HANDBOOK
Master of Arts Program

Philosophy and the Arts track

Philosophy Department,
Stony Brook University

[updated May 2025]

**Table of Contents:**

**Introduction**

The Philosophy Department offers three Masters degrees: 1) a Master of Arts in Philosophy track which can be earned in the context to the Ph.D. program and open only to students enrolled in the PhD program, 2) an MPhil in Philosophy which also can be earned in the context of the Ph.D. program and open only to students enrolled in the PhD program, and 3) an independent Master of Arts in Philosophy track concentrating on Philosophy and the Arts. For information on 1) and 2), please consult the Doctoral Program Handbook.

This handbook concerns only the MA in Philosophy track concentrating in Philosophy and the Arts.

Given its commitment to philosophical pluralism and its triple focus on the history of philosophy, interdisciplinary studies, aesthetics and the philosophy of art, Stony Brook's Master of Arts in philosophy is distinctive and innovative.  The curriculum of the program embodies this commitment and focus. This handbook offers a statement of the purposes, policies, structures, and requirements of the MA Program and applies to all students enrolled in the program beginning Fall 2025. [Students enrolled in the program before May 2025 will follow the program outlined in MA Program Handbook 2009.]

## A. Administration

The administration of the MA Program is carried out by the MA Director in consultation with the Chair of the Philosophy Department, the Graduate Program Committee, the Graduate Coordinator and the core faculty of the Philosophy MA program.

## B. Course of Study

The primary purpose of the Master of Arts Program in Philosophy is to prepare students for original and independent research and scholarship in the field, and to prepare them for further postgraduate work in either philosophy or other humanistic disciplines.

In order to graduate, students must have earned a total of 30 credits.

Of the 30 credits, 6 credits may be transfer credits (so long as they were not used toward earning another degree).

The core courses of the program are:

**PHI 502: Inquiries into Art Criticism and Theory**

**PHI 505: Core Course in Philosophy and the Arts: History of Aesthetic Theory**

**PHI 506: Art and Its Problems**

**PHI 507: Aesthetic System**

**PHI 508: Contemporary Issues in the Arts**

**PHI 509: Special Seminar in Aesthetics**

Each numbered course will have specific topics for each semester. Numbered courses may be taken more than once, provided the course topic is different each time.

Up to 6 credits may be earned by taking 2 independent study courses (PHI 520). If students enroll for PHI 520, it must be done with a permanent faculty member of the Philosophy Department.

Note the difference between PHI 520: Advanced Studies in Philosophy (3 credits, ABCF grading, variable and repetitive credit) and PHI 521: Independent Study (may be repeated for credit, S/U grading). If the Independent Study is intended to reach the required 30 credits for graduation, enrollment in PHI 520 is recommended (as only ABCF graded courses count towards cumulative credits).

First year MA students may not take either Ph.D. seminars or independent studies. They may do so in their second year if the student is in good academic standing. Permission must be granted by the course instructor and the MA program director.

## C. Style paper

In either fall or spring of the second year, each student will write a style paper. This is typically a seminar paper which is revised and developed in consultation with a faculty member. The aim is to produce a piece of academic writing 15-25 pages long that is sophisticated enough to be submitted to an academic or arts journal or conference, and/or submitted as a writing sample as part of an application to a Ph.D. program.

## D. The MA Thesis Option

Students are strongly encouraged to fulfill all of their MA course requirements by taking the regularly scheduled graduate courses. In exceptional circumstances, however, a student may wish to pursue the MA thesis option by requesting the formation of a faculty committee for the thesis project. Students who take this option are expected to enroll in PHI 599 with the thesis advisor (3 credits) and PHI 520 with their second reader (3 credits). These credits count toward the 30 credits required for graduation. A student who writes an MA thesis must also write a style paper.

The Thesis Committee will consist of a thesis advisor, and at least one other member of the departmental faculty or a reader from the faculty of another discipline. The MA Thesis Advisor is selected by the student, while the Second Reader (and possibly third reader) is selected by the advisor and student together. The Thesis Committee must be approved by the MA Program Director upon submission of the appropriate form and a brief thesis proposal summary. This form must be submitted to the MA Program director at least four weeks before the beginning of the semester in which the student is registering for PHI 599: Masters Thesis Research. The student will not be able to register for the MA thesis course without this form having been fully filled out and signed. See appendix below for the form.

## E. Program Policies

### 1. Incompletes

Students are strongly discouraged from requesting incompletes in any course or seminar. University policy states that incompletes are only to be given in cases in which a student is unable to complete the work for a course in time because of circumstances beyond his or her control. In addition, the Department has a completion deadline earlier than that listed for the University: All fall incompletes must be made up no later than **February 1st** of the following semester, and all spring incompletes must be made up no later than **September 1st**.

