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Introduction

The Departmental Graduate Committee

Graduate life in the Philosophy department is overseen, and where appropriate regulated, by the Departmental Graduate Committee. This committee consists of all the departmental faculty members. There is a Graduate Chair (currently Dr. Holly Andersen), and sometimes an Executive Subcommittee, which the department has authorized to make decisions on routine matters. Any suggestions for improvements to any aspect of our Graduate Program and how it is run are welcome and can be addressed to the Graduate Chair at any time or brought to the department’s attention at a meeting by the Graduate Representative. Should you disagree with a particular decision the Graduate Chair makes, you can ask that your case be considered by the Departmental Graduate Committee. Such appeals should be submitted in writing to the Graduate Chair or to the Department Chair. E-mail submissions are both sufficient and preferred.

Routine Procedures

Many procedures de facto only require that the Graduate Chair be informed, as signified by an approval signature on a form. Such procedures include things like Western Dean’s Agreement courses, applications to form a supervisory or examining committee, applications to graduate, etc., and can be handled through our Departmental Secretary. The relevant forms can be found on the Dean of Graduate Studies (DGS) website. Should the Graduate Chair or the Departmental Graduate Committee find any reason to question one of these routine procedures you will be contacted.

Students can find help with procedural issue issues concerning enrollment, fees, forms, printer access, etc. from our Departmental/Graduate secretary (currently Ms. Linda Sheldon).

Issues of course numbers for directed readings courses as well as the mechanics of life in the department (offices, furniture, etc.) are largely handled by our Departmental Manager (currently Mrs. Laura Bologea).

Appeals, Special Applications

All appeals and applications concerning degree requirements, such as the logic requirement, course credit for previous graduate work, breadth requirements, etc. should go to the Graduate Chair in writing. E-mail is both sufficient and preferred.

Applications to transfer from MA to PhD programs or vice versa are treated within the department in the same way that new applications to the programs are treated (see application procedures).
Source and authoritative version of rules

The regulations and procedures in this handbook are an amalgam of Departmental and Dean of Graduate Studies (DGS) edicts. The two sources are distinguished only where it might be of some relevance to the student (So, for example, most of the degree requirements are departmental. Because they are more restrictive versions of what the University requires, the latter requirements are not enumerated here).

The current document is the ultimate authority on departmental rules, with interpretation to be given by the Departmental Graduate Committee if needed. Departmental rules embellish, but cannot contradict, the University rules as set out in the University Calendar and on the Dean of Graduate Studies website. Interpretation for the university rules is provided by the Dean.

Departmental expectations of Graduate Students

Graduate school in philosophy is a full-time endeavour. There are, of course, financial and family and other personal reasons why a particular person might not be able to concentrate on their studies on a full time basis. The general expectation is, however, that in accepting a place in our Graduate program, a student accepts that graduate education will be the central focus of his or her life. If there is some reason why you must concentrate on some other area of your life for some period, to the detriment of your concentration on your studies, it is important that you discuss this with the Graduate Chair (or someone else in the department) so that our expectations can be adjusted accordingly.

The Philosophy Department considers its Graduate Students to be an essential and integral part of the intellectual and social life of the department. The serious business of teaching, learning and research is not merely enhanced by a healthy, functioning departmental community; such a community is one of the preconditions of much of the work being carried out at all. We strive to include our Graduate Students in as much of the Department’s life as possible and, in turn, we would like the students to play an active role in it.

Thus Graduate Students are expected to attend colloquia, to participate in conferences, to present their work at appropriate departmental and other venues etc. We consider these to be an integral part of your philosophical training. And, while we hardly require such participation, we would like to see students take part in such extra-curricular activities as social events, open houses, departmental outings and so on. All of these activities contribute to building a community conducive to a healthy intellectual life.
Requirements

Requirements common to all MA degrees

- Completion of six Philosophy courses (PHIL 899 and PHIL 898 do NOT count towards this requirement): one course must be the Pro-seminar, PHIL 880, taken in the first graduate study year; one course may be a 300 or 400 level undergraduate course with graduate studies committee permission, completed with a grade of A- or higher (see below). The rest must be Graduate courses.
- Demonstrated competence in such foreign languages as the Departmental Graduate Committee requires for the proposed research.
- Demonstrated competence in formal logic at the level of PHIL 210, or higher when relevant to the proposed research.
- There is no minimum residence requirement for MA students, but there is a maximum of 12 semesters (not counting leaves) or 6 calendar years.
- A minimum Cumulative GPA of 3.0 must be maintained at all times.

