HUMANITIES DIVISIONAL BOARD

Changes in the regulations governing the Master of Studies in Study of Religions: communication from the Board of the Faculty of Theology and Religion

Master of Studies in Study of Religions

Brief note about nature of the change: Syllabus updates.

With effect from 1 October 2014 (for first examination in 2015)

1. In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 672, l. 45, after ‘15,000 words.’, insert ‘Essays and dissertations on the relations or comparisons between two religions, or approaches taken from one view towards others, are also welcomed, so long as they do not overlap with work done for any other elements of this degree. Decisions on the suitability of titles for both dissertation and essays will be taken in consultation with the Chair of Examiners for that year.’

2. In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 673, l. 2-23, delete ‘The aim of this paper... studying the subject’, and substitute ‘The aim of this paper is to examine the main classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religions, the problems involved in comparative study of religions, and the relation between religious belief, theology and the study of religions.

   1. Students should know the work of key figures in the study of religions, the main attempts to define religion and the problems of defining religion.
   2. They should be aware of the differing approaches to the study of religion in phenomenology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and theology. By the use of examples, the strengths and limits of each approach should be investigated.
   3. They should be aware of the major explanations that have been offered of religious belief, particularly by Durkheim, Freud, Feuerbach, and Jung, and of the problems in giving such general explanations.
   4. They should be aware of some major authors who have attempted comparative studies in religion, and the problems of such comparative studies. They should be aware of some of the issues involved in claims for religious truth and rationality, and attitudes to religious conflict and diversity.

Candidates should have sufficient data to take an informed view of the place of religion in the modern world.’

3. In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 673, l. 25-29, delete ‘The earliest... Theravadin tradition’, and substitute ‘The earliest Buddhist doctrine and practice will be studied against the background of the early Upanishads and other religious movements in north-east India round the 5th century BCE. Practice includes both meditation and monastic life. The primary source is the Pali Canon supplemented by the commentarial literature of the Theravadin tradition.’

4. In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 673, l. 31-34, delete ‘This paper...and institutions’, and substitute ‘For this paper, students may study any aspect of Christian life or thought at any period of the Common Era and in any part of the world. Christianity is here understood to encompass groups and systems that are commonly deemed heterodox or heretical, together with those that are commonly regarded as offshoots of Christianity. Topics may be historical, sociological or theological, but students taking theological texts as their principal subject are strongly encouraged to take account of the historical and social background. The Graduate Studies Committee may reject
proposals which it considers more suitable to other master’s degrees administered by the Faculty of Theology and Religion.’

5 In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 673, ll.36-48, delete ‘The paper...Modern Islam’, and substitute ‘The paper will consist of a broad introduction to Islamic history and religion from the Prophet Muhammad to the modern period, with particular emphasis on the formative period (7th to the 11th century, CE). Candidates will cover the following topics in lectures and tutorials:

1. Muhammad and the Arabian milieu
2. Qur’an
3. Hadith
4. Law
5. Theology
6. Sects
7. Sufism
8. Islam and other monotheisms
9. Modern Islam’

6 In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 674, ll.2-5, delete ‘Jewish religion...Michaelmas term’, and substitute ‘Jewish religion and thought since 70 ce with reference both to its historical development and to Judaism in the modern world. Selections from the texts listed in the student handbook will be assigned by the course tutor by the beginning of Michaelmas Term.’

7 In Examination Regulations, 2013, p. 674, ll.7-23, delete ‘This paper...initiation (diksa)’, and substitute ‘This paper, for which the source material lies in Sanskrit texts read in English translation and in the context of reliable secondary sources, will be concerned with the main components of the brahminical tradition which, though of ancient origin, are still relevant today. Key areas include Vedic religion, nondualism, and traditional (smarta) ritual practice. Particular attention will be paid to leading ideas developed in the listed primary texts read in translation, though the secondary sources provide necessary context. No attempt will be made to cover later theism or Hindu sects.’

Explanatory note

(i) The syllabus has been updated.
(ii) There are no vested interests.
(iii) There are no resource implications.