Graduate Student Handbook

Department of History
Welcome to the Graduate Program! This handbook is designed to help you understand the program requirements, become familiar with various options as you develop your course of study, and enable you to benefit more fully from your graduate school experience.

The Department of History focuses on historical themes of “Empires, States, and Borders.” This builds on current Department teaching and research strengths, as faculty regularly engage topics such as nation building, civil wars, and state formation and disintegration in a variety of geographic settings and across historical eras. It also fits with trends in the profession that deemphasize the study of nations and states as static entities in favor of a perspective that places them within comparative frameworks and highlights the fluidity of border regions.

The graduate program builds on the “Empires, States, and Borders” theme in order to take full advantage of the various topical and geographical specialties of our faculty. Unlike some graduate programs, UTSA’s MA degree may not be tightly defined by region. Drawing from a desire to deepen students’ analytical/critical thinking skills, we try to encourage a thematic approach on the study of history. For example, if someone has a particular interest in the U.S./Mexican border from 1880-1920, they may end up taking classes that focus on the geographical border, as well as classes that deal with gender and race relations. As a faculty, we encourage you to take a variety of classes that will push you to see historical topics in new ways, as well as result in a coherent program of study. The GAR (Graduate Advisor of Record), as well as faculty members in your area of interest can help you create a course of study that best fits your needs.
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--Overview

The 30 hour graduate hour requirement is designed to offer students an opportunity to learn various theoretical and methodological approaches to history, give them both breadth and depth of knowledge on a various historical themes, and apply research and critical thinking skills. Often, these themes correlate to geographical areas, such as U.S. colonial history or East Asian history—which is why the department often describes graduate “focus areas” as based either on the U.S. or the World. However, these geographical limits do not necessarily reflect the interconnectedness of topics and themes and may not reflect the career aspirations of the student. We have many thematically-base classes, such as Migration in Historical Context, or the History of Sexuality. Ultimately, you will work with the GAR and your professors to design a program of study that meets both the department’s requirements and your own personal interests.

The graduate program’s courses are divided into multiple types: 1) Historiographical classes focus on a particular topic, which explore the ways that different historians have analyzed and interpreted historical evidence; 2) Research classes, which offer students an opportunity to research and write a paper based on both archival material and secondary literature; 3) Internships, which enable students to use their historical knowledge in a “real-world” environment. Students may work for a variety of institutions that will require them to use both their historical research and critical thinking skills.
--A. Introduction to History: Theories and Methods

His 5003: Introduction to History: Theories and Methods provides the groundwork for future classes by examining various ways that historians “know what they know.” One way to think about this is to look at methods as the introduction to how historians research—what tools do they use to investigate a topic? What types of sources are they using and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these sources? For example, a typical archive may include such things as correspondence, diaries, diplomatic or intelligence reports, etc. Other research methodologies may examine images—photographs, postcards, advertisements, or editorial cartoons. Oral histories are increasingly being used as a way to learn multiple perspectives of events, especially when formal literacy may be limited. Each of these “methods” has strengths and weaknesses, and a good historian recognizes/acknowledges the various biases of each method and source.

Historical theories describe the ways in which historians interpret their sources. The historian’s goal is to make sense of why things happened in the way that they did. Historians often understand events differently, causing significant historical debates or “schools of thought.” Historiography traces the ways that people have researched and interpreted historical events over time, and how and why these interpretations have changed. By exploring the ways in which historians have understood their sources and have constructed their arguments, the Introduction to History class reinforces the fundamental idea of history is more than collecting increasingly detailed levels of information. Historical thinking provides a framework to make sense of the past.
--B. Comparative History

The graduate program reinforces the history department’s “Empires, States, and Borders” perspective by requiring students to take at least three semester hours (one course) in a designated Comparative History course. Currently, 12 different courses meet the comparative requirement (see the degree plan for the listing). Comparative history examines similar historical processes and/or institutions in different time periods or in different geographical regions. For example, scholars of the Atlantic World often research the similarities/differences of slavery in the 18th century in the U.S., Brazil, and the Caribbean. The comparative approach has enabled historians to deepen their understanding of how colonial powers implemented slave regimes and how the physical environment impacted slave culture.

