Since becoming the Program Director for Norwich’s Graduate History programs, I have reviewed hundreds of application files. During that time, I have been very impressed with the quality and diverse backgrounds of our students. While the majority of applications are quite strong, a small portion of them have been problematic or subpar and result in a rejection. It is my hope that this information sheet outlining our expectations will be of assistance to those who are applying to our program.

Applying to graduate school is serious business and not something to be taken lightly. As Program Director, I am responsible to many different parties. One of my primary responsibilities is to offer students a rigorous graduate level education in history that prepares them for work as historians and teachers or for advanced study at military staff colleges and PhD programs. As Program Director, I must also protect the value and reputation of our degree on behalf of Norwich University, its students and alumni. It is vital that our MA in Military History and History degrees are well respected by other academic institutions that might consider our alumni for teaching positions or as students in history PhD programs. Finally I also have a responsibility to our applicants. Our program is very challenging. I have no desire to select someone for our program who does not have the skills required for success and is likely to be dismissed from the program for academic reasons.

In the business world, it is important to have a professional, accurate and convincing resume that outlines your skills and accomplishments. When called for a job interview it is important to present yourself as a professional that has the character and skills required for the job. Applying to graduate school is a serious affair and your approach should be just as careful, serious and professional. Your application must convince us that you have the skills and character required to succeed in our graduate program and that you have what it takes to join the community of academic historians.

- James Ehrman, PhD
  Program Director
What are the minimum standards for admission?

The Norwich University MA in Military History and History programs require applicants to have a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution and an undergraduate grade point average of 2.75 or higher. We do not require the Graduate Record Examination. Meeting or exceeding our minimum requirements, however, does not guarantee admission to our program. We review a wide range of factors when making our admissions decisions such as life experience, undergraduate grade point averages, letters of recommendation, and analytical reasoning and graduate level writing skills.

How important is my undergraduate grade point average?

Grade point averages are certainly one important component of your application package but, under certain circumstances, can be unreliable predictors of an applicant’s prospects for success in our program. If you are fresh out of an undergraduate program your grade point average does tend to indicate your seriousness as a student and your ability to handle the level of work in a MA in History program. In those cases we do put a great deal of weight on your undergraduate GPA. If your GPA is less than ideal it is important you explain why your undergraduate GPA was not high, (i.e. 2.75 or higher) and why you believe you are prepared to tackle graduate work in the field of history.

For those applicants that have not been in college for many years, the undergraduate GPA is a less useful guide. Although older GPAs are a less useful predictor of success in our program, an explanation in your statement of intent regarding undergraduate GPAs lower than 2.75 is helpful. In those instances we look closely at what you have done in the intervening years. If an old GPA is less than spectacular but the applicant has an impressive record in business, education or the military, it certainly demonstrates that the applicant is serious, has an admirable work ethic and went on to develop important skills after earning the baccalaureate degree.
What is required in the statement of intent?

This short writing assignment is your opportunity to let us get to know you as a person, understand why you are applying to the program and evaluate your writing skills. The statement of intent should be approximately one to one and half pages in length, single spaced and include the following:

Part 1:

A: What has inspired you to pursue your master’s at this particular point in your career?

B. Why are you choosing this particular degree?

C. Why does the Norwich program appeal to you?

D. The writing and research in the program has been described as “above and beyond”, how will you make this work with your current schedule?

E. What are a few potential barriers to hinder your progress, and how are you prepared to overcome those (please do not leave out any detail)?

Part 2:

As you complete all your application materials, please keep in mind that this is a professional level degree in history. Critical thinking, argument, analysis and criticism are the lifeblood of the historical profession. Norwich faculty will provide critical feedback and evaluation of your work and strong criticism and disagreement will likely form a fundamental part of your career in the field of history. You will provide significant criticism of the works of others, and others will critique your work. Note that these outcomes are not personal but part of your professional development as you take your part in a process and profession bigger than any one individual; these outcomes help the profession as a whole move forward.

How do you feel about improving your work based on critical feedback, first by professors who intend for you to grow, advance and become the best scholar you can be, and second, after you obtain your degree, by other academicians who may strongly disagree with your work?
The statement of intent should be addressed to the Program Director, not your Admissions Advisor.

**What about letters of recommendation?**

Your application requires, at minimum, one letter of recommendation. Ideally it should be from someone who is familiar with your academic work and can authoritatively address your academic skills and abilities. A letter of recommendation from a former professor is best. If it has been many years since you earned your baccalaureate degree then a letter of recommendation from a supervisor, commanding officer or business associate familiar with your work and character are certainly sufficient. Letters of recommendation where the applicant has waived their right to access the letter are considered more seriously than those where the applicant has not waived the right to access.

Letters of recommendation should be typed on official stationary and provide the mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address of the person writing on your behalf. If the person does not have stationary or cannot use official letterhead, then a neatly typed letter that provides the contact information of the author will suffice. It is very important the author provide the means for us to contact him/her so we may verify the authenticity of the letter of recommendation and ask further questions. All letters of recommendation should include the signature of the author.

