Handbook for the PhD Program in Philosophy

USC School of Philosophy

Fall 2019

Contents

1 Preamble 4

2 Overview of the PhD program 5
   2.1 Coursework ........................................ 5
   2.2 Transition from coursework to dissertation ......... 7
   2.3 Dissertation ........................................ 7

3 Coursework 8
   3.1 Core requirements .................................. 8
   3.2 Logic requirement ................................... 9
   3.3 Distribution requirements ............................ 9
   3.4 Teaching and research tool requirements ............ 10
CONTENTS

3.5 Additional courses ................................................. 10

4 Screening procedures .................................................. 12
  4.1 First year review ................................................. 12
  4.2 Second year review ............................................. 12

5 The area exam .......................................................... 16
  5.1 The point of the exam ........................................... 17
  5.2 Another point of the exam .................................... 18
  5.3 The area exam and the dissertation area ..................... 18

6 The qualifying exam .................................................... 20
  6.1 Key principles .................................................... 20
  6.2 Timeline .......................................................... 22
  6.3 The bar to clear in the qualifying exam ...................... 22
  6.4 The extent to which you can compare your situation to others’ .................. 23

7 Dissertation ............................................................. 24
  7.1 What a dissertation does ..................................... 25
  7.2 What a dissertation looks like ................................. 26
  7.3 How to get started .............................................. 27
  7.4 When the dissertation is done ................................. 28

8 Sample timelines ......................................................... 30
  8.1 Five year timeline .............................................. 31
  8.2 Six year timeline ................................................ 31

9 Teaching ................................................................. 33
  9.1 When you will be a TA ........................................ 33
  9.2 Your TA contract ................................................ 34
  9.3 TA eligibility ..................................................... 34
  9.4 Your responsibilities as a TA .................................. 34
  9.5 The faculty’s responsibilities to teaching assistants .......... 35
  9.6 TA training and support ....................................... 36
  9.7 Your teaching portfolio ....................................... 37
## CONTENTS

10 Departmental citizenship and service 38
  10.1 Talks and events ................................................. 38
  10.2 Service .......................................................... 39

11 University fellowships for advanced graduate students 40

12 Departmental opportunities for graduate students 42
  12.1 Progress awards ............................................... 42
  12.2 Travel grants .................................................. 43
  12.3 Flewelling summer awards .................................. 44

13 Placement 45
  13.1 Statement on non-academic placement ................... 45
  13.2 The academic job market in philosophy ................. 46

14 External links 50
  14.1 General .......................................................... 50
  14.2 Financial ....................................................... 51
  14.3 Health ........................................................... 51
  14.4 Courses .......................................................... 51
  14.5 Milestones ...................................................... 52
  14.6 International ................................................... 52
  14.7 Leaves ............................................................ 53
  14.8 Requests and appeals ........................................ 53
Welcome to the Philosophy Graduate Program at USC. This handbook provides an overview of the procedures and requirements of the PhD program as well as information on some of the resources the department makes available to you during the program of study. Some of this information is available from the USC catalogue, where you can find the official statement of the procedures and requirements of for a PhD in Philosophy:


For more general policies and requirements for a PhD degree at USC, you may consult:


The catalogue remains the document of record for the university and the graduate school, but the purpose of this handbook is to supplement it with a more detailed description of these procedures and requirements. In addition to the USC catalogue and the handbook, the Program Specialist (Natalie Schaad) and the Director of Graduate Studies (Gabriel Uzquiano) are available to help with any other complexities or any questions you may encounter as you navigate the graduate program. Chances are, after all, that we have not been able to anticipate all of the questions you may have. In addition to these resources, as you enter the program, you will be assigned a faculty advisor to whom you can turn for advice, suggestions, and any guidance you may need in your first year of study.
2 Overview of the PhD program

The PhD program in Philosophy breaks down into three broad stages:

1. Coursework (Years one and two)
2. Transition from Coursework to Dissertation (Year three)
3. Dissertation (Years four and beyond)

What follows is an overview of each of these stages. You will find a more detailed discussion of different aspects of each stage in later chapters.

2.1 Coursework

Years one and two generally involve coursework. The PhD program requires graduate students to complete at least 60 units of credit of which approximately 40 consist of course credits accumulated in the first two years of study. In order to complete the course requirements, you may sometimes find that you need to take another course in your third year, but this will depend on your plans for the first two years and on whether or not you are eligible for transfer credit for graduate work completed prior to USC. The coursework breaks down into core requirements, distribution requirements, and teaching and research tool requirements. In your first year, you will generally take three courses (12 credit units) per semester of which two will be core requirements. Since, by default, you will TA in the fall and spring semesters of your second and fourth year, you will take only two courses (8 credit units) per semester in your second year. Table 2.1 provides the typical course structure for the first two years of study.
CHAPTER 2. OVERVIEW OF THE PHD PROGRAM

Table 2.1: Years one and two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>SPRING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
<td>PHIL 500 (Contemporary Literature)</td>
<td>PHIL 503 (Contemporary Literature on Value)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 45x (Logic) or Distribution Requirement</td>
<td>PHIL 45x (Logic) or Distribution Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Two</strong></td>
<td><strong>TA section</strong></td>
<td><strong>TA section</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHL 593x (Teaching Philosophy) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHL 590 (Directed Research) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
<td>Distribution Requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Choose a faculty mentor for your second year paper</strong></td>
<td><strong>Submit second year paper by the end of week seven</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assemble an area exam committee and submit your signed third year plan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assemble an area exam committee and submit your signed third year plan</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Screening procedures

Your progress with coursework will be monitored by the graduate advisor and the department in an annual review at the end of your first and second year of study. The Graduate School requires a screening procedure to be administered before you take more than 24 credits in the program. This takes the form of a first year review in which the department reviews your coursework on the basis of individual reports submitted by the instructor for each course. The second screening procedure is the second-year review, which takes place at the end of the second-year of study and includes a review of coursework, teaching record, and a second-year paper.

Graduate transfer credit

If you have completed graduate work at your prior institution, you may be eligible for transfer credit. If you want to apply for transfer credit for some of this graduate work, you should follow two steps. The first step is to ask for a transfer credit report for this work. If the graduate work for which you want to apply for transfer credit was done within the United States, you should bring your official transcript for this work to the Degree
2.2. TRANSITION FROM COURSEWORK TO DISSERTATION

Progress Department, which will prepare the report for you. If the work was done outside the United States, then your work will be reviewed by the Graduate and International Admissions Office. You can find more detailed instructions by following this link to the Office of Academic Records and Registrar:

- https://arr.usc.edu/services/degree-progress/graduatetransfercredit.html

Once this report has been prepared and we have a list of eligible courses for transfer credit, you should meet with the graduate advisor to determine what portion of this work would be appropriate for transfer credit and whether or not any of the relevant courses can be used to fulfill any of your distribution requirements.

2.2 Transition from coursework to dissertation

Year three, and maybe part of year four, will be devoted to transition from coursework to your dissertation. One milestone is the area exam, which covers a broad area of philosophy for which you will receive a set reading list. The exam will consist of a written component followed by an oral examination with the members of the area exam committee, which generally consists of two faculty members specializing in the area.

The second milestone is the qualifying examination, which consists of a written prospectus followed by an oral examination of the subject matter of the proposed dissertation with the members of the qualifying committee. The qualifying committee consists of five faculty members of which one has a primary appointment outside philosophy at USC. The exam must be completed by the end of the seventh semester of study.

2.3 Dissertation

After the qualifying examination is completed, you will assemble a dissertation committee and begin to work on dissertation. Your dissertation committee can consist of three to five faculty members, provided one of them has a primary appointment at a different school at USC. Once you begin work on dissertation, you will be expected to enroll in a 2 unit course, PHIL 794. Doctoral Dissertation, each semester until you complete it. However, students are expected to enroll in no more than five semesters of 794, and no more than 8 units of credit can be used toward the degree regardless of how many semesters of PHIL 794 you take.
3 Coursework

You can, as usual, find a formal statement of the course requirements in the PhD in Philosophy entry in the USC course catalogue, but the general rule is that you must complete all five components listed below.

3.1 Core requirements

The core requirements consist of PHIL 500 (Introduction to Contemporary Literature) and PHIL 503 (Introduction to Contemporary Literature on Value). These courses are generally taken in the Fall and Spring semesters, respectively, of the first year of study.

