

Preface to Application: A Guide to Preliminary Examinations

Please read before completing form on page 6

Purpose and Philosophy of the Preliminary Examinations

The preliminary examinations represent the next-to-last point of reference in the doctoral student's progress toward the degree. The student who successfully completes the prelims will have only the dissertation remaining for the accomplishment of the Ph.D. These exams, then, are the final opportunity of the faculty as a whole to evaluate the student's progress. They are given not merely as an exercise, but to determine as accurately as possible:

1. Whether you have matured into a professional in the field, capable of functioning as such and able to bring your academic accomplishments to bear in a creative, personal and original way;
2. Whether your research and writing skills have matured to the point that you can be expected to contribute creatively to the enrichment of scholarship in the field;
3. Whether your formal course work has been supplemented by a careful program of private study and self-strengthening, such as makes for breadth as a scholar and gives evidence of a self-discipline that suggests a trajectory of continued growth.
4. Whether your studies indicate that you are ready to undertake teaching responsibilities with the promise of success, so that the faculty may with good conscience recommend you as a teacher of record for the department and recommend you to inquiring institutions.

The Nature, Scheduling and Administration of the Prelims

The exams are normally given early in December and late April/early May. Each student will have three days of testing in a two week period. Each test period is five hours in length. You are responsible for alerting the Graduate Studies office of your intentions to take preliminary exams at the beginning of the full semester prior to that in which you plan to take them. That is, those taking prelims in May must notify the Graduate Studies office by October. Those taking prelims in December must notify the Graduate Studies office by April. Application may be made no sooner than the semester in which you register for the thirty-sixth hour of your final forty-eight hours (exclusive of dissertation). You may not take the exams in any semester in which you have more than three hours of class work in progress. You may not take the exams if you have more than three residence hours to complete other than the maximum three hours in progress.

How to Apply for Preliminary Exams

To apply for preliminary exams, carefully read this PDF document. Then complete and submit the included form on page 6.

Time Limit for Taking Prelims

The prelims must be taken no later than the third time they are offered after the semester in which you complete your forty-eight hours of coursework. Extensions can be given only on petition to the graduate faculty of the Department of Religion.

The Nature of the Preliminary Exams

Students will take three exams in their area of concentration. Concentrations include Old Testament, New Testament, Historical Studies, and Theological Studies.

You should not be unduly intimidated by the nature of the exams. The faculty is aware that no one has an exhaustive knowledge of any area. Furthermore, you should remember that the professor who prepares your exam will know your background and history and will make every effort to design a test for you which will be fair and will give you ample opportunity to demonstrate your preparation and your abilities.

What Will Be the Content of the Preliminary Exams?

1. **Old Testament Concentration:** Old Testament preliminary exams constitute field exams, including Hebrew Proficiency, Torah, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, Writings, History and Archaeology, and Old Testament Theology. In addition, one portion of the exam will cover dissertation research. Check with faculty for a preliminary reading list and further directions.
2. **New Testament Concentration:** New Testament preliminary exams constitute field exams. Once a student completes the Greek proficiency in the fall of the third year, they will be allowed to take preliminary exams in the spring. During orientation week when students begin their program, New Testament faculty will provide students a guide for studying for preliminary exams.
3. **Historical Studies Concentration:** If your area of concentration is Historical Studies, you will take three exams in the history of Christianity. Exams will be organized around the major divisions of Historical Studies, i.e. early, medieval, early-modern, and modern. You will be expected to demonstrate a sound general knowledge of the field. In addition, one section of the exams will cover dissertation background readings as they have been negotiated with the area faculty.
4. **Theological Studies Concentration** If your area of concentration is Theological Studies, you will take three exams. Two exams will relate to a foundational reading list in theology; the third is in the student's area of research interest. You will be responsible for a solid general knowledge of the field. In addition, however, the graduate faculty in Theological Studies may specify areas in which you are expected to demonstrate special expertise and in-depth preparation. Check with your advisor for the foundational reading list and advice for preparing a reading list for the specialized portion.

Steps toward the Prelims

In order that your progress toward the completion of the residence phase of your doctoral program may be as rapid and efficient as possible, the department has established the following procedures:

1. After you have completed one academic year of residence and a minimum of twelve semester hours (exclusive of remedial work), your performance will be reviewed. This review will be based on grades received in courses taken, on consultation with faculty concerning observed strengths and weaknesses, and progress toward the fulfillment of language requirements, etc.

A report will be provided to your graduate advisor. The advisor will have a conference with you, advise you of this report and assist you in remedying any perceived weakness or limitations. Should issues surface that need to be addressed by the student, that student should provide a report to the advisor and the Graduate Studies office at the end of the second year documenting how those concerns have been addressed. This report should address progress toward degree completion and any concerns raised in the 12 hour review.

2. During the semester in which you register for the thirty-sixth hour of the final forty-eight hours (exclusive of dissertation), your performance will undergo another evaluation. Performance in several areas will be examined:
 - a. Grade performance. (You should bear in mind that the passing of individual courses with minimal grades does not guarantee further advancement toward the doctoral degree. Consistently marginal grade performance may be sufficient reason for terminating a program.)
 - b. Writing skills.
 - c. Verbal and organizational skills for effective performance in classroom.
 - d. Effective and diligent performance of academic responsibilities in graduate assistant or classroom teaching assignments.