Comparative history often highlights how distinct social, economic, political, or cultural contexts impacted similar institutions, ideas, or events in radically different ways. A comparative approach allows historians to see how unique outcomes develop in seemingly similar situations.
--C. Electives/Focus areas

World/U.S. Focus Area

Students take 18 hours of elective classes (six classes total), and choose either a U.S. or World focus area, depending on their areas of interest and career goals. Students will take four elective courses in their main focus area and two outside their focus area. The Department strives each term to offer electives across geographic and thematic areas, but it cannot guarantee that a specific class will be offered in a particular semester. The “Designing a History Class” may be used as either a U.S. or World History elective, depending on how the professor structures the course. If most readings focus on U.S. topics, then it would count as a U.S. class, however, if most readings focus on World topics, then it would count as a World class.

The Department also recognizes that individual students may want more flexibility in designing their degree plan. In order to accommodate diverse interests, students may apply the following to their degree plans:

- Up to 6 hours of graduate level courses outside the program may be taken with prior approval of the Graduate Advisor of Record.
- Up to 6 hours of Independent Study hours may be taken with approval of instructor.
- Up to 6 hours of Internship may be taken with an approved internship form
- Up to 6 hours of Upper-Division courses with graduate-level course enhancements may be taken with prior approval of instructor and GAR

Students should note that GAR approval is needed prior to pursuing one of the options above.

Internships:

The GAR officially coordinates internships, but your faculty mentor may know about internship opportunities in your field of interest, which is particularly valuable in cases where people are looking for history jobs in local archives or museums. Students have interned in places such as the Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC), the Witte Museum, the archives of various military bases, the National Park Service, and the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Internships are designed to give you an opportunity to use your archival/research/writing skills in ways that both advance your own learning and career goals, while providing an important service to the host institution.

Degree Audits:

In order to make sure you are progressing as needed in the program, you will need to complete a degree audit with the GAR (graduate advisor of record) after 12-15 hours in the program. This audit simply provides a formal opportunity to review your degree plan, check the progress towards completions, and allows you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

See the graphs for various possibilities to complete the MA.
NOTE: These are examples ONLY—they should not be seen as a definitive list of options!!!
**Designing a History Class** is required for those who want to apply for a Nau TA position and may count as either a U.S. or a World elective.
Student with a US focus, proSeminar/seminar and thesis
Red= 1st semester; orange= 2nd semester, green=3rd semester, purple=final semester

**Designing a History Class is required for those who want to apply for a Nau TA position and may count as either a U.S. or a World elective**
**Thesis Only Option, two semesters of thesis course**

Red = 1\(^{st}\) semester; orange = 2\(^{nd}\) semester, green = 3\(^{rd}\) semester, purple = final semester

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<td>Designing a History Class**</td>
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Note: This is more difficult to complete in two years because comps generally are taken in the spring of the first year. **Designing a History Class is required for those who want to apply for a Nau TA position and may count as either a U.S. or a World elective.
Thesis Only Option, one semester with two theses courses

Note: This is more difficult to complete in two years because comps generally are taken in the spring of the first year. **Designing a History Class is required for those who want to apply for a Nau TA position and may count as either a U.S. or a World elective.
--D. Proseminar/Seminar and/or Thesis Option

The Proseminar/Seminar and/or Thesis are designed to be the capstone experience for the MA program. Students spend an academic year researching a particular topic and writing an original article-length paper based on primary and secondary research.

