Philosophy Graduate Student Handbook

San Francisco State University

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# Important Deadlines (Spring 2023)

Advancement to Candidacy Form (to Prof. Montemayor) **March 1st**

(submitted once you have completed your prerequisites and are taking your 18th unit to be counted towards your degree)

Proposal for Culminating Experience (to thesis committee) **March 1st**

(submitted the semester *before* you plan to register for your thesis course: PHIL 898)

Proposal for Culminating Experience (to Prof. Montemayor) **March 15th**

Deadline to Apply to Graduate **February 17th**

Final Deadline to Apply for Graduation **May 19th**

Preliminary Thesis Format Check **April 7th**

Last Date to Take Oral Exam (thesis defense) **May 19th**

Final Format Check **May 19th**

Proof of Completion **May 19th**

# Graduate Coordinators

The Department of Philosophy has two Graduate Coordinators, each of whom handles different aspects of the MA program. The department also has a Graduate Program Administrative Coordinator.

**Professor Reid** [jwreid@sfsu.edu](mailto:jwreid@sfsu.edu)

Graduate Coordinator regarding matters of recruitment and admissions, including:

* Applications to MA program;
* Formal Logic Challenge Exam (in conjunction with logic instructor);

See: <http://philosophy.sfsu.edu/page/formal-logic>

* Information regarding student travel funds;
* Adviser for students before they have completed Phil 715;

**Professor Montemayor** [Montemayor@sfsu.edu](mailto:landy@sfsu.edu)

Graduate Coordinator regarding matters of progress to degree, including paperwork regarding:

* Advancement to Candidacy (ATC) and revisions;
* Proposal for Culminating Experience (PCE) and revisions;
* Change of Graduate Program Form (to move from Conditionally Classified to Classified Standing, usually after having fulfilled outstanding prerequisites);
* Cross Registration and Consortium Agreements (Berkeley and other CSUs);
* Work done at SFSU and in excess of Bachelor’s degree;
* Graduate-level work done at other universities.
* Paperwork regarding probation, declassification, disqualification.

**Olivia Walters**  [grdphl@sfsu.edu](mailto:grdphl@sfsu.edu)

Graduate Program Administrative Coordinator

* Helps with all administrative aspects of the graduate program. Always feel free to contact her with any questions or concerns you have.

# Program Overview

* The MA program in philosophy is **33 units**.
* Most courses count for 3 units, so the program can be completed with **11 courses**.
* **Three** of those are **required** courses:
  + **PHIL 715**: Seminar on Philosophical Writing
    - This is the gateway course for the program. Take it in **the first semester** in which you are taking graduate seminars.
  + **PHIL 896**: Directed Readings in Philosophy
    - This is the MA comprehensive Exam. Take it in the **second or third** semester in which you are taking graduate seminars.
  + **PHIL 898**: Culminating Experience
    - This is the thesis course. Take it in your **final semester**.
* **Four** of your courses must be **graduate seminars in philosophy**.
* The remaining **four** courses are electives. These can be:
  + Graduate seminars in philosophy,
  + Upper-division (300+) undergraduate courses in philosophy (other than 301, 303, or 450),
  + Teaching units,
  + Courses taken in other departments that are directly relevant to your thesis (requires the approval of the graduate coordinator),
  + Other philosophy courses (e.g. field projects, independent studies),
  + Courses taken at other universities (requires the approval of the graduate coordinator).
  + Note: **at least one** of these electives must be a graduate-level (700+) course.
* In the semester in which you are taking your **18th unit**, you submit your **ATC** Form, which is a plan for how your will complete these coursework requirements.
* In the semester **prior to enrolling in your thesis course**, you submit your **PCE**, which is your thesis proposal.
* Some students will enter the program with **prerequisites** outstanding.
  + Fulfilling these prerequisites should be **the first thing you do**.
  + You cannot submit your ATC or PCE until they are complete.
  + 205, 301, 303, and 450 cannot be counted towards the MA degree, but the 600-level courses that are requires to advance to candidacy can.
  + If you believe that you have been assigned a prerequisite in error, you may contact Prof. Reid about a correction.
  + Once you have fulfilled your prerequisites, you may contact your graduate coordinator about changing your status from ‘Conditionally Classified’ to ‘Classified’.

