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GUIDE TO JOBS AND GRADUATE SCHOOL in HISTORY (8e)

PART FOUR : GRADUATE SCHOOL

Your Options

You may decide to embark upon graduate study right away, or to pursue graduate school simultaneously with a job (such as a teaching job). While the traditional graduate school path still exists, increasingly ways to complete the M.A. or the Ph.D. are becoming diversified. Online degrees are becoming increasingly available, especially in History-related fields such as Library Science or Museum Studies. There is even a M.A. in Military History completely available online. Also, many graduate programs now offer "fast track" programs in which the M.A. and Ph.D. programs are joined together as a way to shorten the course work part of the degree.

All this is great news considering that earning the M.A. takes two years and that the average Ph.D. student remains in graduate school for 4 - 6 years, even longer if holding part-time teaching or research appointments. The average age of a Ph.D. holder is the early to mid-thirties. By the time you have earned your Ph.D., however, you have accumulated an impressive teaching, publications, and presentations record.

You need to decide first of all what you are going to use your graduate degree for. An M.A. in Education or a Ed.D. will open administrative or counseling positions in the K-12 school system. To teach at a Junior College (Survey courses of U.S. or World History) you must earn 18 graduate hours in history. To teach at a 4-year university level, you need the Ph.D. in history and a solid scholarly publications record. Academic employment opportunities vary from year to year. Right now is a very good time for women and minorities to enter the profession. The most popular disciplines are American history (40%), European history (22%), and Asian history (8%). Academic employment is exciting because of the new digital possibilities, the new emphasis on pedagogy, and the ever-broadening ways to practice history.

Graduate life entails economic sacrifices and requires the support of your significant other and your family. Even with a full graduate scholarship or a position such as Graduate Assistant, Research Assistant, or Teaching Assistant, your lifestyle will be austere. Loans are available, of course, and part-time jobs. But graduate work is time-consuming and requires discipline. Are all those years of study and sacrifice worth it? What is most important to you? Money? Long-term fulfillment?

The Flexible Path

Online Degrees. There is a growing number of online programs available. Business, international affairs, or specialized fields of study such as Native American history, are beginning to feature courses and degrees on-line. The growth of the "university without walls" is revolutionizing graduate school. Usually, those programs are sponsored by large, established universities with a solid academic reputation. Nonetheless, you should do your homework before choosing such a program. Will it really save you money? Is the program accredited? By what accrediting agencies? Who are the faculty? Can you get in touch with their graduates? How easy is it to use the program's resources?

Going Full-Time or Part-Time? Perhaps you need to take a couple of years off to work to save money for graduate school. Before doing that, investigate grants, fellowships, assistantships, and loans. In some programs, especially in the field of International Studies, gaining field experience abroad may be
beneficial and help you get into a more competitive program. Another option is to go to school part-time. Some programs require that you go full-time, and it may be difficult to impossible to get financial aid without being a full-time student. On the other hand, attending school part-time allows you to work in the field and earn money. Some organizations or companies are willing to send you to graduate school as a part of your training. If you teach high school Social Studies you will be able to pursue a M.S. in Education or a M.A. in History part-time.

**Joint Degrees and/or Interdisciplinary Programs.** This is part of a growing trend of graduate studies that seek to combine students' strengths in various areas. In History, for example, Secondary Education issues have led to the creation of special Ph.D. programs seeking to ally students' interest in teaching and research. Library Science and Information Science, American Studies and other Area Studies, are growing. International Studies, Intercultural Studies, Business, Diplomacy, International Relations, to mention but these, are good fields to consider for joint degrees or interdisciplinary studies.

### Strategies for Success

The AHA’s Committee on Graduate Education prepared very comprehensive advice on graduate education in History. [www.historians.org/grads/StartToFinish.cfm](http://www.historians.org/grads/StartToFinish.cfm)

To be successful in graduate school, you must have:

- intelligence, initiative, self-discipline, focus, persistence, motivation
- excellent writing and oral communications skills
- good time management skills -- keep those deadlines
- willingness to "be taught" and to accept constructive criticism
- willingness to assume diverse responsibilities within the department if you are on a scholarship or a TA, GA, or RA
- leadership abilities, especially in the graduate student organization
- ability to relate well to your peers, professors, and university staff
- proven interest in teaching, and ability to attract students to your classes if you are a TA
- strong scholarly record of presentations and publications
- involvement in a professional organization
- good knowledge of at least one foreign language

