

**GUIDELINES FOR THE FULFILLMENT PHIL 910  
IN THE MA PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM**

**AT**

**FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY OF STEUBENVILLE**

The MA philosophy faculty believe that the culmination of the M. A. Program in Philosophy consists in students demonstrating their ability to write philosophical works of a certain caliber. It is the means by which an evaluation is made of the extent to which students' have fulfilled the goals of the program. These goals, which also appear in the graduate catalogue, are the following. Students upon completing the M. A. Program are expected to be able to articulate a significant philosophical problem or question and to develop and defend a position regarding this issue. The position should be defended using a philosophical methodology such as offering arguments, making distinctions, clarifying terminology and anticipating objections and responding to them. Students are also expected to be able to explain and analyze the position of some significant philosophers who have dealt with the problem or question.

Students can fulfill this writing requirement in one of two ways though in each case students must enroll PHL 910 (Thesis Research). Students can write a master's thesis (a work from 45 to 75 pages) or they can write two shorter articles. The norms for completing each of these two options are described below. It is important that students notify the director of the MA philosophy program which of these two options they intend to pursue as soon as possible once they begin their graduate studies. Students who elect one option and then change their mind and elect the alternative, may extend the time required to complete the MA degree.

## **1. NORMS FOR PREPARING, WRITING, AND DEFENDING THE M. A. THESIS**

(A) The preparation for writing a graduate thesis begins with a thesis proposal. The thesis proposal should be written within the framework of the program goals described above. In selecting a philosophical problem or question, a student should ensure that the topic is not merely a historical or textual study. The problem or question addressed in the thesis can take the form of a critical study of some major philosopher or can center on the texts of an author. But the student should nevertheless go beyond a purely textual study of a philosopher's work. The texts or philosopher should be studied, not just for the sake of understanding the texts, but also and above all for the sake of understanding better the issue that is at stake in accordance with the famous utterance of St. Thomas that "the point of studying philosophy is not to learn what others have thought about what is true, but to learn about the truth." A thesis topic need not center on a particular philosopher or philosophical texts, but can focus on a particular philosophical problem or question. However, in all cases the thesis should demonstrate the student's competence in discovering, analyzing, and evaluating relevant historical and contemporary research. Philosophical research by its nature has a social dimension whereby a philosopher engages in problems in the context of a community of scholars and often for the sake of dialogue with members of that community. Furthermore, the process of engaging others' positions critically, of testing one's position against those of other philosophers and scholars, of understanding how and why one's own ideas are different from others', can each contribute to sharpening and improving the argumentative and systematic dimensions of the thesis.

(B) A student is not eligible to enroll in PHL 910 (Thesis Research) until 24 hours of course work have been completed, and the student has an approved thesis proposal. Since an approved thesis proposal is needed in order to enroll in PHL 910, a student is eligible to submit a thesis proposal to the Director of the M. A. Program once he or she has completed 18 hours of course work. Submitting a thesis proposal after 18 hours have been completed allows students to get a head start in writing their thesis proposal so that it is approved well before students are eligible to enroll in PHL 910. In fact, once a thesis proposal is approved, a student can begin working on the thesis even though the student is not yet enrolled in PHL 910. Waiting until 30 hours of course work (or even 24 hours) is completed to begin work on a thesis proposal can extend significantly the amount of time it will take to complete the thesis and therefore the degree, since a thesis proposal must be approved before a student can enroll in PHL 910. Needless to say, a student should not begin working on a thesis until a thesis proposal is approved.

(C) It is important for students to understand that part of the philosophical activity of writing a master's thesis consists in picking a topic and considering how this topic will be investigated philosophically. It lies, therefore, with the candidate to take the initiative in formulating the thesis topic; this is not assigned to the candidate. While students can certainly pick a topic they are familiar with and interested in, they should not merely string together previously written papers.

The thesis proposal consists of a title, a formulation of the philosophical problem or question to be addressed in the thesis, and an explanation of the position that will be defended in the thesis. The thesis proposal should also mention the positions of the significant philosophers who will be dealt with in the thesis. The proposal should also include a bibliography of the works to be used in writing the thesis. Proposal length: 3-4 pages.

(D) The thesis proposal is submitted to the Director of the M. A. Program. The responsibility of the director is two-fold. The first task of the director is to ensure that the proposal has been written according to the proper form of a thesis proposal. Thus, the director will look to determine if a student explains the position that will be defended in the thesis, if there is an outline and bibliography, etc. The director will not determine if the student has a viable thesis topic. This is the responsibility of the thesis director and the other two members of the thesis committee. The second task of the director is to appoint a thesis defense panel that consists of a thesis director and two additional committee members. This is done in consultation with the student. The student should at this time express his or her preference for a thesis director, a preference that the Director of the M. A. Program will usually follow. A member of the thesis defense panel, but only one, can, in special cases, come from outside the M. A. philosophy faculty.