There are three ways to complete a Masters degree in the Department of Philosophy

Non-Thesis Option

The department recommends this option for most students planning to apply for a philosophy PhD program admission after completing their MA. The program is designed to broaden and deepen philosophical education and to allow the student to develop the necessary materials for a successful PhD program application. Instead of centering on a thesis, it specifies extra coursework and a more stringent CGPA and distribution requirements, and aims directly at producing a viable writing sample - The Professional Paper.

Extra Course Work: There is one additional Philosophy course required, for a total of seven courses.

Course Distribution: At least one course must be in each of three major areas of philosophy: value theory, metaphysics and epistemology, and history of philosophy. Taken together with upper division undergraduate courses, normally completed previously, a total of three courses in each area are required. A student who wishes to complete the non-thesis MA and has not taken two courses in each of the distribution areas prior to enrolling in the program may satisfy the distribution requirement by choosing appropriate areas for the three remaining courses of the seven required to complete the degree, or take additional courses. In the latter case, they may be upper division undergraduate courses.

Overall Cumulative Grade Point Average: A Cumulative GPA of 3.5 is required at graduation.

PHIL 899 and the Professional Paper: In this course, the student revises a paper to a standard suitable in form and content for submission to a professional journal. The starting point is typically a paper from a previously completed graduate course. The resulting Professional Paper normally shall not exceed 30 pages. The course is completed under the
direction of the senior supervisor.

The leading idea behind the Professional Paper is that those who wish to apply to PhD programs have a chance to produce a truly polished piece of work to use a writing sample in their applications, and those who do not, have the experience at least once in their educational career of working on something until it is really good – and not just until the course deadline. Thus the paper is not meant to be a small thesis, or an extended research project. On the contrary, because of the length restrictions on writing samples, the emphasis here is on quality, clarity, and focus, over quantity, breadth, and all-inclusive coverage. This is why we have the journal-article specification in the official definition of the requirement.

*Final Examination:* There is a public final examination on the Professional Paper produced in Phil 899. (See details under Completion)

**Classic Thesis Option**

This option has the following specific requirements:

*Course Distribution:* The candidate completes at least one course in each of three major areas of philosophy: value theory, metaphysics and epistemology, and history of philosophy.

*Thesis:* The student submits and successfully defends a thesis, normally not more than 100 pages in length, that gives evidence of independent critical ability. (See details under Completion)

**Specialized Thesis Option**

This option is intended for those who have a particular project and supervisor in mind when they enter the program, and especially for those with interdisciplinary interests. It has the following specific requirements:

*Program of Study:* The student is normally accepted into the program with a well-defined project and Program of Study, and a permanent (as opposed to interim) senior supervisor. The project and course of study is approved by the Departmental Graduate Committee prior to the student’s first semester of registration. Specialized MA students are assigned Teaching Assistantships outside of their area of specialization only with the approval of the Departmental Graduate Committee.

*Relaxed distribution requirement:* The courses required for completion of a Specialized MA are set at admission in the student’s Program of Study. Up to three of the required courses projected in the course of study may be from outside the Department of Philosophy.

There is no logic requirement unless specified by the project and course of study.


Thesis: The student submits and successfully defends a thesis, normally not more than 100 pages in length, that gives evidence of independent critical ability (See details under Completion)

The area of specialization is noted on the student's final transcript under Committee Decisions.
MA Advice

How to Complete a Non-Thesis MA in Two Years or Less

A non-thesis MA requires you to take 7 courses and complete a Professional Paper. If you take 2 courses a term for three terms and the spend one term on one course plus the Professional Paper, you should be able to complete in 4 terms. So, if you start in the Fall and go right through, you should be out by the end of the following Fall. Well under two years. So what is the issue?