Graduate school can be fun. You are not just a number, but your professors and peers give you lots of attention. You meet all kinds of interesting people and find yourself in an intellectually and culturally challenging environment. Your class schedules are flexible. The key is to keep your life balance. With all the pressures you are facing, it is very important to remember to nurture your physical, mental, and emotional health. Many graduate schools stress this point. The most stressful part, however, is the transition to graduate school. The first semester is critical: the first impressions that you make and the relationships that you forge will be lasting ones. You need to earn a minimum 3.0 GPA. You want to make your mark, distinguish yourself from the crowd, and prepare to be remembered in a positive way long after you have graduated. A new town, a different climate, new friends in a new environment, may make you homesick. That is natural, and you will adjust. You will learn to participate in class, interact with your peers, and do group work. You may find it hard at first to keep up with the reading that you are expected to do in preparation for class discussions. You have to compete with your peers in an atmosphere of intellectual rigor, hard work, initiative, leadership, responsibility, and excellent communication skills. Graduate schools recognize these challenges: you are not required to work during your first semester on campus.

### Choosing the Right Graduate School and Program
Specialization. Different schools and departments are strong in different areas, so it is important that you begin to study your options and prepare early. Study graduate schools and gather documentation about the programs you are interested in. You need not narrow your focus before graduating from college, and as a matter of fact you can choose a M.A. program that is relatively general, and wait until the Ph.D. level to specialize. On the other hand, programs such as Public History are highly specialized. Some schools feature interdisciplinary programs that offer the opportunity to combine your major and minor undergraduate fields of study. Before choosing a school, visit it and ask to talk to the graduate director or to a member of the graduate faculty. Graduate study in History can be completed in any number and combination of fields and subfields. These will lead you to a variety of careers that include, but are not limited to the world of the academe.

The Right Fit. The most important factor in your selection process is whether the school feels "right" and whether it is a good "fit." Important signs are the responses that you get from faculty, alumni/ae, current graduate students, and departmental staff. Consider all the variables below, ask questions of prospective graduate programs, talk to their students, rank the variables (A - excellent, B - good, C - average, U - unsatisfactory) and make a table comparing the various schools.

Program Requirements. Carefully study the graduate field. Consider each program's number of required courses and their emphasis, the number of seminars, and the structure of the program. How long does it take other graduate students to complete the M.A. requirements? How long before they take their comprehensive examinations? What is the reputation of the dissertations that are written in the program. How many have been published in article or book form, or shared as papers presented at professional conferences? Most graduate programs will put you in touch with their current or former students. Talking to them can help you make a better decision.

Location and Size. You might feel more comfortable in a smaller program or among a larger group of graduate students. Are you willing to relocate? Will it be too costly for you to leave home? You may choose to pursue an M.A. program close to home, especially if you are going to graduate school part-time. The area around UT Martin has a number of excellent graduate programs at Murray State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Vanderbilt University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and University of Memphis. Then you can reevaluate your goals after earning the M.A.

Placement Record. Carefully examine the placement success of the programs where you are applying. How many in academe are on tenure-track jobs? Working for international organizations? Being museum curators, special collections directors, international businessmen, journalists, archivists? Studying this is another good way to learn about potentially interesting careers. You need to look at the general figures on graduate student placement rate, but also at the success rate of students in your specific program of choice. This may not be indicated in departmental statistics. Talking directly with program alumni and current graduate students will help you learn the whole story.

Reputation. You want to attend a school with an excellent graduate reputation. Check with professional associations and other accredited programs. Consult the sites below that rank graduate programs, such as US News and World Report. Talking with current students and alumni of a particular program can reveal a lot about the program's accomplishments and whether it will fulfill your expectations.

Faculty. You want to attend a university that has a strong reputation in your particular specialty. Some programs have leading professors in American history, but fewer professors in World history. Other programs may be on the cutting edge of methodological research and pay less attention to American history. You want a good match between your interests and skills and a graduate program. If
you decide to choose a program based on the reputation of a certain professor, be sure that the professor will be around during your tenure as a graduate student. You want the faculty to be accessible and evaluate whether you can develop a relationship with the program’s faculty.

Your Major Professor. Perhaps one of the most important factors in choosing a graduate school is choosing your major professor. Some universities have ample name recognition that can aid graduates in their future careers, like Harvard or Princeton. The reality is however that most graduate students do not go to an Ivy League school. The alternative is to study under a well-respected professor in your chosen field. While master programs are less mentor-oriented, if you seek to go on to a combined masters/doctoral or a Ph.D. program, you should consider who your lifetime mentor will be. Theoretically, your major professor will be your mentor in graduate school and in your career thereafter, and it is very beneficial to have an influential name in your field to direct your studies and dissertation and to support you in your future career.