PHIL 500. Introduction to Contemporary Philosophical Literature.

*Analysis of selected philosophical problems and theses of current interest; explication of major contemporary papers and/or books is emphasized.*

PHIL 503. Introduction to Contemporary Philosophical Literature on Value.

*Analysis of selected philosophical problems and theses of current interest; explication of major contemporary papers and/or books is emphasized.*

You must pass both courses with at least a B+ by the end of the second year of study.
3.2 Logic requirement

You can satisfy the Logic Requirement in more than one way. One option is to take and pass with at least a B PHIL 450 (Intermediate Symbolic Logic) or PHIL 452 (Modal Logic). These courses are periodically offered in different semesters to provide some flexibility for the completion of the logic requirement.

PHIL 450. Intermediate Logic

*Systematic study of the metatheory of quantificational logic, with applications to questions of decidability and completeness of formal systems including Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems.*

PHIL 452. Modal Logic

*Elements of propositional and quantified modal logic and the logic of counterfactual conditionals with an eye to some of their applications in contemporary philosophy.*

Alternatively, you can take an exam on the material covered in one of these courses. Whatever route you choose to take, you must make sure to complete the logic requirement by the end of your second year of study.

3.3 Distribution requirements

In addition to the core and logic requirements, you must take at least six more courses in different areas of philosophy in order to gain a breadth of exposure to different parts of the subject. These areas are grouped into three broad categories. To complete the distribution requirements, you must take:

- Two courses in *Metaphysics and Epistemology* broadly construed to cover, for example, Mind, Language, Logic, and Science.

- Two courses in *Value Theory* again broadly construed to include, for example, Aesthetics, Law, and Politics.

- Two courses in *History of Philosophy* construed to include figures and periods prior to 1879, which is when Frege published his *Begriffsschrift*. 
Your choices inside each broad area of philosophy must represent breadth, that is, they should not be too close to each other; this is something to discuss in advance with the graduate advisor. The distribution requirements are governed by a few more constraints:

- Neither PHIL 500 nor PHIL 503 can be used toward the distribution requirements.
- PHIL 590 (Directed Research) cannot be used to fulfill a distribution requirement.
- You can petition to use no more than two 400-level courses toward this requirement, provided that the departmental standards for graduate level coursework are satisfied.

The distribution requirements must be completed by the end of the fifth semester of study.

### 3.4 Teaching and research tool requirements

You must complete a 2 unit course on teaching during the Fall of your second year of study, which is the first semester in which you are scheduled to teach:

- PHIL 593x. Teaching Philosophy
  
  *Basic principles of philosophical pedagogy, with emphasis on practical applications and the importance of career-long skill development. Required for first-semester teaching assistants in philosophy.*

The research tool requirement is described by the catalogue as “an approved course in a subject essential to the student’s research program.” You may complete this requirement by a sequence of two PHIL 700 courses in your third year of study.

- PHIL 700x. Dissertation Seminar.
  
  *A focused environment in which to present and evaluate dissertation work-in-progress. Focus on peer and faculty feedback, developing professional presentation skills, improving critical communication skills.*

### 3.5 Additional courses

In addition to the courses mentioned above, the following may be used toward the 60 units of credits you need to complete the PhD program:
3.5. ADDITIONAL COURSES

- No more than two PHIL 590. Directed Research courses where you work one-on-one with a faculty member.

- No more than two courses outside the School of Philosophy, provided that they are in a field related to Philosophy. This would allow you to complete courses in Literature, Statistics, Mathematics, or Physics, if they relate to your dissertation goals. In case of doubt, you should consult with the graduate advisor.

Your progress with coursework will be closely monitored by the graduate advisor and the faculty. In your first three years, you will generally meet with the graduate advisor twice per semester: once when classes begin and once when they finish. These meetings will allow the graduate advisor to check your progress with the different course requirements and to advise you as to what else you may do to make sure you are on track with them. The faculty will review your annual progress at an end-of-year meeting after which we will be able to provide you with concrete feedback and advice for the summer and the next year of study.
4 Screening procedures

The Graduate School requires a screening procedure to be administered before you take more than 24 credits in the program. The screening procedures will take the form of two annual reviews at the end of the first and second year of study.

4.1 First year review

At the end of the first year, the department will review your coursework on the basis of individual reports by the instructor for each course. The faculty will provide you with individualized feedback and advice conveyed by the graduate advisor at the end of the spring of the first year.

4.2 Second year review

The second screening procedure is the second-year review, which takes place at the end of the fourth semester of study. This is another opportunity for the faculty to review and provide feedback on your coursework and teaching, your second year paper, and your plans for the third year of study. Your coursework will be reviewed, as before, on the basis of individual reports provided by the instructor for each course. In addition to this, the faculty will consider your teaching record for the second year of study when you will have had the chance to TA for two courses, one in the fall and one in the spring. The graduate advisor will relay the feedback to you at the end of the fourth semester in the program.
Two important aspects of the second year review require separate discussion: their second year paper and their plans for the third year in the program.

**The second year paper**

In your second year of study, you will be asked to submit a substantive piece of research in philosophy in the form of a journal-length paper. The point of the second year paper is to provide you with an opportunity to further develop and hone your skills for writing independent research in philosophy. These will be particularly important skills to develop with an eye to later stages in the program, where you will eventually producing independent research for your dissertation. The second year paper will initially, and anonymously, be reviewed by at least two faculty members selected by the graduate advisor. The faculty members in question will compose a written report, which will eventually be discussed by the faculty as a group with a view to providing you with individualized feedback on your writing. After the faculty meets to discuss the papers, the graduate advisor will relay both the written reports and set out to meet with you in order to discuss the individualized feedback provided by the faculty. Note well that given the rationale for the second-year paper, there is no expectation that the paper you submit should be publishable or even that you may ever submit it for publication. The point of the exercise is rather to make sure you have an opportunity to work on your writing independent research sooner rather than later. Of course the more time and effort you invest in the exercise, the greater the pay-off you may receive in the form of intellectual progress, helpful feedback, and concrete suggestions for further development or even for further work in the area covered by your paper. In short, it is best to focus on the second year paper as an opportunity to produce original research and receive helpful and concrete feedback on your writing.

**Timeline**

You will be asked to submit the second-year paper by the end of the seventh week of the spring semester. The rationale for this is that we want to make sure you devote the second part of the spring semester to coursework and the development of your third year plan on which more later. Once you submit an anonymized version of the paper, the graduate advisor will send it to two faculty members who are either specialists or at least competent with the area of the paper. The two faculty reviewers will then compose a written report, which will be sent back to the graduate advisor. The faculty will then meet as a group
to discuss the reports and come up with individualized feedback and advice, which will be relayed to you by the graduate advisor in an individual meeting. This advice may include suggestions for improving your writing, specific advice on different parts of the paper, potential directions for further development and suggestions for related research questions you may eventually consider.

The faculty mentor

By the end of the fifth week of the fall semester, you will be asked to choose a faculty mentor, who will be able to provide guidance throughout the process of writing the second year paper. The main role of the advisor is to help you make sure you are on track to produce a substantive piece of research and to help you avoid taking any wrong turns in the process. In order to formalize the role of the faculty mentor, you will be asked to register for a two-unit independent studies course with your faculty mentor in the Spring semester.

The Third Year Plan

The other aspect of the second year review is the production of a third year plan in which you will detail your plans for the area and qualifying exams and will identify a faculty member to play the role of a teaching mentor. Here is detailed description of the information we want you to include in your third year plan.

Area exam plan

You should identify a broad area in philosophy for your area exam. (See the description the area exam below for more information about what constitutes a reasonable choice for this and the nature and role of the exam more generally.) The area exam is generally administered by two faculty members, and it is common to work closely with them during the fall semester in your third year. Once you identify two faculty members to administer the exam on the basis of your choice of area, you should explicitly ask them and make sure to obtain their signature for the third year plan. Please make sure to identify one of them as a chair for the area exam. Once you have an area exam committee, you should consult with them and the graduate advisor to make sure a reading list is made available to you by the end of the second year of study.
4.2. SECOND YEAR REVIEW

**Tentative qualifying committee**

You should tentatively identify five faculty members for your qualifying exam. College regulations require one of the five faculty members to come from outside the philosophy department. It is of course understood that you may eventually change your mind about the composition of the qualifying committee; the point of this requirement is simply to make sure that you are thinking ahead about the shape of your qualifying committee.

