

Dear Prospective Applicants,

We are so thrilled that you have found your way to UIC's MAT program, and I'm excited to provide a few insights into what this program is all about from a student's perspective. My name is Rossie Schwartz, and I am currently a second-year MAT student and work as the program's assistant. I'm here to help you make an informed decision as you consider applying and to offer some suggestions if you've already been accepted.

Like many of you, I am very excited to become a teacher and was eager to find a program that would provide the preparation I needed to get into the classroom. I was not only looking for a program that would help me obtain a license to become a teacher, but also searching for a program that would help me develop a deeper philosophy of teaching and hold me to high expectations for my academic and professional work. When I met with Robert Johnston, the director of the program, I knew that UIC was the perfect fit for me. Robert cares deeply about teaching and brings his love of history and years of experience in the discipline to the classroom as well as to his one-on-one interactions with his students. He assured me that I would be challenged to think intellectually about my teaching as well as about historiography. I become excited to enroll in rigorous classes that would help me prepare for the classroom. After all, I knew that as a teacher I should be well versed in the discipline in order to translate and transmit my enthusiasm for history to teenagers.

Therefore, this program is not only designed to help prepare you to be a middle school or high school history teacher; it also provides the rigor that most secondary education Master's programs won't.

TYPES OF COURSES

Like most programs you will come across, you will be required to take education classes. While on the surface they may not appear to be as rigorous as the rest of the required coursework, I believe that a course is as beneficial as you make it. I pushed myself to read additional books on literacy, writing, and special education to supplement my required reading. Instructors are always willing to recommend books and will also help you take your assignments to the next level. I held myself to a higher standard than was expected of me and created lesson plans that I would be proud to share with practicing teachers. Robert likes to remind us that it is a privilege to be graduate students who get to dedicate most of their time to reading, writing, learning, and growing. I know this is true based on the experiences of teachers I've observed in the field. There is always a need for time in the day, and the ability to read a book about teaching students how to read primary source documents, for example, is a luxury. I encourage you to be purposeful in every assignment you complete and make it beneficial for you and your future students.

The rest of the classes you will take are based in the history department. The first two are pedagogical classes taught by Robert and our co-director, Julie Peters, that respectively focus on teaching history and the social sciences. Robert's class is one of the most challenging, yet also rewarding, classes I've taken during my time in the program. This is only offered during the fall semester, so it will almost certainly be one of the first classes you take. Students in this class study the philosophy and politics of teaching history, theories of pedagogy, school reform, and curriculum design, and they also engage in significant archival and primary source research. Julie's class focuses on curriculum design in the other social sciences—geography, economics, psychology sociology, and political science—and explores how teaching these subjects can be approached. As you may already know, your license in teaching will include history and all of the social sciences, so the directors want to make sure you are exposed to some pedagogical knowledge in each area. The program is designed for completion in two years, so there are no other courses required in the social sciences. I would, however, recommend taking a few additional classes if you

are interested in teaching the subjects and want to get a leg up on the competition when you start applying for teaching positions. In fact, with enough work, you can become eligible to earn an endorsement within a specific field that makes you eligible to teach Advanced Placement (and that often comes in handy on the job market). This may extend your time in the program, but I will touch on that more below.

The final category of classes is history colloquia. You will take four of these classes—one in each area of focus (U.S., European, or World)--and the fourth will be an extra course in the area of history in which you decide to concentrate. These courses are by far the most rigorous, challenging, and time-consuming of all that you will do in the program (besides student teaching, of course). You will engage with cutting-edge historiographical works and thoroughly process them through class discussion and written essays. Most of the colloquia are attended by history students from all graduate levels, meaning that half the class is usually comprised of MAT students and the other half are those who are seeking a PhD.

Finally, you will end your program with a semester of student teaching. By the time you get to this point, you will be as prepared as you can be for the demands that you will face in the classroom. Student teaching is not an experience that can be boiled down to a few sentences. Each student teacher's experience is unique to where s/he is placed, the teacher with whom s/he is assigned, and the students in her/his class. You can rest assured that you will have a say in where you get placed. "Julie Peters will be happy to discuss this issue once you are in the program."

