

Guidelines for Writing the M.A. Thesis in History

William Paterson University

(as of August 2011)

Once students have completed 18 to 24 credits (depending on individual rate of progress through the program), they are qualified to begin the process of writing the M.A. thesis. The M.A. thesis writing sequence (HIST 6980 and HIST 6990) should be the **last 2** courses completed in the program.

The semester before the thesis is written students select an advisor from the History Department faculty under whose supervision they will write their Master's thesis. Students should consult the Graduate Program Director if they are uncertain about choosing an advisor.

At least once a year, the Graduate Program Director holds a thesis workshop. Samples of past proposals are distributed and discussed, and questions regarding the proposal may be asked. A flyer announcing the date of the workshop is disseminated in current graduate classes and is posted on the University's web site and bulletin board.

Thesis proposals are due before or shortly after students register for HIST 6980: Thesis Seminar. After the thesis advisor and instructor of HIST 6980 approve the thesis proposal, the student begins researching the thesis (if s/he has not already begun to do so). The instructor of HIST 6980 provides a summary of his/her and the advisor's observations and comments on the proposal and suggestions for further research.

You will not be allowed to register for HIST 6990 Independent Thesis Writing until you have completed a first draft of your thesis.



**William Paterson University
Department of History**

Convocation of Readers for the Master's Thesis

We, the undersigned, agree to serve as first and second readers and advisors for the Master's thesis entitled

to be presented by _____

on or about (month) _____ (year) _____

First Reader _____

Date _____

Second Reader _____

Date _____

The Thesis Proposal:

a) Rationale

All candidates for a M.A. in History from William Paterson University must write a Master's Thesis, a work of original research from thirty to fifty pages in length. This thesis is to be conceived of as an article worthy of publication. The thesis will be researched and written over the course of two semesters, within the framework of HIST 6980: Thesis Seminar and HIST 6990: Independent Thesis Research. In keeping with the program's emphasis on mastery of information technology, students are required to prepare their thesis for electronic publication and to present their findings to the department via a multi-media presentation. The first step in this challenging road towards a completed Master's Thesis is the submission of a Thesis Proposal.

b) What is a thesis proposal?

A thesis proposal is a brief statement describing a student's chosen topic, the significance and uniqueness of the intended approach to the topic, and a general plan of research.

c) When should you start researching a thesis proposal?

At the latest, students should start researching and preparing their proposal in the spring semester prior to enrolling in HIST 6980 (offered only in the fall).

d) When should the proposal be submitted?

The proposal should be submitted prior to enrolling in HIST 6980, the first of a two-course sequence dedicated to the researching and writing of the Master's Thesis. HIST 6980 and HIST 6990 should be the last two courses taken in the program.

e) To whom should the proposal be submitted?

The proposal is submitted to the professor who has agreed to be the first reader (advisor) of a student's thesis and to the HIST 6980 instructor. The proposal must be approved by both a student's first reader and his/her HIST 6980 instructor. Timely submission and approval of the proposal is critical to the successful completion of the master's thesis in two semesters.

f) What is the correct format for the proposal?

Proposals should be double-spaced, from three-to-five pages in length, not including the bibliography. The proposal should contain the following sections:

- a narrative in which the thesis topic is clearly defined.
- a historiographical discussion of the thesis's proposed contribution to the field.
- a research plan outlining possible sources, libraries, collections to be visited or requested through inter-library loan, and estimates of the

approximate amount of time required for completion of each phase in the project.

-- a preliminary bibliography of primary and secondary works.

Style and Format of the Finished Thesis:

Requirements for formatting and the final production of the Thesis are to meet the standards of University Microfilms, Inc. for microfilming, and American Library Association (ALA) suggestions for preserving archival copies of theses.

A master's thesis will be microfilmed if it is requested through interlibrary loan. Many of the procedures specified below are intended to ensure optimal microfilm copies.

Arrangement of Contents:

This list indicates the order in which to place the parts of the thesis. Pages marked with an asterisk (*) are mandatory. All others are optional or depend on the content of each individual thesis. All pages, except for the title page and dedication page, must be titled in capital letters accordingly. All titles are centered.

- * TITLE PAGE
- COPYRIGHT PAGE
- * ABSTRACT
- * BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
- DEDICATION
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
- * TABLE OF CONTENTS
- LIST OF TABLES (if applicable)
- LIST OF FIGURES (or LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS) (if applicable)
- LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS
- * TEXT
- APPENDIX (or APPENDICES) (if applicable)
- *BIBLIOGRAPHY

Title Selection:

The words in the title of the thesis should be selected carefully to represent as accurately as possible the subject content. The words in the title are important access points to researchers who may use computerized keyword search techniques to identify works in various subject areas.

Title Page:

The title is in all-capital letters, centered within the left and right margins, double-spaced, about 2 inches from the top of the page. (See sample title page at end.)

