

revision fall 2024

The Program in Social, Political, Ethical and Legal Philosophy (SPEL)

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

2024

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Welcome to SPEL!

SPEL is a small graduate program and we aim to give each graduate student plenty of individual

Faculty:

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“Whose Uptake Matters? Sexual Refusal and the Ethics of Uptake” (forthcoming), co-authored

TONY REEVES is Associate Professor of Philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 2009 from Boston University. His areas of research and teaching include philosophy of law, political philosophy, and normative ethics. He is particularly interested in questions concerning legitimacy, authority, legal reasoning, the ethics of risk, and international criminal law. His recent publications include “Practical Reason and Legality: Instrumental Authority without Exclusion” *Law and Philosophy* (2015), “Standard Threats: How to Violate Basic Human Rights” *Social Theory and Practice* (2015) and “Liability to International Prosecution: The Nature of Universal Jurisdiction” *European Journal of International Law* (2017).

MELISSA SUMPTER is the Office Assistant in the Philosophy Department. She has been at Binghamton University since 2024.

Getting oriented and choosing an advisor

Orientation takes place the week before classes begin, towards the end of August. The Binghamton University Graduate School holds a mandatory orientation for those who will be teaching assistants. SPEL also holds its own mandatory TA orientation, as well as a general orientation, during the same week. At this orientation, new students will meet all of the SPEL faculty and other SPEL students, including students who are more advanced in the program. During this week all incoming SPEL students will also have an individual meeting with the DGS. At this meeting, the DGS will, in consultation with each incoming student, determine

Reasoning) or 122 (Elementary Logic), PHIL 201 (Plato and Aristotle), and PHIL 202 (Descartes, Hume and Kant) in order to 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 five-year combined degree 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 if these differ from the requirements for undergraduates. During their fifth year, students take a full load (three graduate seminars plus the SPEL colloquium per semester) to complete the SPEL M.A. requirements; they are, at that point, no different from any other terminal M.A. students. Students must enroll in the SPEL colloquium for four semesters (unless they do not begin the Five-Year 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, Five-Year Combined Degree Program students must choose between writing an M.A. thesis (which must be defended by April of their fifth year) and taking the M.A. Comprehensive Exams (receiving a passing grade no later than January of their fifth year). Students who complete the five-year combined degree program and continue to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy usually continue their studies at another university.

Earning a terminal M.A. degree

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. A terminal M.A. is usually completed in two years. Terminal M.A. students complete all of the requirements for the M.A.; they may choose between writing an M.A. thesis (which must be defended by April of their second year) and taking the M.A. comprehensive exams (no later than January of their second year). Terminal M.A. students are not eligible for paid teaching assistantships. If a student begins as a terminal M.A. student and then changes her/his mind and wishes to apply for admission to the Ph.D. program, she/he must take the M.A. comprehensive exams. Such a student may apply for funding when applying to the Ph.D. program.

Earning an M.A. and Ph.D. degree in SPEL (the M.A./Ph.D. track)

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 four years; students who are not initially offered funding but who nevertheless begin the program are welcome to apply for funding in

subsequent years. Students who wish to continue in the Ph.D. program after finishing the M.A. are required to pass the M.A. Comprehensive Exams. Students' overall progress and performance in the program is reviewed at least annually by the SPEL Committee; students must make satisfactory progress in order to receive funding or continue in the program.

Entering SPEL with an M.A. in Philosophy and earning a Ph.D.

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 three years. Students with a philosophy M.A. who are admitted to SPEL will begin at the same point in the program as students who have just completed the M.A. requirements in SPEL, except that 1) they must enroll in the SPEL colloquium for two years; 2) among the six seminars that they take to fulfill the requirements for the Ph.D., they must take the first-year seminar in Social and Political Philosophy and the first-year seminar in Ethics, assuming these are offered while they are doing coursework; and 3) if they have not concentrated on social, political, ethical or legal philosophy in their M.A. work, they will be required to pass the M.A. Comprehensive Exams in Ethics and/or in Social and Political Philosophy by no later than January of their second year. Students who enter SPEL with an M.A. in Philosophy are required to take the M.A. Comprehensive Exam(s) no later than September of their second year, and only retake the exam(s) in January if necessary.

Program requirements

The M.A. degree may be earned by completing the following requirements.

A minimum of 32 credits of graduate coursework, i.e. eight seminars, with a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.3. Seven of these seminars must be SPEL seminars and the remaining one may be a SPEL seminar or may be chosen from other philosophy graduate courses or, in consultation with the student's adviser, from among graduate courses offered by other departments. All graduate courses taught by SPEL faculty count as SPEL seminars.

