

Virginia Tech

Department of Philosophy

Graduate Student Handbook

2023-24

Virginia Tech Dept. of Philosophy Graduate Student Handbook

The [Masters of Arts Program in Philosophy](#) at Virginia Tech welcomed its first students in the fall of 1993. The two-year MA program is designed to provide students with a solid grounding in philosophy in the broadly analytic tradition. It is well-suited to students with a variety of interests: many go on to PhD programs in philosophy after obtaining the MA, but others go on to further studies in other areas of academia or in law, and others seek to broaden their liberal education through advanced study. See the MA program's [placement record](#) for more details.

The key departmental personnel for the MA program for 2023-2024 are the following:

- Department Head (DH): Kelly Trogdon
- Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Jordan MacKenzie
- Graduate Coordinator (GC) and Department Business Coordinator (DBC): Jin Tian Acton
- Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS): Hannah Wildman Short

What follows is the official Handbook of the MA in Philosophy at Virginia Tech. All students in the MA program are responsible for knowing the information that follows. The information in this Handbook supersedes that provided by any other resource.

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1. Introduction

1.1. *Living in Blacksburg*

[Virginia Tech](#) is located in [Blacksburg](#), in the scenic [New River Valley](#) of southwestern Virginia. The area is well known for its natural beauty, healthy atmosphere, and year-round outdoor recreational opportunities. The town of Blacksburg is noted for its progressive planning and high quality of life. Blacksburg has three main shopping areas within easy reach of the campus. Regularly scheduled local bus service is available to Virginia Tech students as part of their student services fee. Non-students are charged a nominal fee. There are dedicated bicycle lanes, and many apartments allow for bicycle or walking commutes.

Roanoke (pop. approximately 100,000) is 40 miles east of the campus. Amtrak has trains from Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Charlottesville to D.C. and to New York, and on to destinations in the US and Canada. Several airlines maintain regular direct flights from Roanoke Regional Airport (ROA) to major US transportation hubs. The [Smart Way Bus](#) offers Blacksburg-Roanoke bus service, including stops at [Squires Student Center](#) and the Roanoke Airport, and [Virginia Breeze](#) has service from the Blacksburg area to Washington, D.C.

Numerous recreational facilities are available to students at Virginia Tech, including those found in the [McComas Hall](#) (swimming pool, basketball courts, weight rooms, and much more), and the [Squires Student Center](#) (bowling, billiards, table tennis, video games). Equipment for outdoor recreation is available for rental through [Venture Out](#). The Appalachian Trail is within easy reach and the area has numerous hiking and biking opportunities. In addition, the university attracts a variety of nationally and internationally recognized cultural events each year and has an active [performing arts program](#).

The [Graduate Life Center](#) (GLC) provides space and venues that meet the unique needs of graduate and professional students. The GLC is the hub of graduate student life. The programs and services offered in the GLC encourage and facilitate active participation in the graduate community. These include the [Little Hokie Hangout](#) for child care, and [Weekly Walk-In Services](#) (personal counseling, career advice, and more).

1.2. The university

Virginia Tech is a diverse university with an enrollment of about 35,000 students. Since its founding as a land grant university in 1872, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, now officially known as Virginia Tech, has become the state's largest university and a major research institution. The university offers 110 undergraduate majors and 170 master's and doctoral majors, through its nine colleges and graduate school.

[Carol M. Newman Library](#) has more than 2 million volumes, over 5 million microforms, subscribes to more than 22,000 journals, and is designated as a repository for US government documents. The library is a member of the Association of Research Libraries and the Southeastern States Library Network. The library provides various graduate student resources, including access to the full range of computer facilities available on campus. Importantly, it has an institutional subscription to PhilPapers, a useful database for both discovering and accessing philosophical works.

The [Graduate School](#) will be your institutional home on campus. It is on the first floor of the Graduate Life Center. If you have questions about deadlines, forms, and so on, your first stop should be the DGS and GC, but often the Graduate School will be the definitive source of information.

1.3. The philosophy department

The [Department of Philosophy](#) at Virginia Tech is internationally recognized for its research-oriented faculty. In 2023-24, the department will have fourteen regular faculty members and four emeritus professors. Here (and throughout this document) a *regular* faculty member is either an Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, (full) Professor, Assistant Collegiate Professor, Associate Collegiate Professor, or (full) Collegiate Professor.

The philosophy faculty sponsors a year-long lecture series and regularly hosts conferences and workshops. Recent speakers in the colloquium series include Regina Rini, David Chalmers, Jeffrey Bub, Gillian Russell, Don Howard, Elizabeth Barnes, Andy Egan, and Sarah McGrath. Topics of past conferences include: induction, statistics, and modelling; ethics in democracy; meaning and modern empiricism; ontology and methodology; and Aristotle on “for the sake of” relations.

