**Why get a master’s degree in history?**
Graduate study in history offers many opportunities. For those who want to pursue a career in K-12 education, an M.A. in history can improve your job prospects or lead to new opportunities at your school. A history M.A. can also help you find a career working in museums, libraries, law firms, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and private research firms. For those interested in obtaining a Ph.D., working toward the M.A. helps you define your goals and make a successful application. Lastly, working on the M.A. is intellectually satisfying. If you enjoyed undergraduate classes that gave you the freedom to engage in deep discussions and write independent research papers, the M.A. program will allow you to pursue these activities at a higher level.

**Why get the master’s at Cal State L.A.?**
The History Department at Cal State L.A. is home to a talented, award-winning faculty that conducts world-class research while also offering students a personalized education. Members of the faculty have won the University’s distinguished professor award, the American Historical Association’s teaching award, system-wide CSU prizes, and research awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities and other scholarly organizations. Graduates of the M.A. program have gone on to win research prizes and fully-funded Ph.D. scholarships at top research universities nationwide. Our alumni also work in schools, archives, libraries, museums, non-profits, government agencies, and businesses. Our department staff is very knowledgeable and helpful. Each year, the department publishes its own scholarly journal, *Perspectives*, and it also houses an active chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor’s society.

The department’s program offers students flexibility in the design of their program. Depending on their interests or goals, students can cap their program either by writing a master’s thesis or by passing comprehensive exams. The department also offers most of its graduate classes in the evening to accommodate students who work during the day.

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**I. Admission to the Program**

**Application Materials and Due Dates:**
All applicants must submit an application form, a statement of purpose, two letters of recommendation, and transcripts. Students can begin their program in either Fall or Spring Semester. Please check the department’s website for application deadlines:

www.calstatela.edu/academic/history/graduate.php

This website also contains the application form and additional instructions on submitting your materials.

**Applicants with undergraduate history degrees:**
*Note: Students who do not meet items D & E can still gain admission to the program, but they must meet these two requirements to obtain classified standing.*

• A. Must have attained a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 (A=4.0) in the last 60 semester units (or 90 quarter units) of undergraduate work attempted, or satisfactory completion of probationary units needed to remedy a GPA below 3.0.
• B. Must have been in good standing in the last college or university attended.
• C. Must show completion of an accredited history program at a four-year university or college.
• D. Must give evidence of passing HIST 3080 (Historiography) and HIST 3090 (Historical Research and Writing), or their equivalent in another accredited college or university.
• E. Must meet all university and college requirements including the GWAR (Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement). Students can fulfill the writing requirement in one of two ways: 1) by registering for UNIV 4000 and passing the Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE); or 2) by scoring a 44 or higher on the writing portion of the CBEST (teacher certification exam). Students who take the CBEST route must submit a copy of their scores to the History Department.

• **Note:** Students who meet all these requirements can obtain admission with classified graduate standing.
Applicants with an undergraduate degree in a major other than history:
A. must have a GPA of 3.0 or higher in the last 60 semester units (or 90 quarter units) of work in their major field. Applicants with a GPA between 2.75 and 3.0 may be admitted at the discretion of the department after the completion of qualifying courses, with at least a 3.0 GPA. (Students with deficiencies in the prerequisite preparations detailed above may be admitted to the graduate program with conditionally classified status.)
B. must also complete 15-21 units of approved upper division history courses with at least a 3.0 GPA, including HIST 3080 and HIST 3090. These prerequisite courses cannot be applied toward the requirements for the M.A. degree program.
C. must be in good standing in the last college or university attended.
D. must meet all university and college requirements, including the GWAR (see above).

II. Requirements for the Degree

A minimum of 30 to 33 units are required, depending on whether the program is completed by comprehensive examinations or a thesis. At least 21 units must be in 5000-level courses.

Required Courses (6 units)
HIST 5000 and 5950 are required of all students, and are included in the 21 units of required 5000-level history coursework.

Depth Track or Global/Comparative History Track (15 units)
Students choose either a Depth Track or Global/Comparative Track in History courses (with the HIST prefix) from among the following fields:
- Africa
- Latin America
- World
- Asia
- Middle East
- Europe
- United States

Depth Track: In addition to HIST 5000 and 5950, students select three courses in a major field (at least two at the 5000 level) and two courses in a minor field (at least one at the 5000 level).

