Sage School of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Philosophy Handbook

This handbook is a collaborative effort of faculty, staff, and graduate students.

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Overview of the graduate program

Length of program

The PhD program in Philosophy is designed to be completed in five years. After 14 semesters the Graduate School requires students to petition for an extension. The Sage School does not offer a terminal master’s (MA) degree, although PhD students typically receive an MA after a successful completion of the A Exam (see below).

Special Committees

Upon matriculation, each student is assigned a “special committee”, consisting of at least three members of the Graduate Faculty, one of which serves as the committee chairperson and two as “minor members”. The committee offers general academic
advising, approves the student's course selections, and helps the student develop a plan of study that will provide the background needed for research and teaching in philosophy. The special committee is also charged with recommending the awarding of residence credit (6 semesters are required by the Graduate School), and with overseeing the student’s progress through the program by administering and adjudicating the A and B Exams (for details, see “Trajectory” below). Per Graduate School requirements, students must officially designate a committee chairperson by the end of their 3rd week in the program.

Students may change the composition of their special committee and are encouraged to do so as their interests and dissertation plans develop. Students should seek the permission of faculty before adding them to their special committee. Prior to the A Exam, special committee changes can be done directly through the Student Center. After the A Exam, such changes require a special petition to the Graduate School. The Committee chair and at least one minor member must be members of the field of Philosophy. With permission of the committee members from the field of Philosophy, a student may arrange with member of the faculty of another university to serve as an “ad hoc” member of the committee.

Trajectory through the Program

Years 1-2

Coursework: Students normally complete 12 courses covering a broad range of philosophical subfields (for details, see “Guidelines and Requirements” below). In order to do this, students typically enroll for credit in at least three courses per semester for the four semesters constituting their first two years in the program. Students may also audit courses with the permission of the instructor.

Teaching Assistantships: After a first year on non-teaching fellowships, in the second year, students TA (for details see “Teaching” below).

At the end of the fourth semester students should approach a member of the Field of Philosophy to supervise the Fifth-semester Tutorial (see Year 3, below).

Year 3

Fifth-semester Tutorial and “A Exam”: During the first semester of the third year (i.e., the fifth semester overall) students take an individual tutorial (an independent study) with one or more faculty on their special committee. This fifth-semester tutorial is the mechanism by which students identify a dissertation area and begin the research necessary for articulating, focusing, and launching a dissertation project.
Students spend the rest of the third year preparing for the A Exam under the supervision of one or more members of their special committee. The A Exam is an oral exam based on (1) a significant piece of writing preparatory for the dissertation and (2) the student's formal dissertation prospectus (both typically produced during the third year) and relevant literature.

The A Exam must be attempted before the start of the seventh semester in residence. This deadline can be extended by the Graduate School to three weeks into the seventh semester, if the student’s Special Committee confirms that the exam will be attempted by that time. Financial support administered by the Graduate School is contingent on satisfaction of this requirement. At least one week’s notice of the A Exam must be given to the Graduate School and to the Department office.

The A Exam may not be attempted until all coursework Incompletes have been made up.

**Years 4-5**

Dissertation and “B Exam”: Students spend their fourth and fifth years in the program writing the dissertation under the supervision of their special committee. The B Exam is the oral defense of the completed dissertation, administered and adjudicated by the student’s special committee. The Ph.D. is awarded on successful completion of the B Exam and the submission of the completed dissertation.

The Graduate School requires that the B Exam be scheduled at least a week before it is attempted.

**Summers**

There are no formal academic obligations during summers. However, students should discuss their summer plans with their special committees, as the typical funding package provides summer stipends for the four summers following the first year, intended to enable students to pursue academic work (for more information see “Funding” below).

**Requirements and guidelines**

The following is a list of the requirements for the Ph.D. in Philosophy. The special committee may augment, waive, or alter some of the requirements below. For example, the committee may impose additional requirements, such as language courses or courses in related fields necessary for research in the student’s area of specialization (e.g. linguistics).

