

University of Texas at Austin

Department of Philosophy

Graduate Student Handbook

Master of Arts (MA) & Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2026-2027

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PHD REQUIREMENTS

In the first year:

- PHL 384F (First-year Seminar) - an intensive introduction to a central area of philosophy
- PHL 389, Logic

Within the first two years:

- a graduate course in metaphysics or epistemology
- a graduate course in ethics
- a graduate course in history of philosophy
- five additional graduate courses in philosophy

Within the first three years:

- Completion and defense of a dissertation prospectus
- Completion of PHL 398T - a one-semester teaching course
- Foreign Language Proficiency - four semesters study or equivalent in a language other than English (can be satisfied with coursework completed before enrolling in the program) *or* two additional graduate philosophy seminars or upper-division or graduate courses in a related area (approved by the Graduate Studies Executive Committee)

Finally:

- Completion and defense of a dissertation

An M.A. is not required for the PhD but may be earned after completing all relevant requirements.

Students in special programs, such as the Ancient Philosophy Program, may need to do supporting coursework or language study at an earlier stage.

Students must be continuously registered, excluding summer sessions, unless granted a leave of absence by petition to the Graduate Studies Committee. Students must register for at least nine hours unless granted an exception by the Graduate Adviser for health or financial reasons.

PROGRAM GUIDE (YEAR-BY-YEAR NARRATIVE)

Overview of the Program

In typical progression through the program, during the first two years graduate students focus on satisfying the coursework requirements for the PhD, laying the foundation for subsequent work. The third year centers on the dissertation prospectus, which is normally one dissertation chapter. The fourth and fifth years are dedicated to the remainder of the dissertation. Summers are times to get ahead. The program also furnishes opportunities for students to develop their work for presentation and publication, helping to prepare for success on the job market.

The First Two Years: Coursework

Coursework begins with the First-Year Seminar, or “ProSem” (PHL 384F), which is restricted to first year students in the Ph.D. program. The ProSem is normally taught by two faculty members, who also serve as primary advisors for those students during their first two years. A student’s prospectus supervisor serves as primary advisor in the third year until the prospectus has been successfully defended. The prospectus supervisor may then continue as dissertation supervisor, or the student may select a different dissertation supervisor. Throughout, the Philosophy Department’s Graduate Advisors and the Graduate Program Coordinator stand ready to help students navigate their way through the program.

In addition to the First-Year Seminar, students must take Logic (PHL 389) in the spring of their first year, and at least one graduate course in each of the following three areas: history of philosophy; ethics; and metaphysics and epistemology. Thereafter, students are encouraged to follow their interests in selecting five additional courses in philosophy, with the aim of developing areas of specialization and competence. They must also *either* demonstrate foreign language proficiency *or* take two additional graduate philosophy seminars or courses—upper-division or graduate—in a related area approved by the Graduate Studies Executive Committee (GSEC). Foreign language proficiency is demonstrated by four semesters study, or equivalent, in a language other than English; this can be satisfied with coursework completed before enrolling in the program.

Coursework provides a solid and broad basis for further philosophical inquiry, which students undertake in writing their dissertation prospectuses and, eventually, their dissertations. Colloquia and other departmental events provide a fantastic opportunity to learn about new philosophical topics or to dive deeper into familiar ones, and students should plan to attend most of these events. Students are encouraged to participate in reading groups throughout the program. In the second year (or even earlier), students will begin to brainstorm ideas for a prospectus topic, perhaps based on a seminar paper. Students may also try to develop a seminar paper for presentation or publication, in consultation with relevant faculty specialists.

Towards the end of the second year (in late March or early April), students should identify a prospectus supervisor(s) and schedule one or more meetings to begin planning their prospectus research. We recommend that in the fall of their second year, students plan to approach one, or possibly two, other faculty specialists in their anticipated prospectus field for exploratory conversations and advice about their proposed project. Usually it takes a few tries to pinpoint a suitable project, so we recommend starting early. By the end of the second year, the student’s prospectus supervisor takes over as primary advisor, though it remains possible to change advisors during the third year. Students should report any change of advisors to the Graduate Program Coordinator, so that the department’s Graduate Advisors and faculty can keep track of who is overseeing each student’s progress and support students more effectively.

