

PHILOSOPHY, M.A.

The USC Department of Philosophy is an intellectually active and pluralistic community offering a congenial environment for graduate study. We host numerous invited speakers, workshops, and major conferences. The department seeks to provide tools (analytical methods, conceptual schemes, writing skills) that are beneficial to a variety of professional outcomes within and without of academia.

The department understands itself to have four essential disciplinary strengths:

- Normative theory, including ethics, applied ethics, and philosophy of law. The faculty has particular strengths in normative ethical theory, bioethics, engineering ethics, environmental ethics, and the ethics of emerging technologies. In addition to research, faculty in these areas also contribute to the public profile of the department through public-facing work.
- Philosophy of science. We emphasize issues and methods that are closely tied to the actual content of the sciences, whether contemporary or historical. Collaboration with the Ann Johnson Institute is an important element of the department's strength.
- Philosophy of language. The faculty has particular strengths in semantics and pragmatics, emphasizing both foundational issues and experimental methods. Collaboration with the Linguistics program is an important element of the department's strength.
- History of philosophy. While the department does not possess a strength in a particular area of history, we consider it a strength, and a necessary part of our departmental identity, that we are committed to history, and maintain essential coverage across the history of philosophy.

The department regularly collaborates with various units across campus such as Linguistics, Classics, Women and Gender Studies, Physics, Biology, Engineering, Law, Music, Nursing, and Public Health.

Deadlines

Students are normally admitted to the program only in the fall semester. The absolute deadline for applying for the fall semester is July 1. However, to receive full consideration for financial assistance, applications should be completed before January 15. Applicants who do not meet the January deadline will still be considered for and may even be awarded support, but opportunities become increasingly limited after this date.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to synthesize a wide breadth of philosophical knowledge, including factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge.
2. Students will be able to conduct original research of an extended investigation in philosophy.

Admissions Requirements

The philosophy department admits new students into the M.A. program in the fall semester of each year. Applications for admission are reviewed during the previous spring term. Normally, to be admitted with full standing, a student will have completed 18 hours of course work in philosophy above the introductory level. Applicants must also have met the general admission requirements of the Graduate School.

Applicants should arrange for three letters of recommendation and transcripts to be sent to the Graduate School; GRE scores are not required. In addition, all applicants should send a sample of philosophical writing (maximum length 6,000 words) and a brief statement of purpose (400 words) to the department.

Letters of recommendation should come from persons familiar with the applicant's academic achievement and potential and should specifically address the applicant's potential for success in a graduate degree program.

Transcripts of prior undergraduate and graduate work must show sufficient promise of ability to do graduate work. Hence the department looks for GPAs in the range from 3.00 to 4.00 for all undergraduate work and 3.50 to 4.00 for all graduate work (on a 4.00 scale).

Applicants whose native language is not English are required to submit a satisfactory score on the TOEFL or the IELTS Intl. Academic Course Type 2 exam. For admission to the M.A. program, applicants must achieve a minimum score of 570 PBT or 80 IBT, which is also the minimum requirement for entrance into the Graduate School. The minimum acceptable overall band score on the IELTS Intl. Academic Course Type 2 exam is 6.5.

Evidence of high potential from several parts of an applicant's file may occasionally outweigh a low test score or a low GPA.

Students whose undergraduate major was not philosophy may be considered for admission on a conditional basis. If admitted, special programs will be arranged to provide them with the background necessary for graduate study.

Degree Requirements (30 Hours)

Students in the M.A. program may elect either the thesis or non-thesis option.

Course Requirements

Students in the M.A. program may elect either the thesis or non-thesis option. Students in the M.A. program who choose to write a thesis are required to take eight graduate philosophy courses (24 non-thesis semester hours), at least four of which must be at the 700-level taken in face-to-face format. An additional 6 semester hours of PHIL 799 are also required. Without a thesis, eleven courses (33 non-thesis semester hours) are required, at least 6 of which must be at the 700-level taken in face-to-face format.

Logic Requirement

Successful completion of PHIL 511, taken either as an upper-level undergraduate course or as part of the graduate program, is required of all M.A. students.