I. **Coursework**
Coursework requirements are established by the student's special committee, in light of the student's preparation and plans. What follows are guidelines intended to help the student and their special committee in settling on a list of courses. These guidelines constitute a set of general expectations for a typical student, and may be set aside at the discretion of the special committee.

1. **Six registration units.** One registration unit corresponds to the satisfactory completion of one academic semester of full-time study and research.

2. **Twelve graduate-level courses in philosophy.** (Graduate level courses are typically courses that begin with the number 6 in the four-digit course number.)

3. **The Sage Seminar.** In their first semester in the program, PhD students are required to take the departmental proseminar (the Sage Seminar), which provides an introduction to selected central issues in philosophy. The Sage Seminar counts toward the 12 graduate level courses in philosophy but does not count toward a distribution area (see next bullet point).

4. **Distribution requirement.** During their first two years, students are expected to complete their 12 graduate-level courses in each of the following four areas:
   - A. History of Philosophy
   - B. Metaphysics and Epistemology
   - C. Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy
   - D. Logic or Mathematical Methods

More specifically:

A. **History of Philosophy**

Students are expected to take at least 3 courses in the history of philosophy, of which:

- at least one must focus on some major figure(s) or works of ancient western philosophy, and
- at least one must focus on some major figure(s) or works of modern western philosophy through the 19th century.

The third course may cover any figure(s) in the history of western or non-western philosophy through the 20th century.

(Normally, graduate-level Philosophy courses with a second digit of 2 count as history courses, but the special committee may approve courses taught in other departments for history credit as well.)

B. **Metaphysics and Epistemology**
Students are expected to do work in at least two areas in this category. This category is construed as including Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science, Art, Mathematics, Language, Mind, and Religion. (Normally graduate-level courses with a second digit of 5, 6, 7, or 8 in the four-digit course number satisfy this guideline.)

C. Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy

Students are expected to do work in at least one area in this category. (Normally graduate-level courses with a second digit of 4 in the four-digit course number satisfy this guideline.)

D. Logic or Mathematical Methods

Graduate students are expected to take at least 1 graduate-level course in logic or mathematical philosophy. The course must require at least one of the following:

1. Demonstrating understanding of classical 1st-order logic (of at least the Boolean connectives, universal and existential quantification), including understanding of deduction, basic model theoretic concepts and facts, soundness, and the completeness of a formalization of at least classical 0th-order logic.
2. Demonstrating competence with some of the mathematical concepts, methods, theories and logics that play a role in the philosophical literature, e.g. basic set theory, semantic theory, intensional logics, probability, decision theory, game theory and social choice theory.

Note: Graduate-level courses in logic/mathematical philosophy standardly have PHIL 2310 listed as a prerequisite. For this reason, students will only be allowed to enroll in a graduate-level course in logic/mathematical philosophy if one of the following conditions have been met:

a. the logic committee has agreed that the student has done previous work equivalent to the content of PHIL 2310 (e.g., in their undergraduate studies)

b. the student has successfully completed 2310

c. the student has learned the material covered in 2310 and has taken the preliminary and final examinations (in take-home form) for 2310

d. the student has special permission from the logic committee.

The faculty members who teach PHIL 2310 will set and administer the relevant examinations. Students who choose option (b) may not count 2310 as one of the 12 required courses. Students are expected to complete this 2310 prerequisite by the beginning of their third term in residence.
Transfer students are typically asked to supply the syllabi of logic courses taken elsewhere to the Sage faculty teaching logic courses in order to determine their status with regard to the Logic or Mathematical Methods requirement.

5 Fifth-semester Tutorial. During the fifth semester, students find and begin work on a suitable dissertation topic with one or two faculty members in the field of philosophy (usually on their special committee) to supervise their research and meet regularly with them to gauge progress.

Credit transfer: Students who have completed graduate coursework elsewhere may receive course credit for that coursework upon approval of their special committee. Note that such credit is limited to two residence units (i.e., two semesters of full-time course work). Credit for work done elsewhere is not granted automatically, and no decision about whether to grant such credit is made until a student has completed at least one semester, and normally one year, of graduate study at Cornell.

