

UBC Department of Philosophy

Graduate Degree Regulations



September 2025

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Other Sources of Information

1.1 Precedence of the University Calendar

Students admitted to UBC graduate programs should familiarize themselves with the contents of the UBC Calendar. In particular, special care should be made to consult those sections outlining regulations and deadlines concerning graduate degree admissions, fee payments, and programs. In any case in which these Regulations are at variance with the Calendar, it is the Calendar which shall have precedence.

1.2 Other Philosophy Department Documents

Philosophy department documents are available from PHIL AIR at <https://phil.air.arts.ubc.ca> or on the Department website at <http://www.philosophy.ubc.ca>.

Requirements for the MA

2.1 Registration

Once accepted into the program, a student must maintain continuous registration unless leave is granted.

2.2 Duration of Program

MA candidates have a maximum of five years in which to complete their programs. Only under exceptional circumstances are extensions recommended. Extensions require the recommendation of the research supervisor and the Graduate Advisor as well as the approval of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and are for a maximum of one year.

2.3 Residency

A minimum of one year's study (September to April) at UBC is required for the MA degree.

2.4 Course Requirements

The normal course load for MA students is 15 credits (5 courses) per year.

Course Only Option: 30 credits, of which 6 must be at the 300-level or above and 24 at the 500-level or above. At least 18 credits must be in Philosophy.

6-Credit Thesis Option: 30 credits, including 24 credits awarded through coursework. Of these, 6 credits must be at the 300-level or above, and 18 credits must be at the 500-level or above. At least 12 of these 24 credits must be in Philosophy.

12-Credit Thesis Option: 30 credits, including 18 credits awarded through coursework. Of these, 6 credits must be at the 300-level or above, and 12 credits must be at the 500-level or above. At least 9 of these 18 credits must be in Philosophy.

MA students must obtain a minimum grade of B– (68%) for course credit, although a maximum of 6 credits as low as 60% may also be accepted. To remain in good standing an average of at least 72% is required.

During their first year, all MA students must complete at least 15 credits, 12 of which must be at the 500-level or above. In addition, at least 12 credits must be completed with an average of 76% or above. Failure to meet both criteria by August 31st of their first academic year will result in a finding of ‘not making sufficient progress’.

2.5 Languages

There is no automatic language requirement. However, the Department, in consultation with the supervisor, may require MA candidates to show competence in one or more foreign languages needed for their work.

2.6 MA Thesis Prospectus

(A) 12-credit option.

In order to exercise the 12-credit thesis option for the MA in Philosophy, a student must submit, with the proposed supervisor’s approval, a thesis prospectus by June 30th of the first year.

The thesis prospectus indicates adequate preparation to begin detailed work on a specific thesis topic. The prospectus must be clearly written and focused on a well-defined topic or problem. The prospectus includes each of the following elements:

Abstract. A summary, not exceeding 300 words, of the thesis proposal.

Background. An outline, not exceeding 1000 words, of the nature and importance of the topic, issue, or problem discussed in the thesis. Relevant literature should be cited or discussed in appropriate detail.

Proposal. A description, not exceeding 1000 words, of how the topic, issue, or problem that is the subject of the thesis will be dealt with. Indicate what hypothesis will be defended or what goal will be reached. Indicate the expected significance of the thesis as a contribution to scholarship, and the approximate length of the thesis.

Preparation. A brief account of the student’s preparation to undertake this project. For example, list relevant courses, term papers, presentations, and language skills.

Bibliography. A list of writings, in standard bibliographic format, especially relevant to the prospectus, including all works discussed elsewhere in the prospectus.

The thesis prospectus will be evaluated on the basis of the following: (1) The student’s academic excellence as demonstrated by academic transcripts, presentations, awards, and distinctions. (2) The quality of the student’s analytical skills, ability to think critically, ability to apply skills and knowledge, judgement, and originality. The quality of the student’s communication skills. (3) The breadth and suitability of the student’s background in philosophy as preparation to undertake the proposed thesis. (4) The student’s initiative, autonomy, and determination as indicating an ability to complete the thesis within one year. (5) The manageability of the proposed thesis project as a one-year project, the significance of its outcomes, if realized, as a contribution to scholarship, and its potential for presentation or publication.

(B) 6-credit option.