Well, there must be some, since no one finishes in four terms. Here are some candidate issues:

- Graduate School is a lot harder than expected. We run a sort of philosophical boot-camp here and incoming students are often a bit surprised at what is expected of them. The result is late papers, deferred grades, only one course per term, and all manner of other slowdowns. Within limits, the department agrees with students when they wish to do a good job, rather than a quick job.

- Distribution Requirements. Quite often, students need to take extra courses to satisfy the more stringent breadth requirements (three in each area, at least one of each in Graduate School)

- Course availability and interest-driven slowdowns. Students get interested in a particular topic, participate in reading groups, wait for a term when a professor with whom they want to do a directed reading course is available, etc.

- Professional Paper, pt. 1: You are supposed to revise an already good paper from a course you have taken to a standard that is close to ready to submit to a journal or, at any rate, that would make a good writing sample for applying to a PhD program. But that means you have to have such a paper on hand to revise, and a surprising number of students don't actually have a paper that satisfies the twin requirements of being good already and being in the area they wish to work in. So they carry on until they get one, or write a brand new paper for the purpose. This takes time.

- Professional Paper, pt. 2: There is some confusion about what the paper is supposed to be like. It is not a thesis or even a project (by SFU definition). It is just a paper, only it is supposed to be good, and glossy and shiny and polished.
Still, shouldn’t two more terms take care of these delays, still keeping completion in 2 years?

Yes, except here is the number one reason people take 3 years:

- They are not ready to apply to PhD (or other) programs when they need to be - at the end of the Fall term of their second year.

So, if you are taking a year off, or are not planning on going on to further post-graduate programs, you do not need further advice. But, if you are, you need...

A strategy for being ready to apply to PhD or other programs by the end of the Fall term of your second year.

What we aim to provide our graduates with, so they can succeed in their applications, are three things:

- a broad philosophical education
- letters of reference from people who know the student
- a writing sample

No one can get into a good PhD program without the latter two items, so that is what you need to get by the Fall of your second year. In other words you need:

- Courses in your area of interest so the professors in that area get to know you
- Your Professional Paper finished.

The first thought students have when they arrive in the program is that the way to proceed is to first get the course-requirements out of the way, especially the distribution ones, and then concentrate on their area of interest to come up with a professional paper.

This approach, natural as it is, will not work if you want to be applying for PhD programs in the Fall of your second year. The ideal procedure for that is to:

- Immediately start taking all courses in your area of interest with a view to getting a good paper to revise and getting to know the professors in that area.

- Aim to revise your paper to Professional Paper standards in the Fall of your second year or, ideally, in the Summer preceding (The Summer term - whether of your first or of your second year - is the best term to do the Professional Paper: there are fewer courses offered and most non-TAship support)

- Worry about the breadth requirements in the Spring (and Summer, if needed) after you apply to PhD programs (So, at the time of application, point (a) above is discharged by a
In other words, there is no reason why the Professional Paper needs to be the last thing you do in the program - it is needed as a writing sample, and that takes priority. You can present it as soon as you finish it or, if you want the presentation to be the final event of your degree, hold off on it.
Registration

All Graduate students at SFU are required to be registered in every semester until they graduate. In order to register for a term, a student must register in at least one course. (Dropping all courses later in the term does not affect a student’s registration status for the term.) Normally this would be a graduate course, or if course work is completed, PHIL 998, PHIL 898, or PHIL 899 (dissertation, thesis, or Professional Paper preparation). It may, however, be an undergraduate course.

If, for some reason, you plan not to register for a term (for financial reasons, for example), make sure you discuss your plans with the Graduate Chair. In order to continue in the program after a term in which you failed to register, you must apply to be reinstated and pay a fee.

If a student plans to be away from campus for a given term, he or she needs to apply to register On Leave ([forms on the Graduate Studies web site](http://sfu.ca/philosophy)).

The course work for each semester requires the approval of the Graduate Chair. Students who fail to obtain such permission and file the appropriate form with the Departmental Secretary by the end of the second week of classes will have their registration cancelled. It is expected that students consult their Supervisors in devising a program of study for each term prior to seeking the Graduate Chair’s approval.

