

The Program in Social, Political, Ethical and Legal Philosophy

SPEL GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

**Philosophy Department
Binghamton University**

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The SPEL program

Welcome to SPEL! The graduate program in Social, Political, Ethical and Legal philosophy offers a pluralistic approach to these areas of research; students study social, political, ethical and legal philosophy using a range of philosophical methodologies and perspectives. Although students will specialize in a particular area as their coursework and research progresses, they typically achieve a breadth of engagement with analytic, continental, historical, and non-western philosophical inquiry. The program also values and supports a full variety of types of scholarship in SPEL areas, from the highly abstract or historical to the applied and/or interdisciplinary, including work that addresses contemporary social issues. Students pursuing a graduate degree in SPEL will become capable philosophical researchers, receive professional training, and learn the skills required to be a first-rate teacher.

The faculty have broad strengths in social and political philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of law, and support an array of sophisticated research programs in these areas. Particular areas of research interest include feminist philosophy, philosophy of technology, Asian philosophy (especially in the Buddhist tradition), metaethics and moral psychology, Kant, 19th-century continental philosophy, philosophy of art, and applied ethics.

SPEL is host to a vibrant scholarly community. The combination of intellectual diversity and common orientation of interest in SPEL areas makes for rich exchange. The SPEL Colloquium hosts multiple visiting speakers every semester, and we have active reading groups, discussions of works in progress, and the like. The SPEL graduate student organization also hosts an annual conference that draws graduate students from across the region and nation.

SPEL and the Philosophy Department work closely with the Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Law, which annually hosts a reputed scholar addressing issues of public concern. There are also opportunities to work with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, which offers graduate fellowships and a weekly speaker series. Some SPEL students also work closely with the Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention.

The SPEL faculty, and philosophy department staff

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS):

ANJA KARNEIN is Associate Professor of Philosophy. She received her Ph.D. from Brandeis University. Before coming to Binghamton, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Edmond J. Safra Foundation Center for Ethics at Harvard University and, following that, Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Society and Genetics at the University of California, Los Angeles. She spent several years at Goethe University in Frankfurt, first as a post-doctoral fellow in the Cluster of Excellence "The Formation of Normative Orders" and then as wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin (comparable to untenured assistant professor). She works on intergenerational-, climate- and global justice. Her first book, *A Theory of Unborn Life*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2012 (and, in German translation, with Suhrkamp 2013). Her recent papers include, "Historical Immortality and the Prospect of Human Extinction" (*The Journal for the Philosophy of History*, 2025), "Two Kinds of Social Cooperation?," (*Economics and Philosophy* 2025), "Intergenerational Distributive (Climate) Justice" (*Res Publica* 2025), "What's Wrong with the Presentist Bias? On the Threat of Intergenerational Domination" (*Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2023), and "Rawls and the Future: On the Possibility of Cooperation Across Time" (*Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2022).

Faculty:

CASEY DOYLE is Assistant Professor in Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh and B.A. from Bates College. Before coming to Binghamton in 2020 he had an EU Mobility Fellowship in the Czech Republic and a Junior Research Fellowship at St. Hilda's College, Oxford. He mostly works in philosophy of mind and epistemology, focusing on self-knowledge, but has additional research interests in philosophy of technology, moral psychology, and history of philosophy. His recent publications include "Might Technology Undermine First-Person Authority?", "Listening to Algorithms: The Case of Self-Knowledge", "Politicization, Signaling, and the Epistemic Landscape", and "Alienation and Self-Blindness".

MATEO DUQUE is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 2020 from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). He has been at Binghamton University since 2020, the first two years as a Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow. His areas of research and teaching include Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly Plato; aesthetics, theater, comedy, and performance; and philosophy as a way of life. His recent publications include "'Οὐκ ἔστιν' (141e8): The Performative Contradiction of the First Hypothesis" (2023) on Plato's Parmenides, "The Performative Contradiction of the First Hypothesis" (2023) on Plato's Parmenides, and "Two Passions in Plato's Symposium: Diotima's To Kalon as a Reorientation of Imperialistic Erōs" (2019). He is the co-editor, with Gerald A. Press, of *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Plato* (2023).

CHARLES GOODMAN is Professor in the Philosophy Department and the Department of Asian and Asian-American Studies. He holds a B.A. in physics from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is interested in views and arguments about ethics, metaphysics and epistemology found in Buddhist texts from premodern South Asia, Tibet and China, and in what we today can learn from these traditions. Goodman is the author of *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics* (2009) and a co-author of *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness* (2016). His translations from Sanskrit include *The Training Anthology of Śāntideva* (2016) and *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarākṣita: Selected Metaphysical Chapters* (2022.) He has also published articles on Buddhist philosophy and on applied ethics. Goodman's current research focuses on dialogues between different philosophical traditions, both in ancient India and today. He is currently preparing a collaborative volume with Professor Malcolm Keating of Smith College entitled *Buddhist Philosophy and Its Critics: An Anthology of South Asian Sources*. His next book project will focus on ways in which including Buddhist perspectives in the conversation of the philosophy of religion could affect the relative plausibility of positions already under discussion in that field. Goodman has also recently been writing, presenting and engaging in collaborative conversations on AI ethics and AI safety.

ROBERT GUAY is Professor of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 2000 from the University of Chicago. He has been at Binghamton University since 2006. His areas of research and teaching include continental philosophy (especially 19th century German), moral and political philosophy, and philosophy of art. His recent publications include *Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment* (edited, Oxford University Press, 2019) and *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

REBECCA E. HARRISON is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy in 2023 from the University of Michigan, and started at Binghamton University in 2023. Rebecca's research and teaching interests include the philosophy of language, feminist philosophy, social and political philosophy, social epistemology, and action theory. Her work explores how power and oppression shape the way we use language. Recent publications include "Whose Uptake Matters? Sexual Refusal and the Ethics of Uptake" (2025), co-authored with Kai Tanter. She is originally from the Melbourne area in

Australia.

