

Pursuing a Ph.D. in History

If you are completing your M.A. in history here at Monmouth, you might be considering a Ph.D. program. Here are a few guidelines that you should follow if a Ph.D. in History is part of your plan.

Is a Ph.D. program right for you?

Pursuit of Ph.D. can be a fulfilling and wonderful experience, but before embarking on the application process, you need to ask yourself if a Ph.D. program is right for you. Pursuing a doctorate represents a significant commitment and is a decision that requires serious, measured analysis. Remember, there will be no lack of ambition amongst your peers vying for admission, or in the Ph.D. program to which you aspire.

Remember, there are other ways to pursue an interest in history other than by completing a long course of study in a highly competitive job market. For example, with a MA you could consider careers in museums, archives, or historical societies. The primary aim of a doctoral program is really focused training for hopeful college and university professors, so if you are sure this is your goal, then please consider the following guidelines. They can help you put yourself in the best possible position to gain acceptance.

Laying the groundwork

Ph.D. programs are looking for highly motivated and accomplished students. Getting straight As in your M.A. program is an important first step, but a great GPA is not enough to gain admission. It is also important to:

- 1) Impress your professors, as they will be writing letters of recommendation. This means that a student should come to class prepared and be an active learner. All the work done for your professors should be of a high caliber.
- 2) When you face the decision to write a thesis or test out of the program, you should definitely write a thesis. A sustained research project will be an excellent calling card for admission into most programs. If you feel like you have no good ideas for a thesis, or would rather not do one, a Ph.D. program in history is probably not the right choice for you.
- 3) Most Ph.D. programs require applicants to have taken the Graduate Record Examination (GREs). The applicants with whom you are competing will likely have taken a GRE prep course, and we strongly advise you to do the same. In addition to acceptance, funding is often predicated on good test scores.
- 4) You should attempt to get your scholarly work out there – both by publishing and/or presenting at conferences. There are many opportunities to submit papers to conferences, including some conferences designed exclusively to feature the work of graduate students. Publications, such as encyclopedia entries or book reviews, can also strengthen your application. If possible, submit an article to a scholarly journal.

- 5) Most Ph.D. programs require that you demonstrate reading comprehension in one or two languages. If you intend to study a subject beyond the history of the English-speaking peoples, you should demonstrate to prospective programs that you are already taking steps to acquire the appropriate language skills.

Where to apply?

First of all, it is incumbent on you, the applicant, to research appropriate schools in terms of admissions competitiveness, program requirements, and areas of scholarly specialization. Today's Ph.D. aspirants are expected to know what they intend to study when they apply.

Other Resources

- 1) Faculty. Talk to your professors and the Graduate Director: they are here to help you and they may have useful insights into the process in general, the state of the profession, and even specific schools.
- 2) Links. The following are links to some helpful websites with a brief explanation as to what they are (please keep in mind that Monmouth University is not endorsing or vouching for any particular business by providing a link):

<http://www.kaptest.com/gre> - for Kaplan GRE prep

<http://www.princetonreview.com/grad/gre-test-prep> - for Princeton Review GRE prep