Proseminar/Seminar:

Each year, the program offers at least one Proseminar/Seminar sequence, with the topic alternating between a U.S focus and World focus. Topics tend to be very broad, in order to accommodate a wide range of student interests. Many seminar papers have been presented at academic conferences and several history students have won awards as part of the COLFA student research competition. The first semester of the class introduces students to a variety of background readings on the general topic, and provides opportunities for students to shape their research proposals. The second semester tends to offer more time for individual faculty/student meetings, as students complete the research and writing of the paper. Students often enroll in proseminar/seminar during the same semester that they may take their comprehensive exams.

Thesis:

The thesis option allows students to move beyond the article-length research paper to a full M.A. thesis, which generally includes 3-4 chapters, each of which is roughly the same length as a proseminar/seminar paper. The thesis offers students an opportunity to delve more deeply into a research project. Permission to do a thesis is not automatic; it depends upon faculty members’ willingness to work with a student on a particular topic. Thesis hours cannot be taken until students have completed their comprehensive exams. Students must take six hours (two classes) of thesis work, and generally students take these over the course of two semesters. (This can include one long semester and a summer semester.) The thesis option provides students who may have completely different research interests from those offered in proseminar/seminar an opportunity to pursue their research goals. Finally, if for whatever reason, your thesis advisor/committee/GAR determines that you are failing to make adequate progress on your thesis, we will meet with you to decide an appropriate course of action, including dropping the thesis and enrolling in the next available proseminar/seminar sequence. We do not want people to get stuck in the program indefinitely because of an inability to complete the thesis.

Proseminar/Seminar AND Thesis:

This has traditionally been the most common path to doing a thesis. A student may begin their research during the proseminar/seminar class, and then decide that the topic would be better as a fully developed thesis. In this case, the paper written for the proseminar/seminar class becomes one part of the thesis. During the subsequent thesis hours, the student continues researching and writing on the topic, until the thesis is complete. As with the thesis only option, the student must make adequate progress on the thesis in order to be approved for registering for the thesis class.
How do I know if I should write a thesis?

Only YOU can decide the best option…

1) Definitely get input from trusted faculty mentors and the GAR. Remember, you need to convince faculty to serve on your thesis committee, and faculty members are often extremely busy and may not be able to commit to this. Faculty also may advise a student not to write a thesis or decline to serve on the committee if, in their judgment, a student is not adequately prepared to research and write a thesis, or if there is a problem with the topic or with accessing archival sources.

2) Remember that the thesis requires significantly more work, self-discipline, and often more time. Students should ask themselves and their advisors if a thesis will help them achieve their career goals.

3) If a student wishes to pursue a career in academia, a thesis may be helpful in determining if this is a good career choice. Completion of a thesis does not necessarily improve chances of getting into or completing a Ph.D. program. In fact, students who completed the proseminar/seminar sequence have gained admission to prominent Ph.D programs.

4) A student who hopes to publish about their research topic as an independent scholar may find it helpful to gain the experience of extensive independent writing that a thesis requires.

5) Some students choose to do the thesis because they think it will help them find a job after they complete their M.A. This may be true in some cases (see #3 above), but many career paths look for students who demonstrate other types of professional skills. If you hope to work in a museum or archive, completing a semester internship may be a better choice for demonstrating your skills as an historian.

6) Sometimes, a topic just grabs you—and you can’t let it go until you fully research it.

7) **Choosing the thesis option requires significant time and financial commitment. You need to take this into consideration when deciding to commit to a thesis.**
--E. Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive exams are designed to give the student an opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in two thematic areas of historical analysis. Students develop these fields in consultation with their exam committee. Students request faculty with expertise in particular thematic areas to serve on the exam committee; faculty who serve on a comprehensive exam committee agree to work with students in preparation for the exam. Students should note that faculty availability to serve on exam committees depends on a variety of factors, including the number of other students being mentored, teaching and administrative obligations, and research leave. Comprehensive exams are offered twice a year (Fall or Spring semester), and the paperwork to take the exam is due the semester before you plan to take it. Often, students will take the exam in either their first or second full semester of their second year, usually during the same year they are enrolled in the proseminar/seminar sequence. Students will be given the deadlines well in advance, and the time, date, and location of the exam will be announced. The exam exists of two parts (or fields), and the student will be given two different questions per field. They will then choose one question from each field, and will write for roughly two hours on each question.