2. Funding, fees, and first steps

2.1. GTAs and GRAs

Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs) are available on a competitive basis. GTA/GRA-ships include a tuition waiver and a stipend of approximately \$20,700 per academic year (which covers fall and spring). Partial funding is also available, which includes a stipend (normally more modest) but no tuition waiver. Summer instructorship assignments are possible as well. These are made at the discretion of the Department Head (DH).

GTA/GRA contracts are valid for a year, and must be renewed for a second year. While we expect that incoming GTA/GRAs will have two years of full funding, this funding is contingent on a variety of factors, including (but not limited to) the student's performance as a GTA/GRA and progress to the degree. The department endorses Virginia Tech's [Principles of Community](#) and expects its students to act in accordance with them, especially with reference to professional conduct as a GTA/GRA. The department reserves the right to decline to enter into a new contract with a student whose performance is lacking in these or other relevant areas. In some cases, as determined by the department, the contract may be canceled during the academic year.

Anyone with a GTA/GRA-ship (or partial funding) must show the Graduate Coordinator (GC) either of the following before classes start in order to get the necessary paperwork completed:

- A passport
- A driver's license and a social security card

The passport need not be current except for international students, but it needs to be an *original* and not a copy, as does the social security card if you use that instead. If you do not have the required documents, contact the GC for possible alternatives.

GTAs should consult with the professor teaching the course before making any travel plans for winter break, to determine when the final grading meeting will be held. Please do not make any travel plans without first checking with the professor for whom you are a GTA.

A final important note about funding: attending as an unfunded student at Virginia Tech requires assuming a certain financial burden. It is in your interest to plan your graduate studies carefully so you do not encounter financial difficulties. Make sure to calculate and to be aware of the total cost of each year's study, including tuition and fees, living expenses in Blacksburg, health insurance, and travel to visit family. Depending on your circumstances, there will surely be additional expenses to consider. Please consult with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or with the Graduate

School if you have questions about tuition, fees, health insurance, or other costs associated with attending Virginia Tech.

2.2. Student fees and health insurance

Graduate students must pay approximately \$1,583 in fees per semester. You can arrange to pay these fees over time, rather than all at once, by setting up a payroll deduction.

Virginia Tech provides a health insurance subsidy rate of 88% for graduate students, which matches what the university offers other employees. This results in students paying approximately \$22.29 per month.

2.2. Setting up your PID and VT email

After you've been admitted and decided to join the program, consult the [New Student Guide](#), which will show you how to set up a Personal Identification Number (PID) and create a VT email address. As soon as you get your PID and e-mail address, inform the DGS and GC. If you have a Graduate Teaching Assistantship/Graduate Research Assistantship (GTA/GRA-ship), please inform the DGS and GC of your PID and email address as soon as possible.

When you arrive on campus, please make sure you check in promptly with the DGS and GC. Be sure to give the DGS and GC your local address, phone number, and VT email address. The GC will help with the necessary paperwork, give you your office keys, etc. The DGS will send information on office assignments in August.

2.3. Enrolling in classes

You must enroll for classes *prior* to the Friday of the first week of classes, and should do so *before* classes start. With a PID, you can register for courses on [Hokie Spa](#) (Student Personal Access) beginning in early August. Please enroll online as soon as possible and alert the DGS and GC right away if there are any problems with course overlaps or conflicts between your graduate seminars and the class you are TA-ing for.

You can get course listings from the [timetable of classes](#). Although the university catalog lists prerequisites for several of our graduate seminars, these do not apply to you. You may take any graduate seminar in philosophy you like without concern over prerequisites (with the possible exception of sequenced courses, such as PHIL 5505 and PHIL 5506, the latter of which might presuppose the former).

All funded students are required to enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours each semester. For unfunded students: this requirement does not apply to you. Note, however, that 12 credit hours is defined as a 'Full Time Enrollment' (FTE), i.e., as the minimum load for one to be considered a full-time student for some legal purposes.

Note that Project and Report (and Research and Thesis) do not have meetings. Registering for Research and Thesis requires that you be engaged in a research project with a faculty member (including independent studies), or writing a thesis.

2.4. Three initial meetings

Before classes begin, there is a mandatory [GTA Training Workshop](#) run by the Graduate School for first-year students with GTA funding. For details of how to register for this workshop, please click on the link above. There are two stages of the workshop, Phase I and Phase II. Phase I typically takes place on the Monday and Tuesday before classes start. Phase II sessions are spread throughout the fall semester. (Make sure not to miss Phase II—it will be noticed, and your paycheck can be held up until you complete this Phase.) Note that if you cannot make the GTA Training Workshop, you have the option of completing it in a subsequent semester.