Distribution requirements. Graduate coursework must include the components listed below. Before the beginning of each semester, a listing of which courses count towards which distribution requirements will be available. Please note that some seminars may satisfy more than one distribution requirement at the same time; for instance, a particular seminar may fulfill both the requirement for a course that draws mainly from the Anglo-American tradition and the requirement for a course in metaphysics, epistemology, etc.

- One first year SPEL seminar in Social and Political Philosophy **and** one first year SPEL seminar in Ethics, to be taken during the first two years of residency. The specific topics of the seminars vary, though they focus broadly on contemporary social and political philosophy and contemporary ethics; they are taught by different SPEL faculty members each year. These two seminars are taken by all (and only) entering SPEL students, including those who enter with an M.A. from another institution.

they are doing coursework.

SPEL Colloquium. Students entering with an M.A. in Philosophy from another institution must enroll in the SPEL Colloquium every semester for their first two years in the program.

Students are required to take the exam(s) in August or September of their second year in the program. A terminal M.A. student who fails a Comprehensive Exam will be allowed to retake it once; the exams are administered in January as well as September. If any other student fails a Comprehensive Exam, the DGS will determine, on the basis of all available evidence, whether it is necessary for the full SPEL Committee to review that student's progress. If the DGS calls for a review, then the SPEL Committee will meet to determine whether or not the student should or should not be allowed to continue in the program and/or continue to be funded. If no review is necessary, then the student will be allowed to retake the exam.

thesis, and should contribute an original idea to this literature. Usually Fall semester is spent doing reading/research on the thesis topic and drafting the thesis. By the end of Fall semester, each student who is writing a thesis should, in consultation with her/his advisor, form a committee of three members (including the chair of the committee, who is the student's advisor and who must be a SPEL faculty member), the majority of whom are members of the Philosophy department. The first part of Spring semester may be used for rewriting or revising the thesis. The DGS will provide a deadline, usually in March, for all M.A. theses to be circulated to committee members.

Committee members may ask for revisions to the thesis before the oral defense. When all committee members agree that the thesis is ready for defense, a one and a half hour oral defense will be scheduled, by the end of April. The thesis must be passed by the committee and submitted in final form to the Graduate School by the deadline set by the Graduate School (deadlines and guidelines are available on the Graduate School website).

Ph.D. Qualifying Exam and dissertation

Students must begin to develop a dissertation plan and undertake independent pre-dissertation research even before having completed all course requirements. Working closely with her/his primary advisor (who will become the chair of the committee for the qualifying exam and then for the dissertation), the student should write both a dissertation prospectus and a bibliography. The prospectus consists of an overall abstract (usually about two or three pages) of the dissertation, and separate abstracts (also usually about two or three pages each) for each of the planned dissertation chapters. A typical dissertation has about five or six chapters. 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 bibliography should indicate which works are relevant for each of the dissertation chapters. The student is expected to have studied every work listed in the bibliography.

When the student's advisor thinks that the prospectus and bibliography are ready, 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 Qualifying Exam.

The Qualifying Exam has a written and an oral component. Usually, 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 (sometimes committee members divide up which chapters they will each examine the student on). The student chooses two questions per chapter to respond to. The questions may focus on the abstract of the chapter itself or on any of the works listed in the bibliography that correspond to that chapter.

Example of a Qualifying Exam, for a planned dissertation of six chapters:

Day 1: Exam on chapters one and two and corresponding works in the bibliography. For chapter one examiner A provides two questions and examiner B provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question. For chapter two examiner B provides two questions and examiner C provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question.

Day 2: Exam on chapters three and four and corresponding works in the bibliography. For chapter three examiner C provides two questions and examiner A provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question. For chapter four examiner A provides two questions and examiner B provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question.

Day 3: Exam on chapters five and six and corresponding works in the bibliography. For chapter five examiner B provides two questions and examiner C provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question. For chapter six examiner C provides two questions and examiner A provides two questions; the student chooses one question from each examiner to respond to, and writes for one hour on each question.

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 she/he has 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 she/he anticipates. 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 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.

The precise format of the qualifying exam is flexible, and may be modified by the student and committee when appropriate. The above description is intended as a guideline.

Following the qualifying exam, the student begins writing the dissertation. Usually, the committee that gave the qualifying exam becomes the student's dissertation committee (and the chair of that committee becomes the dissertation director). For the oral defense of the dissertation, the student must also have an outside member on the committee. For full guidelines and deadlines on preparing a dissertation, see the Graduate School website.

Spring semester: Register for Doctoral dissertation (1 credit).

