

Guide for Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

Valid from 01-09-2023

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1. **Scope**

The rules, as described in Article 7.12b, third paragraph, of the Higher Education and Research Act are adopted by the Examination Board and further referred to as the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board.

These Rules and Guidelines apply to examinations and final degree assessments for the e 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 enrolled in the degree programme in this academic year, irrespective of when he or she started the degree programme.

2. **General**

1. The terms used in the Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) also apply to these regulations. The definition of all other terms used is in accordance with the definition used in the Act.
2. In the event that any provision in these regulations conflicts with a provision in the TER applicable to the relevant degree programme, the provision from the TER 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 lecturer 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 will consult with the Examination Board regarding the proposed appointment.
3. Board members are appointed for three years and may be re-appointed.
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 chairperson (external members are not eligible for this position). The chairperson is responsible for the general procedural matters of the Examination Board. The chairperson appoints another member to replace him/her in 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 laid down by law. These include drawing up rules for the performance of duties and exercise of powers 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 OER relating to the knowledge, insight and skills necessary to be awarded a degree;
- b. safeguarding the quality of examinations and final degree assessments;
- c. determining guidelines and instructions for assessing and determining the results of examinations and final degree assessments within the framework of the OER;
- 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 passed a supplementary examination on the relevant subject matter;
- f. determining in exceptional cases that the assessment method laid down in the TER may be deviated from;
- f. ensuring that measures are taken in cases of academic misconduct;
- g. appointing examiners to conduct 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 take part in a free-choice study programme, the final degree assessment for which leads to the awarding 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 chairperson deems necessary. The meeting schedule is published well in advance. The meetings are not open to the public.
2. The Faculty Board may add an Administrative Secretary to the Examination Board.
3. Any request or complaint involving a member of the Examination Board will be handled without the member in question being present.
4. A request or complaint must in any case include substantiation or a description, respectively.

5. The Examination Board will make a decision within no more than 30 business days of receiving a complaint or notice of request. The Examination Board may postpone this decision and inform the interested parties of this in writing.
 6. Students taking a course elsewhere as part of their degree programme, should contact the Examination Board of the degree programme of which the course is part, if they wish to request an exemption or an additional examination opportunity.
 7. The Examination Board of the degree programme of which the course forms part that is taken by a student who is doing a degree programme at a different institution, is responsible for investigating the suspicion that academic misconduct has been committed by the student. Its findings are reported to the Examination Board of the programme the student is enrolled in. This Examination Board then determines whether academic misconduct or plagiarism has been committed and, if so, what measure will be imposed on the student.
 8. If the Examination Boards concerned are both competent with regard to the subjects referred to in Paragraphs 6 and 7, the Examination Boards will determine by mutual agreement what decision is to be taken.
 9. If the decision of the Examination Board requires the weighing of interests, the following should be taken into account, among other things:
 - a. safeguarding the quality of examinations or final degree assessments;
 - b. efficiency requirements: the Examination Board aims to prevent students falling badly behind in their studies, as well as lecturers or the degree programme having a significant/excessive additional workload. It will be taken into account in the assessment that the efforts required of the degree programme should not be disproportionate;
 - c. leniency: the Examination Board will exercise leniency towards students if they have fallen behind in their studies due to special circumstances beyond their control.
 10. Students can submit an appeal against the decision made by the Examination Board directly to the Examination Appeals Board within six weeks of the announcement of the decision.
- 6. Questions and problems, study material and duration of examinations**
1. None of the individual examination questions or problems will cover anything beyond the previously announced examination material. The main points of this examination material will be published 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 following academic year, the student will sit the examination based on the material set for that examination in the following academic year, unless the Examination Board decides otherwise at the request of the examiner.
- 7. Examination in a form other than that prescribed by the TER**
1. At an examiner's request, the Examination Board may decide that an examination shall be conducted in a different form than that stipulated in the TER.
 2. At the student's request, the Examination Board may permit an examination to be conducted in a different form than that stipulated in the TER.

8. Oral examinations

1. Unless specified otherwise by the OER for the relevant educational unit, no more than one student will take an oral examination 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 reasoned request to the Examination Board to deviate from the public nature of the examination. The Examination Board will weigh the student's interest against the interests of administering a public examination.
4. An oral examination will be conducted in the presence of a second lecturer. If an oral examination is conducted by means of a video call, it is sufficient for a single examiner to be present and to make a sound recording.