EXAMS

The final requirement you will need to fulfill before graduating is a set of comprehensive exams. These exams will assess your learning and growth in the areas of urban education, teaching of history, and the area of history in which you major. While all sections will require advance study, you will spend significantly more time preparing for your major exam. Students don't normally begin preparing for these exams until their second semester, but I would like to put them on your radar now because they are so important. The first step in this process is creating reading list of 75-100 books that will be used to prepare for exams. The exam is not content-driven but is instead much more focused on historiography. You will be required to answer three essay questions in four hours using the books you've read to prepare. I know this may sound like a daunting task, but by planning ahead will allow you to have plenty of time to prepare. You will have the option of taking these exams anytime after your third semester, or after you have taken your second course in your major, or you can choose to take them during your semester of student teaching. There have been a number of students who have opted to take them during student teaching, but doing so was no easy task. I would suggest planning ahead and making sure exams are behind you before you begin your student teaching experience if possible. You will have plenty of opportunities to discuss this process with Robert in depth once you start the program, but in the meantime it may be useful to start thinking about which area of history you'd like to major in so that you give yourself plenty of time to study. The goal of the exam is to make sure that you are conversant, at the highest level, with the scholarship in the field that you plan to teach, so keep this in mind as you formulate your book list and think about the amount of time you'd like to dedication to preparation.

SURVIVING THE PROGRAM

Right now you're either wondering how you are going to manage this all, you are feeling confident about this journey on which you are about to embark, or you are somewhere in between. No matter where you are along this spectrum, I'd like take some time to give you some advice on how to survive this program.

The prescribed time period to complete the M.A.T. is two years, but you must remember that this is only a suggestion. If you are anxious to get into the classroom or simply need to finish in two years, I suggest that you think about summer school, including in the summer before you begin the program (but be sure to talk

to Robert about this before you register for classes). Most education classes are offered over the summer in either the four- or eight-week session. Doing this will allow you to lighten your load throughout the semesters so that you can spend more time during the regular school year focusing on your history classes (remember, you are required to complete all of the courses I outlined above in three semesters if you plan to stick to the two-year plan of completing the degree). However, if summer school is not an option for you, know that your time will be consumed with school work. Many first-semester grad students experience a bit of trauma as they realize how much time is required to be successful. **This means that you will have to consider seriously whether or not you will be employed during the program.** My advice is to focus all of your time during the first semester on school work in order to acclimate yourself to the grad school environment and get a good grasp on how much time each course demands. I would also suggest that you speak with current students to get a more detailed account of what a typical school week looks like (Robert will be happy to put you in touch with current students). However, if you'd like to enjoy a balance between school and work by enrolling part-time (which is quite fine to do), I highly recommend limiting your enrollment to two classes per semester. There are benefits to both routes, and, again, we would be happy to refer you to current and former students who have decided one way or the other.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IN THE MEANTIME

Now that you have all of this information you may be wondering if you can start preparing for this journey before it begins. I suggest that you spend some time in a history or social studies classroom at a neighborhood school. It is very useful to do this because it allows you to get a feel for how schools function today. Whether it's been 5 years or 25 years since you've been in a classroom, there is much you can learn from experiencing it from a teacher's perspective. Get a feel for the profession, the workload, and the magic of transforming students' lives. Start sharpening your vision of your future classroom. Let these observations inform your studies right from the start. The state of Illinois requires students to complete 100 observation hours before you are allowed to student teach, but I suggest spending as much time as possible beyond that. Getting a head start on observations will help you further ignite your passion for teaching.

Also, Robert and other professors will be happy to provide you with a reading list of major books for your first courses so that you can spend your summer getting a bit of a head start.

So there you have it. There is absolutely no program that can fully prepare you for the realities of the classroom—where you teach, the students you teach, and what you teach will determine the opportunities and obstacles you will face and how you teach. This program is designed to give you the tools you will need to be as prepared as a new teacher can possibly be before writing his or her name on the whiteboard on that first day of school. The rigor of the history classes and exam prep will give you a substantial base of content and historiographical knowledge so that you can plan interesting lessons. Your education classes will help you understand and appreciate the rigor and art of curriculum design so that you are better able to extend your love of learning to your students. And your methods classes in the history department will acquaint you with the leading edge of thinking about teaching history and the social studies—including the best ways to buck accepted convention, if you choose to do so. We are excited to meet you and speak about your passion of history and teaching and hear your story and why you've chosen the classroom as the arena in which you will perform a significant portion of your life's work. In the meantime, we are happy to answer any questions, offer more advice, and my favorite, give book recommendations! I can be reached at rrange3@uic.edu. I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rossie Schwartz