

Department of Religions and Cultures
Guidelines Regarding Comprehensive Examinations
for Ph.D. Graduate Students

1. Choice of Exam Areas

Students are expected to prepare for and write three distinct written comprehensive examinations. Each exam must focus on a clearly demarcated topic area.

Students focusing on Judaic Studies will define the topic areas for their written exams in consultation with relevant faculty members and the graduate program director. In so far as possible, two of these topic areas ought to be related to their dissertation topic. The third exam ought either to focus on a related aspect of a second religious tradition or on a related topic in a discipline on the study of religions (Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Archaeology, or Philosophy of Religion).

Students focusing on Comparative Ethics are expected to prepare for two written exams on the religious ethics and/or social role of two different religious traditions. Students have some latitude in selecting what aspects of these two religious traditions will be the focus for their exams. They may choose to concentrate more on the thought or the social roles of these religions. While they should possess some sense of the religious traditions as a whole, they may focus on particular periods or features of this tradition. Students studying comparative ethics may choose any other topic for their exam, although it is recommended that this exam be related to their dissertation.

2. Scope of the Exam

The faculty advisor in consultation with the student will set the bibliography for the exam. Students should read and comprehend sufficient amounts of material to gain a sense of competence or mastery of this topic area. As a consequence of preparing for this exam, students should be able, for example, to teach an undergraduate course in this topic area, if she or he were asked to do so. It is not always easy to quantify what this means in terms of number of books and articles, since some works are much easier reads than others. As a very rough approximation, students should expect to have read and understood critically approximately twelve solid works in this topic area.

3. Meetings with Faculty Advisors

Students should meet with their faculty exam advisor at least once, in order to agree upon the bibliography for the exam. It is recommended that students meet with faculty exam advisors at least three times: once to establish a bibliography, at least once to discuss readings, and once before the exam in order to discuss the kinds of questions and concerns that will likely be on the exam.

4. When Exam Should be Taken

The exams must be completed before students are formally advanced to candidacy. Ordinarily, students finish their exam before they begin the actual writing of their dissertation. It

is, therefore, recommended that students attempt to take their written exams by the end of their period of residency, which is two full years for full-time students or equivalently longer for part-time students. Students may well use their course work as a means of preparing for their exams.

5. Questions for Exams

Students may assist in the identification of relevant questions by indicating the types of questions that they are especially equipped to answer or which especially interest them. However, the questions will be prepared and finally formulated by the faculty exam advisor. The faculty exam advisor may consult with other faculty and must contact the Graduate Program Director with respect to the questions asked.

6. The Writing of Exams

There are two standard options available for how exams themselves will be conducted, but other accepted format have been used:

- a. Exams may assume the form of a three to four hour sit down written exam, which will be written in a room at the University.
- b. Exceptionally, the exam may be conducted as a take home exam. In this case the student will receive the exam by email and write his/her answers at home and then return the answers to the GPA within 24 hours.

7. Evaluation of Exams

Faculty members are expected to read and evaluate these written exams within two weeks of the time they are taken. They should write out their evaluation of the exam (in the form of an overall assessment as well as marginal notes) and indicate whether the exam is satisfactory or not. If the written exam is not satisfactory, then the student will have to sit for a subsequent written exam. The faculty member may judge the overall exam to be adequate responses to these areas.

Students may take any written exam a second but not a third time. Failure to secure a satisfactory evaluation for any written exam will constitute a failure for the comprehensive exams as a whole.

8. Oral Part of the Exams

The Oral Comprehensive Exam will cover all of the written exams. It will focus only on the questions, which the students answered in their written exams. Students will be expected to address concerns which faculty members raised with respect to their written exams. In addition, students should be prepared to discuss other questions related to their written answers.

9. Judgement of the Exam

At the end of the oral exam, students will receive a pass or not pass grade for the written exams and oral judged as a whole. After the student finishes addressing questions raised by the faculty examiners, the student will be excused from the room where the exam is held. The faculty will then reach their judgement, which they shall announce, to the student. It is recommended that the faculty assign only one of these two grades: pass or not pass. They will make their judgement by majority vote of the faculty present.

Students who receive a non-pass grade may sit again for all or part of their written and oral exams. Ordinarily, if the written exams are judged to be inadequate that will be noted at the time the written exams are evaluated. Hence, if the student receives a not pass grade after the oral examination, then it will be because the oral exam itself was judged to be not adequate. If a not pass is assigned then the faculty should indicate the conditions under which part or all of the parts of the written and oral exam may be taken a second time. No third attempts to take these examinations will be permitted.

The faculty committee can set whatever terms they judge to be appropriate if they assign a not pass grade. Thus, they may ask a student to repeat part or all of one or more written exams, and may or may not choose to sit a second oral exam. The final grade will be assigned by the majority vote of the faculty committee. The oral exam shall be conducted by at least three faculty, constituted by the faculty exam advisors for each exam plus the Graduate Program Director as chair of the oral exam. Each faculty member of the Exam Committee will be expected to read all of the written exams.