

Proposal for a Ph.D. Field in African history

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The faculty members in African history propose the creation of a doctoral field in African history. There are several important justifications for this. First, considerable demand exists for the training of specialists in African history. According to data from the American Historical Association, African history is one of the few fields in which academic job openings exceed the number of new history Ph.D.'s.¹ History departments usually ranked above ours have at least small graduate fields in African history, and a strong field in African history may enhance the national ranking of the Department.² Indeed, because most African history graduate fields are in fact small, and given the constellation of relevant resources at UNC, an African history field here could soon become one of the strongest in the United States. Resources to implement and sustain an African history Ph.D. field exist both within and outside of the Department. Within the Department, there are now three specialists in African history: Emily Burrill (Francophone West Africa, gender history, legal history); Lauren Jarvis (South Africa, religious history); and Lisa Lindsay (Anglophone West Africa, slave trade, African diaspora). Other faculty (Claude Clegg, Susan Pennybacker, Don Reid) teach courses or conduct research with links to African history, while some graduate students in other fields (notably modern Europe, global history, and African American history) seek to augment their credentials with African history training. The African History field will have the same milestone requirements as the other fields in the History Graduate Program. What follows is a brief description of the field-specific expectations for students in the African History program as they relate to these general milestone requirements, as well as some reasons why we think this will become a very successful field within the graduate program.

Structure of the Field

The structure of the field is intended to provide broad training in African history (premodern and modern), while enabling specialization by geographic area and theme. In regard to written comprehensive examinations, students admitted in African history will

¹ While overall the number of advertised new academic jobs fell below half the number of history Ph.D.s conferred, African history represented 4.4% of the job listings and 2.7% of new Ph.D.s (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2016/the-troubled-academic-job-market-for-history>). In 2004, 21 people earned Ph.D.s in African history; 29 did in 2009; and 32 did in 2014 (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2016/nsf16300/data/tab13.pdf>). In 2012, 30 African history PhDs were awarded, and 40 new academic positions in African history were advertised (<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2014/the-2013-jobs-report-number-of-aha-ads-dip-new-experiment-offers-expanded-view>).

² <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-humanities-schools/history-rankings>

be required to complete a total of three comprehensive exam clusters (detailed below), all of which will require formal examination.

Naturally, students will be expected to complete a substantial amount of coursework in African history, along with the courses required of all Ph.D. students in the Department. Two graduate-level courses in African history already exist: Hist 719 (Readings in African History) and Hist 815 (Topics in African History), in addition to several 500-level courses on African history that would include undergraduates as well as graduate students. We imagine that Hist 719 would be taught approximately every two years as an introduction to the field for new Africanists as well as graduate students in other fields and other departments seeking expertise in African history. Hist 815 may also be taught every two years, alternating with Hist 719, as a readings and research seminar for African history students at various stages of their graduate careers. Existing or future thematic courses such as “Gender and Imperialism” may also be appropriate for Africanist graduate students. Graduate students in African history will have to rely upon directed readings courses for some of their coursework, which Africanist faculty are prepared to support.

In addition to students from the History Department, graduate students from other departments pursuing a Certificate in African Studies (housed in the AAAD department) or on FLAS fellowships which require coursework in area studies will likely take graduate courses in African history. Indeed, the African History field will benefit – and benefit from – any graduate degree that may emerge from the AAAD department, as well as a host of other graduate programs on campus that involve the study of Africa.

Guidelines for Comprehensive Examinations

As with other graduate students in History, the practical goals of the comprehensive examinations are preparation for teaching, dissertation writing, and scholarly discourse, which requires breadth of knowledge as well as particular expertise. Normally, the exams will test a student’s understanding of approximately 100 books (or book equivalents), to be determined by consultation with individual faculty members.

Students will prepare for three exams:

- 1) modern African history
- 2) premodern African history
- 3) another field to be determined by the student, which may be a thematic or geographic field focused on Africa or another part of the world.

Students will take the examinations over a two-week period (one to two exams per week). For each of these exams, the student will receive questions to answer over the course of a twenty-four hour period, under the assumption that the time students spend on writing each exam will be limited to eight hours in that twenty-four hour period. The length of each exam’s response is limited to no more than ten double-spaced typed pages. Students may use whatever books, notes, and other aids they have prepared, and may take

the exams at whatever time during the semester that they pre-arrange with the examining faculty. Students should sign an honor code statement before submitting their answers.

