

MA Thesis Prospectus Guidelines
Department of History
Winthrop University

Admission to the thesis track is granted by the Department of History only to students who have demonstrated the ability to successfully complete a quality thesis and whose prospectus identifies a feasible approach to an original historical topic. The thesis is a minimum two-semester project, for which a student receives six hours of credit. A student whose prospectus has been approved may register for HIST 695, and, on the successful completion of that course, he or she may register for HIST 696 during the next or any subsequent semester. Further information on the specific requirements for HIST 695 and 696 are found on the syllabi for those courses. The guidelines for the preparation for the final draft thesis are found on the Graduate School website:

<http://www.winthrop.edu/graduateschool/default.aspx?id=28187>

The prospectus and thesis, including the citation format, must be done in accordance with the most recent editions of *Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

Prospectus Approval Process

Prospectus Committee: The prospectus committee includes the chair and the graduate director. The student should consult with the graduate director to identify an appropriate thesis advisor. The student should then work closely with the thesis advisor to develop an effective prospectus.

Thesis Committee: The thesis committee includes the thesis advisor and at least two other readers who will help and give feedback to the thesis author. The student should consult with the graduate director to identify appropriate thesis committee members.

Deadlines: The thesis prospectus and bibliography must be submitted to the prospectus committee two months prior to the first day of classes of the following term. A student should expect to be required to revise and resubmit the prospectus and bibliography one or more times prior to approval, so do not miss the deadline.

Topic selection: A topic must be sufficiently narrow in scope to allow for the in-depth focus necessary in a work of this sort, but it must also address significant historical and historiographical issues. Input from the members of the prospectus committee prior to the submission of the prospectus is an essential part of the topic selection process.

Originality: A thesis must be original in some significant way. A thesis cannot simply synthesize the work of other scholars in the field—to be, in effect, a lengthy term paper. It must address a topic or a research question previously unexamined by historians and/or use sources in a novel way.

Prospectus:

The prospectus should be 1800-2100 words in length, plus an appended bibliography. It must include:

1. The working title of your thesis.
2. An abstract of no more than 100 words. An abstract is a useful exercise in reducing your topic to its essence and clarifying your thoughts regarding the project.
3. A discussion of the proposed topic, including the research question(s) that the student proposes to address in the thesis.
4. A review of the literature, including both primary and secondary sources. Begin with a historiographical review of the relevant secondary literature addressed by the proposed research questions, including the most significant works in the field, their methodological approaches, and how your thesis will fit into the extant body of literature. Discuss the most significant secondary works in the field, and focus on texts in proportion to their relevance to the topic. This section should also explain the ways in which the proposed thesis will differ from extant works and offer an original contribution to the literature. Conclude the literature review with a discussion of the primary sources on which the thesis will be based and information that each offers. This section must demonstrate familiarity with each of the major sources or collections of sources to be used, and it must focus on texts in proportion to their relevance to the topic. Show how your primary sources will allow you to address your research question.
5. A tentative chapter outline that identifies the thematic organization of the thesis. Each chapter heading should include a brief discussion of the thematic content of that chapter. The final thesis does not have to and probably will not adhere fully to this outline, but doing this now will force you to think in organizational terms.
6. A schedule for completion of the thesis.
7. A list of all thesis committee members and confirmation of their agreement to participate.

Bibliography

The bibliography must be reasonably comprehensive and must include relevant secondary sources, including but not limited to the secondary works discussed in the literature review section of the prospectus. The bibliography should be divided into sections for primary and secondary sources, and each section should include subheadings for books, articles, and any other category that is appropriate to the individual project.

Primary sources: This section will vary considerably according to the nature of the topic and the sources. Very large individual sources such as manuscript collections, government documents, and oral history interviews should be broken down into subsections to the extent practicable. The literature review section of the prospectus is the appropriate place in which to discuss the details of the major primary sources to be used in the thesis.

Secondary sources: Relevant books, journal articles, individual entries in collections of essays, and any other secondary sources should be listed under appropriate subheadings.