Available courses

There are five kinds of courses a graduate student can take:

1. Scheduled Graduate courses;
2. Graduate courses based on a 300 or 400 level courses. To take such a course, the student makes an agreement with the instructor, before the start of the term, regarding any additional regular meeting times and the extra requirements needed to make the course count as a Graduate Course. The Department Manager assigns the course an appropriate number;
3. Directed Reading courses. These courses are set up with individual faculty members on specific topics and/or readings at the student’s initiative. Once arrangements are made for such a course, the Department Manager finds an appropriate course number for it. Ideally, more than one student would participate in a Directed Reading Course or a Graduate course based on undergraduate courses. To this end, the department strongly encourages students to try to find others interested in the proposed topic and faculty members to announce projected directed reading courses and Undergraduate course Graduate extensions;
4. Scheduled 300 and 400 courses as such with permission of Departmental Graduate Committee. Minimum grade of A- is required and there is a limit of 1 per MA, 2 per PhD.
5. Courses at other Western Canadian Universities (including UBC) under the Western Dean's Agreement.

The department urges students to complete as much as of their coursework as possible without using options 2 and 3.

Some Graduate Students may be required, at admission, to complete a certain number of upper division undergraduate courses as part of their degree. Qualifying students will typically be taking undergraduate courses as well and, at any rate, any Graduate courses they take while they are qualifying will not count towards their future degree.

Graduate students are strongly encouraged to complete their major assignments early enough so that revisions, taking into account the instructor's comments, are possible before the final grade is assigned.

Courses in other departments

Graduate students can take courses offered by any department at SFU or at other Western Canadian universities. To enroll in such a course, permission of the Departmental Graduate Committee is needed (please contact the Departmental/Graduate Secretary for procedural details). Such a permission is normally granted if the course is relevant to the student's program of study.

The department feels, however, that the integrity of the Graduate degree requires that our students complete a certain number of Philosophy courses. Interdisciplinary work is encouraged, but it necessarily involves some work in addition to the philosophical requirements. Thus, except in the case of Specialized MA students, outside courses will not normally count towards satisfying degree requirements unless they have significant philosophical content. To have an outside course count towards degree requirements, the student must file a separate appeal to the Graduate Chair and include the course syllabus with the application.

Deferred Grades

The department recognizes that it is sometimes difficult for a Graduate student, especially one who is working as a Teaching Assistant, to find sufficient time to complete major papers toward the end of a term. Instructors will make every effort to be flexible, and students are urged to make arrangements with them to finish the course in time. Should this prove impossible, a deferred grade (DE) can be granted at the discretion of the instructor. It is very important, however, that this be the exception rather than the rule, and that DEs be removed in a timely manner.

Please note that Dean of Graduate Studies policy mandates that after the end of the first calendar month of the term following the granting of a DE, the DE grade converts to an F, unless a different grade is submitted by then. Any change of grade or extension of DE status
after the DGS deadline requires documentation of extenuating circumstances, letters of support from both the course instructor and the Graduate Chair, and the approval DGS. Such approval is anything but routine.

Students who ask for a DE grade should, at that time, arrange with their instructor a date at which all work will be submitted. There is an expectation that this date will be no later than the end of the first week of classes of the following term. In any case, the date must be long enough in advance of the DGS deadline to allow the instructor the time required to assess the work. **This would normally be one week prior to the deadline.**
Supervision

Interim Supervisors

Every student not in the Specialized MA program is assigned an Interim Supervisor upon entering the program. If the student finds him or herself seeking most of her advice from a faculty member other than the assigned Interim Supervisor, and if the faculty member is in agreement, the Departmental Graduate Committee will change the Interim Supervisor assignment at the student's request.

The interim supervisor acts as the student's advisor and it is expected that the two shall meet within the first week of the student's arrival and at least once a term thereafter.

Supervisory Committees

The Dean of Graduate studies expects students to acquire a permanent Senior Supervisor early in their program. The choice of Senior Supervisor is up to individual agreements between students and faculty members, although the form does require approval by the Graduate Chair.