At the vertical and horizontal center of the margins and double-spaced are the following five lines (all centered):

- * Line 1: A Thesis
- * Line 2: Presented to the Faculty of the Department of History
- * Line 3: of the William Paterson University of New Jersey
- * Line 4: in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
- * Line 5: Master of Arts

The following three lines are centered within the margins approximately 1.5 inches from the bottom of the page and are double-spaced:

- * Line 1: by
- * Line 2: Student's Name
- * Line 3: Month and Year of degree conferral (no comma between month and year)

The student's name must appear as it is on file in the University Registrar's Office. The date on the title page should be the date of degree conferral, not the date the thesis is submitted. The thesis title and the student's name must be exactly the same wherever they appear in the thesis: title page, copyright page, and acceptance page.

Spacing, Margins, and Fonts:

The text of the manuscript is double-spaced. Footnotes, bibliography or list of references, tables and figure captions are single-spaced. Bibliographic entries are separated by double-spacing.

The left-hand margin must be 1.5" wide; the top, bottom, and right margins 1". The appendix, if applicable, and the bibliography each start on a new page, with a 2" top margin. Justifying the copy at the right margin is optional.

The general requirement is that only fonts giving 12 characters per inch (CPI) may be used. Use a font that is easy to read and photocopy. Footnotes may be single-spaced in a 10-point size but must be in the same font as the rest of the text. Use the same font throughout the thesis, including page numbers and other minor aspects of formatting.

Signature Page:

To be supplied by the Program Director

Abstract for Master's Thesis:

The abstract should state the problem, describe the methods and procedures used, and give the main results or conclusions. The abstract must not exceed six hundred (600) words in length and should be double-spaced. The heading of the Master's abstract is the word "ABSTRACT" in all capital letters, centered within the margins at the top of the

page. Do not number the abstract pages, and do not count the abstract when numbering preliminary pages.

Biographical Sketch:

The biographical sketch must be written in the third person and contain the student's educational background. It may contain additional biographical facts. The heading is the phrase "BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH" in all capital letters, centered within the margins at the top of the page. The sketch should be double-spaced. The page is numbered at the bottom of the page, centered within the margins, using lowercase Roman numerals

Footnotes:

Footnotes are required. They are single-spaced, in the same font as the text but in 10 CPI, and numbered sequentially in Arabic numbers. Footnotes must conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Page Numbering:

Each page excluding title page and abstract is numbered. The number may be centered at the top or bottom of the page, or may appear at the top right-hand corner. For the preliminary pages (those before the text of your thesis), use lowercase Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.).

Tables and Figures:

Tables and figures must conform to the same margins as the text. Over-sized computer-generated tables can be reduced and printed or photocopied onto bond paper for inclusion in the original. If a table or figure must be placed broadside (horizontally on the paper), the margins and page-number location must be the same as on a regular page. Captions for tables, figures, and page numbers should be in the same type as the body of the text.

Bibliography or References:

The style for references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and must be consistent throughout the manuscript.

Print Quality:

Be sure that the manuscript is clearly legible throughout. All photocopies should be checked to make sure they are legible and will reproduce well. If materials are scanned, select a setting of at least 200 DPI.

Submission and Binding:

The original and one copy are submitted to the Program Director. They must be submitted in separate envelopes or folders with the following notations made on the envelopes: 1) your name 2) the word "thesis" 3) the word "original" or "copy." After binding, the original, first copy is filed in the library; the second copy goes to the program office.

Evaluation:

Both HIST 6980 and HIST 6990 are taken on a pass/fail basis. The instructor of HIST 6980 determines whether a student is ready to continue on to HIST 6990, and issues either a "Pass," "Fail," or "Incomplete" for the course. Students may not register for HIST 6990 until they have passed HIST 6980. Upon completion of the final draft, both the thesis advisor and second reader must approve the thesis. Very often, revisions may be required before the thesis is accepted and the M.A. is granted.

The Thesis Presentation:

A final requirement for the degree, the thesis presentation is a formal oral report to the department. The overall time for the presentation should be one hour, with the body of the presentation taking about 40 minutes, leaving 20 minutes for question and answer. The purpose of the presentation is to allow students to report on their main findings and to demonstrate their acquisition of information technology skills as promoted by the program. Typically, the presentation takes the form of a PowerPoint presentation. The audience will evaluate the quality of the thesis presentation using an anonymous questionnaire.

Examples of M.A. Theses:

Richard Kearney, "Child Labor Laws in New Jersey" (Advisor: Evelyn Gonzalez)

Jeffrey Kovach, "Dual Interpretations of Quakerism: the Shippen Family of 18th-Century Philadelphia" (Advisor: Daniel Meaders)

Robin Chandler, "From Soldier to Educator: The Reinvention of Richard H. Pratt and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School" (Advisor: Terrence Finnegan)

Susan Deeks, "Trenton Iron Company and 19th-Century Industrialism" (Advisor: Jonathan Bone)

Jonathan Kinney, "New Jersey's Civil War Bounty Jumpers" (Advisor: Lucia McMahon)

Kristy Buchalla, "The Libbie Garrabrant Case and Prostitution in the 19th-Century" (Advisor: George Robb)

(Sample title page)

A HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE-EASTERN COMMUNITY OF CLIFTON, N.J.

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of History
of the William Paterson University of New Jersey
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Jane Q. Student
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