

# HISTORY

**Director of undergraduate studies:** Daniel Magaziner (daniel.magaziner@yale.edu) [spring 2026], Anne Eller (anne.eller@yale.edu), [fall 2026, spring 2027], Humanities Quadrangle, 320 York Street, 2nd Floor, 432-2724; history.yale.edu

The History major is for students who understand that shaping the future requires knowing the past. History courses explore many centuries of human experimentation and ingenuity, from the global to the individual scale. History majors learn to be effective storytellers and analysts, and to craft arguments that speak to broad audiences. They make extensive use of Yale's vast library resources to create pioneering original research projects. Students of history learn to think about politics and government, sexuality, the economy, cultural and intellectual life, war and society, and other themes in broadly humanistic – rather than narrowly technocratic – ways.

History is one of Yale College's most popular and intellectually diverse majors, encompassing nearly every region and time period of the global past. The study of history is excellent preparation for careers in many fields, including law, journalism, business and finance, education, politics and public policy, social activism, and the arts.

## COURSE NUMBERING

History undergraduate courses are numbered 0000–4999. The first digit indicates the course's level; courses that begin with 0 (zero) are first-year seminars, with enrollment limited to eighteen. Courses that begin with the number 1 are lectures. Courses that begin with the number 2 are either (a) more advanced lectures, some of which might include WR credit (b) seminars cross-listed with other departments, or (c) reading or historiography focused seminars that do not require substantial work with primary sources. Courses that begin with the number 3 are departmental seminars; these courses combine reading, research, and writing and are intended to prepare students for their Senior Essay. All departmental seminars prioritize History major enrollment and are available for preregistration by History majors. Departmental seminars are capped at fifteen students; many carry WR credit. Courses that begin with the number 4 are senior requirement courses and independent studies.

Each course's second digit indicates its region: x1xx courses explore the history of the United States or Canada; x2xx, Europe, Russia, and Britain; x3xx Africa (Sub-Saharan), x4xx Asia, x5xx Latin America, and x6xx Middle East/North Africa. x7xx courses address comparative, transnational, or global topics. Thus, 16xx indicates a lecture on the Middle East/North Africa, 31xx is a departmental seminar on the United States or Canada, and so on.

## PREREQUISITE

The prerequisite for the major is two course credits in History. Courses completed in fulfillment of the prerequisite may be applied toward the requirements of the major. (Directed Studies history and philosophy courses count automatically as history prerequisites.)

## REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

**Students are held to the requirements in place when they declared their major.** However, with approval from the DUS, the following requirements, updated for the academic year 2025-2026, may be fulfilled by students who declared the major in a prior term.

See Links to the attributes indicating courses approved for the History major requirements.

Twelve course credits in History are required, including prerequisites and the senior requirement. Upon declaration, all History majors select either the global or the specialist concentration. The global concentration is designed for students seeking a broad understanding of major trends in the history of human societies throughout the world. The specialist concentration is for students seeking to focus in a particular geographic region, such as the United States, or in a thematic pathway, such as empires and colonialism. Majors may change concentrations until the end of the course selection period in the second term of the junior year.

*The global concentration* requires one course credit in five of the six different geographic regions (see below). Students must also take two preindustrial course credits, covering material before the mid-19th century (and no later than 1900), and two 3000-level departmental seminars.

*The specialist concentration* requires at least five (and up to eight) course credits in a particular geographic region or in a thematic pathway (see list below). Courses appropriate for each region and pathway are listed on the department website. Students must also take at least two course credits outside their area of specialization, and their overall coursework must include at least three geographic regions. Like students in the global concentration, students in the specialist concentration must take two preindustrial course credits, and at least two 3000-level departmental seminars. Students in the specialist concentration may design an area of specialization with the approval of a faculty adviser and the DUS.

Regions: Africa (Sub-Saharan), Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East/North Africa, and United States/Canada.

Pathways: cultural history; empires and colonialism; environmental history; ideas and intellectuals; international and diplomatic history (formerly international history); politics, law, and government (formerly politics and law); race, gender, and sexuality; religion in context; science, technology, and medicine; social change and social movements; war and society; the world economy

Students in either concentration may count the same courses toward geographical, preindustrial, and seminar requirements. For instance, a departmental seminar on premodern Japan simultaneously fulfills the preindustrial, departmental seminar, and Asia geographical requirements.

**Departmental seminars** All students who declare the History major are entitled to preregister for 3000-level departmental seminars. Many seminars are popular and fill up quickly. Students may use their preregistration privileges at any time after declaring the major, in their sophomore, junior, or senior years. Sophomores contemplating study abroad are urged to take at least one seminar in the sophomore year. Residential

College Seminars, study abroad courses, 2000-level seminars, and courses in other departments that count toward the History major do not fulfill the departmental seminar requirement, although they can satisfy other requirements (preindustrial, region, pathway, etc.) Students cannot preregister for 2000-level seminars during departmental preregistration.

**Distinction in the major** Students who receive an A or A- on the two-term senior essay and who receive the requisite grades in their remaining coursework are awarded Distinction in the Major. (See The Undergraduate Curriculum, Honors.) Students who do not complete the two-term senior essay are not eligible for Distinction.

**Credit/D/Fail** History majors may count up to two lecture course credits or non-3000 seminars taken Cr/D/F toward the requirements of the major. Departmental seminars may not be taken Cr/D/F. (Writers of one-term senior essays may opt to take their 11th course Cr/D/F. Please see one-term senior essay below.)

**Outside credit** Courses taken at another institution or during an approved summer or term-time study abroad program may count toward the major requirements with DUS approval.