A letter of recommendation form that includes a grid rating your skills should also be filled out by the person recommending you to our program and attached to the letter of recommendation. Unless the person was in a position to evaluate your academic skills and abilities they probably should not weigh in on your ability to do graduate work in history. Being rated below the top 10% in a particular area does not necessarily jeopardize your chances of being admitted to the program and also suggests the person writing on your behalf is providing a credible evaluation of your skills. To be frank, forms indicating you are within the top 10% of each category are generally greeted with deep skepticism unless other items in the application file appear to support such an evaluation. In a nutshell, we are looking for honest, credible assessments of your skills and character. Waiving your right to access the letter and grid will also encourage an honest assessment.

**What is required in the writing sample?**

The most important piece of your application file is your essay. A high undergraduate GPA, strong letters of recommendation and impressive resume mean very little if your essay does not demonstrate graduate level writing and analytical skills. I have rejected applicants with high undergraduate GPA’s and letters of recommendation indicating the candidate was in the top 10% of every category when their essay was very poorly written. In those instances, the low quality of the essay suggests the letters of recommendation are not credible, grade inflation was rampant at the applicant’s undergraduate institution and the applicant is not prepared to do graduate level work in history.
A well written essay should feature a clear and compelling argument, use evidence to support the argument, proper Chicago Manual of Style documentation, a high level analysis of the issue, and be free of grammar errors.

The elements I look for in an admissions essay are analysis, synthesis, argument and significance (ASAS). Narrative essays that simply tell the reader what happened do not impress me and do not demonstrate graduate level skills. In graduate level writing it is important to make an argument, support it with facts and analysis, utilize different scholarly sources of information, and demonstrate the significance of your argument.

Remember, the essay is the most important element of your application package. Take your time and do not rush through this requirement. Be sure to follow all the instructions provided. Proofread your paper multiple times, use the spell and grammar check and have a friend or spouse proofread your paper. If you do not already have one it is a good idea to pick up an inexpensive grammar and citation guide. Every professional should have one at their desk! For example, Kate Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations, is an excellent resource to have on hand for questions of grammar, writing, and proper Chicago style documentation. It is readily available online via places like amazon.com and a new version is generally less than $10.

**Important Note for Applicants:**

The application essay comes with explicit instructions. Failure to read and follow instructions tells us a great deal about an applicant and suggests they will not read instructions or feedback if admitted into the program. If you select an essay requiring books, we expect you to limit yourself to those books. If it requires you to access and analyze documents on a specific Internet primary source archive we expect you to limit yourself to the materials on that site. If you have questions about the instructions please confer with your Admissions Advisor.
Admissions Essay Criteria:

Choose one question below and write an essay on that topic. Use only the books cited below each question for your essay. The essay should be approximately 5-6 pages in length, double-spaced with 1 inch margins. Applicants should utilize the Chicago Manual of Style system of documentation for footnotes/endnotes and bibliographic citations. Here is the link to more information for the Chicago Manual of Style: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html

Tip: The book and article dissections described in the MMH/MAH Survival Guide can be useful tools in helping you identify and summarize the arguments of the books required for your essay.

Bibliographic citations for the books you will need to write your admissions essay are available below. You may use any available edition of the books required for the essay.

MMH Admissions Essay Questions:

1. Given the power and status of the European nations in the year 1400, Europe’s rise to world hegemony in the period 1400-1914 appears both unlikely and surprising. The factors that account for this development are the fodder for intense debates among historians. Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs and Steel*, and Victor Davis Hanson, in *Carnage and Culture* offer two startling different arguments that attempt to explain the rise of the West. Outline the arguments of both Hanson and Diamond, analyze their strengths and weaknesses and indicate what argument is more credible and convincing. Be sure to outline why you believe one author is more convincing than the other.


2. The use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the topic of intense debate among historians of the Second World War and early Cold War. Compare and contrast the argument put forward by Gar Alperovitz in *The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb* with the argument Richard Frank presents in *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*. What interpretation is most convincing and why?

3. A long running debate among academic military historians concerns the concept of “military revolutions” and their relationship to the rise of the European nation states. Select three essays from Clifford Rogers’ book *Military Revolutions: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*. Compare and contrast the arguments of each essay and demonstrate which argument you find most convincing and why.


4. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident of August 2 and 4, 1964 was an important watershed event in the deepening American involvement in Vietnam. The Johnson Administration capitalized on these incidents to vastly expand American involvement in Vietnam. Using primary source documents available online at the National Security Archive at George Washington University (see link to documents below). Write an essay to determine whether or not the Johnson Administration deliberately distorted information regarding action in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964.


5. One of the most controversial decisions of the Second World War was the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Using some of the primary source documents available online at the National Security Archive at George Washington University, (see link to document below) develop an argument either for or against the use of the atom bomb. Was deterrence of the Soviet Union a major factor in President Truman’s decision to use the weapon?

- [http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/index.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/index.htm)

6. The Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan proved a long and painful experience between 1979 and 1987. In an essay based on the documents listed below, outline the primary reason why Soviet nation building efforts failed in Afghanistan and what, if anything, they could have done differently to pacify the country.

- [http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/us.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/us.html)
- [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP60_Web_Final.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP60_Web_Final.pdf)
MAH Admissions Essay Question:

If you are applying for the Master of Arts in History program, the question below was designed specifically for this program. However, should you prefer to use any of the seven questions designed for the Master of Arts in Military History program, you are welcome to do so.

1. Historians of the American Revolution have disagreed on whether to characterize the revolution as radical or conservative. Compare and contrast the arguments of Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood and make and build an argument for which interpretation is most convincing.