History Comprehensives for Senior Majors
Not Writing Theses in the History Department
Academic Year 2017-18

As History majors, you have all either completed or are in the process of completing a research paper that conforms to the Guidelines for Research Papers for the History Department. (These research papers are 20 to 25 pages in length and are based on primary-source research.)

Deadlines at a glance (each is described below):

- **Friday, January 26:** Five page summary paper due to department website.
- **February 2:** Students assigned to groups and seminar meeting times.
- **Week of February 12:** Seminar meetings (i.e. oral presentations)
- **Friday, February 23:** Revise and resubmit deadline (if applicable)

The Comprehensive will consist of the following:

1) **A Brief (five page) Summary of your Research Paper:** The summary should consist of the research question, a concise statement of the argument, and your most important findings (the conclusion). It should be written as a paper and not as an outline or a collection of bullet points. You should also sketch out what steps you would take to expand this paper into a longer research project if you had the time to do so. These steps might include incorporating analyses that you have encountered in other courses and/or other scholars’ works (be specific), conducting additional research, or refining the research question itself.

This five page summary is due by 2:30 pm on **Friday, January 26, 2018** and should be submitted via this online webform within the History Department’s website: [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/history-major/comprehensives/submit-essay-here](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/history-major/comprehensives/submit-essay-here)

The written summary, considered in combination with your oral presentation (see below), will be marked by two faculty members as either “High Pass,” “Pass,” or “Revise and Resubmit.” If it is marked as “Revise and Resubmit,” you will have to revise it, along the lines suggested by the faculty members, and resubmit it to the department for review no later than **Friday, February 23**. See the accompanying “Senior History Capstone Project Guidelines.”
2) **An Oral Presentation of your Research Findings:** This will be a ten minute presentation to a small group consisting of five or six other History seniors and two department faculty members. These presentations will take place sometime between **February 12 and 16**; a group and date will be assigned to you by **Friday, February 2nd**. The oral presentation should include a statement of your argument and your major research findings, as well as a discussion of the broader historical questions that you engage. You may use visual media in your presentation.

3) **Active Participation in the Discussion of Other Students’ Work in your Seminar:**
Your five page summary (along with those of the other students in your group) will be photocopied and circulated to the students and faculty in the group several days before the meeting to give everyone the opportunity to read them in advance of the presentations. You should come to the seminar meeting prepared not only to present your own work, but also to listen attentively to other students’ presentations and to participate in the discussion.

If you have any questions about the Comps, please do not hesitate to contact either your adviser or the Chair of the department, Professor Sean Redding (sredding@amherst.edu).
Senior History Capstone Project Guidelines

Five-page paper guidelines

Research question
- Briefly explain your research question, what your project sought to explore or to answer.
- This may, but need not, include an explanation of why you chose your topic.

Research Trajectory and Approach
- Where did your research take you? Did it lead to more questions? Did it lead you to narrow or broaden your topic? i.e., explain a bit how your thinking developed over the course of the project.
- How did you approach the subject? What theories were helpful? What ideas did you use to understand your material?

Obstacles
- What specific obstacles or challenges did this research present?
  o This could be access or availability of sources, or the difficulties managing large amounts of information, or the difficulty in formulating a narrow enough question, etc.

Sources
- What kind of sources did you use?
- Did they require special sorts of treatment (i.e. archives, vs. films, vs. literature, etc.)
- Explain how you approached and dealt with the sources – how you extracted information, what you wanted them to ‘tell’ you.

Findings and Conclusions
- What were your principle conclusions or findings? I.e. What did you discover?
- Did you answer your question?
- Did you end up asking new questions?
- Did you develop any theories or templates or models from your analysis that could be applied more generally?
- What were the ‘lessons’ learned?

Moving On
- If you were to continue to pursue this project, what would you do?
  o This could be about expanding the topic, looking at more sources, reshaping the topic, adding comparison, etc.

We are looking for you to discuss your work and its relevance. This is not the same as providing an abstract of your work. Do not simply retell it in shortened form; instead explain what your project was really about, what was important about it, what was valuable about your findings that speak to other larger questions. This paper should read as if you were talking to a potential editor about why the editor should be interested in publishing your work. Please provide both footnotes/endnotes as needed and a Bibliography. (This can be the same Bibliography that was part of the original paper; the Bibliography is in addition to the 5 pages for the paper itself.)
Guidelines for the ten minute oral presentation

You can assume that all members of the seminar, including other students and the faculty in attendance, have read your 5-page paper; in all likelihood none will have read the longer, original research paper. Therefore, you should focus the presentation on a brief discussion of your major findings, and perhaps also highlight some of the most intriguing or startling evidence and conclusions that you developed. Then provide a brief statement of how you might improve the longer research paper if you were to continue working on it now.

It is not necessary to prepare a Powerpoint for the presentation unless you have some visual aids that will enhance the understanding of the topic. If you have pictures, maps, charts, graphs, etc., these are great to include in a Powerpoint. As a general rule, however, you should not use a Powerpoint just to provide lists of your talking points. As part of the presentation, you might also incorporate other audio-visual materials, such as music or video clips, if they are appropriate for your topic and were part of the original paper. If you intend to include video or audio clips, remember that these will count as part of the 10 minutes allotted to the presentation, and you need to give yourself sufficient time to develop the context and analysis.

At the end of each of the 10 minute presentations, the other students and the faculty will have the opportunity to ask questions about the projects. You should be prepared both to answer questions about your own project, and also to ask them about the presentations done by other students in the seminar.

Finally, please practice your presentation in advance and make sure that you can deliver it in 10 minutes. Depending on the number of students in the seminar, it may not be possible to allow you extra time to finish a presentation that goes over the 10 minute time limit.