

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
History Department

Honours Programme

**This information is also available on-line at the
History Dept. website**
<https://history.ubc.ca/undergraduate/ba-history-program/honours/>

Updated March 2021

History Honours Programme

“As a history major, you will learn history. As a history honours student, you will learn how to be an historian.” *Yannick Thoraval (Former Honours Student)*

In the History Honours Programme, students make the shift from being consumers of history to becoming producers of historical knowledge. Participation in small seminars and the preparation of a graduating essay helps them to develop skills in critical thinking, research and writing, and oral presentation and argument. Many Honours students go on to graduate school in history, but the programme is designed for all academically able and highly motivated students interested in a research-intensive programme. Many History Honours students have gone to law school, gotten education degrees, or pursued other forms of professional training. To help Honours students succeed in the programme, faculty mentors work closely with them throughout their two years. In addition, Honours students create their own close-knit intellectual and social community through shared seminars, dedicated study space, and infectious enthusiasm for the study of history.

The Essence of the Honours Programme

- a significant thesis project
- explicit training in historiography and methodology in HIST 333 and HIST 433
- small tutorials with like-minded and dedicated students
- a strong sense of intellectual community; an *esprit du corps*

Admission to Honours

Each year the History Department admits to the Programme about fifteen students, chosen on the basis of academic achievement and promise. To qualify, these students must complete 12 credits of lower-division history or the equivalent at UBC or another post-secondary institution, and should obtain at least an A-average in these courses. They must also meet the Faculty of Arts requirement of an overall average of 68% in the first two years. In addition, students' overall academic records and letters of recommendation will be taken into consideration. Students typically apply at the end of their second year in college or university. The deadline for applications is **12 May 2021**, although in exceptional cases (such as for transfer students to UBC) applications may be considered after that date. The Honours Committee will begin selecting candidates soon after the deadline. Students who have been admitted to the Programme will receive a letter from the Honours chairperson by mid-June confirming their admission and telling them how to proceed with registration. Students with assigned registration time before mid-June should register for regular classes and then withdraw and register for Honours classes should they be accepted into the programme.

For more information on the Programme, please contact:

Chair of History Honours Programme

[Prof. Robert Brain](#)

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Applications should be submitted on-line and can be found on the History Department's website at: <https://history.ubc.ca/undergraduate/ba-history-program/honours/>

Honours Classes

Honours seminars facilitate exploration and training in how to think historically. They bring students together to consider problems of wide import to the discipline. All incoming honours students take HIST 333, which introduces them to the philosophy and practice of history, as well as teaching them how to conceptualize and complete a research project. HIST 333 is a full-year course, but students who want to participate in an exchange or co-op programme may divide it and take half in their third year and half in their fourth year.

In their graduating year, students take HIST 433 in which they will discuss the research and writing of the senior thesis, as well as study a broad issue of current concern to the discipline.

The one semester-long honours tutorials present large units of history in terms of region, period or, most often, theme. Each tutorial, small in size, is open to both third-and fourth-year honours students. Students are required to take one tutorial each year. To account for their intensity, they are worth twice the usual number of credits.

History honours students are required to take a history department "capstone" course as well as nine credits of upper division history courses, which should include an upper division history course in a field related to their thesis topic.

Language Requirement

A requirement of the Programme is that before graduation, students must demonstrate a reading knowledge of French or a foreign language appropriate to their field of interest. Students hoping to write a thesis which requires languages other than English are encouraged to complete their language preparation as early as possible. All students are required to demonstrate their competence in a language other than English by passing a translation exam. In the exam, Honours students will be asked to translate an unseen passage from the language of their choice

into English with the help of a dictionary. The History Department administers these translation exams in March and November each year. Students need to pass only one translation exam and may make more than one attempt.

Senior Thesis

The senior thesis is both the main challenge and the main reward of the last year of Honours. It is the capstone achievement of the undergraduate experience. Students undertake substantial pieces of independent research on topics of their choice and under the direction of faculty members' expert in the various fields.

By the end of their first year in Honours, students should have decided on what most interests them and have consulted with department members who are knowledgeable in the field. Students are strongly urged to pick a topic in a field with which they are already broadly familiar and to that end are encouraged to have taken classes relevant to the topic of their thesis (for example, a student interested in questions of empire and race in Mexico should ideally have taken classes in the history of Mexico or Latin America as well as classes exploring questions of empire and/or race.)

[Prof. Brain](#), the programme chair and faculty advisor will help you shape a thesis topic congruent with your interests, your existing knowledge of the field, and the faculty member's own knowledge and interests. The length of the thesis should be approximately 60 typed double-spaced pages.