9. Inspection and reflective discussion

1. If the student was unable to inspect his/her marked work during the specified period 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 discussion shall take place at a time and location to be determined by the examiner.
3. If a student has lodged an appeal regarding the marking of his/her work, he/she will be supplied with a copy of the marked work at his/her request.

10. Procedure for written examinations

1. Students are obliged to be validly registered at the time of participating in an examination and to provide proof of identity in accordance with the provisions of the VU Amsterdam Examination Regulations.
 - a. If a student is unable to supply the documentary evidence referred to in the first paragraph, he/she may be barred from participating in the examination or the examination which he/she has handed in will be declared invalid. The registration for the examination will be retained.
 - b. It is not possible for a student to take part in a digital exam without making use of the personal VUnet ID and password. Students are responsible for knowing both codes.
2. In consultation with the faculty education office, the testing organisation sees to it that enough invigilators are appointed for the written examination, who will ensure that the examination is conducted properly.

3. If the examination is not conducted in a common examination room as described in the VU Amsterdam Examination Regulations, the faculty education office will ensure that enough invigilators are present.
4. Students are obliged to follow the instructions of the invigilator(s).

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. Graduation

1. The Examination Board will determine the result of the final degree assessment once it has established 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 can only be issued once the Executive Board has certified that the student has met all procedural requirements, including the payment of tuition fees.
3. The student may ask the Examination Board to postpone graduation and therefore not to proceed with awarding the degree certificate. Any such request must be submitted within 10 days 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 for the student, plus one year. The Examination Board may decide differently in exceptional cases.

13. Free programme

1. Under certain conditions, students have the option of departing from the standard curriculum as prescribed by the programme and composing their own study 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 put together by the student from the educational units offered by VU Amsterdam or another institution of higher education and must at least have the size, breadth and depth of a regular Bachelor's programme. The student must ensure that the proposed programme will enable admission to at least one Master's programme, though this does not mean the student is under any obligation to actually take this 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.

14. Degree classifications (*Iudicia*)

1. If a student completes the programme with outstanding results, the classification 'cum laude' may be awarded.
2. 'Cum laude', Bachelor's programme

The classification 'cum laude' is awarded to students who have met the following conditions:

- a. Received a 6.0 or a 6.5 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 obtained;
 - c. The grade for the graduation project is at least an 8.0;
 - d. The grades were achieved within the nominal duration of study, which may be extended by a maximum of two months per academic year;
 - e. The weighted average of 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;
 - f. Exemptions make up no more than 20% of the nominal credits required;
 - g. Only the results obtained during the initial participation are taken into account.
 - h. The iudicium 'cum laude' will not be awarded if the student has been sanctioned for fraud or plagiarism during the programme
3. When applying the criteria for awarding degree classifications as described in paragraphs 1 and 2, the rounded final results of the degree components as registered in the official student administration records are used.

When applying the criteria for awarding degree classifications, a student will be deemed to have participated in an examination once the examination location has been entered or, in the case of a digital examination, once the examination environment has been accessed. In the case of papers and assignments assessing skills, the student will be deemed to have participated once a final version has been submitted.

4. '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 or higher has been obtained for all components.

15. Degree certificate and statement

1. The Examination Board will award a degree certificate as proof that the student has passed his/her final degree assessment. The Examination Board will append a diploma supplement to the degree certificate outlining the nature and content of the degree programme. The diploma supplement is drawn up in Dutch or in English and meets the requirements of the European format.
2. Those who have passed more than one examination but who are not entitled to a certificate as referred to in paragraph 1 may, on request, receive a statement issued by the relevant Examination Board which at the very least states the examinations passed, specifying the educational units concerned, the number of credits thus obtained and when the examination results were achieved.

16. Exemption from educational units

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 using the form designated for this purpose on the faculty website.
2. After consulting the relevant examiner, the Examination Board can grant exemption from an examination or practical based on the following:
 - a. an examination or practical in higher education successfully completed in the Netherlands or elsewhere that corresponds in terms of content, level and study load with the component for which an exemption is being requested
 - b. [or knowledge and/or skills that are comparable in terms of content, level and scope, acquired outside higher education].
3. If the Examination Board grants an exemption for an examination that is part of an educational unit that involves more than one examination, the exemption can only be granted once all other components of the educational unit have been passed. In that case, the exemption is registered as the final result for the educational unit.