# Advancement to Candidacy form (ATC)

* The ATC outlines your plan for meeting the requirements for the degree.
* Submit this form in the semester in which you are taking the **18th unit** to be counted towards your degree, and **at least one semester before you intend to enroll in your thesis course**.
* You can find the ATC form here: <https://grad.sfsu.edu/content/advancement-to-candidacy>
* Deadline for you to submit this form:
  + **Spring Deadline: March 1**
* Important notes:
  + You should email your ATC to Prof. Montemayor in advance of the deadline. He will review it, ask for any necessary changes, and when it is ready, instruct you to submit it via Graduate Studies’ Docusign portal.
  + The timelines in the SFSU Bulletin and on the Graduate Studies webpage apply to administrators, not to you. Department deadlines are earlier so that we have time to process and correct your paperwork by the university deadline.
  + Your ATC should list:
    - 715, 896, and 898,
    - 4 graduate seminars in philosophy, and
    - 4 electives.
  + Keep in mind that:
    - **No more than 4 teaching units** can be counted towards the degree.
    - **At least one** of your electives must be at the **graduate level (700+)**.
    - List courses in which you are currently enrolled as ‘IN PROG’.
    - List courses that you have not yet taken as ‘TO DO’
    - **Do not leave any blanks**. If you do not know what course you will take, list any course from the Bulletin that meets the relevant requirements. This can be changed later.
* Note to students who are **conditionally classified**:
  + When you submit this form, you will be automatically changed to classified standing. Please include in your email to Prof. Montemayor how you have fulfilled your outstanding prerequisites.
* Checklist to Avoid **Common Errors** on the ATC
  + Note what year you started.

Be sure you have properly noted when you started the graduate program by selecting the correct University Bulletin year for the requirements listed below. For example, if you started in Spring ‘16, you choose ‘2015-16’; if you started in Fall 16, you choose ‘2016-17’.

* + Correct listing of classes
    - With the exception of courses at the 600-level, courses you took as **prerequisites cannot be counted toward the degree** (with the exception of 600-level courses) and, thus, should not be listed on the ATC form.
    - In the second grouping of classes, there must be **at least one class that is at the graduate level**; this can be a philosophy seminar, Phil 717, Phil 899, or a seminar in another graduate program (as long as it is related to your field of study and approved by the Graduate Coordinator).
    - **No class should be listed more than once** anywhere on the form.
    - If you would like to petition to have a class that is “older” than seven years count on your ATC, you also need to submit a Seven Year Limit Extension Form. Keep in mind that this petition may or may not be accepted.
    - If you would like to petition classes that you took outside of any consortium program that SFSU has with another university, you need to submit a form called Request for Graduate Program Transfer Unit Evaluation.
    - Grades in classes that are numbered **300-599**: In these classes, you must have received an **A or A-** to count them on your ATC.
    - List the Graduate Coordinator whose duty it is to approve this form (Professor Montemayor) as **both the Graduate Adviser and the College Graduate Coordinator**. (The Graduate Coordinators are the only advisers that sign the forms.)

# Submitting the Proposal for Culminating Experience (PCE)

* Submit this form one semester before you intend to enroll in your thesis course (PHIL 898).
* You can find the PCE form here: <https://grad.sfsu.edu/content/culminating-experience>
* **Before** you submit this form online, you should have it checked and approved by your **thesis director**, then your **thesis committee**, then **Prof. Montemayor**.
* Deadlines for you to submit this form to your thesis supervisor and to your entire committee:
  + **Spring Deadline: March 1**
* After your committee has approved your form, **email it to Prof. Montemayor**. He will check it, ask for any necessary revisions, and then instruct you to submit it via Graduate Studies’ Docusign portal.
* Note: You should begin a conversation about your plans with your committee well before this deadline.
* Deadline for you to submit this form to the Graduate Coordinator:
  + **Spring Deadline: March 15**

Important: Your PCE must be submitted to and **reviewed by the Graduate Coordinator before** it is submitted to Graduate Studies. The timelines in the SFSU Bulletin apply to administrators, not to you!

Please see the Prof. Montemayor so that you can be sure you have correctly filled out your forms. The most common errors are:

* Failing to fill out the required schedule for thesis work,
* Failing to sign underneath this schedule,
* Using more than the allotted 12 words in the titles of their theses.

# PHIL 896: The Comprehensive Exam

Contact the Graduate Coordinator if you have any questions about the guidelines below.