Students who hope to teach at the community college level often take one exam in an area of U.S. History and one exam in an area of World History. The idea is that this makes one more desirable as an employee because most community colleges (or high schools) are looking for people who are comfortable teaching both U.S. and World History courses. For example, a student may take one field in the History of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, and one field in the African Diaspora.

Students pursuing a “thesis only” option tend to take one exam in their research area and one in a complementary area. So, if a student was researching the role of Mexican women in the Texas Independence movement, the student and committee could design a comps field on women in 19th century U.S. borderlands. The second comps field could be on the social history of Colonial Latin America, or the U.S. Civil War.
--F. Funding:

**Financing the M.A. as a Reader/Grader or Research Assistant**

The Department offers a variety of Reader/Grader positions, for up to 19 hours/week. Reader/graders help professors manage exams and general grading tasks. This may include helping with ParScore, running Scantrons, helping maintain grades in BlackBoard, etc.

Research assistants are competitive positions for highly motivated, self-directed students. Graduate research assistants have helped professors in diverse tasks, including preparing annotated bibliographies, doing archival research, transcribing oral histories, checking sources, preparing PowerPoint presentations for lectures, etc.

Please check with the GAR (Catherine Nolan-Ferrell) or the Graduate Administrative Associate (Jacquelyn Mills) for additional information.

**Financing the M.A. with Fellowships and Scholarships**

The Department of History is fortunate to provide a variety of scholarship/fellowship opportunities for students. The largest source of funds are the Nau Fellowships and Nau Teaching Assistantships. Incoming students may qualify for one to two year awards (the first year as a Fellow, the second year as a Teaching Assistant.) These awards are ONLY for incoming students entering in the Fall semester. Second-year students may apply for the Nau Teaching Assistantship. Those receiving this award work as a teaching assistant for a professor who will help mentor the student as s/he prepares for a professional career.

Students may also apply for the Henderson Scholarship or receive information about the Wing Ching Lam scholarship. Both graduate and undergraduate students are eligible for the Henderson Scholarship, while the Wing Ching Lam Scholarship is intended for graduate students who have completed 6-12 hours toward their degree at time of application. Both scholarships are awarded annually.

**Department Scholarships for Courses and Research:**

The Department of History offers a variety of grants to support students who are travelling to archives or presenting papers. Additionally, students can apply for department grants based on demonstrated need, progress in the program, and the application. Although these grants tend to be small, they often can help cover the cost of books or some tuition. The application form is available through the Department of History office. The GAR will provide additional information on the application process and deadlines as needed.

(Please see the following chart for a summary of various graduate scholarships.)
## Graduate Scholarships

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Eligibility Summary*</th>
<th>Application Requirements*</th>
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| **Nau Graduate Fellowship in History**    | 5-7 students will be selected to receive $8,000 to $12,000 each, per year | - Grad  
- Must be new to UTSA graduate program  
- 3.5 GPA in last 60 hours  
- Full time  
- Students with an interest in the U.S. Civil War Era or Texas History (including borderlands history) may be eligible for a two-year funding package that will include a Teaching Assistantship the second year  
- Click application link for more details | - Online application  
- Brief essay  
- Writing sample  
- 2 letters of recommendation  
- Two-year funding package applications must include additional essay |
| **Nau Teaching Assistantship in History** | 4-6 Teaching Assistants will be selected and will receive $10,000 to $16,000 per year | - TA’s will be expected to work up to 19 hours per week assisting faculty mostly in upper division history courses.  
- Completed two long semesters in the UTSA History Graduate Program | - Online application  
- Two brief essays  
- Two letters of recommendation  
- Two assistantships are reserved for students with a demonstrated research interest in Texas History (including borderlands history), or 19th Century, |
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<th>Scholarship</th>
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<th>Eligibility Criteria</th>
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| Dwight F. Henderson Endowed Scholarship in History | Amount and number of awards vary depending on endowment distributions | - Undergrad or Grad
- Major in History
- Full-time (12 hrs or 6 hrs)
- 3.0 GPA | Application |
| Wing Ching Lam Endowed Scholarship in History | $500 annual award | - Major in History
- See department for additional criteria and requirements | See department for additional criteria and requirements |