The Examination Board does not grant exemptions from examinations sat at another faculty or university in the period during which the student has been debarred from sitting examinations due to academic misconduct.

17. 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

18. Replacement assignment and exemption from practical exercise/study group sessions

1. Prior approval must be obtained from the Examination Board if a student wishes to meet the requirements for specific examinations by obtaining results at a different faculty or (Dutch or foreign) university. A study result for a replacement assignment for which a pass mark has been obtained at a foreign university, may be registered as 'geslaagd' or 'pass'.
2. In exceptional cases, the Examination Board may, if requested, exempt a student, or partially exempt a student, from participating in a practical exercise or a study group session.
3. Students can request that the Examination Board provides a replacement assignment for practical components. If the Examination Board honours this request, it will determine in consultation with the examiner which substitute requirements the student must meet. In all cases, the student must meet the final attainment levels for the degree programme.

19. Academic misconduct in examinations and final degree assessments

1. Academic misconduct is defined as any act or omission by a student that partially or entirely precludes making an accurate assessment of his or her knowledge, understanding and skills, or those of another student.
2. Academic misconduct includes:
 - a. being in possession of aids or resources during an examination (e.g. pre-programmed calculator, mobile phone, smart watch, books, syllabi, notes and the like) which the student is not expressly permitted to consult;
 - b. copying from or exchanging information with another student during an examination;
 - c. assuming someone else's identity during an examination;
 - d. allowing someone else to assume your identity during an examination;
 - e. obtaining the details of examination problems before the date or time at which the examination is scheduled to take place;
 - f. changing, extending or amending a section of an examination after it has been submitted for final assessment;
 - g. continuing to work on an examination after the official examination time has ended, with the exception of those who have been granted extra time;
 - h. submitting work that has been generated using artificial intelligence, as if it were one's own work, in cases in which artificial intelligence is not permitted to be used as an aid;
 - i. falsifying data/research data;
 - j. plagiarism.
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 text is being cited directly from another author, even where correct source references have been included;
- c. paraphrasing the contents of another person's text without sufficient referencing of sources;
- d. submitting previously submitted or comparable texts (or parts thereof), for assignments for other degree components;
- e. copying work from other students and presenting this work as one's own work;
- f. submitting papers that were obtained from a commercial agency or that were written by someone else (whether or not for payment).

Fraud detection software may be used for the detection of academic misconduct. By submitting a text, the student implicitly consents to the inclusion of the text in the database of the relevant detection software.

20. Procedures and penalties

1. If the examiner suspects academic misconduct, he or she will report this immediately to the Examination Board in writing. The Examination Board will inform the student of this report in writing, enclosing/attaching the relevant documentary evidence.
2. The Examination Board will invite the student to present his or her case and will decide whether academic misconduct has been committed on the basis of the evidence and, where possible, the information provided by the student at the hearing. Further information may be required from the examiner.
3. If the Examination Board finds that academic misconduct has indeed occurred, a penalty will be imposed.
4. In cases of academic misconduct, with due regard to the principles of legal fairness and proportionality, the Examination Board can declare the examination or the paper 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, the Examination Board may debar the student from participating in one or more examinations or final degree assessments for a maximum of one year. If serious academic misconduct is identified, the Examination Board can advise the Executive Board that the student's registration should be terminated permanently.
6. In urgent cases relating to academic misconduct that are not covered by these Rules and Guidelines, the Examination Board will make a decision, with due regard to the principles of due process.

21. Irregularities

If the Examination Board concludes that one or more examination components, or an entire examination, was not completed in the prescribed manner or that an examination component or

examination was not held in the proper manner, it will declare the examination, or the relevant component 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 problems are retained for at least seven years, starting from the end of the academic year in which the examination was put together. Exam question answers, including essays and other written materials for which a mark/partial mark has been awarded and examination results are retained for at least two years after the end of the academic year in which the answers have been given. For the purposes of programme re-accreditation, an arbitrary selection of answers is retained for seven years. In relation to the remainder, the Examination Board follows the terms stipulated in VU Amsterdam's List of Retention Periods.

23. Annual report

Before 1 November, the Examination Board will compile a report on its activities over the last academic year. The Examination Board will send the annual report to the Faculty Board. On request, the annual report or parts thereof 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 be detrimental to 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 Examination Board will have the final say.

26. Entry into force

These Rules and Guidelines take effect on 1 September 2023.

Thus adopted by the Examination Board on 31 August 2023.