



# GRADUATE HISTORY

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

## Graduate Program in History

### *Writing History:* **The Master's Thesis**



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#### **Informational Brochure**

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# The Master's Thesis Option

The Graduate Program in History offers its Master's candidates the opportunity to write a thesis as part of the student's program toward the Master of Arts in History. Although an extremely challenging undertaking, a thesis can be an intellectually rewarding and totally satisfying experience not only for students who intend to pursue further graduate study but also for those with careers in education, business, government, or other professions. Moreover, thesis writing makes a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the past so that we might understand the present more fully and approach the problems of the future more intelligently.

## Why Consider Doing a Master's Thesis?

Writing a thesis is an opportunity for the student to work as independent historian. Such a major project requires a significant investment of time and energy, but there are several good reasons why one might consider such an undertaking.

First, for the highly motivated, serious student of history - especially the student who is planning further graduate study in history - it is an invaluable opportunity to learn, discover, and actually "do" history.

Second, it offers the rare pleasure to a graduate student to explore long-standing interest or to delve more deeply into a topic covered in history classes but not investigated fully.

Third, because of the significant time, effort, and patience involved in research, synthesis, and analysis, the student has a chance to learn and master - under the supervision of a Thesis Director - the historian's craft of structuring an extensive piece of original writing.

Fourth, a master's thesis can lay the foundations for a potential doctoral dissertation in history.

## Criteria for Doing a Master's Thesis

1. The option of doing a master's thesis is available to any degree-seeking graduate history student of good standing.
2. A successfully completed thesis earns six credits towards the thirty credits needed for the Master of Arts in History.
3. Early in the course of a student's master's program, a student who is interested in writing a thesis must first approach the Director of the program to secure preliminary permission to proceed with the project.
4. Previous to the semester in which the student will register for the thesis, the student will submit a five-to seven-page thesis proposal to the Director of the program for approval. The proposal should:
  - (1) State the topic and purpose of the thesis
  - (2) Outline the approach of methodology to be used in investigating the thesis statement
  - (3) indicate the nature and availability of the primary and secondary sources to be used

- (4) include a preliminary bibliography
- (5) Indicate how the research may clarify wider historical questions.

5. Once approved by the Director of the program, the thesis proposal will be evaluated by the Thesis Director, first reader, and second reader (all of whom are selected by the student and the Director of the program)
6. If the thesis proposal is approved by the selected Thesis Director, first reader, and second reader, the Director of the program will provide official written acceptance of the proposal to the student.
7. After written acceptance of the proposal is received, the student will register for HIS 780 Thesis Research for the following semester.
8. As soon as written acceptance of the proposal is received, the student should begin the reading and researching of the topic, developing an extended bibliography of primary and secondary sources as well as a preliminary and final outline of the thesis. The student is advised to complete most of the reading and research in advance of the semester in which registration for the thesis takes effect, leaving adequate time for the final and most important stages - writing, revising, and finalizing the thesis project.
9. Consultations with the Thesis Director will be held on a frequent and regular basis throughout the course of the thesis project.
10. The thesis length will be at least eighty double-spaced, typed pages. Ideally, it will make an original contribution to the field in question. Nonetheless, it should demonstrate research in primary sources, historical interpretation, critical analysis, and accurate scholarly documentation. In all cases, it should show evidence of clear understanding of the issues concerning the topic.
11. The deadline for the fully completed and revised thesis will be determined on a case by case basis by the student, the Thesis Committee, and the Director of the program.
12. After the final review of the thesis, the student will schedule their thesis defense in coordination with the Program Director, Thesis Committee, and the History and Classics Office. Once the defense is complete, the Thesis Director will assign the final grade for HIS 780 Thesis Research.
13. Once the thesis is fully complete and edited and has received the formal written acceptance of the Thesis Committee, the student will submit an electronic copy to the History and Classics office for binding. One bound copy is to be kept in the History and Classics office, and one is to be sent to the Phillips Memorial Library. Any additional personal copies are to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

## Availability of Historical Source Materials

Before deciding on a thesis, it is important that the student determine the availability and accessibility of historical primary and secondary sources in which to investigate the thesis topic. A consultation with the prospective thesis director may prove helpful in the area. The Phillips Memorial Library contains excellent collections of primary source materials,

including many United States and European newspapers and magazines, and a wide variety of academic journals. These are available in printed form, microfilm, and/or electronic format.

The library's collection of books and bound periodical volumes totals more than 320,000, including approximately 1,650 current print periodical titles and over 19,000 full-text electronic journals. The library is also a full depository for Rhode Island state documents, and since 1970 it has been a selective depository for United States government documents.

As a member of HELIN (the Higher Education Library Information Network), the library, through its online catalogue, makes available the materials owned by it and the ten other HELIN member libraries; Brown University, Bryant College, the Community College of Rhode Island, Johnson & Wales University, Rhode Island College, Roger Williams University, Salve Regina University, Wheaton College, the University of Rhode Island, and the Dominican House of Studies.

The library also subscribes to over 100 bibliographic and full-text electronic databases, which include indexes to periodical literature, as well as corporate information, statistics, and full text sources. A complete listing of these databases is available through <https://providence.libguides.com/az.php>. Two of the leading electronic historical databases subscribed to are *America: History and Life* and *Historical Abstracts*.

Located in the library are the Providence College Archives and Special Collections, which not only is a repository for information on Providence College, but also for 48 donated manuscript collections. These collections emphasize primary source material on local and national individuals and organizations that impacted Rhode Island political, legal, and cultural history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some prominent mayoral, gubernatorial, and congressional papers include those of John E. Fogarty, Joseph A. Doorley, Jr., J. Howard McGrath, John O. Pastore, and Dennis J. Roberts. Other noteworthy collections are those from the Quonset Point Naval Air Station, the Urban League of Rhode Island, and the state constitutional conventions. Still other collections illustrate traditions and contributions of the Dominican Friars, who founded and administer Providence College. Located in the Center for Catholic and Dominican Studies are the Dominican Archives, administered by the Province of St. Joseph.