Faculty reading the exams will assign graduate grades to each of its parts. In the event a student receives a grade of L on one part of the comprehensives, he or she will receive a passing grade on the exam, providing the student demonstrates competency in the area during the oral defense of the dissertation prospectus. A student receiving a failing grade (F) on one part of the exam will be allowed to retake that part within six months. A student receiving grades of L or F on two or more parts of the exam will be assigned a grade of fail for the entire exam, and will be allowed to retake it no sooner than three months and no later than six months after having first sat the exam.

Foreign Languages

The African field will follow the Department's language requirements for the Ph.D.: either (1) minimal proficiency in two foreign languages; (2) advanced proficiency in one foreign language; or (3) minimal proficiency in one foreign language and successful completion of a two-course field designed to develop proficiency in a research skill or theoretical perspective. For students in African history, one of the proficient languages should be French, Portuguese, Dutch, German, or Arabic; it is desirable but not required that students also develop proficiency in a language of African origin. Lingala, Kiswahili, and Wolof are offered at UNC, as are Arabic, French, Portuguese, and a range of other languages. Summer study in other African languages is also possible, both in North America and elsewhere.

Administration of the Field

The faculty members in the African field will administer the doctoral field, and they will be responsible for selecting a convener for the field, although in accordance with Departmental policy the Chair of the Department will have the ultimate responsibility for appointing the convener.

During the admissions process, all faculty members in the African field will read all of the applications for the field.

New Responsibilities for Faculty Members in the African Field

The comparatively small number of faculty members in the African field requires that they communicate regularly among themselves to coordinate plans for future teaching schedules and research leaves in order to ensure that an adequate number of seminars and opportunities for independent reading courses will be available to their graduate students each year.

Graduate Student Funding

In this era of fiscal austerity, it is important to point out the relatively robust sources of funding already in place that would be available for Ph.D. students in African history. At UNC these include FLAS fellowships (<http://africa.unc.edu/students/flas/flas.asp>), which support language and other training for a year at a time, as well as funding from the Center for Global Initiatives and other centers on campus. Students undertaking dissertation research abroad will be eligible for Fulbright, Fulbright-Hays, SSRC, and other fellowships, many earmarked specifically for research in Africa. Recent graduate students in other fields of history who have applied for nationally-competitive fellowships to conduct research in Africa (Mark Reeves, Joel Hebert, and Laura Premack) have all received major awards.

Within the department, African history graduate students will be ideal Teaching Assistants for Hist 130 (Modern Africa) and Hist 278 (the Transatlantic Slave Trade), both of which regularly enroll 100-165 undergraduates, as well as for Hist 140 (The World Since 1945).

Resources

Considerable resources at both UNC and at neighboring universities are available to support a doctoral field in African history on this campus, as described below.

UNC's African Studies Center (<http://africa.unc.edu/>): This federally-funded Title VI center serves as a campus hub for interdisciplinary inquiry and communication on Africa, including the sponsorship of a wide variety of activities that bring together interested faculty and students from a large number of academic disciplines, focusing on the interconnected issues of political change, expressive culture, gender, sustainability, health, and Islam. The Center offers FLAS fellowships for graduate students studying Arabic, Lingala, Kiswahili, and Wolof. The fact that the Center's Director, Emily Burrill, is a member of the History Department would help to ensure that a Ph.D. field in African history would be well connected to this important resource.

Faculty in other departments: Numerous faculty throughout the University focus on Africa. Graduate students in African history may be particularly interested in courses or consultations with Profs. Lydia Boyd (AAAD), Pamela Jagger (Public Policy), Thomas Kelley (Law), Michael Lambert (Anthropology), Paul Leslie (Anthropology), Carol Magee (Art), Lucy Martin (Political Science), Chérie Rivers Ndaliko (Music), Georges Nzongola (AAAD), David Pier (AAAD), Victoria Rovine (Art History), Eunice Sahle (AAAD), Bereket Selassie (AAAD), and Brigitte Zimmerman (Public Policy).

Faculty at Duke: Janet Ewald (History), Bruce Hall (History), Tsitsi Jaji (English), Anne-Maria Makhulu (Anthropology), J. Lorand Matory (Anthropology), Louise Meintjes

(Music), Charles Piot (Anthropology), and Karin Shapiro (AAAS) are all distinguished Africanists who may be consulted by UNC graduate students.

Triangle exchanges: Africanist faculty and graduate students from all of the area universities convene regularly for the Triangle African Studies Seminar as well as other seminars, colloquia, talks, and events. This would continue and perhaps increase if UNC's History Department offered a Ph.D. field in African history.

Library: Between UNC's collections (described at <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/africahome>), Duke's, and Interlibrary Borrowing, researchers have access to an enormous range of library resources for African history. UNC Libraries has an Africana librarian currently on staff.