(E) Once a thesis proposal is assigned to a thesis defense panel it is the task of the three panel members to review the thesis proposal to ensure that it is a viable thesis topic. The primary responsibility for this lies with the thesis director, but any comments and suggestions of the other panel members should be given to the thesis director. Their comments should be considered by the thesis director since an approved thesis proposal requires the agreement of each panel member. Should there be any disagreement among any panel members regarding the thesis proposal, the committee members involved should attempt to resolve the disagreement among themselves. If the disagreement is still not resolved all three panel members should meet with the Director of the M. A. Program (assuming the Director is not already a panel member) in order to resolve the issue. Once the thesis director and other two panel members believe that the student has a viable thesis topic, a copy of the proposal along with a copy of the "Thesis Proposal Approval Form," signed by all three panel members should be given to the Director of the M. A. Program for inclusion in the student's file. (A copy of this form is included below) At this time the student can proceed with writing the thesis. However, a student can only enroll in PHL 910 Thesis Research if at least 24 hours of course work have been completed.

(F) Graduate students should keep in mind that the faculty members of the M.A. Philosophy Program of Franciscan University are ready and willing to serve as directors or readers of theses. The faculty is composed of philosophers with diverse philosophical backgrounds, interests, and beliefs. While faculty members will not decline to serve on a thesis committee simply because they disagree with the position defended in the thesis, graduate students should be aware that philosophy faculty have the right to decline to serve as a director or reader for a thesis that in their professional opinion is not viable or coherent.

(G) The thesis must be a minimum of 45 double-spaced pages in length and cannot exceed 75 pages (approximately 11,000 to 19,000 words) Pages include the title page, table of contents, bibliography, notes, etc. The thesis should be written according to a recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. A shorter book based upon the Chicago Manual called *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Turabian will also suffice. While the first draft of the thesis may depart from the manual of style, it is expected that the second and any subsequent drafts conform to what is prescribed in the manual. Thus, by the time a student has written a thesis that the thesis defense panel deems is sufficient for a thesis defense, the defense copy of the thesis should be in strict conformity to the manual. A defense of the thesis should not be convened if the thesis is not properly formatted. This is to ensure that the student will not have to spend time formatting the thesis after the thesis defense which would then require further review of the thesis by the defense panel after the thesis was defended. Any revision of the thesis after the student has successfully defended the thesis should be limited to small corrections such as typographical errors or similar mistakes not previously noticed by the members of the defense panel. The student should also take particular care to avoid any use of authors that could be taken as plagiarism.

(H) Students will typically write two full drafts of the thesis although in many instances three or more drafts may be necessary. The thesis director is responsible for aiding and guiding the student in writing the first draft of the thesis. Once a complete first draft is completed, the thesis director as well as the other two committee members will each be given a copy which they will carefully review with their comments given to the student. While students should not ignore the comments made by any of the readers, students should give particular consideration to the comments of the thesis director. It is important for students to keep in mind that they do not have to agree with any comments or criticisms made by the readers, but are expected to treat these comments seriously and take them into account. For example, a reader's criticism might be incorporated into the thesis as an objection to which the student would then respond. Conflicting comments between two readers could be resolved in a similar way.

With respect to the first draft more attention will be given by the panel members to content rather than the extent to which the thesis conforms to the manual of style. With respect to the second and any subsequent drafts attention will be given to content as well as to whether the thesis is written in conformity to the manual of style. Therefore, the defense copy of the thesis should be properly formatted and the manual of style followed.

When the two secondary readers have completed a reading of the first draft each of them will indicate whether or not he wishes to review further drafts of the thesis before reviewing the draft the student proposes as the final defense copy. However, all three readers must carefully read the proposed defense copy to determine whether it is acceptable for a defense and whether it conforms to the manual of style. If one of the secondary readers believes the thesis is not ready for a defense he must explain what concerns he has and what revisions are needed. Such an occurrence should be rare since the student has already received comments on at least the first draft from the readers.