*The Eligibility Summary and Application Requirements are intended as summaries. For detailed information, please obtain a scholarship application from the department office or website (if available).
--Resources

Other Students/PAT

The Department of History encourages a collaborative, friendly learning environment—meaning that you will learn not only from your readings, but from discussions with your colleagues both informally and in the classroom. Other students in the program can help you refine ideas, suggest readings, and provide hints to sources/archives. You may not agree with other students (or professors), but one goal of the program is to challenge students to think critically about ideas. This may mean that your preconceived beliefs/values are tested, refined, and perhaps rejected.

Along with academic and intellectual interchange, your fellow students will also become a source of moral support. Grad school can be stressful when balancing the demands of school, work, and family. Talking to peers can be a great way to blow-off steam, to gain fresh perspectives, and to problem-solve. **One caveat: ALWAYS** check ask either the GAR or the grad program administrator any of your program related questions. The grad student pipeline of information can be notoriously unreliable.

The Department of History has an active chapter of Phi Alpha Theta (PAT), the history honor society. They sponsor a variety of events including movie nights, trips to local historical sights, etc. The national and regional PAT association hosts various conferences for student research presentations.

Phi Alpha Theta, Alpha Theta Iota chapter has an open membership. Anyone interested in attending meetings and events is welcome, however, only those members accepted into the Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society may elect officers of, or hold office in the Alpha Theta Iota chapter. Graduate students must have completed at least one-third of the residence requirements for their Master's Degree. The student must have at least a 3.5 GPA in all graduate classes.

**Faculty: Mentoring and Professional Development**

Each student entering the program is assigned a faculty advisor. Generally, the faculty advisor shares a thematic or geographic interest with the student. The advisor can be a wonderful resource about secondary readings, research topics, or simply someone with whom you can discuss your ideas. Faculty members have set office hours, so it’s best to try to meet them during those times. However, many also see students by appointment, so it’s important for you to contact them and find mutually agreeable times to meet.

Faculty mentors also can help students with professional development in the areas of teaching, internships, and further graduate study. If you are interested in learning how to teach, you may want to ask a professor for permission to observe their class. Sometimes, the best way to learn how to teach is to see good teachers “in action.” Sometimes, students have given guest
lectures for various faculty, if that is mutually beneficial to the professor, the grad student, and the class overall. The department offers many formalized opportunities for students to develop their teaching skills, but working individually with your faculty mentor may be a more informal option.

Finally, faculty mentors encourage students’ professional development by encouraging students to disseminate their research through conference presentations. Several students present their findings at the COLFA research conference each spring, as well as at various regional and national conferences. These are excellent opportunities to both disseminate your research and gain professional experience.

**Graduate School/Tomás Rivera Center/The Writing Center**

Students admitted into the graduate program have excellent undergraduate records. However, the level of writing, researching, time-management, and reading skills advances to an entirely different level in the graduate program. Students may find that faculty members refer them to various workshops held by the graduate program, or to services offered by the Tomás Rivera Center. Faculty members sincerely want students to succeed academically, and students are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to polish their writing skills or develop their research abilities. The TRC has very specific programs geared towards graduate students at all stages, from new students to those completing a thesis. [http://utsa.edu/trcss/la/gsla.html](http://utsa.edu/trcss/la/gsla.html) In addition to formal workshops, the TRC also offers academic coaching, which is a one-on-one meeting focused on meeting a student’s specific academic needs.

