

U. Iowa Department of Philosophy
– Statement of Normative Progress to the Ph.D. –

PREAMBLE: The following is an informal statement of normative progress to the degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Iowa. It is in no way intended to replace or supplant official Philosophy Department rules and regulations.

First year of Graduate School

Fall semester of first year:

This is my first semester of graduate school. I should be enrolled in three graduate-level philosophy courses, in the range from PHIL 4050 to PHIL 6800. At this pace I will be able to satisfy all of my course requirements by the end of the fall or spring semester of my third year. I also sign up for PHIL 6920 Philosophy Colloquium each semester, which is taken for S/U credit. As a first-year student, I won't yet be doing directed research or independent study courses, as the focus is on regular coursework and seminar-level discussion.

As this is my first semester, I have not necessarily settled on a specialization or dissertation topic. I should therefore select my courses with an eye to (1) my philosophical interests and (2) whether or not the courses satisfy distribution requirements. Roughly speaking, I need to take three courses in the area of metaphysics and epistemology, three courses in the history of philosophy, three courses in ethics, and two courses in the area of philosophy of math/philosophy of science/logic,. That adds to eleven courses. I need to keep in mind that of these courses, four will need to be seminars (courses numbered 6100-6800). I also need to keep in mind that I will need to take a few extra courses in my secondary area of concentration (which is secondary to my eventual area of specialization), though I don't really need to think of any of this until later. There is a checklist that I can acquire from the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) that will help me to keep tabs on this.

Another thing that I need to keep in mind is that I can only take a grade of "Incomplete" with instructor approval and that different faculty members have different policies on giving incompletes. If I do take an incomplete, the instructor and I set a date by which leftover work will be completed, and I need to finish the work by that date. Another thing to keep in mind is that I cannot advance to candidacy (normally in the fourth semester) if I have any incompletes on my record.

The first thing that I want to do at the start of this and every semester is to meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to schedule my courses for the semester and to talk about distribution requirements, a possible trajectory of study, etc. As the semester gets underway I will want to meet with my professors (in office hours and by appointment) to talk through course material and to engage in discussions that will help to locate the seeds of possible paper topics for each course. Faculty members tend to keep their doors open in the department, so it will be easy to go and visit them.

The standard grading scale for graduate study is not A, B, C, etc., but A, A-, B+, and I will want the bulk of my grades to be in the A/A- range for purposes of advancing to candidacy in my fourth semester. I should make sure to meet on a regular basis in office hours with the faculty instructor for my courses, esp. in 4000-level courses where there is not always the same opportunity (as in 6000-level courses) to get into lengthy exchanges about course material. I can meet on my own with the faculty member, or in a small group with other graduate students.

Spring semester of first year:

I have satisfied some of my distribution requirements. This semester I will enroll in courses that satisfy other distribution requirements but that also mesh with interests I may have developed from the courses that I took in the fall.

The first thing that I want to do at the start of the semester is to meet with the DGS to talk about my courses for the semester, my interests, and a possible trajectory of study. As the semester gets underway I will want to meet with my professors (in office hours and by appointment) to talk through course material and to engage in discussions that will help to locate the seeds of possible paper topics for each course.

Second year of Graduate School

Fall Semester of second year:

I am about half-way to satisfying my distribution requirements. One thing that I want to start thinking about is that later I will be declaring an area of specialization and a secondary area of concentration. The area of specialization will reflect the work that I end up doing on my dissertation. I need to take at least three courses that are in the area of specialization. (But these can overlap with the eleven distribution-requirement courses.) I will also choose a secondary area of concentration from among the following: metaphysics and epistemology; ancient and medieval philosophy; modern philosophy; logic, philosophy of science, and philosophy of mathematics; and value theory. To select metaphysics and epistemology as my secondary area of concentration, I will have to have completed a total of five courses in metaphysics and/or epistemology (which would mean two such courses in addition to the regular distribution requirements); to select ancient and medieval philosophy, I will have to have completed at least four courses in ancient and/or medieval philosophy; to select modern philosophy, I will have to have completed four courses in modern philosophy; to select logic, philosophy of science, and philosophy of mathematics, I will have to have completed four courses in logic, philosophy of science, and/or philosophy of mathematics; and to select value theory, I will have to have completed five courses in value theory. So, I will want to start choosing my courses as a function of whether or not they satisfy distribution requirements and as a function of whether or not they will fulfill the additional requirements for my secondary area of concentration.

The first thing that I want to do at the start of the semester is to meet with the DGS to talk about my courses for the semester and my trajectory of study. As the semester gets underway I will want to meet with my professors (in office hours and by appointment) to talk through course material and to engage in discussions that will help to locate the seeds of possible paper topics for each course.

Spring Semester of second year:

I am continuing to take courses to satisfy distribution requirements. Note that this is the semester in which the department meets to decide whether or not I advance to Ph.D. candidacy. Achieving this status is a pre-condition for selecting a comprehensive examination committee (CEC) advisor and for planning to take the comprehensive exam (which I will take in my third year).

The first thing that I want to do at the start of the semester is to meet with the DGS to talk about my courses for the semester, my interests, and my trajectory of study. As the semester gets underway I will want to meet with my professors (in office hours and by appointment) to talk through course material and to engage in discussions that will help to locate the seeds of possible paper topics for each course.

Third year of Graduate School

Fall Semester:

There are at most a couple of courses left for me to satisfy all of my remaining distribution and area of specialization and secondary area requirements. I have informed the Director of Graduate Studies of my area of specialization and my secondary area of concentration. We have filled out the relevant form together.