## Taking PHIL 896

* PHIL 896 is the Department of Philosophy’s qualifying exam for graduate students. The course tests the student’s ability to comprehend, explain, compare, and explore the views of philosophers working on topics selected by the Department faculty. The course also satisfies the University’s Written English Proficiency Requirement for graduate students.
* PHIL 896 is a mandatory CR/NC course. It may be repeated once if NC is earned the first time. It must be completed with a CR before the student may officially begin work on the master's thesis. Students are permitted two attempts to pass PHIL 896. Students who fail a second time will be subject to disqualification from the program.
* All students should confer with the Graduate Coordinator before enrolling in the course. Students who are Conditionally Classified are generally advised not to take the exam until all prerequisite work is completed. Students are encouraged to take PHIL 896 in their second or third semester of graduate-level work, and to have successfully completed three graduate seminars prior to attempting the course.
* Students who fail the course for the first time will be contacted by the Graduate Coordinator for a mandatory conference. Students will not be allowed to retake the course without having this mandatory conference.
* The passing grade for credit is a B-. Three faculty instructors grade the assignments for the course and confer to assign the final grades. The results of the course will be emailed to students within two weeks after the date of the final submission.
* It is possible to pass the course with distinction, although this honor will not appear on your transcripts.

## The Format of the Course

1. Summary:
2. Students will work on one topic throughout the semester.
3. Each topic will have four readings assigned to it.
4. Students working on the same topic will participate in four study sessions throughout the semester.
5. Following each study session, each student will submit a summary of the discussion at the session.
6. Additionally, each student will submit a final exam for the course.
7. An orientation session with the Graduate Coordinator will be held in the first two weeks of the semester.
8. Each semester, three faculty volunteer to assign readings, lead a discussion section on those readings, and assess student work for the course. Prior to the start of the semester, the Graduate Coordinator will inform students of the three topics that the faculty volunteers have chosen for that semester, along with the readings for each. Each set will consist of four readings, and will have at least one contemporary and at least one historical selection.
9. Each student will work on one of those topics throughout the semester. Students begin the course by submitting a ranked list of the topics on which they wish to work to the Graduate Coordinator, who will then assign each student to a topic, taking these preferences into consideration. A student cannot undertake a topic on which they have taken a course as a graduate student at SFSU.
10. Students assigned to work on the same topic constitute a study group for that topic. Students from each study group will meet four times during the semester to discuss the assigned readings (including one meeting with the faculty volunteer for that topic). All meeting times will be posted by Graduate Coordinator prior to the start of the semester, although students may meet at other times, if all the members of a group and their faculty volunteer agree.

Within a week of each meeting, each student will submit their own summary of the discussion at that meeting. These summaries each constitute 10% of the student’s grade in the course. Your summary should have the following format.

1. The summary should state the text(s) that was discussed.
2. It should begin with 1-2 sentences that summarize the overall discussion during the meeting.
3. It should then be broken down into sections, and sections should be structured as follows:
4. Each section should have a clear and concise header that is a statement that tells the reader what was discussed by the group with respect to a particular issue in the reading. For example:
5. “The group discussed how Rawls defines legal obligation in Rawls's “Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play.” We came up with the following proposals:” or
6. “The group discussed the positions for which Smith argues in Smith’s “On Knowing God’s Nature.”
7. Under that header statement, in bullet point or numbered form, the writer should present the reasons the group discussed in support of the positions taken with respect to the issue at hand in clear, concise sentences (2-3 sentences). For example:
8. “Some group members concluded that Rawls’s account of the duty of fair play makes it the case that it would only rarely be permissible to disobey the law. Other group members concluded that Rawls’s account of the duty of fair play makes it the case that it would often be permissible to disobey that law, provided that the society whose laws those were was sufficiently systematically unjust.” Or
9. “Some group members took the conclusion of the argument to be that God does not exist, because his existence is incompatible with human suffering. Others took it to be that we cannot know the nature of God, because we cannot understand the role that suffering plays in maximizing the goodness of the world.”
10. Each student will also submit a final exam that summarizes the main theses and arguments of each assigned reading, and of how these readings relate to one another. Your final exam should be no longer than 3,000 words. This exam counts as 60% of the student’s grade in the course, and the student must receive a B- or better on it to pass the course. Your exam should answer the following questions.

For each assigned reading:

1. What is the thesis for (or against) which the author is arguing in this paper? (If there is more than one thesis, state that and identify the theses.)
2. How does the author argue for this thesis or theses?
3. What, if any, are the subarguments that the author makes in support of the overall argument of the paper?
4. Does the author consider any objections to their argument? If so, identify these objections and briefly state how the author responds to these objections.