**Teaching mentor**

In your second year, you should identify a faculty member as a teaching mentor. This faculty member will observe the student teach sections and both provide feedback on the teaching and eventually help the student prepare a teaching portfolio, which will generally include a teaching statement. The teaching mentor can again be of help when it comes to preparing this document. You should include the teaching mentor’s signature in the third year plan.

Remember that the third year plan should be signed by the student’s area exam committee members and teaching mentor.
5 The area exam

By the end of your fourth semester, you will choose a broad area of philosophy in which to take your area examination. Appropriate areas for the exam are broad areas such as philosophy of language, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, normative ethics, metaethics, practical reason, political philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophical logic, and so on. In case of doubt, consult with the graduate advisor.

The exam will be based on a set reading list for the chosen area. Reading lists have currently been compiled for philosophy of language, philosophical logic, normative ethics, metaethics, practical reason, political philosophy, philosophy of law, epistemology, and early modern philosophy. Other lists will be compiled as needed, but it takes some time to compose these lists, since they require several faculty members’ input. So, plan ahead if you think you might be interested in another topic. If the reading list does not yet exist for the area which you are considering, then you should consult with the graduate advisor by the beginning of your fourth semester of study to make sure the reading list can be ready in time for you to work on it over the summer in case you choose that topic.

At the time that you choose an area (at the end of your fourth semester), you will also make arrangements with some faculty member to supervise your progress through the reading list. This arrangement may be informal, or it may consist in registration for a semester—or even two—of PHIL 590 (Directed Research) during your third year. How the arrangement is structured should be decided based on what you need and what is most appropriate for your situation. But the graduate advisor should be informed as to who you will be working with at the end of your fourth semester.

When you are ready, the exam will be scheduled. The last appropriate time for your
area exam to be scheduled is the end of your 6th semester, but you should not see this as
the default, and the exam can be scheduled at any time during the academic semester. The
sooner you are done with your area exam, the better start you can get on your dissertation.

At least one week before the written part of the exam, you will be given a list of
questions that might be asked on it. At the time of the exam, you will be given some
subset of these questions and a set period of time to answer them in writing—a period of
twenty-four hours is generally appropriate. A day or two after you submit your written
answers, you will defend them orally as well as answer other questions on the exam
material in front of a committee of at least two faculty members. They will write a report
on your exam, which will go into your file.

5.1 The point of the exam

The main point of the area exam is to formalize a large part of the process of becoming
acquainted with the literature in the area in which you expect to do your dissertation
research and to help you come up with a specific topic. Area exams cover broad areas of
philosophy, so preparing for your area exam won’t immediately make you ready to start
writing a dissertation on some more specific topic. But the area exam process can serve as
a funnel to direct you to a specific topic.

The idea is simple. Even if you don’t start out with any idea of what topic you
want to work on, you can choose a broad area of philosophy that you like and in which
you anticipate having good faculty members to work with and with whom you have a
productive relationship. Working through the literature for the area exam will not make
you an expert on any particular topic, but it will give you a very broad sense for the shape
of a large part of that area of philosophy, and will give you time to see which sub-topics
interest you the most or are otherwise most promising for dissertation research. Then, as
you continue your area exam preparation, you can begin to read more deeply on those
topics, so that by the time you take the exam, you have pretty much zeroed in a topic for
your dissertation research. Finally, even if you still don’t have a particular thesis, that
doesn’t stop you from getting started on your dissertation. The very first step of writing a
dissertation, on the funnel approach, is to write up a survey or “review” of the literature
on your topic as it stands, and having just completed preparing for the area exam, you will
find that this is just the sort of thing that you have already been doing, assuming you were
being smart and writing up discussion notes or short papers on each of the things that you
were reading for the exam. Then, by the time that you have written the literature review, you will find that you have more specific things to say about your dissertation topic, and that is how you end up with a dissertation on the funnel approach.

Not everyone needs the funnel approach to find a dissertation topic; some people have ideas in advance about arguments they want to run or specific topics they think are hot or would be fruitful to pursue. But given the funnel approach, you don’t need to have such ideas in advance. The area exam is in part a safety mechanism to make sure that everyone ends up with a dissertation project in a timely manner, rather than leaving it to chance.

5.2 Another point of the exam

A second purpose of the area exam is that it instills breadth. The area exam does not make you an expert on any particular topic, but it makes sure that you are aware of and understand the topics that everyone with your research interest can be expected to be aware of and understand. It would be embarrassing to leave graduate school with a dissertation on the metaphysics of time, for example, and not be aware of the most significant issues in the metaphysics of properties. Moreover, you will be expected to teach courses in your area of research, and few of these courses will focus exclusively on areas covered by your actual research. For example, even if your dissertation is only about the semantic/pragmatics distinction, as a philosopher of language you will need to teach students about the literature on truth, on theories of meaning, on conditionals, and so on, for many other topics. And if you land a job at an institution with a graduate program, you may find yourself supervising students who work in your sub-area, but not on the topics of dissertation. It is very important that you have a broad competence within your area that extends well beyond your dissertation research.

5.3 The area exam and the dissertation area

You may wonder whether the area exam signals commitment to a specific dissertation area. The answer is ‘no’. You may discover while doing the area exam that some other jewel gleams more brightly or that your talents lie elsewhere. But though you are not committed, you are making things much harder for yourself. Unless you already have a very specific idea for your new topic when you switch, you are losing valuable time that could help you
5.3. THE AREA EXAM AND THE DISSERTATION AREA

arrive at a dissertation topic, and you will still need to achieve an exam’s worth of breadth in your new area.

So choose carefully and plan in advance. You have two years of graduate study before you select the area for your area exam; use it wisely in trying out different areas that you think might interest you and in making sure that you shop through different faculty who would be the most probable advisors in each area of potential interest. It is just as important to have a good advising relationship as it is to start with a topic that interests you, and it is risky to make a decision in the dark, without having worked with someone yourself in a seminar or an independent study. The best philosophers are not always the best advisors, and even good advisors are not always the best match for every personality, philosophical style, work style, research topic, or thesis. Be smart and plan ahead, and do your best to put yourself in a situation in which you won’t need to change your mind.
The purpose of the qualifying examination is to establish a shared understanding between the PhD candidate and your supervisors about the planned direction of the dissertation, including the establishment of minimum expectations for the completed thesis. You should not think about qualifying as a separate, distinct process from writing your dissertation; unfortunately, many students in the past have thought about it in this way, and it has tripped them up or caused them delay. Rather, it is very important that you understand that the qualifying examination is just an incidental part of the process of writing a dissertation, and that you appreciate the pedagogical value that it can have for you.

6.1 Key principles

You must form your qualifying committee before the end of your third year, and if your goal is to qualify during your third year, you should form it as early during your third year as possible—ideally 6 to 12 months in advance of when you plan to take the qualifying exam. Your committee must consist of five faculty members of which one must come from outside of the philosophy department. You should establish an understanding with every faculty member who agrees to serve on your committee about their expected role on the committee, including how often you hope to meet with them, and you should follow through and meet this expectation. It is possible to change the composition of your committee, but it should never happen that time goes by without your having a committee, because that just means that there are no faculty who feel any responsibility for keeping track of how you are doing.
6.1. **KEY PRINCIPLES**

The actual format of the qualifying exam requires that the candidate submit two pieces of writing in advance—the customary expectation is two weeks before the scheduled exam. In some cases, a single piece of writing can fulfill both functions. One piece of writing—customarily called the ‘writing sample’—is to be a representation of the finished written work of which you are capable, in the area of the dissertation. It is usually expected to be a substantial chapter of the thesis or a well-developed paper which you expect to expand into the full dissertation. The other piece of writing—customarily called the ‘proposal’—is to set out and advocate for a plan for what you hope, ideally, to accomplish in your dissertation. It may and usually should involve a substantial piece of stage-setting in order to make the case that your project needs to be pursued, and in most cases will involve an overview of what you hope to accomplish in each chapter. It is helpful to think of it as an early draft of an introduction to your completed thesis. These two pieces of writing serve complementary pedagogical purposes. The writing sample encourages you to be active early in writing, and the proposal encourages you to be actively thinking in a bigger-picture way about where your project is or could be going. Remember that your proposal is not a promise of what you are going to do—it is a description of an ideal scenario that you would be happy with, if that is how your dissertation worked out.

