

Opperman Fellow Handbook

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN HISTORY
September 2019

This handbook is for students who have been awarded the Opperman Fellowship in the MA in History program in the Department of History and Philosophy at Eastern Michigan University. Careful reading of this handbook will familiarize you with the requirements of the program, advising and policies, and will provide forms and other helpful resources. This guide is a supplement to, not a substitute for, the University Graduate Catalog and University Student Handbook.

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1. Opperman Fellow Contact Information

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2. Opperman Fellow Scholarship Objectives

The Opperman Fellow Scholarship was established with the goal of providing generous financial and academic support for highly qualified graduate students who are pursuing the MA degree in History at Eastern Michigan University, and who want to pursue the PhD in History once they have completed their graduate studies with us. The academic track that the Opperman fellow will follow is designed to facilitate the completion of the MA degree in History within two years, while giving the fellow numerous opportunities to develop professionally as a historian. In

addition to providing the fellow with a generous stipend and paying for thirty hours of graduate tuition, the scholarship also includes a stipend for travel to professional conferences, money to fund a research trip to archives and libraries, and summer support to help students devote themselves to their scholarly research and writing. From the first semester the fellow is in the program, he or she will be paired with a faculty mentor who is a specialist in or who has expertise in the field of historical study in which the fellow is concentrating. The faculty mentor will provide guidance and advise the fellow in his or her academic preparation and choice of research topic for the thesis, and will serve as the chair of the fellow's thesis committee. The faculty mentor will also provide support in helping the fellow in selecting and applying to PhD programs as well. The combination of financial and academic support is designed to ensure that the Opperman fellow has the resources and training and support that he or she needs to succeed with distinction in the MA program in History at Eastern Michigan University.

3. Application Qualifications

To be eligible for the Opperman Fellow Scholarship, the applicant must meet the following criteria:

- Be admitted into the MA in History Program at Eastern Michigan University
- Have an undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or above

Along with the application form, the applicant must also submit

- two letters of recommendation from faculty who know the applicant's work
- an essay outlining the student's scholarly area of interest and how the MA in History would help further the career plans of the student. This statement should be no more than two pages, double spaced
- a writing sample
- a current copy of the applicant's transcript

4. Advising for the Opperman Fellow

a. Advising with the Graduate Coordinator

Incoming Opperman fellows must arrange an initial **orientation advising session** with the graduate coordinator to plan their program of study in detail.

Contact information for the graduate coordinator is:

Prof. John G. McCurdy
701-H Pray Harrold
Department of History and Philosophy
jmccurdy@emich.edu
734.487.0906

During this initial advising session, the graduate coordinator will go over the MA program in History requirements and expectations with the student. The graduate coordinator will also work with the student to establish his or her two areas of concentration, and select courses for the upcoming semester. At this meeting the graduate coordinator will review the requirements and expectations for the Opperman Fellow Scholarship, and will lay out the proposed plan of coursework, research and thesis writing that will allow the fellow to graduate within two years. During this meeting the graduate coordinator will also help to identify the faculty member who will serve as the fellow's faculty mentor while he/she is in the program.

After this initial advising session the fellow must meet with the graduate coordinator each semester before enrolling for classes, in order to make sure that he/she is on track to complete the requirements for the MA in History degree in a timely fashion.

Opperman fellows should confer with the graduate coordinator toward the end of their second semester in the program to begin discussing the application process for admission into the thesis track of the MA in History program.

b. Advising with the Faculty Mentor

Beginning in the first semester the Opperman fellow is in the program, he or she will be paired with a faculty member who will mentor and work closely with the fellow during his or her time in the program. The fellow should consult frequently with his or her mentor regarding opportunities for professional development, coursework, and identifying an area of research upon which to focus the thesis. The faculty mentor will serve as the chair of the fellow's thesis committee, and will work closely with the fellow in putting together the thesis committee, and in preparing the thesis prospectus, which must be submitted when applying to the thesis track of the MA in History program. The faculty mentor will also serve as the fellow's coordinator as he or she begins to apply to PhD programs in History as well. Opperman fellows are encouraged to consult on a regular basis with their faculty mentors, in order to take full advantage of their academic and professional expertise.

