BA in Comparative History of Ideas

Comparative History of Ideas (CHID) is a one-of-a-kind interdisciplinary major. While CHID is based in the humanities, its students, faculty, and staff connect ideas and practices from across the sciences, arts, and social sciences to examine ideas in their cultural, historical, and political contexts.

Students in the program have the freedom to tailor their studies to their own interests and professional goals. They undertake intensive, original intellectual inquiries with award-winning teachers. They master skills by engaging thoughtfully in experiential learning, including transformational study abroad opportunities and work with local and international organizations. As graduates, they use the unique skills and expertise they develop to establish successful careers in a wide variety of fields.

Admissions, Advising & Student Resources

Students in good academic standing may declare the major at any time after meeting with the undergraduate adviser. Learn more about applying to the University as a first-year student, transfer student, or postbaccalaureate student.

Please see our Undergraduate Programs section for information about advising, career paths, scholarships, and other student resources.

Degree Requirements

CHID 101: Introduction to CHID (1 course)

This course introduces students to the CHID learning community. It incorporates discussions about the program's philosophy, structure, resources, faculty and students. It is an introduction to the content and logistics of learning in CHID. Students must take this course in the first or second quarter after declaring the major.

Gateways to CHID (2 courses)

Each of these courses will offer students a particular approach to the comparative history of ideas. Classes in this category examine a particular topic/idea from a variety of disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. In taking at least two courses in this category, students will begin to think comparatively and from a range of perspectives. Students can choose from a variety of courses taught by CHID faculty. See Suggested Courses.

Cultural and Historical Engagements

This requirement asks students to engage in rigorous and comparative cultural analysis, which may or may not involve international study. It can be fulfilled in one of three ways:

CHID Study Abroad (1 quarter)

Students spend one quarter studying in one of the various CHID study abroad programs. In addition to fulfilling the requirements
of the study abroad program, students will also be asked to write a concise 1 page paper describing the ways in which their international study informed their understanding of cultural engagements and encounters. If a student feels that a non-CHID study abroad program may also satisfy this spirit of comparative cultural study, they may consult with CHID’s academic advisor for approval. Visit CHID Study Abroad to see a list of our upcoming programs.

Local/Global Engagements (1 course)

Though based at the UW, these courses use a transnational theme and structure to explore the links between local and global forces. For example, a course which uses communication technology (e.g. webcasts, online learning, etc.) to link students at the UW with other communities outside of the U.S. would satisfy this requirement. Alternatively, a course that provides students with out-of-classroom experiences (field visits, community work, field research, etc.) tracing the global and local intersections in areas such as immigration, agriculture, transnational advocacy, artistic production, etc., would also fulfill this requirement. See Suggested Courses.

Encounters Across Cultures (2 courses, 1 of which can be a non-CHID study abroad program)

Students may satisfy this requirement by taking at least two courses on different peoples, places, spaces, or moments. The goal of such exposure to different contexts is to provide the opportunity to make cross-cultural comparisons regarding power, difference and belonging. As with the CHID study abroad requirement, students will be asked to write a brief 1 page paper based on the courses taken for this requirement, detailing the value of comparative research. See Suggested Courses.

Ideas in the World (1 course)

Through these courses, students will explore various systems of belief, conceptual frameworks, paradigms, historical understandings, and ways of knowing. For example, these courses can include such diverse areas as science and technology, European intellectual history, indigenous intellectual production, and post-structural theory. See Suggested Courses.

Power and Difference (1 course)

Oppression, injustice and efforts to combat forms of domination work through the cultural politics of identity in various ways. Such a course should emphasize the ways in which categories like gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion structure the terrain of social orders and struggles. See Suggested Courses.

CHID 390: Junior Colloquium (1 course)

The core course for all majors, this course introduces students to central concepts like culture, identity, and power, and to the cross-disciplinary study of these concepts. Organized as a seminar, students are expected to shape the direction of these explorations in a collaborative fashion and are encouraged to engage in both oral and written exchanges with their peers. Prereqs: CHID 101, Gateways to CHID, Ideas in the World, and Power and Difference.

Electives (to bring total CHID credits up to 60 credits; 13-18 credits)

Each student is required to complete at least fifteen elective credits by taking courses that contribute to her/his focus in her/his degree. The only stipulation for this requirement is that the courses be at the 300-level or above, and that the CHID Academic Counselor has agreed that the classes fit into the student's course of study.

Senior Thesis/Capstone Project (10-15 credits)

This requirement asks students to engage in rigorous intellectual and interdisciplinary inquiry. The senior project should demonstrate that the student has attained the educational objectives of the major. CHID students can choose from two senior research project
options: a 10-credit (CHID 491 and 493) or a 15-credit (CHID 491, 492, and 493) senior thesis. Students who have planned and finished a large-scale academic project will not only have the ability to finish similar projects in their chosen field of work, but they will also have developed the communication skills necessary for the successful dissemination of their ideas. Prereqs: CHID 390

Students who declared CHID as their major prior to Fall 2014, may choose to complete a 5-, 10-, or 15-credit thesis project. Should a student choose the 5-credit option, they may fulfill this requirement by either taking CHID 490, which is only offered during selected quarters, or working independently with a thesis advisor (upon their approval) during one quarter. In order to register for this option (working independently with an advisor), students will need to complete the CHID 491B form, and will register for CHID 491 B. CHID 491 A will no longer accommodate students completing a 5-credit thesis. Instead, CHID 491 A will support students in crafting a thesis proposal and finding a thesis advisor. We strongly encourage students to consider the 10- or 15-credit thesis option. If a student insists on a 5-credit thesis option, CHID highly recommends that the student enroll in CHID 490. Click here for guidelines for non-text-based projects and senior theses.

You can find a list of senior thesis titles from the past ten years here: CHID Senior Thesis Presentations, 2006-2015 (PDF).

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