

**UC Davis Graduate Program in Religion
Exam Policies and Procedures
Effective: Fall 2020**

Currently, the GREL Ph.D. requires

1. a written exam during the first year*
2. an exam after the second year
3. qualifying exams after the third year, and
4. a final defense upon completion of the dissertation.

*In practice, the written work for the 200 A-C courses and grades conferred at the conclusion of the 200 A-C sequence have served as the equivalent of the first-year written exams.

This document outlines the purpose, policies, expectations, structure, and procedures pertaining to the **Preliminary Exam (Prelims)**** taken at the end of a student's second year and the **Qualifying Exam (QE-S)** taken in the student's third year.

Please see the degree requirements for full details: Ph.D. students who wish to earn the M.A. en route please see the details in the program handbook:

https://religiongradgroup.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk7711/files/files/page/study_of_religion_degree_requirements_05.14.19_0.pdf

****NOTE: The formal GREL degree requirements refer to the second-year exams as Comprehensive Exams. However, GGSR/GREL practice has been to refer to these exams as the Prelims (i.e. Preliminary Exams). Therefore, this document uses the terminology of current practice. Preliminary Exams are the same as the Comprehensive Exams mentioned in the program's formal degree requirements.**

PRELIMINARY/COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

TIMING OF THE EXAM

The exam is taken in the student's second year, generally in the spring quarter. The student must complete the exam before the start of the seventh quarter of study in the GREL Ph.D. program.

PURPOSE OF THE EXAM

The purpose of the exam is to evaluate the student's progress towards the Ph.D. degree, assess the student's ability to pursue independent research, and to provide necessary feedback and direction to help the student prepare for the Qualifying Exam in the third year of the program. The Preliminary (aka Comprehensive) Exam is a chance for students to receive formal feedback on their work to date so that they know where they stand and know what remains to be accomplished in the quarters leading up to their Qualifying Exams. It will allow the student to outline an "Area of Specialization" profile based on their Regional Area of Specialization and the Thematic Area of Specialization.

This exam is internal, and the results of the exam are not reported to Graduate Studies. However, the GREL maintains an internal document summarizing the results of the exam.

COURSE WORK

The GREL's core courses (200 A, B and C) are the foundation for the second-year exams, i.e. the Preliminary/Comprehensive Exams. In addition, students will take 4 units of 200 D, split over two quarters, to prepare for the exams. These should be taken in the Fall and Winter terms of the student's second year, with the faculty that the student has identified as a potential major professor.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The Preliminary/Comprehensive Exam committee consists of **three** faculty members, at least two of whom must be members of the Religious Studies department. Students may include faculty outside the RST department and those not affiliated with the GREL in their committees for the remaining slot. The Chair of the Preliminary Exam Committee cannot be the student's major professor.

When possible, faculty partners/spouses should avoid serving on the same preliminary exam committee. If this is unavoidable, and a faculty couple are both serving on the same committee, a fourth member, preferably from within UC Davis, should be added to the committee to negate possible perceptions of bias. The program's graduate advisor will help identify and secure the additional committee member. If the graduate advisor is one of the faculty-couple, the decision will revert to the GREL Program Committee.

Additionally, since the dissertation chair cannot serve as the Chair of the Preliminary Exam, it is recommended that the Preliminary Exam Chair shall not be the partner/spouse of the dissertation chair.

A student's Prelim, QE, and Dissertation committee need not be made up of the same faculty members. However, the major professor must serve on the QE and Dissertation committees, and ideally also serve on the Prelim exam committee.

STRUCTURE OF THE PRELIMINARY [COMPREHENSIVE] EXAM

The exam consists of three parts:¹

- a 3-5-page research statement (written component)
- a research essay (written component)
- a 1.5-hour oral presentation and discussion on the day of the exam (oral component)

¹ The preliminary exam format differs in these new guidelines from past practice. The exam will now include a 3-5 page research statement.

A. The written component

There are **two** written components to this exam (A-1 and A-2).

A-1 Research Statement

The first is a 3-5-page (i.e. no more than 1500 words) research statement that describes the student's proposed dissertation research. This statement should include a preliminary description of the topic, its relevance to the field, a sketch of primary sources, and the contributions the proposed research would make to the study of religion. **This is not a prospectus** and will be understood by the evaluating committee as a preliminary sketch of the student's proposed research project. This document will guide the preliminary exam committee in determining the viability of the student's proposed research project.

It is recommended that the student work on the research statement with their major professor in the REL 200D course.

The purpose of this document is to assess the student's ability to undertake independent research, a crucial aspect of the PhD program.

