

# Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board Theology & Religious Studies 2020-2021

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## 1. Scope of application

The Rules and Guidelines referred to in Article 7.12b, third paragraph, of the Higher Education and Research Act are adopted by the Examination Board and further clarified as the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board. These Rules and Guidelines apply to examinations and final assessments for the BA Theology & Religious Studies, MA Theology and Religious Studies (1 yr), MA Theology and Religious Studies (2 yr) and MA Theologie en Religiewetenschappen (3 yr) of the Faculty of Religion & Theology. These regulations apply to anyone following the degree programme in this academic year, irrespective of when he/she started the degree programme.

## 2. General

1. The terms used in the Teaching and Examination Regulation (TER) also apply to this regulation. All other terms have the meanings ascribed to them in law.
2. In the event that any provision in these regulations conflicts with a provision in the Teaching and Examination Regulation that applies to the relevant degree programme, the provisions of the Teaching and Examination Regulation shall take precedence.

### **3. Composition of the Examination Board**

1. The Faculty Regulations apply to the composition of the Examination Board. At least one member of the Examination Board works as a teacher within the programme or one of the programmes to which these Rules and Guidelines apply. At least one member of the Examination Board is not affiliated with the degree programme(s). Members of the Executive Board and persons otherwise bearing financial responsibility within the institution may not take a seat on the Examination Board.
2. Before a member is appointed, the Faculty Board (FB) discusses the proposed appointment with the Examination Board.
3. A member of an Examination Board is appointed for a period of three years and may be reappointed.
4. The members of the Examination Board are appointed by the Faculty Board.
5. The Examination Board appoints one of its members to act as chair (external members are not eligible for this position). The chair is responsible for the general procedure of the Examination Board. He/she shall appoint an alternate to replace him/her in the case of absence.
6. The Faculty Board is responsible for guaranteeing that the Examination Board operates in a manner that is independent and expert.

### **4. Duties of the Examination Board**

The duties of the Examination Board are regulated by law. These include drawing up rules for the performance of duties and responsibilities and taking measures with regard to:

- a. determining in an objective and expert manner whether or not a student meets the conditions set in the Teaching and Examination Regulation relating to the knowledge, insight and skills necessary to be awarded a degree;
- b. maintaining and assuring the quality of all examinations and final degree assessments;
- c. determining guidelines and instructions to assess and determine the results of examinations and final degree assessments within the framework of the Teaching and Examination Regulations;
- d. granting exemptions for one or more examinations;
- e. extending the limited period of validity of an examination or exemption if a student submits a reasoned request to that effect. The Examination Board can decide to permit an extension of validity only after the individual making the request has successfully completed a supplementary examination on the relevant subject matter;
- f. ensuring that measures are taken in cases of academic misconduct;
- g. appointing examiners to conduct (interim) examinations and determine the results;
- h. granting a degree certificate, including a diploma supplement, as proof that the student has successfully completed his/her final degree assessment;

- i. granting permission to students to complete a free study programme with an examination that leads to the award of a degree;
- j. issuing a statement of results attained to persons who have successfully completed more than one examination but are not eligible for a degree certificate;
- k. preparing an annual report of its activities.

#### **5. Working method of the Examination Board**

1. In principle, the Examination Board meets once a month or as often as its chair deems necessary. The meeting schedule is published in a timely fashion. The meetings are not held in public.
2. The Faculty Board can add an administrative secretariat to the Examination Board.
3. In the event of a request or complaint involving a member of the Examination Board, this shall be dealt with in the absence of the member concerned.
4. The request or complaint must always include a justification of the request or a description of the complaint.
5. The Examination Board will make a decision within 30 working days of receiving a request or complaint. The Examination Board may postpone this decision and inform the interested parties of this in writing.

#### **6. Registration for exams**

1. Registration for written examinations is subject to rules and regulations. The Examination Board can set specific additional rules with regard to the organization and procedures associated with administering examinations and final degree assessments.
2. Registration for oral examinations should be done by completing the required form in consultation with the examiner.
3. Signing up after the deadline is not possible. A student who is not able to register before the deadline due to special, personal circumstances may submit an appeal on the basis of the hardship clause.