The qualifying exam itself is an oral examination which in most cases will take place in the chair’s office in MHP. Most qualifying exams run a little bit under two hours, with time at the end for discussion about the next steps on a student’s project.

Qualifying exams can take place at any time during the fall or spring semesters, but they sometimes slip to the end of the semester, a time at which it is very difficult to coordinate the scheduling of an in-person exam with a group of six, including five faculty who may also be participating in as many as four to ten other committee meetings or exams in a small space of time at the end of the semester, and who may have competing commuting or travel schedules. Wise students take the initiative to reserve a time for a possible qualifying exam months in advance—even before their committee agrees that they are ready, in order to be able to take advantage of being ready when the time comes, instead of delaying because of a conflict in schedules. These guidelines do not exhaust the rules governing qualifying exams; the graduate school has further rules about forms to constitute the committee, who can participate in the exam over telephone or videoconference, and so on. Make sure that you have an up-to-date understanding of any applicable rules, which you can find at

- [http://catalogue.usc.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=2388#general-requirements-](http://catalogue.usc.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=2388#general-requirements-).
for-the-doctor-of-philosophy-degree.

6.2 Timeline

There are different considerations to take into account when planning when to take your qualifying exam. On the one hand, you will be expected to pass your qualifying exam before the end of your eighth enrolled semester—so by May 15th of your fourth year, assuming that you have not taken any leave. But if you aim to finish the PhD in five years and get an academic position during the fifth year, it is in all practical respects necessary to qualify by the end of the third year. It is the department’s goal that finishing in five years is a feasible goal for any student—not that everyone or even most do finish in five years, but that there is a clear and available path to do so, for those who do not choose to take more time for substantial return. As a result, the department tries to encourage the goal of qualifying by the end of the third year.

But although these things are important to keep in mind, the most important thing to know about when to take the qualifying exam is that you should take it when you and your faculty advisor—and the other members of your committee—believe that you are ready. Don’t assume that whatever schedule others are on is the best schedule for you, and don’t assume that your advisor knows that you have a goal to qualify in your third year; if this schedule makes sense for you, then let your advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies know, so that they can support you in working towards it.

6.3 The bar to clear in the qualifying exam

You pass your qualifying examination by establishing a possible path that your developing dissertation might take, which has the feature that the members of your qualifying committee can agree with a high degree of confidence that if your dissertation develops along those lines, then the result will be one that meets the standards for completed dissertations at USC.

Re-read the last paragraph; it is the most important point in this section. The proposal that is part of your qualifying examination is not a prediction about what your finished dissertation will look like, and it is not a commitment to a plan for what it will look like. If the proposal really were either of these two things, then it would be very difficult to qualify before having essentially completed your entire dissertation. But it is not; the proposal
6.4. **THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU CAN COMPARE YOUR SITUATION TO OTHERS’**

is just a map for one possible path that the dissertation might take. The reason why the proposal needs only to be a map for one possible path the dissertation might take, is that the purpose of the qualifying examination is to establish a shared understanding between the candidate and the committee of a minimal expectation for the finished product of the dissertation. Once you qualify, you can change the path that you take, but the qualifying examination sets a shared understanding that any changes that you make in the basic structure of the dissertation would be for the purpose of improvement from the baseline that is set by the qualifying exam. Once you qualify, no one should have to worry about whether you are going to meet the baseline; the interesting questions should be how far above it you can go.

6.4 **The extent to which you can compare your situation to others’**

Unfortunately, the nature of the bar that is set by the qualifying examination means that it is very difficult to make straightforward comparisons between your situation and that of others. If you are working on a topic that your committee sees as very fruitful and about which it looks hard to go wrong, then it may take less convincing in order to settle on a shared picture of a possible path about which everyone agrees they could be happy with the final product. On the other hand, if you are working on worked-over or very difficult topic with many pitfalls, or are advancing a thesis about which your committee is very skeptical, it may take a lot of progress on substantive portions of the dissertation before your committee can agree that there is a possible path ahead of you which will lead you to a satisfactory outcome.

This means that it is very difficult to make comparisons between qualifying examinations. So consult with other graduate students about how the process worked for them, but don’t take their experiences as definitive. There is no substitute for communicating clearly with your own committee members on a regular basis, and for being direct in your questions about where things stand, so that you know what you need to do, for your particular case.
Let’s start with the question of what is a dissertation. What follows is the entire text of the “dissertation” section of the philosophy course catalogue:

When the student passes the qualifying examination, a dissertation committee (see Graduate Advisement), replacing the guidance committee, is appointed by the director of the school in consultation with the student and the philosophy faculty. Normally, the guidance committee simply becomes the dissertation committee. This committee and the candidate will then agree upon how the dissertation is to be developed and written. The dissertation must be an original contribution to some well-defined area in philosophy, and must give evidence of ability to do respectable, large-scale research, thinking, and writing in the field. The school requires the defense oral when the research and writing of the dissertation is substantially complete. Attendance at this oral examination is open to all members of the university faculty, but the examination is conducted and evaluated by the candidate’s dissertation committee. The faculty normally works with the dissertations only in the fall and spring semesters, and the student should plan accordingly.

Obviously this is not very informative, but the course catalogue sets the official rules, which means that the official rule is the part spelled out in italics: that the dissertation must be an original contribution to some well-defined area in philosophy, and must give evidence of ability to do respectable, large-scale research, thinking, and writing in the field. More information on the university policies about dissertations is available at
7.1. WHAT A DISSERTATION DOES

As you can see from this description, there aren’t many hard-and-fast rules about what a dissertation must be. But there are three core principles: (1) that a dissertation must constitute an original contribution to some well-defined area of philosophy, (2) that it must be evidence of ability to do all three of research, thinking, and writing, and (3) that this research/thinking/writing be respectable and large-scale. Correspondingly, these principles leave several ways in which it is possible to fall short. You might fail to make any original contribution. Or you might make a contribution, but not show the ability to write in a satisfactory way. Or you might make an original contribution and show ability, but not manage to do anything, or provide evidence of the ability to do anything, large-scale. At any rate, the question that should always be running through your head is, “am I making an original contribution to a well-defined area of philosophy that exemplifies research, thinking, and writing that is respectable and large-scale?” If the answer is ‘yes’, then you are making progress toward your dissertation, and your dissertation will be complete in non-cosmetic respects when it is sufficient evidence on these scores.

7.1 What a dissertation does

Beyond the abstract criteria set out above, there is nothing that a dissertation has to do. But there are certainly some pretty obvious connections between the criteria and certain sub-tasks. For example, if you want to demonstrate that you are prepared to do original research and thinking in some particular area of philosophy, it is likely that a large part of doing so will involve demonstrating that you have mastered the literature in this area of philosophy. Consequently, dissertations nearly invariably involve some kind of survey or “review” of the existing literature. Such a review not only plays a role in demonstrating your readiness to do research on the topic, it is also an opportunity to make (smaller) contributions in your discussion of existing views, and an opportunity to show that you are doing “large-scale” work, by connecting whatever narrower question on which you ultimately take a stand to the broader dialectic in which it figures. Moreover, writing a detailed review of the literature is the best and most sure-fire strategy to walk yourself into a positive view, even if you don’t already have one.
The other pretty obvious things for a dissertation to do are to have a chapter developing a positive view, and to spend considerable time defending it against challenges. The former plays a natural role in your claim to be making an original contribution, and the latter plays a natural role in your claim to be doing large-scale research, quite unlike a journal article, in which even important objections sometimes simply need to be set aside. But neither of these things is necessary for a good dissertation. You can make an original contribution without advancing a new view on the topic you investigate, and even without advancing a new argument for an old view. Sometimes the contributions which are the most likely to make an impact on the field by being absorbed by other philosophers, are ones which simply help us to better understand the nature of a problem, or the relative costs we face in deciding between theories. It can sometimes be harder to be sure if work like this is genuinely original or how much of a contribution it makes, but it is important to recognize that not all “original contributions” have the same character.

7.2 What a dissertation looks like

Again, there is nothing in particular that a dissertation has to look like, over and above the formatting and submission guidelines set down by the graduate school. But there is a fairly standard format that can be a good place to start from, at least for most self-contained dissertation topics. A dissertation in the standard format begins by introducing and explaining the central problem(s) or issue(s) in the topic on which it is focused. Second, it surveys the space of existing approaches to this problem, classifying these existing views in some interesting way and trying to assess their main costs and benefits. Third, taking off from some of the lessons in the second part, it develops and states a positive view about the central questions that it takes up. And fourth, it defends that positive view against serious objections.

