



Department of Philosophy

Guide to Graduate Studies
2025-26

Guide to Graduate Studies

Department of Philosophy University of Notre Dame

The rules and requirements contained here were adopted by the Philosophy Department in academic year 2025-26, and apply to students who begin the program Fall 2025 or later.

This document provides most of the basic information students will need about the Philosophy Department doctoral program. Further information is contained in the Graduate School Bulletin of Information (available at the Graduate School Website, <http://graduateschool.nd.edu/>).

Structure of the program

The Department of Philosophy admits students into a PhD. program, awarding the degrees of PhD. in Philosophy and MA in Philosophy. The Department does not have a separate MA program to which students can apply.

All regular faculty in the Department contribute to the PhD. program by leading reading groups, serving on the Committee for Graduate Studies (CGS), serving on oral exam and dissertation committees, and supervising dissertation projects. Faculty with joint appointments count as members of the Philosophy Department for the purpose of staffing examination boards for oral exams, dissertation proposal committees and dissertation advising boards, and serving as dissertation directors. Faculty with concurrent appointments count as members of other departments unless they are deemed to have philosophical expertise not satisfied by other members of the Philosophy faculty, but they cannot ever serve as sole director of a student's dissertation.

The program is managed by a CGS. The committee is made up of faculty from the Philosophy Department appointed by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The CGS oversees the degree requirements and monitors the progress of students in the program. Decisions about dismissing students from the program are made by the CGS.

Requirements for a Ph.D.

1. Course-credit and research-credit requirements

A full-time student is one who (1) registers for nine or more credit hours of course work per semester in the academic year or (2) has completed 42 credit hours and is registered for a minimum of one credit hour. A student need not be in residence to be full-time.

All students must complete at least 42 credit hours of graduate course work (fourteen 3-hour seminars). Credit hours from dissertation research do not count toward the 42 hours required for the degree. Students entering the doctoral program with previous advanced study (from graduate work in another PhD program, graduate work in an MA program, or graduate work during the completion of the undergraduate degree) may be excused from up to 12 hours of course work. Decisions about this are made after the student's first year. With approval from the DGS, up to six hours of the graduate course work here at Notre Dame may be in graduate courses in related areas outside philosophy. With approval from the DGS, and prior approval from the relevant professor, another six hours of the graduate course work may be in undergraduate philosophy courses numbered 43000 – 43999 here at Notre Dame, provided that the student has arranged with the professor to take a modified graduate-level version of the course. Finally, with approval from the DGS, up to six hours of the graduate course work may be completed through directed readings. Almost all of the 42 hours of course work is ordinarily completed in the first two years of the program, and any remaining hours must be completed during the third year.

Feedback: While the timing and the precise nature of the feedback provided to students on their seminar work will naturally vary from professor to professor, that feedback will include a final written assessment of the student's term paper. This feedback, or a brief summary thereof, will be provided to the DGS for inclusion in the student's file.

Additionally, at the conclusion of each semester, professors will submit evaluations of all of their students to the DGS. These evaluations will contain detailed descriptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each student, plus a categorization of each student's total performance over the semester as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. These seminar evaluations will appear in each student's file, and they will play a central role in each student's 2nd-year review.

At the end of each spring semester, the DGS will meet with all 1st-year students to discuss their files and address any concerns about seminar performance that may have arisen. In cases of extreme underperformance, the DGS may place a student on probation.

2. General Course Requirements

Each student must satisfy the following:

- Proseminar (PHIL 83104) to be taken in the first semester
- Logic requirement (PHIL 83901 or more advanced course or exam)
- Distribution requirement: Four seminars in different fields, including at least two from Area I and one from Area II.
 - Area I: Philosophy of Mind, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Logic, Philosophy of

Mathematics

- Area II: Ethics, Political Philosophy, Aesthetics
- History requirement: Three seminars in the history of western philosophy, one each from the historical periods Ancient, Medieval, Modern.

Except in unusual circumstances, students cannot use directed readings to satisfy any of these area requirements. Students seeking an exception to this policy must get approval from the DGS.

Students must also take a year-long dissertation writing course.

Finally, students must take a year-long teaching course, the Pedagogy Workshop, which is typically taken in the third year of the program. Except in unusual circumstances, students must complete the Pedagogy Workshop before teaching their own course. Neither the dissertation writing course nor the Pedagogy Workshop count toward the required 14 seminars.