#### **7. Questions and assignments, subject matter and duration of examinations**

1. None of the individual questions and assignments in the examination will relate to anything other than the previously announced examination material. The main points of this examination material will be announced prior to the start of the programme component that prepares students to sit the examination in question. No later than one month before the date of the examination in question, students will be notified of the exact scope of the examination material.
2. In the event of a resit in a subsequent academic year, the student will sit an examination based on the material set for that examination in the academic year in question, unless the Examination Board decides otherwise at the request of the examiner.
3. The Examination Board monitors the quality of examinations and final degree assessments.

#### **8. Completing examinations in other ways**

1. At an examiner's request, the Examination Board may permit a different form of examination than that stipulated in the study guide.

2. At the student's request, the Examination Board may permit a different form of examination than that stipulated in the study guide.

### **9. Oral examinations**

1. Unless otherwise specified by the Teaching and Examination Regulation for the relevant educational unit, no more than one student will be examined orally at the same time.
2. The Examination Board or the examiner may, in exceptional cases, decide that an oral examination is not conducted in public.
3. A student may submit a request to the Examination Board to deviate from the requirement for a public oral examination. The Examination Board will weigh the student's interests against the interests of administering a public examination.
4. An oral examination will be taken in the presence of a second examiner.

### **10. Inspection and reflective discussion**

1. If the student was unable to inspect his/her marked work at the designated place and time through no fault of his/her own, an alternative option will be offered.
2. Students who have attended the collective reflective discussion, or who were unable to attend through no fault of their own, can submit a request for an individual reflective discussion to the relevant examiner. The reflective discussion will take place at a time and location to be determined by the examiner.
3. If a student intends to appeal against the way in which his/her mark was assessed, he/she can be issued with a copy of the marked work at his/her request.

### **11. Quality assurance**

1. Quality is assured in accordance with the provisions of the Guide for Examination Boards ('Handreiking Examencommissies').
2. The Examination Board applies the Assessment Policy Framework ('Toetsbeleid') to ensure the quality of examinations and final degree assessments.
3. The length of each examination is such that the student can reasonably be expected to answer the questions in the time given.

### **12. Procedure for written degree components**

1. In order to participate in an examination, students must show a valid proof of registration (university registration card) and a valid ID with a signature and a photo that is a good likeness of the individual in question.
  - a. When the student cannot show the supporting documents referred to in paragraph 1, he or she is excluded from the examination, or the examination that the student has handed in is declared invalid. The registration indicating that the student has taken the exam will be maintained.
  - b. Participation in a digital test is not possible without the student's personal VUnet ID and password. The student is responsible for having both codes ready for use.
2. The Examination Board ensures that enough invigilators are appointed for the written examination and that these individuals will ensure that the examination is conducted properly.

- a. The examiner may, when using a common examination room, ask the central organization unit to ensure that there are enough invigilators present.
3. Students are obliged to follow the instructions of the invigilator(s).

### **13. Graduation**

1. The Examination Board will determine the result of the final degree assessment if it establishes that the student has passed all of the educational units in the programme. The final degree assessment takes place on the date on which the final examination has been successfully taken.
2. A degree certificate will only be issued once the Executive Board has certified that the student has met all procedural requirements, including payment of tuition fees.
3. The student may ask the Examination Board not to proceed with issuing the degree certificate. Any such request must be submitted within two weeks after the student is informed of the intended graduation date or meets the requirements for graduation. The Examination Board allows graduation to be postponed provided the postponed graduation date falls within the nominal duration of the programme plus one year. The Examination Board may decide differently in exceptional cases.