MATTIAS ISER is Associate Professor of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. from Freie Universität Berlin (Germany) in 2005 and has been at Binghamton since 2014. He works in social and political philosophy as well as in ethics, with an emphasis on recent developments in Frankfurt School critical theory, theories of recognition and just war theory. His recent publications include “Sequential Sovereignty between Justice and Authenticity” (2025), a co-edited volume on Rainer Forst’s work in German, *The Power of Justification*, 2024 (selected essays forthcoming in a special issue with *Philosophy & Social Criticism*), “Objectionable Objections. On Toleration, Respect, and Esteem” (2019), “Beyond the Paradigm of Self-Defense? On Revolutionary Violence” (2017) as well as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on “Recognition.”

CHRISTOPHER MORGAN-KNAPP is Professor of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 2001 from Rutgers University, and has been at Binghamton University since then. His areas of research and teaching include environmental ethics, ethical theory, and the ethics of economic life. His recent publications include “Competitions, Prizes, and Economic Desert,” “Fairness, Individuality, and Free-Riding,” “The Environmental Case Against Employmentism,” and “Comparative Pride”. He is a recipient of the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching.

JORDAN PASCOE is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. She received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. Prior to coming to Binghamton in 2025, she was Professor of Philosophy at Manhattan College. She works in feminist philosophy and philosophy of race in areas including Kant’s practical philosophy, feminist ethics and epistemology, social and political philosophy, and philosophy of law. She has interests in applied areas including the philosophies of sex, public health, disaster, and A.I. She is the author of *Kant’s Theory of Labour* (Cambridge University Press 2022) and the co-author of *The Epistemology of Disasters and Social Change* (Rowman Littlefield 2024). Some recent publications include “Kant’s Political Theory of Race”, “On Work, Precarity, and Citizenship in the A.I. Era.”, “Feminist Rethinking of Disaster Response”, “The Aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*” and “The Whiteness of Consent.”

MAX PENSKY is Professor of Philosophy and Co-Director of Binghamton University's Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention. He received his Ph.D. in 1988 from Boston College. He has been at Binghamton University since 1990. His areas of research and teaching include contemporary social and political philosophy, critical theory, and the philosophy of international law and international relations. Recent publications include numerous articles and book chapters on the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (especially Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno. and Juergen Habermas), transitional justice, and international criminal law. As I-GMAP Co-Director, he also publishes policy research documents on post-conflict stabilization and reconciliation, protections for forcibly displaced populations, and international responses to genocides and other atrocity crimes.

ANTHONY PREUS is Distinguished Teaching Professor. He received his Ph.D. in 1968 from Johns Hopkins University. He has been at Binghamton University since 1964. His areas of research and teaching include ancient Greek philosophy and medical ethics. He has published books and articles on Aristotle and other topics in ancient philosophy, most recently *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Scarecrow Press).

TONY REEVES is Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. from Boston University and started at Binghamton University in 2009. He works in philosophy of law, social and

political philosophy, and ethical theory, and has particular interests in questions of authority, political justification, rights, procedure, responsibility allocation, risk, and international criminal law. His recent publications include “Impunity and Hope” *Ratio Juris* (2019), “Human Rights as Protections Against Rational Despair” *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2023), and “Agents of Our Interests: The Moral Claim to Legal Process” *Philosophers’ Imprint* (2025).

LISA TESSMAN is Professor of Philosophy. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1996. She has been at Binghamton University since 1999. She also holds an appointment as a Senior Researcher at the University of Oslo, where she is working on a project on moral residue in health care contexts, funded by a European Research Council advanced grant. She is a recipient of the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities. She served as President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in 2023-2024. Her areas of research and teaching include Ethics, Moral Psychology, Feminist Philosophy, and related areas. Her books include *When Doing the Right Thing Is Impossible* (Oxford University Press, 2017); *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 2015); and *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford University Press, 2005). She is currently writing a book, co-authored with Cullin Brown, on situations of moral residue, namely situations that are characterized by certain asymmetries between how people hold themselves responsible and how they are held (or not held) responsible by others; the book is under contract with Oxford University Press.

MELISSA ZINKIN is Professor of Philosophy. She received her Ph.D. in 1999 from Northwestern University. She has been at Binghamton University since 1998. She is a recipient of the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Her areas of research and teaching include Kant, the history of philosophy, aesthetics, and feminist theory. Some recent publications include; *Depth: A Kantian Account of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 2024), *The Art and Aesthetics of Capitalism*, guest editor with Brian Soucek, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (2024), “Kant on Wonder as the Motive to Learn,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 55: 3 (2021): 921-934, “Two Kinds of Feminist Philosophy,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 99: 4 (2018): 207-227.

Post-doctoral fellows

EMILIE PAGANO is the PRODIG+ postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Philosophy. She received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin in 2023. Before coming to Binghamton in 2025, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Vienna under the *Knowledge in Crisis* project. She is interested in a range of issues at the intersection of metaphysics and social philosophy. She is especially interested in a distinctive feature of social phenomena; roughly, that they exist because we say they exist. She has related research and teaching interests in the metaphysics of social construction, sex, and gender. Her recent publications include: “All Socially Constructed Facts are Social Facts.” *Forthcoming in Philosophical Quarterly*; “Functionalism, Pluralities, and Groups.” *Forthcoming in Dialectica*; “Social Construction, Social Kinds, and Exportation” *Analysis*, 84(1): 83–93 (2023); “What Social Construction Isn’t” *Philosophia*, 49(1): 1651–1670 (2021).

