Guidelines of the Committee on Degrees

The faculty established the Committee on Degrees to oversee the degree programs of the Divinity School. The Committee monitors student progress through the formal requirements of the Divinity School's degree programs. The Committee normally responds to student petitions concerning the Ph.D. program, of which there are three types: 1) course of study petitions; 2) dissertation proposals; and 3) minor petitions requesting modification of a previously approved petition or, in rare instances, a degree requirement. Details about each of these three types of petition are provided below.

The Committee has four members. The Dean of Students is a standing member, convenes the Committee and is its Recorder. Three members of the faculty, appointed by the Dean, serve terms of one academic year. Each academic committee of the faculty is represented, usually by its chair. All administrative matters are handled by the Recorder, to whom questions concerning the Committee and its work should be addressed.

The Committee ordinarily meets twice in the Autumn Quarter (on the Mondays of the fourth and tenth weeks) and once each in the Winter and Spring Quarters (on the Monday of the tenth week of each quarter). The Committee does not meet in the Summer Quarter. The dates of meetings, and the deadlines for submitting petitions may be obtained from the Dean of Students Office and are posted in the glass cases outside Swift 104 and in the student lounge. Minor petitions and dissertation proposals are due ten days before the meeting at which they are to be considered; course of study petitions are due on the Friday of the sixth week of the quarter in which they are to be considered.

All petitions are submitted to the Dean of Students Office for circulation to the Committee. Submissions should include a hardcopy of the petition with all necessary signatures, and one (1) electronic copy, submitted to the Dean of Students via email. Petitions that do not observe the guidelines given may not be reviewed by the Committee.

The Dean of Students communicates the decisions of the Committee by letter. A copy of the letter is sent to the student's advisor, and a copy is also placed in the student's permanent file along with the original petition.

Course of Study Petitions

Ph.D. students in the Divinity School are required to establish a course of study that structures their preparation for their qualifying exams. This includes:

1. Abrief statement of three to four pages outlining the student's intended intellectual program, both general areas in which he or she seeks competence and the particular research issues and topics which will be the focus of research;
2. One page describing the four qualifying examinations in which the student's coursework will culminate, and confirming that the designated examiners have indicated their willingness to administer the indicated exam(s); and
3. The request for a faculty advisor for this part of the Ph.D. program.

M.A. and M.Div. students at the Divinity School seeking admission to the Ph.D. program and the establishment of a course of study file this petition in January of their second year, in the case of M.A. students, and in January of their third year in the case of M.Div. students. Ph.D. students who entered the Divinity Schools as Ph.D. students are required to file a course of study petition in their third quarter of residence, i.e. the Spring Quarter of their first year.

The Dean of Students circulates the course of study petitions to the appropriate areas of study for review. Each area meets to review its petitions and to make a formal recommendation to the Committee on Degrees concerning action.

While formally quite similar, there are differences between what M.A. and M.Div. students do what Ph.D. students do when they submit course of study petitions. The two types are discussed separately in what follows.

M.A. and M.Div. Students Seeking Ph.D. Admission and Approval of a Course of Study

M.A. and M.Div. students seeking Ph.D. admission file this petition to the faculty of the area to which they are applying, and along with it, a research paper written for a course offered by the area in which they propose to concentrate Ph.D. study. The paper should include the original grade and comments.

The cover sheet for the course of study petition from M.A. and M.Div. students follow this format:

TO: The _____ Faculty (specify area)

FROM: Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone Number/E-mail address

I petition the faculty of the _____ area for:

1. admission to the Ph.D. program with a concentration in the _____ area of study; and
2. approval of the course of study described in the attached statement, including the following four Ph.D. Qualifying Examinations:
   a. (Exam # and Title, e.g. HC 3 -- Modern Christianity (Evans)
   b.
   c.
   d.