Early in the Fall semester, the department will hold Meet and Greet for all faculty and graduate students. You will be introduced to the faculty and to other new as well as continuing graduate students at this meeting.

The Graduate School holds an [Orientation Meeting](#), usually the Friday before classes begin. At this meeting you will meet the Dean of the Graduate School and learn about university services available to graduate students.

3. Fall semester, first year

3.1. Department orientation luncheon

At the beginning of the fall semester, the DGS holds an orientation meeting for all new BA/MA and MA students. At this meeting, you will be given general information about departmental requirements and procedures, plans of study, office procedures and privileges, advising, thesis preparation, and timetables for meeting course requirements and completion of the thesis. Departmental policies concerning review of student progress and expectations for adequate progress are specified at the orientation meeting.

3.2. PHIL 5505: Logic

All MA students must complete PHIL 5505 in their first semester, unless they test out of the requirement. Testing out of logic is very rare, and is only offered to students who come in with extensive logic backgrounds (e.g. previous graduate coursework in logic).

4. Spring semester, first year

4.1. PHIL 5004: Pro-Seminar

PHIL 5004 will introduce students to the norms of philosophical writing and professionalization, and will help prepare them to conduct independent philosophical research throughout their time in the program.

4.2. Thesis Defenses

In the spring, 2nd year students defend their theses in front of the department. All MA students are strongly encouraged to attend these defenses.

4.3. Advisory committee

By **March 1**, you must form your Advisory Committee (see Appendix 2 for the relevant form). This committee consists of at least three faculty (one chair and two members), at least two of which must be regular faculty in the Virginia Tech Philosophy Department. You can have more members on your committee, but the majority must be faculty members from the department. If you're going to take the Thesis Track, this is your default Thesis Committee and the chair is your default Thesis Advisor.

The chair of your Advisory Committee will forward to the DGS a statement of your progress in the program. Advisory Committees have final approval authority within the program for recommendations of granting the MA degree in Philosophy. Advisory Committees are responsible for forwarding these recommendations to the Graduate School. Changes in your Advisory Committee will be granted only on approval of all proposed your Advisory Committee members and the DH.

4.4. Letter of self-evaluation, provisional plan of study, declaration of track, and thesis proposal

By **April 1**, you must submit a letter of self-evaluation, along with a provisional Plan of Study (see Appendix 1 for the relevant form) and thesis proposal (if on the thesis track) to your Advisory Committee and the DGS.

Your provisional plan of study should address the following:

- How do you stand with respect to meeting the MA program requirements (see §8)? List all course grades so far.
- How do you evaluate your performance in the courses you have taken and are currently taking?
- If you have a GTA/GRA-ship, how do you evaluate your performance so far?
- Declare whether you are taking the Thesis Track or Non-Thesis Track.

If you are planning to apply to philosophy or other academic PhD programs, the Thesis Track should be selected. As should come as no surprise, if you select the Thesis Track then you are required to write and defend a thesis. If you select the Non-Thesis Track, then you are instead required to take a Comprehensive Exam.

You may change from the Thesis Track to the Non-Thesis Track (or vice versa) once, but this must happen before the first month of the fall semester of your second year. If the Non-Thesis Track is exercised, Research and Thesis hours (5994) are *not* included in the Plan of Study. Project and Report (PHIL 5904) can be listed instead.

If you have selected the Thesis Track, you must submit a short thesis proposal along with your provisional plan of study. The proposal should include a description of the specific research to be undertaken. It should also include a brief review of the relevant literature and, in addition, an explanation of how the proposed project is related to the work of other scholars in the same area, and how you propose to make an independent contribution to scholarship. The proposal should include a bibliography. It should also include a plan of work and a timetable, indicating the dates and times to be spent on the various aspects of the project. While this timetable will be only an estimate, it will give you and your committee a measure of the manageability of the project within the time period designated. Thesis Proposals should not exceed five (5) pages, where about one page is dedicated to a reading list, one page to a timeline, and two to three pages to a description of the plan of work.

4.5. Annual evaluation

Towards the end of the spring semester, the regular faculty will meet in order to make general evaluations of all students. This evaluation will be based on a consideration of your grades, reports from the course professors, the annual evaluation by your

Advisory Committee, reports on your work as a GTA/GRA, your self-assessment letter, and any other material you wish to submit. The DGS will send you an email summarizing this evaluation. Note that the Graduate School requires that funded students maintain at least a 3.0 overall GPA.

Appeals of the outcome of the evaluation must be made in writing to the DH within two weeks of the written notification of the evaluation. In the event of an appeal, the DH will appoint an *ad hoc* committee, composed of three faculty members. Members of your Advisory Committee and the DGS are not eligible to serve on this committee. The *ad hoc* committee will reevaluate the materials and make a recommendation regarding the claims in the appeal to the department within two weeks of being appointed. The DH will render the final evaluation in these cases.