#### SENIOR REQUIREMENT

Students in the History major are not passive consumers of historical knowledge: they create original works of history themselves. As seniors, History majors complete a work of original research in close consultation with a faculty adviser. The range of acceptable topics and methodological approaches is wide. The aim is to take on study of a significant historical subject through research in accessible primary source materials.

Most students choose to write a two-term independent senior essay, for two course credits toward the major. The two-term essay is required to earn Distinction in the Major. A smaller number of students choose to write an independent one-term senior essay, for one course credit toward the major.

**The one-term senior essay** History majors may choose to write a one-term independent senior essay during the fall term under the guidance of a faculty adviser. However, students who choose the one-term option are not eligible for Distinction in the Major or history prizes. The one-term essay is a substantial research paper (roughly half the length of the two-term senior essay) based on primary sources, along with a bibliographic essay. Seniors receive course credit for their senior essays by enrolling in HIST 4997 during the first-semester of their senior year. In rare circumstances, with permission of the adviser and senior essay director, a student enrolled in HIST 4997 during the first term may withdraw from the course in accordance with Yale College regulations on course withdrawal and enroll in HIST 4997 during the second term. Even more rarely, students might register for HIST 4997 during their second term, with prior arrangement with both their adviser and the Senior Essay director. Additional details about the senior essay are provided in the Senior Essay Handbook, available on the History website. Students writing a one-term essay must enroll in one additional full-credit course, of any sort, for a total of 12 History credits (11 courses + one-term essay). This additional course can be taken Cr/D/F, bringing the potential total to three such Cr/D/F courses, unless the additional course is a departmental seminar.

**The two-term senior essay** History majors seeking to earn Distinction in the Major must complete a two-term independent senior essay under the guidance of a faculty adviser. The typical senior essay is 40–50 pages (no more than 12,500 words), plus a bibliography and bibliographical essay. Seniors receive two course credits for their departmental essays by enrolling in HIST 4995 (first term of senior year) and HIST 4996 (second term of senior year). The grade for the final essay, determined by an outside reader in consultation with the faculty adviser, is applied retroactively to both terms. Additional details about the senior essay are provided in the Senior Essay Handbook, available on the History website. History majors graduating in December may begin their two-term senior essay in the spring term and complete the senior essay during fall term.

**Additional option for the senior essay** Some students embark on the two-term essay but discover that their choice is not a good fit. Students who enroll in HIST 4995 during the first term may opt out in consultation with their faculty adviser and the senior essay director. This decision must be made in accordance with Yale College regulations on course withdrawal. Instead, the student will enroll in HIST 4997 in the spring term to write a one-term senior essay. Students who opt out will not be eligible for Distinction in the Major or History prizes. Additional details about the senior essay are provided in the Senior Essay Handbook, available on the History website.

**Alternative senior essay option** In addition to the one-semester and two-semester essay, the department will occasionally accept an alternative senior project that is not an extended written essay, with the approval of the Senior Essay Director, an adviser and a second reader. Such alternatives must be based on extensive research with primary and secondary sources. Students completing such projects must consult with experts in their chosen medium, in addition to the faculty members delineated above. Alternative projects will require a proposal (due by the end of the first month of the student's senior year) and a substantial piece of historical writing (~ 5,000 words) to complement the alternative project. Both components will be considered when assessing and grading the project. These will be two-semester projects only and will be eligible for distinction in the major. Seniors receive two course credits for their departmental projects by enrolling in HIST 4995 (first term of senior year) and HIST 4996 (second term of senior year).

**Advising** All students who declare the History major are assigned an adviser from among the departmental faculty. The adviser is available throughout the year for consultation about courses and the major. Students in the global concentration are assigned an adviser from the general History faculty. Students may request a specific adviser in consultation with the DUS, though the department cannot always accommodate such requests. In addition, a small group of advanced undergraduate students serve as peer advisors and are available to assist students in navigating the major.

**Course substitution** History majors are permitted to include up to two courses (for two credits) taught outside the department toward fulfillment of the major, with the approval of the DUS. Non-departmental courses may fulfill geographic, region/pathway, and preindustrial distribution requirements. They may not fulfill Departmental Seminar or senior requirements.

**Simultaneous B.A./M.A. degree program** Exceptional students may be able to structure their undergraduate programs to become eligible for a simultaneous master's degree in selected graduate programs. Students must successfully complete relevant graduate course requirements and earn qualitative grades of Honors, High Pass, or Pass. At least two grades of Honors are required, and all grades must average High Pass in order to fulfill requirements for the master's degree.

Interested students should consult with both the DUS and DGS prior to submitting the online application, which is due no later than the last day of classes in their fifth term of enrollment in Yale College. Students should also review the GSAS Degree-Granting Departments and Programs page and select the relevant program for specific requirements and application information.

## SUMMARY OF MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

**Prerequisites** 2 course credits in History

**Number of courses** 12 course credits (incl prereqs and senior req)

**Distribution of courses** *Both concentrations* – 2 course credits in preindustrial hist as specified; 2 departmental seminars; *Global concentration* – 1 course credit in 5 of 6 geographical regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, U.S.); *Specialist concentration* – at least 5 course credits in specific region or pathway; overall coursework must include 3 regions

**Substitution permitted** 1 or 2 non-departmental course credits approved by DUS

**Senior requirement** 1-term senior essay (HIST 4997) or 2-term senior essay (HIST 4995 and 4996), or alternative 2-term senior project (HIST 4995 and 4996), if approved

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