3) I have consulted with Professor _____ concerning this petition and request that (s)he be designated as advisor for my course of study.

signature of student

date

Attached to the cover sheet should be a statement of four pages, typed and double-spaced, in which the student primarily discusses the work he or she plans to do in the Ph.D. program. The statement should communicate clearly the student's understanding of the proposed area of concentration and how the course of study described addresses the work of that area. If the program involves significant work elsewhere in the University, or field research, the student should indicate what plans have been or will be made to pursue it. At the conclusion of the petition, the student should confirm that he or she has consulted with all prospective examiners for the proposed qualifying exams. In cases where alternative faculty could write a designated exam, the student should indicate which faculty member has agreed to do so. (See Special Note at the conclusion of this section for information on including a faculty member from outside the Divinity School as an examiner.) Applicants submit an original and two copies of the course of study petition and paper to the Office of the Dean of Students. If the student is admitted to the PhD program, this course of petition will be referred to the Committee on Degrees for approval, and will go on file as the student's approved course of study.

Ph.D. Students Seeking Approval of a Course of Study

Ph.D. students seeking approval of a course of study do so by submitting this petition in either third or their fourth quarter of residence. They submit no materials other than the petition.

The cover sheet for the course of study petition from Ph.D. students should look like this:

TO: The Committee on Degrees

FROM: Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone Number/E-mail address

I petition the Committee on Degrees for:

1. approval of the course of study described in the attached statement, including the following four Ph.D. Qualifying Examinations:

Area of Concentration:

1) (Exam # and Title, e.g. HC 3 -- Modern (faculty name Evans)
2)
3)
4)

1. I have consulted with Professor _____ concerning this petition and request that (s)he be designated as advisor for my course of study.

signature of student

date

Attached to the cover sheet should be a statement of four pages, typed and double-spaced, in which the student primarily discusses the work he or she plans to do in the Ph.D. program. The petition is more detailed and specific than the second application essay, but it is not a preliminary draft of a dissertation proposal. The petition should communicate clearly the student's understanding of the proposed area of concentration and how

the course of study described addresses the work of that area. If the program involves significant work elsewhere in the University, or field research, the student should indicate what plans have been or will be made to pursue it. At the conclusion of the petition, the student should confirm that he or she has consulted with all prospective examiners for the proposed qualifying exams. In cases where alternative faculty could write a designated exam, the student should indicate which faculty member has agreed to do so. (See Special Note at the conclusion of this section for information on including a faculty member from outside the Divinity School as an examiner.)

Additional Notes:

Qualifying Exam Bibliographies: Students are entitled to use the Qualifying Exam bibliographies in effect at the time their course of study petition is approved, so long as they take the exams within five years of that date. Students who have not completed exams within that period ordinarily use the bibliographies in effect when they take the exams. Petitions to modify this policy must be submitted to the Committee on Degrees.

Non-Divinity School Faculty as Outside Examiners on Qualifying Exams:A student who wishes to include a faculty member from outside the Divinity School as the examiner for one of the Divinity School qualifying exams consults with the faculty chair of the area offering the exam to request this arrangement. The faculty chair consults with the area and, with its approval, invites the outside examiner to participate as a co-examiner. A Divinity School faculty must be a co-examiner on any such exam.. Such an agreement should be established prior to submission of the course of study petition (or a minor petition amending an approved course of study), and the arrangement should be clearly indicated in the concluding portion of the statement.

Dissertation Proposals

The dissertation proposal should develop out of the interests and competencies the student establishes through coursework and qualifying exams. In preparing the proposal, she or he should work closely with the faculty advisor for the project. The Divinity School faculty considers an optimum dissertation to be approximately 200-250 pages.

Prior to the submission of the proposal to the Committee on Degrees, the student must have discussed the proposal in a colloquium with the proposed members of the reading committee. The student and the advisor schedule this colloquium, which usually occurs after the student has revised at least one draft of the proposal with the advisor. Its scheduling should ensure that faculty attending have sufficient time to review the document and to make substantive suggestions.