II. Exams

1 Admission to Ph.D. candidacy (the A Exam). This oral examination must be taken prior to the seventh semester of residence. It covers the student’s dissertation prospectus and relevant literature.

2 Final examination for Ph.D. candidates (the B Exam). This is an oral defense of a student’s completed dissertation work administered and adjudicated by the student’s special committee.

(There is no Q-Exam (qualifying exam) for the PhD in Philosophy.)

III. Dissertation

The dissertation must embody the results of original and substantial research. It may treat a single philosophical problem (or set of problems) in the course of several chapters or consist of a series of distinct papers.

Teaching

Teaching experience is part of professional philosophical training and as such is required for the Ph.D. in the Sage School. Further, graduate students normally receive part of their five-year funding package in the form of Teaching Assistantships (see below, under Funding).

First-year Writing Seminars
Advanced graduate students typically have the opportunity to teach their own course on a philosophical topic of their own choosing in Cornell's First-Year Writing Seminar Program. Graduate students often find teaching these seminars especially rewarding. First-year writing seminars (FWSs) enroll a maximum of 17 students and emphasize the development of writing skills within the context of discipline-specific subject matter. Typically graduate students propose topics for FWSs in the Spring of the year prior to teaching; the topics and proposals are vetted by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The First-Year Writing Program requires any TA who has not previously taught a FWS to take a course in teaching writing in either the summer prior to, or the fall semester of, the academic year in which the Seminar is to be taught. The Knight Center often supports the development of the course over the summer. Graduate students are eligible to teach a first-year seminar in Philosophy only after passing the A-Exam. Generally no one below the fifth year is asked to do a FWS.

TAs and FWS instructors are strongly advised to invite a faculty member to observe their teaching. Among other things, this ensures that some faculty member can write informatively about their teaching for the job dossier (see Placement, below).

Assessment

Learning Outcomes

The PhD in Philosophy at the Sage School enables students to

1. Think clearly and creatively about fundamental concepts;
2. Write clearly;
3. Generate original arguments about issues of philosophical significance;
4. Reconstruct and evaluate the arguments of others;
5. Be familiar with the history of philosophy and with philosophical logic.

Demonstration of these skills forms the basis of evaluation of students' coursework, exam performance, and dissertation.

Coursework assessment

Typically students are expected to complete each course in Philosophy (i) with a grade of “S” (for “Satisfactory”) or (2) with an “Inc” (for “Incomplete”) as long as the Incomplete grade is resolved within the 12-month period set by the Graduate School. To receive an Incomplete, a student must secure the permission of both the instructor and all members of the student's special committee.
In accordance with Graduate School rules, Incompletes that are not made up within one calendar year of the end of classes during the semester in which the Incompletes were assigned are recorded permanently on a student’s transcript. Courses with a permanent Incomplete will not count towards the required twelve courses.

A student who acquires too many Incompletes may be put on probation. (As a rough guideline, more than one Incomplete per term for more than one term may count as too many.) Incompletes carried over to the third year can delay the A-Exam, and threaten eligibility for fourth year support. The Graduate School requires that the A Exam be taken no later than the beginning of a student’s seventh semester, and it may not be attempted until all course work is complete, which includes making up all Incompletes.

A and B Exam assessment

Students can Pass, Conditionally Pass, or Fail their A and B Exams; this outcome is determined by the student’s special committee. In cases of a Conditional Pass, the committee puts in writing the conditions and timeline for achieving a Passing grade. A student who fails the A Exam may receive a second chance after a 3-month interim period if the special committee approves.

Student Progress Reports

The Graduate School conducts an annual Student Progress Report (SPR). The SPRs are to be completed jointly by every student and their special committee each spring semester. The SPR is intended to clarify expectations, set goals for the next academic period, and assess the student’s progress towards the completion of their PhD.

In addition, the Sage School performs its own Departmental Progress Report (DPR) SPR each semester. Students must meet with their special committee at the start of each semester to complete the DPR form, outlining the goals and expectations for the semester to come.