In order to exercise the 6-credit thesis option for the MA in Philosophy, a student must submit, with the proposed supervisor’s approval, a thesis prospectus by June 30th of the first year (for a thesis to be completed by December 31st of the second year) or by September 18th of the second year (for a thesis to be completed by March 18th of the second year). Other schedules may sometimes be agreed

with the proposed supervisor; however, all students wishing to graduate at Spring Congregation are required to submit their theses to the Graduate Advisor for examination by March 18th.

The thesis prospectus indicates adequate preparation to begin detailed work on a specific thesis topic. The prospectus must be clearly written and focused on a well-defined topic or problem. The prospectus includes each of the following elements:

Abstract. A summary, not exceeding 150 words, of the thesis proposal.

Background. An outline, not exceeding 500 words, of the nature and importance of the topic, issue, or problem discussed in the thesis. Relevant literature should be cited or discussed in appropriate detail.

Proposal. A description, not exceeding 500 words, of how the topic, issue, or problem that is the subject of the thesis will be dealt with. Indicate what hypothesis will be defended or what goal will be reached. Indicate the expected significance of the thesis as a contribution to scholarship, the approximate length of the thesis, and the deadline for submission.

Preparation. A brief account of the student's preparation to undertake this project. For example, list relevant courses, term papers, presentations, and language skills.

Bibliography. A list of writings, in standard bibliographic format, especially relevant to the prospectus, including all works discussed elsewhere in the prospectus.

The thesis prospectus will be evaluated on the basis of the following: (1) The student's academic excellence as demonstrated by academic transcripts, presentations, awards, and distinctions. (2) The quality of the student's analytical skills, ability to think critically, ability to apply skills and knowledge, judgement, and originality. The quality of the student's communication skills. (3) The breadth and suitability of the student's background in philosophy as preparation to undertake the proposed thesis. (4) The student's initiative, autonomy, and determination as indicating an ability to complete the thesis within one term. (5) The manageability of the proposed thesis project as a one-year project, the significance of its outcomes, if realized, as a contribution to scholarship, and its potential for presentation or publication.

2.7 MA Thesis

(A) 12-credit option.

Deadline: Students wishing to graduate at Spring Congregation are required to submit their theses to the Graduate Advisor for examination by March 18th.

Format: Each thesis must conform to the format required by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. This format is described in the Instructions for the Preparation of Graduate Theses available on the Faculty of Graduate Studies web site.

Examination and Defence: Upon submission of the thesis, the Graduate Advisor, upon recommendation of the supervisor, appoints an Examining Committee. In most cases this Committee consists of the candidate's supervisor together with one additional University Examiner. This committee has the option of requiring an oral examination.

Lodging of Theses: Theses, once completed, are lodged in the UBC Library Special Collection and the Department Reading Room, and are publicly available. One signed copy is required for each depository. The Library's copy is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. It is also customary for the student to present a copy to his or her supervisor.

(B) 6-credit option.

Deadline: The deadline is determined at the prospectus stage. Typically students should submit their

theses to the Graduate Advisor for examination either by December 31st of the student's second year, or March 18th of the student's second year.

Format: Each thesis must conform to the format required by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. This format is described in the Instructions for the Preparation of Graduate Theses available on the Faculty of Graduate Studies web site.

Examination and Defence: Upon submission of the thesis, the Graduate Advisor, upon recommendation of the supervisor, appoints an Examining Committee. In most cases this Committee consists of the candidate's supervisor together with one additional University Examiner. This committee has the option of requiring an oral examination.

Lodging of Theses: Theses, once completed, are lodged in the UBC Library Special Collection and the Department Reading Room, and are publicly available. One signed copy is required for each depository. The Library's copy is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. It is also customary for the student to present a copy to his or her supervisor.

2.8 Transfer to the PhD

Students accepted into the MA program may apply to transfer into the PhD program without completing the MA degree. They should submit an application for admission to the PhD program in the normal way (through the online application system, in advance of the advertised deadline).

Requirements for the PhD

3.1 Registration

Once accepted into the program, a student must maintain continuous registration unless leave is granted.

3.2 Duration of Program

Ph.D. candidates have a maximum of six years to complete their programs. Only under exceptional circumstances are extensions recommended. Extensions require the recommendation of the research supervisor and the Graduate Advisor as well as the approval of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

3.3 Residency

For students who have already obtained a master's degree, a minimum of two years' residence (September to April) at UBC is required. For all other students, a minimum of three years' residence is required.