Philosophy department support staff:

NICOLE HALLETT is the Operations and Finance Manager in the Philosophy Department. In 2021, she completed her MBA with a concentration in Human Resource Management (HRM) from Excelsior College, having previously joined Binghamton University in 2017.

MELISSA SUMPTER is the Administrative Assistant in the Philosophy Department. A Binghamton University alumna, she earned her BA in Philosophy, Politics and Law in 2008 and began working at the

university in 2024.

The SPEL committee

The SPEL Committee consists of all tenured and tenure-track SPEL faculty members. Policy decisions, curricular decisions, admissions and funding decisions, and so on are made by this committee. This committee also evaluates current SPEL students. Once a year, or additionally as needed, a joint faculty-student SPEL meeting is held. The SPEL committee welcomes suggestions from any SPEL student at any time.

Orientation

Orientation takes place at the beginning of the fall semester; it includes a session at which the DGS will explain important aspects of the program to the incoming graduate students as a group, and an individual meeting between the DGS and each student, as well as a welcome event for new students to meet all of the SPEL faculty and other SPEL students. The Binghamton University Graduate School holds a mandatory orientation for those who will be teaching assistants, often prior to the beginning of the semester. SPEL also holds its own TA orientation.

Faculty advisors

All incoming SPEL students who do not yet have an M.A. in Philosophy will be paired with a faculty member who will serve as their initial advisor; after completing the M.A. portion of the program, they may choose another faculty member to serve as their advisor and dissertation director. Any student who enters SPEL with an M.A. in Philosophy should choose as an advisor the faculty member who will serve as dissertation director. If a student wishes to change advisors they should speak with the DGS about this. Students may change advisors at any time, and this may happen for a variety of reasons; for instance, a student may begin with one advisor, and then find that their interests have shifted and that they will be better matched with someone else.

Students should meet with their advisor regularly—*at least* once a semester. The advisor keeps their advisees' checklists of completed requirements on file and updates this checklist at meetings; the advisor also helps their advisees plan a course of study and choose seminars.

Funding graduate studies in SPEL

Teaching Assistantships

Students who have been admitted with funding are offered teaching assistantships. Teaching assistantships are renewable for up to five years of funding for students who do not already have an M.A. in Philosophy from another institution, and renewable for up to four years of funding for students who already have an M.A. in Philosophy from another institution.

Teaching assistantships are offered for one year at a time and are renewed conditional upon the student's satisfactory progress towards the degree and satisfactory performance as a teaching assistant. A teaching assistantship comes with a tuition scholarship, a stipend, and health care benefits. Students who are not initially offered funding but who begin the program may apply for funding in subsequent years, but they will be competing for the available teaching assistantships with new applicants to SPEL.

All domestic (U.S. citizen or permanent resident) students are required to become N.Y. residents before the beginning of their second year; tuition scholarships will not cover non-resident tuition for domestic students beyond their first year. Tuition scholarships will cover non-resident tuition for international students.

Students in the 4+1 program and other terminal M.A. students cannot be considered for funding.

Dissertation Assistantships

Each year, the department awards one merit-based Dissertation Assistantship (DA), which comes with no teaching obligations. It may be awarded to one student for two semesters or to two students for one semester each.

The application deadline for the Dissertation Assistantship is February 7 of a student's fourth year for students entering without at M.A. in Philosophy, and October 7 of a student's third year for students entering with an M.A. in Philosophy; the timing of this deadline is intended to give students who entered with an M.A. a fair chance to compete for the DA. Students are normally expected to be in residence during the period when they are supported by the DA. All students who apply for the DA should clearly indicate whether or not they commit to being in residence. The committee will regard a clearly expressed residency commitment as a reason in favor of granting the DA to that student. However, unless there are unforeseen and genuinely extraordinary circumstances, any student who makes such a commitment and then is not in residence during the DA-supported period will forfeit the DA, which the committee may then award to another student.

Students who are working on dissertations but who are not a DA recipient are often offered work in the department as TAs or adjunct instructors.

Other opportunities for funding

Students who have already earned their M.A. in Philosophy (in SPEL or elsewhere) and who have already served as a teaching assistant (or taught elsewhere) may apply to teach their own courses during summer sessions or winter session.

Applicants to the SPEL program who meet particular criteria are encouraged to apply for a [Clifford D. Clark Graduate Fellowship](#).

Students are strongly discouraged from teaching at other institutions while working on their degree, unless it is financially impossible to complete the degree without doing so. Students who do choose to work outside of Binghamton University while on funding are required to complete the Petition for Approval of GA/TA Dual Employment and have it signed by the DGS.

International students

SPEL welcomes international students. Applications from international students are assessed exactly the same way as those from U.S. citizens, except that a [proof of English proficiency](#) is requested from students for whom English is not a native language. International students are eligible for teaching assistantships and for the dissertation assistantship (but not for Clark Fellowships).

International students who wish to improve their ability in spoken or written English may enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. A [variety](#) of courses are offered. Information about visas,

employment, immigration regulations, and so on is available at the [Office of International Student and Scholar Services](#).