Annual Review

An Annual Review of all graduate students by all philosophy faculty is conducted in May or June of each year, following which each student receives cumulative written feedback on their progress and performance from the DGS.

As a result of the Annual Review, students are occasionally placed on probation for one or more terms. Probation may result from the accumulation of too many Incompletes or from performance judged inadequate for the satisfactory completion of a PhD in Philosophy at Cornell. The department will specify conditions that will vary from case to case for being removed from probation. After a semester on probation, a student may be asked to leave.
the doctoral program. This process is meant to ensure that students receive adequate notice of unsatisfactory progress and a reasonable opportunity to satisfy departmental standards.

**Funding**

*Funding commitment*

The Sage School is committed to equal, secure, and non-competitive financial support for all its graduate students. All students receive essentially the same financial package and are guaranteed full financial support for five years, contingent on satisfactory academic performance and satisfactory performance in any required teaching. Students in the program do not compete for ongoing funding.

*Structure of funding*

Since the PhD program is designed to be completed in five years, students in the program are guaranteed full financial support for five years. This support includes:

- Full tuition in the Graduate School
- A living stipend for the academic year
- A summer fellowship for four summers
- Student health insurance

This guaranteed financial support comes in two main forms – Fellowships and Teaching Assistantships:

**Fellowships**

Typically, for two of the five years (normally the first and fourth years) students receive non-teaching (“Sage”) Fellowships. During these two fellowship years, students are freed from other obligations so that they may focus exclusively on their coursework and/or research. Students may use the second of their two fellowship years to pursue training or research-related activities at another institution.

**Teaching Assistantships**

Support for the other three years typically comes in the form of Teaching Assistantships. Sage School TAs typically assist an instructor in a lower-level (i.e. 1xxx-2xxx) undergraduate course, leading one discussion section per week for about 25-30 students, and are responsible for grading the work of those students.
In the summer before the new academic year, the DGS circulates a list of the courses that will probably require TAs; prospective TAs indicate their preferences; and the DGS assigns TAs to courses taking those preferences into account. Initial assignments must sometimes be revised because of fluctuating enrollments. The number of TAs assigned to a course is determined by the course enrollment, as well as by the sort of workload demanded of a TA.

TAs are provided by the College of Arts and Sciences. As members of the instructional staff, TAs are employees of the College of Arts and Sciences, which determines how many TAs are available. Both the University and the Department provide training programs for TAs.

A TA's duties should require no more than 15 hours of work per week, on average, over the entire year. Hours are calculated by considering what could reasonably be expected of an average TA. The calculated hours include all the time spent on the course (grading and preparing for grading, preparing and conducting discussion sections, meeting with students outside class, attending class lectures, etc.).

NOTE: in all funded years (whether through fellowship or TAship), students may only add an average of 5 hours per week of extra work over the course of the semester, per Graduate School policy.

Additional Support

Funding beyond the fifth year may be available for students making good progress towards the completion of their degree. Students who need funding after five years often receive a TAship or other teaching assignment for a sixth and even a seventh year.

Supplemental funding is also usually available to support summer language study, other specialized coursework, or conference attendance. In particular, there are two standing sources for conference travel:

1. Grad School Conference Travel Grant: Students traveling to present at a conference can apply once a year for travel money to the Grad School, with the approval of the DGS, which is contingent on the student's special committee chair's approval. Abstract of paper and proof of invitation are required for the application. The maximum amount awarded is $675 as of 2021.

2. Departmental Travel Money: Students can also apply to the department for a reimbursement of expenses incurred by conference attendance (not necessarily involving presenting). The maximum amount of reimbursement is $300 as of 2021. The form required for such requests can be obtained from the Graduate Field Assistant (GFA) and the request has to be approved by the student's special committee chair and the DGS. Expenses incurred for presenting at conferences will
be reimbursed by the department only after the Grad School Conference Travel Grant has been exhausted.