3. 2nd-Year Review

At the end of your 4th semester, the CGS will read your entire file to determine whether you are performing sufficiently well to continue in the PhD program. A positive vote will suffice for continuation in the program. In the case of a negative vote, the CGS will collect additional information by meeting with you personally, interviewing relevant faculty members, and so on. After collecting and discussing this additional information, the CGS will cast a final vote to determine whether you will be dismissed from the PhD program or placed on probation and allowed to continue in the PhD program. A necessary (but not sufficient) condition for passing your 2nd-year review is that you "meet expectations" in more than 75% of your graduate courses, according to your instructors' written evaluations.

In the event that a student is placed on probation, the CGS will detail in writing the steps that the student must take to return to good standing. In the event that a student is dismissed from the PhD program, the student may be permitted to earn an MA by taking the Oral Exam in semester five and completing any remaining coursework in semester five.

4. Advising

At the beginning of your 5th semester, report to the DGS the members of your oral exam committee, and specify the advisor; when you have an advisor who has agreed to direct your dissertation, no later than the end of your 6th semester, report this to the DGS.

Students are encouraged to develop informal working relationships with academic advisors as early as possible. It is not uncommon to change advisors one or more times during one's studies, especially when one begins preparing for the oral exam or the dissertation project. An advisor, even one that the student does not expect to supervise the oral exam or dissertation, is an excellent resource for guided mentoring and scholarly development beyond what comes with participation in seminars.

At the beginning of the 5th semester, the student will report to the DGS the name of the advisor who will supervise reading in preparation for the oral exam, as well as the other members of the oral exam committee. All students who have passed their oral exams (as well as students who are scheduled to take their exams in the current semester) are eligible to participate in the

Department's Dissertation Seminar, offered each semester. The Dissertation Seminar is a one-year (two- semester) course, and students in their 7th and 8th semesters are required to participate in the seminar. (With approval from their dissertation advisors and the DGS, students who have secured visiting positions at other universities can be excused from the relevant semester of the Dissertation Seminar.)

At the end of the 6th semester, the student will report to the DGS the name of the advisor who has agreed to direct the student's doctoral dissertation. Beginning in the student's 7th semester, before the beginning of the academic term, each student must submit to their dissertation director(s) and DGS a report on the status of their dissertation project. This report should include either a description of the progress made on the dissertation or a description of the project that the student plans to propose. The student is expected to submit new work each semester and to report to each member of the student's dissertation committee each semester. Students who fail to submit substantial new work in a semester will have their file reviewed by the CGS to determine if the student should be put on probation.

5. Oral Exam

Orals reading lists should be approved by all members of the examining board by roughly the end of the first week of classes after mid-semester break of 5th semester; oral exam must be passed before the end of the first week of classes after mid-semester break of 6th semester.

At the beginning of the 5th semester the student and advisor, in consultation with the DGS, assembles an oral examination board consisting of the advisor and three other tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the Philosophy Department. A student may, in exceptional circumstances, request to have a board with one member from outside the Philosophy Department, or one member from inside the Philosophy Department who is not a tenured or tenure-track member of the department. This board will help the student devise a reading list for the student's oral exam, oversee the student's preparation for this exam, and conduct the examination.

The board and advisor must approve the reading list by the end of the first week of classes after the mid-semester break of the 5th semester.

The purpose of the examination is to determine whether the student is ready to enter the dissertation research and writing phase. As such, the reading list should provide general coverage of the area of intended dissertation research. The board and advisor are expected to advise the student on the basis of the student's specific plans and needs. A typical reading list will contain approximately 40 articles or chapters, but the board and advisor can suggest longer or shorter reading lists, depending on the student's plans and needs. The board and advisor should also help determine the appropriate depth and breadth of the reading list, given the student's plans and needs.

The Department allows for a wide range of research topics, but a student planning to select a topic that does not fall within the areas covered by the general course requirements—logic, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, ancient philosophy, medieval philosophy, and modern philosophy—must receive permission from the CGS. The oral exam

will test the student's mastery of the literature on the reading list and the student's capacity to engage, and to defend views regarding, the topics treated in that literature.

The exam must be passed before the end of the first week of classes after the mid-semester break of the 6th semester. It should be scheduled with the Philosophy Department at least four weeks in advance and last ninety minutes. Three votes out of four are required to pass the exam. Should the student fail, the examining board will advise the CGS whether to allow the student to retake the exam by the end of the student's 6th semester. The CGS will determine, within ten days of receiving this advice, whether to provide this allowance based on the report from the examining board and a consideration of the student's overall record. In the event that the allowance is not made, or in the event that the student fails the exam a second time, the student will be dismissed from the PhD. program.