For the readings collectively,

1. How do each other these readings relate to the others? Some ways to answer this question:
2. Which readings present what arguments against which others?
3. Which readings share conclusions?
4. What is the logical space that these readings occupy with respect to one another? (E.g. do the articles have overlapping scope? Can the views expressed be located on a single dialectical spectrum?)
5. Students may collaborate in interpreting the material, providing feedback on each other’s writing, etc., but must each write their exams individually.
6. To preserve anonymous grading, faculty will not review drafts of the final exam. Students should also prepare their exams for anonymous grading before uploading, e.g. by ensuring that no identifying information is included in the body of the exam.
7. Meeting summaries and the final exam must be submitted on iLearn.
8. Late meeting summaries will be assessed a penalty of one-third of a letter grade per day late, and will not be accepted more than one week late.
9. Late exams will not be accepted, except where an emergency has prevented the student from submitting their assignment on time. Students may be required to provide documentation of the emergency.
10. If students have any questions about the organization of their study group, they should raise these questions with the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

# PHIL 898: Thesis

## Prior to Enrolling in PHIL: 898

* Most successful theses are expansions of a paper written for a graduate seminar in philosophy.
* Supposing you have such a paper that you want to use as the basis of your thesis, no later than the start of the semester prior to enrolling in PHIL 898, you should talk to the instructor of the course for which you wrote that paper about your thesis, and submit your PCE.

## Weeks 1 & 2 of the semester

* In the first weeks of the semester, get in touch with your thesis director to schedule an initial check in.
* Your PCE includes a schedule for writing your thesis. Be in touch with your thesis director throughout your final semester according to that schedule, or if you need to change that schedule at any point.

## Mid-Semester

* Work on your rough draft, according to the process upon which you and your chair have agreed. Remember that before you submit the final draft of your thesis to the department (deadline: Week 11), it will have to be reviewed by your committee, and you will have to incorporate any revisions requested. This process takes time, so plan accordingly!

## Before Week 11 of the semester

* Prior to submitting your final draft to the department, this draft should be approved by your entire committee, and they should have cleared you to schedule your defense.
* To schedule your defense, arrange a date and time with your committee, and then contact Olivia Walters ([grdphl@sfsu.edu](mailto:grdphl@sfsu.edu)) to set up the defense itself (reserve a room, setup a Zoom meeting, etc.), submit your draft, and begin your graduation paperwork.
* It is prudent to begin these arrangements early, as there are a number of students finishing each semester. Faculty have many other commitments as well.
* Olivia will prepare the necessary forms that will need to be signed at your defense, or will instruct you on how to prepare the forms that he cannot.

## Week 11 of the semester

* The final draft of your thesis must be submitted to the department at least a week before your defense (deadline: Week 12).

## At your Defense:

At your defense, you should plan to give a 10-15 minute presentation in which you explain the nature and significance of your thesis project and outline the main claims made and your arguments for them. You should prepare a printed handout, though your presentation should not consist of merely reading your handout. You can use Powerpoint, but it requires prior preparation for which you are responsible (i.e., for obtaining the technical devices that will project your materials). Then you should be prepared to answer questions from your committee. This discussion period usually lasts about 45 minutes to an hour, and then non-committee members are permitted to ask questions. After that, everyone but the committee leaves the room while the committee and other present faculty deliberate. Finally, the results are announced and the candidate is invited back in the room.

## Grace Semester and Beyond

Note: if you do not complete your thesis in the semester in which you register for PHIL 898, you are allowed one grace semester to do so. Your thesis director can assign you a grade of RP (Report in Progress) and change it once you are done. During this grace semester, you do not need to enroll in any courses.

If you do not finish your thesis in your grace semester, you must enroll in CEL 499 to maintain your continuous enrollment until you do finish. This can be done retroactively if you let your enrollment lapse, but it is best to avoid that.

