

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Guide to Graduate Study in History

On behalf of the [American Historical Association](#), welcome to the community of historians. The AHA is the largest professional organization in the United States devoted to the discipline of history in all fields and specializations. The AHA provides opportunities for networking, publishing, fellowships, career development, and much more. Our website offers resources to guide you at every stage, and we look forward to supporting you as you begin your career.

Sincerely,



Vicki L. Ruiz, President



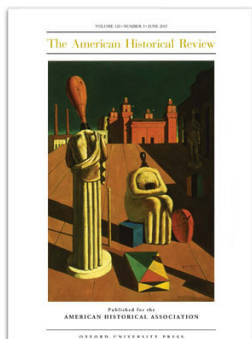
Patrick Manning, President-elect



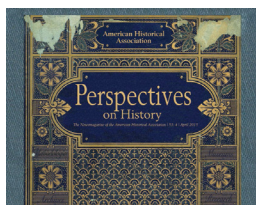
Jan E. Goldstein, Past President

Inside, you'll find a brief guide to our resources on the following topics:

- Benefits of AHA Membership
- Course Work
- Obtaining a Master's Degree
- Preparing for Comprehensive Exams
- Language Training
- Conceptualizing a Dissertation
- Applying for External Funding
- Conducting Research
- Organizing & Writing a Dissertation
- Presenting Your Work
- Publishing
- Networking
- Teaching
- Preparing for the Job Market
- Career Diversity for Historians
- Professional Standards & Ethics
- Graduate and Early Career Committee



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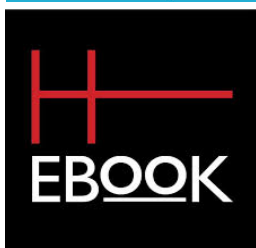
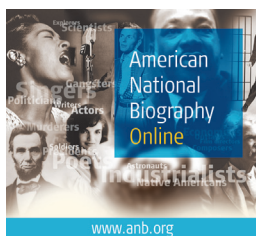
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The Chicago Manual
of Style Online



HISTORY
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Benefits of AHA Membership

As a graduate student, the AHA invites you to join at a special discounted rate of only \$28 per year. With this price, you'll receive:

- The mobile version of *American Historical Review* – the easiest way to keep up with the latest scholarship (for \$12 more, you get all 5 issues delivered in print).
- The print version of *Perspectives on History* so you can follow news and information about the history discipline.
- Access to AHA Communities, a place to ask questions of your colleagues (like a recent thread about how books are chosen for review in the *AHR*)
- Free access to *Choice Reviews Online*, featuring over 7,000 reviews of new scholarly books – perfect for writing that review paper or studying for comprehensive exams!
- A free subscription to Interfolio Dossier service, the easiest way to apply for jobs, as well as grants and fellowships. Your subscription fee is waived each year you're an AHA member.
- Discounted registration for the annual meeting, where you'll find panels and workshops on research, digital history, career development, graduate issues, and more.
- Discounts on books and online databases from Oxford University Press.
- And much more!

Special Offer for

First-Year Graduate Students

Get an additional \$15 off of your membership dues with promotion code GRAD_2015.

Go online to learn more about how the AHA uses your membership dues to:

- advocate for the discipline
- promote scholarly discussion
- advance teaching and learning
- enhance career development

Even if you join a specialized historical society devoted to your research interest, only the AHA can provide the nationwide voice to support the entire discipline in all its diversity.

[Please Join Today](#)

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AHA Guide to Graduate Study in History

Course Work

Course work is a standard part of the first 2-3 years of graduate education in history. It is also the entry point to one's professional life as an historian. Its purpose is to help graduate students get a sense of the state of the historical discipline; the state of the field in which a student will work; to learn the conventions, vocabulary, and epistemologies of the discipline; and to hone the research and writing skills necessary to complete a dissertation. [Read more online.](#)

Obtaining a Master's Degree

Students may study for a Master's Degree before seeking employment in teaching, public history, or industry. The Master's Degree may also be a point along the path to a PhD, either at the same institution or at a new institution. Learn about getting the most from your Master's Degree with a [Report from the AHA's Committee on the Master's Degree in History](#), a [Perspectives on History forum on the Master's Degree](#), and [an article on switching institutions on the way to a PhD.](#)

Preparing for Comprehensive Exams

After completing your institution's required coursework, you will take a set of comprehensive exams, written and/or oral, in your selected specializations. Usually, the scope of the examination will be set with your advisors based on a reading list. Talk to post-qualification or "All-But-Dissertation" (ABD) students about the book lists they used, but be sure to tailor your list to your specific research focus.



