

## **Proposal for Ethics and Integrity Requirement, Department of History**

The History Department will address issues of ethics and integrity in graduate training through a variety of outlets, most of which are already well established within our MA program policies, procedures, and requirements. We will convey appropriate ethical practices and outlets for reporting alleged misconduct through instructional experiences and publicly disseminated documents. We will also evaluate the individual use of professional conventions and ethical standards in student research and teaching. Finally, we will mandate student engagement with professional development activities primarily through participation in our annual graduate history conference. Our practices with regard to the ethical conduct and scholarly integrity in graduate training are informed by the standards in our field as outlined by the American Historical Association (<http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/policies-and-documents/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct>), and the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code (<http://ghs.graduateschool.vt.edu/>). Through these multivalent approaches, our MA students will be exposed and acculturated into the professional ethics of our field and the integrity expectations of the University.

### **1. Plagiarism and other violations of the Graduate Honor Code**

### **2. Proper use of professional conventions in citation of existing research and scholarship, accurate reporting and ownership of findings, and acknowledgement of contributions to the work**

The History Department will provide graduate students with information on plagiarism and the proper use of professional citation, reporting, and acknowledgment of contributions to the work primarily through three instructional experiences:

- 1) Each year, the History Department conducts a new student orientation for incoming MA students. This orientation contains a faculty presentation on professional development that includes a section on professional ethics, including definitions of plagiarism, academic misconduct, and direction to relevant university policies concerning plagiarism and academic misconduct. We also provide students with our departmental policies document at this meeting, which we will update to include a section on professional ethics. Students begin our MA program on the first day aware of the need to avoid plagiarism and academic misconduct.
- 2) Avoidance of plagiarism and academic misconduct are reinforced in Historical Methods (HIST 5104), the first of two required methodology courses that MA students take in their first year of the program. The Historical Methods course devotes an entire week to plagiarism and ethical research standards. It also directs students to documents outlining ethical standards of the American Historical Association (url above), which is a required reading for the course, as well as to the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor System.

- 3) In the second required methodology course, Research Methods for Historians (HIST 5134), students focus intensively on issues of proper citation, ethical use of sources and data, and proper reporting of research findings. The primary assignment for this course is the development of the first draft of the student's MA thesis proposal. Students engage in intensive primary and secondary source reconnaissance and use these materials to draft a thesis proposal in which professional standards for footnoting and bibliographic referencing are central components of the evaluation. Students are also required to identify the key works of their chosen field, attribute authorship of important ideas and content in their field, and articulate how they intend to develop a unique research project in relation to existing scholarship.

In addition to instructional exposure to plagiarism and professional standards of citation, the History Department also engages in a variety of layers of evaluation of professional and ethical standards in student work. Evaluation takes several forms:

- 1) In the methods courses mentioned above, students are evaluated on their use of professional standards of citation and attribution of the sources of knowledge, etc. and errors of judgment are corrected.
- 2) All students are required to take a research seminar as part of their program in which they conduct research and produce a scholarly paper based on the research. Evaluation of these projects includes the professional and ethical use of sources and their citation. Other elective courses also contain significant attention to issues of professional and ethical integrity. For example, Oral History Methods (HIST 5424) is already included in the Graduate School's list of "Current Graduate Course Offerings with Stated Ethics Component." In this class students complete IRB training before undertaking oral interviews for research projects.
- 3) All students receive an official evaluation at the end of their first year. This evaluation is conducted by the department's Graduate Committee and includes course performance, information about professional development provided by the student, and an evaluation by the student's primary research advisor and committee members. This form, which is submitted to the Graduate School each spring, provides for an "Advisory Committee Assessment of Student Progress and Needs" where faculty most directly involved in the student's performance and understanding of professional ethics can make recommendations to the Graduate Committee and the student for follow-up study as needed. If there are particular concerns about a student's ethical behavior or demonstrated problems with his or her employment of professional ethics in research or GA work, they can be articulated here.
- 4) All students write either a thesis or significant non-thesis research paper as the culmination of their research experience in the MA program. The thesis path consists of the student working with a primary supervisor and a committee to develop a year-long plan for the researching and writing of a significant piece of original historical work. The non-thesis research project requires the student to work only with a primary advisor, but also on a project designed to contribute an original piece of scholarly history. For both tracks, however, students are

instructed and evaluated on the professional and ethical use of sources and their citation.