This is the semester in which I need to start planning for the comprehensive examination, which consists of a written dissertation prospectus and an oral defense of the prospectus. The first thing that I need to do is to approach a faculty member about being my CEC advisor. This is probably going to be someone with whom I have already done a lot of work.

I also need to make arrangements so that I can take the exam in the spring semester. First, I obtain the "Application for the formation of a Comprehensive Examination Committee" form from the department office and meet with my CEC advisor to fill it out. I give the completed form to the Director of Graduate Studies who, in consultation with my CEC advisor and me, will finalize my Comprehensive Examination Committee. Over the next few weeks, I work with my CEC advisor to write a 2-3 page abstract for my dissertation and assemble an initial bibliography. When the abstract is ready, I arrange a meeting to have it approved by the comprehensive examination committee. At this meeting I also finalize a date, between two and six months away, for the submission of the dissertation prospectus. For example, if I plan to submit the prospectus at the end of April, I can schedule the meeting as early as the end of October, but no later than the end of February. The oral defense must take place within 2 weeks of the submission.

In terms of coursework for this semester, there are a number of options. I can take courses to complete leftover requirements, and for area of specialization and secondary area requirements I can take directed readings courses. I can also take a directed readings course with my CEC advisor in preparation for the comprehensive exam.

This is a point at which I might start thinking about my career trajectory more generally. The most common career path for a Ph.D. in Philosophy is to enter the academic profession and

become a faculty member, usually after a few years as a post-doc or Visiting Assistant Professor. More recently Philosophy Ph.D.s have begun to pursue alt-ac careers that are very satisfying and lucrative – for example, professional librarian, consultant, lawyer, K-12 teacher or principal, among others. While working toward the Ph.D, a student might complete a library science M.A., a J.D. for law, a K-12 teaching credential, or other training that makes a very powerful combination with the doctorate. We also like the idea of philosophically-trained experts entering into institutions that are influential and make a difference; and so a student might write a dissertation on military ethics, join the National Guard, and impact the military from the inside; or a student might get a Ph.D./J.D. and become a judge, or they might get a Ph.D. and a teaching credential and quickly become an administrator who works to make philosophy a part of the common K-12 curriculum.

Spring Semester:

I take the comprehensive exam. If I do not pass the comprehensive exam, I can request permission to re-take the exam. In accordance with the Graduate College rules, I cannot re-take the exam less than 4 months after the first exam. If I pass with reservations, I may need to make some revisions or meet some further conditions in order to pass.

If I pass the exam, I begin writing my dissertation. I should graduate by spring of my fifth year, which would leave 1½ - 2 years after the comprehensive exam for writing the dissertation. If I write 10 (double-spaced) pages per month, I have a 180-page dissertation in 1 ½ years.

I should be on the lookout for upcoming deadlines for post-comp and dissertation research fellowships now and in the following semesters that will help me make progress on my research and writing. I can check on the graduate college's website for a schedule of deadlines, and the DGS will forward the fellowship announcements to eligible students.

Fourth year of Graduate School

Fall Semester:

Assuming I passed my comprehensive exam, I continue working on my dissertation. I sign up for thesis hours with my dissertation advisor for my remaining semesters, and I can also enroll in a 4000- or 6000-level course for S/U credit. I also continue to sign up for the PHIL 6920 colloquium course. I need to have 72 total hours of graduate credit in order to graduate, but I will have completed only 42-60 by the end of my third year. I should also keep in mind that, of the total 72 credits, at least 39 must be earned after admission, while registered in the University of Iowa Graduate College.

Spring Semester:

I am writing my dissertation.

The department will host a job-market workshop as part of the PHIL 6920 colloquium course. Fourth-year students will attend the workshop and then meet with their dissertation advisor about the timeline for their job search. The department does not have an official placement advisor, as that is the role of each student's dissertation advisor, but the Department Chair and the DGS are

also official contacts to meet with students in the spring and over the summer – to go over the student’s c.v. and other job materials, etc. A student should not plan to go on the job market unless they will have the bulk of their dissertation completed by the end of the fall semester of their fifth year. The members of the student’s dissertation committee will not be able to write letters of recommendation if there is not enough completed work to detail in a letter.

The summer after my fourth year:

I am writing my dissertation. Sometime during the summer or, at the latest, very early in the fall I need to have a discussion with my dissertation advisor about preparing for the job market. The initial job ads come out in mid-October. My dissertation does not need to be finished for me to apply for jobs. I will need to be finished by the end of the Spring semester of my fifth year, however.

If I am going on the job market in the fall. I work on some of the application materials and share them with my advisor. The Chair and DGS are also available to look over the materials over the summer or early fall.

Fifth year of Graduate School

Fall and Spring Semesters:

I am writing the dissertation with the expectation of finishing this year. In order to file the dissertation at the end of the Spring, I need to enroll in Doctoral Final Registration hours for the Spring semester. Details on signing up for these are in the Department Office.

NOTE: I have an expectation of being assigned 10 semesters of funding in total. When there is the possibility of an appointment beyond the fifth year, the department shall take into account the student’s progress toward the degree. The department will also consider evidence of teaching effectiveness. Former students who have recently received the doctorate in the department will also be considered for such appointments and will be given priority over a student who is not making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

nth year of Graduate School

Fall and Spring Semesters:

I am still here. I should talk with faculty about strategies for completing the dissertation.

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