Funded students entering with an MA: 1st year:

Fall semester: 2 courses + Colloquium (9 credits). Spring semester: 2 courses + Colloquium (9 credits).

It is strongly recommended, but not required, that students who must take the MA comprehensive exam(s) do so in January of their first year.

2nd year:

Fall semester: Register for 2 courses + colloquium (9 credits).

Students who must take the MA comprehensive exam(s) and have not already done so must take them in September.

Spring semester: Register for Colloquium (1 credit). International students must be registered full time unless course complete.

Complete the prospectus by early in spring semester, and take the Qualifying Exam by the end of spring semester.

All students should be ABD before the beginning of Fall semester of their 3rd year.

Notes on the timelines:

Funded students' tuition scholarships cover a limited number of credits; if students register for additional credits, they must pay for these credits themselves. Tuition scholarships will pay for: 13 credits for each semester of the 1st year; 9 credits for each semester of the 2nd year; 9 credits for each semester of the 3rd year; 9 credits for fall semester of the 4th year, and 1 credit for spring semester of the 4th year. Students are required to register for at least 9 credits until they are ABD. Thus, if students do not become ABD according to the expected timeline, they will have to pay for all but one credit for continuing enrollment (exceptions may be made for Clark Fellows, who have additional years of funding).

Students who wish to enroll in a 1 credit course such as a TRIP course may substitute this for the Colloquium, with the understanding that they are still required to participate in the Colloquium.

SPEL seminar: Nietzsche; *fulfills requirement for a SPEL seminar that draws mainly from the continental European tradition.*

SPEL seminar: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; *fulfills one of the requirements for a SPEL seminar that emphasizes the history of philosophy.*

Teaching Assistant for PHIL 149, Environmental Ethics

Summer:

Study for M.A. Comprehensive exams.

Revise a seminar paper to submit for a conference presentation.

Year 2:

Fall: Take M.A. comprehensive exams.

Colloquium

SPEL seminar: Advanced topics in medical ethics

SPEL seminar: Buddhist metaphysics; *fulfills requirement for a SPEL seminar in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science or philosophy of mind.*

Teaching Assistant for PHIL 148, Medical Ethics

Sit in on PHIL 122 (elementary logic) and take exam.

Spring: Colloquium

SPEL seminar: Ethics of cost-benefit analysis

Graduate course cross-listed with Philosophy: Radical politics Teaching

Assistant for PHIL 345, Philosophy of Law

M.A. requirements completed

Summer:

Instructor of record for summer session course, PHIL 101, Introduction to Philosophy.

Revise a seminar paper to submit for a conference presentation.

Year 3:

Fall: Colloquium

SPEL seminar: Virtue ethics

SPEL seminar: Feminist political theory

Teaching Assistant for PHIL 122, Elementary Logic Pre-dissertation research.

Winter break: Revise a paper that was presented at a conference and submit it for publication.

Spring: Colloquium (serve as commentator for the second time) SPEL seminar: Rawls

SPEL seminar: Global politics

Teaching Assistant for PHIL 101, Introduction to Philosophy

Pre-dissertation research (begin writing prospectus).

Summer:

Complete a draft of the prospectus and bibliography. Take a vacation (?)

Year 4:

Fall: Attend (but do not register for) Colloquium Register for Pre-dissertation research:

Revise, polish, and turn in prospectus and bibliography Prepare for and take the qualifying exam.

Teaching Assistant for PHIL 101, Introduction to Philosophy

D) completed

Spring: Attend (but do not register for) Colloquium

Submit prospectus in February to be considered for Dissertation Assistantship (awarded one semester DA for fifth year)

Register for Doctoral Dissertation (write chapter 1) Instructor of record for PHIL 140, Topics in Ethics

Summer:

Write chapter 2 of dissertation, and revise it into a stand-alone article, then submit it for publication.

Year 5:

Fall: Attend (but do not register for) Colloquium

Register for Doctoral dissertation (write chapters 3-4) Receive DA

Spring: Attend (but do not register for) Colloquium (serve as presenter) Register for Doctoral dissertation

Revise another chapter of the dissertation into a stand-alone article, then submit it for publication.

Write chapter 5

Teach adjunct course in the Binghamton University philosophy department or at a community college.