- 5) Thesis and non-thesis research projects are evaluated using standard evaluation forms, available to students and faculty on the MA program website. One of the four criteria upon which students' thesis and non-thesis research projects are evaluated by their committees and advisors is "Demonstrated proficiency with appropriate discipline-based methodologies, analyses and technologies." If an advisor or committee has concerns about plagiarism, professional misconduct, or the improper citation of sources, it can be noted on this document. This document is publicly available to students and mentors throughout the writing process, providing a reminder to all that issues of scholarly integrity should be incorporated into the mentoring, writing, and revision of the thesis or non-thesis project. If a student still fails to achieve a satisfactory rating on this form, he or she must continue to revise the thesis or non-thesis project until it meets the standards of the thesis committee. Students cannot graduate with an MA in History until they have completed the thesis or non-thesis research project satisfactorily.

Finally, in an effort to strengthen the History Department's already strong commitment to conveying knowledge about plagiarism and professional standards within our discipline, we will add to our "Policies and Procedures" document, with which all students are very familiar, a section on "Professional Ethics" which will include links to the Virginia Tech definition of plagiarism and the Honor Code, as well as links to the professional standards for citation and avoidance of plagiarism provided by the American Historical Association. As noted, this document will be given to students during Orientation and the document will be available to download from the MA program website.

### **3. Ethical standards in teaching, mentoring, and professional activities**

The History Department will undertake several measures to inform graduate students of their ethical responsibilities as teachers and mentors. We will also require graduate students to engage in professional activities that will enhance their understanding of and direct experience with ethical standards for professional comportment as an historian. Once again, we will do this through instructional techniques, providing actual hands-on experience, and through evaluation of students' work.

To meet this requirement, the History Department will require all incoming graduate students to attend the GTA training workshop, whether they will be serving immediately as GTAs in our department or not. The GTA workshop includes instructional modules on ethical issues in the classroom, thus giving all our students exposure to these issues.

In addition, the department already provides several outlets to expose graduate students to ethical issues of teaching and mentoring.

- 1) The department's GA experience: All of our GAs get similar classroom experience working with faculty over the course of their time in the History

- Department. As part of this experience, graduate students learn how to interact with undergraduates ethically and how to ethically evaluate student work, provide feedback, and work with the institution to provide necessary services to students with different types of needs.
- 2) GTAs in the History Department are evaluated on their GTA work in their “Annual Review of Student Progress.” If there are any ethical issues with the student’s GTA responsibilities, they can be recorded in this place and the Director of Graduate Studies can follow up with the student regarding any areas of improvement.
  - 3) GTA Workshop: All new GTAs in History are required to attend a departmental workshop on GTA duties in addition to the University workshop before they begin their first semester of duties. This workshop reinforces the guidance they received through the University workshop and provides GTAs with information about steps to take if questions of an ethical nature arise.
  - 4) Teaching/Mentoring Support Group: We currently have within the department a teaching/mentoring support group for faculty and graduate students that meets roughly bi-weekly throughout the academic year. It is designed to be an informal environment for discussion of the challenges we face as teachers and mentors. Graduate students are encouraged to attend and engage in the discussion about issues that they are personally facing in the classroom while they also are made aware of the ethical problems and the solutions found by others.
  - 5) Mentoring for teaching one’s own class: The History Department offers graduate students the voluntary opportunity to teach their own course in their final semester in the MA program. For those who wish to do so, we have developed a GTA mentoring network to pair the graduate student with a faculty advisor in the field in which the student will be teaching. The student shadows the faculty member in a course for a semester, and the faculty member provides the student with mentoring on what to expect when teaching a course for the first time.

Graduate students in history receive exposure to and experience with ethical standards of professional activities through their required engagement with the History Department’s annual Brian Bertoti Innovative Perspectives in History graduate conference. This conference is organized and run by the History Graduate Student Association (HGSA) of which all of our MA students are members, and supervised by the History Department’s Director of Graduate Studies (and incorporated as part of professional development into HIST 5134: Research Methods for Historians). In participating in this conference, graduate students learn how to ethically:

- 1) develop and implement a budget for a professional event
- 2) solicit abstracts, select papers and organize panels
- 3) book and support guest speakers
- 4) select award recipients for paper prizes
- 5) present their own research to a scholarly audience

Through participation in HGSA and implementation of the Bertoti conference, all of our MA students receive exposure to the ethical standards and procedures for professional

activity in academic history.

#### **4. Available avenues for reporting alleged misconduct**

Avenues for reporting alleged professional or ethical misconduct will be provided to students in two ways:

- 1) We will incorporate information about how to report misconduct both through Virginia Tech channels and through the American Historical Association as part of the instructional session on plagiarism and professional ethics in the Historical Methods (HIST 5104) course that all MA students in History are required to take
- 2) We will provide this same information in our “Policies and Procedures” document with which all our students are familiar and to which they have unimpeded access on the history graduate program website.

Through the implementation of the above plan, graduate students in the MA program in History will have a multifaceted exposure to and experience with the professional ethics and integrity requirements in our field.