### **14. Free programme**

1. Subject to certain conditions, the student has the option of compiling a study programme of his/her own choice which deviates from the study programmes prescribed by the degree programme.
2. The composition of such a programme requires the prior approval of the Examination Board that has the greatest jurisdiction over the programme components.
3. The free programme is compiled by the student from educational units offered at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam or another institution of higher education and must at least have the same scope (breadth and depth) as a regular Bachelor's programme. The student must ensure that the proposed study programme enables him/her to proceed to at least one Master's programme. In doing so, he/she is not obliged to take the relevant Master's programme.
4. In all cases, the following requirements must be fulfilled in order to be eligible for the Bachelor's degree:
  1. at least 70 credits must be obtained from one of the regular study programmes of the faculty.
  2. the free programme contains at least 70 credits from courses of other programmes.
  3. the free programme must include at least 60 credits at level 100, 60 credits at level 200 and 60 credits at level 300.

### **15. Iudicia**

1. If a student completes the programme with an 'excellent' classification, a 'cum laude' degree may be awarded.
2. 'Cum laude', Bachelor's programme  
The classification 'cum laude' is awarded to students who have met the following conditions:
  - a. grades of 6.0 or a 6.5 have been assigned for no more than two components;

- b. for the other components, with the exception of the graduation project, grades of 7.0 or higher have been awarded;
  - c. the grade awarded for the graduation project is 8.0 or higher;
  - d. all grades were obtained without resitting an examination.
  - e. the grades were achieved within the nominal duration of study, which can be extended by a maximum of two months per academic year.
  - f. the weighted average for all degree components excluding the graduation project of the Bachelor's programme is at least an 8.0. The weighted average is determined on the basis of the unrounded average. Extracurricular grades are not counted;
  - g. exemptions make up no more than 20% of the nominal credits available.
  - h. the iudicium 'cum laude' will not be awarded if the student has been sanctioned for fraud or plagiarism during the programme.
3. 'Cum laude', Master's programme  
Master's students must meet the requirements set out in paragraph 2 with the exception of (a): a grade of 7.0 has been assigned for all components;

#### **16. Degree certificate and statement**

1. The Examination Board grants a degree certificate as proof that the student has passed his/her final degree assessment. The Examination Board adds a diploma supplement to the degree certificate that provides information on the nature and content of the degree programme completed. The diploma supplement is drawn up in Dutch or English and complies with the European format.
2. Those who have passed more than one examination but who are not entitled to a degree certificate as referred to in paragraph 1 may, upon request, receive a statement issued by the relevant Examination Board which lists the examinations passed, specifying the educational units concerned, the number of credits thus obtained and when the examination results were achieved.

#### **17. Exemption and replacement assignment**

1. A request for exemption from an examination must be submitted to the Examination Board at least six weeks before the start of the relevant degree component.
2. After consulting the relevant examiner, the Examination Board can grant exemption from an examination or practical based on the following:
  - a. a successfully completed examination or practical exercise in higher education in the Netherlands or elsewhere, which corresponds in terms of content, level and study load with the component from which an exemption is being requested;
  - b. or knowledge and/or skills of similar content, level and scope gained outside higher education.
3. Students wishing to meet the requirements of certain exams by studying at another faculty or university, in the Netherlands or abroad, must request permission from the Examination Board beforehand.
4. Students can request that the Examination Board provides a replacement assignment for practical components. If the Examination Board accepts this request, it will in consultation with the examiner determine which substitute requirements the student must meet. In all cases,

the student must meet the final attainment levels for the degree programme.

5. An exemption that has been granted based on study results obtained at a foreign university is registered as a 'pass' or 'fail'.
6. The thesis is exempted from the possibility of exemption.

### 18. Maximum exemption

The maximum number of credits that can be granted in the programme is as follows:

BA Theology & Religious Studies	max. 60 EC
MA Theology & Religious Studies (1 year)	max. 12 EC
MA Theology & Religious Studies (2 year)	max. 24 EC
MA Theology & Religious Studies (3 year)	max. 60 EC

