



THE UNION PhD

Program Description

Approved by the Faculty on January 30th, 2015

The following provides a brief description of the PhD Program. A complete description of program policies and procedures appears in the PhD manual.

Program Description

Union Theological Seminary offers the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Theology for students who want to teach in colleges, universities, and seminaries, or to hold positions of leadership in churches or social service and social justice agencies. The Union PhD program offers advanced study in the disciplines of theology with major specialization in one of the following areas. Students also elect a minor concentration in one of these areas or in an allied academic discipline such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, or religious studies.

- Bible
 - Old Testament
 - New Testament
- History
- Theology
 - Systematics
 - Ethics
- Interreligious Engagement
- Practical Theology
 - Psychology and Religion
 - Preaching and Worship
 - Religion and Education
 - Theology and the Arts

The major-minor structure in Union's PhD program enables interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and "mutual illumination" that is intended to generate original scholarship. This structure also equips graduates with the academic versatility and expanded teaching competency that will serve to optimize their employability in a competitive market.

The interdisciplinary nature of the Union PhD program is further enhanced by the doctoral seminar in which all students participate. By attending to the interplay between the methods of the theological disciplines and those of religious studies, the program cultivates in graduates a sense of the ongoing dialogue between Theology and Religious Studies that marks contemporary religious education; it prepares graduates to teach and to lead in the diverse, multi-religious, and multicultural contexts of today's world.

Program Goals and Outcomes

The goals of the PhD program reflect the mission and vision of the seminary in general and purposes of the doctoral program in particular. The learning outcomes identify advanced and integrated knowledge, skills, and competencies that a graduate of the Union PhD program is expected to be able to demonstrate.

GOAL I. To enable students to acquire comprehensive knowledge of the disciplines of theological study with specialization in a particular area of study. Students will develop an expert's knowledge of the specific topic of their research and of the subject matter of the dissertation. They will be able to do research at the highest level in that area.

Outcomes:

1. Demonstrates comprehensive knowledge in and a general mastery of their major area of specialization.
2. Demonstrates expertise in the specific area of the minor concentration.

GOAL II. To provide students with the skills needed to engage in original research, writing, learning, and teaching at the university and seminary level in their area of theological expertise; and to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field through research and publications.

Outcomes:

1. Demonstrates a capacity to produce original, publication-worthy research and writing that contributes to the knowledge and advancement of the field.
2. Demonstrates an ability to teach effectively at the graduate and undergraduate level.

GOAL III. To engage students in a sustained exploration of the connections and interactions between the objective disciplines of religious studies and the more existentially engaged disciplines generally described as Christian theology.

Outcomes:

1. Demonstrates knowledge of the distinction and relation between the subject matter and methods of theological studies and religious studies.
2. Demonstrates an ability to engage critically in interdisciplinary discourse.

GOAL IV. To equip students with a dual competency that enables them to teach undergraduate courses in their minor area of study.

Outcomes:

1. Demonstrates advanced knowledge of contents and methods in their minor area of study.
2. Demonstrates an ability to teach effectively at the undergraduate level in their minor area of study.

GOAL V. To cultivate in students a commitment to communicate their knowledge and to interpret the subject matter of their discipline with sensitivity to particular academic, religious, and cultural contexts.

Outcomes:

1. Demonstrates an ability to interpret and to communicate their knowledge for different cultures and publics

Major Specialization and Minor Concentration

Applicants to the PhD program identify and describe the rationale for their choice of the major area of specialization and their minor area of concentration in their application essay.

PhD students will have two advisors corresponding with their major and minor, pursue course work and comprehensive exams in both areas, and write a dissertation in one area in a way that integrates the other into the research. Students are expected to master the subject matter that will qualify them for doing research and teaching on the graduate level in their major and undergraduate teaching in their minor.

Program Planning

The program begins with a Program Planning Conference with the student's advisors. Both advisors should be present at the Program Planning Conference at the start of the student's program. The roles and expectation of each advisor will be discussed. Thereafter, the student should meet with his or her advisor(s) at least once each semester. First-year doctoral students are required to meet with their advisors, in person, prior to course registration for the Fall semesters.

