

The Two-Course Requirement in Philosophy

A Notre Dame undergraduate education should produce liberally educated women and men who possess basic cultural literacy, who are capable of articulate and logical reflection on the fundamental problems of human existence and who can take their place as citizens capable of critically evaluating arguments which bear on public affairs. Because Notre Dame is a Catholic university, its purposes also include the preservation, extension and transmission of Catholic thought. Notre Dame students should learn to think in depth about the problems posed by a life of faith. They should have the opportunity to learn how the great thinkers of the Catholic tradition approached those problems in the past, and what Catholicism has to say about those problems as they arise in the contemporary world.

The courses which the Philosophy Department offers as ways of satisfying the two-course requirement in philosophy serve a number of purposes which advance the ends of a Notre Dame education so conceived. Students satisfy the two-course requirement by taking "Introduction to Philosophy" followed by a second, more specialized course, most often at the 200-level.

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy is a subject to which students need to be introduced at Notre Dame because they cannot be supposed to have had any previous exposure to it. Their lack of previous exposure to philosophy has four implications that set the aims of the introductory course.

1. Students should read some seminal philosophical texts like those that have contributed to the Catholic tradition and those that have presented challenges to it. Such exposure is required, not just by the standards of the Catholic tradition, but by any defensible standards of liberal education.
2. Students should become aware that many of the concepts they pre-reflectively employ, and that are employed in their other classes -- concepts such as causation and causal explanation, rules and laws, free will and responsibility, truth and meaning, mind and the mind-body relation - - generate significant philosophical questions. An introductory course should do all that reasonably can be done in a classroom setting to make students feel the force of these questions.
3. Students may have puzzled over the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, the demands of justice or the possibility of knowledge. But many will find novel philosophy's assumption that such questions can be made more tractable by attention to the concepts employed and by application of human reason. Students should therefore learn that many great philosophers have not thought that these questions are matters of opinion, but have believed they can be solved or that some answers to them can be shown to be better than others. They should also learn to formulate and defend their own positions.
4. Finally, students need to acquire argumentative and analytical skills, and the standards of argumentative rigor and clarity. They need to be aware of the importance of logic, of the different types of argument and of how to identify standard fallacies.

An introductory course may be organized either historically or around philosophical problems. The department does not prescribe either the use of particular texts or attention to particular

problems, because of the importance the department attaches to the freedom of teachers to design their own courses. The department does assume that introductory courses include exposure to some subset of the significant figures in the history of philosophy, and that in their written work and their examinations students will demonstrate acquaintance with the authors covered.

Students should complete the first course in philosophy better able to read philosophical texts and to identify the main lines of argument and counter-argument, better able to reason about philosophical questions knowledgeably and articulately, and better able to defend their own philosophical positions. Individual instructors shall decide how the written work, and any other work required in their classes, shall be assessed to insure that these goals are met.

Second Courses in Philosophy

Students satisfy their second philosophy requirement by taking classes at the 200- or, occasionally, at the 300-level. These courses are designed to allow students to explore a subset of philosophical questions or authors of special interest to them, and to do so in greater depth than is possible in “Introduction to Philosophy”. These courses fall into four clusters:

- *Aesthetics, Ethics and Political Philosophy, including Feminist Philosophy*
- *Philosophy of Science, including the Philosophy of Medicine and the Ethical Implications of Science and Technology*
- *Philosophy and Religion*
- *Philosophy and the Nature of Humanity, inc. Philosophy of Mind and Personal Immortality*

A course need not fall into one of these clusters to satisfy the second philosophy requirement. But these are the clusters into which second courses have largely fallen since the department’s last review of the two-course requirement. Most courses fall into the first and third clusters, so that students have ample opportunity to explore their interests in ethics and values, and in the philosophical questions raised by religion. The department has consistently offered second courses on questions and figures central to the Catholic philosophical tradition. This allows Catholic students who are interested in studying the philosophical bases of their faith to do so.

Courses which satisfy the second philosophy requirement are more specialized than “Introduction to Philosophy”, but they do not merely presuppose that the goals of the introductory course have been achieved. To satisfy the second requirement in philosophy, it is essential that a course have among its aims to deepen the commitment to clarity of argument that students developed in their first course, and to build upon the argumentative and analytical skills they acquired there. Thus for a course to satisfy the second philosophy requirement, it is not enough that it cover authors conventionally classified as philosophers or that it take up questions that are, broadly, philosophical. Courses which satisfy the second philosophy requirement should be conducted in accordance with the high standards of rigor characteristic of professional philosophy.

As in “Introduction to Philosophy”, so in their second courses, students should demonstrate that they have met these standards. Individual instructors shall decide how the written work, and any other work required in their classes, shall be assessed to insure that they do so.