The research statement is due no later than a week (7 calendar days) before the date of the oral exam and should be emailed to the Chair of the preliminary exam and the GREL's Staff program coordinator, Maria Ruby.

The Chair of the preliminary exam will be responsible for sharing the documents with the preliminary exam committee.

A-2 Research Essay

The second part of the written portion of the exam is a twenty-five-page research paper based on work completed over the course of the first two years in the program. The student may rework an essay that was submitted for a course **or** the essay can be the product of work undertaken with the major professor for REL 200D. The paper must be representative of the student's research interests but is not an expanded version of the 3-5-page research statement. In addition, the student will also submit an annotated bibliography of key works (15-25 sources) relevant to their field of study (Regional Area of Specialization).

The research paper demonstrates the student's ability to sustain an argument using a range of primary, secondary, and theoretical sources.

The research essay is due no later than a week (7 calendar days) before the date of the oral exam and should be emailed to the Chair of the preliminary exam and the GREL's Staff program coordinator, Maria Ruby.

The Chair of the preliminary exam will be responsible for sharing the documents with the preliminary exam committee.

B. The oral component

The oral component of the exam consists of two parts. First, the student will provide a 20-25-minute focused presentation of their research based on their twenty-five-page essay. This presentation will be in the style of a formal conference presentation, and should outline what we call the "Area of Specialization Profile," namely: her/his/their research, its chief theoretical and methodological contributions, the relation of this work to relevant fields (key scholars, issues, debates, institutions or journals, and so forth), and principal research objectives in light of "regional" and "thematic areas of specialization", as far as these have been developed to date.

Following the student's oral presentation, each committee member will be given the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and hear responses. Group follow-up and collaborative conversation can follow; note that while some of this can happen organically as participants move around the table in the initial Q&A session, most of this should occur after all faculty have had a chance to ask their questions and hear the student's responses.

EVALUATING THE PRELIMINARY EXAM

The committee will evaluate the totality of the student's written and oral performance. The committee will convene for a ten-minute confidential meeting prior to the student's oral presentation. After the presentation and the Q&A/discussion, the committee will convene once again to confidentially discuss the student's overall performance in the Preliminary Exam and to determine the concrete feedback to be provided. The student will be invited back, and the committee will convey its assessment and offer suggestions to ensure the student's progress towards degree. The committee will also provide a written assessment of the student's performance, supplied to the student, with a copy retained by the GREL Program Committee. This written assessment must be made available within twenty-four hours of the exam. The exam will be evaluated as Pass (P) /No Pass (NP)/Provisional Pass (PP). A copy of the research statement, twenty-five-page paper, bibliography and the committee's written assessment will be retained by the GREL Program Coordinator.

In the case of a Pass, the exam is considered complete. No further work on the examination will be required.

In the case of a Provisional Pass, the committee will provide specific directions to the student. The student will be required to address the issues within one quarter of completing the Preliminary Exam. A provisional pass on this exam will be noted in the student's annual Student Progress Assessment (SPA). In the event the student does not complete the requested work in the designated time, the Provisional Pass will revert to a NP. The student will then be required to take the Preliminary Exams again.

In the case of a No Pass (NP), the student will be given one opportunity to retake the exam. This must be taken within one quarter of the Preliminary/Comprehensive exam. A NP on the exam will be noted in the SPA. A student who does not pass the Preliminary Exam on the second attempt shall be disqualified from the program.

QUALIFYING EXAM

<https://grad.ucdavis.edu/resources/faculty-and-staff-resources/qualifying-exam-regulations>

TIMING

Students take their Qualifying Exams (QE-s) to Advance to Candidacy at the end of their third year in the program. The QE-s must be completed before the start of the student's 10th quarter in the GREL program. Students must have successfully passed their Preliminary/Comprehensive Exams by the end of their second year to sit for their QE-s.

There is an expectation that students with a NP/Provisional Pass on their Preliminary Exams will still adhere to the normative time for the QE-s. However, students in this position may petition the GREL-PC for a delay in their QE-s. QE-s may not be delayed beyond the student's 12th quarter of study.

Students typically begin preparation for their QE-s in the summer prior to the start of their third year, and continue intensive work over three quarters (Fall, Winter and Spring) of their third year.

Students will enroll for an REL 299 in the quarter of their QE-s with their major professor. It is also recommended that students work with the exam committee to practice writing a four-hour exam during the QE Quarter and complete work on their prospectus in this quarter.

