

Duke Philosophy Graduate Program Handbook

Updated December 6, 2022

This handbook applies to graduate students entering the PhD program in Fall 2023 and beyond.

Introduction

This Handbook gives the program requirements for the PhD 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) or the DGSA: between the two, they should have an answer to any programmatic question.

As a reminder, the rules for program requirements are presented here at a certain level of generality only. 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 at any time that something seems unclear to you.

The first section of this Handbook covers the requirements for coursework; the second, the requirements for the Second Year Paper; the third, the structure of the directed readings course preceding the Prelim; and the fourth, the requirements for the Prelim.

1. General coursework/other structures and requirements

- 15 graduate courses are required for the degree.
- 5 of these 15 can be non-philosophy courses. For example, if you are pursuing a Master's degree in another department concurrently, then up to 5 of those courses can count also toward the 15 required for your PhD in philosophy.

The 15 courses are subject to the following distribution requirements:

- **2 proseminars.** One proseminar is in metaphysics and epistemology, and the second is in value theory.
- **1 formal methods course.** A 700 level class on formal methods in philosophy, which covers logic, probability, and related topics.
- **1 metaphysics/epistemology course** (in addition to the proseminar).
- **1 value theory course** (in addition to the proseminar).
- **2 courses in the history of philosophy.** 1 must be in ancient philosophy, and 1 must be in early modern philosophy.
- **1 philosophy of science course.** Can come in many different areas (economics, biology, neuroscience, etc.).
- **Directed readings course:** to be taken in the first semester of Year 3, as explained below.

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

With permission of the DGS, a student may count at most one directed readings course toward the requirements.

You may audit courses at any time. Audited courses do not count toward the required 15 courses or toward the distribution requirements.

Double-counting: In general, double-counting for the purposes of satisfying a distribution requirement is not allowed. Where a course satisfies more than one requirement, the student may choose, subject to DGS approval, which requirement the course satisfies toward their distribution.

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

Once you have finished your coursework and Prelim, *you must audit two more graduate philosophy seminars at Duke* before you graduate.

In addition to the course distribution and post-Prelim-auditing requirements, given above, there are two further course requirements:

- 1) **Professional Development** (PHIL 797S). This class meets biweekly, and it is required for all graduate students from year 2 onwards. The student must take at least four semesters of the class, although they are strongly encouraged to take it every semester, if feasible. The class will be organized by modules, each covering a particular topic of professional development, such as how to give a successful talk, publishing and refereeing, alternative careers, etc. In general, all modules will be covered at least once in a three-semester sequence.
- 2) **Philosophical Interlocution** (PHIL 798S). This class corresponds to the colloquium, in which local and invited speakers come to the Philosophy Department to give talks on various topics. Graduate students are required to assist with these colloquia, and are encouraged to participate in professional development activities organized with the speakers.

2. Second Year Paper

In lieu of a master's thesis, the philosophy department requires as an internal milestone the completion of a "Second Year Paper". This paper may or may not be related to the student's main research topic, but it should be a stand-alone piece approaching a publishable standard, and be between 5,000 and 7,500 words in length. The Second Year Paper should be defended in front of a committee of three faculty members, ideally with the chair being the student's advisor. The student is responsible for gaining written approval from the DGS for their committee by the end of January in the Spring of Year 2. The defense should include an oral presentation of no more than 20 minutes, and a subsequent discussion of no more than one hour. To pass the defense, the student should be able to talk fluently and intelligently about their paper, reflect upon its contents, and discuss its place in relation to surrounding scholarship. Ideally, the discussion would offer the student feedback so that they can incorporate it into the manuscript and eventually seek to publish it in an appropriate venue. The defense

should take place before the end of April of the Spring of Year 2, and the manuscript should be delivered to the committee at least 2 weeks before the date of the defense.

The committee will grade the Second Year Paper and associated defense as Pass, Low Pass, or Fail, by majority decision. At the end of the year, this result will be taken into account in assessing continuation in the program.

Pass: A student with a grade of “Pass” will normally continue to the third year.