5. Summer, between first and second years

5.1. Working on your thesis

A full draft of your thesis is due at the end of the summer provided that you are on the Thesis Track (see §6.1). Therefore, you need to work on your thesis in the summer between your first and second years. You should set ample time aside for writing the thesis, including independent research and background reading.

5.2. Meet and greet

See §2.4 and 3.1

6. Fall semester, second year

6.1. Full thesis draft

By **August 31**, a full draft of the thesis must be submitted to the members of your Advisory Committee and the DGS if you are on the Thesis Track.

6.2. Thesis committee

By **October 1**, you must form your Thesis Committee if you are on the Thesis Track. If you are content with your Advisory Committee serving as your Thesis Committee,

you don't have to do anything; the Advisory Committee will automatically convert to your Thesis Committee at this point.

If you would like to have your Thesis Committee comprised in some other way, you must make the relevant arrangements directly with faculty members. The same rules about who can serve on your Advisory Committee apply to your Thesis Committee. Make sure to contact the DGS to let them know about any changes you have made to your Thesis Committee.

7. Spring semester, second year

7.1. Plan of study

By February 1, you must submit an approved (signed) Plan of Study (whether on the Thesis Track or Non-Thesis Track—see Appendix 1 for the relevant form). The Plan of Study must meet the minimum required for the designated degree (see §8) and must be approved by the chair of your Advisory Committee in consultation with the DGS, the DH, and the Graduate School.

You are responsible for completing the Plan of Study form and for obtaining the required signatures, then submitting the form to the DGS before the deadline noted above. Any change in the Plan of Study must be approved by the DH, the chair of your Advisory Committee in consultation with the DGS, and the Graduate School. Once a course on the Plan of Study is taken for a grade, it must remain on the Plan of Study.

7.2. Settling on a thesis defense or comprehensive exam date

If you are on the Thesis Track, then you need to settle on date for your Thesis Defense (which must be in either January, February, March, or April). You do so by contacting your Thesis Committee members and arranging a date and time that works for everyone involved. Your Thesis Committee will agree upon a date only if you have a written draft of your thesis that is substantially complete such that significant revisions are not anticipated. The agreed upon date must be included in your letter of self-evaluation (see §7.3.), which itself is due on **April 1**.

If you are on the Non-Thesis Track, then you need to settle on a date for your Comprehensive Exam. You do this in consultation with the DGS. No exams will be scheduled after May 1. The agreed upon date must be included in your letter of self-evaluation (see §7.3.), which itself is due on **April 1**.

7.3. Letter of self-evaluation

By **April 1**, you must submit a letter of self-evaluation, along with your approved Plan of Study, to your Advisory Committee and the DGS that addresses the following:

- How do you stand with respect to meeting the MA program requirements (see §8)? List all course grades so far.
- How do you evaluate your performance in the courses you have taken and are currently taking?
- If you have a GTA/GRA-ship, how do you evaluate your performance so far?
- If you are on the Thesis Track, what is your Thesis Defense date? If you are on the Non-Thesis Track, what is the date of your Comprehensive Exam?

7.4. Scheduling thesis defense or comprehensive exam with the graduate school

You must **request to be admitted to final exam** for either your Thesis Defense or Comprehensive Exam using the Electronic Signature System. Just to be clear, the date you select here should be either the date of your Thesis Defense that you have settled on with your Thesis Committee or the date for your Comprehensive Exam that you have settled on with the DGS. You must submit this request at least two weeks before your desired exam date (i.e. Thesis Defense or Comprehensive Exam date).

If you are on the Thesis Track, then when you request to be admitted to final exam, the members of your Thesis Committee will have to sign an agreement as part of that form *saying that your thesis is ready for defense*. That means they will need to receive the thesis itself well *before* that time. You must send a draft of your thesis to all members of your Thesis Committee and the DGS at least two weeks prior to the date of the Thesis Defense.

7.5. Further tasks

Review the [Graduation Requirements](#) and then submit a Degree or Certificate Conferral Request online using Hokie SPA. A \$25 fee will be charged to your student account. You must do this by the [deadline](#) for your name to be printed in the Commencement Bulletin.

If you are on the Thesis Track: following a successful Thesis Defense, you are responsible for seeing that a properly formatted electronic copy of the thesis (ETD) is submitted to the Graduate School, along with the accompanying forms and archiving

fees. Pay special attention to the ETD submission deadline: missing that will also now require enrolling again during the summer to graduate (which will cost you a considerable amount of money). And don't forget about details such as the [ETD approval form](#), and the [archiving fee](#), which can hold up completion of degree.

