

Ph. D. Program in History of Religions  
Valid from January 1, 2010, until further notice

**1. General Remarks**

Each faculty member in the History of Religions (HR) Area maintains both a general interest in certain key theoretical problems within the discipline and an interest in a particular area of specialized research. Similarly, the programs of study designed for the students enrolled in the doctoral program are structured to provide training for both aspects of academic work. In addition to taking courses offered by faculty within the Area, students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of other Areas of the Divinity School and other segments of the larger University in order to acquire the specialized knowledge and linguistic skills they need.

**2. Definition of the Area**

HR approaches religion as an exclusively human phenomenon, via the methods of the social sciences and the humanities. It is concerned to theorize at a high level of generalization, informed by broadly comparative and empirical research, and to carry out high level empirical research informed by theoretical reflection. It pays self-conscious and explicit attention to problems of epistemology, terminology, category formation, method and motive. Irreverent by temperament and sometimes on principle, it insists that [a] the Western monotheisms should not be the only paradigms and/or objects of legitimate study, [b] religion cannot be reduced to belief, but also includes issues of practices, institutions, communities, habitus and other factors that often operate below the level of consciousness, and [c] interpretation involves critical probing and systematic interrogation of the idealized self-representations of any religious phenomenon.

**3. Application to the Ph. D. Program**

The application should demonstrate a sound theoretical understanding of the student's project and a sound beginning in any special area that the student intends to study. All HR students applying from within the M. A. program should take courses with as many members of the HR faculty as possible.

**4. The Colloquium and the Theory Courses**

The HR Area requires all students to participate in a colloquium with the HR faculty approximately midway between entering the field and taking the qualifying examinations; this moment generally falls during the second year of Ph. D. study. This is not an exam, but a collective evaluation of a student's progress and future course of study. The student should submit an essay that constitutes a serious piece of research, to be discussed at the colloquium; it is often an expanded, or refined, version of a paper submitted for a course. The colloquium paper should, ideally, be empirically grounded in the student's special area and engage theoretical issues. Students will inaugurate the discussion with a statement of their academic purpose and objectives. The paper will be circulated to all faculty (including associated faculty in HR) and all faculty are invited to take part, but a quorum of three is necessary. Discussion will extend to all aspects of the student's academic performance. The colloquium is intended to provide constructive advice to help the student prepare for Ph D exams and dissertation. In some

cases, the faculty may ask the student to revise and resubmit the colloquium paper and, in rare cases, the faculty may advise the student to transfer to another academic program or to withdraw from the HR program.

MA students who plan to apply for admission to the Ph. D. in HR should take, in their first year if possible, and no later than the end of their second year, at least the first and if possible the second of the two basic theory courses offered in sequence by the HR faculty, namely the courses in Classical Theory and Contemporary Theory. This will count as one (or two, if both are taken) of the three courses required for application to the Ph. D. field. The Classical Theory course will be offered in every year and is a pre-requisite for the Contemporary Theory Course. Students who enter the Ph. D. program from outside the Divinity School should take the Classical Theory course and, if possible, the Contemporary Theory class before the colloquium and must complete both theory courses before the qualifying examinations. If similar coursework has been completed elsewhere, the student may petition the HR faculty to accept this as fulfilling one or both of the two basic theory courses. Students who took only the Classical Theory course in the MA program should take the Contemporary Theory course before scheduling their colloquium.

## **5. Qualifying Examinations**

### **A: Orals Statement**

The paper submitted at the time of qualifying examinations, known as the Orals Statement, should satisfy the same criteria as that of the colloquium paper, but on a larger scale, sometimes closer to the area of the student's intended dissertation.

### **B: Distribution**

Each student will take at least 2, and no more than 3, HR exams, within the total of 4 exams, including at least one theory exam and one Special Area exam. Students will choose faculty members to administer each of the exams in such a way that there are at least 4 Divinity School faculty members, including at least 2 HR faculty members, involved in the examinations as a whole.

### **C. Bibliographies for the Qualifying Examinations**

#### **Exam 1: Special Area**

The student will, in consultation with the appropriate faculty, select a bibliography of 20 books that focus on various aspects--theoretical, practical, and communal--of the religious tradition(s) within the chosen Special Area. These should cover both pre-modern times and (in cases where the relevant tradition is still alive) the contemporary period, and both primary and secondary materials.

These Examinations include some religious traditions that are relatively narrowly geographically bounded and some that extend over a broad geographical area. In both cases, the examinations cover the diversity of religious phenomena within the given tradition as they have developed over an extended period of time. Students must have, and demonstrate, knowledge of the relevant languages of the tradition on which they intend to write their dissertation. Examples of Special Areas that have the scope required, and in which the present faculty work, include: Hinduism, Buddhism, South Asian Religions, Southeast Asian Religions, Tibetan Religions, Chinese Religions, Japanese Religions, Islam, Greek Religions, Roman Religions, Germanic

Religions, Zoroastrianism, North American Native Religions, South American Religions, Sub-saharan African Religions, and aspects of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students who wish to arrange for an Examination in a Special Area in which the HR Area does not have obvious faculty resources must demonstrate sharp focus and strong determination. Such students should first consult with an appropriate member of the HR faculty concerning possible strategies; they must forge a good working relationship with some faculty member outside the HR Area or outside the Divinity School who has expertise in the student's chosen area and who has made a serious commitment to serve as the student's co-advisor and to assist in writing and/or grading the Special Area Examination. HR students who specialize in Christianity, Judaism, or Islam will work with the History of Religions faculty to devise individual ways of meeting the Special Area requirement; this may involve substituting for the HR Special Area Examination one or more of the Examinations given by the Committee on the History of Religious Traditions.

## **Exam 2: Theory**

### **A. Contemporary Theory**

This examination covers representative works that have broad and ongoing significance in the discipline of history of religions. Students will choose 4 clusters of 5 books, each cluster dealing with a coherent theoretical focus. The content of each cluster will be decided upon by the student in consultation with the examiners. Some clusters (such as Structuralism or Psychoanalysis) may fall in either the Contemporary or Classical period, depending on the books selected. Examples of such clusters are: Structuralism; Post-structuralism; Psychoanalysis [Neo]; Neo-Marxism; Cultural Hermeneutics; Feminism; History and Historiography; Post-Colonialism; History and the Imaginaire; Language Theory.

### **B: Classical Theory**

This examination provides an opportunity to take account of some important authors, issues, and trends in the field, and to set them within their historical context. Students will choose 4 clusters of 5 books, each cluster dealing with a coherent theoretical focus. The student will decide upon the content of each cluster in consultation with the examiners. Typically, the exam begins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it might well stretch to include pre-modern texts. Examples of clusters are: Hegel and Marx, Enlightenment and Romanticism, Max Weber, Psychoanalysis, Durkheim and the École Sociologique; Early Anthropology; Phenomenology; Pre-modern theories of religion; Dumézil.

## **Exam 3.**

This examination may take any of 4 basic forms:

A. Whichever of the two Theory exams was not chosen for Exam Two.

B: An exam in a second Special Area.

C: In consultation with the advisor, a student may choose a second exam in the same Special Area as Exam 1, such that one of the two deals with primary sources and the other with secondary.

D: Other Foci. Exam 3 may be defined in terms of specific themes or categories (e.g. myth and symbol, communities and practice, comparison, purity and pollution). It may consist entirely of

theoretical material on selected topics or of a combination of such theoretical materials with primary material within a particular religious tradition. Each student will negotiate a topic and reading list (4 clusters of 5 books) with the faculty member[s] who will administer the examination.