History Requirement

Successful completion of at least two upper-level history-of-philosophy courses is required of all M.A. students: at least one from Ancient to Renaissance Philosophy, and at least one from Early to Late Modern Philosophy.

Ancient to Renaissance Philosophy

Course	Title	Credits
PHIL 505	Plato	3
PHIL 506	Aristotle	3
PHIL 526	Hellenistic Philosophy	3

PHIL 701	Studies in Ancient Philosophy	3
PHIL 507	Medieval Philosophy	3
PHIL 540	Renaissance Philosophy	3

Early to Late Modern Philosophy

Course	Title	Credits
PHIL 501	British Empiricism	3
PHIL 502	Continental Rationalism	3
PHIL 508	Hume	3
PHIL 509	Kant	3
PHIL 723	Hegel	3
PHIL 705	Studies in 17th- and 18th-Century Philosophy	3
PHIL 707	Studies in 19th-Century Philosophy	3
PHIL 709	Studies in 20th-Century Philosophy	3
PHIL 503	Analytic Philosophy	3
PHIL 721	Pragmatism	3
PHIL 504	Phenomenology and Existentialism	3
PHIL 534	Contemporary European Social Philosophy	3
PHIL 706	Studies in Continental Philosophy	3

Note: PHIL 760, Special Topics in Philosophy, and PHIL 797, Independent Study, may count as history courses. This will be determined by material to be covered. PHIL 707 may count as either early or late modern history requirement depending upon the material to be covered. These determinations are made by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the instructor.

Language Requirement

A reading knowledge of one foreign language is required of all M.A. students. The Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures administers tests of foreign language competency.

Comprehensive Examination

The MA Comprehensive Exam is a written exam consisting of a revised version of one of the student's first-year papers or a similarly-high-quality paper on an approved topic of interest to the student. This paper will be assessed by two faculty members, to be designated by the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the student and possible examiners. Normally the paper will be written under the supervision of at least one of the examiners.

The MA comprehensive exam is intended to demonstrate mastery of the skills required for basic philosophical writing. These include the ability to articulate and defend a thesis on the basis of argument and textual interpretation. The standards for assessing the MA exam lie between the standards for evaluating undergraduate work and PhD-level work. While the MA comprehensive exam assesses many of the same skills involved in undergraduate writing, the exam holds students to a high standard, because it requires mastery of these skills. On the other hand, the MA comprehensive exam is less demanding than the PhD comprehensive exam, because the former does not require students to make an original contribution to the literature and, consequently, does not require the level of research needed to show that such a standard has been met. Rather, the extent of research involved in the MA comprehensive exam is variable and depends upon the paper topic and the judgment of the faculty advisor.

These papers will vary in length (15 to 30 pages, 12pt, double-spaced, etc.). A final version must be submitted to the examiners and to the

Director of Graduate Studies by August 15 prior to the beginning of the student's second year in the program.

These papers are graded "pass" or "fail." The result will be reported to the Graduate Director and to the student within ten days of the examiners' receipt of the paper. A student whose August 15 paper does not pass may resubmit a revised version at most once anytime before the following January 16. The result of that second assessment will determine whether the student passes or fails the MA Comprehensive Exam.

Thesis Option

Students who choose the thesis option must also write a master's thesis. The thesis topic should be chosen in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies and a member of the Graduate Faculty. The latter will act as thesis director and first reader. Another member of the faculty, appointed by the Director of Graduate Studies, will act as second reader. A thesis proposal approved by the two readers should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies, normally within sixty days of the date on which the M.A. Comprehensive Examination is passed. The proposal should be several pages in length, outlining the topic and argumentative structure of the proposed thesis. It should include a title, and be accompanied by a fairly substantial bibliography.

Theses vary in length, but are typically about 15,000 words long (60 pages, double-spaced). Normally a thesis goes through a number of drafts before it is approved. A final draft of the thesis must be submitted to the two readers for their approval at least five weeks before the end of the term in which the student plans to graduate.