

# **Christian Theological Studies Guidelines**

## **Introduction**

The graduate program in Christian Theological Studies at Duke University constructively engages the breadth of the Christian tradition, its contemporary formations, and the interaction between theology and its social, political and economic contexts. Alongside constructive work in Christian doctrine, the program encompasses work in the relationship between Scripture and theology, Christian ethics/moral theology, political theology, philosophical theology, the intellectual history of theology, and the study of theology as a cultural phenomenon. These foci may also include either a quantitative or qualitative dimension such as ethnographic work. The program does not envisage these sub-fields of Christian theological studies as mutually exclusive. Rather, it cultivates projects that include one or more of these approaches, seeing them as mutually illuminating and co-generative.

The size and vibrancy of the field of Christian theology as well as the diverse scholarly trajectories of the faculty, and--last but not least--the world-class scholarship represented in other fields of intellectual inquiry at Duke University all offer students a rich context in which to develop their own emerging scholarly work in Christian Theological Studies. As a whole, the program offers opportunities and frameworks for discovering a specific focus for individual research, a collegial context of learning and robust dialogue, a set of shared reference points and interlocutors, and professional development as a scholar and teacher.

## **Requirements – Major**

### **Courses**

Students will normally take three courses a semester for a total of 12 courses over a two-year period. Students can, with the agreement of their advisor/s, take additional courses should they want to. Students with advanced degrees will usually take two years of course work. In selecting which courses to take it is important to balance a need to develop a knowledge base for one's own research, plug gaps in one's knowledge that may be required when teaching, and be intellectually adventurous.

The usual pattern for the program is as follows:

**Years 1-2:** course work, including language exams.

**Year 3:** Prepare for and take preliminary exams (includes developing reading lists);

develop one's dissertation area, including drafting a dissertation proposal.

**Years 4-5:** Write dissertation.

(**Year 6:** Should it be needed an extra year can be taken to complete the dissertation).

### **Languages**

A reading knowledge of two modern languages is required. These normally include either German, French or Spanish. Selection of languages depends to a large extent on the nature of the dissertation area.

Knowledge of the two languages will be examined by a translation of a text appropriate to the student's interest, selected by the Christian theology field (normally one's supervisor). These examinations must be passed before preliminary examinations can be taken. Bibliographies for the preliminary examinations and the dissertation should usually include appropriate titles from the two languages.

### **Internal Minor**

Choosing another field in the Graduate Program in Religion, students will meet this requirement according to guidelines established in that field. Crucially, for these courses to count they must be with a faculty member who is part of the track selected as an internal minor.

### **External Minor**

Normally two courses in a department or program other than Religion/Divinity.

### **Preliminary Exam Guidelines**

The following guidelines offer a basic consensus of faculty in Christian Theological Studies concerning preliminary examinations in this field at Duke University. These guidelines presuppose the wider framework of the Preliminary Exam Procedures and Guidelines adopted in Duke's Graduate Program in Religion.

The student will begin preparation for the preliminary exams by developing a reading list in consultation with her advisors. This reading list will include 30-40 texts. These texts may be cross-listed (i.e. appear on more than one list). Some texts will be single articles or chapters, while others will be whole books.

Since the reading list should indicate both the student's attentiveness to the breadth of the Christian tradition as well as the student's own particular scholarly focus, the decision on the individual titles for this reading list is left to the collaborative labor

between the student and her advisors. However, it is worth seeing examples of other lists from previous students, and, if possible, identifying a canon of core texts.

[Link to Graduate School Preliminary Exam Procedures and Guidelines.](#)

## **Reading Lists**

All reading lists will contain the following:

- The Scriptures are presupposed as a foundational text in every reading list. Consideration of how Scripture relates to your field of study is expected.
- 2-3 titles from the early centuries of the Christian tradition, the choice being governed by the student's scholarly work and research agenda. Attention should be given to whether figures are drawn predominantly from East, West or South; that is, the Byzantine, Latin and Oriental (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox) worlds.
- 2-3 titles from the Medieval period.
- 2 titles from the century of the Reformations.
- 2-3 titles from 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- 2-3 titles from contemporary theological inquiry (20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> C).
- You may want to consider how key philosophical figures feature in your list and how key figures from Judaism and Islam might be relevant.

