

Public History Thesis/Applied Research Project Guidelines

History Department
University of West Georgia
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Students who choose the public history track within the M.A. degree program typically culminate that program with a thesis project, or an applied research project.

The thesis-project option for public history concentrators allows students to showcase the two sets of skills they developed through their M.A. degree—as historian and as public history. As academic historians, we must be able to conduct research in primary sources, contextualize that research in the scholarship of the field, develop and support an argument in an original essay, and express our ideas clearly and accurately in writing. As public historians, we must be able to develop a project for a public audience. The project provides an opportunity to demonstrate that the student has mastered a set of skills and professional knowledge in public history to assist him/her in this practice.

For the thesis-project, graduate students communicate a topic to both an academic and a public audience. Students complete a project in association with a public history organization and then write about some aspect of that topic in an original academic essay that is equivalent to a journal article. The thesis-project presents two strong products to share with a potential employer.

The thesis-project thus prepares public historians for the two major aspects of his or her work. First, public historians must be prepared to undertake professional public history practice work following the best practices of the field. Second, public historians must also act as historians and demonstrate all the skills and knowledge of the academic historians with whom they will interact. We strongly encourage all students to work towards publishing their thesis essay.

We are often asked if undertaking a thesis-essay would hinder a student's chance to pursue a PhD in the future, if s/he chooses to do so. The answer is no. Students who have completed a thesis project have had students accepted into a PhD program. If you are considering a PhD at some point, we advise you to publish your essay in an academic journal.

Thesis-project guidelines

The guidelines for completing the thesis-project are very similar to but slightly different than those for the thesis:

1. The student must select a thesis committee of at least three faculty members to advise on the thesis project prior, but at least one of these committee members must be a public history faculty member to supervise and oversee the project;
2. The student must demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for the thesis requirement as set forth in the History M.A. program guidelines;

3. The student must defend his/her thesis project before a faculty committee;
4. The student must register and successfully complete three hours of thesis credit.

The thesis-project must:

1. Be developed and completed in consultation with the public history coordinator, a professional institutional sponsor from a public history organization, and the thesis project committee. The student cannot use a project that has already been completed; the project must be completed under the supervision of the student's thesis committee.
1. Make a scholarly contribution to the public history field;
2. Involve original research equivalent to that which would have been conducted on a thesis on the same topic, using primary sources;
3. Demonstrate the student's knowledge of the historical topic and the historiography of that topic and place his/her work within this body of knowledge and academic study;
4. Demonstrate the student's ability to think and write critically, analytically, and clearly;
5. Demonstrate the student's knowledge of public history practices and techniques and his/her ability to craft a project that meets professional public history standards.
6. Demonstrate the student's ability to successfully work with a partnering institution to complete a project that meets the institution's expectations as well.

The thesis-project committee

The **committee** for an M.A. thesis project should:

1. Include two UWG history faculty members in the student's field (whether U.S. or World) and one non-field history faculty specialist from UWG (either U.S. or World).
2. Include one of the department's public history faculty members to direct the project.
3. May include one faculty member from outside the department in place of either faculty member (field or non-field).
4. May include one professional in the public history field or one independent historian with approval of the Public History Coordinator.

The **director** of the committee should be either the public history faculty member or the history department specialist in the student's field of study. While it is traditional for one faculty member to chair the committee, it is also acceptable that the public historian and history faculty specialist share this responsibility. In this case, the public historian would direct the project and the history faculty specialist would direct the essay. Any outside committee member may not be the director of the committee.

It is also possible for the committee to contain **four** members to provide expertise in a range of fields. This option may allow for the student to benefit from expertise both inside and outside the department. In such cases, all faculty members participate in the review and the defense. In some cases, this fourth individual is the institutional sponsor of the project.

The project

The project component must contribute to the public history field. A public history faculty member must direct the project. The student's thesis committee will help to determine the scope of the project and will evaluate the project upon its completion.

The project must be developed for and in consultation with a partnering public history organization. A professional staff member from that organization shall be identified as the sponsor, and s/he will assist in developing the scope of the project, providing assistance as needed, and evaluating the project at its completion. As in all public history practice, the student will gather input about the needs of the organization and respond to the sponsor's suggestions and comments. The sponsor must sign off that the student has completed the required project before the defense is scheduled. The sponsor may also serve as a fourth member on the thesis committee, and s/he may participate in the thesis project defense if time allows.

Sometimes students begin their projects through internships, so much of the work is completed in the internship. In other cases, students may begin a project through a class and decide to continue it. A few students have developed their graduate research assistantship work into a project. Other students develop a project outside of any class or internship.

Students may register for thesis hours while working on their project, since it is part of their thesis-project requirements.

Projects have included:

1. Exhibits
2. Educational programs
3. Digital history projects
4. Interpretive trails, signage, and walking maps
5. Interpretive plans
6. Furnishing plans for historic houses
7. Traveling trunks
8. Collections management projects
9. Folklife studies
10. Archival projects
11. Oral history projects
12. CD productions
13. Architectural surveys
14. National Register Nominations
15. Museum administration projects, such as strategic or marketing plans

The Thesis Prospectus

The thesis prospectus must include discussion of both elements of the thesis-project. It should be five to six pages, double-spaced. The prospectus should be footnoted, including the historiography of the topic as well as of the public history field.