Summers: Getting Ahead

All offer letters incorporate funding which is intended to support summer research. (Sometimes the support does not mention “summer” explicitly, or it may be paid in the spring. Don’t hesitate to ask if you have questions.)

It’s understandable that after finishing the spring semester some students may need a break to catch their breath before pursuing the summer projects that their funding supports. Each summer affords significant time for students to make substantial progress towards satisfying the program requirements and to develop their work. For example, during the first two summers, students are encouraged to form a plan (in consultation with their mentors) to fill gaps by reading widely, to dive deeply into the literature in a specific area of interest, or to revise a course paper into a conference or journal submission. A good portion of the second summer is likely to be spent studying literature relevant for the prospectus—supervisors will help students assemble a reading list. During the third and fourth summers, students will work on their dissertation, researching and writing as appropriate—once again, supervisors will offer advice. Students will also continue to develop their work (perhaps another course paper, or a chapter from their dissertation) into a presentation or publication. At the end of the spring term each year, students will meet with their advisor to fashion a viable plan for the upcoming summer.

The Third Year: Prospectus and Presentations/Publications

After fulfilling coursework requirements, students turn their attention to the dissertation prospectus. Each semester of their third year, they will enroll in prospectus hours (PHL 388C) with their prospectus advisor. The end of graded coursework marks the beginning of the transition to being an active member of the profession, who not only participates in philosophical discussions in diverse contexts (seminars, colloquia, workshops, and conferences) but also submits papers for presentation or articles for publication. To facilitate this transition, students will enroll in the fall semester Presentation and Publication Seminar, or “PPS” (PHL 388), which is dedicated to helping them revise and prepare a paper for presentation and for journal submission. While PPS is also open to those in earlier or later years working on a piece (distinct from their dissertation) for presentation or publication, it is primarily intended to assist third year students. Students must also take a one-semester teaching course (PHL 398T) designed to help develop teaching excellence. Finally, in the spring semester students will enroll in one graduate seminar for credit (CR/NC, not a grade), allowing them to reap the benefits of a seminar—such as broadening and deepening philosophical knowledge and honing philosophical conversation skills—without the expectation of a term paper.

Presentation and Publication Seminar

Each student in PPS selects their “best paper,” from any area, and asks a faculty member with expertise in that area to serve as a “Specialist” who provides topic-specific guidance in regular one-on-one meetings (starting in the first week of the fall semester). The PPS instructor(s) will schedule monthly meetings at which students set concrete goals for themselves (including dates for meetings with the Specialist) and discuss general matters regarding presentation and publication. These include various facets of the submission process, publishing conventions (style, organization, etc.), how to respond to revise and resubmit (R&R) decisions from journals, including how to write a cover letter, and presentation norms (timing, slides, handouts, handling questions, etc.). The PPS instructor(s) will read each student’s drafts with an eye to presentation and publication, providing written and oral feedback and advice directed at these goals.

Each student will be assigned a partner (or partners) working in the same area or a closely related area; partners will read, discuss, and comment on each other’s drafts. (Students may also read other enrollees’ papers, but they aren’t expected to do so.) If a student wishes to discuss something pertaining to the topic or content of their paper (e.g., an article in the literature or whether a given objection merits consideration), they may confer with their partner(s) or the Specialist.

Students are invited to seek advice from faculty when selecting their best paper. The default is that it will be independent of the prospectus, as this may allow students to develop a presentation or publication in addition to the prospectus paper. Perhaps the paper is in another field, thereby adding to a student's areas of specialization (AOS). Even if the chosen piece doesn't eventuate in a presentation or publication, the PPS seminar offers a special glimpse into the publication process and the profession itself. The lessons learned will reap dividends for future projects.

