I’m currently in a position to admit graduate students to the Vanderbilt PhD program in history during the 2018-9 application cycle. I work with scholars who specialize in the history of the United States in the late 19th and 20th centuries, particularly those interested in questions of the United States’ relationships to the wider world.

At the center of my graduate teaching philosophy is the idea that PhD study in history should place at its center graduate students’ discovery of the unique questions they want to ask of the past. For this reason, I’m happy to work with students who work on themes quite different from the ones I have and am currently researching. I’m also excited to work with students interested in methods different from those I’ve employed.

For example, I’m currently advising and co-advising graduate students working on American Protestant missionaries in the 19th century Ottoman Empire; the birth of U. S. international banking in the early 20th century; Americans involved in interwar refugee and international relief efforts in the period between the world wars; the international politics of media regulation after 1945; the intellectual-political history of American Cold War expertise; and international educational migration between Cuba and the United States in the early 20th century.

I want to admit sharp, driven, creative students who are passionate and hard-working, who make subtle intellectual distinctions, and who are willing to examine and challenge their own assumptions and those that characterize the dominant scholarship in their fields. My goal is to help such students become the best possible historians of the pasts that draw them.
Any prospective advisor or dissertation committee member is going to be more effective at
guiding this discovery in certain areas more than others. I am a practitioner of critical history
and will be most effective working with students interested in writing critical histories of the U.
S. in the world: that is, scholarship that denaturalizes, problematizes and historicizes the United
States’ transnational power relationships.

I’m especially inclined to support the admission of students interested in studying the United
States in the world by engaging in dialogue with scholars working on other nations and regions,
and bringing non-U. S. historical settings, institutions, actors, voices and archives into their
thinking and writing.

While my research and teaching engages with histories of the U. S. state, graduate students
principally interested in the field of U. S. diplomatic history should instead get in touch with my
colleague, Prof. Thomas Schwartz, as a prospective advisor. I have worked closely with many of
Prof. Schwartz’s advisees, and served on their dissertation committees.

I strongly recommend that prospective graduate students carefully read some of their prospective
advisor’s and committee members’ recent work, not in order to ask themselves, “is this who I
want to be?” but to ask themselves, “is this scholarship that I want to shape my work?” in terms
of its methods, approaches, critiques, or topical coverage.

This is really the best way to answer the crucial question of whether you want this particular set
of scholars constructing the syllabi for the courses you take; supplying the reading lists for your
comprehensive exams; and reading and critiquing your dissertation chapters.

(This might seem obvious, but we professors are repeatedly surprised at how many applications
come our way in which other, essentially non-intellectual factors seem to predominate: rough
topical coverage, institutional prestige, region, seeming randomness. This isn’t a particularly good use of anybody’s time, yours or ours.)

In my own case, I’d encourage prospective applicants to take a close look at the three article-length pieces posted on the home page of my website, which will give them a good sense of the topics, methods and philosophy which I employ in my writing and teaching of the history of the U. S. in the world:

http://www.paulkrameronline.com/

I’ve also posted other written pieces here:

http://www.paulkrameronline.com/writing/

If you’d like to know how I approach graduate-level education, you may want to check out one or more of the talks I’ve given to Vanderbilt graduate students, posted here:

http://www.paulkrameronline.com/speaking/

A few that might be of interest:

“Good Seminar Citizenship (and Bad)”: on what a graduate seminar is and can be.

“Thinking about Thinking”: a broad, philosophical talk on approaches to critical and creative thinking in graduate school.

If this approach to scholarship is interesting and you want to get in touch, please drop me an email with a brief description (roughly 150 words) of the specific historical questions, scholarship and research themes you are interested in, a description of sustained research projects you’ve completed, and a short writing sample of under 25 double-spaced pages. I’m at:

paul.kramer49@gmail.com

A general word of advice: graduate admissions are highly competitive (in recent years, Vanderbilt’s history program has generally received between 150-200 applicants, for approximately 12 slots for all areas of history, divided among approximately 40 faculty members). What that means is that, even if I really like your application, and it’s potentially a great intellectual fit, it still may not work out here (or at other institutions) for any of a number of reasons, so I encourage you—having thoroughly researched prospective advisors and committee members as outlined above—to apply as broadly as possible.

One final note: Unfortunately, Vanderbilt (like many of its peer graduate institutions) charges $95 to apply to its graduate school. But there is a program that allows this fee to be waived in cases where it represents an economic hardship to the applicant. The program is new and won’t provide resources in every instance, but it is worth looking into if this is an issue. Just let me know if this is the case and I can put you in touch with the right people.

Good luck!