The 4+1 program

The 4+1 Program is for Binghamton University undergraduates who are majoring in either Philosophy or Philosophy, Politics and Law (PPL) and who would like to stay one extra year at Binghamton in order to earn an M.A. in Philosophy. Many students in this program plan to continue on to law school or to a Ph.D. program in Philosophy at another university. To enter this program, a student must apply during the spring of their junior year or the fall of their senior year. Students who are admitted to the 4 + 1 program spend their senior year completing their B.A. requirements and simultaneously beginning to fulfill the SPEL M.A. requirements.

By the end of their senior year, 4 + 1 program students must have taken (and received a grade of B or better in):

- PHIL 121 (Methods of Reasoning) or 122 (Elementary Logic), and
- PHIL 201 (Plato and Aristotle), and
- PHIL 202 (Descartes, Hume and Kant)

These courses fulfill the proficiency requirements for the M.A. All students who want to leave open the possibility of applying to a Ph.D. program in Philosophy after completing their M.A. are strongly advised to take PHIL 122 rather than PHIL 121 for the logic proficiency, as formal logic is an expected part of a Philosophy M.A. and students will be disadvantaged in applying to Philosophy Ph.D. programs if they have not studied formal logic. However, students who intend to apply to law school after completing their M.A. and are certain that they will not be continuing to a Ph.D. in Philosophy may benefit more from PHIL 121.

All 4+1 program students must also take two SPEL seminars (plus the SPEL colloquium) during their senior year. These can be courses that are cross-listed with 400-level undergraduate philosophy courses, and that “double-count” towards the student’s undergraduate major. However, students will be treated in these courses like graduate students rather than undergraduates, and will be required to fulfill the course requirements for graduate students, which differ from the requirements for undergraduates. During their fifth year, students take three graduate seminars plus the SPEL colloquium each semester to complete the SPEL M.A. requirements. Students must enroll in the SPEL colloquium for four semesters (unless they do not begin the 4+1 Program until the spring of their senior year, in which case they may have one semester of the colloquium waived). Like all terminal M.A. students, 4+1 Program students must complete the area paper (see section on “The Area Paper” below). They must submit the paper by March 1 of their fifth year, and must receive a grade of “pass” on the paper by the end of their fifth year.

The terminal M.A. program

Students with a B.A. (usually but not necessarily in philosophy) may apply to the SPEL program to earn a terminal M.A. degree if they do not intend to continue in SPEL to earn a Ph.D. Binghamton University undergraduates may apply to this track. Terminal M.A. students complete all of the requirements for the M.A., including the area paper (see section on “The Area Paper” below). For terminal M.A. students, the area paper is due by March 1 of the student’s sixth semester in the program (but may be submitted earlier for students wishing to be awarded the M.A. sooner). Students need a grade of at least “pass” on the area paper to earn an M.A.. Terminal M.A. students are not eligible for paid teaching assistantships. If a student

begins as a terminal M.A. student and then changes their mind and wishes to apply for admission to the Ph.D. program, they must receive a grade of “high pass” on the area paper. Such a student may apply for funding when applying to the Ph.D. program.

The M.A./Ph.D. program

Students with a B.A. (usually but not necessarily in philosophy) may apply to SPEL with the intention of earning first an M.A. and then a Ph.D. These applicants may be offered teaching assistantships that can be renewed for up to five years. Students are required to receive a grade of “high pass” on the area paper to progress from the M.A. portion of the program to the Ph.D. portion of the program.

Students who have earned an M.A. in philosophy from another institution may apply directly to the SPEL Ph.D. program. These applicants may be offered teaching assistantships that can be renewed for up to four years. Students with an M.A. in Philosophy who are admitted to SPEL do not need to earn any course credit for the SPEL M.A.. They must complete the required coursework for the Ph.D., and additionally must: 1) enroll in the SPEL colloquium for two years; 2) take, from among the six seminars that fulfill the requirements for the Ph.D., the seminar in Ethics (PHIL 505) and the seminar in Social and Political Philosophy (PHIL 508); and 3) submit the area paper (see section on “The area paper” below) by March 1 of the student’s fourth semester in the program; these students must receive a grade of “high pass” on the area paper by the end of their fourth semester to continue on in the program.

Requirements for the M.A. degree

- **Eight seminars** (32 credits), with a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.3. Seven of these seminars must be SPEL seminars and the remaining one may, in consultation with the student’s adviser, be chosen from among graduate courses offered by other departments.
- **Distribution requirements** (some seminars may satisfy more than one distribution requirement at the same time):
 - The seminar in Ethics (PHIL 505) and the seminar in Social and Political Philosophy (PHIL 508), to be taken during the first two years of residency.
 - At least two seminars emphasizing the History of Philosophy
 - One seminar that draws mainly from the Anglo-American tradition
 - One seminar that draws mainly from the Continental European tradition
 - One seminar outside of SPEL areas (e.g., Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Science or Philosophy of Mind).
- Enrollment in the **SPEL Colloquium** for the first four semesters.
- **Proficiency requirements:**
 - Logic proficiency:
This can be satisfied by either of the following:
 1. A grade of at least B in an undergraduate course on formal logic, taken at another institution;
 2. A grade of at least B in PHIL 122 (Elementary Logic), or completion of the exam(s) in PHIL 122 with a grade of at least B.

SPEL students may informally “sit in” on PHIL 122 (check with the instructor for permission

to do this) and take the exam(s) for the course, or may study the course material on their own and take the exam(s). Courses in “Critical Reasoning,” “Informal Logic,” and the like will not count as fulfilling this proficiency requirement. The exception to this is for students in the 4+1 Program, who are permitted to take PHIL 121 (Methods of Reasoning); however, such students are strongly advised to take PHIL 122 if they intend to apply to Ph.D. programs in Philosophy.

