

POST-COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

Guide for M. A. Students

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M. A. Qualifying Exam
Post-Colonial Latin America
M.A. Students
Dr. Adriana Novoa
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The purpose of this exam is to demonstrate that you know the most important events that defined the history of post-colonial Latin America and also the way in which they have been researched by historians. On the day of the exam, you will receive two questions from me, the first is related to the analysis of a historical process (for example, the role of the Enlightenment in the Independence revolutions); the second will ask you to analyze a historiographical debate (for example, the role of the guerrilla movement in the Cuban revolution). In addition, this list will be helpful for organizing a syllabus if you need to teach a class in the future. In order to pass the exam, you will need to show command of these two areas. If you plan to write a dissertation instead, you will also have a complete proposal for your dissertation approved by the members of your committee before starting with the writing of your dissertation.

It is important that you get to know when you need to take this exam from the first semester. Write an email to the graduate coordinator to make sure you know what credits you need, when you will take them, and when you will be ready to take your qualifying exam. Remember that your academic advisor is not in charge of the administrative aspects, so you need to make sure that you have a good communication with the person in charge of the graduate program. Ask all the questions you need to ask regarding credits, transfer credits, or the courses you need to take. Also, make sure you know when you need to pass your language exam. If you are already ready to take this requirement, let me know, so we can get this done as soon as possible.

The list of books that I am providing indicates the main historical processes that you will need to know, from the independence movements to globalization. You will need to send me a list of fifty books taken from this list. This is in addition to the bibliography you are using for your dissertation. You will need to pick at least a book from each of the sections, and if this is the case, pick one that provides a general context of the topic to be discussed. Once your list is final, send it to me to discuss it and approve it. We will meet after I take a look to your document. The approval will depend on the coherence of themes included, and if they allow you to provide a thoughtful answer during the exam. For example, a list that is very scattered, and does not provide a coherence among the different books/articles included will not be very helpful. I also included historiographical articles at the end to show you how to produce a good analysis in this area. From this list, you will need to pick two historiographical topics that you will prepare for your exam, and these books will count towards the total number of books you will prepare. It needs to be different from the topic you will research in your dissertation, but I recommend that it is complementary. For example, if your topic is liberalism in Brazil, you can prepare liberalism in Argentina. You can also use this list to find more resources if it is needed.

Your list needs to have at least 50 books. If I am co-directing your dissertation, you only need to prepare 25-30 books from my list and the rest from the other committee's chair. We will need to jointly approve the list before you take the exam, and you need to explain the logic that unites the selection from the two different sections.

Preparation Guide

Each student is different, and you might already know what the exam entails and what you need to do in order to do well. If this is the case, this information might not be relevant. But, if you are uncertain and need to get advise on how to prepare, these are my recommendations:

1. Discuss with the professors who will ask the questions how to prepare for each section, and the best way to prepare for questions. Each person can have different processes, so be aware that this procedure only applies to my section. Stay in touch with each person throughout the process, so that you can be sure about what are the expectations for the exam. Discuss the format of the exam at the first meeting--knowing how the exam will be structured will help you to prepare well and avoid wasting time.
2. Start by reading the synthetic histories/textbooks provided in the list. They will help you to grasp the general conceptualization used by the main historians in the field. Also, pay attention to the concepts used, and the areas in which there is historiographical debates.
3. Take notes while reading the books/articles included in your list. Make sure your notes are detailed and be sure to include the new information that you need to know and how each selection fits in the historiography of the country/field covered. Also, it is very important that you start building a glossary of theoretical concepts that are used repeatedly in the different readings. For example, "liberalism," "material conditions," "colonialism," "coloniality," "empire," "agency," and "hegemony" are terms that can appear frequently. Take note of them, and their meaning, in a separate section of your notes, where you keep these terms together. If it happens that you find a term that it is not clear, contact me immediately to discuss it.