Global/Comparative History Track: In addition to HIST 5000 and 5950, students select five 5000-level courses distributed across at least four different fields.

Electives (9 units)
Select nine units 4000 or 5000-level courses in history with adviser approval. Courses outside history may be substituted to maximum of 6 units, with adviser approval.

Independent Studies
With department and faculty approval, students can apply up to 6 units of HIST 5980 to their program. All independent studies are subject to agreement by a supervising faculty member.

Research Skills
The History Department strongly recommends that all its M.A. students learn a foreign language, especially those planning to pursue a Ph.D. Such students should speak with their field advisors as early as possible about foreign language competency requirements for Ph.D. programs.

Transfer Courses and Credits
No more than 9 units of acceptable transfer or extension courses may be included in an M.A. degree program. No more than 6 of these 9 units can be in 5000-level or other graduate-level courses. Credit for thesis or comprehensive exams is not transferable.

No courses taken as an undergraduate may be included on a master’s degree program except as specifically provided for baccalaureate candidates in their final semester of undergraduate study. (See the University Catalog for details on this policy.)

Advancing to Candidacy
Before embarking on either comps or the thesis, students must “advance to candidacy” by completing the requirements listed here:
A. obtain classified graduate standing
B. complete a minimum of 16 units in the master’s program with an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher
C. fulfill the writing requirement (i.e. pass the WPE)
D. obtain approval by the History Department and the College of Natural and Social Sciences

Leaves of Absence
Students may petition for a leave of absence for the pursuit of professional or academic opportunities, for medical reasons, or for financial reasons. Graduate students are granted a maximum of 2 semesters’ leave. Petitions must be filed with the University after approval by the department chair and college graduate dean no later than 3 weeks before the end of the semester preceding the proposed leave.

Maintaining Your Status in the M.A. Program
Students are required to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 to keep classified standing in the M.A. degree program. Grades below C (i.e. C- and lower) receive no credit in the program and are computed in students’ overall GPA. Students with a GPA under
3.0 will be placed on academic probation and will not be allowed to complete final degree requirements.

### III. Comprehensive Exams (“Comps”)

The comprehensive exams, or “comps,” offer students the chance to develop wide-ranging knowledge in history. The exams are really a set of take-home essays that students write in consultation with faculty. The big advantage to comps (instead of the thesis) is that they provide students with a very wide breadth of knowledge and they are generally quicker to complete than the thesis. Comps can thus be very useful for those planning for a career in teaching, or for those who enjoy reading history for a sense of the “big picture.” They also provide a strong foundation for students interested in a Ph.D.

**When to start thinking about comps**

Students take comps once they have completed all their coursework. However, students should start thinking about their exams by the end of their first year in the program. For students in the depth track, comprehensive examinations will be in the major and minor fields. For students in the global/comparative history track, comprehensive examinations will cover and compare three fields covering three different geographic regions.

Students need to identify faculty members appropriate to serve as examiners in these fields. If you have not yet had a class scheduled with a professor who might serve as your examiner, introduce yourself during office hours to build a relationship. The examining faculty members will serve as your *comps committee*. A comps committee needs to be composed of three to five faculty members. Every professor handles comps slightly differently, but in all cases you and the professor will develop an extensive book list that will serve as the basis for your exam. This list should ideally be set at least one full semester before the exam.

Students must then complete a “grad check” with the department’s graduate advisor the semester BEFORE taking comps. Refer to the Schedule of Classes or the History Department for the grad check schedule. Students must also file the “Application for Comprehensive Exams” no later than the first week of the semester they intend to take the exams.

Students need to register for HIST 5960 (0 units) the semester when they take comps; students will not be able to register for the comps until they have successfully completed all other program requirements, have completed a grad check, and have submitted the “Application for Comprehensive Exams”.

The comprehensive exams consist of essay answers to historiographic, historical, or pedagogic questions based on a reading list of monographs & articles for each field. Students will work on their essays in consultation with their advisers up to the Monday of week 10 of the semester in which they are registered for HIST 5960. Final essays must be submitted no later than 12 noon on the Wednesday of week 14 of the semester in which the student has registered for HIST 5960. Further guidelines can be found online at www.calstatela.edu/academic/history/gradcompletion.php

If a student fails one or more of the field exams the comprehensive examinations may be retaken once, unless the student violates the academic honesty policy, in which case they may not be retaken.