All course requirements, including language competency exams, must be completed prior to the student's QE.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the QE is to assess the student's preparation in three areas (Thematic Area of Specialization (TAOS), Regional Area of Specialization (RAOS) and Area of Competence (AOC) to pursue independent research. The written and oral portions of the exam evaluate the student's grasp of the field, while the prospectus outlines the student's proposed research project and its contribution to their respective fields.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The QE committee consists of a minimum of four members. If the student is pursuing a DE, the QE committee will consist of five members, with the fifth member representing the Designated Emphasis, even if the student has multiple DE affiliates on the committee. At least one member of the QE

committee must be external to the GREL. A minimum of three members must be voting members of the Academic Senate of the University of California.

The student's major professor cannot also serve as the QE Chair. The QE Chair must be a member of the GREL. Students may include up to two non-senate members (i.e. lecturers) on their committees, but only one of these may be a faculty member from outside the UC system (i.e. from another university/university system or from outside academia).

The QE Chair plays an administrative role in the exam. The QE Chair does not participate in the evaluation of the student's performance in the QE.

When possible, faculty partners/spouses should avoid serving on the same dissertation committee. If this is unavoidable, and a faculty couple are both serving on the same committee, an additional member preferably from within UC Davis, should be added to the committee to negate possible perceptions of bias. The department graduate advisor will help identify and secure the additional committee member. If the graduate advisor is one of the faculty-couple in question, the task of identifying an additional member shall fall to the GREL-PC.

Additionally, since the dissertation chair cannot serve as the Qualifying Examination (QE) Chair, it is recommended that the QE Chair shall not be the partner/spouse of the dissertation chair. It is preferable that the QE chair be a different committee member.

The student's major professor must serve on both the QE and the Dissertation committee. The QE committee does not need to be the same as the Dissertation committee, but as per the degree requirements, at least two of the Dissertation Committee Members must have also served on the student's QE Committee.

EXAM COMPONENTS AND STRUCTURE

The QE consists of four parts

1. A reading list for each category: RAOS, TAOS and AOC as well as the DE if undertaken
2. A written exam
3. A prospectus
4. An oral exam

Details provided below on each of the categories.

1. READING LIST

The student will prepare a reading list/bibliography in each of the three categories--RAOS, TAOS and AOC--in consultation with the faculty members supervising each category.

The typical reading list for each category consists of 25-30 sources, balanced between primary and secondary literature. The lists are not intended to be exhaustive but should include key and representative sources that can demonstrate the student's command of the field.

Students will be provided **4-6 questions** for each category by the supervising faculty member to guide the building of the bibliography. The questions are designed to develop the student's fields of study.

The reading lists should be finalized **no later than the end of the Fall term of the third year** to provide the student sufficient time to prepare for the QE.

The reading list also includes a brief introduction (1-5 double-spaced pages), which explains the list's coherence and its relevance to the student's areas of specialization/competence. The reading lists must be approved by the GREL's Graduate Advisor before the exam can be scheduled.

Students will register for REL 299 independent study courses during the third year to prepare for the QE-s. These may be distributed across the Fall/Winter/Spring quarters in consultation with the GREL Grad Advisor and the student's major professor.

2. WRITTEN EXAM

The student will take **three (3)** written exams, one for each of the three areas of competence (TAOS, RAOS, and AOC). The DE does not require a separate exam.

These three written exams will be spaced over the course of a week, with the oral exam scheduled within a week of the completion of the three written exams.

The exam questions for each of the three exams will be sent to the Chair of the student's QE Committee and to the Graduate Program Coordinator, at least one day prior to each exam date. The Chair of the QE Committee is responsible for sending the questions for each exam to the student at the scheduled time. At the end of the exam, the student will return their responses to the Chair of the QE and the Graduate Program Coordinator. The Chair of the QE Committee will then share the student's response with the members of the QE Committee. While the exam will be evaluated by the faculty member responsible for their specific area (TAOS/RAOS/AOC), the student's response to all questions will be made available to the entire committee.

In each of the three written exams (TAOS, RAOS, AOC) students will be given **five (5)** questions from which the student responds to two (2) over 4 hours, spending approximately 1.5 hours on each answer.² Thus, students respond to a total of 6 questions over 12 hours spread over three exam days. Students are allowed (and indeed, encouraged) to take breaks during the four-hour

² The current QE format is 3 responses of 5 questions in 3 hours. This has been changed in this new document to allow students more time to produce substantive answers and to account for breaks while taking the exam.

slot devoted to each written exam. They may use their computer and may consult relevant sources. Plagiarism or cheating of any sort will result in an automatic NP and be addressed in accordance with university policy.

Committee members may consult with each other on the questions and may also decide how closely the questions will be modeled on the preassigned questions that helped develop the bibliographies.