The minimum acceptable standing on the graduating thesis for an Honours degree is 68%. The standing is established by a panel of History Department members, including the adviser, who jointly judge the thesis and also examine the student orally on the written work and on the general subject of which it is a part.

Honours in History with Arts Co-op

History Honours can be combined with the Arts Co-op Programme. The Arts Co-op Programme has one intake period annually in September. Applications are normally available on the Arts Co-op web site in August. We recommend that students interested in combining History Honours with Arts Co-op apply for the Co-op programme in their second year and do their first co-op term prior to the start of third year. However, it is also possible to apply to the Arts Co-op Programme in your third year after you have entered the Honours Programme. You can find out more about the Arts Co-op programme at <http://artscoop.ubc.ca/>.

If you want to pursue this option, you should speak to the Honours Chair (currently [Robert Brain](#)) and to Julie Walchi, the Director of Arts Co-op (Julie.walchi@ubc.ca) in order to work out a schedule for your co-op terms.

Honours in History with Go-Global International Learning Programmes

We encourage students interested in studying abroad to combine History Honours with one of the many exciting international exchange opportunities available through UBC's Go-Global Programme. A one-semester exchange can be incorporated into your History Honours Programme without delaying graduation. A two-semester exchange is also possible but in most cases will require adding at least one semester to your studies at UBC. You can find out more about Go-Global Programmes at <http://www.students.ubc.ca/global/>

If you want to pursue this option, you should speak to the Honours chair (currently [Prof. Robert Brain, robert.brain@ubc.ca](#)) and contact Carol Zachs at Go-Global (go.global@ubc.ca).

Honours in History with International Relations

Another variant of History Honours accommodates students especially interested in International Relations. This requires the successful completion of 120 credits. Students considering this option should consult the History Honours adviser (currently [Prof. Robert Brain](#)) and the International Relations advisor (currently [Prof. Jessica Wang, jessica.wang@ubc.ca](#)) in their first or second year of undergraduate studies. For more details, please see the course and credit requirements listed below.

Standing

Honours students are expected to maintain high standing over the two-year period of the Programme. Third year students who cannot maintain a good B average in their honours courses may be asked, for their fourth year, to revert to the majors Programme. Those students who receive less than 68% in any of their honours courses will not be granted an honours degree. Normally, they will graduate with a majors degree in history.

Advising

The programmes of all honours students must be approved during the summer or at the beginning of each year by the chair of the Honours Committee, who represents the department in these matters and is available for advice throughout the student's course of study.

Summary

The Honours degree in History requires the successful completion of 120 credits, 60 of which are in History courses and 54 of which must be in upper level courses. Of these 54 credits, 48 must be in upper level history courses. Students must also complete Faculty of Arts programme requirements for a B.A. Students considering the Honours programme should consult the History Honours advisor (currently [Robert Brain](#)) in their first or second year.

Course and Credit Requirements for Honours History

First and Second Years

- must take 12 credits of lower-level History courses (or the equivalent taken in other institutions), of which 6 credits must be at the 200-level. The 12 credits may include up to 6 credits of Arts One, or a relevant Coordinated Arts Program (CAP) course.
- should have an average of at least 80% in History courses.

In the regular honours stream, students take:

Third Year

- HIST 333 (3/6 credits): year-long course in historiography and methodology (can also be taken as two 3-credit courses)
- HIST 321 (6 credits): intensive one-term honours tutorial

Fourth Year

- HIST 433 (6 credits): year-long course devoted to a topic of broad interest and to working collaboratively on skills relevant to writing the honours essay.
- HIST 421 (6 credits): intensive one-term honours tutorial
- HIST 449 (12 credits): Honours Graduating Essay
- an oral examination on the graduating essay.

Third or Fourth Year

In addition to the requirements specific to the third year and the fourth year, students must complete in either the third or fourth year:

- HIST 490 (3 credits): a History department “capstone” course
- 9 upper division history credits which must include an upper division history course in a field related to essay topic; and
- an exam confirming reading knowledge of French or a foreign language.

Course and Credit Requirements for Honours in History with International Relations

First and Second Years

- must take a minimum of 12 credits of lower-level History courses with an average of at least 80%,
- at least 6 credits must be at the 200-level
- must include either HIST 102 (6) or HIST 103 (6), or the equivalent taken in other institutions.
- must include POLI 260 (3 credits)
- must keep in mind prerequisites for any upper-level courses in affiliated fields to be taken in the upper years

Third Year

- HIST 333 (3/6 credits): year-long course in historiography and methodology (can also be taken as two 3-credit courses)
- HIST 321 (6 credits): intensive one-term honours tutorial
- 6 credits in History
- in consultation with an advisor, 12 credits selected from courses listed in the International Relations Major programme

Fourth Year

- HIST 433 (6 credits): year-long course devoted to a topic of broad interest and to working collaboratively on skills relevant to writing the honours essay
- HIST 421 (6 credits): intensive one-term honours tutorial
- HIST 449 (12 credits): Honours Graduating Essay
- IR seminar (3 credits)
- 3 additional credits in IR
- an oral examination on the graduating essay

Third or Fourth Year

- an exam confirming reading knowledge of a foreign language.

