In addition to high standards of writing ability and academic achievement, admissions preference will go to students whose research goals can be adequately met by current WSU Vancouver history graduate faculty.

Students who maintain a full-time course load of about 20 credits per year will be able to complete the MA degree in history in two years. Basic language training is available on campus in Spanish and French; Chinese is anticipated soon. Students who need language training in other languages should transfer into the program with language prerequisites complete.

Candidates for the MA History must satisfy all College of Liberal Arts and University requirements as described in the University catalog.

***“History not used is nothing,
for all intellectual life is action,
like practical life, and if you don’t use the
stuff – well, it might as well be dead.”***

***A.J. (Arnold Joseph) Toynbee
(1889-1975)***



Image courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY COURSES

A minimum of 30 credits is required, including coursework in two fields of history, one seminar, two field courses, one historiography course, and an internship (in the case of public history candidates). The following coursework is already available:

- Hist 510 Field Course in American History
- Hist 515 Jeffersonian– Jacksonian America
- Hist 519 United States, 1945– Present
- Hist 521 The American West
- Hist 522 History of the Pacific Northwest
- Hist 525 Seminar in American History
- Hist 527 Public History: Theory and Methodology
- Hist 528 Seminar in Public History
- Hist 539 Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation
- Hist 570 World History Theory and Methods
- Hist 571 Topics in World History
- Hist 575 Field Course in Women’s History
- Hist 576 Revolutionary China, 1800– Present
- Hist 578 Field Course in Asian History
- Hist 580 Historiography
- Hist 596 Topics in American Studies
- Hist 597 Seminar in History
- Hist 598 History Internship
- Hist 600 Special Projects or Independent Study
- Hist 700 Master’s Research, Thesis, and/or Examination
- Hist 702 Master’s Special Problems, Directed Study, and/or Examination
- Hist 800 Doctoral Research, Dissertation, and/or Examination

Additional courses will be available at WSU Vancouver and
Portland State University by special arrangement.

GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING TO THE MA IN HISTORY

Student Admission is a two-part process. The student must file an application for admission to the Graduate School of Washington State University AND a separate application to the Master of Arts in History (MA in History) program on the Vancouver campus. Students are held to policies of the Graduate School as listed in the Graduate School Policies and Procedures of the year of their admission. Students are also held to the policies of the MA in History the year of their admission. NOTE: When there is an overlap of policy between the Graduate School and the MA in history program, the student is expected to meet the more rigorous of the two requirements.

General Admission Information: Students must be admitted to both the Graduate School and the MA in History program as a Class 6 regular or Class 6 provisional student. To be eligible for admission as a Class 6 regular or provisional student through the Graduate School at WSU, students must:

Have attained at least a B (3.0 on a 4.0 scale) grade point average in the last 60 semester (90 quarter) hours of their graded undergraduate work taken at an accredited college or university;

OR

Have completed at least 12 semester hours of graduate level course work beyond the bachelor's degree at an accredited college or university, maintaining a grade point average of B+ or better (3.5 on a 4.0 scale). This also includes courses that may have been taken as a UNDG status at WSU Vancouver.

AND

Have been granted admission through the program and department.

“To study history means submitting to chaos and nevertheless retaining faith in order and meaning. It is a very serious task, young man, and possibly a tragic one.”

Hermann Hesse (1877–1962)



Image courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society

Program Admission Requirements:

Minimum admission requirements for the MA in History are:

- Unofficial transcripts from all colleges/universities attended
(must show the awarding of a Bachelor's degree)
- A minimum undergraduate cumulative GPA of 3.3 in the undergraduate major
- Official report of Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores
(verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing)
- A “Statement of Purpose”: *two or three pages in length, outlining career objectives within areas of proposed degree.*
- A writing sample, preferably in the field of history
- Completion of the Language Background Form
- Completion of the Preferred Fields of Study Form
- Three letters of recommendation: *addressing your potential for success in a graduate program. Letters should be from academic or professional sources, at least two letters should be from individuals qualified to comment on your academic work.*
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score, if applicable.