Prospectus and Prospectus Defense

Students write the dissertation prospectus under the guidance of one or more specialists in their chosen field. In writing a dissertation prospectus, students should aim to produce a substantive, self-contained, polished essay of around 5-9,000 words. It should demonstrate a strong grasp of the literature in that field and show that the student is on track to successfully complete a dissertation that makes an original contribution. Normally, it will be a draft of one chapter of the proposed dissertation. The prospectus should also include 2-3 pages describing the content and importance of the remaining chapters. It should evidence the breadth and depth of a student's knowledge of the field and the specific topic, as well as the significance of the contribution being made. The prospectus should also display the qualities of good philosophical writing, including careful organization, clear and precise prose, strong argumentation, imagination, sobriety, and charity.

With their advisor's guidance, students will assemble a prospectus committee, comprising the advisor and four other faculty members, in the fall semester of their third year. They will send their prospectus to their committee two weeks prior to the scheduled prospectus defense. Students are encouraged to meet frequently with their advisors, generally every week or two, and to produce written work at consistent intervals, as well as to meet occasionally with other members of their committee for their input. A reasonable goal is to complete a full draft by the start of the spring semester, and then to revise this draft over the next several weeks in light of that input.

The defense will be oral, around 90-120 minutes, based on the content of the prospectus (but will not be limited to it), and it will occur during the week before or the week after spring break in the third year. The defense has two main purposes: (1) to determine whether the dissertation topic is viable, and (2) to ensure that students have sufficient command of the field and of relevant philosophical skills to pursue the topic effectively. An assessment will be made based on these two factors plus (3) whether the prospectus itself has the features identified above. Students will be given a *green light* (= pass, and proceed with the project), *yellow light* (= conditions 1-3 are almost met, but not fully: for example, the student needs to rework one or more of the central arguments in the prospectus, or engage more deeply with relevant literature, or improve their précis of the other chapters), or *red light* (= conditions 1-3 are not close to being met). In case of a yellow light, the committee will inform the student of further required work and decide how to determine that it has been completed satisfactorily. Normally, the committee will have the student schedule a second prospectus defense before the end of the spring semester—or, if more time is needed, up to (but no more than) 30 days after the last class day of the spring semester. If the needed revisions are minor, the committee may instead instruct the student to undertake the relevant work and then obtain the advisor's approval that the requirements have been satisfied. In case of a red light, a second prospectus defense is automatically required. After two defenses, the examining committee may fail the candidate, at which point the candidate will no longer be in good standing in the program.

Upon passing the prospectus, the student will either retain the same advisor as the dissertation supervisor or switch to a different dissertation supervisor. Either way, they will meet their dissertation supervisor at the end of the third year identify the "cornerstone" of the dissertation and discuss and construct a plan for completing the remaining work. They should also assemble a dissertation committee, comprising the advisor and four other faculty members plus an external reader, at the end of the spring semester of the third year. Having done this, students are in a position to apply for candidacy.

They're also poised to earn the MA; to do this, enroll in PHL 398R.

The Fourth and Fifth Years: Dissertation and Presentations/Publications

Dissertation research commences after passing the prospectus. Students at this stage enroll in the dissertation seminar (PHL 396W), which is offered at least once per year; here they will receive feedback on their dissertation material from peers and one or two faculty instructors who will also provide guidance. They are also expected to enroll in one graduate seminar for credit (CR/NC, not a grade) each semester. At any time, the fall PPS seminar is an option for students working on a paper (independent of the dissertation) for presentation or publication.

Students become *dissertators* once they advance to candidacy, at which point they become eligible to enroll in dissertation hours (PHL 399W) with their supervisor.

Standardly, dissertations are around 55,000 words (average: 62k; median: 55k). They may take the form of a monograph, or may instead consist of at least three papers typically related by a topic, area, or theme (though this isn't required) together with an introduction. In the latter case, the goal is to write at least one good paper each year after coursework. With the advisor's guidance, students will decide on the appropriate form for their dissertation.