6. Dissertation Proposal

Report the name of the dissertation advisor by the end of 6th semester; distribute dissertation proposal to the committee by the end of the first week of classes after mid-semester break of 7th semester; proposal must be approved by end of 7th semester.

By the end of the student's 6th semester, each student chooses one or two tenured or tenure-track members of the Philosophy Department as the director or the co-directors of the dissertation.

In consultation with the director(s), the student prepares a written proposal for research in a particular area. The dissertation proposal consists of a description of the topic and central questions to be treated in the dissertation and an account of the general approach to be taken to address those questions. The length of the proposal is specified by the director(s).

The student distributes copies of the dissertation proposal to the DGS and the student's Dissertation Proposal Committee before the end of the first week of classes after the mid-semester break of the 7th semester. The Dissertation Proposal Committee consists of the director and three additional tenured or tenure-track members of the faculty that have been approved by the director and the DGS. In exceptional circumstances, the DGS may allow the student to have a committee with one member from outside the Philosophy Department, or one member from inside the Philosophy Department who is not a tenured or tenure-track member of the department. Any such member must be approved in advance by the DGS.

Each member of the committee has at least two weeks to read the proposal and decide whether or not to approve it. If a member of the Proposal Committee does not approve the proposal, the student will either revise the proposal to satisfy the member's objections or, with the permission of the DGS, replace one but no more than one member who has rejected the proposal with another member of the faculty. A student may proceed with a dissertation only after all four members of the Proposal Committee have approved the proposal.

Following the approval of the proposal, the Proposal Committee meets with the student and the dissertation director(s) to ask questions and give advice about the student's writing of the dissertation. For purposes of advancing the student to candidacy, the department must count this meeting as the student's Candidacy Examination. However, the purpose of this meeting is to allow the Proposal Committee to give the student expert guidance regarding the dissertation

topic. Though formally listed as an exam, this meeting should not be thought of as something the student passes or fails.

The dissertation proposal must be approved by the end of the 7th semester of enrollment, and this meeting must also occur by the end of the 7th semester of enrollment.

7. Foreign Language Requirement

To be determined for each student by the advisor and DGS immediately after the proposal meeting.

After the student's proposal meeting, the director(s) and DGS may agree that the student has the linguistic competence to complete the dissertation and proceed with future academic work. Alternatively, they may agree that the student must demonstrate further competence in languages necessary either to complete the dissertation or to be a responsible professional researcher. The dissertation director(s) and DGS will determine in each case the particular languages and level of expertise required, and the student will not be permitted to defend the dissertation until demonstrating that level of expertise. When the student has completed this requirement, the director(s) will communicate this to the DGS.

8. Dissertation

When the dissertation is completed and approved by the director(s), the student submits an electronic copy to the DGS, and distributes copies to the other members of the dissertation committee. A dissertation committee must have at least four members, including the director(s), and at least three of these members must be tenured or tenure-track professors from within the Philosophy Department. All committee members—including especially members from outside Notre Dame and members from other departments at Notre Dame—must be approved by the DGS, on recommendation of the student and dissertation director(s). In exceptional circumstances, the DGS may allow the student to have one committee member from within the Philosophy Department who is not a tenured or tenure-track member of the department. Any such member must be approved in advance by the DGS.

Committee members must be given at least four weeks in which to read a dissertation and approve it for defense. Students are responsible for seeing that they are able to meet all deadlines for final acceptance of the dissertation by the Graduate School while allowing committee members sufficient time to read the dissertation. A list of relevant deadlines is available each semester in the Philosophy Department Office.

A dissertation rejected by two or more committee members may be resubmitted after revisions to the same committee. If only one committee member rejects the dissertation, the student may either resubmit a revised version to the same committee or else ask that an additional reader evaluate the dissertation. This reader must be approved by the DGS and all of the original committee members of the dissertation. If the additional reader rejects the dissertation, the student may resubmit it in revised form to a board consisting of any three of the previous committee members.

