

**MANUAL FOR Ph.D. STUDENTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON**

**2007**

## Introduction

The program of supervised study that leads to the Ph.D. degree is the most intellectually sophisticated and demanding in the university. The goal of this study is to prepare an individual to function as an independent scholar at a high level of competence and responsibility. Success is not guaranteed, but for those who achieve the goal, the Ph.D. is the faculty's certification that the recipients are equipped to participate in the work of the discipline as equals to their mentors.

In the field of history, a competent scholar is expected to have a broad base of knowledge of the past, an awareness of the methods and interpretations of other historians, a capacity to analyze diverse conditions and complex issues, a sophisticated, thoughtful conceptualization of his or her field of study, and the ability to carry out research and to communicate the results of that research in graceful prose. Doctoral study ought to develop knowledge and hone skills to the end that a student can independently formulate meaningful questions, devise and conduct appropriate research, and reach mature judgments. Having been so trained, the Ph.D. historian should be able to undertake historical investigations, place findings in context, and communicate an understanding of the past to students in schools and universities, to patrons of museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions, or to clients in business, government, journalism, law, and other fields where insight into the past is valuable.

A well-rounded program of graduate study in history ought to challenge students to read widely in the historical literature of the chosen field, draw comparisons between times and places, consider a variety of methodological and interpretive approaches, confront contemporary viewpoints, and articulate ideas both orally and in writing. These activities require interaction with fellow students as well as faculty and the larger professional community in seminars, informal discussions, visiting lectures, and professional meetings. Doctoral study should also compel the students to organize and focus their ideas, as well as confront the extent and quality of their knowledge. Regular writing tasks and examinations are the principal means to these ends. Ultimately, students must demonstrate their qualifications to pursue independent work by passing a comprehensive examination of knowledge in their chosen fields. Thereafter, doctoral students conclude their apprenticeships by completing an original independent research project under the supervision of a mentor. This doctoral dissertation, when examined and approved by a committee of scholars, serves as an introduction and a first credential to the world of mature, independent scholarship. It is the culmination of doctoral study.

The doctoral history programs of The University of Akron and Kent State University seek, through a structured program of seminars, individual tutelage, examinations, research, and writing, to assist qualified students toward the goal of becoming mature, independent historians in the fields of history where the faculty has expertise to guide them. Ph.D. recipients may pursue academic careers in teaching, and in the past, a number of graduates from Akron and Kent have found employment at four-year colleges and at regional institutions. Other Ph.D. recipients may prefer to pursue careers as public historians in archives, museums, and libraries; may become academic administrators; may provide their

expertise to businesses; or may pursue the degree primarily for personal enrichment. The special strength of the graduate training in the Akron-Kent consortium is the close interaction between faculty members and graduate students. Full-time students may apply to become TAs, where they will be guided and mentored in the fine art of teaching college-level courses, a vital preparation for those intending to pursue careers in higher education. The regulations that follow set forth the basic requirements and procedures for Ph.D. study at The University of Akron and Kent State University.

Students are strongly advised to acquaint themselves with the general rules and procedures of their Graduate School. These are spelled out in each university's Graduate Bulletin.

## Admissions Requirements

The Graduate Committees of the History Departments at Akron and KSU will consider an applicant for admission if a person has a Masters degree in history or the equivalent and a grade-point average of 3.5 or better at the M.A. level from a properly accredited institution. Those holding a Master's degree should not assume, however, that they will automatically be admitted to doctoral studies. In addition to the application made to the Graduate School of either The University of Akron or Kent State University, the student must submit to the appropriate History Department the following materials:

- 1) A letter of intention, giving reasons for wishing to undertake doctoral study, the fields of study the student wishes to pursue, and the choice of professor to serve as Principal Faculty Mentor.
- 2) Three letters of recommendation from former professors.
- 3) A writing sample, preferably an M.A. thesis or seminar paper that demonstrates strong writing ability and familiarity with the methods of historical research.
- 4) Scores on the Graduate Record Examination, General Aptitude Test. Although there will not be an absolute cut-off, the qualifications of students with verbal aptitude scores below 500 will have to be considered very carefully.
- 5) Evidence of a reading knowledge of one foreign language appropriate to a student's research interests, or knowledge of an acceptable cognate field (such as a statistics). Those whose native language is not English must demonstrate proficiency in English.
- 6) Potential students are also strongly encouraged to visit the department and to talk with the Graduate Director, faculty members with whom they hope to study, and other graduate students.