Additional *summer funding* may be available depending on the availability of Departmental and Graduate School funds. In distributing extra funds, the department seeks to promote equity and to facilitate completion of the PhD within the five-year program. Priority will be given to those within the five-year program and to those who have had relatively more TAship support (as compared with non-teaching support) than others. A candidate's academic record, such as probation and incompletes, will also be considered. At the end of the Spring term, the DGS will advertise the availability of such funding, if any. Applicants for this summer support should advise the DGS of special factors (such as financial need) which may then be taken into account. The DGS, in consultation with the rest of the faculty, makes the final assignments of funds.

The *Norman Malcolm Fellowship* is an endowed fellowship that resides at and is managed by the Sage School and provides for a graduate student exchange between the philosophy departments at Cornell and King’s College London. The fellowship is normally awarded to one graduate student each academic year, with Cornell and King’s awarding the fellowship in alternating years. For Cornell students, the fellowship provides for one semester of time at King’s, including a living stipend (the same amount as received by Cornell graduate students in residence at Ithaca for the semester), health care, and a semester’s tuition at King’s. This fellowship counts as an external fellowship, and thus does not use up any of the recipient’s promised support from the Sage School. All graduate students are eligible to apply; but a recipient who would be in the fourth year or beyond during the fellowship year must have passed the A Exam before starting the term at King’s.

**Placement**

One of the aims of the graduate program in the Sage School is to help students compete favorably in the academic job market upon finishing the program. Each year a member of the faculty serves as the Placement Director. The role of the Placement Director is to coordinate and guide student preparation for the job market in the early years of the program, through the application process as they wrap up their PhDs, and, when needed and possible, beyond graduation.

Typically students apply for jobs for the first time in their fifth or sixth year in the program. (The first deadlines for academic jobs are usually around mid-October, with some international jobs and fellowship deadlines even earlier). But the Placement program aims to help students prepare for the job market long before the year they actually first apply. This preparation has several components.
Each Spring the Placement Director runs an informal Placement Seminar designed to give job market advice to students still early in their passage through the PhD program, as well as those planning to apply for jobs the following fall. The Seminar typically consists of 4-6 weekly meetings, and supplies students with detailed information about all aspects of the application process, including relevant deadlines. The Spring Seminar includes panels with recent graduates and faculty on topics such as publishing while still in graduate school; building a strong teaching record; becoming a competitive candidate for specific types of jobs (e.g. at liberal arts colleges, regional state universities, community colleges, etc.); and careers beyond academia. Throughout the year, the Placement Director also typically organizes additional advice panels. All students, no matter how early in their careers, are encouraged to attend both the Spring seminar and the one-off panels.

The keystone of the Placement program is the Fall Placement Seminar. This is a required course for all first-time academic job applicants, and it’s not unusual for candidates making a second run at the market to attend the seminar again. The primary purpose of the Placement Seminar is to workshop application materials: in particular, the Writing Sample; the Research and Teaching Statements, as well other components of the standard application (CV, cover letter, diversity statement, teaching dossier, and professional websites). The Seminar also includes round-robin-style practice interviews. Seminar students tend to greatly appreciate having the support, camaraderie, and feedback of other job candidates going through the same process.

In addition to the Placement Seminar, first-time job candidates are given two more formal practice ("mock") interviews by the Sage School faculty. The Placement Director also arranges for practice job talks, practice teaching sessions, further mock interviews, etc., as needed in the Spring, when candidates begin to receive invitations for campus visits.

Alongside the Placement Director, the GFA plays an indispensable role in the department’s Placement services. The GFA handles the submission of letters of reference for Sage School candidates. The department generally helps submit letters of reference 1) during the applicants’ time as PhD students, and 2) until they get their first tenure track job, or are 3 years post-PhD, whichever happens first. (Job applicants may also choose to manage the submission of reference letters on their own, using a dossier service like Interfolio.)