The Planning Conference will frame an overall vision of the program, review the student's preparation for the program, and outline a course of studies in a Program Plan (PP). If any aspect of the student's educational preparation for the doctoral program at Union so warrants, the advisor conducting the conference may recommend or stipulate remedial courses.

Residency Requirements

Students admitted to the doctoral program will pursue advanced study for at least two academic years of residency (course work) at the Seminary, while working under the advisement of two professors designated by the Academic Dean and the faculty of the student's area of study. If the student holds the S.T.M. from this Seminary, residency may be completed in one year of full-time study.

Course Credits

Students will complete 43 points (credits) in course work. Ordinarily the course work is divided between the major and minor as follows: 9 courses in the major [27 points]; 4 courses in the minor [12 points]; four bi-weekly, 2 hour semester-long doctoral seminars valued at one point per semester [4 points]. The ratio between major-minor courses of 9 to 4 may be adjusted in consultation with the advisors in either direction for reasons that are particular to each student and his or her project, provided that the purposes of having a major and minor are served.

During residency, students should take at least three (3) and no more than twelve (12) points of graduate work in another institution, normally at one of the institutions affiliated with the Seminary: Columbia University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences,

General Theological Seminary, Jewish Theological Seminary, the Department of Theology at Fordham University, Drew University Theological School, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Candidates majoring in Bible or focusing their studies on Early Church History may take up to sixteen (16) points at affiliated institutions because of the particular need for the study of ancient languages).

Doctoral Seminar

The Doctoral Seminar, taken by PhD students in their first two years of study, helps to integrate students into a community of learning that binds them together across different areas of specialization. At present the seminar focuses on the relationship between the methodologies of theological and religious studies, with particular attention given to a comparison of their differing methodologies. Taught by a professor who is familiar with each sphere of discourse, the doctoral seminar meets for two hours, six times a semester for a total of 2 points per academic year.

Language Examinations

Each candidate must become proficient in reading scholarly materials in two modern languages other than English (frequently Spanish, French or German). Other modern languages may be substituted for Spanish, French or German if they are more useful for scholarly research in the student's area of special study. Students are encouraged to acquire knowledge of these modern languages before entering the program. Students who have not done so may meet the language requirement by passing an examination administered by Union on dates stated in the academic calendar. The timing of this requirement does not apply to classical languages such as Hebrew, Greek, or Latin that are required for certain individual programs. (Candidates in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and Early Church History will be allowed to take up to 16 points at affiliated institutions because of the particular need for study of several ancient languages.)

Teaching Fellowships

Normally during a student's second and third year in the program, he or she may work as a Teaching Fellow. A student may not work as a Teaching Fellow before one modern language requirement is completed. Both modern language requirements must be completed before a student begins comprehensive exams.

Additionally, students who will serve as Teaching Fellows are required to take the course in "Teaching Theology and Religion" before or during assuming this role.

Comprehensive Examinations

The functions of the comprehensive exams are (1) to ensure broad knowledge of the major area of specialization and competency in the minor area of concentration; (2) to test the student's academic skills in research and writing; and (3) to provide knowledge and resources that will inform the student's dissertation topic and proposal.

Comprehensive exams are graded based on these general criteria, as well as specific field-determined criteria.

PhD students are expected to begin their comprehensive exams after they have finished their coursework and completed their modern language requirements. They should pass their four comprehensive examinations by the end of a 12-15 month period after coursework, that is, by September 1 after their third year of residency.

The prospectus for the comprehensive examinations is approved by the faculty in the areas in which they are taken. The student's faculty advisor(s) supervise(s) the comprehensive exams and reports the results to the Registrar and the Academic Office.

The four comprehensive examinations are distributed among their major and minor as follows:

Option A: 3 comprehensive exams in the major area; 1 comprehensive exam in the minor area; or

Option B: 2 exams in his or her major, 1 exam in the minor, and 1 comprehensive exam that combines the major and minor areas.

No comprehensive examination will constitute a proposal for the dissertation. However, comprehensive examinations are meant to lean into writing the dissertation.

The Master of Philosophy Degree

After satisfactorily completing the four comprehensive examinations and all other requirements stated above, the candidate will be awarded the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) at the next commencement.

Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

After the MPhil requirements have been completed, the student becomes a candidate for the PhD and prepares a proposal for a dissertation that must be approved by the student's dissertation committee. The dissertation committee is usually made up of three Union professors, including the student's advisor(s), and one outside reader from another university, seminary, or graduate school who is especially competent in the topic of the dissertation.

The Dissertation Proposal

Ordinarily students write their dissertations in their major area of specialization. The dissertation may and frequently will be enhanced by the minor area or involve some kind of dialogue among areas. Normally, the dissertation proposal is submitted within six months following the completion of the comprehensive examinations. The student drafts a proposal, which the principal advisor(s) examine. When the advisor(s) believe the proposal is ready for formal review by the dissertation committee, they set up a hearing with the student and at least two other members of the faculty who will be members of the dissertation committee. After this committee approves the proposal, the

advisors notify the Registrar. The student writes the dissertation under the direction of the advisors and the professors on the dissertation committee.

The Dissertation

While working on the dissertation, candidates are obliged to develop with their advisors a calendar of regular contact and a timetable for completion of their work. The advisors, in turn, have the responsibility to set up with the student the procedures and schedule of writing to be followed in developing the dissertation: i.e., meetings, completion of drafts, etc. Normally, the advisors assume responsibility for working out difficulties should they arise.

The Dissertation Defense

When the advisor(s), in consultation with the student, agree that the dissertation is ready for defense, they contact the members of the dissertation committee and determine the date. Ordinarily, the student's primary advisor, two other faculty members, and one professor from another graduate school or theological faculty constitute the examining committee or board. The student should prepare a copy of the dissertation for each member of the committee. The members of the examining board should have the completed thesis in their hands one month prior to the defense. When the dissertation is successfully defended, the final copies of the dissertation are submitted to the Registrar one week prior to Commencement.

Completion of the Program

Students can finish the PhD program in four to five years. They are expected to finish within seven years. However, a student who has not defended the dissertation after seven years may be granted an extension by an appeal to the Director of the PhD Program supported in writing by the student's dissertation director. An extension may be granted for one year at a time, recorded in the Academic Office, and may be renewed up to the tenth year. If after ten years the student has not presented the dissertation for defense, he or she is dismissed from the program.

Assessment

Assessment of student learning and progress through the program is a continuous and integral part of the doctoral program from inception to completion. Students regularly maintain ePortfolios that provide direct (performance-based) and indirect (perception-based) evidence of their learning and academic success as well as their progress through the stages and requirements of the program. The ePortfolios contain, among other things, select student essays, comprehensive exams, the degree audit, and the transcript with instructor evaluations. (see PhD program handbook for a complete list of ePortfolio contents)

Throughout the program, ePortfolios are continually updated, reviewed, and assessed. The process begins in the first semester with the deposit into the student's ePortfolio of the *curriculum vitae* and application essay. The advisor(s) review these documents in

preparation for the Program Planning Conference described above. The student deposits the Program Plan, signed by the student and advisor(s), into the ePortfolio.

Thereafter, at the end of each academic year, students participate in a Student Progress Conference, during which time the student and advisor(s) review and discuss the current contents of the ePortfolios and assess the student's progress toward achieving the program learning and his/her timely advancement through the program. At the conclusion of the conference, a Student Progress Report (SPR) is deposited into the ePortfolio. During the writing of the dissertation, the director of the dissertation continues the annual formal Student Progress Conference.

All graduating students must participate in a Final Assessment Conference with his or her advisor in April or May of the final year. After a final review of the ePortfolio and consultation with the student, the Advisor will complete and submit electronically a Final Assessment Report (FAR), a copy of which will be deposited into the student's ePortfolio. In the case of PhD candidates, this conference (attended by both advisors) may take place at the time of the dissertation defense.

The Union PhD Graduate

Graduates of Union's PhD program are expected to possess the competencies outlined in the learning outcomes; in sum, comprehensive knowledge and research, writing, and graduate-level teaching competency in the student's major area; secondary expertise in and undergraduate-level teaching competency in the student's minor area; knowledge of and an ability to participate in the dialogue between theological and religious studies; and an ability communicate effectively within diverse contexts. All of this will be achieved in a context of pluralistic interchange among the many varied interests represented at Union.