8. Requirements for the MA Degree

8.1. Required credit hours

The MA degree requires a minimum of 30 semester hours of graduate-level coursework. Up to 6 of these hours can be from 4000-level courses in cases where the areas in question are not covered at the 5000 or 6000 level.

8.2. Two special requirements

These requirements—the Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Requirement and the Diversity and Inclusion Requirement—are satisfied by attending *PHIL 5004: Pro-Seminar*.

8.3. The logic requirement

All students, whether Thesis or Non-Thesis Track, must take PHIL 5505 (logic) in the fall of their first year (BA/MA students may postpone this requirement to the fall of their MA year), or must complete a rigorous test-out exam and then enroll in another course with a substantial formal component. Those who take 5505 must either pass it with a 'B' or better, or sit in on the course (or relevant parts of it) the following fall and take the comprehensive exam in logic, preferably at the end of the fall semester. Note that Thesis Track students, who do not generally have to take comprehensive examinations, may thus have to take this one if they do not get a 'B' or higher in 5505.

The test-out exam takes place before the start of the academic semester. Students who think that they may be qualified to pass it should consult with the professor teaching PHIL 5505 well in advance of the start of term. They may be asked to submit syllabi from previous logic coursework. Students must pass the test-out exam with a 95% in order to waive the PHIL 5505 requirement. They will also be required to take an additional course that has a significant formal requirement.

8.4. *Specific requirements for different tracks*

You must select either a Thesis Track or a Non-Thesis Track (see §4.3). If you take the Thesis Track, then you must include 6 hours of Research and Thesis on the Plan of Study, but *only those 6 hours may be counted toward the 30-hour requirement*. At least 21 hours must come from graded classes: independent studies, Research and Thesis, and Project and Report do not count as graded classes. The completed thesis will be evaluated by your Advisory Committee and must be successfully defended before that committee in an oral examination (see Appendix 1).

If you take the Non-Thesis Track, then at least 24 of your 30 credits must consist of graded coursework. The rest can be fulfilled with Project and Report credits. Note that Independent studies are Pass/Fail and do not count as graded classes. (The P/F option is available only for courses outside of the major, and may not be used for courses counting toward the 30-hour degree requirement, with the exception of PHIL independent studies, Research and Thesis, and Project and Report. These courses are all graded P/F and can be counted up to the limits given above.) Students on this track must successfully pass a comprehensive examination consisting of exams in each of the core areas (see §8.10).

8.5. *Grades*

To be eligible to continue in the MA program, you must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 (B average). Students whose GPA falls below this level may be placed on academic probation for one semester. After this semester, the student's GPA must remain 3.0 to remain in the program.

8.6. *Curriculum*

All students must complete the Core (see (a) below) and take a minimum of 12 hours from a list of approved courses (see (b) below)—3 of those credits from list (b) must be PHIL 5004. Not all courses are offered every year.

a. The Core:

- LOGIC: PHIL 5505 (*Symbolic Logic*)
- METAPHYSICS, EPISTEMOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE:
TWO of the following three core areas:
 - Metaphysics: PHIL 5214G (*Intermediate Metaphysics*)

- Epistemology: PHIL 5224G (Intermediate Epistemology)
- Philosophy of Science: PHIL 5614G or PHIL 5604G (Philosophy of Biology) or PHIL 5305/6 (Themes in Philosophy of Science and Technology) or PHIL 6334 (Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Science)
- HISTORY: TWO of the following courses:
 - PHIL 5204 (Topics in History of Philosophy)
 - PHIL 5344 (History of Ethics)
 - PHIL 6204 (Advanced Topics in the History of Philosophy)*
 - PHIL 6314 (History of the Philosophy of Science)
- VALUE THEORY: ONE of the following courses:
 - PHIL 5324 (Metaethics)
 - PHIL 5334 (Normative Ethics)
 - PHIL 5344 (History of Ethics)
 - PHIL 6324 (Advanced Topics in Ethics/Political Philosophy)*

*: Two “topics” courses under the same number will appear the same on your transcript.

b. Additional Requirements:

1. PHIL 5004 (Pro-Seminar in Philosophy)
2. 9 credit hours from the following list of courses:
 - PHIL 5204G (Intermediate Philosophy of Mind)
 - PHIL 5214G (Intermediate Metaphysics)
 - PHIL 5224G (Intermediate Epistemology)
 - PHIL 5304G (Intermediate Topics in Social and Political Philosophy)
 - PHIL 5604G (Intermediate Philosophy of Biology)
 - PHIL 5614G (Intermediate Philosophy of Science)
 - PHIL 5204 (Topics in the History of Philosophy)
 - PHIL 5305-6 (STS 5305-6) (Main Themes in the Philosophy of Modern Science and Technology)
 - PHIL 5324 (Contemporary Metaethics)
 - PHIL 5344 (History of Ethics)
 - PHIL 5506 (Symbolic Logic)
 - PHIL 5904 (Project and Report)
 - PHIL 5974 (Independent Study)
 - PHIL 5994 (Research and Thesis)
 - PHIL 6014 (Special Topics in Philosophy)