## 2. Transfer Credits

Students can petition the MA Program Director to transfer up to six graduate credits from course work taken prior to entering the MA program to count towards their MA courses total, if the following criteria are met:

i. These credits must be from an institution authorized to grant graduate degrees by recognized accredited commission.
*ii. Credits must not have been used to fulfill the requirements for another degree/certificate.*
iii. Credits must not be more than 5 years old at the time the student is admitted to graduate study at SBU.
iv. A course listed as both graduate and/or undergraduate level will not be considered for transfer.
v. Credits must carry a letter grade of B or higher, or the equivalent.

For this option an official transfer request will be completed and submitted to the Graduate School for processing.

## 3. Courses taken outside the program

Courses taken in other departments at Stony Brook University may fulfill the degree requirements. Such courses must be cleared by the MA Program Director prior to registering in order to determine whether credits earned can count towards degree requirements.

## 4. Support Policies

At present, the Philosophy Department does not offer financial support for MA students.

## 5. Requests for Leaves of Absence

Graduate School policy discourages leaves of absence except for serious circumstances:

*"…Leaves are granted for a maximum of one year at a time, renewable upon request for the second year. In order to request a leave, the student must be currently registered or registered during the previous semester. Students must submit a leave of absence request signed by the Doctoral Program Director. Students planning to return from leaves of absence are required to complete a readmission request form and should submit it to their departments three months in advance of the enrollment. All students should be aware that if they take a leave of absence they are stating that they will not be doing any work towards their degree or consulting with faculty, and that they will lose student status privileges and may be required to pay back student loans…"*

The department has an additional internal process in place that students are required to follow:

(1) Requests for leaves of absence must be made in writing and presented to the Graduate Program Committee along with a brief statement of the reasons for the change in status.

(2)  The deadline for requesting a leave of absence is the first day of the previous academic semester. Students are requested to notify the MA Program Director in writing at that time.  Understandably, some students who are applying to other academic programs or research foundations may not find out about the results of their applications until much later in the semester. In this case, students should identify the foundations or programs applied to and the date by which they expect to hear from them. The MA Program Committee shall take such requests into account.

(3)  Returning students are asked to notify us on the first day of the previous semester of the year in which they wish to return to the program (e.g., students who have been on leave for the academic year 2008-09 and who wish to return in September 2009, should notify us of their desire to do so by January 22, 2009.

## 6.  Grievance and Adjudication Procedures

In the event that a student considers the outcome of an appeal to the Graduate Programs Committee unsatisfactory, or on any matter not directly involving the graduate program, the student may have recourse to the departmental grievance procedure. The Chairman of the department is the contact person for initiating such grievance procedures. (The departmental grievance procedure is open for all appeals including those applying to academic decisions if these appear arbitrary.)

## 7.  Dismissal from the MA Program

The Department's dismissal procedure coincides with Graduate School Policy. A second semester of probation may be sufficient for dismissal from the program. The Graduate Programs Committee has the discretion to consider contingencies and may recommend remedies for making up such deficiencies within short deadline periods if the student's overall record warrants such.

## 8.  Changes in Masters Program Structure and Policies

No change in this handbook may take place without the approval of the faculty members described above under Section A (Administration). On issues related to the structure and requirements of the Masters Program as a whole, the vote of the Philosophy Department faculty is required.

## Approval of Thesis Committee

Departmental guidelines require that the thesis advisor and second reader be selected by the student in consultation with and approved by the MA Program Director prior to enrolling in the two courses that constitute the MA thesis project. The Thesis Committee consists of one thesis advisor (who is a permanent philosophy faculty member), and either one other member of the departmental faculty, or, one faculty member of another discipline/graduate program at Stony Brook University. This form must be signed by the student and the advisor and submitted along with a brief description of the thesis topic (no longer than 250 words) to the MA Program Director for approval at least 4 weeks prior to registration for the thesis courses. Students are expected to enroll in PHI 599 with the thesis advisor (3 credits) and PHI 520 with their second reader (3 credits).

Student name  _____

Tentative thesis title  _____

_____

We request approval of the following Thesis Committee

        Advisor _____

Departmental /External Reader _____

Departmental /External Reader _____

Submitted by

        Signature of student _____

        Signature of advisor _____

Approved by the MA Program Director on: _____

MA Program Director _____

The Thesis completion is anticipated during  (circle one)

Fall - Spring – Summer Semester 20____