

---

*General Examination Procedures and Guidelines*

*Religion in the Americas (RA)*

---

The General Examination includes four units. Two of these, taken as sit-down exams, cover aspects of the history and historiography of Religion in the Americas from pre-colonial contact to the twenty-first century and are aimed at developing broad teaching competency in the field. The third exam takes the form of a substantial research paper unrelated to the dissertation, and the fourth General Examination is a historiographical and methodological essay that is intended to establish the groundwork for a dissertation prospectus.

*The target date for completing all four general examinations is the end of the Fall semester of the third year of study.* It is strongly encouraged that each year's cohort of students in the subfield prepare for the first two exams together. The Graduate Administrator maintains a file of past exam questions which students may consult as they select their exam fields and develop reading lists.

The procedure for preparing for the **first two general examinations** is as follows:

- The student should work with their General Advisors to determine five examination areas in which to concentrate their reading. The aim of the first two exams is to become familiar with and demonstrate understanding of topics, questions, and methodological approaches within the field of Religion in the Americas that will support future teaching in the field. As such, the examination areas should not be overly specialized or simply lead to the dissertation but should attend to broad areas of significance in the field. Preparation for these exams will require reading broadly in both the primary and secondary literature central to the study of Religion in the Americas.
- The reading lists (see Appendix) are meant to help get the process underway but are not comprehensive and students are expected to add to the list according to areas of special interest or emphasis. Students will develop specific lists of primary and secondary readings for each examination area in consultation with the faculty.



## GRADUATE PROGRAM

- Once sufficiently prepared, the student should confirm the date of the examination with their GA1 and with the Graduate Administrator. GA1 will notify other faculty members in the subfield of the scheduled date of the examination.
- In consultation with the General Advisors, the GA1 will prepare a question pertinent to each of the student's five chosen topic areas and submit them to the Graduate Administrator.
- On the day of the examination, the student will receive the questions from the Graduate Administrator.
- The student will select three of the five proffered questions and have a full, eight-hour day to respond to them. The student may complete the examination at a location of her or his choosing. Books, notes, computer files, and the Internet are not to be used during the composition of the essays. It is important that students manage their time carefully in order to give full consideration to each of the questions.
- At the end of the eight-hour period, the student will send the essay responses by email to all their advisors.
- The student will receive a summary of faculty comments about the examination and her or his performance will be evaluated and recorded as pass or fail.

**The third examination consists of a substantial research paper** (25-30 pages) in an area of the student's own choosing and *unrelated to the dissertation topic*. It provides the opportunity to build on research from a seminar or to embark on a project in a domain of particular interest that has otherwise been left unattended in one's course work. The aim is a piece of scholarly writing and research of publishable quality. Whatever its subject (a figure, a movement, a denominational tradition, a collection of images or artifacts, a ritual, an idea), it should demonstrate strong historiographical and methodological awareness on a level with leading contemporary academic research.

**The fourth examination consists of an essay** (also of 30-35 pages) examining a critical issue, conceptual problem, or methodological question in an area related to the student's planned dissertation. This paper provides the opportunity to conduct a systematic literature review, assess past and current scholarly approaches, and consider future directions for research. The fourth exam helps to prepare the way for a viable dissertation proposal and, while there is often overlap between the exam and the proposal, the issue, problem, or question at the heart of this essay must extend beyond the scope of the dissertation topic.