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. 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 who 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
Chair of Graduate Programs, College of Graduate and Continuing Studies Norwich University
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 an 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 who 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 stationery and provide the mailing address, telephone number, and email address of the person writing on your behalf. If the person does not have stationery 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 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 GPAs 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](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. Did an American “Way of War” exist, if at all, during American military history from 1775 to 1973? Using Russell Weigley’s famous thesis in *The American Way of War*, please agree or disagree. First outline Weigley’s definition and explain his two key case studies in American military history. Then give your own definition of a “way of war” or “ways of war” that supports, refutes, and modifies Weigley’s thesis using the same case studies or two other case studies in American military history. Why or why not?


2. To what degree was the American Civil War a “modern” and/or “total war”? First define these terms. Then take sides with either Charles Royster’s *The Destructive War* or with Mark Grimsley’s *Hard Hand of War*, or synthesize these two authors. Which one or do both argue that the Civil War was “modern” and/or “total”? Why or why not?

3. Please read Why the Allies Won by R.J. Overy and World War Two: A Military History by Jeremy Black. Understanding an event as complex and comprehensive as World War II involves two questions: why and how. Why depends on abstractions and categories, such subjects as ideologies, economics, diplomacy, politics. How focuses on agency, on volition: decisions and their interactions. Why emphasizes determinism, necessitarianism. One approach is object-oriented, the other human-centered. Overy discusses why the Allies won. Black addresses the how. Which of these approaches seems to be a more accurate interpretation of the Second World War?


4. Using R.C. Smail’s Crusading Warfare and John France’s Victory in the East, answer the following questions. Was there a ‘Western Way of War” during the Crusades? If so, explain its major strategic and tactical aspects; if not, explain why. How did these compare or contrast with the Muslim manner of warfare? Comment on the success or failure of the Crusading enterprise based on these military aspects.


5. Please define the historical construct “military revolution” as used in Geoffrey Parker’s The Military Revolution and Peter Lorge’s The Asian Military Revolution. Then please determine which author strikes the better balance of factors such as technology, political systems, commerce, and/or state development. Why or why not? In other words, which author offers the most complete picture of the “military revolution” in each respective region?

American History Admission Essay Questions:

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 in Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* with Gordon Wood’s *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* and then make an argument for which of their interpretations is more convincing.


2. Historians of antebellum slavery vary widely in their approach to the institution of slavery. Compare and contrast Genovese and Gutman’s analysis of the institution of slavery on both masters and slaves. What elements of slaves’ lives were shaped primarily by the institution of slavery and white culture and which were shaped by continuities that can be traced back to Africa?


3. In the face of the Great Depression, the newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered a “New Deal” to the American people in 1933. His programs have been praised and criticized over the decades as being revolutionary. Was the New Deal a revolutionary or evolutionary development? Why or why not? Please read Alan Brinkley’s *End of Reform* and William Leuchtenberg’s *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940*. Pick one author or synthesize them to answer the question.

4. By the early 20th century, Progressivism emerged as the dominant reaction in the United States to that new century’s advances in technologies, politics, international relations, social reforms, medical treatments, educational methodologies, etc. But, why didn’t the Progressive movement rise decades earlier in the 1870s and 1880s? To answer this question about the origins of the Progressive, please read Robert Wiebe’s *Search for Order* and Nell Painter’s *Standing at Armageddon*. Be sure to define “Progressivism” for each author.


5. Read John Lewis Gaddis’ *Strategies of Containment* and Walter LaFeber’s *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1984*. Which author offered the most realistic interpretation of Cold War diplomacy from 1945 until 1975? Why or why not? Please use each author to define the term “Cold War.” In assessing which interpretation is more realistic, please address topics such as political realism, ideology, economics, commerce, and/or others in the context of when Gaddis and LaFeber wrote their books in the 1980s.


6. What did American women experience on the “frontier” during the westward movement in the 19th century? What degree of agency did they have, if any? Please compare, contrast, or synthesize Glenda Riley’s *Female Frontier* with Linda Peavy and Ursual Smith’s *Pioneer Women*. First define the term “frontier” for each author.

World History Essay Questions:

1. What roles did African women play in revolutions in Africa? Please read Cora Ann Presley’s *Kikuyu Women, the Mau Mau Rebellion, and Social Change in Kenya* as a case study to answer this question. Then, as a follow-on question, to what degree were women’s roles in the Mau Rebellions typical or atypical of the revolutionary movements analyzed in W. O. Maloba’s *African Women in Revolution*.


2. First read François Furet’s *Interpreting the French Revolution* and then read Georges Rude’s *The Crowd in the French Revolution*. After summarizing Furet’s three conceptual approaches to understanding the French Revolution, please identify if Rude’s book can be placed among Furet’s three conceptual approaches? Or should Rude be situated in a fourth conceptual approach? Why or not?


3. Traditionally, China’s Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) was seen as a conservative, insular, static empire, especially compared with the preceding Yuan Dynasty of the Mongols (1279-1368) and the succeeding Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) of the Manchus. But more recent scholarship has revealed a much more nuanced and dynamic picture of the Ming state and society. Would you consider the Ming a dynamic or a static society? Read *Ming China: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* by John Dardess, and *1587: A Year of No Significance* by Ray Huang. Which author presents a more compelling case and why? In what ways do the books contradict one another? In what ways are they complementary? What does this suggest about the evolving state of the field?

4. Understanding what motivates warriors to fight is an important question for military historians. In the case of the First Crusade, historians have long debated what inspired those who participated, ascribing motives that include greed, religious fanaticism, genuine piety, or the defense of fellow Christians and Christian interests. Since at least the 1980s the scholarship of the late Cambridge University historian Jonathan Riley-Smith has come to dominate the historiography of this debate, with many seeing his work as having settled the issue. Yet his claims have been challenged by John France, another important and influential historian of the crusades. Please read Jonathan Riley-Smith’s essay “Crusading as an Act of Love” and John France’s essay “Patronage and the Appeal of the First Crusade.” Then clearly define each of their arguments, the evidence they cite as the basis for their claims, and explain the strengths and weaknesses of each argument to support your view of which historian has the more convincing argument.


Note: Both essays are included in Madden, Thomas, ed. The Crusades: The Essential Readings. Blackwell, 2002.

5. First read David Bushnell’s The Liberator, Simon Bolivar: Man and Image and then read Salvador de Madariaga’s Bolivar. Which biographer portrayed Simon Bolivar in the most accurate way? How? Why or why not? Please compare, contrast, or synthesize these two books to determine whether Bolivar was a visionary leader, or a ruthless dictator, or a little of both. To put it another way, to what degree was Bolivar motivated by ideology, power, or a combination thereof?

ANY History Stream Essay Questions:
(questions can be used by anyone to apply to any history stream if needed):

1. 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.

   • https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/index.htm

2. 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