### 19. Academic misconduct in examinations and final degree assessments

1. Academic misconduct and plagiarism are defined as any act or omission by a student that partially or entirely precludes an accurate assessment of their knowledge, understanding and skills, or those of another student.
2. Fraud and academic misconduct include:
  - a. being in possession of aids or resources (pre-programmed calculator, mobile phone, books, syllabi, notes, etc.) which are not expressly permitted during the examination;
  - b. copying from or exchanging information with another student during the examination;
  - c. assuming someone else's identity during the examination;
  - d. allowing someone else to assume your identity during the examination;
  - e. obtaining details of examination questions before the date or time at which that examination is scheduled to take place;
  - f. changing, extending or amending a section of the examination after it has been submitted for final assessment.
3. Plagiarism includes the following:
  - a. using or copying another person's written work, data or ideas without providing full and appropriate source references;
  - b. failing to show clearly in the text, for example through the use of quotation marks or an appropriate layout, that words are being cited directly from another author, even where correct source references have been included;
  - c. paraphrasing the contents of other people's texts without appropriate source references;
  - d. submitting [parts of] a text that has previously been submitted for an earlier assignment for a separate examination component;
  - e. copying work from other students and presenting this work as one's own;
  - f. submitting assignments that have been obtained from a commercial agency or that have been written by someone else (whether or not in exchange for payment).

Electronic detection software programs may be used to detect plagiarism in texts. When submitting a text, the student implicitly consents to the text being entered into the database of the detection program concerned.

### 20. Procedures and penalties

1. If the examiner ascertains, or has good reason to suppose, that academic misconduct has taken place, he/she must report this to the Examination Board in writing immediately. The Examination Board will inform the student of this report in writing.
2. The Examination Board will invite the student to present his/her case and will decide whether academic misconduct or plagiarism has been committed on the basis of the evidence and, where relevant, the information provided by the student at the hearing. Further information may be required from the examiner.
3. If the Examination Board is convinced that academic misconduct has been committed, a penalty will be imposed.
4. In cases of academic misconduct and plagiarism, with due regard to the principles of legal fairness and proportionality, the Examination Board can declare the examination or the assignment to which the academic misconduct relates to be invalid or assign a grade of 0, and may also exclude the student from the following relevant examination.
5. In the event of serious or repeated academic misconduct or plagiarism, the Examination Board may exclude the student from participating in one or more examinations or final degree assessments at VU Amsterdam for a maximum of one year.
6. If very serious academic misconduct or plagiarism is identified, the Examination Board can advise the Executive Board (through the Faculty Board) that the relevant student's registration should be terminated permanently.
7. The Examination Board grants no exemptions regarding the sitting of examinations which are held in another faculty during the period in which the student is debarred from sitting examinations.
8. The student can appeal directly to the Examination Appeals Board against the decision made by the Examination Board within six weeks of the announcement of the decision.
9. In urgent cases relating to academic misconduct which are not covered by these Rules and Guidelines, the Examination Board will make a decision with due regard to the principles of an appropriate procedure.

### **21. Irregularities**

If the Examination Board concludes that one or more examination components, or an entire examination, were not completed in the prescribed manner or that an examination component or examination was not held in the proper manner, it can declare the examination, or the relevant part thereof, invalid.

### **22. Retention periods**

Bachelor's theses and final assignments and Master's theses are retained for a period of at least seven years. Examination assignments are retained for at least seven years, with effect from the 1 January immediately after they were drawn up. Exam question answers, including assignments and other written materials for which a full or partial examination mark has been awarded, are retained for a period of at least two years after the student's registration comes to an end. For the purposes of programme re-accreditation, an arbitrary selection of work is retained for seven years. In relation to the remainder, the Examination Board follows the terms stipulated in the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam's list of retention periods.



**23. Annual report**

By 1 November, the Examination Board will compile a report on its activities during the previous academic year. The Examination Board will send the annual report to the Faculty Board. On request, the annual report or parts of it can be made available to interested parties.

**24. Amendments to these Rules and Guidelines**

No amendments are made in relation to the current academic year, unless there is a reasonable expectation that this will not infringe the interests of the students.

**25. Unforeseen circumstances / hardship clause**

In any circumstances not covered by these Rules and Guidelines, or in circumstances where the provisions in these regulations are unreasonable or unfair to the student, the decisions of the Examination Board will be final.

**26. Date of commencement**

These Rules and Guidelines take effect as of 1 September 2020

Adopted by the Examination Board on 10 November 2020