Honors Program in Philosophy

The honors program in the Department of Philosophy is designed to provide outstanding majors in philosophy the opportunity for independent research and the incentive for sustained and enhanced philosophical reflection during their senior year. Under the supervision of their advisors, students admitted into the program will engage in a yearlong thesis project cumulating in a polished piece of philosophical writing and in an oral presentation. For that purpose, they will enroll in an honors tutorial with full course credit in each semester of their senior year. Only one of those credits can however be counted towards the minimum of 10 courses required for the philosophy major (and should not replace any of the required upper level seminars). Students admitted into the honors program are also expected to manifest their intellectual potential through an increased presence in the department by attending colloquia presentation or by playing a more active role in the philosophy club, for example. Students are allowed to be both members of the departmental honors program and the College Honors Program. Their philosophy thesis can be counted towards both programs.

Eligibility Criteria:

1.) Students are expected to have a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 overall and a cumulative grade point average of 3.6 in the department. In case they fall somewhat short of these requirements a special nomination for the honors program by a professor in the Department would be required.

2.) By the end of junior year, students should have completed at least six courses in philosophy including one advanced seminar (300-level)

The Application Process

At the beginning of their second semester junior year, the chair of the department will contact eligible students so that they consider applying for the departmental honors program. He or she will also solicit nominations of students for the honors program from his or her colleagues in the department.

Students, who want to enter the honors program should think in broad terms about a philosophical topic or a philosophical question they would like to work on as the subject matter of their thesis project. They should consult in this respect with professors in the department that could serve as potential advisors for their project. Before a student applies for the program he should obtain the explicit consent of a professor from the department that he will serve as his thesis advisor during his or her senior year. The student should also obtain the explicit consent from a second professor to serve as a reader for his or her thesis.
The deadline for the application is April 1. The completed application has to be handed in to the chair of the department. It has to contain the following documents.

1.) The application cover sheet signed by the student, advisor, and reader.

2.) A narrative (not more than 3-5 single spaced pages) that explains the student’s motivation and interest in participating in the honors program and what the students plans to accomplish during his time in the honors program. Most importantly, it should explain in broad terms the chosen thesis topic and its philosophical significance; that is, what is so interesting and perplexing about it that it justifies and engages the student's intellectual attention for a whole academic year.

3.) Two letters of recommendation from professors in the department, at least one of them should be written by the thesis advisor.

4.) The academic transcript and an explication of how the student intends to fulfill all of his or her remaining requirements during the senior year.

The honors committee of the department (consisting of at least three professors from the department) will determine the merit of the student’s application. The student will be informed about its decision by the chair of the honors committee latest by the last day of classes.

**The Senior Year**

Students are encouraged to start working on their thesis project already in the summer between their junior and senior years. In order to develop their research skills, they are strongly encouraged to apply also for a Mellon Summer Research Grant during the second semester in their junior year.

In consultation with their advisor, students will determine specific syllabi for their tutorials in the Fall and Spring semesters. Generally it is expected that the students will meet with his or her advisor every week to discuss the relevant literature and, later on, to discuss drafts of writing. Most importantly, in the Fall semester, before the start of Thanksgiving Break the student is expected to provide the departmental honors committee a thesis prospectus, that is, a more specific explication of his thesis project with a detailed bibliography and a more specific plan for its completion. After Thanksgiving the student will meet with the honors committee, the advisor, and the reader for the thesis in order to discuss his prospectus with them. They will decide if the student has completed enough work and presented an appropriate prospectus and work plan to continue with the thesis in the second semester. If so, the student will receive a grade of IP (in progress) for the first semester and will receive a grade at the end of the second semester that will apply to the full year of work. If not, the first semester course
will be converted to a tutorial and a grade will be assigned for the work completed by the thesis advisor. In addition, if the student or the thesis advisor decides that the student should not continue the thesis at the end of the first semester, the thesis course will be converted to a tutorial and the thesis advisor will assign a grade based on the work completed.

Moreover, if there are a number of students working on different honors theses, they and their advisors will meet on an informal basis as a group once or twice during each semester to get to know about each other’s project and to discuss strategies of research, writing and oral presentations. Students are also expected to attend at least four different colloquia talks during their senior year.

Toward the end of the Spring semester, honors students will present their theses to students and departmental faculty (including members of the Departmental Honors Committee). A complete draft of the thesis must be presented to the advisor and reader at least one week before the scheduled oral presentation. Latest a week after their presentation students will deposit a bound copy of their thesis with a cover page listing the title, author’s name and the names of the advisor and reader in the department. They will also give one copy each to their advisor and reader. The advisor will then in consultation with the reader determine the final grade for the thesis.

**Conferring Honors in Philosophy**

The final authority of conferring Departmental Honors, which will be indicated on the student’s transcript, rests with the departmental honors committee. Honors is normally conferred if the student successfully completes the requirements listed above, maintains an overall GPA of 3.4 and a departmental GPA of 3.6, receives at least a B+ for his or her thesis, and has presented it orally in a “honors-worthy” manner. The grade that the student receives for his or her thesis will also be the grade that he or she receives as semester grades for the honors tutorials in the Fall and Spring semesters.