It should include:

1. An introductory paragraph about the overall project that briefly describes the two components of the project and shows the link between them;
2. A discussion of the project which must include a brief description, the need for the project, the sponsoring organization, and the significance of the project as well as a discussion of how it will be completed according to professional standards
3. A discussion of the thesis essay which includes the central question of the essay, the primary sources used, the basic historiography of the field, and the methods and approach the essay will follow
4. A bibliography of primary and secondary sources used for *both* the project and the essay, organized by primary and secondary sources.

The project essay

Each student will write a description and evaluation of the thesis project, approximately five to ten pages in length, with a project title. This description should provide information on the following topics and/of questions:

- a. Describe the sponsoring institution. Be sure to incorporate its mission statement
- b. Why was this project undertaken? How does it fit their mission?
- c. When was the project undertaken?
- d. What was your role in the project? With whom did you work?
- e. What did you do for the project? Please be as specific here as you can about the process of completing this project. For example, if you started an archive, describe how you did it and why you made the choices that you did. If you created a museum program, be specific about the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating the program.
- f. How would you evaluate the project? What were its strengths? Weaknesses? What would you change if you were to do it again?
- g. What was the overall contribution of this project to the institution?
- h. How does this project build on skills or knowledge that you developed in your public history classes?
- i. How does the project meet professional public history standards? Be sure to reference public history sources, as appropriate. For example, consider works you have read in your public history and museum studies classes, works that provide a historiography for the field in which you worked as well as those which provided suggestions for professional practice. Be sure to include footnotes or endnotes for these scholarly works and to incorporate these public history sources in your thesis bibliography.

The thesis essay

The thesis essay should be an original essay written for an academic audience on a topic related to the thesis. It must be a minimum of 25 pages up to 35 pages in length, which is equivalent to a journal article that could be published. The essay must state and defend an historical argument. Students must put their work in the context of other scholarship and show how their work contributes to the field as a whole. All essays must use proper footnotes or endnotes according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Please note that the essay will not be divided into chapters. However, the student may divide the essay using section headings, if desired.

The oral defense

The oral defense will be scheduled when the project has been completed and approved by the sponsor and when the committee has approved the final essay and project essay.

The oral defense for the thesis-project will include both the thesis essay and the project.

Students will make a brief presentation about their thesis project at the beginning of the defense.

Preparing the thesis-project for submission

Students preparing the thesis-project will follow all guidelines for the thesis, including the front matter and formatting that is required.

The full thesis-project will require a title. In addition, the thesis essay and project description will each have a separate title.

The abstract must describe both the thesis essay and the project. Equal attention should be provided to both, and the significance of each of these elements to the professions must be discussed.

After the required front matter, the completed thesis project will include, *in this order*:

1. The thesis essay, with its own title.
2. The thesis project essay, with its own title.
3. A complete ***bibliography*** of sources consulted for both the project and the essay. This bibliography should divide the sources into primary and secondary sources primary. Primary sources should be divided further into other more specific categories such as oral histories, manuscript collections, historic newspapers, etc. Secondary sources should include separate categories for books, journal articles, websites, etc. Be sure to list ALL of the sources that you use, including artifact collections or other non-traditional sources.

4. A **portfolio** that illustrates the non-written component of the project. For students who complete an internship as part of the project, you may draw upon your internship portfolio to prepare the thesis portfolio. These items will be bound with the thesis, so you will need to follow the margins required for the thesis by ProQuest. This portfolio can include any of the following or other additional materials, depending on the type of project:
 - a. publicity for the project (such as newspaper articles, posters, etc),
 - b. written elements of the project (e.g. the liner notes from a CD or the text of an exhibit—either electronic or traditional),
 - c. photographs of the project (e.g. for an exhibit or public program)
 - d. archival finding aids
 - e. samples of the final product (e.g. transcriptions for oral histories, accessions forms for a collections management project)
 - f. copies or a summary of evaluation forms or reports for the project
 - g. evaluations of the student’s work by scholars or professional public historians
 - h. maps and site descriptions for archaeological projects
 - i. pages from websites if the project incorporates a website
 - j. exhibit plans

The thesis-project and signature forms must be submitted to ProQuest according to the required schedule and procedures required by the Graduate School.

**Thesis Project Approval Form
Public History Track
University of West Georgia**

The public history program at the University of West Georgia encourages public history concentrators to complete a thesis project, which includes an applied project for the public and a related essay for a more academic/professional audience.

The project must be developed for and in consultation with a partnering public history organization. A professional staff member from that organization shall be identified as the sponsor, and s/he will assist in developing the scope of the project, providing assistance as needed, and evaluating the project at its completion. As in all public history practice, the student will gather input about the needs of the organization and respond to the sponsor's suggestions and comments. The sponsor must sign off that the student has completed the required project before the defense is scheduled. The sponsor may also serve as a fourth member on the thesis committee, and s/he may participate in the thesis project defense if time allows.

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By signing this form, the public history institutional sponsor agrees that this project has been completed to his/her satisfaction:

Student name: _____

Project title: _____

Approved by: _____

Title: _____

Institution: _____

Date: _____