The remainder of the reading list should be geared to equipping the student to have a competent (rather than comprehensive) grasp of the sub-fields of Christian Theological Studies that their dissertation is situated within (notably, systematic theology/doctrine or Christian ethics/moral theology). One way to think about this is to develop lists as if one were writing either an overview piece for a companion to the field or preparing an introductory course to the relevant field of enquiry: what key primary texts and key figures would need to be included? And what vital secondary literature would need to be included or touched on?

## **Study Questions and Exam Questions**

The reading list forms the basis of the student's preparation for the preliminary examinations. In collaboration with her advisors, the student will develop study questions to guide her reading and reflection. In general, four to six such study questions are suggested for the major field, including at least one question about a figure of the Christian tradition and one question focused clearly on one theological topic or theme.

The actual examination questions are left to the choice of the advisors but will take into

account the agreed upon study questions. Questions may be formulated through a dialogue between student and advisor/s, and the advisor/s will select 3 or more questions to be set for the exam. These will be given to Carol Rush who will help coordinate the exam.

### **The Preliminary Examinations**

The preliminary examinations consist of:

1. A comprehensive examination in Christian Theological Studies (4 hours).
2. An internal minor examination in a cognate field within the Graduate Program in Religion, to be prepared and given according to the regulations established by that field for students minoring in it (3 hours).
3. An external minor examination, to be prepared in consultation with a professor in another Department of Duke University and to be set by them (3 hours).
4. An examination related to the projected focus of the dissertation, to be prepared in conjunction with the professor/s who are likely to serve as principal advisor/s in the writing of the dissertation (3 hours).

Students may petition the convener of the area for an additional 2 to 4 hours to complete any exam. That request, however must be submitted in writing one week prior to the beginning of the examination cycle.

### **Dissertation Proposal**

After the preliminary examinations, a formal dissertation proposal must be approved by the student's dissertation committee before the student is admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. This should take place within, at the most, *six months* of completing the preliminary exams.

The proposal that will be developed in consultation with the director should include:

- a. A **working title**.
- b. A **statement of the problem** to be addressed and the **core thesis** to be developed.
- c. A brief defense of the topic's **significance**, including the prospective dissertation's location within a wider field of scholarship, paying particular attention to the context of the field's secondary literature (i.e., who is working in related or parallel areas and how does the dissertation differ from or build on their work?).
- d. A brief statement regarding the **methodology** and **foreign languages** to be used.
- e. A **working outline**, including descriptive chapter headings and a brief statement of the material to be covered within each section.
- f. A **basic bibliography** of key primary and secondary sources

### **Procedures for Writing and Defending the Doctoral Dissertation**

The first draft will be written by the student in consultation with the supervisor. In this process, individual chapters or portions thereof normally will be submitted to other members of the dissertation committee, as appropriate. The student should consult with the supervisor and other readers to determine when and how these materials will be distributed.

After the supervisor has gone through the first draft of all the chapters, the student will make the revisions suggested by the supervisor and any other committee members to whom the student has shown it for feedback. In the normal course of things this revised form will be the penultimate draft. The student will give the supervisor four weeks to review this penultimate draft. The supervisor may decide:

- a. that the dissertation is ready for defense,
- b. that the dissertation requires some minor revisions, or
- c. that it needs more substantial revision.

If substantial revision is required, the supervisor may suggest that it should be looked at in part or in full by one or more of the other readers. If revisions are required, the student will make them and then resubmit the dissertation. The same options will be available to the supervisor. When the supervisor decides that the dissertation is ready for defense, the student may set the defense date, **allowing at least a minimum of three weeks** (ideally four or more weeks) between submission of the defense copy and the defense. Failure to allow sufficient time between submission of the dissertation and the date of the defense may lead to disqualification.

### **Requirements for a Minor**

In conjunction with at least one professor in the field, students will establish an agreed bibliography that seeks both to introduce them to the range of the field and to respect their particular interests in their major field. A student minoring in Christian theology is required to take two courses or seminars in the field for credit, and to take a three-hour written examination set and graded by an advising professor from the field as part of their preliminary examinations.