It is far from the case that all dissertations should resemble this standard format. But it is useful to see dissertations with different formats as departing from the standard one for reasons that are specific to how that dissertation project played out. For example, if you are writing on a relatively worked-over topic, it may be very hard to state any positive view that is particularly distinctive. In that case, stating your positive view will be less important, and some other part of the dissertation is going to have to constitute your main contribution. Perhaps it will be the defense of one of the existing views from some serious problem? If so, then that part of the standard format will be played up, and the
7.3. HOW TO GET STARTED

positive part will be played down. Or perhaps your main contribution will be a new way of understanding the relationships between different views and how the problems they face trade off against one another. If so, then the first part of the standard format may expand to effectively constitute the whole dissertation—but this can work only if you have a lot to say in this section. In general, the parts where you have the most to say will play themselves up, and the things you have the least to say about will play a smaller role, although there will often be things that you don’t have anything original to say about, which you need to cover anyway, for completeness.

It is also possible in some circumstances that a dissertation can consist in a set of closely related papers. Because a dissertation is required to demonstrate ability to do “large-scale” research, however, it is not possible for these papers to be only loosely related. This is a matter requiring judgment, which it is essential that you share with every person on your committee, as well as the graduate advisor. But in some cases, it is possible that the best way of presenting your biggest contributions is as separate papers, and in that case you may want to explore this option with your committee and with the graduate advisor, to see whether it is appropriate in your case.

7.3 How to get started

It is very easy to get off to a slow start on your dissertation, and it is a very bad idea. Many graduate students believe that they cannot get started on a dissertation until they “have an idea” or know what they want their thesis to be. Nothing could be further from the truth, and no presupposition could be more detrimental to your degree progress. Although it is true that some graduate students have an idea that they want to develop at greater length before they begin the dissertation process, this does not happen for everyone, and if it does not happen for you, the solution is not to wait until it does happen. Many graduate students lose years of their lives to this process, but waiting around for an idea to happen, or even waiting around while doing lots of reading for an idea to happen, is not a strategy.

Don’t wait for ideas to come to you; develop a strategy that is going to get you a dissertation on the timetable that you have set for yourself to finish the program. Since there are different stages in getting started on a dissertation, your strategy may need to incorporate different elements.

The first stage, of course, is to choose a topic. The topic of your dissertation doesn’t need to be the single topic in all of philosophy that interests you most; if you need to
make that decision, then it may take you a long time. The best topics are ones that are relatively circumscribed, so that you can get a clear handle on the literature in a manageable timeframe, which are not too worked-over, on which there has been relatively recent work for you to dialogue with, which is of interest to the faculty members who you want to work with, and which have interesting connections to other topics, rather than being totally isolated. (The last of these is important not for writing a dissertation, but for helping your dissertation launch you on research projects down the road.) It is at least as important to pay attention to considerations like these, as to which topic simply interests you the most. For the most part, if you get started on a promising topic, it will empower you and you will stay interested; whereas if you are most interested in a worked-over topic, finding a way to make an original contribution may come to frustrate you over time and disenchant you with the topic. And certainly one of the most important research skills is good judgment about which topics it will be fruitful to pursue.

In any case, a real strategy for choosing a topic will involve setting yourself a reasonable but clear deadline in which to do so. If you can’t narrow it down by your deadline, even by considering all of these other factors, and even if you don’t yet “have an idea” about what you will say about any of the topics you still have remaining, just plump for one. The ideas will come, and they’ll come faster once you immerse yourself more fully in writing—so long as you pick a promising and fruitful topic.

The next stage at which people can get stuck, is where to go, once their topic is chosen. Don’t get stuck, here, waiting for an idea! Again, develop and act on a strategy that is going to get you ideas. The most straightforward such strategy is to begin by writing a literature review, and see what happens as you try to write up a single document which explains and presents the question that you are interested in, and all of the existing approaches to that problem. Ideas that you have about the balance of the costs facing these existing approaches may hint to you which way you should go, and the more time you spend writing about them, the more opportunities you have to develop ideas. If you do this, the positive stuff will happen. Just don’t wait for it. Set your agenda and act out a smart strategy, and it will come to you.

7.4 When the dissertation is done

Your dissertation is not your life’s work. It is a piece of evidence of your ability to do research, not the summary or end of your research project, and to be honest, in nearly
every case, very few people will read it other than your committee members. It should be done when you and your committee can agree that you have demonstrated the abilities as required; don’t drag it out.

What is in many ways more important, if you wish to continue to an academic job in philosophy, is the question of when you are ready to enter the job market for academic jobs in philosophy. For information on how that process works, see the section on Placement. Because the philosophy job application process happens only once a year, it is *imperative* that you communicate well and regularly with your advisor, your committee, with the graduate advisor, and with any other letter writers, about where you stand, and what it will take for you to be ready to apply on the schedule you intend. If you do not all stay on the same page, you can end up just a month or two behind schedule, and that can be all it takes to make it worth waiting for the next time around—which is a year. Don’t let it happen to you that you get to the summer before you intend to apply and you find out that you’re simply not quite ready. Don’t hesitate to ask people if you are still on the \( n \)-year plan, for your appropriate value of \( n \). Don’t wait and see how things work out; make a plan for how you want them to work out, and work your plan.

If you have any other questions about what a dissertation should involve or how to go about it, do not hesitate to ask both your own advisor and the graduate advisor. There is no worse situation to be in, than not seeking out information that you need, simply because you feel like you are supposed to already know. If you’re unsure about something, ask.
Different students may make progress at a different pace, and an intended timeline may still be influenced by a variety of unforeseen circumstances. So, the program is designed to be flexible and to accommodate different paths from admission to degree. Having said that, we would like to make sure there is both a five year and a six year path to degree for anyone interested. These are of course different, but you may find it helpful to see them side by side as described in tables 8.1 and 8.2, respectively.

It is particularly important to keep in mind how each timeline interacts with the academic job market: in general, if you hope to receive your degree in May of your fifth year, with an academic position in hand, you should aim to complete your qualifying exam by the end of the third year; if you complete your qualifying exam by the fall of your fourth year, then the prospects of an academic position would be better if you aim for a six year degree. Historically at least, many, if not most students have opted for the six year path.

We ask you to TA in the fall and spring semesters of your second and four years. This means you will be on fellowship in years three and five, where you will be able to focus on the area and qualifying exams and dissertation, respectively. The main difference between a five year and a six year timeline concerns the timeline for the completion of the area and qualifying exams. For a five year timeline to be feasible, you should plan to complete your qualifying exam by the spring of your third year. This would allow you to develop a substantial portion of your dissertation by the end of your fourth year, which is something you would need to be on the market in your fifth and final year in the program.
8.1 Five year timeline

Table 8.1 illustrates the five year path to degree. Years One and Two are like before. However, the five year path requires students to complete the area exam in the fifth semester of study and to pass the qualifying examination by the end of the third year. Thus years four and five are devoted to dissertation, and much of year five would interact with the academic job market.

Table 8.1: Five year timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Three</th>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>SPRING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 700 (Dissertation Seminar) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 700 (Dissertation Seminar) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 589 (Directed Research) (4 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 589 (Directed Research) (4 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution Requirement, if required</td>
<td>Take the Qualifying Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take the Area Exam</td>
<td>Assemble a qualifying committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Four</td>
<td>TA section</td>
<td>TA section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaise with the placement officer if you plan to be on the job market in year five.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Five</td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare job applications if you are on the job market</td>
<td>Defend dissertation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.2 Six year timeline

If you plan to take six years for completion of the degree, then you will have more flexibility with respect to the two milestones. You could take the area exam in the fall or spring of your third year and take the qualifying exam by the fall of your fourth year. Table 8.2
illustrates a six year path to degree in which the qualifying exam is taken by the end of the fall of year four.

