

PRELIMINARY EXAM PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

DUKE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN RELIGION

PREREQUISITES

Before students are eligible to take preliminary exams, they must:

- Complete all required coursework in major and minor fields (normally 2 years of coursework, usually including 2 courses in each minor field; or 3 years of coursework for students entering without a master's degree.)
- Pass all necessary language competence exams (normally German and French for all fields unless otherwise approved by the DGS or the convener; certain fields may require additional ancient language exams.)
- Assemble his/her preliminary exam committee and have it approved by the DGS and the CDC (Committee on Doctoral Committees).

PRELIMINARY EXAM COMMITTEE

The student's preliminary exam committee is normally made up of 4-5 faculty members, including:

- 2-3 professors/primary readers in the major field and
- 1 professor/primary reader in each minor field.

At least 3 members of the committee must be faculty members in the Graduate Program in Religion unless otherwise approved by the DGS.

BOOK LIST

When students begin preparation for the preliminary exams, they create a reading list in consultation with their primary advisor and other committee members. Some fields have such a list from which a student may make selections.

- The book list provides the material for which the student is responsible and from which exam questions will be taken.
- It is the student's responsibility to make sure that all committee members have seen and approved the book list before taking exams.

EXAM QUESTIONS

In some fields, students are required to write their own exam questions (usually along with composing a book list.) In most fields, faculty members write them for the student.

- Students are responsible for finding out policies for each major and minor field.
- Sample questions from previous student exams in all fields are available through the Graduate Program assistant.
- Students writing some or all of their own exam questions must (1) have them approved by the chair and respective primary readers and (2) submit a copy of the questions to the Graduate Program assistant.

EXAM COMPONENTS

WRITTEN: Preliminary exams include four written exams and an oral defense. The four written exams normally include:

- a 4-hour exam on the major field;
- a 3-hour exam on the inside minor field;
- a 3-hour exam on the outside minor field; and
- a 3-hour exam on the dissertation area.

- N.B. Some fields do not require a second minor!

NOTE: Students are required to provide their own laptop computers on which to type their written exams. Upon completion of each exam, students must print out the exam (in the library) and make hard copies (in the Religion Department office) for each member of the committee and the Graduate Program assistant.

ORAL: An oral defense follows the written exams.

- All faculty members from the committee must be physically in attendance or participate via telephone if unable to attend the defense.
- Students should confer with the chair regarding expectations for the oral exam.
- Committee members with major questions should notify the chair in advance of the oral exam.

PASSING AND FAILING EXAMS

- For a 4-person committee, passing requires at least 3 affirmative votes. For a 5-person committee, at least 4 affirmative votes are required; the chair must vote affirmatively in each case.
- A student may fail up to two written exams and take them again no sooner than three months after the first oral defense.
- Students who fail a second time will be asked to leave the program.
- In order to pass exams on the second try, the committee's vote must be unanimous.

TIMING AND SCHEDULING OF EXAMS

- Scheduling of all exams must be coordinated through the Graduate Program assistant.
- Preliminary exams are expected to take place within 6 months after coursework is completed.
- The four written exams must be completed over the course of two weeks. They may be taken in any order, and scheduled according to the student's preference and room availability. (For example, Monday-Thursday, Monday-Thursday; Monday-Wednesday-Friday-Wednesday; etc.)
- The oral defense normally takes place within one week after the written exams.

PARTICULARITIES BY FIELD

Each field has its own specific guidelines regarding language competence, book lists, and exam questions.

- It is the responsibility of each field convener to maintain clear exam guidelines and make them available on the department's web site.
- It is the responsibility of each student to acquire this information before beginning preparation for exams.

UPON COMPLETION OF PRELIMINARY EXAMS

Students who have successfully passed their preliminary exams are eligible to propose a dissertation. A student should meet as soon as possible with her/his primary advisor to discuss:

- the makeup of her/his dissertation committee (not necessarily the same as the preliminary exam committee); and
- expectations regarding length and detail of proposal and bibliography.

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