3.4 Course Requirements

For students who enter the PhD program with a master's degree, a minimum of 24 credits at the 500-level or above are required. For all other students, a minimum of 30 credits at the 300-level or above, including at least 24 credits at the 500-level or above, are required.

PhD students must obtain a minimum grade of B– (68%) for course credit. To remain in good standing an average of at least 72% is required. These are minimum requirements and philosophy students are typically required to complete two full years of coursework prior to being admitted to candidacy.

During their first year, all PhD students must complete at least 15 credits, including at least 12 credits at the 500-level or above, and at least 12 credits with an average of 80%. Failure to meet these criteria

by August 31st of their first academic year will result in a finding of ‘not making sufficient progress’. During their second year, all PhD students must complete the PhD coursework requirement with an overall average of 80%. Failure to meet these criteria by August 31st of their second academic year will result in a finding of ‘not making sufficient progress’.

3.5 Formal Methods Courses

PhD students are required to show such competence in formal logic, metalogic, and other formal methods as may be required for their overall programs, but including in any case competence in classical propositional and predicate logic. All PhD students are, thus, required to complete (a) Philosophy 220 or its equivalent with a mark of 76% or above, and (b) an additional course in formal methods with a grade sufficient for PhD credit (68%). This course may be selected from PHIL 320, 321, 322, 323, 324 or a higher-level course or seminar on formal methods given in the Philosophy Department, or it can be a course in another department approved by both the student’s research supervisor and the Graduate Director. Typically, part (a) of the above requirement will be fulfilled before a student enters the PhD program.

3.6 Core Courses

The department will offer two graduate courses each year, designated as core courses, in the following areas: mind, language, metaphysics, logic, epistemology, philosophy of science, and value theory.

Core courses are taught at a suitable level for first-year graduate students. They should be broad enough to cover some central topics in the relevant area, but need not be general surveys. They are aimed at preparing students for further graduate work in an area of philosophy.

3.7 Distribution of Courses

Students are required to have completed (over the course of their academic careers) coursework in the following four areas. (The requirements are the same for the three non- history areas.)

History of Philosophy. Four upper-division undergraduate or graduate-level history courses (at UBC or in previous studies), one of which must be 500-level.

Ethics and Value Theory (including aesthetics, philosophy of law, and political philosophy). Either i) one core course plus one 500-level graduate seminar, or ii) three upper-division undergraduate or graduate-level courses (at UBC or in previous studies), one of which must be 500-level.

Metaphysics, Philosophy of Language, and Philosophy of Mind. Either i) one core course plus one 500-level graduate seminar, or ii) three upper-division undergraduate or graduate- level courses (at UBC or in previous studies), one of which must be 500-level.

Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. Either i) one core course plus one 500-level graduate seminar, or ii) three upper-division undergraduate or graduate-level courses (at UBC or in previous studies), one of which must be 500-level.

3.8 Colloquium Presentation

All PhD students are required to make at least one presentation to the Department’s Graduate Colloquium series during their first twenty-four months in the program.

3.9 Languages

There is no automatic language requirement. However, the Department, in consultation with the supervisor, may require PhD candidates to show competence in one or more foreign languages needed for their work.

3.10 Program Approval

Supervisory committees, as soon as they have been formed, meet with their students in order to work out the program requirements that must be met before the student may begin work on a thesis. The program of studies must be approved by the Graduate Advisor.

The student must normally have met all requirements listed in 3.1 to 3.9 above and must have completed any courses recommended by the supervisor as preparation for the writing of a thesis in the area of their choosing.

In recognition of the fact that some areas of philosophy require advanced study in other fields, students (after consultation with their supervisor and the graduate committee) may be exempted from some portion of the requirements in 3.4 to 3.9 above, as appropriate.

3.11 Comprehensive Examination

Approval of the program of studies is required in order to submit comprehensive examination papers.

The comprehensive examination is mandated by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Its purpose is to assess that the candidate has both a breadth of philosophical knowledge and a precision of written and oral expression that the Department feels is sufficient for the student successfully to undertake PhD dissertation research.

The comprehensive exam will consist of two papers.

A literature review paper. This paper should report on a number of articles, books and book chapters (a number determined by the relevant sub-disciplinary standard of a professional paper) central to the topic of the qualifying paper (see (2) below). It should be 3,000 to 5,000 words and is similar to the Dissertation Prospectus literature review, but on a much narrower topic. The literature review paper must be completed by August 31st of the student's second year. The paper should be submitted to the graduate advisor electronically, including a word count. The paper will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis by a faculty expert in the relevant area, typically but not necessarily the student's supervisor. The result will be communicated to the student and to the graduate advisor no later than September 30. If a student fails the literature review paper, they will be requested to revise or rewrite it. The revised/rewritten version must be submitted no later than the end of the third week of November, and the pass/fail result will be communicated to the student at the end of the examination of the qualifying paper.