3. PROSPECTUS

The student will produce a dissertation prospectus (10-20 double-spaced pages) that outlines the proposed research project. The prospectus includes the following:

- a. proposed title
- b. the research question(s)
- c. the methodology
- d. a review of primary and ethnographic sources for the research
- e. a literature review of significant secondary/theoretical sources
- f. contribution to the field
- g. timeline for completion
- h. a preliminary bibliography
- i. chapter outline

The prospectus is developed in consultation with the student's major professor, but all committee members are invited to provide feedback prior to the final submission. **The finalized prospectus should be made available to the QE Committee at least two weeks prior to the QE oral exam.** The prospectus must be approved by all members of the QE committee before the student can begin work on the dissertation. In no case will a dissertation prospectus be approved whose topic lies within an area not covered by a student's Qualifying Examination.

4. ORAL EXAM

The three-hour oral exam is scheduled in the week following the written exams.

Format: The committee will first convene confidentially to discuss the student's written exams and to decide the order in which questions will be posed to the student. The student will be invited to join for Part 1 of the Oral Exam.

Part 1 of Oral Exam

The first portion of this exam will focus on the student's answers to the questions; committee members will take turns asking several questions to which the student responds. After the

student answers, other committee members can weigh in on questions and responses before moving to the next committee member's questions.

At the conclusion of Part 1 of the Oral Exam, the student will be asked to leave, while the committee will deliberate on the student's oral performance. The student will be invited back in, and after a very brief review of the written exams, the committee will turn to a discussion of the prospectus.

Part 2 of Oral Exam

In the second part of the exam, the committee will focus on the prospectus. Questions and comments can be offered in a more organic and less-structured manner than in the first part of the exam.

At the conclusion of Part 2 of the Oral Exam, the committee will once again evaluate the student's overall performance and decide whether the student has passed or failed the QEs. The student will be invited back in and informed of the result.

Evaluation

The QE Committee will evaluate the student on their command of their subject area, their written work, which demonstrates their mastery of subject-area bibliographies, the prospectus and the viability of the proposed research and its contributions to the field.

Students will receive a Pass (P)/No Pass (NP)/Provisional Pass (PP) on the QE.

Pass: if the student passes the exam, work for the QE is understood to be complete and the student may begin work on the dissertation.

Provisional Pass: if the student is granted a provisional pass, the student will need to retake either the whole or part of the exam, based on the QE committee's recommendation, within one quarter of the original QE date.

No Pass: if the student does not pass the exam, the student will be offered one opportunity to retake the entire exam no later than within a quarter of the original QE date.

The Chair of the Committee will be responsible for compiling a brief report on the student's QE performance. This will include comments from the committee members on all four parts of the exams: reading lists, written exams, oral exam, and prospectus. The student will be provided a copy of the report, and the GREL will maintain a copy as well. This report is due within twenty-four hours of the oral exam.

Copies of the student's bibliographies, written exams and prospectus must be provided to the GREL's staff coordinator along with the committee's written report of the exam.

LANGUAGE EXAMS

Students must complete their language exams prior to the QE. All students must demonstrate competency in a language other than English. Students may demonstrate language competency via coursework, or a translation exam administered by a qualified faculty member at UC Davis with the relevant language expertise. Students who have two or more primary languages of research may petition to substitute one of these languages for the language of scholarship (typically French or German).

Competency in a primary language (research language) may be demonstrated either through coursework (one graduate seminar, 4 units) or through a three-hour language exam evaluated either by the major professor or by a faculty member with competency in the language. The exam involves translating an article of no more than 10 pages into English within a three-hour period. Students may consult dictionaries but may not rely on online resources or translators. A one-hour written exam will also be required to demonstrate written competency. If a student's research requires oral competency, the student may replace the written exam with the oral exam. The decision to take the oral or written exam is taken in consultation with the major advisor and Graduate Advisor. A copy of the exam(s) will be retained by the GREL.

The language of scholarship exam requires students to demonstrate reading competency at the second- or third-year level. Students may pass this exam by taking a placement test, passing a reading course with a grade of B or better, or taking a translation exam administered by a faculty member with the relevant expertise in the exam. If students are taking a language exam, students demonstrate reading competency by translating no more than five pages of an article related to their field of research in two hours. The result of the exams will be maintained by the GREL.

It is understood that if students have primary research languages, that their fluency in these languages is at a higher level than of the languages of scholarship.

For further details about the language exams, refer to the handbook, which can be found here:

<https://religiongradgroup.ucdavis.edu/study-religion-graduate-program-handbook>

EXCEPTIONS

Students may petition the Graduate Program Committee for extensions on Preliminary and Qualifying Exams. The student's major professor must write on behalf of the student to request the extension and address how delays in exams will impact the student's normative degree progress. Petitions will be reviewed by the GREL program committee and approval will be granted on a case-by-case basis.