5. Expectations for the Opperman Fellow

a. Coursework and GPA

Typically an Opperman fellow will take 9 credit hours of coursework in the fall and winter terms of his or her first year in the program, and 6 credit hours of coursework and thesis hours in the fall and winter terms of his or her second year in the program. Opperman fellows are required to maintain a GPA of 3.5 in their coursework. Failure to do this may result in the loss of the scholarship.

b. The Thesis

As part of their academic and professional training, students awarded the Opperman Fellow Scholarship are expected to write a thesis as the culminating project for the MA degree in History. Students are expected to make extensive use of primary sources in their research and writing of the thesis, and to produce a work based upon original research. Chapters from the

thesis can be used when applying to PhD programs, as evidence of the fellow's academic and intellectual abilities and training as an historian.

c. Participation in Professional Conferences

As part of his or her professional development while in the program, the fellow is expected to attend at least one professional conference, where ideally he or she will present a paper. In addition to conferences within the fellow's chosen area of concentration, he or she is also encouraged to consider presenting their work at local conferences, such as Eastern's Graduate Conference, or the annual Phi Alpha Theta conference at the University of Toledo, or the Graduate History Conference at Central Michigan University. Participation in these conferences is an ideal way for the fellow to make contacts among historians and students working in the profession, and in their own field of study. The Opperman Fellow Scholarship carries with it a \$1000.00 stipend to help pay the fellow's expenses to attend a conference. If expenses for attending a conference exceed the \$1000.00 stipend, the fellow should ask his or her mentor about further sources of available funding.

d. Leadership in the Department

While in the program the fellow should take advantage of the opportunities to develop his or her leadership skills by participating in the various student groups in History. EMU's chapter of Phi Alpha Theta is very active, and traditionally fellows have held leadership positions in this organization and participated in its meetings and activities. The History Graduate Writing Workshop provides a venue for fellows to share their written work with other graduate students, and to receive useful feedback on their thesis chapters or seminar papers. Fellows are strongly encouraged to participate in this graduate organization as well.

6. Duties and Expectations for Graduate Assistantship in History

As part of the Opperman Scholarship, the fellow will be awarded a graduate assistantship for the two years that they are in the program. The first year the student holds a graduate assistantship, he or she will be obligated to perform 20 hours of work per week for the History Section. In the second year of the program, the fellow will be obligated to perform 10 hours of work per week for the History Section. Fellows working as graduate assistants may be assigned to help faculty members in the classroom, or be assigned to help a faculty member on a scholarly research project. Fellows may be assigned other duties as well at the discretion of the Graduate Committee, such as helping to edit the History Section Newsletter, or to do undergraduate advising.

7. First-Year Performance Evaluation

At the end of the fellow's first year in the program, he or she will undergo a performance evaluation. This evaluation will be based upon feedback from faculty with whom the fellow has worked as a graduate assistant, and upon the student's performance in the classroom. The fellow is expected to discharge his or her duties as a graduate assistant in a professional manner. The fellow is also expected to perform at a high level in the classroom, and maintain a 3.5 GPA.

Failure to meet this criteria may result in the student not receiving the Opperman Fellow Scholarship again in the second year of the program.

