PRELIMINARY EXAM PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES
DUKE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL
DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

PREREQUISITES
Before students are eligible to take preliminary exams, they must:

- Complete all required coursework in primary and secondary areas of concentration (normally 2 years of coursework, including 6 courses in the primary area, 3 courses in the secondary area, and 3 elective courses)
- Pass all necessary language competence exams (see language examination guidelines)
- Assemble his/her preliminary exam committee and have it approved by the Th.D. Director and the Th.D. Oversight Committee.

PRELIMINARY EXAM COMMITTEE
The student’s preliminary examination committee is normally made up of 3-5 faculty members, with the student’s principal advisor as chair. The student’s primary area of concentration should be reflected by the expertise of at least 2 members; the secondary area by at least 1 member. At least 3 members of the committee must be regular rank faculty members in the Divinity School unless otherwise approved.

BOOK LIST
When students begin preparation for the preliminary exams, they create a reading list in consultation with their principal advisor and other committee members.

- This list of between 50 and 75 books provides the material for which the student is responsible and from which exam questions will be taken.
- The largest portion of the list will reflect the student’s primary area of concentration, with appropriate additional portions devoted to secondary concentration(s) and the dissertation area.
- It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that all committee members have seen and approved the book list before taking exams.

EXAM QUESTIONS
Committee members will compose examination questions in consultation with the student. The principal advisor will submit a copy of all questions to the Th.D. Director one week in advance of the initial examination.

EXAM COMPONENTS
Written: Preliminary exams include at least three written exams and an oral defense. The three written exams normally include:

- a 4-hour exam in the primary area of concentration;
- a 3-hour exam in the secondary area of concentration; and
- a 3-hour exam in the dissertation area.

NOTE: The exams will normally be taken on campus, in an assigned room. For the exam, students use a clean computer provided for the occasion by the Office of Academic Formation and Programs (108 Gray). When they return the computer to the Office of Academic Affairs, the Th.D. staff assistant will download the exam, email it to the student and members of the student’s preliminary exam committee, and provide paper copies as requested.

Revised January 25, 2011
Oral
An oral defense follows the written exams.

- All faculty members from the committee must be physically in attendance or participate via telephone if unable to attend the defense.
- Students should confer with the chair regarding expectations for the oral exam.
- Committee members with major questions should notify the chair in advance of the oral exam.

PASSING AND FAILING EXAMS

- For a 3-person committee, passing requires at least 3 affirmative votes. For a 4-person committee, at least 3 affirmative votes. For a 5-person committee, at least 4 affirmative votes are required; the chair must vote affirmatively in each case.
- A student may fail up to two components of the written exams and (if recommended by the examining committee) take these components again.
- Students who fail all components of the written exams, or fail any component a second time, will be asked to leave the program. The vote of the examining committee on second chance exams must be unanimous.

TIMING AND SCHEDULING EXAMS

- Scheduling of all exams must be coordinated through the Th.D. Program assistant.
- Preliminary exams are expected to take place within 6 months after coursework is completed.
- All components of the written exams must be completed over the course of two weeks. They may be taken in any order, and scheduled according to the student's preference and room availability. (For example, Monday-Thursday, Monday-Thursday; Monday-Wednesday-Friday-Wednesday; etc.)
- The oral defense normally takes place about one week after the written exams.

UPON COMPLETION OF PRELIMINARY EXAMS

Students who have successfully passed their preliminary exams are eligible to propose a dissertation. They should meet as soon as possible with their principal advisor to discuss the makeup of their dissertation committee (see Th.D. Dissertation Guidelines).