- History of philosophy proficiencies (ancient and modern):

This can be satisfied by either of the following:

1. A grade of at least B in undergraduate courses in ancient Greek philosophy and modern (i.e., 17th and 18th century) philosophy, taken at another institution;
2. Completion of the exam(s) in (undergraduate) Plato and Aristotle (PHIL 201) and Descartes, Hume and Kant (PHIL 202) with grades of at least B.

As with the logic proficiency requirement, students may “sit in” on PHIL 201 and 202 and take the exams, study the material on their own and take the exams, or take equivalent courses at other institutions. Courses at other institutions must, to satisfy a history of philosophy proficiency requirement, offer a general survey of the major figures of the period. The DGS has discretion in determining equivalencies.

Proficiency exams may not be graded by Graduate Instructors of Record; they may only be graded by SPEL faculty members. However, SPEL students may take or sit in on PHIL 122, 201, and 202 when taught by a Graduate Instructor of Record, and have a faculty member grade their exam(s).

- **The area paper** (see section on “The area paper” below). The area paper is due by March 1 of the student’s sixth semester in the program for students who enter the program without an M.A. in Philosophy. Students need a grade of at least “pass” on the area paper to earn an M.A., and a grade of “high pass” to continue on in the program.

Students who complete the M.A. requirements and wish to continue on to earn a Ph.D. must be formally accepted into the Ph.D. program. This decision will depend on the SPEL Committee’s assessment of the student’s performance in seminars and on the area paper, and on the student having completed all M.A. requirements according to the expected timeline.

Requirements for the Ph.D. degree

- **Six seminars** (24 credits) with a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.3, some of which may, when applicable, be chosen from departments other than the philosophy department with approval of the student’s adviser and the DGS.
- Enrollment in the **SPEL Colloquium** for the first two semesters after completing the M.A.
- Students who entered with an M.A. from another institution must additionally:
 1. Enroll in the SPEL colloquium for their first four semesters (rather than two);
 2. Take, from among the six seminars that fulfill the requirements for the Ph.D., the seminar in Social and Political Philosophy (PHIL 508) and the seminar in Ethics (PHIL 505); and
 3. Submit the area paper (see section on “The area paper” below) by March 1 of the student’s fourth semester in the program (though students are strongly encouraged to submit the area paper earlier than this); these students must receive a grade of “high pass” on the area paper

by the end of their fourth semester to continue on in the program.

- **Ph.D. qualifying exam and dissertation** (see section on “Ph.D. qualifying exam and dissertation” below)
 - Acceptance of a dissertation prospectus and satisfactory performance on a Ph.D. qualifying exam. For students earning both an M.A. and Ph.D. in SPEL, the Ph.D. qualifying exam must be passed by February 7 of their fourth year; for students who earned an M.A. in Philosophy at another institution and are earning only a Ph.D. in SPEL, the Ph.D. qualifying exam must be passed by October 7 of their second year. Students who do not meet this deadline for passing the Ph.D. qualifying exam will be considered to be not making satisfactory progress toward the degree. A committee of three SPEL faculty members (including the student’s advisor, who is the chair of the committee) must approve the prospectus, and will administer the exam which includes both a written and an oral component.

Students who have passed the Ph.D. qualifying exam and all course requirements for the Ph.D. are designated “All But Dissertation” (ABD) and are admitted to doctoral candidacy. The Graduate School imposes a five-year limit on the time from admission to the M.A./Ph.D. program to admission to doctoral candidacy; it is possible to petition the Graduate School for an extension of the five-year limit, but the DGS will not support such a petition except in extraordinary circumstances.

- Satisfactory completion of a dissertation under the direction of a dissertation committee chosen by the student in consultation with their faculty adviser, who must be a member of the SPEL faculty. The committee is composed of at least three faculty members, the majority of whom (including the student’s adviser, who is the chair of the dissertation committee) must be members of the SPEL faculty. Any committee member who is not on the SPEL faculty must meet the guidelines of, and be approved by, the Graduate School. The dissertation must be approved by the dissertation committee and defended in an oral examination. For the oral examination, the graduate school appoints an examiner who is outside of the Binghamton University Philosophy department (outside examiner)—usually chosen by the student in consultation with their adviser—to serve on the dissertation committee.

The Graduate School imposes a five-year limit on the time from admission to doctoral candidacy to completion of the Ph.D.; it is possible to petition the Graduate School for an extension of the five-year limit, but the DGS will not support such a petition except in extraordinary circumstances.

Students may request waivers for particular requirements. The SPEL Committee will consider all such requests.

The area paper

Students who enter SPEL without an M.A. in Philosophy, with the aim of earning a terminal M.A., need a grade of at least “pass” on the area paper to earn an M.A.. For such students the area paper is due by March 1 of the student’s sixth semester in the program (but may be submitted earlier for students wishing to be awarded the M.A. sooner).

Students who enter SPEL without an M.A. in Philosophy, with the aim of earning both an M.A. and a Ph.D., need a grade of at least “pass” on the area paper to earn an M.A., and a grade of “high pass” to continue on in the program. For such students the area paper is due by March 1 of the student’s sixth semester in the program.

Students who enter SPEL with an M.A. in Philosophy, with the aim of earning a Ph.D., need a grade of “high pass” on the area paper to continue on in the program. For such students the area paper is due by March 1 of the student’s fourth semester in the program.