Miscellanea

## Taking Classes at Other Universities while Enrolled at SFSU

* SFSU has several programs that allow students to pay fees at SFSU and to take classes at other universities. Please see this website for more information:

<https://www.sfsu.edu/~bulletin/previous_bulletins/1314/spenroll.htm>

* As part of the Cross Registration Program with **UC Berkeley**, the Department of Philosophy allows all MA students to take undergraduate courses at Berkeley. Students who have achieved a track record of excellent Master’s-level coursework at SFSU may be considered eligible to take additional courses; to take such courses, they will need: (1) an arrangement with a **faculty sponsor** at SFSU, (2) permission (and signature) from the **Graduate Coordinator**.
* The Consortium program is only available during the regular sessions of the academic year and specifically excludes summer session, winter session, and extension.
* The Berkeley cross-registration form can be found here: <https://grad.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/forms/uc-berkeley-sfsu-cross-registration.pdf>

## Petitioning Coursework Completed through Open University or at Other Institutions

* Students may petition a maximum of **six semester units** to count toward their MA degree. This may include any combination of Open University (CEL) work, credit by examination, and/or transfer work). For more information, see: <http://bulletin.sfsu.edu/graduate-education/academic-policies-procedures/>
* Students who completed their BA degrees at SFSU and who took courses that were not counted towards their BA degrees may also petition to count such courses toward their MA degrees.

## Student Travel Funding

Students may apply for funds to aid in travel to present work at conferences that will contribute to their philosophical studies and/or careers. Funds will be awarded according to the following criteria.

* Students should be presenting original work, although students delivering comments may also apply.
* Presentations should be beneficial to the advancement of the student’s philosophical studies and/or career.
* Students already receiving travel funding from another source (e.g., APA travel funds) are not eligible.
* As a rule, acceptance to student conferences or student sections of conferences will not be assessed as sufficiently important to advance a career, although these are very helpful as a first step in learning how to submit and in networking. Occasionally, however, a student conference will be highly selective and will qualify.

The earlier the application is made, the better. To submit an application, please contact Olivia Walters at grdphl@sfsu.edu.

## Suggested Timeline for Applying to PhD Programs

### Spring and Summer

* Make appointments with your professors so that you can talk with them about your plans.
* Begin thinking about which paper you will submit as your writing sample. Note that you may want to revise (and perhaps lengthen) your paper with the help of one or more of your professors. This is true even if you received an A on this paper.
* Study for and take the GRE.
  + Note that it is highly recommended that you study for and take this exam before the fall semester when you will apply for programs. This is because the process of applying for programs itself can be a time-consuming task, it you should not over burden yourself during this time.
  + If you google ‘GRE’ the GRE homepage will come up. Follow the links for information about the different kinds of exams (paper-based, computer-based), how many times you can take the exam, different ways of receiving your scores, etc.
* Consider many different graduate programs.
* Ask three professors to write letters that recommend you. These professors should be: (1) your thesis committee chair; (2) the second person on your thesis committee; (3) one of the following: the third person on your committee, if you have one; a faculty member in whose graduate seminar you did superb work; a faculty member for whom you have TAed; (note: this third person does not need to be doing research in your field).
  + Be aware that all faculty need to know of your request before the beginning of September so that they can budget their time. Note also that faculty are sometimes on leave and are not available to write letters in the fall, which is a good reason for contacting them in spring or summer. Keep in mind that under the current modes of submitting recommendations electronically, the submission of each letter is enormously time consuming for faculty; for this reason, faculty may put a limit on the number of letters they will submit on your behalf.
  + Note: When you ask the professors to write your letters, be sure to ask whether they will be able to write you a good letter (you should not have any lukewarm letters in your dossier).

### Early September

* Gather application forms (and financial aid and housing information) from the programs to which you are considering applying. Schools prefer that you complete on-line applications. Be sure to check departmental web pages for application important information and deadlines.
* In deciding where to apply, consider the specialties, placement record, character, and size of the program. You should also consider the pros and cons of M.A. versus Ph.D. programs.
* You should apply to a number of programs. The competition is stiff, and you should be sure to apply to a number of “fall back” schools. (People often recommend submitting ten applications.)
* Draft your statement of intent.
* Work on your writing sample.
* Connect with the professors who will write your letters. Talk with them about your progress with respect to where you will apply, your statement of intent, and your writing sample.
* At this point, you should be able to provide to your letter writers the following:
  + a list of the schools to which you are applying,
  + clear directions about to where the letters should be sent,
  + your unofficial transcripts,
  + a draft of your statement of intent,
  + a draft of your writing sample,
  + Prior work you did for their classes.

### March to December

* Work on your statement of intent and writing sample. Show drafts of these to the professors who are writing letters that recommend you.

### January and February (sometimes December)

* Applications are due!