

Duke Philosophy Graduate Program Handbook

Updated April 20, 2017

Introduction

This handbook gives the program requirements for the Ph.D. degree in philosophy at Duke. It is a complement to the information on the department website, which will be updated regularly as well.

Whenever you have any specific questions about these points or anything else, you can always talk to the director of graduate studies (DGS). Speaking to the DGS directly is the simplest and most reliable way to clarify anything. The DGS for 2017–2018 is Gopal Sreenivasan.

As a reminder, the rules for program requirements are only given to a certain level of generality. How they are implemented will vary from faculty member to faculty member.

Should you have any questions about what your committee is planning or how they are implementing the requirements, you should talk to the DGS. You can talk to the DGS before a program milestone, while you are working on it, or any time that something seems wrong. The DGS can talk to your committee members but won't be able to do anything without being aware of your concerns.

The first section of this handbook covers the requirements for coursework; the second, the requirements for the FRS; and the third, the requirements for the prelim.

General coursework/other structures and requirements

15 graduate courses are required for the degree.

5 of these 15 can be non-philosophy courses.

You can take more than 5 non-philosophy courses, but any such courses beyond the fifth will not count toward your degree requirements.

The 15 courses are subject to the following distribution requirements:

2 proseminars One proseminar is on metaphysics and epistemology, and the second is on value theory.

1 logic course You may take the logic course, or test out of it. In some cases you may also be able to get transfer credit for another graduate-level logic course. To get

more information about the logic requirement, speak to the DGS and to either Robert Brandon or Carlotta Pavese.

1 metaphysics/epistemology course In addition to the proseminar.

1 value theory course In addition to the proseminar.

3 history courses Of these, 1 must be on ancient philosophy, and 1 must be on modern philosophy.

1 philosophy of science course Can come in many different areas.

1 more philosophy course In any area.

5 additional courses These courses may be in philosophy or some other area, such as biology, neuroscience, statistics, literature, and so on.

In principle, you can petition to receive credit for up to four courses from prior graduate work. Speak to the DGS for more information about transfer credits.

You can also receive credit for up to three courses with an official audit instead of taking a course for a letter grade. These deviations must be approved by the DGS.

It will not be possible both to transfer four courses and receive three audit credits; there is a limit to how many non-standard course credits are allowed. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

These course requirements must be completed by the end of your third year.

Once you have finished your coursework, you must audit three more graduate philosophy seminars at Duke *total* before you graduate.

In theory you can audit more than one such course per semester, but this is not common.

In addition to the course and distribution requirements given above, there are two more courses required for the degree:

Teaching seminar The current version of the teaching requirement is that you must take the teaching seminar once, during the third year.

Dissertation seminar This requirement only applies to those who have completed the prelim. Graduate students are required to take it for two years following their prelim, though they are encouraged to take it every year they are in residence post prelim.

FRS

FRS stands for *future research statement*. It is a requirement unique to the philosophy department, intended to prepare students for their prelim.

You may think of the FRS as a “pre-prelim” requirement.

Each student will assemble a three-person committee for their FRS. All three committee members must be from the philosophy department, and one of the members must be the chair.

There are two tracks to take to finishing the FRS:

The Standard Track You must constitute your committee (which means, ask them to be on your committee, and get them to agree, and then report to the DGS) by the end of January in the second year. By the end of the spring term of your second year, you must prepare the two documents discussed below and have them approved by your committee. You will complete the FRS (meet for the FRS exam) at the start of your third year.

The Early Option Track You will complete the exam at the end of spring term of second year. To take this track, you must pick your committee by the end of the first semester of second year; and you must have the two documents discussed below complete and approved by the start of spring break of second year, at the latest. Earlier is better.

Regardless of which track you take, you must complete both of the following documents in preparation for the FRS exam:

1. A five-page description of your topic area.
2. A reading list that contains approximately fifty items (articles/book chapters). In practice it may have somewhat fewer but the lower bound is somewhat fuzzy. This requirement will change even more in some areas of study, such as early modern history, where you would read whole books. You will work with your chair and your committee to assemble this list.

After completing these documents you will actually read the materials on the list. The exam itself takes place sometime in September of the third year (for the standard track), or at the end of the second year (for the early option).

According to the official prescription, you must write a short summary on each of the items on the list. It is up to you and the committee to decide exactly how long these summaries shall be, and what they will aim to do. In general they should be brief: $\frac{1}{2}$ of a page is fine.

You should also agree with your committee on a schedule for sharing these summaries. Some committees may want all of them at the end, while others may want them at the end of every week in the summer, and so on. Whatever seems agreeable to the whole group is fine.

Instead of individual summaries, some faculty members prefer a more synthetic literature review, which amounts to doing something more substantial. You should speak to possible committee members beforehand to find out what they will expect.

The FRS exam is two hours long, divided into two parts. The first part is backward-looking, focusing on your research statement and mainly on your reading list. The second

part is forward-looking, focusing on the more specific ideas you (and your committee) may have about your developing topic.

It is possible to fail the FRS exam, or to be asked to re-do it. The most common reason for this is that, based on your summaries and the discussion, you don't really seem to know the literature; you may only show familiarity with the readings, but not competence.

If you know the literature but don't know what to do with it, then you may pass but be advised to re-think things before the prelim.

Prelim

The prelim is a graduate school requirement, and the graduate school requires you to complete it by the end of the third year.

The prelim requires a committee of four, not three; the default assumption, which can change if you want, is that the FRS committee passes on to be the prelim committee + 1.

Three members of the committee must come from the philosophy department; the fourth does not have to be in philosophy. Strictly speaking, the fourth does not need to be at Duke at all, though it is better that they are, since it will be easier to arrange the exam.

If you wish to have a committee member from outside Duke, it is usually easier to invite them after you have completed your prelim.

Officially the prelim only has to be 90 minutes, but more often it's 2 hours.

For the prelim there are fewer official prescriptions than for the FRS regarding what you are supposed to have done by exam time.

The standard requirement is to have two documents:

1. A draft chapter from the dissertation.
2. A prospectus or outline of the dissertation project.

These documents should total in the neighborhood of at least 30 pages. The chapter should be at least 20 pages, and the prospectus about 10.

You must send these materials to the committee before the exam; you must agree with them on the schedule. You should plan to turn in your documents at least two weeks ahead of time and possibly earlier depending on the committee.

It is also possible to fail the prelim. If you are missing documents or they are not of (roughly) the correct length, you may be asked to do it again. In addition, the committee, among other things, has to reach the judgment that you are ready to write a dissertation on your designated topic. If for whatever reason they think that this isn't true, then various outcomes are possible, one of which is just failing the exam.

You may also have a version of "revise and resubmit."

Mere submission of materials is not sufficient to pass.