The area paper may be in any subfield of philosophy, and when appropriate may, with the approval of the student’s dissertation director, be reworked to become a part of the student’s dissertation. The paper may be, but is not required to be, a revision of a paper that began as a seminar paper. Each student should ask a SPEL faculty member to serve as an area paper advisor to guide them in the process of writing the paper; if that faculty member is already committed to advising another student that year, or is unavailable for another reason, the DGS can assist the student in identifying an alternative advisor. Each faculty member will advise only one area paper per year. Students are encouraged to secure the commitment of an area paper advisor, and begin work on the paper, by a year before the area paper is due; the final deadline to begin working on the area paper with an advisor is the end of the first week of classes in the Fall semester before the semester in which the area paper is due.

The paper will be evaluated by a committee of three SPEL faculty members including the area paper advisor and two other faculty members appointed by the DGS. Committee members will grade and comment on the paper within one week of the due date, in order to allow students to revise and resubmit if necessary. The paper must receive a grade of “pass” from a majority of the committee members in order to receive an overall grade of “pass,” and a grade of “high pass” from a majority of the committee members in order to receive an overall grade of “high pass.” A grade of “pass” indicates that the paper makes a sufficiently original and significant contribution to the literature; a grade of “high pass” indicates, additionally, that the paper is of sufficiently good quality to be submitted to a mid-ranked journal. Actual acceptance, or even submission, is not required, but the paper should be prepared to conform to the submission requirements of a specific target journal, with the choice of journal approved by the area paper advisor. A paper that does not initially receive a grade of “pass” (for students not aiming to proceed beyond the M.A.) or “high pass” (for students aiming to continue in the program to earn a Ph.D.) may be revised and resubmitted by the last day of classes of the semester in which the paper was initially due. Students who do not receive a “pass” on the area paper after revising and resubmitting it will not be awarded the M.A. and will be severed from the program. Students who entered the program without an M.A. in Philosophy and who receive a “pass” but not a “high pass” on the area paper will be awarded an M.A. (conditional upon their having completed all other requirements for the M.A.) but denied entrance to the Ph.D. portion of the program. Students who entered the program with an M.A. in Philosophy and who receive a “pass” but not a “high pass” on the area paper will be considered to not be making satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D. and will be severed from the program.

Ph.D. Qualifying exam and dissertation

The dissertation is an original and significant contribution to the field. It may be a monograph-style, book-length work, or three or more thematically related papers prepared for journal submission. More specifically, it may be either:

1. A monograph-style dissertation, in which individual chapters (typically four to six) need not be able to stand on their own.
2. A set of (at least three) thematically related articles suitable for publication in philosophical journals, usually accompanied by an Introduction that shows the relationship amongst the articles.

To qualify for writing the dissertation, students must write and defend a prospectus. The prospectus provides a general overview over the dissertation in no more than 20 pages. The bibliography that accompanies the prospectus should contain approximately 40 or 50 works, some of which will be articles or chapters, and others of which will be books. The student is expected to have studied every work listed in the bibliography before the Ph.D. qualifying exam.

When the student's advisor approves the prospectus and bibliography, the student will circulate them to the other two faculty members on the committee. Committee members may simply approve the prospectus and bibliography, or may ask for revisions to the prospectus or changes or additions to the bibliography. After all committee members have approved the prospectus and bibliography, the student may prepare for the Ph.D. qualifying exam.

The Ph.D. qualifying exam has a written and an oral component. Typically, the written exam is taken over a three-day period, during which the student writes for four hours per day. The written exam is devised by the committee. Usually, committee members write several exam questions for each planned dissertation chapter. The questions may focus on the prospectus itself or on any of the works listed in the bibliography. After the committee has read and evaluated the written exam, a two-hour oral exam will be held. Generally, the student will be asked to describe what they have learned during the written exam; sometimes it becomes evident to a student during a written exam that revisions must be made on the dissertation plan, and the student may describe what revisions they anticipate. Then the committee members may ask the student questions about any portion of the written exam or about works listed in the bibliography.

The aim of the Ph.D. qualifying exam is to provide a format for the student to do intensive work on beginning the dissertation and to bring out problems that may be encountered in the dissertation topic. Students may find that the written material that they produce during the exam forms the beginnings of chapter drafts.

Following the Ph.D. qualifying exam, the student begins writing the dissertation. For the oral defense of the dissertation, the student must also have an outside member on the committee. All dissertations must abide by the [Graduate School's guidelines and deadlines](#).

The SPEL colloquium

The SPEL colloquium is a series of invited talks by Philosophers from other institutions, which is attended by SPEL faculty and graduate students. The colloquium is a forum for intellectual exchange; for graduate students it is a good venue for practicing the sort of participation expected at professional conferences. Students are expected to take advantage of this opportunity by participating actively in the colloquium

discussion.

In addition to the colloquium, there are several other opportunities for intellectual exchange in the department, such as reading groups around a specific shared interest, a “brown bag” lunch series for discussion of recently published articles or book chapters, a faculty works-in-progress series, and so on.

Professional development workshops

Mandatory workshops aimed at helping students prepare for a career in Philosophy will be held for SPEL students with the DGS or with other SPEL faculty. These meetings serve to help students gain professional experiences while they are graduate students and to achieve professional goals such as publishing, as well as to prepare students in other ways for the academic job market.

Incomplete grades

As required by the [Graduate School policy](#), incomplete grades should be assigned only in special circumstances, such as a serious illness at the end of a semester.

Independent studies

SPEL students are strongly discouraged from taking Independent Studies. Please note that Independent Studies do not count as SPEL seminars and thus also do not satisfy distribution requirements.