A qualifying paper. Students must write a polished, professional paper, accompanied by an abstract. The paper must be between 5,000 and 8,000 words (exclusive of abstract and works cited). The topic of the qualifying paper will be related to the literature review paper. Typically, this paper will be a revision of a paper written during the first two years of coursework, though students may choose to write a paper de novo. The paper topic may be in the student's main area of research or it may be in a different area. The paper is due no later than November 30 of the student's third year. The paper will

be examined by three faculty members (with an accompanying oral defence) during the first half of December. The examination committee will be formed by the Graduate Advisor, comprising the paper supervisor and two additional faculty members. At the beginning of the Fall term the student will be notified of the examination committee composition. In writing the paper and preparing for the exam, the student may not seek advice from the two non-supervisor faculty members on the committee, but may seek advice from anyone else. After the examination, the examining committee immediately meets in camera to discuss the results. The committee deliberates jointly; the results are agreed upon by consensus or, failing that, majority vote. Papers will be awarded either pass, revise and resubmit, or fail. If the committee is deadlocked and cannot reach a majority vote, the paper will be awarded a revise and resubmit. The results are communicated to the candidate by the chair of the examination, typically the paper supervisor, or the graduate advisor. If students are asked to revise the paper, revisions must be completed by the end of January of the third year. At that time papers will be awarded a pass or a fail. Students who fail at this point will not be able to continue in the PhD program.

In addition to the two-paper comprehensive exam, students in their third year are required to attend (i) a qualifying paper seminar and (ii) a dissertation prospectus seminar.

All students in the first semester of their third year of the PhD program will attend the qualifying paper seminar, led by at least one faculty member. Students will examine good models of qualifying papers as well as present and workshop drafts of their qualifying paper. Participation will be marked on a pass/fail basis. The primary goal of the seminar is to help students present polished qualifying papers by the November deadline (see (2), above). Students are allowed and encouraged to seek expert assistance from other faculty members, except the two ‘external’ examiners. Secondary goals include improving students’ presentation and discussion skills and building an intellectual community

All students in the second semester of their third year will attend the dissertation prospectus seminar, led by at least one faculty member. Students will examine good models of dissertation prospectuses and present and workshop drafts of their own. The goals of this seminar are to prepare and encourage the students to defend their prospectus by the end of the term, and to improve the graduate community.

All students must attend the qualifying-paper and prospectus seminars during their third year, and will not be examined before completion of the corresponding seminars (the qualifying paper seminar for the comprehensive examination and the dissertation prospectus seminar for the prospectus defence). In some exceptional circumstances, students will complete all their coursework at the end of their first year. In this case, the student will be required to satisfy the third-year requirements during their second year in the program.

3.12 Thesis Prospectus and Defence

Each student is required to submit to the Department for approval a formal thesis prospectus approved by his or her supervisor. The comprehensive requirement must be met before a thesis prospectus may be submitted.

The thesis prospectus must indicate adequate preparation to begin detailed work on a specific thesis topic. It should be clearly written and focused on a well-defined topic or problem. It includes each of the following elements:

Abstract. Ranging in length anywhere from a single paragraph to a single page, the abstract provides a short summary of the thesis proposal.

Literature Review. The prospectus should begin with a review of the relevant literature, 10 to 20 pages long, outlining the nature and indicating the importance of the topic, issue, or problem that will be discussed in the dissertation.

Proposal. Typically ranging in length from five to ten pages, the proposal describes how the topic, issue, or problem that is the subject of the dissertation will be dealt with. While recognizing that research sometimes leads one to conclusions or into areas that one did not have in mind at the outset of the research, the prospectus should nevertheless indicate what hypothesis will be defended or what goal will be reached.

Chapter Outline. Typically short and to the point, the chapter outline should still contain enough information to give the reader an indication of how the dissertation will be structured.

Bibliography. A list of writings especially relevant to the dissertation, including all works discussed in the Literature Review, in the form of a standard bibliography.

The prospectus should be no longer than 10,000 words, exclusive of bibliography.