Table 8.2: Six year timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Three</th>
<th>FALL</th>
<th>SPRING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 700 (Dissertation Seminar) (2 units) or Distribution Requirement</td>
<td>PHIL 700 (Dissertation Seminar) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 589 (Directed Research) (4 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 589 (Directed Research) (4 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take the Area Exam</td>
<td>Take the Qualifying Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assemble a qualifying committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Four</th>
<th>TA section</th>
<th>TA section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 700 (Dissertation Seminar) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 589 (Directed Research) (4 units)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take the Qualifying Exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Five</th>
<th>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</th>
<th>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaise with the placement officer if you plan to be on year six</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Six</th>
<th>TA section</th>
<th>TA section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
<td>PHIL 794 (Dissertation) (2 units)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare job applications if you are on the market</td>
<td>Defend dissertation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please remember that these are only two sample timelines, and there is no expectation that your own path to completion should match either one exactly.
9 Teaching

For at least some of your time as a philosophy graduate student at USC, you will be expected to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for an undergraduate course. Acting as a TA is an important part of your education in philosophy. Teaching experience develops abilities to communicate ideas in a clear and accessible way to a diverse audience, to listen to what others are saying, and to evaluate their written and oral contributions fairly and perceptively. These are crucially valuable abilities, which will be helpful to your work in philosophy (and in many other domains) in many ways. Moreover, if you are pursuing a career in academia, the application process for most academic positions will involve submitting a “teaching portfolio” (see below). In general, teaching experience is viewed as essential for gaining an academic appointment. (It will also be viewed as valuable by many other employers as well.)

9.1 When you will be a TA

Your original offer letter explained the number of semesters when you will have fellowship support from USC, and the number of semesters when you will be expected to be a TA. For example, the usual arrangement for students entering the program from 2015 onwards is to have six semesters of fellowship support and four semesters as a TA. The standard approach is to take the first two of these four TA semesters in your 2nd year and the other two TA semesters in your 4th year. To a limited extent, the department’s administrators can accommodate your wishes for which courses you are a TA. You will be asked to rank the available courses in order of preference. However, each course needs to have a sufficient
number of TAs, and we may not be able to give you your first choice. The six semesters of
fellowship support are funded by the university. In addition to them, the graduate school
makes available some competitive university fellowships for which advanced graduate
students may apply. If you are awarded one of these fellowships, you would have an
additional period of fellowship support. (More on these university fellowships in section F
of the handbook.)

9.2 Your TA contract

As a TA, you will have a contract with the University. Your rights and responsibilities
under this contract are defined by the rules and regulations that are made by the Graduate
School. The best way to understand these rules is to consult the Graduate School’s official
Handbook for Teaching Assistants (TAs), Research Assistants (RAs), and Graduate Assis-
tant Lecturers (ALs). This Handbook contains the official University rules that everyone in
the Department (faculty members, administrators, and graduate students) need to conform
to with respect to Teaching Assistants. You should receive this handbook at the Dornsife
TA orientation session. This orientation session generally takes place on the Thursday and
Friday in the week before Fall Semester classes begin in August. You should attend this
orientation session in the first semester when you act as a TA; you should make sure that
your travel plans allow you to attend this session. This handbook will not try to repeat
everything that is explained in the Graduate School’s handbook. However, in what follows,
some points will be made about the Department’s approach to implementing these rules.

9.3 TA eligibility

To be eligible to be a TA at USC, you must be a USC graduate student in good standing. In
addition, if your first language is not English, you must demonstrate sufficient competence
in English. These eligibility conditions are explained in the Graduate School’s Handbook.

9.4 Your responsibilities as a TA

The standard TA position is known as a 50% position. This position covers tuition for 12
course units per semester. The contract for this position stipulates that teaching responsibil-
ities should occupy no more than 50% of a graduate student’s total effort, allowing for the
remaining 50% to be dedicated to the student’s individual academic pursuits. The duties of a TA should not exceed 20 hours per week on average. The time devoted to these duties may vary from day to day and week to week, given the fluctuation of demands during the various periods of the semester, but the total workload for the semester should not exceed the cumulative average. Furthermore, a TA should never work more than 8 hours a day or more than 40 hours a week, and deviations from the 20-hour standard should be kept to a minimum. If you find that you are consistently working more than 20 hours a week, consult with the course instructor or seek advice from the department on how to manage your TA commitments more effectively or, if appropriate, to adjust your workload.

Additional employment is not allowed for Teaching Assistants, given the demands of full-time study, unless that work is directly related to a student’s academic development. (Exceptions can be made with approval of both the department and other university bodies.) In general, whether from outside employment or teaching duties, the workload during the semesters should be kept to 50% of the graduate student’s total effort. The typical responsibilities of a TA include: reading course materials, preparing for and leading discussion sections, and grading the students’ work; TAs should also hold regular office hours to advise the students about their work for the course. The responsibilities of the TA do not include tasks typically assigned to the instructor, such as creating the course syllabus, lecturing on the primary course material, providing grading standards, or bearing ultimate responsibility for the content and grading of examinations. Although faculty may offer additional professional opportunities for their Teaching Assistants (e.g., an occasional lecture), such opportunities should be regarded as optional, not obligatory.

9.5 The faculty’s responsibilities to teaching assistants

At the beginning of the semester, the faculty member who is the instructor for the course for which you are a TA must give you an explanation of the scope and nature of your responsibilities. This communication should also include a discussion of the overall objectives of the course, and the methods and standards for assessing student performance. In general, at the beginning of the semester, the faculty instructor must make it clear to their TAs what exactly is expected of them. For example, the faculty member may have specific expectations about such matters as: what topics will be covered in the discussion sections; how the undergraduates’ written work will be graded; when the undergraduates’ work will be graded and returned; or the like. These expectations must all be clearly
communicated to the TAs at the beginning of the semester. In addition, the faculty member should also explain the protocol for addressing any problems or issues (such as cheating or grade disputes) that might arise during the semester. In general, faculty members should not expect TAs to take responsibility for resolving such contentious problems; they should expect TAs to report such problems to them, so that these problems can be dealt with by the faculty. Following the completion of the course, the faculty instructor for the course will provide an evaluation of the course’s TAs to the department. The faculty member should explain to the TAs at the beginning of the semester what the criteria for this evaluation will be. In philosophy, it is common for the instructor to attend at least one of each TA’s discussion sections, and to give the student feedback after the section. If the instructor intends to attend one of the TA’s sections, this should be explained at the beginning of the semester; if the instructor intends to take a different approach to evaluating the TAs, this too should be explained.

9.6 TA training and support

The university requires all departments organize training for new Teaching Assistants that will prepare them for their teaching responsibilities. As noted above, Dornsife College offers a training session in August every year for new Teaching Assistants. During Dornsife’s training session, new TAs are introduced to outstanding faculty and experienced TAs, who offer advice on how best to confront the challenges of teaching at USC. In addition, the department offers a Practicum course, PHIL 593x: Teaching Philosophy, in the Fall Semester of each year. New TAs in Philosophy must enroll in this course. This is a 2-unit course; these 2 units will not be deducted from the 12 units per semester that are covered by your TA position. Each graduate student in the program will have a faculty member in the department who is appointed as their teaching mentor. Your teaching mentor will attend some of your discussion sections or guest lectures (if any), and they will be prepared to write a letter of recommendation describing your teaching skills to any potential employer. Your teaching mentor is available for consultation and teaching advice. The university also has a Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) which can provide a wide range of teaching support. For example, the CET can create a video recording of your teaching, which you can study to see if it suggests ways in which you can improve your teaching.
9.7 Your teaching portfolio

If you apply for academic positions, you will need to include a portfolio giving evidence of your teaching skills. This teaching portfolio should contain:

- A record of your teaching experience
- A statement of your teaching philosophy
- A summary of the results of your teaching evaluations

Sometimes, you may include a syllabus for one or two courses that you might be interested in teaching. It is a good idea to start thinking about this teaching portfolio early. For example, you should keep records of your teaching experience and the results of your teaching evaluations; you should start thinking about what you have found to be more effective ways of improving your teaching; and you should also start thinking about how you would like to structure your own course syllabus for different sorts of courses that you might want to teach in future. If you go on the academic job market, the Department’s placement committee will help you to prepare a final version of your teaching portfolio. You should start thinking about how to develop this portfolio as soon as you start as a TA.
As a PhD student in the school of philosophy at USC, you are a member of a community of faculty, postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates. Membership in this community comes with a variety of informal responsibilities and opportunities, commensurate with your status as a graduate student. These responsibilities are not formal degree requirements for your PhD, but belonging to this community comes with a responsibility to carry your weight in the many formal and informal tasks that bring us together as a community and allow the department to function.

