

HISTORY DEPARTMENT HONORS PROGRAM

Adopted 31 August 2015

The honors program is designed to afford an opportunity for recognition of distinguished achievement in the study and writing of History. Covering the two semesters of the senior year, the program provides qualified majors with training both in the analysis and criticism of historical scholarship and the intellectual experience for interested students regardless of whether they plan to pursue graduate work in History.

These guidelines are applicable to students in a normal sequence of completing their work in History. Students outside the normal sequence (e.g. those who plan to graduate in December), or who are planning to be off campus during parts of either their junior or senior years) should consult with their advisors and/or the Department Chair.

A. Criteria and Procedure for Admissions into the Honors Program

1. Formal entry to the honors program is by invitation of the Department and is dependent upon the availability of appropriate staffing. Shortly after mid-term break during the fall semester, the instructor of the Honors Seminar will circulate to all junior History majors a letter describing the honors program. This letter will encourage those who meet our basic requirements (as listed below) and are interested in honors to speak with their potential honors advisor (who need not be their regular academic advisor). Faculty are expected to encourage students who would benefit from the program to apply. Students who are off campus during all or part of their junior year are encouraged to use email, FAX, or letters to stay in touch with their advisor regarding honors work.

2. Criteria for admission to the honors program normally include the following:

I. By the end of the fifth semester:

- a. GPA of at least 3.00
- b. History GPA of at least 3.25

II. By the end of the sixth semester:

- a. An acceptable proposal for an honors thesis
- b. A minimum of four courses from the Oberlin History Department in History course work
- c. The year-long survey (or its equivalent) in the area of concentration
- d. A minimum of three courses above the survey (100) level, including one 300-level course, and relevant preparation in the area of thesis research.

3. At the discretion of advisors, students can be required or simply advised to take a private reading course as background for their honors research during the second semester of their junior year. If an advisor feels that this need has been

satisfied by other course work or is not otherwise necessary, it will not be required. Students planning to be off-campus the second semester of their junior year should consult in advance with potential honors advisor or the department Chair.

4. Students are expected to develop an honors prospectus over the course of the first half of their sixth semester in consultation with their project advisor. All prospective honors students who are on campus during the spring semester are required to submit a full proposal to the department by April 15. The proposal should detail the project to be undertaken, briefly trace some of its historiography, discuss bibliography with particular attention to primary sources, and call attention to any difficulties which could be expected to arise in terms of access to sources, facility with necessary foreign languages, etc. Students who are studying away during their spring semester and are having difficulty crafting a full proposal may submit a shorter preliminary proposal by the April deadline with their full proposal due by August 20th. All prospective honors students are expected to have consulted with their project advisor in preparing their honors proposals. If the appropriate advisor is on leave, the student is encouraged to consult with the chair who will endeavor to find an interim advisor.

5. The Department will meet each May to evaluate honors proposals and to determine invitations into the honors program. Students will be invited into the program, rejected from the program, or encouraged to rework their proposals over the summer for reconsideration during the first week of classes in the fall semester.

6. The Department will meet during the first week of classes in the fall semester to reconsider any proposals returned for resubmission the previous spring, as well as any new proposals from students who were away from campus during the spring semester and who did not submit them at that time.

B. Credits and Dropping Honors

1. Each semester, honors students will enroll in the History Honors Seminar (History 501 and 502). Each semester will count as one full course. In the Honors Seminar, they will meet weekly with the Honors coordinator and with their fellow honors students. Students will also be expected to meet regularly with their thesis advisors.

2. A student can be dropped from the honors program by the collective action of the Department or at the initiative of the thesis supervisor. In either case, the registration for honors (HIST 501/502) will revert to private reading credit (HIST 995). The faculty advisor will then assign a grade for the private reading consistent with the amount and quality of work completed.

C. Evaluation of the Honors Project

1. Theses need to be written in a manner accessible to readers from the History Department beyond the specific areas of geography or chronology. Theses will typically range from 15,000-18,000 words. Concision and precision of writing will be one measure that readers consider in evaluating all theses.

2. The thesis will be read by two members of the Department. The Honors Coordinator and the department chair will select the readers. Readers will be chosen not later than the week before Spring Break. Students will be told who their readers will be as soon as the list of readers is complete.

The Honors coordinator, the thesis advisor, and the department chair will not serve as readers. At least one reader must be outside the areas of geographic and chronological concentration. Primary responsibility for serving as readers lies among continuing members of the History Department. Readers will be on duty during the term in question.

In rare circumstances, the Honors Coordinator and the department chair may ask a continuing faculty member outside the History Department to serve as one of the two readers. The contribution of the outside reader will be equal to that of each of the other reader. Each outside reader will be sent a description of the History Honors program at the time he/she is asked to participate in the evaluation.

3. The week after Spring Break, the advisors, the Honors Coordinator, and the chair will meet all together to assess students' progress. The primary goal of this meeting is to make sure all of the honors students are on track to finish their projects successfully.

4. The candidate will submit three copies of the final thesis for evaluation by 4:30 PM on the last Friday in April.

If both readers find the thesis to be satisfactory, the thesis will be accepted as recommended for honors, and the oral examination administered. In case of disagreement, the department chair will read the thesis and determine if the oral examination is to be administered.

5. The candidate will be orally examined on the thesis by the readers and other interested members of the Department. The Honors Coordinator will chair and moderate all oral exams, but will not otherwise participate in the exam or its evaluation. If in a given year there is an unusually large number of honors students, the Honors Coordinator and the department chair will share the responsibility of chairing the oral exams. If the Honors Coordinator and the thesis advisor are the same person, the department chair will moderate the defense.

The thesis advisor will be present during the examination and will be consulted by the readers but will not participate in the evaluation of the thesis. It is the responsibility of the Honors Coordinator to set the time and place for the oral defense. Prior to the defense, the Honors Coordinator will discuss with the readers the order of questioning. Each examiner will utilize fifteen minutes, with the remaining time for other faculty in attendance. The exam may not exceed sixty minutes in length, and is open to the public.

6. The readers of the thesis will evaluate the thesis and the oral exam and make a recommendation to the Department as to the level of honors (honors, high honors, or highest honors). The Honors Coordinator will provide input from the year-long seminar (History 501 and 502). If the readers disagree, the department chair will be consulted to determine the recommendation to be brought to the full department.

7. The Department will forward its recommendation as to the level of honors at graduation to the College Honors Committee, which makes the final determination on this matter. The thesis advisor determines the final grade in HIST 501/502. The thesis advisor may grant either a grade or a deferred grade (*) for the first semester of honors (HIST 501). In the case of the latter, the final grade will be deferred until the completion of the thesis.

D. Depositing the Thesis

It is the candidate's responsibility to submit an electronic version of the thesis to the Oberlin College Library. Please see the library policy for electronic submission:

<http://www.oberlin.edu/library/policies/digitalhonors.html>