

HONORS IN PHILOSOPHY

Requirements and Steps

1. Be a philosophy major and have a GPA of at least 3.5 in Philosophy
2. Write an Honors Thesis and pass an Oral Defense on the thesis
3. Take one extra upper-level Philosophy course

Start by contacting the Philosophy Undergraduate Program Director. A student pursuing honors in philosophy chooses a topic to research and selects a faculty member who agrees to supervise the student's work on the thesis. The Undergraduate Program Director assists the student in setting up a committee for the oral defense consisting of the faculty member who supervised the thesis and two additional faculty members.

The student may develop the thesis from an earlier paper written for a philosophy course. Also, the student may take the required extra philosophy course as a directed readings course with his or her faculty supervisor.

A draft of the thesis must be completed early enough in the semester that the faculty supervisor can make comments for possible revision. The other members of the defense committee may offer feedback if they wish.

When the thesis is completed, an oral defense of the thesis is scheduled, usually by the student and his or her faculty supervisor. The three faculty members participating in the oral defense then vote on whether the student has passed the defense.

For more information contact the Philosophy Undergraduate Program Director Dr. Kristen Irwin (kirwin@luc.edu).

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be a member of the Interdisciplinary Honors Program in order to graduate with honors in philosophy?

No. The two programs are completely independent of each other.

When do I need to sign up or declare that I want to graduate with honors in philosophy?

For a student graduating in the spring, it is a good idea to start the process sometime in the fall semester of one's final year in order to allow ample time to get things done. However, a student may sign up as late as the first few weeks of the spring semester.

How do I sign up?

Contact the honors advisor in the Philosophy Department.

How long does the honors thesis need to be?

There is no set page minimum or maximum. The thesis should be a substantial paper. A student's faculty supervisor will help the student determine what is required in her or his chosen area of study.

Do I need to write the thesis "from scratch"?

No. Doing so is permitted, but students often start with a paper they have written for a philosophy class and revise, expand, deepen, and develop it into a bigger, better paper.

Do the above deadlines mean that I can submit my thesis during finals week?

No. The normal procedure is for a student to submit a draft of the thesis to the supervising faculty member (or to all three faculty members on the defense committee, if they are willing) of the student's thesis. The faculty

supervisor (and perhaps the other faculty on the defense committee) critique the paper and return it to the student for revisions. The revised version of the thesis is then given to all three members of the committee approximately one week before the scheduled defense of the thesis. As a general rule, the student should expect to submit a draft by the tenth week of classes.

Who decides if the honors thesis and oral defense satisfy the requirements?

That determination is made by the three faculty members who take part in the student's oral defense of the thesis.

How long is the oral defense?

There is no required time limit, but typically the defense lasts between one and two hours. Usually, the student begins by summarizing the thesis (this might take 5–10 minutes) and then the faculty members ask the student questions about the thesis (or the research for it, or its applications) for about an hour. The student then leaves the room while the faculty members decide whether the student passed. The defense is not so much an examination as it is a discussion.

The Honors Thesis

The Honors Thesis is more than a paper written for a class. In general, it is longer, better developed, and more sophisticated. It should be similar to a paper written by a first year graduate student.

Minimally, the Honors Thesis must be a good philosophy paper, although we expect that a major working at honors will aim to make his or her thesis even better than that. The descriptions below indicate what to aim for and also what sort of work falls short of being even good.

Good:

- The thesis statement is clear and fully articulated
- The paper presents a well-reasoned argument without important steps in the argument being left out or difficult to find
- The reasons/premises are stated and relevant
- The reasons/premises support the argument, even if the reasons why they support the conclusions are not fully or clearly articulated
- The paper notes that there are counterarguments to its thesis and indicates how they might be responded to
- The paper uses textual references that contribute to its argument or its discussion of counterarguments
- The paper accurately interprets the texts it uses
- The paper offers some critical evaluation of its own thesis and/or arguments and/or of the counterarguments it identifies

Outstanding:

- The thesis statement is clearly and fully articulated
- The paper presents a clearly structured argument that is complete and easy to follow
- The reasons/premises are stated clearly and are relevant and internally coherent
- The reasons/premises directly support the argument and the explanation makes it clear why this is so
- The paper acknowledges and explicitly responds to counterarguments with sophistication
- The paper uses appropriate textual references whose presence is clearly helpful and explicitly explained
- The paper uses an accurate and insightful interpretation of the texts it uses

- The paper offers a thoughtful and persuasive critical evaluation of the various positions and arguments presented

Less Than Adequate:

- There is a thesis that is evident, but it is not clear and/or is not easy to find
- Argumentation is present, but is incomplete and/or its elements are difficult to find
- The reasons/premises of the argument are evident, but are incompletely or unclearly stated
- The reasons/premises lend support for the conclusions, but the conclusions do not follow unless other reasons/premises are assumed which are not stated and/or the relation between the stated reasons and their conclusions is not explained
- Some obvious counterarguments are noted, but others are missed and/or possible responses to those that are mentioned are absent
- Textual references are made but they are either not necessarily appropriate or their connection to the reasoning in the paper is unclear
- The interpretation of the texts that are used is fairly accurate and does not force the texts to fit a certain role in the paper
- The paper shows a few signs of critical evaluation regarding the various positions and arguments presented, but it is spotty and incomplete in this respect