10.1 Talks and events

The intellectual life of our community is built around departmental talks and events, including our regular Friday colloquium series, held most Fridays at 3pm in the seminar room, dissertation defenses, scheduled as necessary, graduate student talks, and other informal talks, workshops, seminars, and visitors, scheduled on an ad hoc basis throughout the year. As members of this community, there is informal expectation of each of us that we attend as many of our regular colloquium talks as we are able, and to make a sincere effort to attend and participate in other events on a regular basis. Don’t conclude that a talk is “not for you” just because it is not on a topic on which you are actively doing research; you will benefit from meeting and observing a wide variety of philosophers working on a wide variety of topics and from participating in a broader conversation than your own work, but more importantly, you will contribute to the experience of others by taking part in these events.
10.2 Service

Occasionally throughout the year, and over the course of your degree, you will encounter opportunities for departmental service that goes beyond the requirements for your degree. You may serve as president or treasurer for Pegasus, the graduate student organization, as a leader in the USC chapter of Minorities and Philosophy, as the organizer of the USC/UCLA graduate student conference, as the graduate student representative in faculty meetings, or on one or another formal departmental committee along with faculty. You may also serve the broader university as a graduate student fellow in the Center for Excellence in Teaching or in the Levan Institute, run for the graduate and professional student senate at USC, or in some other significant capacity. These are all significant service responsibilities that are commensurate with your career stage as a PhD student in philosophy. You can certainly complete your degree without taking on any such responsibility, but there are more than enough of these responsibilities for everyone to take part, and if you do not take up any of these burdens, then you are taking advantage of the fact that others around you are willing to volunteer their time, in part, on your behalf. Being a responsible citizen in our department and of our profession requires recognizing this and being willing to do your part. In addition to major service opportunities, there are many, many smaller opportunities to make a difference in our department, if you recognize the many ways in which everything happens because someone is willing to make a contribution.
The graduate school offers fellowships to advanced graduate students. These include Endowed PhD Fellowships, Research Enhancement Fellowships, and Final Year Fellowships, and they provide an annual stipend for one academic year as well as university fees, tuition, health and dental insurance and eligibility for graduate school travel grants for conferences and research. Each PhD program may nominate three candidates for each type of fellowship, but individual students can be nominated for no more than two of them. These fellowships are allocated by the graduate school candidates compete with candidates from other PhD programs at USC. Here is a brief description of each type of opportunity:

A  Endowed PhD Fellowships

Endowed PhD Fellowships are for students who have completed their qualifying exam and are making substantial progress to the degree in terms of quality of work and timing. To be competitive, they should provide a compelling statement of their current and planned research.

B  Research enhancement fellowships

Research Enhancement Fellowships are designed for advanced graduate students whose research requires work in particularly complex or distant venues or other unusual expenses for research activities that are essential for the research. Students should again include a compelling statement of their research and explain why the resources
provided by the fellowship are essential to that research. These fellowships provide limited additional funds for research and travel.

C Final year fellowships

Final Year Fellowships are designed to facilitate the completion and submission of dissertations. The main difference with respect to the others is that upon completion of this fellowship, students are no longer eligible for further funding from USC.

D Summer research and writing grants

The graduate school offers a limited number of summer research and writing grants, which are designed to increase the amount of summer support students have for their work toward the PhD. These are available for graduate students making timely progress toward the degree after having completed at least two years of study.

Calls for applications to these fellowships come late in December and the deadline for application submissions tends to be very early in the year. If you think you may be interested in these opportunities, please speak to the graduate advisor before the end of the year.
12 Departmental opportunities for graduate students

As a graduate student in philosophy, you are eligible for a variety of departmentally funded opportunities while you are enrolled in the program. These include progress awards automatically earned upon completion of certain benchmarks of progress, grants for conference travel, and Flewelling Summer Awards. Because these opportunities are subject to budgetary constraints outside our control, they will have to be reviewed periodically.

12.1 Progress awards

The department provides some progress awards upon the successful completion of simple benchmarks of progress during the first five years of study. Table 12.1 below lists the awards alongside the relevant benchmarks of progress.
Table 12.1: Progress awards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Summer Stipend†</td>
<td>Upon completion of 24 units of course credits by the first day of classes of the second year (and no later than 12 months since entering the program).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Summer Stipend</td>
<td>Upon completion of 32 units of course credits the second-year review, and submission of a third year plan a one-page summer plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Summer Stipend</td>
<td>Upon completion of the area exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Summer Stipend</td>
<td>Upon completion of the qualifying exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Summer Stipend</td>
<td>Upon completion of at least two chapters or two thirds of dissertation, whichever is more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† The exact amounts for these summer stipends is subject to budgetary constraints and may change from year to year. We project a baseline of at least $2,000 per student per year, but the department will make every effort to increase that amount budget permitting.

12.2 Travel grants

The department makes $600 available for reimbursement for conference travel each year subject to the following guidelines on how much you can expect to be reimbursed.

1. Up to $600 reimbursement for giving a paper.

2. Up to $400 reimbursement for giving a comment or participating as a commentator-at-large at a conference.

Subject to the same guidelines, the department will consider applications for additional travel funding within a given year based on the merits of a written proposal and consid-
erations of resources and need. So, if you want to apply for further support, you should contact the Graduate Advisor with a written description of the event for which you seek funding. In addition to departmental travel funds, students should also seek travel funding from the Graduate Student Government as often as possible. Here is a link to the GSG Travel Grant Portal: https://gsg.knack.com/tg#policies/.

12.3 Flewelling summer awards

The department expects to award five Flewelling Summer Awards for an amount of $3,000 to students in the first four years of study to pursue a research project over the summer. The project may involve writing a paper, preparing a paper for publication, or simply developing research related to the dissertation. Flewelling Fellows will be asked to submit a report of their research and a thank-you letter to the Flewelling family. To apply for one, you should prepare (i) a one or two-page proposal outlining the research project you would like to pursue over the summer and explaining how it fits with your larger research goals for next year, (ii) a copy of your CV, and (iii) a one-page summary of your research activities/achievements, your service contributions, your short-term research goals listed by semester/season, your research-related travel plans in the coming 6 months. At least two of the awards will focus on service.

‡ This would be in lieu of the summer progress award for that year.
13 Placement

It is the goal of everyone that every PhD student coming through USC moves on to a satisfying career. Departmental placement procedures are designed to facilitate the opening stages of this transition.

13.1 Statement on non-academic placement

One important fact that it is easy to lose sight of as a graduate student, when you are surrounded by people you take to be interested in academic careers, is that there are many ways to leverage a PhD into a satisfying career outside of academia. It is important to recognize that the department does not value academic over non-academic placement. Everyone wants you to be successful in whatever path you choose, and to do what we are able in order to facilitate that. At the same time, the career path that the school of philosophy is best-equipped to directly assist you with is one in academia. Consequently, most of departmental placement procedures are concerned with academic placement, and similarly for the content of this section. Nevertheless, if and when you consider non-academic paths, you should feel free to be open and comfortable discussing these opportunities or possibilities with your mentors in the department. Your timeline to completion could be different if you do not plan to apply for academic positions at all, and although your greatest resources for securing non-academic placement will likely fall outside of the department, USC philosophy has many PhD alumni in non-academic fields and we would like to do whatever we can to help you explore these paths or learn what you need to, in order to pursue them.
13.2 The academic job market in philosophy

The process of applying to academic positions is often referred to as “going on the job market”. You are likely to encounter a great deal of conflicting advice and rumors about exactly what to expect from the academic job market. It is not the purpose of this section to fully explain the job market in philosophy or to provide guidance about how to prepare for it; instead, you should be in constant communication throughout your PhD studies with your advisors, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the placement committee, about your preparedness to apply for positions in philosophy and your trajectory toward that preparedness. This section focuses instead just on concrete procedures employed by our department in assisting our current and former students.

Placement procedures

Each year, placement procedures in the department are implemented by a departmental placement committee, with most of the work carried out by its chair, the director of placement, and by our departmental staff, who put a great deal of work into handling and submitting confidential letters of recommendation for job candidates. What follow are brief summaries of the standard procedures followed by the placement committee, in the order in which they will affect you, as a job candidate.