No one shall be admitted without a faculty member in the appropriate department agreeing to serve as Principal Faculty Mentor for the student. A student can change PFM once s/he is admitted and taking classes, but only with the approval of the Graduate Committee. The History Departments discourage students from receiving all three degrees (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.) from the same institution.

## **The Program of Doctoral Study**

The Doctor of Philosophy is the highest distinction that can be earned in an American university. The manner in which a student works toward that degree should be characterized by maturity, honesty, courtesy, and collegiality at all times. The following procedures are outlined to serve as a guide toward maintaining ancient traditions as well as professional standards and assuring that a spirit of cooperation prevails among all those concerned with this serious enterprise.

### **Formulation of the Student's Program of Study**

Upon admission to the doctoral program, the student and the Principal Faculty Mentor (PFM) together shall prepare a formal "outline of program of study," to be approved by the Graduate Committee, no later than the student's second semester of full-time work. Such an outline will specify which fields will be prepared for comprehensive exams. The PFM will generally advise the student in preparing the major comprehensive field and eventually chair the dissertation committee. If a student should change fields or otherwise alter the plan, a new "outline of program study" must be submitted immediately for approval. A Ph.D. candidate is required to take a minimum of 60 hours past the M.A. (of which 24 hours shall be in dissertation research and writing). To meet the residency requirement, each Ph.D. candidate is required to take at least two consecutive semesters of full-time study, defined as 9 hours or more a semester, and to become involved in departmental activities.

#### **Fields**

In preparing fields for comprehensive exams, each student will take at least 36 hours of coursework. No more than 9 hours of 500-level courses (none of which shall be in the major field), and no more than 12 hours of "individual readings" may be counted toward this 36, but those students taking more than 36 hours of coursework, as do most, are free to take additional hours of individual readings or of 500-level courses, as chosen in consultation with the PFM. At least one course a semester, for full-time students who have not yet taken their comprehensive exams, will be a reading seminar ("colloquium") or writing seminar, and all students must take a minimum of 16 hours of such seminars.

A student who has accumulated over 8 hours of "INC" or "IP" grades in seminars/colloquia or in 500-level courses will not be allowed to register for additional courses until these have been made up. Students must maintain a 3.5 GPA to be considered to be making good progress toward the degree. Students whose GPA falls below 3.0 will be put on academic probation; students who compile 6 hours of C or 4 hours of D or F will be dismissed from the program.

The student, in consultation with the PFM, will prepare for comprehensive exams in four fields, each of which will embody a substantial body of historical literature and a diverse and significant body of issues. The fields will be selected from the following list:

Ancient  
Medieval Europe  
Europe, Renaissance to 1815  
Modern Europe since 1750  
United States to 1877  
United State since 1877  
Latin American  
East Asia  
Africa  
Middle East  
South Asia  
History of Science

The student will first choose a major field in which s/he intends to write a dissertation, and then choose three additional fields, one each from the American, European, and Non-western fields. (For example, a student planning to write a dissertation in Modern U.S. will prepare for comprehensive exams in both American fields plus one European and one Non-western field.) The Graduate Committee must approve all choices of fields. Note: availability of any doctoral field is dependent upon the availability of appropriate faculty.

Students will confer with their PFMs about the most appropriate faculty member as advisor and examiner for each field. Students will then ask each prospective field examiner whether he or she will agree to work with them, and the field examiner will develop a program of study to prepare each student for exams. Faculty from both The University of Akron and Kent State University will normally serve as advisors in preparing comps fields, and it is expected that students will take course work, especially seminars and colloquia, with these advisors. Students will prepare for their exams through a combination of course work and additional reading and research. Course work and readings will both provide the student with a broad foundation of knowledge of the major events and the historiography of a field, and will also provide opportunities for more specialized investigations, tailored to the student's interests and needs for their eventual dissertation topics. The PFM will oversee the student's preparation, including determining how the language and residency requirements will be met, and coordinate examinations.

Each student's examining committee will prepare a progress report every year, to be reviewed by the Graduate Committee. The Graduate Committee's annual written evaluation of the student's progress will be sent to the student and the student's PFM and will be made a part of the student's permanent file. Neither courses completed nor time in the program shall guarantee successful completion.

### **Comprehensive Examinations**

Before taking comprehensives, the student must have completed all course work, including making up any outstanding incompletes and "in progress" grades, have satisfied the residency requirement, and have also demonstrated a reading knowledge of a second

foreign language. The PFM will advise the student on the most appropriate language to take.

