

Comprehensive Examination, HIST 5910: The comprehensive exam track, or “comps” track, offers students the chance to develop wide-ranging knowledge in history. The track consists of three 1 unit independent studies (HIST 5910) with individual faculty members; they also write one reflective essay (HIST 5960) on their work in the program. The big advantage to comps (instead of the thesis) is that they provide students with a wide breadth of knowledge and they are generally quicker to complete than the thesis. Comps can thus be useful for those planning for a career in teaching, or for those who enjoy reading history for a sense of the “big picture.” They also provide a strong foundation for students interested in pursuing a Ph.D.

When to start thinking about comps

Students should complete HIST 5910 and HIST 5960 during their final term in the program. However, students should start thinking about taking 5910s by the end of their first year.

Students need to identify faculty members appropriate to serve as examiners in their fields of interest. If you have not yet had a class scheduled with a professor who might serve as your examiner, introduce yourself during office hours to build a relationship. The examining faculty members will serve as your comps committee. A comps committee needs to be composed of three faculty members. Every professor handles the 5910 studies slightly differently, but in all cases you and the professor will develop an extensive book list that will serve as the basis for your exam.

Students must then complete a “grad check” with the department’s graduate advisor the semester BEFORE taking comps. Refer to the Schedule of Classes or the History Department for the grad check schedule. Students must also file the “Application for Comprehensive Exams” no later than the first week of the semester they intend to take the exams.

Students need to register for HIST 5960 (0 units) the semester when they take comps; students will not be able to register for the comps until they have completed a grad check, and have submitted the “Application for Comprehensive Exams”.