- PHIL 6204 (Advanced Topics in the History of Philosophy)
- PHIL (ASPT) 6224 (Distributive Justice)
- PHIL 6324 (Advanced Topics in Ethics and Political Philosophy)
- PHIL 6334 (STS 6334) (Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Science)

8.7. Equivalent courses

With the exception of Phil 5505 (which all MA and BA/MA students must take, unless they have successfully tested out), Virginia Tech undergraduates admitted to the MA program in Philosophy who have already taken a required course and obtained a grade of B or better will not be required to repeat the course to satisfy the core requirement. The course may not, however, count toward the 30-hour requirement, i.e. it may not be ‘double counted’ for that purpose (except as allowed in cases involving the accelerated MA program—see §9). Any student may petition to have courses taken at other institutions satisfy the requirement for a specific required course provided they present adequate information on the course to the Graduate Committee. The Graduate School limits transfer credits to 50% of the total credits required.

8.8. Substitutions

Substitutions for required courses may be granted only with the approval of the DGS. Please email the DGS to request substitutions. The Department wishes to encourage breadth in philosophical training. Course substitutions that detract from this objective will not be approved.

8.9. Thesis and thesis defense

If you take the Thesis Track, then you must write a thesis and successfully defend it. Your thesis should be a substantive piece of philosophy. It goes without saying that you should take advantage of the expertise of the members of your Thesis Committee (particularly your Thesis Advisor) in developing your ideas.

Most students who write a thesis do so with an eye towards using it as a writing sample for their applications to PhD programs in philosophy. If you plan to apply to PhD programs in philosophy, we encourage you to follow suit. As for writing samples, these usually consist of approximately 3,000 to 5,000 words. A thesis that is, say, only 3,000 words would be too short. So, one strategy you might pursue is this: first write your lean and mean writing sample (as PhD applications are due before your thesis), then, once that is done, expand this paper, going into more detail. The expanded, longer paper will be your thesis.

The purpose of the Thesis Defense is primarily to ensure your working familiarity with the details and implications of your thesis project. However, other topics may be explored in the Thesis Defense, within reason and at the discretion of the chair of your Thesis Committee. You must be registered during the semester in which the final examination is administered.

To pass your Thesis Defense, you are allowed at most one dissenting vote from the members of the Thesis Committee. If you fail the Thesis Defense, there must be a lapse of one full semester (a minimum of 15 weeks) before rescheduling the examination. You are allowed no more than two opportunities to pass the Thesis Defense.

Thesis Defenses are open to all members of the department and graduate students unless you request otherwise.

8.10. Comprehensive exams

In lieu of writing a thesis, students exercising the Non-Thesis Track must successfully pass a Comprehensive Exam covering the core areas. Your Comprehensive Exam will have three or four sections (depending on whether or not the logic section is waived). Each section corresponds to a course listed on your Plan of Study as satisfying the Core (see §8.6).

A complete exam looks like this:

- (1) Ethics
- (2) History of Philosophy
- (3) Metaphysics, Epistemology, or Philosophy of Science
- (4) Logic

The logic portion of the exam, however, will be *waived* for those who (a) passed 5505 with a 'B' or higher, (b) tested out of 5505, or (c) placed out of the 5505 requirement by getting a 'B' or higher in 3505 and 3506.

Each section will consist of *two questions* comparable to final exam questions in the relevant course you are counting toward meeting that core requirement. You will *pick one* question from each section and spend at least a couple hours writing an answer to it.

In order to construct each exam, the DGS solicits exam questions from the professors who taught the courses you are counting as your core courses on your Plan of Study.

This means that the DGS needs to receive from you, by a date determined by the DGS, a list that includes:

- The core courses (numbers and titles) from your Plan of Study
- The professor who taught each course
- The semester in which each course was taken
- The members of your advisory committee

Once you submit this list, you *cannot* make any changes. Examinations are scheduled in consultation with the DGS (see §7.2 and 7.4). To pass your Comprehensive Exam, you must have a favorable vote from a majority of the Examining Committee, which *for departmental purposes* consists of the people who contributed questions. But note that it is the Advisory Committee that ultimately signs off on the results. In case of a borderline result, the Department reserves the right to require follow-up work or to add an oral session to the examination. Results of the Comprehensive Exam will be made available in a timely manner. If you fail the exam, there must be a lapse of one full semester (a minimum of 15 weeks) before rescheduling the examination. You are allowed no more than two opportunities to pass the Comprehensive Exam.