NOTE: If a student has been admitted through the Graduate School into a classification other than Class 6-Regular student or Class 6-Provisional student, they have not been admitted to the MA in History program. If the student wishes to pursue the MA in History, they must reapply through the Graduate School and to the program, meeting all admission requirements, for admission as a Class 6-

Regular or Provisional student. Taking MA in History courses before admission is granted does not obligate the Program to admit the student. Students taking coursework under student classifications other than Class 6-Regular student or Class 6-Provisional Student are limited to the number of hours they may apply toward a degree once admitted to the Program (refer to the Graduate School Policies and Procedures manual for hour limitations).

“History takes time.... History makes memory.”
Gertrude Stein (1874-1946)

Writing your Statement of Purpose

The following is an excerpt from the American Historical Association's Perspectives newsletter and should be helpful when submitting your statement of purpose. The essay, entitled "Graduate Applications: The Important Elements," was written at the request of the AHA's Committee on Women Historians, chaired by Professor Judith R. Walkowitz.

Together with the academic transcript and (in some cases) GRE scores, the most important components of an application for graduate study in history are, for many history departments, the student's own statement of purpose and the supporting letters of recommendation. This essay offers some suggestions for avoiding common pitfalls in the preparation of these components, and for making them as strong and persuasive as possible.

In brief, the most effective statements of purpose are those that are specific, well written, professional in tone, scrupulously accurate in spelling and grammar, and tailored to the particular institution to which the application is addressed. The statement should avoid sweeping philosophical generalizations, avowals of political or other ideology, or ruminations about the nature of historical knowledge and its essential role in bettering the human condition. No matter how earnestly intended or passionately felt, such lofty rhetoric all too easily descends to the level of cliché, especially when offered in a necessarily compressed form, suggesting an immature and jejune outlook rather than the intended profundity. Summaries of extra-curricular activities and achievements, no matter how outstanding, are usually best confined to those having a direct bearing on the professional field to which you are seeking entry.

While it is certainly appropriate to discuss how you became interested in history, and to include something about your long-range career goals, such matters should be kept brief and to the point. Remember that your application is one of many being read by busy faculty members who have numerous other time-

consuming obligations as well. Keep your tendencies toward loquaciousness well in check, and observe word limits strictly.

The strongest essay is one that sums up your scholarly interests and immediate academic objectives in a clear and straightforward fashion. Your statement should be quite precise about the time period, geographic regions, or kind of history you want to study, and perhaps even the specific topic you wish ultimately to investigate. You should briefly indicate how your undergraduate reading, research, and course work have shaped your particular interests and have prepared you to pursue them further. At the same time, bear in mind that the earlier phases of graduate education involve primarily general training rather than research on a specific topic. Therefore, your statement should convey openness to the acquisition of a wide range of historical knowledge and research skills rather than an obsessive fixation on a single narrow topic. (An application from a college senior whose sole purpose in life is to study the Battle of Antietam or the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511 would probably raise warning signals for most graduate admissions committees.)

It is entirely appropriate, indeed desirable, to tailor your statement of purpose to the institution to which you are applying. Feel free, for example, to mention professors with whom you would like to work or specific strengths—such as particular manuscript holdings or degree programs—that make the institution attractive to you. Such specificity should avoid elaborate praise or flattery and a fawning, excessively deferential tone is likely to be counterproductive.

The statement of purpose is also the place for you to address briefly any anomalies or ambiguities in your record that might give an admissions committee pause, such as a non-standard grading system or courses whose content is not clear from the transcript (e.g., “Independent Study”). If your undergraduate background in history is weak, it might be advisable for you to describe in more detail than would otherwise be necessary the evolution of your academic interests and to make plain that your commitment to the discipline is now firm.

