

SUBSTANTIVE AREA: Sociology of Religion
DATE: June 2020

OVERALL SCOPE OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE EXAM

All sociologists of religion should be familiar a core set of readings in order to claim professional competence, as background to eventually teaching in the sociology of religion, and as intellectual context to help become an original producer of significant scholarship in the field. The purpose of doctoral exams is to provide occasions for students to master the core literatures of their fields of interest and research. Scholars differ on exactly what literature belongs on such core lists of readings. Listed below, however, are the *minimal* readings which ND graduate students will be expected to master for the program's doctoral exams in the sociology of religion. This is a starting point. To become a working scholar in the field capable of framing articles and books that make significant contributions requires reading more broadly and deeply than this list. Among the key questions in the sociology of religion—which the readings below address in various ways and about which doctoral exams in sociology of religion will ask—are the following:

1. *Subject*: What is “religion?” Why and how are people religious? How is religion expressed in social terms and forms?
2. *Methods*: How can we study religion sociologically? What are the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches, especially as they relate to larger theoretical interests and perspectives and types of research agendas and questions?
3. *Modernity*: How does the historical transition from “pre-modern” to modern (and postmodern?) society affect the strength and character of religion? Does modernity secularize or not? Are there multiple modernities when it comes to religion? What might that mean?
4. *Practice and Belonging*: What social factors and processes influence individuals' religious beliefs, commitments, practices, conversions, switching, etc. and the strength and character of religious communities, traditions, and subcultures?
5. *Social Reproduction and Change*: What influence does religion exert in maintaining and/or challenging established social practices and institutions, through politics, cultural transformation, or other means?

General standards for exam evaluations are as follows. *Passing* exams demonstrate (a) a breadth and depth of familiarity with the relevant literatures and their intellectual questions, theories, and debates; (b) an ability in writing to organize well the theories, issues, debates, and arguments in the field; (c) a capacity to evaluate well the intellectual and evidential merits of major positions and research programs in the field; and (d) an ability to take a position on the issue or debate in question and make a reasoned argument drawing on relevant evidence.

EXAM PREPARATION

USE OF READING LISTS

The committee provides a general reading list for students interested in taking the religion exam. Students should rely on this list as a guide to some of the more important pieces of literature in the field and be able to draw upon them in their exam answers. However, students are expected to read and think beyond the provided list as they prepare for their exams, simply to expand their own breadth and depth of learning. Important literature not on the reading list may be discussed in exam answers but the exam will not contain questions that cannot be answered with reference to the literature on the list alone.

RECOMMENDED COURSES

The department offers grad seminars on the sociology of religion on a regular basis. While the committee does not require that students take these courses before taking the exam, we strongly recommend doing so.

EXAM FORMAT

The exam will be comprised of one six (6) hour session during which students will answer three (3) questions related to the key issues outlined above. Students are permitted in the exam two pages of approved student-authored notes. These notes may be single spaced, but no smaller than 11-point font. Attempting to pre-draft an exam answer in these notes violates the spirit of the exam. Therefore, notes will not include full paragraphs or essay outlines. Any notes must be approved by the Religion exam committee chair one week in advance of the exam. Approved lists and notes will be given to the Graduate Studies Coordinator, who will print out these materials for the student to have on the day of the exam.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CITATIONS

Students do not have to follow one specific citation format, but references to published works in exam answers must be clear enough about the author/publication cited to make the committee clear about to who and what publication specifically the citation is referring. The point of the exam is not to memorize bibliographies but rather to master the issues, arguments, evidence, and other matters needed to be a well-versed scholar in this field.

EXAM RESULTS

POLICIES REGARDING RE-WRITES

Students will be assigned one of two grades for their exam: Pass, or Fail. Students will *not* be allowed to rewrite parts of their exams in order to change a failing grade to a passing one, but will be encouraged to retake the area exam the next semester.

FEEDBACK

After the committee renders its decision, students will be notified of the results by e-mail. Student may then ask to schedule a meeting with faculty committee members to discuss both strengths and weaknesses of the students' performance. Committee members may provide written feedback to students, or may set up separate meetings to discuss students' exam performances.