9. The BA/MA Program

9.1. Details of program

The department offers an accelerated BA/MA program in philosophy for undergraduates at Virginia Tech. The degree consists of one year of graduate study undertaken while simultaneously enrolled in the final year of undergraduate, plus one year of study while enrolled at the MA level. Students must be officially admitted to the BA/MA program in the summer before their final year of undergraduate in order to take advantage of this program.

For details about the application process, contact the DGS.

9.2. Academic requirements

The academic requirements of the BA/MA are the same as the academic requirements of the traditional MA degree (see §8 for details), but students complete these requirements in a reduced timeline. This timeline is as follows.

9.3. Final fall semester of undergraduate degree

In the final fall semester of their undergraduate degree, BA/MA students are not officially enrolled in the MA portion of their degree, but may nevertheless take graduate-level philosophy courses that will count towards their distribution requirements. Students may enroll in PHIL 5505 and PHIL 5004 during this semester, or they may postpone enrolling in these courses until the Fall semester of their MA year.

Although not officially enrolled in the MA program, BA/MA students are expected to actively participate in departmental life attending the department orientation luncheon (see §3.1 for details), attending talks, and participating in reading groups (see §2.4 for details).

9.4. Final spring semester of undergraduate degree

In the final spring semester of their undergraduate, students formally begin their MA coursework. We recommend that students complete PHIL 5004 in this semester, rather than in their final semester.

BA/MA students must also keep in mind the following deadlines:

Deadline to submit updated application. Students interested in applying for a GTA funding package must submit an updated application by **February 1st**. This application should include:

- Academic transcripts from all colleges attended
- Three academic letters of recommendation
- A writing sample (a piece of philosophical writing strongly preferred);
- A curriculum vitae or resume;
- A statement of interest

This application will be assessed alongside all applications to the traditional MA program.

Advisory committee deadline: Students are required to form their Advisory Committee by **March 1**. See §4.2 for details.

Letter of self-evaluation, provisional plan of study, declaration of track, and thesis proposal deadline: Students must submit a letter of self-evaluation, provisional plan of study, declaration of track and thesis proposal by **April 1**. All requirements for these documents are the same as those listed in §4.3, with the following exception: given that BA/MA students have spent less time in their MA degree than traditional MA students, we recognize

that their thesis proposals (if they choose to submit one) will likely be shorter and less substantive.

Annual evaluation. Towards the end of the spring semester, the regular faculty will meet in order to make general evaluations of all students. See §4.4 for details.

9.5. Summer before MA year

BA/MA students pursuing the thesis track should aim to have a thesis draft to their advisory committee by **August 31st**. In light of the fact that they are on a reduced timeline, they may negotiate a later submission date for this draft with their committee. However, it is imperative that BA/MA students have a thesis draft by mid-fall semester at the latest if they are planning on a May graduation.

Students should also aim to attend the departmental meet and greet (see §2.4 for details)

9.6. Fall semester of MA

BA/MA students in the Fall semester of their MA must enroll in Phil 5505.

By **October 1**, BA/MA student on the thesis track should form their Thesis Committee (see §6.2 for details).

9.7. Spring semester of MA

The deadlines and expectations for BA/MA students in the Spring semester of their MA are the same as the deadlines and expectations for MA students in their second Spring semester. See §7 for details.

10. Offices and department facilities

10.1. Offices

All graduate students will be provided with office and desk space (subject to availability) as well as access to an internet connection, photocopier and printer. Priority in the daily use of offices will be given to GTAs meeting with their undergraduate students. Otherwise, graduate students are welcome to use office space

for study and other class related activities and are free to enter the building at any time (keys are provided).

Offices and other department facilities (computer lab, copy room, mail room) must be kept locked when not occupied. Only departmental faculty and graduate students are authorized to have regular access to the computer lab, copy room and mail room. Graduate students are required not to allow anyone else, including undergraduate students, access to these rooms or the keys to these rooms. Failure to observe this policy could result in loss of your own key privileges.

10.2. Copying, printing, and mail

You are given access to the department's copy machine as well as laser printers connected to computers in Graduate Student offices. You are asked to use laser printers sparingly and only for class or research material. Use the copier if possible, and please make double-sided copies. Printer paper is for printing and copying only.

You are assigned mailbox space and can send and receive professional mail, but no personal mail, through the Department. There is a bin for outgoing mail in the main office. On-campus mail may be sent with the Department's or individual's name and the four-digit on-campus mail code. On-campus envelopes are available in the main office. The Philosophy Department's code is 0126. The department mailing address is:

Department of Philosophy
Virginia Tech
220 Stanger Street
229 Major Williams
Blacksburg, VA 24061-0126

The department fax number is 540-231-6367, and is for university business only. Ask a staff person for instructions when first using the machine.