4. For books, pay close attention to the introduction, where the author describes both the argument and the historiographical place of the work. Also, read at least a couple of book reviews after reading the book and compare with your notes. The analysis you will need to produce will be based on your ability to capture the historiographical argumentation. Also, take a note if the book review introduces other points of interest in the argument/historiography of the book. This will help you to realize how well you prepared the notes on this book. Then turn to the rest of the book (or as much as you realistically have time to read). When looking at reviews, it is especially helpful if you can find reviews by other scholars who are also in the list, since many times you will find that they have different approaches to the same topic, or have serious disagreements about argumentation. These conversations among scholars are essential to prepare the historiographical section. Take careful note of these.

5. Be very organized when taking your notes. - Read a book/article. Once you're done, write a one page summary highlighting the argument, methods, sources, and how and to which historiography it speaks. When finished, attach to it a couple of book reviews, and then comments about how your analysis and the book reviews' compare. This will help you to keep track of your own thoughts and gather material that you can use the day of the exam. I advise you to do this with every single book you read from the first day of classes. As you might notice, many books are used by several professors, so you might decide that a book not included in my list is important and needs to be added to your reading list. If this is the case, bring this up when discussing your final list. Remember that I need to approve the final version. This will make your preparation easier and well organized from the beginning.

6. When you are ready to put together your reading list, contact me. I advise you to start with this as soon as possible, since you will not cover all the books in your classes. After we talk, you can start putting the list together. First add all the books/articles you have already read in other classes. It might be that for other classes you have read books/articles covering the same topic, so consult with me if you would like to add different materials to your list. Think carefully about other fields you have covered. How can you connect the readings to create a new engagement among the different authors. This is very important for the section related to historical approaches. Make an appointment with me if any of the readings is too complex and you need assistance to grasp the argumentation, historiographical context, or the key concepts. Do not wait to the last minute to do this.

7. Take credits with me (and the other co-chair if I am not the only advisor) the semester before taking the exam, to make sure that you are ready. We will review your notes and discuss the arguments/information that it is not clear. Your notes should include the synthesizing ideas develop in the book, themes, arguments, historiographical placing of each of the books.

8. Look into software that would help to organize your notes, for example growly notes, a free program available online. Using this program, you can make folders for each field, and subfolders for books and articles. You need to bring these notes when we meet and they will be extremely important to review everything before taking the exam to make sure you are prepared.

9. When writing the exam, try to connect the information you gather in order classes also, demonstrating your ability to connect the topic to

different historical areas and historiographies will only improve your essay.

10. Another important element in the evaluation is your organization. Do not start writing before deciding how you will answer the questions and what are the materials that you will use. At this point is when your notes will be extremely helpful. You will be able to have them with you. Finally, the ideal exam not only reproduce the information learned. Besides showing your grasp of the facts, arguments and historiography, it would be ideal if you could provide your own analysis based on your original interpretation.

PROSPECTUS

If you are writing a dissertation, you will need to submit the prospectus of your thesis. The prospectus is the initial frame of your dissertation; it indicates to the members of the committee that you have a solid project that it is doable. Reading the prospectus, the members of the committee need to understand your main argument and how do you plan to develop it. This is your opportunity to show your original work and address the issues that interest you. Ideally, you should start thinking about your project from the beginning, and start consulting with your major professor the ideas you have in order to develop it with time. These are some tips that can help you to start thinking about the prospectus:

- 1- There is not a single way to write a prospectus, but a good beginning could be to start thinking about the contribution you can make to a particular historiographical area of your interest. After you identify a possible contribution, you should talk to your adviser and discuss the feasibility of this project. If your professor agrees, you should start completing the readings to know everything related to the historiography. Once this is done, you will need to start thinking about your own argument and an outline. Start with trying to explain how your project fits with the current historiography. Second, explain what you would like to do with your topic, not only in terms of historiography, but also regarding the originality of your ideas, and how you plan to develop your argument.
- 2- Consult with the members of your committee while you develop your project. Also, read samples of prospectus to get to know the format and what is expected. There are websites that have samples that can help

you. For example, this one:
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1002704.files/Sample%20Prospectus%201.pdf>

- 3- Read dissertations to get to know successful examples and understand the scope of this project. You can also read dissertations that have been turned into books to understand the differences between the two. Pay close attention to the organization of the dissertation, length, and the use of archives and primary sources. During this process, you will get advice that might not always agree on what you need to do, but do not panic. This is expected, and as the project/argument gets stronger, you will receive less advice and more homogenous criticism. Remember that criticism is essential to develop a strong project; be ready to answer the questions asked and defend your argumentation supporting it with evidence, both original and historiographical.

