Philosophy

Handbook for MA Students

2016/17
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NB If you wish to contact a member of staff from inside the college, the last 4 digits of their telephone number work as an extension number.
M.A. Philosophy at Birkbeck

The Philosophy Department

The Birkbeck Philosophy Department has an outstanding reputation in both teaching and research. In the recent edition of the Leiter report the department was ranked among the very highest in the UK, with special mentions of the quality of Birkbeck’s research in 11 different areas of philosophy. In the last two national research assessments (2008 and 2014), 100% of the department’s research was classed as being internationally recognised. Our teaching achieved the highest rating when it was last assessed by the QAA: we scored a maximum 24/24 in the teaching quality assessment.

For more information about studying philosophy in the Department and about philosophy in London, see our webpage http://www.bbk.ac.uk/philosophy.

The M.A. in Philosophy

This uniquely flexible programme offers postgraduate teaching in central aspects of Western philosophy in the broadly analytic tradition. The curriculum is research-led, with specialist modules taught by leading figures in their fields, and with a consistent focus on the fostering of intellectual curiosity and the development of independent thinking. The programme allows students to follow their own philosophical interests and provides a sound platform for those wishing to proceed to more advanced research work in philosophy.

The MA is open to those with a first degree in philosophy wishing to progress to more advanced levels of study and also to those without undergraduate training in philosophy. Those who did not study philosophy as undergraduates take a special route through the programme (the ‘conversion’ route).

The degree can be studied full-time over one year or part-time over two years, and it can be studied mostly during the day or entirely during the evening.
Our Good Practice Policy

The Department has a Good Practice Policy as recommended by the *British Philosophical Association* and the *Society for Women in Philosophy (U.K.)*. Our aim in having the policy is to do our best to eliminate bias of any sort in how students, colleagues and job candidates are treated, how students’ work is marked, what is said in academic references, and so on. Such a policy is recommended on the basis of evidence that even the most well-intentioned people—male and female—can exhibit unconscious biases in the ways they deal with women. Gender biases interact with biases related to race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, disability and other stigmatized or under-represented groups.

The aspects of the policy which might affect students directly are the following:

a) We ask anyone in charge of periods of discussion (whether in tutorials, in seminars or in reading groups) to facilitate broad participation, if necessary by inhibiting particular individuals from dominating discussion.

b) We invite everyone to show no tolerance for insulting, aggressive or unprofessional behaviour whether from staff members, other teachers or students. (In connection with teaching occasions, such behaviour includes, but is not limited to, dismissive remarks about the intellectual abilities of people of certain sorts, hostile questioning and/or excessive interruption of speakers. In connection with social events [e.g. drinks after seminars or at Cumberland Lodge weekend; parties at induction, Christmas, end of year] such behaviour could include anything that falls under the definition of harassment or victimization in the College’s Guide to Dignity at Work and Study.)

We hope that if any student suffered from or witnessed conduct out of line with the Department’s policy, they would take their concerns to a member of staff in the Department. And we note that anyone who wanted to speak in confidence to someone outside the Department could arrange to meet with one of the College’s trained D@W&S Contacts who are available to all employees and students of Birkbeck. [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hr/policies_services/Dignity_at_work_and_study](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hr/policies_services/Dignity_at_work_and_study) has a list of Contacts and links to the Guide.
Aims and Objectives of the M.A. Degree

Aims

A general aim of the Department of Philosophy is to fulfil the College’s educational mission for adults working during the day through provision of our M.A. programme. Specifically, we aim:

• to provide part-time students over two years with a Masters level education in philosophy equivalent to that received by M.A. students studying full-time for one year
• to provide students with an understanding of a representative range of central philosophical debates, and of the nature of philosophical problems
• to provide a Masters degree programme designed to deepen the knowledge of those with an undergraduate training in philosophy and provide able students from other disciplines with a fast-track into advanced study in philosophy.
• to develop in students the key philosophical techniques of argument and analysis
• to develop in students the ability to evaluate philosophical argument and explanation
• to develop and encourage students’ abilities to think independently and creatively about philosophical problems
• to enable students to think, reason and speak more effectively in a wide range of areas
• to prepare students for further study or lifelong learning