10.3. Seminar Rooms: 215, 225

The department has two seminar rooms: MJWH 215 and MJWH 225. 215 can be booked for department activities and events only, and bookings may be limited in time and frequency. Consult the Department Business Coordinator (Jin Tian Acton) about room bookings. Seminar rooms can be used for private study if no one is using them, but you must leave immediately if the room is booked.

11. Frequently Asked Questions

11.1. Maintaining Clean Student Offices and Workspaces

Q: How does the trash collection for our offices work?

A: Once a week for most rooms; put any food items, including empty containers, in the restroom trashcans as those are emptied daily. Restrooms and classrooms are cleaned daily (facilities staff for the latter work at night by contract). Offices are swept once a week, on Thursdays.

Q: How does it work for the common rooms (Copy room, Mail room, Seminar room)?

A: Housekeepers empty the trash and sweep on a regular basis. They mop/wax the floors once or twice a year. The rest is up to us.

Q: What places/things are we responsible for cleaning?

A: Everything except as mentioned above.

11.2. Printing and copying

Q: What are we allowed to print and copy?

A: Academic items (class, research). Please follow copyright laws.

Q: Is there color printing/copying available for university activities (class, discussion sections, conference)?

A: Yes, see the Graduate Coordinator (Jin Tian Acton).

11.3. Rooms and keys

Q: What doors do my keys open?

A: 85P-1: Room 225, the seminar room; 85-2: outside doors; 85P-1: pass key to mailroom, Rm. 215 (conf. rm.), copy/work room

Q: What if I lose my key(s)?

A: First, try to find them—see the Graduate Coordinator (Jin Tian Acton), check with Squires, Police Dept., housekeepers, and department offices on the floor where you think you lost them. If you can't find them after looking in these places, see Brant for replacements.

Q: Can I reserve the seminar/conference room, and if so, how?

A: Yes. Sign in on dept. calendar, located in the main office. All use of these rooms should be noted on the calendar.

11.4. Registration and rosters

Q: What if I need/want to take a graduate seminar but it is full?

A: Contact the professor for permission, then contact the GC. Be sure to provide the Course Request Number (CRN) to the GC.

Q: How many hours do I need to be registered for?

A: Generally speaking, 18 (although the official minimum for fulltime enrollment is 12).

Q: As a GTA, how can I obtain class rosters for my recitation sections?

A: The course will be on Canvas and a roster is provided there.

11.5. Incompletes and audits

Q: When if ever should I take an incomplete in a course?

A: Students should ask for incompletes only in extraordinary circumstances. All incomplete work for a course must be submitted by the final exam date of the student's first subsequent term of enrollment. Incompletes not removed during the designated time are changed to F.

Q: What are the responsibilities for auditing a course?

A: Students auditing a course must attend at least half of the scheduled course meetings. If a student does not do so, the student may fail the course, which will have an effect on overall GPA and transcripts.

12. University policy on harassment, discrimination and sexual assault

Virginia Tech Policies on Student Conduct and Sexual Harassment are in force at all times on University property, including student meetings, and at off-campus locations if students in a program are meeting together for any reason. If you are assaulted or harassed at Virginia Tech, please report it immediately to the police or to the University's Title IX office, whichever is appropriate to the severity of the offense.

The following is taken from [Virginia Tech's policy on harassment, discrimination, and sexual assault](#):

Virginia Tech does not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of age, color, disability, gender (including pregnancy), gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law.

The prohibition against discrimination and harassment applies to all levels and areas of university operations and programs, to undergraduate and graduate students, administrators, faculty, staff, volunteers, vendors and contractors. Such behavior is inconsistent with the university's commitment to excellence and to a community in which mutual respect is a core value as articulated in the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.

...

The university's jurisdiction includes on-campus incidents and off-campus incidents that cause continuing effects on campus and includes complaints filed by students or employees, or others on their behalf, alleging discrimination or discriminatory harassment (including sexual harassment and sexual violence) carried out by faculty, staff, other students, or third parties.

Virginia Tech is also committed to the free and vigorous discussion of ideas and issues. This policy does not allow curtailment or censorship of constitutionally protected expression, nor does it attempt to address behaviors that do not constitute discrimination or harassment. Offensive behavior that does not violate this policy should be addressed by the appropriate supervisor or administrator.

If you have questions about this policy, or would like to report a case of discrimination or discriminatory harassment involving faculty, staff, or students, please contact:

The Assistant Vice President for Equity and Accountability
Office of Equity and Accessibility

Virginia Tech, North End Center
300 Turner St.
Blacksburg, VA 24061
Phone: 540-231-2010
equityandaccess@vt.edu