(I) When the three panel members have agreed on the acceptability of the thesis for a defense, both in terms of its content and that the thesis conforms to a manual of style, the thesis director schedules as soon as possible a time and place for the student to defend the thesis. With the thesis director presiding, the candidate defends his or her thesis through an examination that lasts 65-75 minutes. Students should be prepared to begin the defense with a brief introduction to the thesis not lasting more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by two rounds of questioning by each panel member. Upon completion of the examination the three panel members shall determine first whether or not the student has passed the defense by achieving at least minimally the M. A. program goals. All three panel members must agree that the student has at least passed since each panel member is required to sign the cover sheet of the bound copy of the student's thesis. If there is agreement that the student has passed, then further consideration shall be given regarding whether or not the panel will confer the distinction of *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, or *summa cum laude*. The conferral of such a distinction requires the agreement of at least two of the three panel members. The deliberation of whether a distinction should be conferred will be based upon the extent to which the thesis and the student's defense of the thesis have fulfilled one or more of three program goals of the M. A. program beyond what is minimally acceptable. If students receive a high distinction on the thesis and its defense, they may be invited and strongly encouraged to present a 20 minute public lecture explaining the main problem or question investigated in the thesis and the student's position on the thesis topic.

In the unlikely event that the student's defense of the thesis is not considered passing, the panel will explain to the student what was unacceptable about the examination. (Such a situation is highly unlikely since the panel has already unanimously agreed that the thesis is suitable to be defended.) A second examination can be scheduled, if the student wishes, but no sooner than one month from the first defense. The second examination must be by the same panel members. If the committee judges that the performance of the student on the second examination is also not passing then the student shall receive a grade of "F" in PHL 910 and will not have completed the M. A. program.

If a student successfully passes the thesis, two hardbound copies with the proper cover sheet that will be signed by the three panel members should be given to the Director of the M. A. Program who is responsible for submitting the grade for PHL 910. (These two copies will be given to the library for inclusion in the collection.) Only after the Director of the M. A. Program has received these two copies can a grade be submitted for PHL 910, and only then will the candidate have completed the 6 hours of thesis research. At this point the student may use the title, "Master of Arts in Philosophy."

## 2. NORMS FOR PREPARING AND WRITING THESIS ARTICLES

The faculty of the MA philosophy program recognize that an important part of a career in philosophy consists in the ability to write papers that are presented at conferences and/or published in journals. This is why students are allowed to fulfill the thesis requirement by writing two shorter papers which make an argument.

(A) Students who elect to fulfill Phl 910 Thesis by writing two articles should first be aware that the completion of PHL 910 requires that each of the two articles actually be presented at a professional philosophical conference and/or published in a professional philosophical journal. (An article presented at a conference which is also published in a journal or proceedings of the conference counts as one article.) Students can consult the philosopher's index for a list of possible journals. Only journals that appear as "hard copies" should be considered; online journals should not. A resource for finding regularly scheduled conferences is included below.

(B) The preparation for writing the first of the two articles begins by students submitting an "Article/Conference Paper Approval Form." to the M.A. Director. This form includes a title, and the conference and/or journal to which the article will be submitted. (A copy of this form is included below.) This form should be accompanied by a one-page summary of the topic or question to be worked on in the article. Students should, if possible, also submit with the proposal a copy of the announcement or call for papers for the conference, or a journal's submission guidelines if students intend to submit the article to a journal. Students pursuing a concentration in bioethics in the MA program are required to write at least one of the two articles in the area of bioethics. However, the articles need not be presented at a bioethics conference or published in a bioethics journal.

(C) In selecting a specific topic or question for an article, a student should ensure that the topic is not merely a historical or textual study. The problem or question addressed in the article can take the form of a critical study of the position of a major philosopher or can center on a theme found in the texts of an author. But the student should nevertheless go beyond a purely textual study of a philosopher's work. The texts or philosopher should be studied, not just for the sake of understanding the texts, but also and above all for the sake of understanding better the issue that is at stake in accordance with the famous utterance of St. Thomas that "the point of studying philosophy is not to learn what others have thought about what is true, but to learn about the truth." The topic of an article need not center on a particular philosopher or philosophical texts, but can focus on a particular philosophical problem or question. However, in all cases the article should demonstrate the student's competence in discovering, analyzing, and evaluating relevant historical and contemporary research. Philosophical research by its nature has a social dimension whereby a philosopher engages in problems in the context of a community of scholars and often for the sake of dialogue with members of that community. Furthermore, the process of engaging others' positions critically, of testing one's position against those of other philosophers and scholars, of understanding how and why one's own ideas are

different from others', can each contribute to sharpening and improving the argumentative and systematic dimensions of the article.

(D) After receiving a proposal, the director of the MA program determines if the conference or journal is a professional philosophical journal or conference. If he determines that it is, he approves the proposal and then in consultation with the student assigns a member of the MA philosophy faculty as a mentor to assist the student in writing the paper. Students should bear in mind that faculty who are familiar with the proposed topic or area of the paper will prove to be the most helpful in assisting the student in writing the article.

