

## Winthrop University Department of History

### Master of Arts in History - Thesis Prospectus Guidelines<sup>1</sup>

*Admission to the thesis track is granted by the Department of History only to students who have demonstrated the ability to successfully complete a quality thesis and whose prospectus identifies a feasible approach to an original historical topic.*

A prospectus is a formal statement that identifies your thesis topic and explains the relevance of your approach to understanding this topic. Not only should your topic be worthwhile, a prospectus shows that the project is manageable for you and your thesis committee. In your prospectus, you should also demonstrate familiarity with the secondary literature and primary sources that pertain to your topic. In a way, your prospectus acts as a rough draft of the introduction to your thesis.

- Begin considering a thesis topic during the **first semester of the first year**.
- A draft prospectus is due the Director of the History Graduate Program and your thesis advisor **6 weeks prior** to the deadlines:
- Prospectus deadline if you enroll in fall – April 15
- Prospectus deadline if you enroll in spring – November 15

**Prospectus Committee:** The Prospectus Committee includes the thesis advisor and the graduate director. Consult with the graduate director to identify an appropriate thesis advisor. The student must then work closely with the thesis advisor to develop an effective prospectus.

**Thesis Committee:** The Thesis Committee includes the thesis advisor and at least two other readers who will help and give feedback to the thesis author. The student should consult with the graduate director to identify appropriate thesis committee members.

- While the thesis committee should include a member of the Winthrop history faculty, the committee can include individuals from other departments on campus and/or from another institution is acceptable.

**Topic selection:** A topic must be sufficiently narrow in scope to allow for the in-depth focus necessary in a work of this sort, but it must also address significant historical and historiographical issues. *Input from the members of the prospectus committee prior to the submission of the prospectus is an essential part of the topic selection process.*

**Originality:** A thesis must be original in some significant way. A thesis cannot simply synthesize the work of other scholars in the field – to be, in effect, a lengthy term paper. It must address a topic or a research question previously unexamined by historians and/or use sources in a novel way.

**Format:** The prospectus, including the citation format, must be done in accordance with the most recent editions of *Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

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<sup>1</sup> This document by the History MA Committee offers revisions and updates to the prospectus guidelines crafted by former Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Andrew Doyle.

## Prospectus Guidelines

The prospectus should be **1800-2100 words** in length, plus an appended bibliography. The thesis prospectus must include the following:

1. The working title of your thesis.
2. An abstract of no more than 100 words. An abstract is a useful exercise in reducing your topic to its essence and clarifying your thoughts regarding the project.
3. A discussion of the proposed topic, including the research question(s) that the student proposes to address in the thesis.
4. A review of the literature, including both primary and secondary sources. Begin with a historiographical review of the relevant secondary literature addressed by the proposed research questions, including the most significant works in the field, their methodological approaches, and how your thesis will fit into the extant body of literature. Discuss the most significant secondary works in the field, and focus on texts in proportion to their relevance to the topic. This section should also explain the ways in which the proposed thesis will differ from extant works and offer an original contribution to the literature. Conclude the literature review with a discussion of the primary sources on which the thesis will be based and information that each offers. This section must demonstrate familiarity with each of the major sources or collections of sources to be used, and it must focus on texts in proportion to their relevance to the topic. Show how your primary sources will allow you to address your research question.
5. A tentative chapter outline that identifies the thematic organization of the thesis. Each chapter heading should include a brief discussion of the thematic content of that chapter. The final thesis does not have to and probably will not adhere fully to this outline, but doing this now will force you to think in organizational terms.
6. A schedule for completion of the thesis.
7. A list of all thesis committee members; students should obtain confirmation of each thesis committee members' agreement to participate in order to receive approval to sign up for HIST 695.
8. A bibliography (see below)

## Bibliography

The bibliography must be reasonably comprehensive and must include relevant secondary sources, including but not limited to the secondary works discussed in the literature review section of the prospectus. The bibliography should be divided into sections for primary and secondary sources, and each section should include subheadings for books, articles, and any other category that is appropriate to the individual project.

- **Primary sources:** This section will vary considerably according to the nature of the topic and the sources. Very large individual sources such as manuscript collections, government documents, and oral history interviews should be broken down into subsections to the extent practicable. The literature review section of the prospectus is the appropriate place in which to discuss the details of the major primary sources to be used in the thesis.
- **Secondary sources:** Relevant books, journal articles, individual entries in collections of essays, and any other secondary sources should be listed under appropriate subheadings.