Low Pass: There are three options available to students who receive a grade of “Low Pass”:

1. Request the possibility of revising the manuscript and defending it for a second time, with the goal of achieving a “Pass” grade. To that end, the student should seek approval from the committee for a second try, and a new date for a defense in the summer should be set. The defense should take place at least three weeks prior to the start of classes (e.g., early August at the latest). If the student does not achieve a grade of “Pass” on this second try, then they will not be admitted into the third year of the program. In the case of a “Low Pass” (from either the first or second attempt), the following two options remain available.
2. Leave the program with a terminal MA degree. This option is available providing the following conditions obtain:
 - a. The student has completed at least 10 courses.
 - b. At least 6 of the completed courses are in philosophy.
 - c. The student has no extant incompletes.
3. Withdraw and leave the program.

Fail: For a student with a grade of “Fail”, options (1) and (3) only are available.

3. Directed Readings Course

In the Fall of the third year (that is, the first semester of Year 3), the student must take a directed readings course, typically with their advisor, in which they will cover essential readings for the student’s main area of research. The goal of this course is to support the student in developing familiarity and competence with the literature in the area of their proposed dissertation. This course requires a final paper, of between 5,000 and 7,500 words, and there are two options for such a paper:

- 1) **Review paper:** A stand-alone paper reviewing the literature surrounding a particular research problem, with an emphasis on recent literature. Ideally, this review paper should approach publishable standards.
- 2) **Dissertation chapter:** A polished draft of a paper that may serve as a chapter of the dissertation or be a stand-alone paper.

4. Prelim (or Preliminary Exam)

The Prelim is a Graduate School requirement, and the Graduate School requires you to complete it by the end of the 3rd year.

- The Prelim requires a committee of 4. The default assumption is that the Second Year Paper committee passes on to be the Prelim committee + 1. You can change your Prelim committee, with the DGS's approval, at any time, but not within 30 days of your Prelim exam.
- At least three members of the committee must come from the Philosophy Department; the fourth need not. The fourth does not need to be at Duke at all, though usually they are (and this makes it easier to arrange the exam). If you wish to have a dissertation committee member from outside Duke, it is usually preferable to invite them after you have completed your Prelim.
- The Prelim must be at least 90 minutes long, and typically runs for 2 hours. The standard requirement for the prelim is to submit two documents:

1) Dissertation prospectus: An outline of the proposed dissertation along with a plan for completion, containing the following elements:

- a. Overview of the dissertation (approximately 1,500-3,000 words)
- b. Chapter list
- c. Outline of each chapter (approximately 1,000 words per chapter)
- d. Timeline for completion of the dissertation

While your dissertation and timeline are likely to evolve during the course of writing your dissertation, the prospectus is intended to provide direction and allow you to start work immediately following successful completion of your Preliminary Exam.

2) Dissertation chapter: A polished draft of one chapter of the dissertation (approximately 7,500 words).

- You must send these materials to the committee at least two weeks before the exam; you must agree the schedule with them.
- You pass the Prelim if and only if all the members of the committee agree that (a) you have a viable dissertation project which they are confident you can carry to completion, and (b) the scholarly quality of the draft chapter is at the level expected of a chapter in a doctoral dissertation. It is quite normal for much of the discussion during the "exam" to be a collective dialogue to tweak and improve the plan for the dissertation so that you can hit the ground running, with one chapter already in hand.
- If you pass, then you can refer to your status as "ABD" (All But Dissertation).
- It is also *possible* to fail the Prelim if, for whatever reason, the committee does not reach the judgment that you are ready to write a dissertation on your designated topic. According to university-wide rules, "Should the student fail, he or she may apply, with the consent of the examining committee and the Associate Dean, for the privilege of a second examination to be taken no sooner than three months and no later than six months after the date of the first." In our experience, with the student's advisor's backing, the Associate Dean will readily grant this second examination.
- If the student fails the second examination of the Prelim, then they cannot continue in the program but have the possibility of graduating with a terminal MA degree (subject to the conditions given above).