Summer:

Revise chapters 1-5

Instructor of record for summer session course, PHIL 101

Year 6:

Fall: Register for Doctoral dissertation Write chapter 6 of the dissertation

Satisfactory progress towards the degree

Every February, the SPEL Committee evaluates the progress that each SPEL student is making towards her/his degree; the SPEL Committee may also convene to assess students in response to particular circumstances. Advisers are responsible for providing students with a written evaluation by the end of February. Students who are not making satisfactory progress will receive a warning from the DGS identifying a date by which specific improvements must be made. A student who fails to make the improvements may be dismissed from the Graduate School by the dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the DGS. 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, grade point average, and participation in SPEL activities. 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 (including receiving a “pass” on the M.A. comprehensive exams) according to the expected timeline, and grade point average. Expectations for satisfactory progress and the consequences for not meeting these expectations are outlined below.

Requirements for Satisfactory Progress for Ph.D. track 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 his or her first year, and the student will receive a warning that if his or her GPA does not improve to above a 3.3 at the completion of the spring semester, he or she may be dismissed 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 he or she will be at risk of not being permitted to continue past the M.A.;

below 3.7 but above 3.3, the student will receive a warning that if his or her GPA does not improve to a 3.7 by the progress review of the second year, then his or her funding will end at the completion of his or her second year, and he or she 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:

years to earn a Ph.D. if entering with an M.A.. The fellowship includes a tuition scholarship, a stipend that is higher than other teaching assistantship stipends in the department, health care benefits, and other miscellaneous benefits. Clark Fellows assist in or teach one course per year. For more information, see <https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/cost-aid-funding/financial-support/clifford-clark-fellowship.html>

Some students find adjunct work at other colleges or universities while they are still working on their degree—most often when they are writing dissertations. While adjunct teaching either at Binghamton or elsewhere may be financially necessary, becoming absorbed in teaching sometimes sidetracks students from finishing their degrees, and students should be careful in this regard.

For information on loans, work-study, and other ways to fund your graduate studies, see: <https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/cost-aid-funding/financial-support/>

Working as a teaching assistant and as an instructor 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. Usually, the teaching assistant attends the lectures that are delivered by the faculty member, and 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. For the first two years of working as a teaching assistant, the student will rotate through a variety of undergraduate courses, usually including: PHIL 146 (Law and Justice), PHIL 149 (Environmental Ethics), PHIL 148 (Medical Ethics), PHIL 147 (Ethics, Markets and Law), or PHIL 345 (Philosophy of Law). After this (or a similar) rotation, students will be asked by the chair of the philosophy department to express their preferences about which courses they would like to assist in. Possible courses may include: PHIL 101 (Introduction to Philosophy), PHIL 105 (Introduction to Asian Philosophy), PHIL 107

required to distribute teaching evaluations in their class; 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.

Adjusting to teaching and learning how to balance the demands of teaching and the demands of being a student can be difficult. Graduate teaching assistants who feel that they are being overloaded with teaching and grading duties should discuss their concerns with the faculty member for whom they are assisting. Usually, as one becomes more experienced with teaching, one is better able to limit the amount of time that it takes to prepare for class and accomplish grading, without sacrificing the quality of one's teaching.

mates about sharing the space; it is best if teaching assistants sharing an office hold their office hours at different times.

Students who do not have teaching assistantships (and therefore do not have offices) may request a library carrel in order to have a private study space on campus. For carrels, see: <https://www.binghamton.edu/libraries/services/services-for-graduates/index.html>

International students

SPEL welcomes international students. Applications from international students are assessed exactly the same way as those from U.S. citizens, except that TOEFL scores are 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. Both intermediate and advanced classes are offered as well as a course called “Oral Communication in College Teaching” which is tailored to international graduate teaching assistants. While graduate students do not receive credit for ESL classes, they do receive hours that count for maintaining full time status. For the student’s first year enrolled at Binghamton University (but not for subsequent years), the cost of the classes is covered by the tuition scholarships that come with teaching assistantships. See: <http://iss.binghamton.edu/admission/esl.html>.

Information about visas, employment, immigration regulations, and so on is available at the Office of International Student and Scholar Services. Visit their office in Room G-1 (ground floor) of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center in Hinman College or go to: [International Student and Scholar Services | Binghamton University](#) There are also several different graduate student organizations for international students. Information on these can be found at: [International Student and Scholar Services | Binghamton University](#)

Non-matriculated students

Students who have not applied or been accepted to SPEL may, if they have completed an undergraduate degree, take graduate courses in SPEL. However, individual faculty members may insist on the student having completed certain prerequisites before taking a particular seminar, and some seminars are restricted; for instance, the First Year Seminar is only for students who have been admitted to SPEL/43(EL)22tml

APPENDIX I: Checklist of Degree Requirements Checklist of Requirements for M.A.**Name:** _____ **Entered program in (semester/year):** _____**Advisor:** _____

Eight seminars, seven of which must be SPEL seminars and one of which may be chosen from other Philosophy graduate courses or in consultation with the student's adviser from among courses offered by other departments, with a cumulative grade point average of at least a 3.3.