The thesis prospectus is defended in an examination run by the student's supervisor and supervisory committee. The defence is open to the graduate students and faculty of the Department.

Following the oral defence, the thesis prospectus is considered for approval by the Department on the recommendation of the supervisory committee.

3.13 Admission to Candidacy

Upon completion of the above requirements, students are admitted to candidacy. All students must be admitted to candidacy by the end of the third year.

3.14 PhD Thesis

Upon being admitted to candidacy, each student is required to complete a thesis embodying the results of original research.

Format: Each thesis must conform to the format required by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. This format is described in the Instructions for the Preparation of Graduate Theses available on the Faculty of Graduate Studies web site.

Lodging of Theses: Theses, once completed, are lodged in the UBC Library Special Collection and in the Department Reading Room, and are publicly available. One signed copy is required for each depository. The Library's copy is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. It is also customary for the student to present a copy to his or her supervisor.

3.15 Thesis Examination and Defence

Three months prior to the completion of the thesis a list of suggested external examiners is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies by the thesis supervisor and the Graduate Advisor. Proposed external examiners must not be contacted directly. Upon completion of the thesis (and at least six

weeks prior to the oral exam), a copy of the thesis is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. An Examining Committee is appointed and an oral defence is then held. A detailed guide to the doctoral examination process is available at:
https://www.grad.ubc.ca/system/files/forms/docexams_planning_tool_checklist.pdf.

Applied Ethics Stream

4.1 Applied Ethics Seminar

All students who have elected to complete their degree in the Applied Ethics stream are required to complete a seminar relating ethical theory to practice (e.g. Philosophy 532). In consultation with their supervisors, the Department may also require PhD students in applied ethics to complete additional work essential for their areas of specialization.

4.2 Science and Technology Studies Stream

Students who elect to complete their degree in the Science and Technology Studies stream are required to take three STS courses: a Proseminar that provides an overview of STS (STS 501); a topic-specific core STS seminar (STS 502); and the PhD Colloquium in STS (STS 598). In addition, those taking the STS stream must write their qualifying paper and dissertation on an STS topic, and their supervisory committee must include one member from outside Philosophy who is affiliated with the STS program.

General Regulations

5.1 Academic Progress Reports

Academic progress reports for each student are made by each student's supervisor to the Department in the spring of each year. Should a student show inadequate progress for two consecutive years, that student may be required to withdraw.

PhD students not yet admitted to candidacy: In year one of the PhD program, adequate progress consists of completing 15 credits, 12 of which at the 500-level or above, and at least 12 credits with an average of 80% or more; in year two of the program, adequate progress consists of completing the PhD coursework requirement and the literature review paper. In year three adequate progress consists in completing the comprehensive examination and advancing to candidacy.

PhD students who have been admitted to candidacy: Every PhD student who has been admitted to candidacy must meet with his or her supervisor (and, at the discretion of the supervisor, the supervisory committee) by September 30 of each year in order to come up with a mutually agreed-upon set of expectations that the student must meet in the following 12 months in order to make adequate progress toward the PhD degree that year. This set of expectations, recorded as a memo co-signed by the student and the supervisor and placed in the student's file, will form the basis of the supervisor's report on the student at the May graduate student review meeting and of the Department's determination regarding sufficient progress at that meeting.

5.2 Auditing Courses

Students wishing to audit a course must receive permission of the instructor. They should register for

the course so that the audit is part of their academic record.

5.3 Leaves of Absence

Students who find it necessary to interrupt their studies may apply for a leave of absence. A student may be on leave for no more than one year in a master's program and no more than two years in a doctoral program. Time spent on leave will not be counted as part of the time allowed for completion of the degree program. In order for a leave to be granted, the recommendation of the research supervisor, the recommendation of the Graduate Advisor, and the approval of the Faculty of Graduate Studies are all required.

5.4 Exchange Agreements

Graduate students in philosophy at UBC may take courses at Simon Fraser University without paying additional fees (and with a minimum of additional administrative requirements) and may include members of the SFU philosophy department on their supervisory committees.

UBC graduate students may enroll as Visiting Graduate Students without the payment of additional tuition fees at: the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, McGill University, the University of Manitoba, the Université de Montréal, the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Toronto, and the University of Victoria.

The Western Deans Agreement allows registration in courses at any of its 23 participating institutions without payment of additional tuition fees. A list of participating institutions may be found at:

<https://www.wcdgs.ca/contact>.