Objectives

a) Subject-specific objectives

On completion of a M.A. degree programme students will:

• have read closely and gained an understanding of key philosophical texts
• be able to read philosophy independently
• have gained a critical command of philosophical terminology
• be able to formulate philosophical questions with precision and clarity
• be able to summarize philosophical arguments and positions
• be able to support and challenge philosophical views and positions by constructing arguments and citing relevant considerations
• have formed their own philosophical views, argued for those views, and be prepared to defend or amend them in the light of criticism
• have honed their abilities to write, read and discuss philosophy through a wide variety of learning experiences
• have carried out a piece of supervised research on a specific philosophical topic and presented a coherently argued account of the topic in a structured dissertation

b) Transferable skills

On completion of the degree programme students will have enhanced their abilities to:

• extract information from the presentation of complex material
• summarize key points from presented material
• analyse complex thought and argument
• draw information together in what they write
• articulate and evaluate the specific questions underlying a more general question
• present well-structured thought orally
• use libraries and, where they have facilities, electronic sources of information
• construct cogent arguments in the course of discussion
• recognise the strengths and weaknesses in opposing views, and be prepared to formulate the best arguments for those views
• assess the validity of arguments
The Structure of the M.A. Programme

The structure of the programme varies depending on whether you are studying full-time or part-time, and on whether or not you have a prior background in philosophy. As a result, there are four possible permutations of the programme, the skeletons of which are laid out here, with more detailed information given below.

**Non-Conversion, Full-Time**

Autumn Term: Philosophical Research Methods & any three options  
Spring Term: Philosophical Research Methods & any three options  
Summer Term: Dissertation

**Non-Conversion, Part-Time**

Y1 Autumn Term: Any two options  
Y1 Spring Term: Any two options  
Y1 Summer Term: Begin work on Dissertation  
Y2 Autumn Term: Philosophical Research Methods & any one option  
Y2 Spring Term: Philosophical Research Methods & any one option  
Y2 Summer Term: Complete work on Dissertation

**Conversion, Full-Time**

Autumn Term: Introduction to Philosophy & any two options  
Spring Term: Introduction to Philosophical Argument & any two options  
Summer Term: Dissertation

**Conversion, Part-Time**

Y1 Autumn Term: Introduction to Philosophy  
Y1 Spring Term: Introduction to Philosophical Argument & any one option  
Y1 Summer Term: Begin work on Dissertation  
Y2 Autumn Term: Any one or two options  
Y2 Spring Term: Any one or two options (to a total of three over the two terms)  
Y2 Summer Term: Complete work on Dissertation
The Compulsory Modules

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

The aim of this module is to introduce M.A. students with little or no academic background in philosophy—‘conversion’ students—to some of the most central areas of the discipline.

The module is taught in the Autumn Term, two evenings per week. It consists in twenty two-hour lecture/seminars, with set readings to be studied in advance of each session. The module is divided into four parts:

• *Epistemology.* What do we know, how do we know it, and what is knowledge in the first place? How should we think about ideas such as belief, justification, evidence and warrant?

• *Metaphysics.* What is the ultimate nature of reality? How should we think about ideas such as space, time, causation and identity?

• *Ethics.* How are we to live? How should we think about ideas such as well-being, death, responsibility, right and wrong, and objectivity?

• *Political Philosophy.* How are we to live together? How should we think about ideas such as justice, democracy, the state, liberalism, and capitalism?

The module also includes sessions on core philosophical skills such as Reading Philosophy, Writing Philosophy, Preparing for Exams in Philosophy, and Approaching the Dissertation.

Assessment: Students write formative essays (850-1500 words) on each of the four parts of the module, on which they receive written feedback; while compulsory, these assignments are for practice and do not form part of the final assessment for the module. Final assessment consists in a three-hour written exam in the Summer Term. This module is compulsory for conversion students.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT

The aim of this module is to introduce M.A. students with little or no academic background in philosophy—‘conversion’ students—to some of the basic concepts and
issues involved in the study of logic. The module is taught in the Spring Term, one evening per week. It consists in ten lectures and ten classes.

