

Department of History

Comprehensive Exams and Thesis Defense Guide

Sam Houston State University

Below are the recommended steps in fulfilling the Masters in History program at Sam Houston State University. Please keep these instructions for your files. They are also posted on our History Department Web Site.

The guidelines presented here are supplemental to general SHSU Graduate Studies guidelines and the requirements of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. At the start you should understand the general university guidelines for graduate study and the general guidelines for History graduate work as outlined by the CHSS. You may review these policies in the SHSU on-line Graduate Catalogue and at the web pages for Graduate Studies and the CHSS.

If you have any questions, please contact: Director of MA Graduate Studies Dr. Kenneth E. Hendrickson (294-1482, his_keh@shsu.edu), or Department Secretary, Ms. Charlann Morris (294-3853, his_cgm@shsu.edu)

COURSE WORK

The student may pursue the MA according to one of three possible plans. These plans are outlined in the Graduate Catalogue in the History section. Students should know and understand the plan options.

After completing the necessary course work for your degree option, students must pass both written and oral comprehensive Master's exams. Students opting for a thesis also must also make a defense, as explained below.

THE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

During the beginning of your final year, it will be your responsibility to establish your committee by contacting the professors with whom you have had the most classes. As you take your courses, be thinking about which three professors you would like to ask to be on your examination committee. Remember that sometimes professors are already serving on several committees and may not be able to take part in your committee, so be prepared to make other choices.

Of the three professors, you will need to ask one to serve as the chair of the committee. Your chair will usually be the professor with whom you have had most courses. If he or she is willing and able to serve as chair, you will need to notify him or her of the other professors who have agreed to serve on your committee, and let the secretary and Director know who your chair will be.

You will need to file an Application for Comprehensive Exam form with the department secretary. This form is available on the History Department Masters Program webpage under the link "forms". You will need to get the names and signatures of your committee members as well as the prospective date/s of your exams. If you are an on-line student and do not come to campus, you can arrange the committee by phone and/or email and your committee chair will record the information on the form for you.

Deadlines for Examination Application are 15 September for Fall; 15 February for Spring; and 15

May for Summer II. The History Department does not administer exams during mid-summer.

THE EXAMS

During your last semester, you will be expected to demonstrate your competence through written and oral examinations.

You will be expected

- 1) to know basic chronology and facts, including names, dates, people and places,
- 2) and be able to describe changes in ideas and theories about your historical subjects by comparing the authors who proposed them, and the books or articles in which these ideas have appeared. You must be able to trace historiography changes in the literature from the information you have learned during the program.

When you have applied for Comprehensive Exams, it will be your responsibility to provide your committee members with a list of the books or other materials you read for their courses. This will be the information on which you will be tested. You must be able to show that you have combined information from your various courses and demonstrate a command of your fields of history. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences has deadlines for completing examinations. Please check with the CHSS webpage to make sure you know the relevant deadlines.

THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

Your chair will be responsible for gathering the questions for your written exam from the other professors. It will be your responsibility to find a mutually agreeable time to take your written exam. Please stay in contact with your chair and with the Graduate Director to avoid any problems.

Each of your three professors will give you a selected number of broad questions. You must answer the questions clearly, providing a logically argued theme with supporting data from books, articles, and readings from your classes.

Bring at least three blue books for the exam and plan on filling them. You may use either a blue or black ink pen. Make sure you bring spares. You will have three hours to complete the test. If you are an on-line student, you will be asked to locate a testing site and have a proctor who will receive the questions by mail and administer the test for you. The Graduate Director must approve the proctor and location. In general, the student should choose a proctor with whom s/he does not have a personal or close working relationship. Locate a testing center in your area. Such facilities are readily available at schools and libraries. Make sure that the Graduate Director approves of your proctoring arrangements before you take your exams.

Your professors will grade your written exams within two weeks. If you pass your written exams, you will proceed to the oral exams. If you fail one or more sections of your Comprehensive exam, you may retake those sections one time. It is likely that this will delay your graduation by a semester. In any event, you must complete any re-examination within one calendar year of the original exam date. Failure to do so will result in removal from the program.