Dissertators are expected to meet with their advisors regularly (at least biweekly), with other members of their committees at least once each semester, and with their entire committee at least once each fall. The latter meeting is useful for making sure that everyone is clear about the status and trajectory of the work and is meant to help the student determine how best to advance their project. While students are always welcome to request a meeting with their advisors on short notice, we encourage all students to schedule meetings well in advance. Of course, students should feel free at any time to approach other members of their committee, or any other faculty who might possess relevant expertise.

Normally, students spend the fall of the fourth year writing, revising, and then polishing the "cornerstone" of the dissertation; a reasonable goal is to submit it for publication by the end of the fall. The following spring will then be spent developing the majority of the remainder of the dissertation. The aim is to draft about two-thirds of the dissertation by the end of the fourth year

Achieving a full draft of the dissertation by the end of the fall in the fifth year positions students to spend the spring making revisions in light of feedback from the supervisor and other committee members and to finish at the end of spring semester. Students must send their dissertation to their committee at least four weeks prior to their scheduled dissertation defense.

This fifth year will be spent not only completing the dissertation but searching for employment. Going on the job market is time-consuming and can be emotionally draining, so fashioning a timeline early on and sticking to schedule during the final three years is critical to being prepared for the job market, as well as to successfully completing the program. Two placement advisors will support students through the process of applying for jobs. No doubt adjustments to a student's schedule will be made as the dissertation progresses. But with the backing of the thesis supervisor and committee, students can form a realistic plan that enables them to succeed.

PROGRAM OUTLINE (YEAR-BY-YEAR TABLE)

Year 1	<i>Fall Semester</i>	- ProSem (PHL 384F) - Area requirements: at least one graduate course in (1) history of philosophy, (2) ethics, and (3) metaphysics and epistemology
	<i>Spring Semester</i>	- Logic (PHL 389) - Fulfill area requirements (listed above) or other course requirements
	<i>Summer</i>	With advisors, develop a plan to fill knowledge gaps, read deeply in a specific area, or revise a course paper for conference/journal submission.
Year 2	<i>Fall Semester</i>	Continue to fulfill course requirements (usually 3 philosophy seminars)
	<i>Spring Semester</i>	- Continue to fulfill course requirements (usually 3 philosophy seminars) - Identify and meet with a prospectus supervisor
	<i>Summer</i>	With advisors, develop a plan of reading relevant to the prospectus; fill knowledge gaps and/or revise a course paper for submission.
Year 3	<i>Fall Semester</i>	- Assemble a prospectus committee (supervisor plus four other faculty members) - Prospectus hours (PHL 388C): work with advisors to complete prospectus draft - Presentation and Publication Seminar, or 'PPS' (PHL 388) - Teaching (PHL 398T)
	<i>Spring Semester</i>	- Prospectus hours (PHL 388C): revise prospectus draft - Enroll in one graduate course for CR/NC - Prospectus defense (just before or after spring break): send prospectus to committee 2 weeks in advance - End of semester: assemble dissertation committee (supervisor, four other faculty members, external reader); apply for candidacy
	<i>Summer</i>	With dissertation supervisor, identify dissertation "cornerstone" and construct a plan for completing remaining work. Use the summer to make progress.
Year 4	<i>Fall Semester</i>	- Dissertation work (PHL 399W) - Enroll in dissertation seminar, if offered (PHL 396W) - Enroll in one graduate course for CR/NC - Revise "cornerstone" paper and submit to journals
	<i>Spring Semester</i>	- Dissertation work (PHL 399W): Complete two-thirds by end of semester - Enroll in dissertation seminar, if offered (PHL 396W) - Enroll in one graduate course for CR/NC - Attend Job Market Preparation meeting
	<i>Summer</i>	- Dissertation work (complete two-thirds, draft remainder) - Begin job market prep in consultation with supervisor and placement advisers
Year 5	<i>Fall Semester</i>	- Dissertation work (PHL 399W): Complete full draft by end of semester - Dissertation seminar, if offered (PHL 396W) - Enroll in one graduate course for CR/NC - Job market preparation and job applications
	<i>Spring Semester</i>	- Dissertation work (PHL 399W): Complete dissertation revisions - Dissertation seminar, if offered (PHL 396W) - Enroll in one graduate course for CR/NC - Dissertation defense: send dissertation to committee at least 4 weeks in advance

DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

Advising

All graduate students must meet with the Graduate Adviser prior to registering. The advising bar (account hold) will not be cleared until the student has met with the Graduate Adviser in person. Academic advising for the Fall semester takes place in March for continuing students and late May for incoming students; academic advising for the Spring semester takes place in October.

Students must be advised by the Graduate Adviser and clear all financial bars before registering. In order to expedite AI, TA, and Reader assignments, please register during initial registration.

Students are ultimately responsible for tracking and completing the requirements in their Program of Work. They should consult the complete Academic Calendar for registration deadlines.

Transfer Credit

The department requires graduate students to take eight graduate courses, including three area requirements (in metaphysics and epistemology, ethics, and history of philosophy). While we encourage students to treat these coursework requirements as opportunities to broaden and deepen their philosophical training, students with a background in comparable graduate-level philosophical work done elsewhere may apply to the Graduate Studies Executive Committee (GSEC) for permission to take up to three of the eight as C/NC rather than for grade. Exemptions will not be permitted for any area requirements, which must be taken for grade, but may be sought for other courses.

A student wishing to take advantage of an exemption should apply to the GSEC, explaining why the exemption would be appropriate. Applications for exemptions should be submitted in a timely manner and specify the following: syllabi of comparable course or courses (up to three) already taken, along with associated written work and grades received; and why the exemption, if granted, would make a positive contribution to the student's progress.

If the student has already embarked on the UT course for which exemption is sought, they should check with the instructor before making the application.

Foreign Language Proficiency

By the end of their third year each student must complete their Foreign Language Proficiency. Which could be four semesters study or equivalent in a language other than English (can be satisfied with coursework completed before enrolling in the program) *or* two additional graduate philosophy seminars or upper-division or graduate courses in a related area (approved by the GSEC).

Registration Policies

Students must register themselves on time each semester using the UT registration system. The Graduate Coordinator will not be registering students for classes. The Graduate Coordinator will assist students during class days 5-12 for fall or spring term or 3-4 for summer sessions, courses may be added by the department in which the course is offered. Students must have the approval of the graduate adviser.

If students don't register on time Department of Philosophy is unable to cover any late add or drop fees. It is the student's responsibility to remove all holds prior to the registration period. If a student decides to drop a course after 12th class day of the fall, and spring semesters or after the 4th day of the summer session the Department of Philosophy is unable to reimburse students for the courses.

The Department of Philosophy will set internal deadlines for when students need to register for at least one course for the long semesters. If the student is not registered by the deadline for at least one course Department of Philosophy may reevaluate your eligibility as a TA, AI, or Reader.

Please review the Graduate School's policies for adding and dropping courses:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/navigating/policies/registration/add-drop>

Students must pay their tuition bill. If students have a zero balance, they must still confirm registration! The bill will read: ****Your Registration is complete and your courses are secured.****

Register on time! Students are subject to substantial fees (\$25 – \$200) for late registration which the department is unable to cover.

Eligibility as TA, Reader, and AI

To be employed in one of these positions, students must:

1. Be a degree-seeking graduate student without existing admissions conditions imposed by the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies;
2. Be in good academic standing and making satisfactory progress toward a graduate degree;
3. Remain registered in courses that count toward the graduate degree for at least nine semester hours during each semester of the long session; and
4. Remain registered in courses that count toward the graduate degree for at least three summer hours during any term of the summer semester, if holding an appointment for any summer term (first six weeks, second six weeks, nine weeks or twelve weeks).
5. Remain in good standing, which means students must *not* have
 - Two grades of X (temporary incomplete), or
 - One grade of X and one grade of I (permanent incomplete), or
 - Two grades of I (permanent incomplete).