The mentor also evaluates the proposal to determine if the conference or journal is a professional philosophical journal or conference, and also evaluates the suitability of the topic for the conference or journal and whether the student has a viable and cogent proposal. If the mentor is satisfied with the proposal, he also approves the proposal, and the approved proposal form is returned to the director of the MA program. If the director of the MA program is also the mentor, the proposal must be approved by another member of the MA philosophy faculty.

(E) The mentor assigned to the student then more carefully evaluates the topic or theme of the student's article and advises the student on any relevant points that will aid the student in writing the article. The mentor also constructs, in consultation with the student, a schedule for the student to submit drafts and revisions of the article with a view to any deadlines that may exist regarding the submission of the article. Students should rely on the professional expertise of the mentor in writing the article.

The article may in some instances be written in conjunction with a course. This requires the permission of the professor teaching the course. However, students should realize that quality of conference or journal articles usually exceeds the quality expected by a professor in a paper written for a course, even a paper that would be deemed by the professor an "A."

(F) If the paper is accepted and after it is delivered at a conference, the student should provide to the mentor a copy of the paper that has been revised to reflect the critical input that the student received from the audience to which the paper was presented. The mentor then evaluates the paper to ensure that he is satisfied with its philosophical quality. If the mentor is not in this way satisfied, he can ask the student to make further revisions of the article. If the mentor is satisfied with the quality of the paper, or when the student has made the requested revisions, the student provides to the director of the MA philosophy program a copy of the conference program as evidence that the paper was accepted and delivered along with a copy of the paper. If the paper is accepted for a journal publication, the student should provide to the director of the MA program a copy of the paper and a copy of the letter of acceptance with the proposed date of publication. These documents will be placed in the student's file.

The entire procedure outlined above should be followed especially in the instance in which the conference requires only the submission of an abstract. The mentor should assist the student in composing the abstract, as well as in writing the paper.

(G) If the paper is not accepted for a conference or publication, students may elect to try a different conference or journal. In this case a new “article proposal approval form” must be completed. This is to ensure that the second conference is a professional philosophical conference or the journal a professional philosophical journal. Students should keep in mind that an article rejected by a journal may still be accepted by another journal or conference, and the same for an article rejected by a conference.

Students may instead wish to start a different article in which case the procedure outlined above must again be followed; or a student may elect to pursue the option of writing a thesis.

(H) The procedure for writing and completing the second article is the same as that described above. A student need not have successfully completed the first article in order to submit a second proposal. This allows the student time to work on a second article at the same time as the first, for instance, while waiting to hear from a conference or journal on whether an article has been accepted, or in the instance in which the deadlines for the submission of articles for two conferences are around the same time. The mentor assigned to the student for the second article need not be the same as for the first article. Again, expertise in a certain area should be a consideration when a mentor is assigned. In addition, with the submission of a second proposal a student should be enrolled in PHL 910.

(I) If students wish to present papers at a conference sponsored by the MA philosophy program at Franciscan University, they are still required to follow all of the procedures described above and will be held to the same standards of submission and review that apply to anyone who submits a paper for the conference.

(J) Once a student has fulfilled the requirements for writing two articles as described above a grade will be submitted for PHL 910 by the director of the MA philosophy program. This grade will be a composite of the two grades assigned by the two mentors.



**ARTICLE/CONFERENCE PAPER APPROVAL FORM**

*Proposal:*

**DATE:**

**NAME:**

**TITLE:**

**CONFERENCE:**

**JOURNAL:**

**APPROVAL:**

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DIRECTOR, MA PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM

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MA PHILOSOPHY MENTOR

*Final grade:* \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:**

**SIGNATURE OF MENTOR:**

***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

***Proposal:***

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVAL:**

Thesis Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Panel Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Panel Member: \_\_\_\_\_

***Defense:***

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRADE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **SOME RESOURCES FOR THESIS PAPERS**

A list of conferences and calls for papers can be found at the American Philosophical Association website.

[www.apaonline.org](http://www.apaonline.org)

Philosophy and Bioethics Blog

Has lists of ethics, political, and philosophical journals.

<http://philosophyandbioethics.blogspot.com/index.html>

Philosophy Journal Information Web Site

<http://wikihost.org/wikis/philjinfo/wiki/start>

Listing of Philosophy Journals and Citation and Rejection Rates

[http://fleetwood.baylor.edu/certain\\_doubts/?page\\_id=823](http://fleetwood.baylor.edu/certain_doubts/?page_id=823)

Conference Paper Guide

A resource on the basics of how to write conference papers and abstracts

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/861.asp>

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