The following are the minimum supervisory requirements. Your supervisory committee may have more members and, in any case, the Department requires that any Faculty Member who made a substantive contribution to the development of your Professional Paper, Thesis, or Dissertation be officially included in the Supervisory Committee.

Specialized MA students must have a Senior Supervisor upon entering the program.

For an MA with a thesis, the Supervisory Committee requires at least one other member in addition to the Senior Supervisor. It may have more, although it is unusual to have more than three members in total.

For a Non-thesis MA, only a Senior Supervisor is required. Sometimes students have larger committees, especially if they have switched to the Non-Thesis option from the Thesis option.
Progress

There is an expectation of normal progress for all graduate students. Students typically complete the program at different rates. However, unless there are extenuating circumstances known to the department, completing requirements either at a substantially slower rate than the norm or with a sub-par level of work will result in an assessment of insufficient, or even unsatisfactory, progress. If you feel you cannot maintain normal progress for whatever reason, it is imperative you see your Supervisor or the Graduate Chair.

Upon entry, an Interim Supervisor is appointed to each student, and any special course requirements or exemptions are set. Specialized MA students have their project approved and a Supervisory Committee appointed. Thereafter, all students are expected to complete 6 courses per year, 4 if they work as Teaching Assistants.

MA students

An MA degree will normally be completed by the end of the second year. Thesis students should start work on their thesis in the first term of their second year. Non-thesis students should plan to take Phil 899 by the end of their second year. University regulations specify that the maximum number of semesters a Masters student can be registered at SFU is 12, and the MA degree must be finished within 6 calendar years, counting leaves.

Yearly Progress Evaluation

At least once a year each student’s Supervisor produces a written Progress Report to be submitted to the Departmental Graduate Committee. This report is signed by the student, and kept in his or her file. Reports written by the Senior Supervisors of students working on a Thesis or Dissertation must include an estimate of completion date as well as some details of the successes and, especially, problems encountered during the preceding year. The Departmental Graduate Committee meets in April of every year to discuss each active student and their Supervisor’s report in turn.

There are four possible outcomes of this discussion:

- Satisfactory Progress: The student is in good standing.
- Satisfactory Progress, but an Interim Progress Report will be required at a specified time, for a specified reason (e.g. to ensure DE grades are removed by then)
- Insufficient Progress: The student is put on probation until the next evaluation.
- Unsatisfactory Progress: The student is asked to withdraw from the program

Historically, almost all of our students have been judged to be making satisfactory progress. Each student is required to meet with the Graduate Chair to discuss the result of the evaluation meeting and future academic plans.
Completion

Please note that you need to be registered in the term in which you complete your degree. Many students defend their Theses or have their Professional Papers examined near the end of term. For this reason, please make sure you know what is the last day for applying for a degree that term and work backwards from there to when you need to apply to schedule your capstone event (as these things are called at SFU). Normally this would be around the 11th week of classes. Should you need not make the deadline, you need to register for the following term and, if you complete your degree in the first few weeks, get a partial refund of your fees. This partial refund is not available to students who exceed their maximum time for their degree.

If you have run out of time to complete your degree, you may be re-admitted for one term to complete your degree, within one year of your last term at SFU.

Non-Thesis MA: Examination and Presentation of Professional Paper

To complete a Non-Thesis MA, a student must complete his or her Professional Paper, have it examined by an Examining Committee, and present it in a public forum.

The normal procedure:

When the Professional Paper revisions are near their final stages, the student approaches the Supervisor about planning and scheduling the Paper’s presentation. At least four weeks prior to the scheduled presentation, the form Scheduling of Master’s Degree Completion must be filed with the office of the DGS. If you are completing your degree at the end of a semester, please check with the Departmental Secretary about the deadline for filing the Recommendation for the Award of Degree form which cannot be filed prior to the presentation.

The Graduate Chair, in conjunction with the student’s Senior Supervisor, forms an Examining Committee consisting of the Senior Supervisor and at least one other examiner who is qualified in the relevant field. This examiner would generally be a member of the SFU philosophy department, but may be from another department at SFU or another university.

Normally, the Professional Paper is made available to the Examining Committee at least two weeks prior to the presentation. A copy of the paper is also made available in the main philosophy office to anyone interested and an abstract is sent out with the advertisement.