Financial Aid. Check the program's record about financial aid and what percent of graduate students receive financial aid. In addition, professional organizations can become sources of funding once you are engaged in a research project.

Graduate Programs in History

General Information

• Virtual University Visits http://www.unigo.com
• Graduate School Rankings http://graduate-school.phds.org/rankings/history
  http://www.oah.org/announce/links.html
  http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com
• http://www.cgsnet.org/students (Council of Graduate Schools)
• http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx (Peterson's)
• http://www.kaplan.com (Kaplan's higher education site)
• http://www.gradschools.com (Graduate schools' listings)
• http://www.graduateguide.com (Graduate schools' guide)

History

• The History and Philosophy Department (Humanities 323) keeps a current copy of the AHA's Directory of Schools and Departments. Look up departments' urls, faculty specialization, dissertations in progress, number of enrolled students, etc.
• http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools (Peterson's)
• http://www.historians.org/projects/cge/PhD/intro.cfm (AHA’s list)

Friendly History M.A.s

MTSU Public History Program http://www.mtsu.edu/publichistory/MA/MA_Program.php
Southern Illinois at Carbondale http://cola.siu.edu/history/faculty-and-staff/index.php
Murray State University http://www.murraystate.edu/Academics/CollegesDepartments
University of Memphis http://www.memphis.edu/history/onlineprogs/mahistory.htm
University of South Florida http://history.usf.edu
Virginia Tech http://www.mcph.sova.vt.edu

Financing Graduate School

University-based Financial Aid. Financial support for graduate study is readily available. Most of the support offered by academic institutions goes to students who apply to the Ph.D. program. There are research assistantships and teaching assistantships. With a research assistantship, students work closely
with a chosen professor on an academic project. With a teaching assistantship, students are assigned their own teaching load and earn valuable experience in the classroom. You should be prepared to pay full fare for the M.A. program, but your grades may earn you a paid internship or tuition waiver. When you apply to a doctoral program, you are simultaneously applying for financial aid. This may be a decisive factor, as you may decide against graduate school unless you get a lucrative offer. If you are granted a fellowship or some other financial offer from a university, wait until you have received all offers before committing to a program. In other words, you may benefit from the fact that universities are competing with each other for good students.

Non-University Based Scholarships. Non-academic sources of graduate financing are many. There are scholarships for minorities and women who are underrepresented in the academic professions. There are summer programs and scholarships for specific programs.

http://www.archaeolink.com/archaeology_anthropology.htm
http://www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships
http://studentaid.ed.gov/types/loans/plus (federal loans)
http://huguenot-manakin.org/manakin/natscholarship.php (Essay Contest Scholarship)
http://www.ssrc.org (Social Science Research Council)
http://www.neh.gov (National Endowment for the Humanities)
http://fdncenter.org (The Foundation Center)
http://www.nsf.gov (National Science Foundation)

Timetable for Applying to Graduate School

Applying to graduate school does not have to be an ordeal but it is a process that takes planning, work, initiative, and determination. Remember to time yourself and keep the deadlines.

Spring and summer semesters of your Junior year
• study various graduate programs, through actual visits or on the Internet
• visit UT Martin's Career Center
• determine test requirements and application deadlines for each school
• write to the graduate admissions director and/or to faculty in your area/s of interest
• talk to your faculty advisor about your findings, ask for guidance
• talk to professionals about career choices, requirements
• request application materials from programs or download them from the web
• study for the GRE and take it. This will allow you time to retake it later if you need to

September of your Senior year
• research financial aid assistance and request application packets
• sign up for the GRE if you need to retake it
• write a draft of your statement of purpose and show it to your faculty advisor
• update your resume and contact your recommenders

October of your Senior year
• start talking to graduate students who are in the programs that you are interested in
• start to finalize your choice of schools
• request recommendations from faculty members

November -December of your Senior Year
• order official transcripts from Registrar's office (make sure that they will include your Fall semester grades)
• complete on your personal statement and all applications materials. Upload them online or mail them before December 15. It is better to complete your application early
• contact recommenders to be sure that they have mailed their recommendation and thank them

January of your Senior year
• contact schools to ensure that all application material arrived by the deadline
• prepare and file a copy of your federal income tax return

February -- April of your Senior year
• make campus visits or accept scheduled interviews
• discuss acceptances, rejections with your faculty advisor and other UTM faculty
• let your undergraduate faculty advisor and History Department chair know where you have been accepted and where you are planning to go
• notify graduate schools of your intentions
• have final transcript sent with indication of your graduation
• pay your graduate school deposit when required