Teaching Assistant policies may be found here:

<https://secure4.compliancebridge.com/utexas/public/getdoc.php?file=9-2020>

Assistant Instructors policies may be found here:

<https://secure4.compliancebridge.com/utexas/public/getdoc.php?file=9-2010>

Graduate school policies regarding graduate student academic appointments:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academic-employment>.

Incomplete Grades

If an “incomplete” is warranted, the instructor submits an X to the Registrar in place of a grade. This signifies a temporary incomplete. Students are only permitted to have two temporary incomplete grades each semester. The instructor must report a final grade by the end of the grade-reporting period in the student’s next long-session semester of enrollment. If this deadline is not met, the X is automatically converted to an I (permanent incomplete) and can never be converted to a grade.

The Department requires students to finalize their temporary incompletes with 30 days of the end of last grading period. It is the student’s responsibility to check that the instructor submits the final grade, thereby eliminating the X.

To be employed as a TA, AI, or Reader, students must *not* have

- Two grades of X (temporary incomplete), or
- One grade of X and one grade of I (permanent incomplete), or
- Two grades of I (permanent incomplete).

Annual Evaluations

Students will review their degree requirements with the Graduate Advisor each year during the fall advising cycle. There will be an annual progress to degree check in the spring semester. The entire Graduate Studies Committee will review every graduate student in the program. The faculty will discuss the students’ time to degree, course completions, milestones, and other prerequisites. If the student is not making satisfactory

progress in a timely fashion, a follow-up letter will be sent to the student with requirements for continuation in the program.

In some cases, students may be placed on probation by the department. If the student doesn't meet the guidelines that the department has set in a timely fashion the department may not be able to employ or fund the student or the student may not be allowed to continue in the program.

Master of Arts Requirements

The master's degree program with report requires completion of [Philosophy 384F](#) and [398R](#), and 27 additional semester hours of graduate coursework in philosophy or 21 additional semester hours of graduate coursework in philosophy and six hours of upper-division or graduate coursework in a supporting subject. The master's degree program with thesis requires completion of 30 hours of graduate coursework in philosophy, or 24 hours of graduate coursework in philosophy including [Philosophy 698](#) and six hours of upper-division or graduate coursework in a supporting subject.

Information regarding the MA may be found here: <https://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/areas-of-study/liberal-arts/philosophy/degree-requirements/>

Advancing to Candidacy

Before advancing to candidacy, students must complete the program of work, including their Prospectus Defense, PHL 398T, and their Foreign Language Proficiency. Once students have passed their prospectus they will work with their dissertation supervisor to assemble a dissertation committee, comprising of the supervisor and four other philosophy faculty members plus an external committee member from outside of the department.

Students must apply and be approved for admission to candidacy by the Graduate School before they can enroll in dissertation hours: PHL 399W, 699W, 999W.

Students must have registered and paid tuition during the term in which the candidacy application is submitted.

As part of the application, you will be required to include a brief (60 lines or less) description of your dissertation or treatise proposal approved by your committee supervisor. This should be prepared in advance; the application will time out after 30 minutes of inactivity and you will lose any changes not yet submitted or saved.

The application for candidacy may be found here:
<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/navigating/phd/candidacy>.

Graduate School Professional Development Awards

Each year the Office of Graduate Studies allocates funds for the Department of Philosophy to use to support graduate students planning to attend professional conferences. To be eligible for a Graduate School Professional Development Award (PDA), students must be on the conference program and present a paper based on original research.

To apply for a PDA students must submit the Student Professional Development Form together with necessary materials to the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate School does not accept applications on a rolling basis but rather considers them at specific times of the year. The deadlines are listed here: <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/funding/awards/travel>.

Students may be funded by a PDA only once each academic year up to \$500.00. If there is still funding after February 1st students may apply for support again.