

**School of Philosophy
The Catholic University of America**

GRADUATE READING LIST EXAMINATIONS POLICY

I. Purpose and Policy

1. The purpose of the Graduate Reading List Examinations is to evaluate a student's capacity to understand classical texts in philosophy. Each semester three written examinations, corresponding respectively to three Lists of primary sources, are administered only at The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. by a committee of members of the School of Philosophy. The three Lists are distinguished chronologically, such that List I ranges over texts from the pre-Socratics to Averroes, List II over texts from Aquinas to Kant, and List III over texts from Hegel to Wittgenstein.
2. To be admitted as a candidate for the Ph.D. degree, a student must pass an examination on one of the reading lists (I, II, or III). To qualify for the Ph.D. degree, a student must pass an examination on a second list, thus passing examinations on any two of the three reading lists. Both examinations must be passed by the end of the semester in which the dissertation proposal is approved. Students may take the two examinations in any order, but no student may attempt more than one part in a given two-day examination period. Moreover, no student may attempt any part of the three-part examination more than two times.
3. A completed examination is considered *sufficient* if it provides accurate answers to the questions and, in the context of the questions, demonstrates a capacity to discuss clearly the terminology, the structure, and the arguments contained in one or more philosophical texts on a given List. A completed examination is considered *superior* if, in addition to providing accurate answers, it demonstrates some *mastery* of the philosophical issues and difficulties of interpretation in relation to the text(s) in question.

II. Procedures for Administering, Composing, and Grading

1. Graduate Reading Examinations for each of the three Lists are held every semester on the date scheduled in the Academic Calendar for comprehensive examinations for graduate students. Each examination is divided into two parts with six questions on each part. The two parts of an examination are administered on successive days. On each of the successive days students taking the examination are given four hours in order to answer four of the six questions. The completed examination thus includes a total of eight and only eight answers, four for each part. If a student completes the exam with fewer than four questions answered on either day, the exam as a whole will be considered insufficient and will not be graded. The student will receive an automatic grade of F for the entire exam attempt.
2. The committee charged with the responsibility of composing and grading the Graduate Reading List Examinations is annually appointed by the Dean of the School of Philosophy. Six faculty members are assigned to the committee and one representative of the graduate students. A seventh faculty member is assigned to chair the committee. The Dean assigns to each List two faculty members who have the responsibility of drafting the twelve questions from the primary sources on their List and subsequently grading completed examinations on that List. The two professors assigned to a particular List should review each other's questions before submitting them to the Chair, who is also charged with reviewing the questions.

3. The questions for the examinations should be submitted to the Chair at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled date of the examination.
4. The appropriateness of questions is to be determined in terms of the following guidelines:
 - i. Each question should be designed to examine the student's proficiency in one or more texts on a given List, texts which the student is permitted to bring to the examination.
 - ii. Questions may be composed only on the texts and editions stipulated on the List.
 - iii. Each question should be composed with the understanding that the student has one and only one hour to think through, to outline, and to write out an answer in the form of a well-developed essay.
 - iv. A question may have more than one part and be directed to more than a single work—if no guideline is violated.
 - v. No question should be too detailed or too general.
 - vi. Questions should not be tendentious, that is to say, they should not be composed in such a manner that they can only be properly answered by recourse
 - to one and only one of several possible interpretations of the text,
 - to a knowledge of a secondary source, or
 - to material gained from participation in a particular course or seminar.
 - vii. Questions composed for previous examinations for at least the last ten years should be consulted to guarantee continuity.
 - viii. No question should be formulated in such a way that it presumes the student has already completed the examination for another List.
 - ix. Questions should be so formulated that a suitable answer can only be given in the form of a well-developed essay.
 - x. One-half of one day examination (that is to say, three of the six questions for one day of one examination) on List II should be questions on the medieval philosophers: Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham. This guideline guarantees that the student will answer at least one question on a text of a medieval philosopher.
5. Grading of examinations should be based upon the same guidelines as the composition of the questions. The examination is to be evaluated on the basis of the merits of the respective answer itself in relation to the text and not on a particular expectation of the examiner.

6. The system of grading should be as follows:

Qualitative Assessment	Letter Grade	Essay Grade	Final Avg. Grade Range
Superior	A+	4.3	4.16 – 4.30
	A	4.0	3.86 – 4.15
Sufficient	A-	3.7	3.56 – 3.85
	B+	3.3	3.16 – 3.55
	B	3.0	2.86 – 3.15
	B-	2.7	2.56 – 2.85
Insufficient	C+	2.3	2.16 – 2.55
	C	2.0	1.86 – 2.15
	C-	1.7	1.56 – 1.85
	F	0.0	0.00 – 1.55

7. Examiners should give a letter grade to each question, but should not identify themselves on the examination. Each answer will be evaluated by the two examiners who have composed the questions for that examination. The final mark for each essay will be the average of the two marks given. The Chair is responsible for compiling the grades and determining the average for each student. An average below B- is a failing grade, requiring that the student retake the examination and indicating some question about the student's ability and qualifications to continue in graduate work. The student may retake the same examination only once. A grade of B- indicates work that is acceptable, but in comparison with the work of peers clearly in need of improvement. Examination grades will be recorded on student transcripts as either "pass" or "fail". A passing grade on the first attempt at an exam will be recorded as such. A failing grade will only be recorded after a failed second attempt at the same exam. Students with an A or A+ average will be publicly recognized for the superior quality of their examination with the grade recorded on their transcript as "pass with distinction".
8. Examinations should be graded and returned to the Chair no later than three weeks after the scheduled date of the examination. The Chair is responsible for compiling the grades, consulting with the examiners, and presenting the results to the dean and the faculty. If the marks assigned the same answer by the two faculty members differ by four or more grade steps (*e.g.*, a B- and an A) or if one corrector passes the answer and the other fails it, the Chair is also responsible for marking the question, and the final mark will be the average of all three grades. The students are to be informed by the Dean's office of their letter grade within one month of their taking of the examination.
9. Only a failing grade on the examination is subject to appeal. In accordance with the university-wide policy on failing grades (<http://policies.cua.edu/academicundergrad/gradesprocedures.cfm>), the written appeal must be submitted to the dean of the School of Philosophy no later than the middle of the term following that in which the failing grade was recorded in the Office of the Registrar.
10. The completed examinations will be kept on file only until the end of the following semester.

11. All past questions for examinations are to be kept on permanent file in the Dean's office. Students may request photocopies of past questions but the original copies of the questions may not be borrowed.
12. The Lists for the examinations are to be regularly reviewed by the Reading List Committee so that only the most suitable and publicly available editions are required.

III. Guidelines for Students

1. Answers should be formulated as clear and coherent, well-developed essays. Questions should be answered with the understanding that the questioner intended the answer to take an hour to complete.
2. Answers should be addressed directly to the respective questions, avoiding tangential matters.
3. While citing can be useful in corroborating an answer (e.g., making reference to several passages), no answer should include writing out lengthy quotations.
4. Answers should be formulated by the student with the understanding that the main purpose of the examination is to evaluate the student's capacity to grasp the basic argument, structure, and terminology of classical texts in philosophy. Advancing or criticizing a specific line of interpretation is certainly not precluded, but only if the student also fulfills the basic requirement of demonstrating a clear and coherent understanding of the argument, structure, and terminology of the texts in question.

Approved by the Faculty of the School of Philosophy, February, 1989.

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