What Students Say about the Honours Programme...

"I was mid-way through my third undergraduate year when my professor approached me and encouraged me to apply to the honours program in History. Entering the program meant extending my degree for another two years, for a total of five, but even now after I have finished my M.A., I consider those two years to have been the most transformative of my education. I became a better reader, writer and researcher because of it. Don't let the honours program be kept a secret from you; don't let it intimidate you; apply, apply, apply! For someone even considering graduate school in their future, there is no better path than this program. The readings chosen by our professors were theoretical, challenging, and multi-disciplinary. The debate and discussion with my peers — now, my close friends — was eye-opening, and inspiring. And the multiple seminar classes designed by professors at home in their field of specialty were incredibly rich. Every week we looked at primary sources and the experience of the past in a new and different light. Now especially we need students of history, people who are alive to alternative readings and the uncertain truths of the past. There is more than one way to slice an onion, and more than one way to cry over it."

- Jacob Goldowitz (2015)

"I feel as though I should preface my testimonial by admitting that I had reservations about entering into the History Honours program – at the time, I was content with simply floating along through my regular classes, and I was hesitant about taking on the responsibilities of a thesis project. What I didn't fully appreciate, at first, was how rewarding it is to become part of a supportive community of peers and professors who are willing to engage with historical materials on a deeper level. The program challenges everything you think you know about historiography (in a good way!), the faculty are enthusiastic and make themselves readily available to guide you through the process, and the participation-heavy seminar style encourages students to actively involve themselves. This program inspired me to continue studying history at the graduate level, and provided an opportunity to build lasting friendships – I definitely recommend it!"

- Robin Bunton (2015)

"The History honors program was without a doubt the best part of my undergraduate experience at UBC. In contrast to large lecture courses, with cram-and-forget exams and relatively little opportunity for one-on-one interaction with their instructors, the honors seminars and tutorials allow for on-going discussion among a small, consistent cohort and with the professors leading these classes. During my time in the honors program, I was able to read great books — many that strongly influenced and sometimes significantly changed my thinking about the discipline of History — and then talk them over with smart, engaged people each week; a rare pleasure in an undergraduate program at a large, public university! Between these stimulating weekly meetings and the research-intensive final thesis project, the honors program really demystifies what it means to 'do history.' Students are immersed in the practical, methodological work of the professional historian, while at the same learning the great variety of forms that such work can take. For a student moving on from the honors program to pursue an M.A. or Ph.D., there will be no potentially overwhelming 'surprises' waiting for them in grad school. In fact, it was my very enjoyable and rewarding experience in the honors program that made me feel confident in my decision to pursue further degrees in History."

- Josh Timmermann (2013)

"History honours benefited me in many ways. To name three: it allowed me to dive deep into a topic that was completely of my own choosing, it offered me a friendly intellectual neighbourhood in the sometimes overwhelming big city that is UBC, and it gave me the opportunity to work closely with my advisor, who I still view as a great mentor years after graduation."

- Catherine Bright (2009)

"Eight years after graduating, I vividly remember the heated discussions from my honours seminars while memories of many other classes have faded over time. As an intellectually curious introvert, I especially appreciated the small size of the program: discussion-based seminars pushed me to learn the skills of oral communication, while the small size of our cohort made me comfortable expressing my thoughts without the fear of sounding 'stupid.' By alleviating my fear of oral discussion, and by offering an intellectually intensive environment for two years, the honours program gave me the best preparation for studying history at the graduate level."

- Chelsea Zi Wang (2009)

History Honours was absolutely the highlight of my undergraduate experience. On a campus as large as UBC's, History Honours offers the chance to feel part of a small intellectual and social community. The program is certainly rigorous, but challenges such as the thesis seem far less daunting when you are surrounded by peers who both cheer you on and strengthen your scholarship. The work may be consuming, but, when you graduate, you do so with the conviction that you have stretched your brain cells and accomplished a significant piece of research. Whether your goals are graduate school, law school, the world of business, or another path entirely, the education you'll receive within Honours will serve you well.

- Meg Leja (2007)