At the presentation, the student is allowed about 40 minutes to give the paper, and then an open discussion follows, beginning with questions from the Examining Committee. Following the presentation and discussion, the Examining Committee meets in camera to
evaluate the Professional Paper. The categories of evaluation are: Pass with distinction, Pass, or Fail. The Committee may require revisions to be made to the paper. Should the paper fail, the student has a second, and final, chance to submit and present a Professional Paper in order to complete the degree.

Thesis or Specialized MA

Defence: at least four weeks prior to the scheduled defence, the form Approval of Examining Committee for a Master’s Student must be filed with the office of the DGS. If you are completing your degree at the end of a semester, please check with the Departmental Secretary about the deadline for submitting a thesis to the library. You should allow time between the defence and that deadline for revisions, formatting, etc.

The Examining Committee consists of the Supervisory Committee plus an External Examiner. Normally, it is the Senior Supervisor's responsibility to seek out and secure the cooperation of a suitable person. The External Examiner cannot be a member of the SFU Philosophy Department, but may be a member of a different department at SFU or a qualified person from outside the University.

Normally, the Thesis is made available to the Examining Committee at least four weeks prior to the Examination.

The MA Thesis Defence is a public event, chaired by the Graduate Chair or appointee and attended by the Examining Committee. The candidate presents a prepared presentation of approximately 20 minutes' length, outlining the contents of the thesis being defended. Two rounds of questions from members of the Examining Committee are followed by a public discussion.

Following the Examination, the Examining Committee meets in camera to evaluate the Thesis and the student’s performance using the categories as those set out in 1.10.2, Classification of the Thesis: The Thesis may pass without revision or Pass with revisions to be approved by the Senior Supervisor. It may also not pass as is, but the decision is deferred until a new substantially revised version is submitted and, at the discretion of the Examining Committee, re-examined. Should the Thesis fail, the student is asked to withdraw from the program.
Aid & Awards

Teaching Assistantships

The department will endeavour to provide a suitable Teaching Assistantship to every Graduate Student who applies for one. Go to the Job Postings page for details concerning rules and procedures.

As per the TSSU collective agreement, the department shall give priority to the applicants in the following order:

- (i) Graduate students registered in the department (but not if they are "On Leave")
- (ii) Graduate students registered in other departments
- (iii) Undergraduate students or External applicants (including SFU MA students that have graduated)

Fellowships

The department has a small number of Graduate Fellowships (GFs) each year. These are allocated to applicants who meet the minimum standards of Cumulative GPA of 3.5 in their Graduate courses using the following criteria.

*Merit*

This is, following university regulations, the chief criterion.

*Distribution*

We try to ensure that as many as possible of our qualified Graduate Students get a GF at least once in their program.

*Best Use of Funds*

In general, we try to favour the applicants who will make the best use of the relief from having to TA to support themselves. In practice, this means that preference is given to those who plan to work on their thesis or project, or prepare for Competency Exams over those who are completing.

Furthermore, since the Department has the least TAship support available in the Summer term, restricting GFs to the Summer term is strongly preferred.

*Recruiting*

The department will, on occasion, use one or two GFs for the purpose of attracting exceptional
Research Assistantships

The Department funds two Summer Research Assistantships per year, worth $6000 each. In the Spring term, faculty members submit project proposals, two are selected, and a call for applications goes out to the graduate students.

In addition, there is usually some RA money available through individual faculty member’s grants.

External Forms of Support

The Department strongly urges all graduate students who are eligible to consider applying for MA or PhD SSHRC Fellowships.

It is also an excellent idea to browse the list of awards on the DGS website.

Travel Funds

The Philosophy Department has at its disposal a small fund dedicated to student travel to conferences and other places where they are presenting or commenting on a paper or that are crucially connected to their research.

We are currently offering up to $1,200 per graduate student for travel, distributed over two years. Normally a student can not use more than $500 in the first year.

To apply for the funds, please follow the Graduate Student Travel Funding Policy and e-mail the Graduate Chair with the required documentation for the final approval. For detailed information about your claim reimbursement, contact the Departmental Manager.