[Learn how to make the most out of your summer break to prepare for exams.](#)

[Exam tips from the Graduate and Early Career Committee online](#)

[Check out titles from the AHA Store](#) that offer updated historiographical analysis in a variety of geographic and thematic fields.

Language Training

Many research projects require knowledge of a foreign language. Discuss with your advisor the most appropriate training for your area of study. Although many universities offer training in languages, you may need to enroll in external programs for more specialized languages or to obtain intensive training.

Conceptualizing a Dissertation

The dissertation proposal process is long and iterative – for many people it is at least a year from the moment when you start to think about a topic idea until the approval of a dissertation proposal. You should be thinking purposefully about your dissertation topic as soon as you can. You have many factors to consider, including the state of the historiography, the availability of sources, your level of interest, and the direction of the field. Even if your department does not require a formal proposal, this information will be useful as you begin to strategize how to approach your topic. [Read more online.](#)

A great resource is the [AHA's Dissertation Directory](#), which includes the title, author, institution, and completion status of nearly every dissertation underway or awarded in the discipline of history by US institutions. Search by keyword in the title to find other scholars pursuing similar topics. (And make sure your clever title hasn't already been taken!)

Applying for External Funding

Receiving external funding to support research travel is not only essential for finding the archival material you need to support your dissertation, it is also a valuable addition to your CV and helps to further conceptualize your research. You should think about research travel as early as your first year in graduate school, depending on your field of study.

Talk with your advisor, other faculty, and advanced graduate students in the program for tips on writing successful grant proposals.

[Be sure to use the AHA's calendar of grants and fellowships to find opportunities.](#)

Conducting Research

Whether your dissertation incorporates manuscript archives, government records, oral histories, material culture, or any other sources, successful research starts with a plan. Learn what you can about an archive's policies and holdings in advance from its website, by calling a staff archivist, or from the [AHA's Archives Wiki](#).

Check out out a [Survival Guide](#) and [Trip Tips](#).

To conduct oral interviews, you will almost certainly need to obtain approval from your Institutional Review Board (IRB). Check with your advisor or department chair to learn your university's policies and get started as soon as you can.

Check out the [Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media](#) for digital research tools.

Organizing & Writing a Dissertation

One of the most daunting moments in the writing of a dissertation is the transition from research mode to writing mode. The process is long and you should be prepared to encounter setbacks and frequent revisions. It is important to not get discouraged.

Perspectives
on History
The Newsletter of the American Historical Association

Read a Forum in *Perspectives* on the [art of crafting a dissertation or monograph](#) and [an article on practical advice](#).

Available for purchase from the AHA Store: [From Concept to Completion: A Dissertation-Writing Guide for History Students, by the AHA Graduate and Early Career Committee](#). Members receive 30% off all titles at the AHA Store.

Presenting Your Work

Sharing your research at conferences is a great way to get feedback from diverse groups of scholars, hone your argument, and network with historians. Graduate conferences are an excellent place to start. Use the [AHA's calendar to find conferences](#). You can also work with your department to set up a graduate conference.



The [annual meeting of the AHA](#) is the premiere gathering of historians in the nation. Held in different cities around the US in early January, the annual meeting brings together scholarship, teaching, career development, advocacy and more. We welcome graduate students as attendees and presenters. Attending sessions and workshops is a great way to improve your knowledge of the discipline. With receptions and meal sessions, you'll also have the chance to network. Ask faculty in your department about the special offer to bring students for only \$10.

Before you head out to the AHA's annual meeting or any other conference, read our [Guide to Getting the Most Out of Conferences and Professional Meetings](#). You can also read tips about [presenting a scholarly paper](#), [introducing a speaker and running a panel discussion](#), and [being a good commentator or member of the audience](#).

Publishing

In the changing landscape of the twenty-first century, emerging historians have many opportunities to publish their research and get their name in print. Blog articles, book reviews, conference proceedings, and peer-reviewed journal articles each play a particular role in the development of a scholar. Discuss with your advisor the best plan for engaging with each of these forms.

Publishing an article is a major milestone in an academic career. Learn more in [a Perspectives article on the mysteries of academic publishing](#).

Finding the right journal for your article is essential. Use the [AHA's Directory of History Journals](#) to search by geographic and chronological field, as well as thematic topic. Discuss with your advisor which journals are best for your topic.

Writing for a popular audience? Read [Pitch Perfect: Communicating with Traditional and Social Media for Scholars, Researchers, and Academic Leaders](#).

