

Department of History, University of California, Berkeley
Statement Regarding the Intent of the Undergraduate Major Spring 2009

Intent of the major program

The History major helps students learn to think critically and deeply about the historical processes that have shaped the world we live in. History majors are exposed to a temporally and geographically broad range of historical experience, but they are also required to concentrate on a world region or theme or period of history, both in order to develop depth of understanding and in order to prepare for the “capstone” of the History major: an article-length, primary-source based, original research project. The major is also designed to develop the critical reading, thinking, and writing skills that will be needed to succeed in this capstone course.

Specific learning goals

I. Knowledge. Students will learn to:

- A. Distinguish and characterize significant periods of historical experience in multiple societies from different parts of the globe.
- B. Describe events and developments in the history of multiple societies in terms of continuity, change, and causation.
- C. Understand interpretive debates about the past
- D. Appreciate the complexities involved in interpreting societies and social change: for example, the local and the global, particular and general, contingent and structural.
- E. Identify different kinds of historical evidence and understand their role in the production of historical knowledge.

II. Skills. Students will be able to:

- A. Recall factual claims about the past and synthesize them into coherent interpretive arguments.
- B. Read documents closely and critically.
- C. Formulate a well-organized, well-supported argument.
- D. Demonstrate clear writing in the form of essays of varying lengths.
- E. Make cogent oral arguments about readings assignments in the context of a seminar discussion.
- F. Conduct original research with primary sources.
- G. Locate good, relevant secondary scholarship, and distinguish good scholarship from poor.
- H. Observe ethical practices of citation and intellectual self-presentation.

How these goals connect to learning in core courses

I. Lower Division lecture courses. All of these courses advance all of the goals listed above. Students generally take four lower division lecture courses, at least one in U.S. history, at least one in European history, and at least one in the history of another world area, with the fourth the

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student's choice. Sections are mandatory. They are small, limited to 20 students, and regular oral participation as well as multiple, guided writing assignments, often based on primary sources, are required. There are three different categories of lower division lectures:

A. Survey courses of particular times and places (e.g. History 4A, "The Ancient Mediterranean World," History 5, "European Civilization from the Renaissance to the Present," History 8B, "Modern Latin America").

B. Comparative History. History 2 is a comparative world history survey focused on a theme (e.g., "Cities").

C. Historiography and Methodology. History R1, "The Practice of History," is a Reading and Composition course that is tailored to the expository skills expected of History majors.

II. Upper division lecture courses. All of these courses advance most of the goals above, although large lecture classes may or may not have a strong discussion component, so the construction of an oral argument is not emphasized, while construction of arguments in writing is a focus. Upper division lectures are more focused than lower division lectures on particular times and places and are often organized around themes (e.g. History 109A, "The Rise of Islamic Civilization, 600-1200," or History 125, "History of African-Americans and Race Relations in the United States"). Upper division lecture classes are particularly important in advancing the goals associated with knowledge and interpretive and writing skills (I:a-d, II:a-d).

III. Seminars

A. Lower division seminars. Each semester the History department offers a variety of freshmen-sophomore seminars (History 39). These seminars introduce students to a subject (e.g. "The Palestinians," "Animals in European History") in a seminar setting, emphasizing oral arguments, written arguments, and reading skills.

B. Upper division seminars.

1. Reading seminars. Each semester the department offers some fifteen versions of History 103. These courses, like the lower-division seminars, are organized around particular themes, and are keyed to addressing the goals associated with interpretation, writing, and oral arguments. Many 103s are comparative. Recent examples include "Food and Eating Practices in the U.S. and Europe Since the 19th Century," and "Technology and Philosophy in China and the West: Explorations in Comparative Cultural History." Most 103s offer students the opportunity to write a final paper that helps to prepare themselves for the 101, the required research seminar.

2. Research seminar. History 101 is required of all majors. Students carry out a major primary-source based research project of their own, under the close guidance of an instructor and with peer workshopping. From conceptualizing a historical problem to researching it (often in archives, and often in archives in foreign countries), to

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developing an argument, to presenting it in ways that respect the craft and ethics of the profession, the required senior thesis is in every way a “capstone” experience.

How does the department evaluate whether or not we are attaining these goals?

Student papers, from the reader response paper to the substantial research paper

Student presentations

Exams and quizzes

Feedback from GSIs who supervise discussion sections

Feedback from staff advisers

Office hours

Student evaluations

Exit surveys