The Writing Center can also help students with various elements of drafting a paper or working with various writing or grammar challenges. [http://www.utsa.edu/twc/](http://www.utsa.edu/twc/). Unlike the TRC program, they can provide more immediate assistance than the formally scheduled writing workshops. Students who need short-term help with brainstorming or proofreading a paper may find the Writing Center helpful, while those who want to work more intensively on a variety of academic skills may find the TRC beneficial.

The Graduate School also offers a variety of activities and workshops that you may find useful both while in school and after you complete your MA. Take advantage of career building opportunities offered by the university—these are an integral a part of becoming a professional historian. [http://graduateschool.utsa.edu/current-students/graduate-student-success-events/](http://graduateschool.utsa.edu/current-students/graduate-student-success-events/)
Comments/suggestions from faculty and grad students:

On colleagues (students, staff, and faculty)

--Get to know people! Fellow students, facility, and staff are all great resources.

--A brief word about faculty members: they are people! One of the best pieces of advice I received when I started my PhD program was to “not take faculty members actions/comments too personally.” If a faculty member appears distracted, it is not likely due to the fact that he/she finds your comment in the hallway uninteresting. It’s more likely that the faculty member has to be at a meeting and cannot take time to really discuss your idea at that moment.

-- Do not let fellow students' stress affect your peace of mind.

--Talk to professors about topics that interest you in class. Ask them about professional opportunities (conferences, internships, job opportunities.) They will be writing letters of recommendation for you, so they need to know who you are.

--Be nice.

"I have noticed that nothing I never said ever did me any harm." - Calvin Coolidge. Meaning, you don't have to say everything that's on your mind. I wish someone had shared this valuable advice with me.

--- Be social and make sure you create relationships with the faculty and staff. This will not only enrich your grad school experience, but it will also help your future job search.

On learning:

--If a professor suggests that you need help writing, don’t get angry or upset. You probably do need help writing.

--Do as much of the reading as possible, but remember that book reviews can be helpful if you cannot finish the assigned reading.

--Internships can be a great way to discover if you like museum work—interning at the ITC was very helpful.

--Do your work. Don’t make your classmates pull your weight in class by being unprepared or refusing to participate.

--Avoid passive voice! Always!

--COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS ARE NOT DESIGNED TO MAKE YOUR LIFE A LIVING HELL! (It just seems that way!)
-- Be open-minded. It shows that you are smart.

-- Flexibility is important to overall success in the program.

-- Grad classes can sometimes be annoying—either because of the students, the professor, or the reading. If you approach the class with the attitude that it will be a waste of time, it will become a “self-fulfilling” prophecy. Better to approach the class with a questioning attitude. Ask what you can get out of the class or how might it apply to your future teaching or research. If a fellow student irritates you, try to see what the person has to offer. If all else fails, think about dealing with a particular class as a way to practice your teaching skills. You’ll have to deal with boring topics, poorly written textbooks, and troublesome students if you teach.

-- Be open to constructive criticism.

-- Present papers as much as you can.

-- I was very shy as a grad student and rarely spoke in class. One of my professors told me to write a few comments/questions on the book to be discussed, and then to offer those comments right away. By initiating discussion, it’s possible to express your thoughts without having to jump into a conversation. It also shows initiative.

-- "Never never never give up." - Winston Churchill

-- "The best way out is always through." - Robert Frost

On “work/life” balance

-- Sleep! You will make fewer stupid mistakes if you are fully rested. Dozing off in a seminar is noticeable.

-- If you want to do a thesis, accept that you’re completely nuts. It’s best if you don’t have any other requirements (being independently wealthy and with minimal to no family obligations helps), and that you really have no concern about when you may/may not finish.

-- Do not let stress grind you down. Plan ahead, and know when to unwind.

-- Grad school has more time constraints than undergraduate. Make sure you section off blocks of time to read, write, and complete assignments. Cramming is not the way to go!

-- Appreciate your family and friends. They’ll be around a lot longer than you’ll be in the grad program.

-- "Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats." - Voltaire
"It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it." - John Steinbeck