After the dissertation defense has been approved, the Philosophy Department and the Graduate

School will arrange for a Dissertation Defense. This is a meeting, open to the public, in which the student responds to questions and comments from the dissertation director, the rest of the dissertation committee, and, if the student agrees, anyone else present. On the recommendation of a majority of the committee members, the defense may take the form of a thirty-minute public lecture, followed by questions and discussion. The committee members may require revisions of the dissertation as a result of weaknesses revealed in the oral defense. At the end of the defense, the committee members decide whether the student has passed or failed the defense.

The student fails the defense if two or more committee members vote against passing the defense, and the student passes the defense if one or fewer committee members vote against passing the defense. The defense is not an evaluation of the dissertation (which has already been approved), but of the quality of the student's oral defense of it. In the case of a failure, the student may be allowed to undertake a second defense, with approval from both the dissertation committee and the Graduate School. Should a student fail the defense twice, the student forfeits degree eligibility and this forfeiture is recorded by the Graduate School on the student's permanent record.

After successfully defending the dissertation and making any necessary changes, the candidate will present two clean copies, signed by the dissertation director, to the Graduate School for final approval and submission. The dissertation must be formatted in accordance with the ProQuest/UMI guidelines and with the graduate school's formatting guide. These are available on the graduate school's web page under "resources for current students."

Questions concerning formatting and submitting of dissertations should be directed to Shari Hill of the graduate school at: sharihill@nd.edu.

The candidate pays the binding costs for the two official copies required by the Graduate School, for any personal copies desired, and for the required microfilming costs.

9. Degree Eligibility

The student must fulfill all doctoral requirements, including the dissertation and its defense, within eight years from the time of matriculation. Failure to complete any of the Graduate School or departmental requirements within the prescribed period results in forfeiture of degree eligibility. Extensions of this 8-year deadline are sometimes granted by the Graduate School when petitioned by the DGS.

10. Teaching

Students serve as teaching assistants for the Department. The ordinary schedule involves serving as a TA each semester of year 2 and one semester of year 3.

Assisting may include meeting students during office hours, grading and leading discussion sections. Some students may be awarded a fellowship from the Department to complete their dissertation in their 6th year, in which case they will ordinarily serve as a TA each semester of their 6th year.

After a dissertation proposal is approved, and after completion of PHIL 85105 Teaching

Practicum, students are eligible to teach courses on their own responsibility and are expected to do so at least once.

The department takes teaching very seriously. Satisfactory teaching counts as part of maintaining good academic standing in the program. The performance of teaching assistants is evaluated in part by having their students fill out the department's TA evaluation form at the end of each semester. In addition, faculty who have students assisting them are asked to provide a written evaluation of their teaching assistants' performance. Graduate students teaching courses on their own responsibility are evaluated by their students who fill out the university's "Course Instructor Feedback" (CIF), online. Graduate student instructors should encourage their students to fill out the CIF.

11. Non-Resident Study

Students who plan to spend a semester at another University must first fill out this form to get DGS approval. Approval is not guaranteed and will depend on TA/Teaching duties and your overall academic progress. If you plan to be away for fall semester, you must submit the approval form by May 31 of the same calendar year. If you plan to be away for spring semester, you must submit the approval form by October 31 of the same academic year.

Specialized Tracks and Programs

The Ph.D. program works together with other academic units at Notre Dame to provide a few concurrent or joint degrees. These include a coursework-based MA in History and Philosophy of Science, an interdisciplinary MS in Interdisciplinary Mathematics, a Joint Ph.D. in Logic and Foundations of Mathematics, and a Ph.D. in the Joint PhD/MA in Philosophy & Classics.

Students who wish to pursue a concurrent or joint degree should contact faculty working in the relevant areas.

Grades

(For further information concerning graduate school policies on grades, including quality points, computation of GPA, S&U grades, examinations, *etc.*, see The Graduate School Bulletin.)

Virtually all professors in the philosophy department expect graduate students to produce significantly better work than undergraduate students. This expectation manifests itself in different ways, however, and there is no uniform standard for grading. While some professors reserve A grades for exemplary performance in a seminar, other professors expect A-quality performance from every graduate student, and these professors may use A grades to express mere satisfaction with a student's performance in a seminar, A- grades to express dissatisfaction with a student's performance, and B+ grades to indicate that a student is producing failing work. Students should talk with their professors about grading, rather than guess what their grades mean. (Grades of C or below are extremely uncommon and uniformly express very strong reservations about a student's performance. C is the lowest passing grade for a graduate course. Grades of C- or lower are considered by the Graduate School the equivalent of an F.)

