

MSU Philosophy Department Graduate Program Cheat Sheet

[updated: 9/7/2023]

General

- All students are advised to look over the handbook. This is a useful tool for committee members as well. The latest handbook is on the Department's website.
- Graduate students are asked to communicate as clearly as possible with the GradDirector. The GradDirector should be cc'd on emails regarding committee decisions, exams, policies, fellowships and any other matter related to the graduate program.

Goals of the Graduate Program

The academic programs and other department activities are designed to educate and prepare students to work as professional philosophers and teachers of philosophy at the college and university level and, as appropriate to their ambitions, in other professional venues related to their disciplinary or interdisciplinary specializations. Students are expected to be developing, to a professional level, the following capacities and competences:

- To read philosophical texts both canonical and current, closely and accurately, with mastery of distinctive terminology and recognizing distinctive kinds of argumentation;
- To discern and articulate philosophical issues and questions that arise in or are pertinent to those texts;
- To engage skillfully in philosophical conversation, comment, and critique;
- To make a substantial contribution of their own to the discourses within the discipline (and as appropriate to the student's interests, across disciplines) both within the student's area of specialization and over a range both historical and topical that is considerably wider than that area;
- To write philosophical essays that clearly articulate views, positions and arguments in the literature and clearly articulate the author's own views, positions and arguments; effectively to present philosophical positions, doctrines and arguments orally;
- To craft syllabi and present philosophical ideas and arguments to students of philosophy and other non-professional audiences in ways that successfully inform, engage and cultivate philosophical skills;
- To craft and develop effective online classes that are based on current technologies and online pedagogies. Workshops for developing skills in these areas are usually offered by the college and Graduate School;
- To work effectively in academic and professional settings as colleagues and as members both of the intellectual community and the institutional unit (department, program, college, etc.).

Responsibilities of Graduate Students

- General responsibilities of graduate students
 - Set up and plan meetings with their guidance committee chairs and guidance committee meetings

- Stay in contact with their teaching mentors
- Setup an annual meeting with the GradDirector
- Timely award reports
- Participate in department events and colloquia
- Filing (PHL requirements)
 - PhD checklist (file after each guidance committee meeting, discuss with chair and send to your committee before the meeting, update after the meeting, by student)
 - RCR Requirements (update and file every AY, by student)
 - Workload Checklist for Large Lecture Classes (at the beginning of each semester, updated mid term, by student or IR)
- Filing (MSU Requirements)
 - Annual Progress Reports & CV (at the end of each AY, by student and GC chair)
 - Milestones (update at the end of each AY, by student, GC chair, and TM); Note: only the latest and updated version is kept
 - GradPlan update (after each guidance committee meeting)

Guidance Committee

The guidance committee monitors the student's progress toward the Ph.D. degree and judges the student's competence to proceed after the coursework phase of the dissertation phase (C.f. [Section 3.4.4.](#)). If it determines that the student is able, a memo to this effect is sent to the student, with a copy in the student's evaluations file, no other action is taken and the student proceeds in the program. If the committee thinks the student is not capable of completing the degree, it recommends discontinuance, and the faculty members of the department graduate committee review the situation and determine whether the student will be permitted to continue or not.

- Will be formed in connection with the GradDirector when students enter our program; can be changed at any time
- Needs to be put into GradPlan by the end of the first semester; student is responsible for submitting their own PhD Program online via the GradPlan system
- Minimum of 4 MSU regular faculty members; the chair or at least one co-chair of the guidance committee must be a regular faculty member in the philosophy department. It is recommended that the remaining members also be regular faculty members in the philosophy department, unless the graduate student and their chair or co-chairs decide that a more multidisciplinary committee is appropriate, in consultation with the Associate Chair
- Note: if students intend to enroll in EEB, additional committee rules come into effect (talk to the grad director if this is planned)
- Procedure to request for NON-regular MSU faculty member to serve on committees <https://grad.msu.edu/nonregular-faculty-committees> (the grad director can provide more information and templates)
- A meeting should be set up during the first semester; coursework is planned, possible waivers will be discussed, etc.
- Note that the requirement for regular meetings (that students meet with their guidance committee once a year) continues to apply in the post-comp period of one's graduate work.

