

# Philosophy Department Senior Portfolio

## 2015-2016 Academic year

### 1. Overview

The portfolio is the culminating product of your time as a philosophy major. Its purpose is to give you an opportunity to bring your major together as a sort of coherent whole, presenting a combination of depth and interrelated breadth, and revealing the importance for your own work of the history of philosophy. While we do not require there to be a tight connection among all of the elements of the portfolio, you should write each element with an eye toward the whole.

The Senior Philosophy Portfolio consists of four parts:

- An intellectual autobiography
- A history sequence paper
- Revision of a seminar paper
  - Including a “Written Response to Comments”
- An hour long comprehensive oral on the Portfolio

The Portfolio is due on at **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 5th, 2016** in the Olin Division Office. You may not turn the portfolio in late without prior permission from the philosophy department.

Orals on the Portfolio will be individually scheduled with two members of the Department. Orals will begin late February, and will be completed by the end of April. Professor Ireland will be absent from campus Spring semester and will not be part of the oral defense of the Portfolio.

The Portfolio is the Philosophy Department’s Senior requirement for graduation. Portfolios are graded Fail, Pass, or Pass with Distinction. If you fail a portion or all of the Portfolio, you will have two weeks to resubmit your Portfolio. If you fail any portion of the Portfolio a second time, you will have to wait six months before you can resubmit and/or retake it. You’ll be notified about whether or not a have failed portion of the Portfolio prior to Spring Break.

### 2. Intellectual Autobiography

You are expected to complete a 1,000-word intellectual autobiography describing how you have developed your own philosophical perspective through your work in the major.

This intellectual autobiography should not simply be a recounting of the classes that you have taken, but should instead trace some central thought, idea, commitment, and/or methodology as it has developed during your time as a philosophy major, through the specific coursework you have done. It should be retrospective, articulating what is most important to you in hindsight, as the philosopher you are now, not necessarily what seemed most important at the time.

This intellectual autobiography should serve to unify your major, bringing (much of) your coursework into a kind of coherent whole.

### 3. The History Sequence Paper

As a major, you are required to take a two-course sequence, Philosophy 201 Ancient Philosophy and Philosophy 202 Modern Philosophy, in which texts from Plato to Kant are read closely. Having completed this sequence, you must then take a third historically-focused course of your choosing in which you follow out an interest generated from your reading.

Upon completion of the three courses, and as part of the Senior Portfolio, you must write a 2,000- word paper that critically defines and discusses a topic on that special interest which was developed throughout your work in the three courses. As with the seminar paper, there is an expectation that you work independently in generating a topic and executing it.

The 2008 Comprehensive Exam Structure may help you to understand how to generate a rich philosophy question and thesis for this paper. Here are the instructions that were given to students:

“Consider the following list of topics:

Freedom	Happiness
Substance	Will
God	Autonomy
Knowledge	Time
Causation	Language
Human Nature	Death
Obligation	Nature
The Good	Beauty
Love	Soul

“In preparation for these exams, we recommend that for each topic, you generate a list of questions associated with that topic. Next, define those questions that are most interesting to you and most important to the history of thought on that topic. Then, answer these questions you have so defined. When answering each question, continually revisit those questions you have chosen not to answer. They may yet be relevant to the question at hand. Also, reconsider those questions you have chosen to answer. Have you, in attempting an answer, discovered that in fact you have asked the wrong question? What now do you think is the right question and what is the answer to it? Repeat as necessary.

“To give you a sense of what we are asking you to do here, we have identified a topic not on the exam and generated a list of questions and related theses.

*“Topic: Friendship — “Questions and Theses*

*“Question 1: To what extent is friendship possible between unequals?*

*“Theses: While unequals can be involved in close relationships of various kinds, they can never properly be considered friends. Or: (Everyone is equal in some respects and unequal in others, and friendship is possible precisely between such people.) Friendship is possible between any people who are able to both respect their mutual equality and grow through their respective inequalities.*

*“Question 2: Why must a friend be a "beautiful enemy"? (Emerson, "Friendship")*

*“Thesis: For reasons that need to be examined, we tend to fixate on a handful of assumptions at work in our view of things, people, the world, etc., and do so in a way that only a certain kind of friend is in the position to help us "unfreeze" ourselves. Thus the need for a friend as a beautiful enemy necessary for what it could mean for each of us to not only better understand what we already think and feel, but raise possibilities to which we would otherwise would be blind.*

*“Question 3: Is philosophy (friendship with wisdom) more accurately called "erosophy" (eros for wisdom)?*

*“Thesis: Philosophy is distinct from erosophy. Eros disappears once it has possessed its object, but friendship endures. A philosopher, once truly wise, abides with wisdom as a friend.*

*“Question 4: What do the various requirements placed on friendship tell us about the nature of humanity?*

*“Thesis: These requirements, such as the requirement of equality and self-disclosure, reveal humanity to be loathsome and untrustworthy, which in the end makes friendship a dangerous business.”*

#### **4. The Seminar Paper Revision**

You are expected to rewrite a seminar paper from a 300- to 400-level course (including the “Thesis Independent Study” paper). This process involves:

- Soliciting comments on the your seminar paper **by Friday, 12/4**. The sooner you get in contact with your professor, the better comments that you’ll receive.
- Substantively revising your seminar paper in response to the comments offered by the professor.
- Writing a 1-2 page “Written Response to Comments” wherein you explain how you revised your paper in light of the solicited comments.

There is an expectation for you to work independently, meaning you should not expect to have more than one meeting with your professor on your seminar paper revision.

#### **5. The Oral Exam on the Portfolio**

Orals on the Portfolio will begin sometime in late February. The oral will last for roughly 50 minutes, and will include two members of the Department. You will be asked to identify your first and second choice of a professor to chair your oral; the second reader of your portfolio will be assigned, and will likely be someone in the Department with whom you have worked little or not at all. The oral will be scheduled via e-mail directly with you and your second reader by the chair of your oral.

To prepare for the oral exam, you should carefully reread your portfolio, thinking about the arguments and assumptions you make in your various pieces of writing. You should also be prepared to answer questions drawn both from the material within the Portfolio and more broadly from the classes that you have taken as a major in the department.

## Philosophy Department Senior Portfolio Checklist

(Please include this checklist with your Portfolio)

Portfolios are due on **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 5th, 2016**. No extensions will be granted on the Portfolio, except with prior approval of the Department.

Completed Portfolios are to be turned in to a box in the Olin Division Office. There will be a sign-up sheet next to that box on which you will request your first and second preference for who you would like to have chair your portfolio oral.

You will be contacted via e-mail to schedule your oral. Most orals are scheduled during the week after 4:00 p.m., and take place in the faculty office of your chair.

Papers included in the Portfolio should be stapled, have page numbers, and have your name at the top of every page.

Portfolio documents should be assembled and placed in good-quality presentation folders with your name clearly marked on the cover; you will be turning in two folders in the box in the Olin Division Office.

You will be making three complete copies of your work: two copies for your examiners, and one copy for yourself to retain and bring to your oral exam.

Documents in the Portfolio should be ordered in the following manner: Intellectual Autobiography, History Sequence, Paper, Seminar Revision Paper.

History Sequence Paper

Your title and topic: \_\_\_\_\_

The additional history course from which you'll be drawing:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Seminar Revision Paper

Your title and topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of seminar and name of professor who taught the course:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Original copy of commented on paper

Professor's written notes for your revision (or your notes, if based on paper conference)

"Written Response to Comments" (1-2 pages)

Bring a copy of your complete Portfolio to refer to during your oral.