Networking

Building a network of scholars is essential for deepening your knowledge of the field and your specific research project. Networking can also prepare you for a future job search. The more people who know you and your work, the more impact your scholarship will have.

Key aspects of networking include:

- *Joining your institution's graduate student association (or start one of your own)*

Stay tuned to important news regarding graduate student funding and fees, health insurance, socializing opportunities, and more.

- *Meeting graduate students from outside your department*

Start by connecting with students in other departments at your university (e.g., English, Political Science, Comparative Literature, etc). If there are other graduate programs nearby, try to host a joint reading group or happy hour. You can also meet other graduate students at conferences.

- *Finding a mentor at another institution*

Recommendation letters from senior scholars outside of your program are an effective tool on the job market. Cultivate these connections early on in your graduate career by seeking out scholars whose books or articles you've found influential. You can also start a correspondence with someone visiting your university.

- *Meeting museum professionals, high school teachers, archivists, and other historians working in the community*

Find ways to bring your skills and knowledge to the public by partnering with historians in the community. Look for ways to volunteer at a local museum, visit a high school classroom, or present a public lecture.

- *Interacting with your department's alumni*
Invite them to participate in graduate student conferences, or see if your department can incorporate them into professionalization workshops.

[AHA Communities](#) is a great place to network with historians across the country. Use it to get advice about a specific research challenge, publication question, or a teaching inquiry. You can also seek co-panelists for conferences through the message boards.

Teaching

The AHA has been a leading advocate for the importance of history education at both the K-12 and post-secondary level. Our project "[Tuning the History Major](#)" aims to counter the decline in history enrollments by working with faculty across the country to articulate the disciplinary core of historical study and define what a student should understand and be able to do at the completion of a history degree program. Tuning is helping a new generation of students and college administrations see that history is an essential component of the education of emerging citizens. [Instructor resources are available online.](#)

The AHA has also advocated for strong history education at the K-12 level, most recently through [public statements and op-eds](#) on behalf of the revised AP US History framework, which emphasized historical thinking.

Teaching is an important component of any doctoral student's training. Get ready for this role by reading a *Perspective* Graduate Students Forum on [advice for succeeding as an instructor](#). The AHA website also collects [teaching resources](#), including digital history lessons for the classroom. There are teaching-focused sessions held at every AHA annual meeting.

Check out [titles on teaching in the AHA Store](#). Members receive a 30% discount on all items in the AHA store.

The screenshot shows the AHA Members' Forum website. At the top is a navigation bar with links for Home, Communities, Member Forum, Directory, Browse, and Participate. Below this is the main header "AHA Members' Forum" with a Settings icon. A secondary navigation bar includes Community Home, Discussion (438), Library (4), and Members (21K). The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled "Latest Discussion Posts", features three posts, all titled "RE: The Idea of Revolution". The first post is by Kenneth Adams (2 hours ago), the second by John Tully (4 hours ago), and the third by Jack Censer (5 hours ago). The right column, titled "Announcements", contains a "Member Forum Guidelines" section with five numbered points: 1. This is your community, please behave fellow members with the respect you'd expect. 2. Aim for civil debate grounded in evidence. 3. Contributors to forum threads should make substantive additions to the conversation if they have issues that diverge from the consensus. 4. Pejorative or defamatory posts will not be tolerated. 5. The member forum is not a place to advertise with the America's Historical Association for advertisers or the AHA's...

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Preparing for the Job Market

Everything has a history; therefore, historians can add value to any workplace. The AHA is committed to supporting the career goals and pathways of historians, no matter where they work.

In 2013, the AHA commissioned an extensive report on “[The Many Careers of History PhDs](#),” which tracked and analyzed the employment of recent PhD graduates. Other [data on the history profession](#) are compiled online.

The AHA has multiple articles on navigating the academic job market, including specific advice on writing CVs, cover letters, and teaching portfolios, and conducting a successful interview and campus visit.

The AHA also has information about the public history job market and the market for secondary education teachers.

[Read more online.](#)

AHA
CAREER
CENTER

[AHA Career Center](#) is a great place to search for jobs in a variety of fields. AHA job advertisements have been open to the public since September 2011. Follow new job postings on Twitter [@HistoryJobs](#).

If you come to an annual meeting, be sure to attend the Career Fair, where historians from a variety of fields—government agencies, military, nonprofits, businesses, colleges and universities, presses, independent scholars, K–12, etc.—speak with students and job candidates about the path to becoming a historian. Mentors can hold informational interviews, display materials about being a historian in their field, or just be available to talk about their own journey in the history profession.