Course name	Course number	Professor	Semester/year	Final grade
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				
7)				
8)				

One first year SPEL seminar in Social and Political Philosophy and one in Ethics, both to be taken during the first year of residency.

Course name: _____

Course name: _____

Two SPEL seminars emphasizing the history of philosophy. Course name: _____

Course name: _____

One SPEL seminar that draws mainly from the Anglo-American tradition. Course name: _____

One SPEL seminar that draws mainly from the Continental European tradition. Course name: _____

One SPEL seminar in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science or philosophy of mind.

Course name: _____

Checklist of Requirements for Ph.D.

Name: _____ **Entered program in (semester/year):** _____

Advisor: _____

Check one:

Completion of the M.A. requirements in the SPEL Philosophy program.

Or completion of an equivalent M.A. at another institution.

One first year SPEL seminar in Social and Political Philosophy and one in Ethics, both to be taken during the first year in the program. (*Required only of Ph.D. students without an M.A. from SPEL.*)

Course name: _____

Course name: _____

A grade of “pass” on Comprehensive Exams in Ethics and/or in Social and Political Philosophy (*Required only of Ph.D. students without an M.A. from SPEL, and who were told in their admissions letters that the Comprehensive Exam[s] would be required.*)

Enrollment in the SPEL Colloquium for four semesters if entering the program with an M.A. from another institution, and for two semesters (in addition to the four semesters already completed for the M.A.) for students who earned their M.A. in SPEL.

Six seminars that may, when applicable, be chosen from departments other than the Philosophy Department in consultation with the student's adviser.

Course name	Course number	Professor	Semester/year	Final grade
1)				
2)				
3)				
4)				
5)				
6)				

Proficiency requirements:

Check one:

Demonstration of proficiency in one more language (other than English). Language:

Or level 2 logic proficiency (see separate sheet for criteria).

Qualifying exam and dissertation:

Acceptance of a dissertation prospectus and satisfactory performance on a Ph.D. qualifying examination.

Date passed:

Satisfactory completion and defense of a dissertation.

Dissertation director:

Committee members:

Outside examiner:

Defense date:

ADVISOR SIGNATURE (when checklist is complete) _____ Date _____

APPENDIX II: Writing the Prospectus

The prospectus consists of an overall abstract (usually about two or three pages) of the dissertation, and separate abstracts (usually about two or three pages each) for each of the planned dissertation chapters. A typical dissertation has about five or six chapters. The bibliography that accompanies the prospectus should contain approximately 40 or 50 works

dissertation chapters. The student is expected to have studied every work listed in the bibliography.

– from the SPEL Handbook

The most important thing to remember about the prospectus is that consists of a series of abstracts. In these abstracts, you have slightly more latitude to specify the details of your claims than you would in a typical conference abstract, but not much. As with all abstracts the goal is to convey both concisely and accurately one's thesis or main claims, the support (whether evidence or argument) for one's thesis or main claims, and the contrary positions that one will take into consideration. There is little room for anything that is neither a main claim nor an argument that supports or refutes a main claim.

It must be immediately clear what your main point is. (There may also be some small number of equally important main points.) If you are unsure what your main point is, then try writing a 50 or 100 word abstract. If you can't or if it doesn't make any sense, then you don't have a dissertation topic.

With anything you write that is not your main point, it should be clear how that relates to your main point. You should not have substantive discussions or extensive use of quotations. You should not frequently refer backwards and forwards in your prospectus; you should structure it in a way that your argumentative aims are clear from the outset and your exposition follows a logical progression. The positions that you are arguing against should be presented with as much care as your own. Please note that according to the Handbook guidelines, a typical prospectus would be about 15 pages long.

The most basic criterion for assessing a dissertation is whether it makes an original contribution to scholarship. This can mean many things, but it always requires acknowledgement and understanding of existing scholarship. What is new can be: a problem, a solution, an argument for an old position, an objection to a new position, an interpretive frame, an analysis, an explanation of something previously unexplained, an observation of something previously unnoticed, or many other things. But one always defines one's original contribution in relationship to existing scholarship. One of the virtues of Lovitts and Wert's Developing Quality Dissertations in the Humanities lies in its discussion of this point.

So one traditional way of organizing a dissertation is: summary and analysis of existing literature, criticism of existing positions, arguments for a favored position, further implications of adopting the favored position. One need not, of course, adopt this form. Another popular format is to break

APPENDIX V: CHART OF REQUIREMENTS