

Academic Assessment Report
Department of Philosophy, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas
Philosophy PhD Degree
May 2025

Procedures: Doctoral students are regularly assessed on the basis of coursework (short papers, term papers, and essay exams). This coursework assures comprehensive coverage of historical figures and contemporary issues. In addition, as crucial to the program's goals, each doctoral student:

1. Prepares a reading list for his or her area of specialization and takes a comprehensive written examination on the material covered by the reading list;
2. Writes a prospectus detailing his or her dissertation project, complete with comprehensive bibliography, and is examined on this to determine the project's viability;
3. Writes a dissertation and defends it in an oral examination. The dissertation is read and examined by a committee of at least three faculty.

For purposes of assessment of program goals and outcomes, the main dissertation advisor, on the basis of the student's dissertation and oral examination and in consultation with the dissertation committee, evaluates the doctoral dissertation on the two dimensions of:

1) Significant critical thinking, communication and writing skills, including but not limited to:

- * The student writes with professional levels of clarity, accuracy and rigor;
- * The student displays care and insight in understanding positions with accuracy, and fairness in presenting his or her own ideas clearly and in ways that are relevant to his or her main points;
- * The student shows significant sophistication and insight in the analysis and evaluation of arguments;
- * The student proceeds critically in examining his or her own presuppositions and assumptions.

2) Knowledge and understanding of content, including but not limited to:

- * The student's work displays a deep grasp of central concepts and terminology and their importance;
- * The student's work shows expertise in main trends and theories in the areas under consideration;
- * The student demonstrates expertise with regard to historically important positions and figures where relevant;
- * The student's thinking on the issues shows genuine coherence, breadth and depth.
- * The student's thinking is making an original contribution to the current state of knowledge on the issues under discussion

The advisor assigns a numerical score of 0-3 to each of these two dimensions, using the following scale:

- 0) Does not meet expectations;
- 1) Minimally meets expectations;
- 2) Meets expectations well, with room for improvement;
- 3) Exceeds expectations.

To explain these numerical evaluations, the advisor provides a brief summary of where the student's dissertation needs improvement and where it displays positive outcomes. These results will be shared with the faculty.

Quantitative assessment of student work by PhD advisors: We had three PhD dissertation defenses (all successful) since the previous assessment report.

Dimension 1 (communication skills and critical thinking), average rating: 2.5

Dimension 2 (knowledge and understanding of content), average rating: 2.0

Feedback:

* The dissertation, while rather short, addressed an important practical moral issue. He had clearly thought long and hard about it. The writing was superb. His presentation was made without notes but was organized and clear. He addressed every question head-on. His answers to our questions were direct and clarifying. While I suspect no one on the committee agreed with everything that was asserted, he was careful not to overstate his conclusions.

This dissertation delved into philosophy of mind as well as ethical theory. Several issues and theories in each were explored. I don't think any member of the committee thought he exhaustively dealt with each of these theories and issues. But he had a single topic in focus, and his discussion of other issues was there only insofar as it connected with that single topic.

* This dissertation was on [redacted]. He worked extremely hard to understand the complexities of the relevant positions and to carve out his own path through this difficult material. The writing remained problematic, particularly when it comes to the analysis and evaluation of particular arguments; sometimes it does not reflect his grasp of the material. He did succeed in making an original contribution, making sense of X's recent attempts to... Mastering these positions, arranging them in a coherent fashion, and trying to draw some substantive conclusions through a discussion of Y add up to a significant research accomplishment.

* A well-argued and researched dissertation on moral theory (meta-ethics).

* Areas for continued improvement:

* Having the secondary committee members provide more feedback to the student prior to the defense stage

- * Making sure that all students keep to the desired timeline
- * Encouraging PhD students to publish portions of their dissertation or otherwise present their material as appropriate

This feedback will be delivered to all who are supervising doctoral dissertations.