When appropriate, and where a student has already demonstrated reading knowledge of one foreign language, a cognate field may be substituted for the second language, with the approval of the Graduate Committee. The definition and performance expectations for such a field must be agreed upon by the student, the PFM, the student's doctoral committee, and the faculty in other departments who may be involved. Examples of such cognate fields include statistics for students needing skills in quantification for writing a Ph.D. dissertation, or economics for students planning to write a dissertation in economic history.

Comprehensive exams will be scheduled by the PFM and administered in all four fields, when the examiners in each of these fields agree that the student is ready. Exams have both a written and an oral component. Students will take all four of their written exams within the same two-week period. The written exams normally have 4 questions, covering both historical events and historiography, and each may be written over a period of between 4 and 8 hours. Each written exam will be graded by the faculty member (or members) principally responsible for preparing the student in that field. Exams are intended to evaluate students on the historiography, methodology, interpretation and analysis, and subject content of the historical field.

In order to proceed to the oral examination, the students must receive a grade of B+ or better on at least three of the four written exams, and at least a B on the fourth (not the major field); otherwise, the student will be considered to have failed. Orals will normally be administered during the week following the successful completion of written exams. The oral examination will take approximately 2 hours and will involve questioning in all four of the student's fields. Oral examinations are open to all faculty of the History Departments. Following the oral examination, the committee will award a grade based on its overall evaluation of the student's written and oral performance. Students may pass with distinction (in unusual cases), pass, pass conditionally, or fail.

The committee will award a grade of conditional pass when the student demonstrates deficiencies in one (only) of the four fields, and such deficiencies can be made up in the following semester. If the student fails comprehensive exams (either the written or the oral component), s/he will be required to retake all exams, written and oral, within one calendar year. Comps may be retaken only once.

Once comprehensive examinations have been successfully passed, the PFM will so notify the Graduate Committee in writing. The student will file an "Advancement to Candidacy" form with the Graduate Director, to be forwarded to the Graduate School.

## The Dissertation

The dissertation committee, to be selected by the student and the PFM with the approval of the Graduate Committee and Graduate School, will consist of at least five faculty members, normally including at least one from Akron and one from Kent. The principal advisor will be from the student's home department, except in very unusual circumstances. Faculty members from other universities may also be included as appropriate, with approval of the Graduate Committee and the Graduate School. Committee members will be chosen for their expertise or special interest in the dissertation topic and need not have served on the committee for the comprehensive examinations. The fifth committee member must be from the student's home institution but from outside the History Department. All committee members must have Graduate Faculty status; both the principal advisor and the "fifth" committee member must have Graduate Faculty II status.

A dissertation proposal outlining the student's plan of research and writing must be composed in consultation with the PFM, approved by the student's committee, and accepted by the Graduate Committee during the semester after the student passes comps. After that, the dissertation committee will meet at least once a year to assess the student's progress. Any major changes in the subject of the dissertation or in principal advisor must be approved by the graduate committee, which will continue to review each student's progress annually. The principal advisor may require that the student gain additional language competency as appropriate for the dissertation's subject matter. The student will take at least 12 hours of dissertation research and writing; up to 24 hours of dissertation research and writing may be counted toward the minimum of 60 hours of graduate work required by the Graduate School. Students shall continue to register for at least one hour of dissertation research/writing each fall and spring semester from the time that they pass their comprehensive exams until they graduate.

When the student and PFM are agreed that a dissertation is a polished piece of original scholarship and ready to be defended, dissertation defense will be scheduled. Other members of the dissertation committee will normally have seen drafts of the dissertation in progress, and will receive a complete text at least one month before the defense. If, during that month, the committee determines that substantial revision is still necessary, then the defense must be rescheduled for a later date. If the student intends to graduate at the end of the semester during which the defense is held, then the defense will need to be scheduled for at least a month before the Graduate School's deadline for submitting the final dissertation.

The dissertation defense is open. The student will be examined on the dissertation's thesis, evidence, methodology, conclusions, and the place of the work within existing scholarship. Observers may comment on the dissertation and the defense if they choose, but only the members of the committee may vote to approve or reject the dissertation. The committee may decide to approve with distinction (in unusual circumstances), to approve, to approve subject to minor revisions, or reject. A majority of the voting members will be required to determine the committee's action. The dissertation defense may be reconvened only once.

The student is responsible for preparing final copies of the dissertation in accordance with the requirements of the Graduate School. The Graduate School will return a dissertation not done to its liking.