The quality of the essay is probably more important than its substantive content. The members of the admissions committee who pass upon your application will evaluate your statement for the evidence it offers about the quality, clarity, and originality of your mind; your maturity and sense of direction; your skills as a writer; and your capacity for careful attention to detail. A thoughtful, well-crafted, coherently organized essay can go a long way toward favorably disposing a committee on your behalf. Conversely, a shallow, formulaic, hastily written statement marred by poor organization, awkwardness of expression, or (even worse) outright grammatical errors or misspellings, can seriously undermine an otherwise strong application. I have seen application essays where misspelled words or grammatical errors had been heavily circled or underlined by previous readers, with an exclamation point in the margin. Such lapses of detail are not

necessarily fatal in themselves, particularly if the admissions committee convinces itself that the applicant is a “diamond in the rough.” But they are sufficiently damaging, especially in borderline cases, that every effort to avoid them is strongly recommended.

History is the present. That’s why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth.

E.L. (Edgar Lawrence) Doctorow (b. 1931)

Letters of Recommendation

The letters of recommendation are also highly important. (Admissions committees evaluate the writers of recommendation letters, as well as the subjects of those letters!) You should select with great care the professors you ask to write on your behalf. While you obviously cannot quiz a professor in detail about what he or she will say in a letter of recommendation, it is appropriate for you to ask an instructor in advance whether he or she feels able to write a reasonably positive letter for you. If possible, select instructors whose scholarly work might be known to those who will be reading the letters. Sometime, particularly at large institutions, it is junior faculty members, or even graduate teaching assistants, who know the applicant best and who write the most useful and perceptive letters. Where feasible, however, try to supplement letters from beginning or relatively unknown instructors with others from more established scholars.

Generally speaking, try to secure a letter of recommendation as soon as possible after you have completed a course or an independent study project, when you and your work are still fresh in the instructor’s consciousness. If you wish to obtain a letter from a professor with whom you studied a year or so in the past, or who taught you in a large lecture course, spend a little time talking with that individual about your work in the course, your general undergraduate program, and your scholarly interests, to refresh his or her mind. The more specific a letter of recommendation, the greater the weight it tends to carry.

The Evaluation Process

Incomplete applications will not be evaluated. Once your file is complete, it will be reviewed by the Vancouver History Department’s Graduate Studies committee.

Grounds for not admitting applicants are diverse. Even candidates with strong academic records may be rejected. No faculty member may be available in the field in which the student is applying; or there may be no room for additional qualified students in a particular field. The prospective major professor or the Graduate Studies committee may consider an applicant academically uncompetitive, inadequately prepared, lacking adequate facility in the English language, or possessing an insufficient foreign language background.

Your statement of purpose will be closely scrutinized by a prospective major professor and members of the Graduate Studies committee. You should pay careful attention when drafting your statement to see that it is a cogent and careful representation of the reasons for pursuing studies in a particular field of history. The guidelines include advice on writing your statement of purpose, which you are encouraged to consult (see writing your statement of purpose above).

*“History is the interpretation of
the significance that the past has
for us.”*

Johan Huizinga (1872–1945)

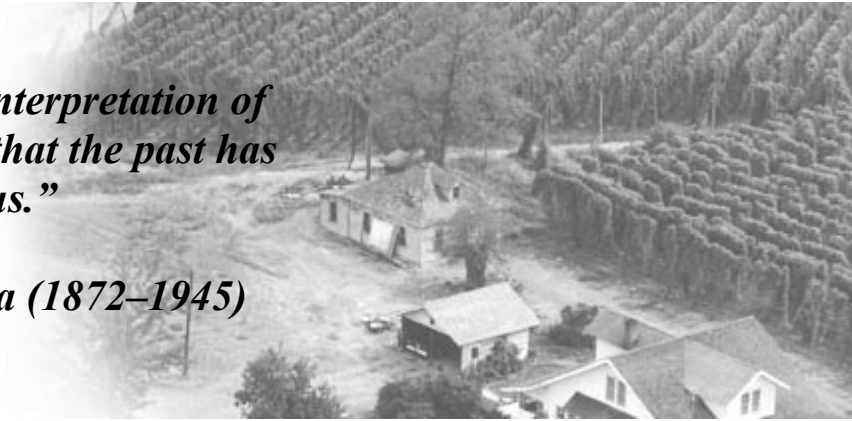


Image courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society

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