Job candidates need to make sure that their special committees are kept informed of any plans to enter the job market, and are in a position to support the job and fellowship applications through detailed letters discussing the student’s dissertation research and any publications. The students are strongly advised to consult their committees for advice when preparing for, and while on, the market, and to discuss what materials the committee would like to receive (and when) from the student. Candidates also need to make sure that a faculty member had observed their teaching, and so is able to write a detailed letter dedicated primarily or exclusively to the student’s teaching.
For further information about placement, including the Sage School placement record in the last decade-plus, see https://philosophy.cornell.edu/graduate-placement. Philjobs.org is currently the best place to search for job advertisements.

**Departmental governance and community**

*Departmental governance*

Two elected graduate student representatives attend faculty meetings and report back to the student body.

The departmental committees responsible for planning the next year’s curriculum and arranging outside speakers have graduate student members.

*Intellectual community*

The Sage School has several regular venues for formal and informal presentations of philosophical work:

**Colloquium series (“Discussion Club”)**

Discussion Club talks by invited and, less often, internal speakers usually take place Fridays 3-5pm. Each term there are typically four Discussion Club talks. *All graduate students are expected to attend these, and attendance and participation in them is taken into account in student evaluations.* Attending such events builds knowledge of recent work in different subfields, and hones critical engagement skills that are highly valued in the profession.

**Department Workshop**

The Department Workshop is the departmental venue for presenting work-in-progress. We aim to create a supportive and casual atmosphere where all feel welcome. PhD students are the primary presenters, but faculty/lecturers, postdocs, and visitors are all also welcome to sign up. *All graduate students are expected to attend.* Each term, a faculty member serves as the Workshop Coordinator, and is responsible for arranging the schedule of meetings and speakers.

**Ethics Colloquium**

The colloquium, sponsored by Ethics and Public Life program, takes place 4-6 times in the Fall semester. It features invited speakers and pre-read papers.

**Reading Groups**
Every semester the department is home to a number of informal reading groups, stemming from faculty and student interests. PLATO (see below) can also help organize and gauge levels of interest for potential reading groups. Some recent and recurring groups include the Philosophy of Law, Semantics, and MAP (see below) reading groups.

### Graduate Student Organizations

#### PLATO

The Philosophy, Leadership, Advocacy, and Training Organization (PLATO) is the Sage School Graduate Field organization comprised exclusively of philosophy graduate students. All philosophy graduate students are automatically members. PLATO is committed to providing support for incoming and current graduate students. It aims to enhance the graduate school experience by facilitating communication among students, faculty, staff, and administration; to create resources and opportunities for improving teaching, research, and leadership; to organize events that improve the communal spirit of the graduate student body; and to help coordinate the various student-led activities, programs, and organizations. Its managing board is comprised by five elected members. Two of the members are also graduate representatives to the faculty, with responsibility for attending faculty meetings and reporting back to the student body; securing open communications with the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly; and mediating, if asked, in faculty-student conflicts.

#### Mentorship Program

The Mentorship Program pairs first-year students with upper-year mentors who help navigate the department, relationships with faculty and other students, classes, administrative hurdles, and any international transition issues that are often part of starting graduate school. Mentors and mentees are recruited and paired at the beginning of the academic year.

#### Minorities in Philosophy (MAP)

MAP (www.mapforthegap.com) is a non-profit dedicated to supporting student members of historically marginalized groups in their pursuit of professional philosophy. The Sage School of Philosophy’s local MAP chapter (mapcormell.weebly.com) typically organize a number of events, including an annual inclusive teaching workshops, reading groups, as well as emotional and mental health check-ins.

#### Sage Editing Group

The Editing Group meets once a week to collaboratively edit and comment on graduate student work in progress, in a rotating pairing system. This program is led by two volunteer graduate students.
Orientation

The fall semester at Cornell begins at the end of August. In addition to orientation and training events organized by the Grad School, there are also Philosophy-specific events. These typically include (1) a welcome of all new graduate students by the DGS; (2) a TA-ing for Philosophy training session for new TAs led by experienced Philosophy TAs; and (3) an introduction to the all-important bread-and-butter logistics of the department (keys, photocopying, etc) led by the GFA.

Graduate students whose native language is not English are required by the Graduate School to pass a language competency test before the start of the academic year a year before they are expected to TA.