The principal focus is on the notion of argument. What is an argument, and what makes for a good one? Sometimes we talk of arguments as being valid or invalid. What do these terms mean, and what is the difference between a good argument and a valid one? Upon successful completion of the module students will have a grounding in the essentials of logic that will be useful both in itself and as a basis for further philosophical study.

Assessment: Formal assessment is by a written exam in the Summer Term. Note that, while passing this module is a requirement for ‘conversion’ students, marks obtained on this module do not contribute to the determination of students’ overall class marks on the MA (e.g. pass, merit, distinction).

PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of this module is to help to train M.A. philosophy students with prior backgrounds in philosophy—non-‘conversion’ students—both in the close reading of philosophical texts and in the practices of group philosophical discussion. It consists in ten intensive, two-hour seminars, each focused on a set reading. Topics vary from year to year.

Assessment: 40% of the final mark for this module is based on seminar participation over the ten sessions (see the dedicated mark scheme for assessment of philosophical discussion, below). 60% of the final mark is based on a seminar presentation, which must also be written up and submitted in hard copy. Note that, while passing this module is a requirement for non-‘conversion’ students, marks obtained on this module do not contribute to the determination of students’ overall class marks on the MA (e.g. pass, merit, distinction).
The Optional Modules

We run a broad range of optional modules, allowing you to choose your own balance of depth and breadth in your coverage of different subject areas. For a full list of this year’s optional modules, including syllabus descriptions and suggested preliminary readings, see the Appendix.

CHOOSING YOUR OPTIONS

In order to organise our seminar teaching, we need you to select your options in good time before the start of each term (see ‘Deadlines’). To this purpose, we supply descriptions of each module, together with suggestions of preliminary reading, well in advance. If you require further advance information about a particular module, please contact the module convenor.

Some modules presuppose prior philosophical knowledge that goes beyond what is covered in Introduction to Philosophy and Introduction to Philosophical Argument; this is noted in the module descriptions. Students who lack such knowledge (conversion students as well as any non-conversion students who have not previously covered the necessary material) and who wish to take one of these modules must contact the module convenor well in advance to discuss what additional preliminary study will be necessary in order to access the module. In some cases, some students will be best advised to avoid particular modules. You may also contact the MA Tutor for advice on this matter.

Part-time students should note that optional modules are timetabled on a two-yearly rotation, whereby modules scheduled in the evening in one year are scheduled in the daytime in the following year and vice versa. This is to ensure that evening-only students are able to access our full range of optional modules over a two-year period. So when choosing your options, be sure to plan ahead!

LECTURES, SEMINARS AND ASSESSMENT

Each optional module consists in ten weekly sessions, consisting in a one-hour lecture followed by a one-hour seminar. Every week there is one key reading that is the focus
of the seminar discussion. One of the purposes of the seminar is to help you to understand the reading, so do not worry if you have not fully understood the reading in advance. Nevertheless, it is essential that you attempt the seminar reading each week if you are to follow the lecture and to participate in the seminar discussion. In addition, there is ‘additional reading’ listed that will deepen your understanding and help you to get the most out of the module.

Assessment for MA optional modules is either by one essay of around 3,500 words or by two essays with a combined length of around 3,500 words (depending on the module). Essays are submitted at the start of the term following the term in which the module took place. Note that, although essays written for different modules may cover similar topics, and may even make similar arguments, you are forbidden from duplicating material across essays (this is treated as ‘self-plagiarism’: for more guidance, see ‘Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism’, below).

Students who would like some guidance on how to approach their essay may request a short advisory meeting (around 20 minutes) with the relevant module lecturer or convenor. Students may produce a plan of their essay in advance of this meeting, but it is not expected that the lecturer will read a full draft. To arrange your meeting, please consult the Department webpage for staff office hours.