Teaching Mentor

- A teaching mentor will be assigned (as discussed by the GradDirector and the student)
- A meeting should take place during the first semester (especially if new students are assigned as TAs)
- Teaching mentors can change; both sides should feel comfortable
- Teaching mentors should observe students in class or recitation sessions; work on the teaching portfolio, develop and check syllabi, discuss pedagogy, etc.

Required Coursework

- A minimum of 45 credits in PHL courses at the 400-level or higher (not including PHL 999 research credits), distributed as follows:
 - PHL 800 Proseminar and PHL 801 Teaching Philosophy
 - A minimum of 33 must be graduate seminars
 - At least two courses/seminars in each of the 4 distribution areas:
 - PHL seminars include
 - one in the field of the dissertation
 - one in the minor field
 - two in areas other than the dissertation or minor field
 - A minor field: 9 credits completed by the end of the 6th semester
 - a minor field within philosophy, distinct from the field of the dissertation; or
 - an interdisciplinary minor field consisting of a PHL course/seminar and two courses/seminars in one or two other disciplines

Milestones

- 1st semester
 - Guidance committee formed, sets up program, registers requirement waivers (if any)
 - Set up and meet with a teaching mentor
- End of 2nd semester
 - Information for Ph.D. Degree Plan is entered online in GradPlan
- End of 5th semester
 - Completed required coursework
 - Meet the departmental logic requirement
 - Via exam
 - Via former class (to be approved by Matt McKeon or David Godden)
 - Via taking PHL 330 (sign up as independent study 490, template on our web pages) or 432
 - Fulfilled language requirement (if required)
 - Guidance committee recommends continuance
 - Guidance committee composition reviewed/revised
 - First meetings for the comprehensive examination
- End of 7th semester
 - Develop and discuss teaching portfolio with teaching mentor;
 - Passed comprehensive examination
 - Must be recorded; send the date and a copy of the comps memo to GradDirector
 - Has an approved Prospectus

- Send copy to GradDirector
- End of 9th semester
 - Teaching portfolio finished; send copy to GradDirector
- End of 10th semester
 - Dissertation completed and defended
 - Inform the graduate secretary and GradDirector of intent to defend; requirements must be verified before defense date
 - The defense is public and needs to be announced at least 3 weeks in advance
 - Submission of dissertation is not handled in the department; dissertations are submitted electronically to the graduate school and therefore are subject to specific guidelines and deadline found on the gradschool's website; check with the graduate school on submission deadlines/requirements: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd>

Note on 6year funding

The department in general does not have funding for 6year students. However, in certain circumstances funding is available (leaves, fellowships, teaching demands, etc.)

DCFs

Degree completion fellowships by the GradSchool can secure one semester of funding during the 6th year of a student. These fellowships are competitive and not guaranteed.

Comps

Comps must be shared with a memo; former memos can be found in the Sharepoint folder system of the graduate program; the memo should contain

- The reading list(s)
- An abstract of the comps areas by the student
- Conditions and timeline for evaluation

The format of the comps process should be negotiated between student and committee; possible formats:

- A sit-down examination taken without access to books and notes on a single date, normally a 6-hour examination (two 3-hour sessions with a lunch break);
- A take-home written exam offering a number of questions from which the student chooses an assigned number, taken in a set period of time (7-14 days would be usual); usually three essays around 3600-4200 words
- One longer essay, which might be a critical survey of the literature covered by the reading list, with a focus on some particular topic(s) or thread(s) within it. The student will be given a title or topic, suggestions or instructions, a length and firm due-date. This would normally be a 10- to 12-week project.
- A critical review of the existing literature in a particular field if the dissertation area warrants it and requires a very specialized approach.

According to MSU regulations, comps needs to be filed. GradSecretary and GradDirector need

- an email from the student's chair confirming that the student passed and the date on which you passed
- a copy of the comps memo (will be filed for other committees to be consulted)
- a copy of the student's written comps exam (will be filed in the student's folder)

Note that, according to MSU policies, the main component of the comps exam needs to be done in writing, although an oral component can be required by the student's committee.

Note that if students intend to do comps during summer, they need to be enrolled at the minimum required level in either spring or fall.