Satisfactory progress towards the degree

Every February, the SPEL Committee evaluates the progress that each SPEL student is making towards the degree; the SPEL Committee may also convene to assess students in response to particular circumstances. The DGS will provide students with a written evaluation within two weeks of the evaluation meeting. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may receive a warning from the DGS identifying a date by which specific improvements must be made, or, if a student has failed to complete a requirement by the deadline, the DGS will recommend to the dean of the graduate school that the student be severed from the program. Students who are receiving funding will not have their funding renewed for the following year if they are not making satisfactory progress towards the degree. Furthermore, students who are working for the department as teaching assistants will have their performance as teaching assistants evaluated. Those who have not performed their duties as teaching assistants in a satisfactory manner may not have their funding renewed for the following year.

Whether or not a student is making satisfactory progress is determined by a number of factors, including satisfactory completion of all degree requirements according to the expected timeline and grade point average. Students who enter the program without an M.A. in Philosophy must be formally admitted to the Ph.D. portion of the program; this decision is based on satisfactory completion of all M.A. degree requirements according to the expected timeline, and grade point average.

Expectations for satisfactory progress and the consequences for not meeting these expectations are outlined below. Please also see the [Graduate School's policies](#) on probation, satisfactory progress, severance, and removal of support; do note, however, that in some cases (such as minimum GPA), the SPEL program has stricter policies than the Graduate School as a whole.

Requirements for Satisfactory Progress for M.A./Ph.D. students entering the program without an M.A. in Philosophy:

At the progress review during February of a student's first year:

- If a student's GPA is **3.3 or below**, the student's funding will end at the completion of their first year, and the student will receive a warning that if their GPA does not improve to above a 3.3 at the completion of the spring semester, they may be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS. If the student's GPA does improve to above a 3.3 at the completion of the spring semester, the GPA must improve further, to a 3.7, by the progress review of the second year, or else they will be at risk of not being permitted to continue past the M.A.;
- If a student's GPA is **below 3.7 but above 3.3**, the student will receive a warning that if their GPA does not improve to a 3.7 by the progress review of the second year, then their funding will end at the completion of their second year, and they will be at risk of not being permitted to continue past the M.A..

At the progress review during February of a student's second year:

- If a student's GPA is **below 3.7**, or if there is any W on the transcript, the student's funding will end at the completion of their second year. In addition, the SPEL Committee will determine whether the student is permitted to continue past the M.A.

At the progress review during February of a student's third year:

- If a student's GPA is **below 3.7**, or if there is any W on the transcript, the student's funding will end at the completion of their third year and they may be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS.

At the progress review during February of a student's fourth year:

- If a student has not completed all doctoral degree requirements but for the dissertation (ABD), the SPEL Committee will determine whether the DGS will recommend that the student be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Requirements for Satisfactory Progress for Ph.D. students entering the program with an M.A. in Philosophy:

At the progress review during February of a student's first year:

- If a student's GPA is **3.5 or below**, the student's funding will end at the completion of his or her first year and they may be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS.
- If a student's GPA is **below 3.7 but above 3.5**, the SPEL Committee will determine whether the student's funding will end at the completion of their first year.

At the progress review during February of a student's second year:

- If the student's GPA is **below 3.7**, or if there is any W on the transcript, the student's funding will end at the completion of their second year. In addition, the SPEL Committee will determine whether the student is permitted to continue past the M.A.

At the progress review during February of a student's third year:

- If a student's GPA is **below 3.7**, or if there is any W on the transcript, the student's funding will end at the completion of their third year and they may be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS.

At the progress review during February of a student's fourth year:

- If a student has not completed all doctoral degree requirements but for the dissertation (ABD), the SPEL Committee will determine whether the DGS will recommend that the student be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Requirements for Satisfactory Progress for terminal M.A. students not in 4+1 Program:

- Students must receive a GPA of **at least 3.0** in their first semester. Students with a GPA of 3.0 or less after their first semester may be severed from the Graduate School by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS.
- Students with a GPA **between 3.0 and 3.3** will receive a warning that, unless they make significant improvement in their work, they may be recommended for severance from the Graduate School.
- All terminal M.A. students will be re-evaluated at the end of their first year; students who are at risk of not meeting the minimum requirements for the degree may be recommended for severance from the Graduate School. Students with a GPA of **less than 3.05** at the end of the first year, or **less than 3.3** at the end of their third semester, will be recommended for severance from the Graduate School.

Requirements for satisfactory progress for students in the 4+1 Program:

- Students will be evaluated before they formally enter SPEL, i.e., typically at the end of their senior year as an undergraduate. Students with a GPA of **less than 3.15** in their initial graduate coursework will not be recommended for matriculation into the Graduate School. Students with a GPA of **less than 3.15** at the end of their first full semester as a graduate student may be recommended for severance from the Graduate School.

The SPEL Committee reserves the right to deviate from these policies in cases that it deems contain exceptional extenuating circumstances.

Graduate certificates available at the University

While completing a degree in SPEL, students have the opportunity to simultaneously earn a variety of [graduate certificates](#), such as the [Graduate Certificate in Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention](#).

Work expectations for teaching assistants and instructors of record

SPEL students who receive a teaching assistantship will be assigned to assist in an undergraduate class taught by a member of the philosophy department faculty. The teaching assistant is expected to attend the lectures that are delivered by the faculty member, and usually leads (and grades all work for) two discussion sections. However, specific duties vary and may include more grading, particularly if extra discussion sections are led by undergraduate teaching assistants (who are not permitted to do grading) or if there is a lecture course with no discussion sections. Typically, students will be assigned to PHIL 146 "Law and Justice" in their first semester as teaching assistant, though this will depend on department needs. After this, students will be asked by the chair of the philosophy department to express their

preferences about which courses they would like to assist in. The chair will normally aim to accommodate these preferences, but will also be considerate of department needs, prior assignments, and questions of fairness in making teaching assignments. Funded later stage graduate students normally have the opportunity to be instructor of record for at least one course (i.e., to teach their own class rather than assist). Typically, 100- and 200-level courses may be taught by graduate instructors of record. All course assignments are made by the chair of the philosophy department in consultation with the DGS.

