



# THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

School of Philosophy

## GRADUATE READING LIST EXAMINATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

### I. Purpose of the Examinations

As a program that emphasizes the history of philosophy, the Ph.D. program of the School of Philosophy expects its Ph.D. students to be familiar with seminal philosophical writings from the Presocratics to the mid-Twentieth Century. Its Ph.D. comprehensive examination consists, accordingly, of two parts, corresponding to a two-part chronological list of readings. “List I” ranges over texts from the Presocratics to Ockham; “List II” ranges over texts from Descartes to Quine. The exams on each List, which are open-book, assess the student’s understanding of the seminal philosophical works that qualify the two exams together as “comprehensive.”

### II. Dates and Deadlines

1. Both parts of the examination are set every fall and spring semester on a date determined by the Office of the Dean of the School of Philosophy. The date will be published on the School’s website at the beginning of each new semester.
2. Students may sit for the two parts in any order, but no student may attempt more than one in a given two-day examination period.
3. On passing one of the two parts of the examination, a student is admitted to doctoral candidacy.
4. A student who earns a failing grade for either part of the exam may retake that part only once.
5. Students must have passed exams on both Lists by the end of the semester in which their dissertation proposal is approved.

### III. Administering and Setting the Examinations

1. The Reading List Examinations are administered by a standing committee of the faculty of the School of Philosophy, appointed by the dean, which includes a chairperson and three graders for each List. The committee will also include a representative of the graduate students, who is to be present at any meetings of the committee at which changes to policy are discussed.
2. The Lists for the exams are to be regularly reviewed by the Reading List Committee so that only the most suitable and publicly available editions are required.
3. Each List is divided into two parts, for which students sit on two consecutive days. There are four questions on each part. Each day, students are given three hours in order to answer three of the four questions. The completed exam thus includes a total of six and only six answers, three for each part. If a student completes the exam with fewer than three 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.

4. The three graders for each List are responsible for drafting and carefully reviewing all questions, which must be submitted to the Chair at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled date of the examinations. The questions must then also be reviewed and approved by the Chair.
5. The questions for each List will conform to the following guidelines:
  - a. The questions should concern only texts and editions stipulated on the List.
  - b. Each question should be designed to examine the student's proficiency in interpreting one or more such texts on a given List, which the student is permitted to bring to the exam.
  - c. Questions should be so formulated that a suitable answer can only be given in the form of a well-developed essay.
  - d. 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.
  - e. A question may have more than one part.
  - f. Questions should avoid excessive detail and excessive generality.
  - g. Questions should not be tendentious, which is to say, they should not be composed in such a manner as to require that the student
    - adopt or defend one particular interpretation of a given text,
    - have knowledge of specific secondary sources, or
    - be familiar with approaches discussed or developed in a particular course or seminar.
  - h. Questions composed for previous exams for at least the last four years should be consulted to guarantee continuity.
  - i. No question should be formulated in such a way that it presumes the student has already completed the exams for another List.

#### **IV. Grading the Exams**

1. Grading of exams is based upon the same guidelines as the composition of the questions.
2. Each answer will be graded by two faculty members. Each answer will therefore be assigned two grades, and each exam will receive twelve grades.
3. No marks are to be made by a grader on the exam itself. Each grader will record his or her grades on a separate sheet designed so that the other grader cannot see those grades.
4. Each grader will assign one of the following grades to an answer: F (fail), P (pass), and P+ (pass with distinction). Exams should be graded and returned, along with the grade forms, to the administrative assistant in charge of the exam no later than three weeks after the scheduled date of the examination.
5. The administrative assistant will then review the resultant grade-pairs. If any grade-pair for an essay is FP, a third grader will adjudicate by grading the essay yet again. The third grader is the faculty member of the respective list who has not yet graded the question that needs further adjudication. Should the third grading result in an "F," the essay will receive an overall grade of "FF," while a "P" on a third grading will yield a "PP." In the unlikely event that the initial grade-pair for an essay is "FP+," a failing grade from the third grader would result in an overall grade of "FF;" a "P+" grade from the third grader would yield a "P+P+" overall; a "PP" overall grade would result were the third grader's grade "P."

6. After adjudication, the overall grade for each exam will be determined in the following fashion.
  - A student fails whose exam has two or more grade-pairs of FF.
  - A student passes with distinction whose exam has no grade-pairs of FF, at least two grade-pairs of P+P+, and at least two additional grades of P+, either in the form of one additional grade-pair of P+P+ or at least two additional grade-pairs of PP+.
  - A student passes who neither fails nor passes with distinction.
7. Exam grades will be recorded on student transcripts as either “fail,” “pass,” or “pass with distinction.” A failing grade will only be recorded after a failed second attempt at the same exam.
8. The chair is responsible for presenting the results to the dean and the faculty. The students are to be informed by the dean’s office of their letter grade within one month of sitting for a given exam.
9. Only a failing grade on the exam as a whole is subject to appeal. In accordance with university policy (see <https://policies.catholic.edu/students/academicundergrad/gradesprocedures.html>), a 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 exams will be kept on file only until the end of the following semester.
11. All past exam questions are to be kept on permanent file in the dean’s office.
12. One set of sample exam questions is to be posted on the website of the School of Philosophy. Students are not allowed access to any prior exam questions apart from the ones posted on the website.

## V. Guidelines for Students

1. Unless otherwise noted, and without prior approval from the chair of the committee in advance, students are to bring to the examination only the approved editions or translations specified.
2. 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.
3. Answers should be addressed directly to the respective questions, avoiding tangential matters.
4. While citing from the text can be useful in corroborating an answer (e.g., making reference to specific passages), extensive quotations from the text are to be avoided.

Approved by the Faculty of the School of Philosophy	February 1989.
Revised and approved by the Faculty of the School of Philosophy	December 2013.
Revised and approved by the Faculty of the School of Philosophy	February 2019.
Revised and approved by the Faculty of the School of Philosophy	September 2020.