Prospectus

Every graduate student is required to write a dissertation prospectus that is in a meeting with the *entire* committee discussed and approved by their guidance committee.

Format:

- Should have a length of at least 4200 words.
- Should contain a longer text on the overall goals, methodological approach, theses, arguments and content of the whole.
- Should contain a chapter outline.
- Should contain a basic bibliography (properly formatted).

Dissertation

There are no standard expectation regarding the length of dissertations, as this will be negotiated between the dissertation committee and the student, but it is expected that a dissertation has *at least* a length of 150 pages.

Changes in PhD Program

- All changes to committee and PhD program will be put by the student into GradPlan
- When it comes time to graduate coursework taken must match up exactly with the coursework proposed on GradPlan. If it does not the student graduation will be put on hold until the PhD program is changed, reviewed and accepted on GradPlan. It is the student's responsibility to make sure their PhD program remains up-to-date with what they plan on taking.

Time Limits

- Comps must be taken by year 5
 - Warning: students are no longer eligible for Graduate Assistantships or DCFs if they do not finish comps by the end of year 5
- Dissertations must be completed by year 8
- Students cannot be employed as TAs for more than 12 semesters

Conditions for remaining in the program, aka being in good academic standing

- Are accumulating credits and satisfying the distribution requirements at a pace that accords with the goal of completing the course/seminar requirements in seven semesters (excluding summer);
- Are keeping pace with the Ph.D. Milestones;
- Are maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better (excluding PHL 999 credits);
- Do not have more than 8 credits of outstanding Incomplete or Deferred grades (excluding PHL 999); and
- Do not have grades below 3.0 in more than 6 credits.

Red lights: conditions for dismissal warning letters

- Grade point average for all graduate work has fallen below 3.0, and remains below 3.0 after the student has had a semester to remedy this.
- More than 6 semester credits below 3.0 (excepting credits taken in fulfillment of the logic requirement).
- For M.A. students: Failing to complete all degree requirements within the college time limit of 6 years (dated from the beginning of the first semester in which credits toward the degree are earned).
- For Ph.D. students: failing to pass the comprehensive examination on two attempts or failing to pass it within the university time limit of 5 years, or failing to complete all degree requirements within 8 years (in both cases, dating from the beginning of the first semester in which credits toward the degree are earned).
- Failure to make satisfactory progress toward the degree as defined in [Sections 2.4.](#) and [3.4.](#), as determined by the faculty members of the department graduate committee, after a semester allowed for correcting remediable deficiencies.
- A student who is not making satisfactory progress toward the degree at the end of the 7th semester in the program can be refused permission to continue in the program.
- Minimally meeting the formal criteria for “making satisfactory progress to the degree” is not alone sufficient for continuance. There is a substantial difference between ability minimally to succeed in courses and seminars and ability to do the sustained original research and writing involved in doing a dissertation
- Graduate assistantships are available only to graduate students who are in good standing and actively pursuing graduate degree programs (confirmed in the union contract, article 12)
- A graduate student needs to be in “good standing” to receive financial aid.

Degree Extensions

- If a student is out of his or her timeline for completing comps or dissertation, then the student needs a time extension. This involves a letter from the advisor to the graduate director requesting that the student be given permission to exceed the deadlines. This is done very rarely and will only be granted in certain circumstances.

Leaves

- Every graduate student can apply for 2 unpaid semesters of leave, regardless the reasons.
- Every student can apply for a medical leave: <https://osa.msu.edu/medical-leave> [this is a protected process and needs to be initiated by the student].

Electronic Communications

- As a member of the academic and professional community every graduate student should on a regular basis check their MSU email address and use this address for professional communication

Sharepoint

- Graduate students' academic files are stored on [Sharepoint](#) (accessible by admin, your guidance committee chair and yourself)

Graduate Program Teams Channels

- *PHL Graduate Program*: only used for accessing files and folders
- *PHL Graduate Student Channel*: used for grad program related chats
- *PHL Graduate Committee*: used for grad committee related chats

Awards

<https://philosophy.msu.edu/graduate/awards-and-funding/>

Graduate Resources (forms, etc.)

<https://philosophy.msu.edu/graduate/graduate-resources/>