8. Projected Two-Tear Timeline for Completion of MA in History for Opperman Fellow

Fall	Winter	Spring/Sum	Fall	Winter	Spring/Sum	Fall
Fellow enters program Fellow paired with faculty mentor Student takes 9 hours of coursework	Fellow lines up research topic and sources for thesis Student takes 9 hours of coursework	Research trip to archives or library Student writes prospectus over summer Student applies for research funding for trip Student applies for summer stipend for support while writing prospectus	Fellow submits prospectus and is admitted into thesis track of program Fellow writes 1st chapter of thesis Student takes 3 hours of coursework and 3 hours of thesis work Student applies to PhD programs	Fellow continues to write thesis Student takes 3 hours of coursework and 3 hours of thesis work	Fellow finishes writing thesis and graduates from program in August	Fellow enters PhD program
		18 hours of coursework must be completed by end of first year in program	Student takes 6 hours of graduate credit	Student takes 6 hours of graduate credit		

9. Applying for the Thesis Track of the MA in History Program

Applying to the Thesis Track in the MA in History Program

During the fellow's second semester in the program, he or she will work closely with the faculty mentor to decide upon a research topic for the thesis. They will also put together the fellow's thesis committee. Once the thesis committee members have been selected, the student will begin the application process for admission into the thesis track. The application form for the thesis track involves the writing of a thesis prospectus, in which the student will outline for his or her thesis committee the historical problem upon which his or her research will focus. The student will also provide a review of the scholarship in the field in which he or she proposes to work, and provide the thesis committee with a detailed outline of the several chapters of the thesis. Having completed the thesis prospectus, the student will then defend it before his or her thesis committee. If the committee deems the defense to be satisfactory, then the student's application materials will be passed on to the graduate committee, which makes the final decision regarding the student's application for admission into the thesis track of the MA in History program.

The application form and guidelines for writing the thesis can be accessed via this web link: [Application](#).

Before deciding to embark upon this lengthy and demanding process, students need to be aware of the rigorous demands of this undertaking:

- The final product will be a highly polished, well researched and written work: expectations are that it will be substantial but no more than 100 pages in length.
- To achieve this quality, the student should expect to spend 8-10 months researching, writing, and revising the thesis
- The student may well incur sizeable expenses in traveling to archives, making photocopies, and producing numerous copies and revisions of the thesis
- Students should also be aware of the four-step process involved in applying to the thesis track:
 1. Creation of thesis committee and identification of thesis committee chair
 2. Writing of 10-12 page thesis prospectus
 3. Defense of prospectus before thesis committee
 4. Approval of application by Graduate Committee

The above four step process typically takes 2-3 months

Graduate Thesis Hours

Students are required to take 6 hours of thesis credit hours while working on the thesis. The form for signing up for thesis credit hours can be found here: [Thesis/Project Study Contract](#)

Thesis Manual

Students working on the thesis should consult with the graduate school thesis manual to make sure they are following the proper guidelines for writing, formatting, and submitting the thesis in a timely manner. The graduate school thesis manual can be found here:

<https://www.emich.edu/graduate/documents/thesis2019.pdf?v=2019-09-12T20:47:25Z>

10. Applying for Funding for Thesis Research

To aid the fellow in developing and writing the thesis prospectus over the spring and summer of the first year in the program, the Opperman fellow should apply for financial support from the Opperman History Research Fund. This scholarship is used to support students traveling to archives and libraries across the country and world for research. Ideally the research trip should be scheduled early during the spring or summer, in order to give the fellow ample time upon returning home to write the thesis prospectus. To apply for this funding, the student should speak with his/her thesis coordinator.

11. Applying for Funding for Summer Support and Writing of Prospectus

Upon returning home from the research trip, the fellow should devote time to writing the thesis prospectus, with the expectation that it will be submitted to the thesis committee early in the fall semester. When the prospectus has been approved, this will mean that the fellow has been admitted into the thesis track of the MA in History program, and can begin writing the thesis, and taking thesis hours. In order to have financial support while working on the prospectus over the summer, the fellow should apply for the Opperman Summer Support Fellowship, which provides a \$2000.00 financial stipend to support work on the prospectus. The application form for the Summer Support Fellowship can be accessed from the Graduate Coordinator.

12. Applying for PhD Programs in History

In the fall of the fellow's second year in the program, he or she should consult with the faculty mentor about possible PhD programs to which the fellow might apply. The mentor will advise the fellow during the application process, provide letters of recommendation and general advice on the completion of the applications.