Graduate teaching assistants are evaluated every semester. Teaching evaluations of graduate assistants are mandatory and will be sent to the teaching assistant's advisor as well as to the faculty member teaching the course, who will then write a formal evaluation of the graduate teaching assistant. This evaluation is read by the DGS and the chair of the philosophy department and is kept in the graduate student's file. Instructors of record are also required to have their students complete course evaluations, which will be sent to their advisor; they are encouraged but not required (unless there is a problem, such as complaints from students) to have a SPEL faculty member (often their advisor) visit their class and write a letter of evaluation.

Expectations regarding graduate student responsibilities as teaching assistants or graduate instructors of record are as follows:

- Your obligations for the semester begin during the first week of classes and end only after grades are submitted.
- Your time commitment during the semester is about 20 hours a week. (The 20 hours include class attendance, office hours, preparation, meeting with students, correcting and evaluating students' work, and all the meetings that are required by the course.)
- You are bound by a code of professional ethics to discharge all your responsibilities appropriately.
- The use of generative AI for grading student work or for completion of other duties as a teaching assistant, grader, or graduate instructor of record is forbidden. Graduate students who are found to have violated this policy will lose their funding for one semester; any graduate student who commits a second offence will lose their funding permanently.
- If you are a graduate teaching assistant, then you must:
 - Be prepared for and attend all lectures and all section meetings of the course you are assisting. If an emergency or a professional conflict arises, you must communicate with the course's instructor of record and work out a solution for your absence.
 - Attend all meetings asked for by the instructor of record for the course that you are assisting.
 - Hold office hours (2 hours a week) during all the weeks that the course you are assisting meets, and make arrangements for students to see you by appointment. (But you do not need to be available to students on demand, to give them your phone number, and the like).
 - Teach to the syllabus of the course. If you are interested in some variation (e.g., introducing a different reading), you need to have a clear understanding with the instructor of record for the course.
 - Complete all corrections and evaluations of student work on time.
 - Administer a teaching evaluation.
 - If difficulties with students arise in your course, such as student conduct problems or academic dishonesty, speak with the instructor of record for the course that you are assisting.
 - If difficulties arise between you and the instructor of record for the course that you are assisting, speak with the DGS and/or the chair of the Philosophy Department.
- If you are a graduate instructor of record, then you must

- Be prepared for and attend all the class meetings of your course. If an emergency or a professional conflict arises, notify your class of changes and arrange to either have another qualified graduate student or faculty member cover your class, or reschedule the meeting you will be missing. If the emergency is long term, discuss the situation with the DGS and the Philosophy Department chair. Notify the Philosophy Department office if you will be missing any classes.
- Hold office hours (2 hours a week) during all the weeks that the course you are teaching meets, and make arrangements for students to see you by appointment. (But you do not need to be available to students on demand, to give them your phone number, and the like).
- Teach to the syllabus of the course. A copy of the syllabus is due in the Philosophy Department's office no later than the end of the first day of classes. If you revise the syllabus, a copy of the revision should be filed with the department.
- Complete all corrections and evaluations of student work in a timely fashion.
- Administer a teaching evaluation.
- If difficulties with students arise in your courses, such as student conduct problems or academic dishonesty, speak first with your teaching advisor, and/or with the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy.

Graduate student organizations

There is a general [Binghamton University Graduate Student Organization](#) (GSO) that SPEL students may wish to be involved in. In addition, SPEL students may become involved in the SPEL-GSO, which is recognized as a suborganization of the Binghamton University GSO. The SPEL- GSO is responsible for setting its own meeting times and for organizing itself and determining its own structure and activities, and deciding how SPEL-GSO funds are to be spent.

Academic Dishonesty

SPEL takes academic dishonesty seriously and follows all applicable rules of the University and Harpur College. Please review the [Harpur College Procedures for Graduate Student Academic Honesty Hearing Boards](#).

In addition, the knowing use of generative AI tools to generate text for submission in fulfillment of SPEL requirements will be considered academic dishonesty. The knowing use of generative AI tools to provide ideas for inclusion in your work, to create organizational structure, or to summarize, explain or interpret source materials, in the context of completing SPEL requirements, will, depending on the context, ordinarily be considered academic dishonesty.

Resolving disputes

Disputes between undergraduate students and graduate teaching assistants or instructors of record, between two graduate students, or between a graduate student and a faculty member can usually be resolved informally. Whenever possible, the parties involved should speak with each other first in order to attempt to resolve the conflict. Students who are supervised by a particular faculty member may speak to the faculty member for help in resolving a conflict that arises between (undergraduate or graduate) students. If the conflict cannot be resolved at this level, SPEL students are encouraged to speak with the DGS or with the chair of the philosophy department about conflicts with each other or with faculty members. In some cases, an ad hoc committee will be formed within the philosophy department to hear

grievances. The University [Ombudsman](#) provides advice and services in mediation and other forms of conflict resolution and may be helpful. Cases of sexual harassment may be reported to the [Title IX officer](#). Please see the [Graduate School's grievance procedures](#) for guidance on disputes that cannot be resolved at the department level or with the help of the University Ombudsman.

The Graduate School

SPEL is governed by all policies of [The Graduate School at Binghamton University](#). All SPEL students should familiarize themselves with the [Graduate School Manual](#).