Third Year Preliminary Papers

In the third year, graduate students must write two preliminary papers. One must be written in a historical area that correlates with the history exam that the student chose not to take the summer before. (Note, pursuing a paper in a period commits one to knowing more than the reading list requires in that area, not less.) The other concerns a sub-disciplinary or systematic or topical area in which the student expects to specialize and which will provide useful background for the dissertation. Students should write one paper/semester.

Research for these papers is conducted under the direction of a professor in the form of a Directed Reading. The Director gives the grade for the course. However, two other faculty members, selected jointly by the student and the directing professor must also read the final paper and award it either a P or NP for the purposes of the preliminary exam.

The purpose of these papers is to demonstrate competence in the relevant area, to help establish each area as an AOS for professional purposes, as well as to help clarify the student’s dissertation topic. These goals are not identical, however, and if they conflict, the goal of competence trumps.

When proposing a project, the student should provide the Director with a list of texts that he or she has read and that are germane to the area. The department will begin to maintain a record of third-year papers as both students and faculty may find this helpful in preparing a proposal. On the basis of that background and its relation to the basic literature of the area or field in question, Director and student will assemble a reading list for the term. That list must then be sent to the two Readers and be approved or modified until approved by all of the faculty members involved. Once the list is finalized, it should be sent to the DGS for review. (This should be done no later than 9/15 in the fall term and 1/15 in the spring.) If issues arise, the DGS will consult the GSC for recommendations.

The actual paper will no doubt be far narrower than the reading list. For example, one might write on intersubjectivity in Sartre and Beauvoir for a 20th Century reading even though one has also read Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Strawson over the course of the term. Or, for a social and political prelim, one might write on the nature of power in Machiavelli and Schmitt even though one has also read Aristotle, Hobbes, and Foucault. But the work done over the course of the term must satisfy the spirit of a preliminary exam designed to insure breadth.