Annual job market overview meetings

Every year in April or May, the departmental placement committee holds an open informational meeting about the academic job market in philosophy and departmental placement procedures for graduate students at any stage of the program. These meetings are voluntary, but by attending each year you will acquire a broad understanding of what to expect from the process of seeking an academic position, develop a much stronger sense for your own prospects by getting a firm understanding of how former USC PhDs have fared in their careers both in their initial searches and in years to come, and have an opportunity to ask any questions that you have in a forum where the answers will benefit your peers as well.
13.2. THE ACADEMIC JOB MARKET IN PHILOSOPHY

Pre-job market preparation meetings

Every year in January and February, the director of placement schedules one-on-one meetings with current PhD students who may be eligible to apply for academic positions in one of the following two years. These meetings seek to focus on the following goals: 1) establishing likely timelines for completion for the student in order to understand what each placement cohort will look like in advance, 2) identifying areas of need for growth in teaching areas, CV, presentations, publications, networking, or other areas, 3) educating about the nature of the academic job market in philosophy and how that affect the student in particular, and 4) and developing strategies about how to best devote the remaining time before the academic job market to putting the student in the strongest possible position to be able to be competitive for the kinds of career path that the student desires. In April or May, the director of placement again schedules one-on-one meetings with every current PhD student for whom it is still epistemically open that they will apply for academic positions in the fall. These meetings focus concretely on how best to spend the summer months in order to be in the strongest possible position. As a general rule of thumb, students who have been successful applying for positions while completing their PhD at USC had passed their qualifying exams by May of the previous calendar year. That is, as a general rule of thumb, if you hope to receive your degree in May or August of year n, with an academic position in hand, you are unlikely to be in a strong position to do so unless you have completed your qualifying exam by May of year n-2. That is why our expected departmental timelines to finish in five years all specify that you will have completed your qualifying exam by May of your third year.

Letter screening and submission

The placement committee collects and reviews all letters of recommendation, which are held confidentially by our office staff and uploaded by staff upon request to job applications. This process is by far the most labor-intensive part of the placement process both for the placement committee and for departmental staff, and so everything that you can do in order to be cognizant of this high workload and respectful of trying to keep things easier for the placement committee and for our staff is essential to the functioning of our placement operation. In recent years, our letter collection process has required collecting and screening over 80 letters of recommendation each year. This is because we understand that academic careers in philosophy are not determined by one’s first placement, and so
we continue to support our former students well into their trip into the profession. Many recent philosophy PhDs continue to apply for positions each year, not just those who have yet to obtain a tenure-track position, but many who already have tenure-track positions continue to seek to solve a two-body problem, move to a more desirable location, or are simply interested selectively in opportunities at departments or programs they see as a stronger fit. Because collecting and reviewing 80 letters of recommendation is an intensive process, these are some guidelines that we expect of everyone involved. We ask every first-time job candidate to ask their letter-writers for letters by May 15, and to communicate clearly with them about expected deadlines. We expect every first-time job candidate to equip letter-writers with the most up-to-date version of their dissertation and writing sample by August 1. And we expect every letter to be submitted by September 1. If we don’t meet these deadlines, we put students in a position to not be able to apply for the jobs with the earliest deadlines.

Letter requests are to be submitted to the e-mail address uscphiljobplacement@gmail.com, and if application HR websites require that separate e-mail addresses be used to request separate letters, the e-mail addresses uscphiljobplacement1@gmail.com, uscphiljobplacement2@gmail.com, etc. may also be used. These addresses all forward to the same place, and this allows our departmental staff to smoothly share this responsibility if necessary and avoid using personal e-mails. It is important that no letters be sent either to or from these gmail addresses, only letter requests. Letters are stored securely and confidentially on a USC server.

Placement support group

Each year, the director of placement leads a placement support group consisting of first-time job candidates together with anyone who has been through the placement process in a previous year, is applying again, is in residence in LA, and is interested in participating. The placement support group meets regularly throughout the late summer and early fall to review and provide feedback on each others’ job market written materials, including first and foremost CVs, dissertation summaries, research statements, statements of teaching philosophy, other teaching materials, cover letters, and to a lesser extent, writing samples. The placement support group meets as many hours as are required to make it through everyone’s materials together, so that everyone can learn from everyone else’s materials and feedback.
Mock interviews

Each year, we conduct at least three rounds of mock interviews. The first round of mock interviews is conducted as an in-person peer mock interview. After receiving general instructions on how to prepare for mock interviews, the placement support group holds long group sessions in which each job candidate is interviewed by the others and by the placement director. This provides both opportunities to learn from each others’ interview experiences and performance, but also to start to understand what it is like to be on the other side of the interview, which is essential for performing to the best of your ability. The first round of mock interviews is conducted in late October or early November. The second round of mock interviews is again a peer mock interview, this time conducted by Skype. Most first-round job interviews are actually conducted over Skype, and so we focus on issues specific to videoconference interviews in our second round, in addition to continuing to refine content aspects of the interview performance. This round is conducted in early to mid November. Finally, the last round of mock interviews are scheduled to be held with departmental faculty who do not know the job candidate well, and held after Thanksgiving. The two earlier rounds of mock interviews enable our candidates to receive the most fine-grained feedback in their faculty mock interviews and have an encouraging experience.

Practice job talks

Every final-year USC PhD student who is applying for academic positions receives the opportunity to give a departmental talk in our ordinary colloquium series, complete with departmental reception in the courtyard, near the end of the fall semester. Before giving the talk to the full department, each candidate gives a dry run of the talk to one or more members of the placement committee, in order to make sure that each candidate has the most success and receives the most fine-grained feedback after their departmental talk. This list is not exhaustive of departmental placement efforts on behalf of our students or former students, but it represents the largest and most regular components of those efforts.
What follows is a list of external links to other university websites and documents you may find helpful:

### 14.1 General

- Graduate school FAQ
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/fellowships/frequently-asked-questions/
- Graduate housing portal
  https://housing.usc.edu/GradPortal/
- Events hosted by the graduate school
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/events/
- Handbook for Teaching Assistants (TAs), Research Assistants (RAs), and Graduate Assistant Lecturers (ALs)
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/guidelines-forms-requests/#ga-handbook
- Requirements for graduation
  http://catalogue.usc.edu/content.php?catoid=7&navoid=1561
- University policies
  http://about.usc.edu/policies/
14.2 Financial

- Financial aid
  http://catalogue.usc.edu/content.php?catoid=2&navoid=267
- Internal fellowships
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/fellowships/current-PhD-students/
- External fellowships
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/fellowships/external-fellowships/
- USC stipends for graduate students (2017-2019)
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/assets/doc/Min_Total_Stipends_Graduate_Students_Amended.pdf

14.3 Health

- Student health center
  http://engemannshc.usc.edu
- USC student health insurance plan
  https://engemannshc.usc.edu/insurance/insurance-plan/
- Waiving coverage
  https://engemannshc.usc.edu/insurance/waivers/
- Counseling services
  http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

14.4 Courses

- Graduate transfer credit requests
  https://arr.usc.edu/services/degree-progress/graduatetransfercredit.html
- International student transfer credit request form
  https://arr.usc.edu/forms/InternationalGraduateTransferCreditRequestForm.pdf
CHAPTER 14. EXTERNAL LINKS

- Courses taken elsewhere
  
  http://catalogue.usc.edu/content.php?catoid=7&navoid=1566&hl=graduation&returnto=search

- USC-UCLA cross-enrollment
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/assets/doc/USC_UCLA_Rules.pdf

14.5 Milestones

- PhD achievement awards
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/fellowships/PhD-achievement-awards/

- Forms for qualifying exams and dissertation defense
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/guidelines-forms-requests/#qualifying-exams

- Guidelines for thesis/dissertation submission
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/thesis-dissertation-submission/

14.6 International

- Office of International Services (OIS)
  
  https://ois.usc.edu

- Maintaining visa status
  
  https://ois.usc.edu/students/maintainingstudentstatus/

- Travel
  
  https://ois.usc.edu/students/travel/

- Spouse and children
  
  https://ois.usc.edu/students/f2dependents/
14.7 Leaves

- Dornsife leaves of absence
  
  http://dornsife.usc.edu/dornsife-payroll/leaves/

- OIS requirements
  
  https://ois.usc.edu/students/maintainingstudentstatus/leaveofabsence/

- Graduate school parental leave
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/guidelines-forms-requests/#parental-leave

- WiSE fellowships for families
  

14.8 Requests and appeals

- Requests & petitions
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/guidelines-forms-requests/#requests-and-petitions

- Appeals
  
  http://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/student-resources/#appeal-panel-guidelines