On the basis of the thirty-sixth hour review, one of three advisories will be issued to the student by the graduate faculty in your area and communicated to the Graduate Studies Director:

1. "It is recommended that the preliminary examinations be taken."
2. "It is recommended that the preliminary examinations not be taken." This recommendation will be given when the faculty feels that a student, although having completed individual courses with acceptable grades, has not demonstrated promise of success in teaching or in other areas of academic achievement. Such a recommendation does not foreclose the taking of the prelims, but alerts the student to the faculty's judgment that prospects for completing the doctorate are not great. If you opt not to pursue the doctorate further, you are free to complete a master's degree by the writing of an acceptable thesis.
3. "Authorization to take the preliminary examinations is withheld." In the case of marginal performance which has persisted throughout a student's residence period, even though you have received minimally acceptable

grades, permission to take the prelims may be denied and doctoral status terminated. Such a student may complete a master's degree in the manner prescribed above.

How Should You Prepare for Prelims?

1. Your preparation should begin with your entrance into the program. Many of your activities during your residence period should be directed toward the preliminaries.
2. While the courses you take will assist your preparation, you should be careful about shaping your curriculum and selecting your courses for the sole purpose of "prelim prep," since prelims are not course exams but are broader and since course needs may be dictated by other considerations as well, such as the correction of areas of weakness, the development of specialization for your dissertation, special interest, faculty schedules, etc. In short, you cannot take enough courses to prepare for prelims.
3. At the beginning of your program you should establish a plan for general preparation through reading and research, in addition to your scheduled classes. Such a program may be developed in consultation with advisor and faculty, but carrying out such a program is your responsibility.
4. A period of specific intensive preparation should begin once the areas and professors have been selected. You will declare to the Director of Graduate Studies your intention to take the exams at a specified time and the examinations to be taken. You should allow yourself a semester for intensive preparation. Each participating professor should be consulted about the nature of the test and suggestions for preparation. **Such consultation should occur at least a full semester before taking the exams.**
5. Do not ignore journal preparation.
6. Work hard but stay relaxed. Do not be compulsive.

A Word of Warning and Encouragement

Assuming that you have taken advantage of your time in the program and have continued to deepen your academic preparation, you should do well on the preliminary exams. You should not anticipate serious difficulties. If you have been cleared and recommended for prelims, you can be sure that the faculty is aware of your competence. If you do encounter difficulty, it is likely to be for one of two reasons. Therefore, consider the following words of counsel:

1. Take the exams seriously. Allow yourself adequate time in the intensive phase of preparation.
2. Do not take the exams too seriously! You can, if you are not careful, be your own worst enemy. Excessive anxiety can be counterproductive. Some excellent people have had difficulties on the prelims because they exhausted themselves in preparation or allowed their concern to be translated into tension. Don't "psyche yourself out." Get adequate rest, especially during the two week period of the exams, and remind yourself of the good work you have done and the solid achievements which your doctoral record contains.

Relax and do a good job.

At the conclusion of the preliminary examination, the examining committee will report to you the result of the preliminary examinations. Each examination will be graded at the level satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or outstanding. Several results are possible for the overall exam experience;

1. The Graduate Studies office will report whether you pass or fail the preliminary exams to the Graduate School, and that information will appear on your transcript.
2. Students will receive a letter from the Director of Graduate Studies informing them what grades were assigned to the individual exams. This report will state whether faculty have evaluated the exam with a mark of "Outstanding," "Satisfactory," or "Unsatisfactory" on each exam.
3. Two types of "Unsatisfactory" exams, may be differentiated: "Unsatisfactory (remediation allowed)" and "Unsatisfactory (remediation not allowed)." The overall quality of the exams should be equivalent to a B or better in order to be judged satisfactory and each exam is also evaluated on whether or not it would be evaluated as satisfactory. If a single exam is given "Unsatisfactory (remediation allowed)", you may remove the unsatisfactory result by retaking only the unsatisfactory exam at the next date when preliminary exams are given or faculty members may prefer for you to improve your competence to a satisfactory level by writing a remedial paper or papers.
4. "Failure of the Examinations." If more than one exam is judged unsatisfactory, or if in the opinion of the committee the performance on most of the exams has been marginal, the student may be asked to repeat the preliminary exams at the next date of administration, or the subsequent one. (It should be noted that marginal passes on all exams does not necessarily add up to a pass on the preliminaries as a whole. If you do poorly or very marginally on one exam, you should have other exams on which you have performed well above the acceptable level.)
5. "Failure without repetition." In rare cases a student may not be allowed to repeat the prelims. This is likely to occur only when a marginal overall record is reinforced by a serious failure of performance on the prelims and is not mitigated by strong extenuating circumstances.

The Relationship of Prelims to Dissertation Research

When you have passed the prelims, only the dissertation stands between you and your doctoral hood. Preliminary exams will assume students have defined at least a general dissertation topic. Students are encouraged, but not required, to investigate the feasibility of taking a reading seminar with the professor in their area of concentration whom they expect to be their dissertation supervisor, in the fall of their third year that will focus on background readings for the dissertation and producing a draft of the dissertation proposal (500 words) that may be circulated among area faculty for refinement. Be in conversation with your anticipated dissertation supervisor by the end of your second year to understand how your prelim preparation is interrelated to the topic of your dissertation.

Preliminary Examinations Application Form

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Baylor ID: _____

Please indicate preliminary exam period ([click here for exam dates](#)).

Applicants who intend to take preliminary exams must submit this application at least 90 days prior to exams. If you do not submit this application by the deadline no exams will be prepared for you.

I am submitting this application at least 90 days prior to exams.

I have read and understand the Guide to Preliminary Examinations (pages 1-5 of this application).

Exam	Professor(s)	Special Topics Arranged with Faculty
1.		
2.		
3.		

NOTE: Applicants may not take exams in any semester in which they have more than three hours of coursework in progress. Applicants may not take exams if they have remaining residence hours to complete in addition to the maximum three hours in progress. This includes any "I" (incomplete) remaining on an applicant's transcript. Please check with the Graduate Office for further clarification.