- 4- Start thinking about the prospectus from day one. Be sure to make notes of the material that might be useful, write a bibliography of possible secondary sources, and identify possible archives/primary sources. Make sure to take note of the authors that are key to your argument. Get to know them well in order to start thinking how your argument is related to their work. Understand that the prospectus is a starting point that might change as you write your project. It is a guide that will help you to manage your time efficiently, but it will be adjusted as long as you write or find new sources.

Organization of the Prospectus

Usually, a prospectus contains these sections: thesis, historiography, methods, sources, schedule, bibliography. Pay attention to the following descriptions to understand what you should add in each section:

Statement of Thesis

What is the novelty of your project? Here you need to explain your argument, which means that after writing it you need to clearly state your burden of proof, or what you will need to demonstrate in your dissertation. This is not just a description of the time, place, or actors, but a conceptual frame that allows the reader to understand what it is original about your work and what he/she will learn after reading it. This does not need to be long. You need to be concise explaining the problem that you will address and what you expect to conclude.

Historiographical Context

What are the main works written about this topic? Who are the main scholars who had paid attention to the issues described in the thesis? You need to discuss these works critically, which means that you need to explain their arguments and how you judge them and why. Then you need to explain how these works are related to your own, and how you plan to expand, contradict, or supplement these works, concluding on how your work will stand among the one that was produced by these scholars.

Methods and Theory

Here you will need to describe how are you planning to frame your argument. Think in terms of the theory that might structure your dissertation, or the way

in which key concepts have been used. For example, if your approach is defined by post-modern critics, or economic historians; explain why is this approach better to develop your argument. Think about methods and theory as a scaffold that supports a structure, which is your thesis. How are your methodology and theoretical approach connected with your expected result? How is your argument related to the sources and methods you will be using to support your dissertation? If you are including approaches that come from fields other than History, make this clear, and justify why the introduction of this interdisciplinary component is important for the success of your project. Develop this section in discussion with the members of your committee. Remember that it is very likely that each of them use a different methodology or theory, so talking to them will help you to define your own.

Sources

In this section, you need to explain which are the sources that you plan to use. Remember that all the prospectus' sections need to be connected, so you will need to address here how the sources that you will use are relevant to develop your kind of project. For example, your professors will expect different sources for a project in intellectual History and another that based on economic History. So, make clear what are the primary sources that you will use. Add a description of the format of the sources that you will include (manuscripts, printed, visual, etc.). Finally, explain where are these sources and how you are planning to access them; list archives, online archives, libraries, etc.

Schedule

In this section, you will need to explain when you plan to finish each of the proposed chapters, and when you expect to finish the first draft. Do not worry, this is flexible, but this schedule will help you to think in a realistic way what you can accomplish in the time you have before your defense. For example, it

will help you to check on the number of chapters that will be included, the time in which you need to finish the research of the primary sources, and when you need to start the writing of each chapter.

Bibliography

List of all the primary and secondary sources of the dissertation. Again, this can change, but this list will help the members of the committee to make sure that you have enough material to start the project successfully. If there are problems, they will be identified immediately, so you will not waste time trying to complete something that cannot be completed.

Finally, once you have a prospectus that it is approved by your main adviser, you will to send it to all the members of the committee to get feedback. Your adviser will organize a meeting with everyone to discuss your prospectus once that she/he think is ready for distribution. The input that you will receive will help you to start the writing process as soon as possible, your adviser will guide you on how to incorporate the comments, and in defining how you will address the suggestions that you heard at the meeting.

Reading List

Post-Colonial Latin America

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General Latin America

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