Incompletes: A grade of “Incomplete” (I) should be given only in exceptional circumstances and only for compelling reasons. A student is allowed no more than one incomplete per semester, and an incomplete may be assigned by an instructor only after the student has obtained written permission from the DGS. When a student receives a grade of I, the student has 30 calendar days from when grades were due (for the semester in which the I was given) to complete the coursework. The instructor of record then has 14 calendar days to report the grade. If the coursework is not completed by this date, the grade of I will be changed permanently to a grade of F. Extensions for Incompletes require formal approval from the associate dean for academic affairs in the Graduate School.

The associate dean reserves the right to seek appropriate documentation from the Office of Disability Services if a request for an extension beyond the usual 30 calendar days is made for mental or physical health reasons.

Financial support

(For further information on Graduate School policies regarding financial support, see The Graduate School Bulletin.)

Maintaining good standing in the program is a necessary condition for being eligible for stipend and tuition support. Maintaining good standing includes, but is not exhausted by, (1) meeting the graduate school requirements that a student (a) be a full-time, degree seeking student; (b) maintain a GPA of at least 3.0; (c) have a dissertation proposal approved within four years of enrollment; (d) complete the degree in eight years or less of enrollment; and (2) meeting all department requirements in a timely fashion as specified in this document.

All regular full-time students in good academic standing and in residence receive full tuition scholarships and, during their first five years of study, stipend support from the College of Arts and Letters to help cover living expenses over the full 12-month calendar. Students deemed by their directors to be making timely progress towards completing their dissertations may apply for additional stipend support during the academic term of their sixth year. Students beyond the sixth year are not eligible to receive stipend support. All awards, except tuition scholarships, are taxable. After eight years, graduate students are no longer eligible to receive tuition scholarships.

Academic Integrity

Consult the Graduate School Bulletin for the Graduate School’s policy and procedures regarding academic integrity.

Governance

Each graduate student class (from years 1 through 5) elects a representative. Class representatives are invited to attend most department faculty meetings as nonvoting participants. In addition, the class representatives elect from their number a member of the Committee on Graduate Studies. Graduate student interests on the University level are represented by the Graduate Student Union, which is operated through a council of elected graduate students. There is also an Advanced Student Affairs Committee, which includes representatives of the University administration and faculty and elected graduate student representatives.

Grievance Procedures

Students who believe they have been unjustly treated in an academic matter should make a written appeal to the CGS. If the matter involves a member of the CGS, appeal should be made instead to the Chair of the Philosophy Department. If a mutually satisfactory resolution cannot be reached at the department level, the Further Appeals complaint may be brought to the Graduate School according to its policy as outlined in “Graduate Student Appeal Procedure,” available at the Graduate School website.

Graduate School Policies and Designations

The following are relevant Graduate School policies and designations in addition our own.

1. Graduate Student Status Designations

There are two status designations available to graduate students: in good standing and on probation. A graduate student can only have one designation, per program, at any given time.

Graduate students who are enrolled and making satisfactory progress in their program of study are considered in good standing. Students must be in good standing to receive a graduate degree.

A student who does not meet all Graduate School and departmental requirements may be placed on probation. On probation status is intended to offer a student a final opportunity to correct deficiencies in the student’s academic progress. Normally, a student will be on probation one or, at most, two semesters.

Students on probation are ineligible for financial support from University sources (stipend, full tuition, and professional development funds) except for a tuition scholarship that covers eight of the nine credit hours required to maintain full-time status. The student will be financially responsible for the remaining one credit.

2. Approval of the Dissertation Proposal

The department requires that students have their dissertation proposals approved by the end of semester 7. If a student fails to meet this deadline, the student's progress will be evaluated by the DGS and the student's dissertation advisor. On the basis of this evaluation, the CGS will vote on whether to allow the student to continue in the program. Additionally, the CGS will vote on whether the student is in good standing in the department. Per Graduate School policies, students who are not in good standing in the department are thereby on probation, with all the consequences of probation listed above.

The department deadline for approval of the dissertation proposal is earlier than the Graduate School deadline. The Graduate School requires that students have their dissertation proposals approved by the end of semester 8. If the student does not meet this deadline, and if the student has not been dismissed from the program for failure to meet the department deadline, the Graduate Committee will vote again on whether to allow the student to continue in the program. In this case, however, the Graduate Committee will not vote on whether the student is in good standing in the department, since the Graduate School will place the student on probation automatically, with all the consequences listed above.