Dissertation proposals, signed by the student and the members of the proposed reading committee, must be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students ten days prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered. A dissertation proposal includes the following:

1. a cover memo in the format given on the following page, signed and dated by the student and the members of the dissertation reading committee. The signatures of the faculty indicate that they have participated in the colloquium, that they judge the proposed dissertation to constitute a worthy and feasible project, and that they are willing to serve on the reading committee. The reading committee usually consists of an advisor and two readers. When appropriate, a student may petition for co-advisors and one reader. Only in rare instances will a proposal of a committee of four receive approval.

(Date)
TO: The Committee on Degrees
FROM: Name

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone Number/E-mail address

Having passed my Qualifying Examinations with a concentration in the (area of study), and having participated in a colloquium with the proposed members of my dissertation reading committee, I petition the Committee on Degrees for:

1. admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree;
2. approval of _____ as advisor in my program of study with _____ and _____ as readers on my dissertation committee; and
3. 3) review of the attached dissertation proposal, entitled _____.

Signature of Student Date

Signature of Adviser Date

Signature of Reader Date

Signature of Reader Date

1. a statement, not to exceed seven typed, double-spaced pages, that includes:

1. a proposed title;
2. a concise formulation of the problem to be researched;
3. an indication of the methods to be employed;
4. a discussion of the resources to be employed in the dissertation;
5. a tentative statement of the hypothesis and argument of the dissertation;
6. brief discussion of the importance of the dissertation as an original contribution to knowledge, whether theoretical or practical (in submitting the proposal, a student attests that it is based upon a thorough investigation that has convinced her or him that the thesis has not been previously argued in the manner proposed);
7. a tentative outline by chapter of the dissertation;
8. a brief formal bibliography (this should present the editions of primary texts to be consulted in the dissertation, and a representative sample of the relevant secondary literature).

The Committee on Degrees does not pass judgment upon the scholarly merit of the inquiry proposed. When faculty in the colloquium approve the proposal and agree to serve on the reading committee, the student should assume that the subject of the dissertation has been accepted. The subsequent review by the Committee on Degrees has two further purposes:

1. to approve the reading committee for the proposed dissertation, thus admitting the student to Ph.D. candidacy;
2. to assure that the dissertation proposal is 1) clearly conceived and formulated and 2) accountable regarding its explicit relations, if any, to other areas of scholarly specialization. If the Committee's review raises questions and/or suggestions, the Recorder will communicate these to the student and the advisor in a letter. The intent of this communication is pedagogical, that is, to strengthen the dissertation in view of its responsibility to the wider academy in the study of religion. Should the Committee judge the proposal to have significant difficulties with respect to these two criteria, it may request that the student respond to its concerns with a letter that either addresses the questions raised, or argues that they were inappropriate. When such a letter is requested, it must be submitted by the student and accepted by the Committee prior to the oral review of dissertation-in-progress.

Additional Notes:

Non-Divinity School Faculty as Members of the Dissertation Committee: While the advisor of a dissertation must be a Divinity School faculty member, in some instances a student may, in consultation with the advisor, elect to include a faculty member from outside the Divinity School as a member of the reading committee. When this individual is a member of the faculty of the University, no special arrangements are necessary. When the individual is a member of the faculty of another institution, the student should indicate briefly at the conclusion of the proposal why her or his participation as a member of the reading committee is essential. This is usually an argument that the individual=s expertise cannot be found on the faculty of the University.

Minor Petitions

Students submit minor petitions to modify a previously approved petition or, in rare instances, a degree requirement. Such petitions should be submitted in the memorandum form as employed in course of study petitions and dissertation proposals. These petitions have two parts: the first should begin, "I petition the Committee on Degrees to ..." and should state the request. The second should begin, "My reasons for this request are ..." and should proceed to a compelling and lucid rationale.

Minor petitions should be signed by the student, and signed and dated by the student's advisor.

Students most frequently use minor petitions to change their qualifying examinations. Such a petition must include a listing of the approved set of exams, using the correct names and numbers of the exams as listed in the Divinity School Announcements, and should indicate clearly the requested change.