THE ORAL EXAMINATION

Once you have been notified that you have passed the written exam, contact your professors and schedule your oral exam at a time that is convenient for all three of your professors as well as for yourself. If you are an on-line student, the oral exam will consist of a conference call placed to a pre-approved, proctored examination site. As with your written exams, locate a proctoring site or service in your area where you can complete the phone-based oral examination under acceptable testing conditions. On-campus students will complete their exams at the History Department offices.

The oral exams consist of questions about any or all of the information you learned for your classes. You will be expected to compare and contrast ideas and concepts from books in all the fields of your discipline. You will be asked to leave the room after your oral exam, and your professors will determine whether you passed or failed. If you are an on-line student, you will hang up, and the committee will call you back after the discussion.

If you pass, you may continue with the graduation process. If you fail, you will need to repeat the oral exam even if it means registering for another semester. If you fail the oral exam a second time, you will be dropped from the program. You must complete any re-examination within one calendar year of the original exam date. Failure to do so will result in removal from the program.

THE THESIS PROGRAM

If you are interested in applying for the 30- hour thesis option, you must:

(1) Discuss your thesis idea with a member of the faculty with expertise in the field of your topic. If the faculty member agrees to direct your thesis, he or she will recommend to the Chair of the Department that you be admitted to the Thesis Program.

(2) If this request is approved by the Department Chair, you will establish a committee of three professors, which includes the faculty member who has agreed to direct your thesis. Please see the Appointment of Thesis Committee form on the Graduate Program forms page.

(3) After your Committee has been determined, you must prepare a Thesis Prospectus that clearly explains your thesis topic. Please see the Thesis Prospectus form on the Graduate Program forms page. This Prospectus must also include a selected Bibliography of pertinent primary and secondary sources. After the Prospectus has been approved by your Thesis Director and the History Department Chair, it will be sent to the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences for Final Approval. If the Dean approves the Prospectus, you will be admitted to the 30-hour Thesis Option.

WRITING THE THESIS

In considering your thesis topic, you must be able to show that you have developed a new approach to the current scholarship and that there are sufficient primary sources to allow you to complete your thesis. You will use your research in primary documents to prove your point.

Once you begin researching and writing your thesis, you must register for HIS 698. In subsequent Fall and Spring semesters you must register for HIS 699 until you complete your thesis.

Plan to submit each chapter to your Thesis Director as you complete it since most professors prefer to make comments and have you revise each chapter before allowing you to move forward with the work. Please establish a system that works best for both of you.

Expect heavy editing, just as you would with a published work. Please communicate with your Thesis Director at every opportunity. You should complete the Thesis well in advance of all University, College and Departmental Deadlines.

After you have made the corrections suggested by your Director and your Thesis Committee, you should prepare for the oral defense of your Thesis.

THESIS DEFENSE

Once the members of the committee have read the manuscript, you will need to arrange a time convenient for all the members of the committee to gather for the defense.

Unless otherwise notified, defenses will take place in AB4 - Rm. 452, the History Department Conference room. Please make sure to notify the secretary of the History Department to reserve the conference room. If you are an on-line student, you will need to find a facility, approved by the History Department, in order to carry out the conference call. Please contact the secretary to determine if the site you have chosen is adequate.

During the defense, the student will be expected to answer all questions relating to the topic of his or her thesis.

If the Director and committee approve the thesis, you will be expected to make any corrections required before sending the Thesis forward.

Once the Thesis is approved, please complete a routing sheet signed by all of the members of your committee and submit the thesis and routing sheet to Dr. John de Castro, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and to the Library where the manuscript will be checked for margin widths and binding. Please see the Thesis/Dissertation Guidelines/Manual at the Graduate Studies Current Students webpage. The SHSU Graduate Studies webpage has further information on Routing Sheets and necessary paperwork for graduation approval.

GRADUATION

Make sure you apply for graduation at the time required by the Registrar. You may review the mandatory deadlines on the SHSU University Registrar webpage. If your Thesis is not approved, you will still be able to participate in graduation although you will not receive your diploma until you complete the Thesis. If you fail to apply at all, you will not be allowed to graduate that semester.