Students will only need to retake exams in the fields that were failed on the first attempt. Students who have failed one or more fields after a second attempt, or who have violated the academic honesty policy, will be dis-enrolled from the program and will be unable to complete the MA degree.

### IV. The Thesis Option

The M.A. thesis represents an extensive and original scholarly paper that shows the skills of a professional historian. There is no formal page requirement, and past theses have ranged in size from 80 to 150 double-spaced pages. Students who take the thesis do not take the comprehensive exams, and instead register for 6 units of HIST 5990. Three of these thesis units may be applied to the 9-unit electives requirement, for a program total of 33 units.

The thesis option is especially attractive for students with a specific research interest, or for those who want experience with extended independent research before launching into a Ph.D. program.

**Minimum GPA Requirement:** Students must complete 18 units before formally beginning the thesis option. Students must maintain at least a 3.5 GPA in these 18 units. Under exceptional circumstances, a faculty member willing to serve as the principal advisor for a student with a GPA under 3.5 may request that the department’s Graduate Studies Committee waive the minimum GPA requirement for that student.
Students writing a thesis should attend the University’s thesis writing workshop that is held once every semester in the Library. This workshop will offer very important information and advice on University thesis regulations and formatting.

Official procedures for the thesis proposal and final submission are set by the College of Natural and Social Sciences. Current information can be found in the History Department office. As of this writing, the proposal should consist of a general overview, a 250-500 word abstract, and the signatures of your three faculty committee members, as well as the signature of the History Department’s Graduate Studies Committee.

When to start thinking about the thesis
From the very beginning, interested students should make sure that they are on pace to meet the 3.5 GPA requirement. In their first year, they should also identify a faculty member whose interests are close to yours. This faculty member may then serve as your principal thesis adviser. You should also identify two other faculty members who can offer supporting advice for your project. Together, these three professors will form your thesis committee. Once you have formed a committee, developed a topic, and completed 18 units with the required GPA, you and your principal advisor will petition the department to formally begin the thesis option.

V. Tips on Making It through the Program

• Socialize
Join Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor society, which is open to all history graduate students with a 3.5 GPA in history classes. Hang out in the student lounge. Building a social network with fellow students is one of the best ways to get the most out of the program. Maintain frequent contact with faculty as well inside and outside the classroom.

• Get regular advising
All faculty can provide general advice on academic life. For specific questions about your transcript and how it relates to program requirements, you should call the department at 323-343-2020 to schedule a graduate advisement meeting. As a general rule, you should meet for advisement at least once every semester.

• Know your “program”
When you begin your M.A. studies, you and the graduate advisor will meet and develop a customized program of classes that you plan to take in the course of your studies.

• Update your program if you take classes that aren’t on it
You can make changes to your program. However, please remember that, when you enroll in a course not on your existing program, you MUST make an advising appointment to update your program. If you do not make this update before or during the semester when you take this non-program class, you risk not getting credit for your work in that class.

• Remember the Writing Requirement
The GWAR (Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement) is a requirement for the degree, no matter the literary beauty of your latest research paper. To meet the GWAR, enroll in UNIV 4000 and take the WPE (Writing Proficiency Exam). Students need to take the WPE within their first 12 units of their program (generally in their first semester of MA work). Consult the university catalog and schedule of classes for more information on the exam. Students who fail to pass the WPE within two semesters of admission to the program will not be permitted to register for further course work until this requirement has been met. This exam is the same one required for the baccalaureate. Students can also fulfill the writing requirement by scoring over 44 on the writing portion of the CBEST.

• The all-important “Grad Check”
Remember that you must complete a “Grad Check” with the department’s graduate advisor before the semester you wish to take comps or file your thesis. Check the department office or university’s Schedule of Classes for information on these deadlines.

• The seven-year rule
Remember that students have seven years from the start of their program to graduate. Once course credits become seven years old, they expire and go off your record. Be sure to plan your progress through the program so that you are done within the seven-year limit.