Career Diversity for Historians

The [AHA's Career Diversity for Historians](#) initiative is working to better prepare graduate students and early-career historians for a range of career options, within and beyond the academy. In addition to national-level programs, four pilot sites are working to explore how the culture and practice of graduate education can better support the changing needs of PhD students. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to improve graduate education in history while increasing the influence of the humanities in society.

Learn about the Career Diversity Initiative from recent articles in *Perspectives*:

- “[New AHA Initiatives Will Examine Teaching and Learning, Career Paths](#),” January 2013
- “[The AHA-Mellon Career Diversity Project: Recent Accomplishments and Next Steps](#),” September 2013
- “[Career Diversity's Time has Come: Mellon Foundation Awards AHA \\$1.6 Million to Expand Historians' Options](#),” May 2014
- “[Career Diversity is Not New, But Let's Get it Right This Time](#),” April 2015

You can read regular updates about what the AHA and its pilot sites are doing on [AHA Today](#) and in *Perspectives on History*. Resources produced by the initiative include “[The Many Careers of History PhDs](#),” a report of career outcomes for a cohort of recent history PhDs; [Career Paths](#), a series in *Perspectives on History* in which historians working beyond the professoriate share their experiences; and [YouTube What I Do](#), a series of short interviews with historians talking about their work.

If you'd like to explore a career path with an individual mentor, sign up for [Career Contacts](#). The service matches history PhDs employed beyond the professoriate with graduate students and recent PhDs who are interested in broadening their career horizons.

“The senior contact was very happy to tell me about her work and her path towards it following her PhD. She had advice on what I could do now as a PhD candidate. She gladly answered any of my questions and understood my concerns about the job market as it is.”

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Professional Standards & Ethics

As the principal umbrella organization for the discipline, the AHA is in a unique position to speak to and for the concerns of the profession as a whole. In addition to collecting information on the profession, the association is often called upon to set high standards for professional behavior and excellence. In addition to the [Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct](#), the association developed a series of best practices for excellence in professional behavior, research, and teaching.

Many of these standards have direct relevance for graduate students and early career historians. The AHA recognizes that emerging scholars face specific vulnerabilities within the profession and takes responsibility for protecting their interests.

In July 2013, the [AHA issued a statement](#) strongly encouraging graduate programs and university libraries to adopt policies that allow new PhDs a full range of options when determining the electronic availability of their dissertations. The AHA believes individual PhD recipients should have the choice about when and how their extensive, original research is disseminated to the public.

The AHA is also working to advance digital scholarship as a component of professional evaluations for hiring, promotion, and tenure. In May 2015, the [AHA Council adopted guidelines](#) that encourage departments to be far-sighted when considering the incorporation of digital scholarship. This expansion of our disciplinary understanding of scholarship follows on the [2010 statement](#) about tenure and promotion evaluations regarding publicly engaged academic historians.

The AHA's professional division routinely offers ethical advice on important issues, including [interviews](#), [job offers](#), and [plagiarism](#). These are published in *Perspectives* and are available to all.

Graduate and Early Career Committee

The [Graduate and Early Career Committee](#) (GECC) provides a voice within the association for graduate students and historians early in their careers, and serves as a venue to discuss issues of concern and interests of students and early career professionals. The mission of the committee is:

1. To serve as the point of contact for graduate student members in order to articulate their concerns and interests to the larger membership and governing bodies of the AHA.
2. To advocate for inclusion of graduate students as vital participants in debates concerning the course of the profession and the practice of history.
3. To support the rights of graduate student teachers who seek to improve the circumstances of their work environment at their respective institutions.
4. To work with other committees and divisions of the AHA to facilitate their understanding of the changing needs of graduate students and to help them and individual departments in an advisory capacity to carry out initiatives that directly or indirectly affect graduate education.

Previous and ongoing responsibilities include



recruiting graduate student members in the AHA, as a means to adequately represent graduate students and to instill professionalism; organizing sessions on topics of concern to graduate students and sponsoring a Graduate Student Forum and reception at the AHA annual meeting; and surveying AHA graduate members and presenting concerns of graduate students to the council and divisions of the AHA.

We value your membership! Joining the AHA lets you have a voice in addressing the issues that face our discipline. We are always looking for ways to improve our support for graduate students. Members can weigh in with their thoughts any time on the Member Forum. They can also use GECC as an avenue to improve AHA practices.

[Join Today](#)

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