Logistics

Office space

Teaching assistants and FWS instructors have the use of offices in Goldwin Smith.

Keys

For the duration of the program, every student receives a key to the departmental mail-and-copy room (GSH 229) and the common room/lounge (GSH 213). Any student teaching (either as a TA or for an FWS) receives an office key for the duration of their teaching assignment. All keys are distributed by the department administrator (Dorothy Vanderbilt).

Copying, printing & scanning

The department has two printers for student use. The first one, in the lounge, is managed by the University (not the department) and uses the CUPrint network. Its use requires an ID card. Every student has a $15 credit (as of Fall 2021) for the use of this printer from the University. Use is billed directly to the student’s bursar account.

The second printer is the departmental printer/copier/scanner in the mail/copy room. Each student receives an access code from the GFA at the start of their first year. All non-teaching students are allowed 100 free copies (=100 printed sides) per academic year. All TA-ing students receive a 1000 free copies per academic year. All students teaching FWSs receive free 2000 copies per academic year. Students can purchase additional copies (contact the GFA for more information and prices). The mailroom machine can also print
from a “thumb” (jump) drive, as well as scan documents (to PDFs), which are then sent to the grad’s Cornell email. Scanning is unlimited.

There is also a department color printer available for very small quantities (<5) of 8.5x11 color printing. (Contact the GFA for details.) For larger size prints or quantities, consult with the library service desk (https://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/printing-in-olin-uris), or the department administrator for outside vendors.

Admissions

Admissions Criteria

The Sage School admissions process is highly selective. We receive approximately 300 applications each year for approximately five places in our program. As a result, we look for students with outstanding potential for graduate work in philosophy. In our admissions process, we give considerable and roughly equal weight to three parts of an applicant’s file:

- Academic record
- Letters of recommendation (3-5)
- Writing sample

The applicant’s personal statement is also given some weight in the process.

We do not require GRE scores, nor have a minimum GPA requirement. However, we do value a strong academic record. In particular, we look for a very strong indication of philosophical ability. The latter is often (but not always) demonstrated by a record of achievement in philosophy courses.

We normally expect applicants to have a background in philosophy, at least the equivalent of what a Cornell undergraduate philosophy major would have.

Letters of recommendation: We require three letters of recommendation, and will accept as many as five. It is best if they are written by people who know the applicant well and can provide a concrete and detailed assessment of his or her work. Typically the letters should be from philosophy instructors.

Writing Sample: We look for a substantial, polished piece of writing that shows the applicant’s philosophical abilities and skills. Typically, a term paper length (about 15 pages) is appropriate. Writing samples longer than 30 pages are unlikely to be read in their entirety. A paper written for an upper-level philosophy course is generally appropriate.
Personal Statement: We look for some insight into a person’s general intellectual character and interests as well as some indication of how the person's abilities and interests fit with our program. We are particularly interested in candidates who are likely to be a good fit with our faculty research profile.

Admissions Process

The Sage School admissions process is conducted once a year, January-March, for admission in the fall of the following academic year.

Application Deadline: January 10th.

Application Materials: The following materials must be submitted online via the Cornell University Graduate School online application system:

- Biographical information
- Academic information (including unofficial transcripts)
- If applicable, TOEFL or IELTS scores (GRE scores are not needed)
- Recommender information for three to five letters of recommendation. A total of five letters of recommendation will be accepted, but only three are required. All letters should be submitted online (contact the Sage School at philosophy@cornell.edu if this is not possible).
- Statement of Purpose
- Writing sample in philosophy (15-30 pages)
- Application fee
- Financial support information (if required)

Notification of Application Status: Application status and receipt of transcripts and letters are reported via the online application interface.

Decision Notification: Notification of admissions decisions will be made by email on or before March 15th.

Application fee waivers are available for qualified persons. The waiver application is part of the online admissions system (How to apply for a Cornell Graduate School application fee waiver).

View the Graduate Admissions Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Please write to philosophy@cornell.edu for additional information.

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