

## Preparing for and Applying to Graduate School

So you think you might want to go to graduate school in history. Before embarking on this goal you should take steps to prepare yourself for what will be a challenging but rewarding road.

First, note that graduate school is a difficult enterprise requiring lots of hard work and time spent alone, away from family and friends. Many apply to graduate school, few are accepted, and even fewer make it through the program with a doctorate. Graduate school involves an immense amount of work. Earning a Ph. D. involves writing a dissertation, a book-length work based on the reading of primary sources (generally found in archives far away from home). Once you earn a Ph. D., there is no guarantee of a job within your field, or in part of the country where you desire to live.

Think carefully about what you want. There are other occupations that require only a B.A. or a M.A in history. These include high school teachers, librarians and archivists, and public historians and museum curators.

### **Here are some of the requirements to get into graduate school.**

1. The best programs require a 3.0 grade point average and even higher one in history. If you are thinking about graduate school and have a low GPA, work to improve it if you have the time.
2. You will be required to write a lot, sometimes several long papers (20+ pages) a semester in addition to writing the dissertation. You need to know yourself—if you don't like writing, a Ph. D. might not be for you. In addition, your writing should be concise, clear and grammatical. We recommend Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* if you need help in this area. Finally, you should know how to properly cite in your work. The *Chicago Manual of Style* should be of great assistance here.
3. You will need to submit a writing sample when applying to graduate school. Use a longer example of your writing, one that impressed your professors. Ideally, this will be your senior thesis. Make sure it is free of mistakes and grammatical errors.
4. You will also need to submit a cover letter explain to the prospective school about your interest in their graduate program and about your interests in history. Keep this letter professional, and, like the writing sample, free of mistakes. Read over it several times and have a friend do the same, perhaps even a professor at UVU's history department. Make sure you research the graduate program that you are interested in applying to. Know the research and teaching program of the school and the professors with whom you wish to work. Mention them in your letter. Keep the letter to a page and a half.
5. You will need to submit a curriculum vitae, or resume. Be sure to include any honors you have won, any internships or study abroad you have done, and any papers you have given at undergraduate conferences. A well-rounded curriculum vitae will look good as part of your application and will prepare you for graduate student work. If you have not done so, get involved in these types of activities, including Phi Alpha Theta (the undergraduate history organization) and give papers at local and national conferences.
6. You will need to take the Graduate Record Examination, known as the GRE. History programs will be more interested in your verbal and writing skills more than your quantitative ability. There are plenty of opportunities to take classes to prepare for the GRE. You should plan on taking it before your senior year or early during your senior year at the latest.

7. You will need letters of recommendation—usually three—from professors who have taught you and know your work well. These letters will attest to your ability to operate at the graduate level and will remark on your intellectual maturity and skills. Be sure you request letters from professors who have been impressed with your intellectual ability and have graded you accordingly.

8. You will need to have language skills other than English, especially if you want to work in fields far removed chronologically and geographically from modern America. Some fields require a great deal of language. For example, ancient history requires the excellent knowledge of Greek, Latin and German. Early modern studies generally require reading knowledge of a Latin and at least one vernacular language (Spanish or Italian for example). Start taking language classes as early as possible if you have an interest in fields other than modern America. Most history departments require coursework and work knowledge in two languages regardless of your field, so take care of these requirements as early as possible.

9. You will need to arrange to have UVU send your transcripts to the graduate programs to which you are applying. These are records of the classes you have taken here and the grades you have received as a student.

10. Research the history programs that you might want to apply to. Be sure to know their application process, financial aid resources, intellectual focus of the department, and the work of the professors with whom you want to work. Ask the school for information and write the professors whose studies interest you. It is a good thing—if possible—to visit the school before applying to its program. Research whether teaching assistant positions or fellowships exist at the schools you in which you are interested. These will help defray the expenses of going to graduate school.

These are the basic ways you can prepare for graduate school in history. Getting a Ph. D. is rewarding and difficult journey. It is also fun. You will learn from experts in the field, bond with a coterie of fellow graduate students, and explore archives, often in far-away places.