**PREPARING YOUR ESSAYS FOR SUBMISSION**

Please note the following important points when preparing essays for submission:

- Essays must be written on one of the set essay topics, except with permission from the module convenor.

- Although essays are normally expected to be around 3,500 words, the strict maximum is 3,700 (where two essays are required for a module, these figures refer to the combined word count). Your essays must not exceed this. **Examiners are instructed to stop reading when they reach the word limit.**

  - The word limit does not include: the title, page numbers, final bibliography, candidate number, module title, and word count.

  - The word limit does include: section headings, footnotes, endnotes, citations, appendices, quotations and, of course, the main text.
• Essays should be double-spaced, written in a standard font (e.g. 12-point Times New Roman), with normal margins (around 1 inch). Footnotes are generally preferred to endnotes.

• Each essay should have a clear bibliography at the end listing all of the works to which you have referred in the essay.

• You may use any recognized academic style for citations and bibliographies, such as Chicago Style or APA Style. Please use the same style consistently throughout each essay. Please also note carefully the college’s rules on plagiarism (see below).

SUBMITTING YOUR ESSAYS

Please note the following important points when submitting your essays:

• Each essay must be uploaded electronically via Moodle. At some point prior to the submission deadline, submission tools will be added to the Moodle pages for your modules: to upload your essays, click these and follow the instructions. (If you are unsure how to do this, you may contact the Postgraduate Administrator for more detailed directions.)

• Please include your student number in the filename of your uploaded document.

• Your uploaded document must include a cover sheet. Cover sheets will be made available via Moodle prior to the submission deadline.

• There is a penalty for late submission. Any essay received after the submission deadline will have its mark capped at 50% (unless you have made a claim of mitigating circumstances and this claim has been accepted—see below).
The Dissertation

The dissertation is the central component of the M.A. programme, and an opportunity for you to examine a philosophical topic of particular interest to you in depth. Dissertations are normally around 10,000 words (with a strict maximum of 12,000).

Dissertation Supervision

Most of the time that you spend working on your dissertation you will be by yourself: this component of the M.A. is primarily an exercise in independent study. However, you can also expect an initial consultation with a supervisor followed by up to three supervisions to help to direct your work. In order to help us to assign you to an appropriate supervisor, you will need to tell us at least the general area of philosophy in which you wish to work (see ‘Deadlines’). Once you have a supervisor, you will then have an initial consultation at which you will normally aim (1) to settle on a precise topic, (2) to put together a reading list and (3) to agree a rough plan of study. How you use your subsequent three supervisions is for you to decide with your supervisor, but normally the first will focus on a plan or outline and the last will focus on a full draft.

Note that it is your responsibility to make contact with your supervisor and to arrange meetings. Note also that most supervisors are unavailable to meet outside of term time, and in particular that meetings and/or written comments on work via email during the Summer Vacation are possible only by prior agreement. Finally, note that supervisors’ schedules often become booked up, especially near the ends of terms: where possible, do try to arrange meetings in good time.

Any student who experiences problems in making contact with their assigned supervisor should contact the Postgraduate Administrator in the first instance.

Choosing a Dissertation Topic

The first—if most obvious—piece of advice on choosing a dissertation topic is this: choose a topic that interests you. Since the dissertation is an exercise in independent study, you need a topic capable of motivating you continuously throughout the many months that you spend working on it. So do not make the mistake of choosing a topic
that you find boring and uninspiring just because (1) you once got a good mark for an essay on that topic, (2) the topic is of special interest to your supervisor, or (3) you think for some reason that you ought to be interested in the topic. Instead, try to choose a question to which you genuinely want to find out the answer (or, at least, to make some progress towards finding out the answer). Indeed, you might try the following thought experiment: imagine that God appears to you and offers to answer any one philosophical question (but just one). What do you ask?

The second piece of advice is this: choose a question specific enough that you can treat it adequately within the word limit. Many students begin by radically overestimating what it is possible to accomplish within an M.A. dissertation, choosing topics more appropriate for MPhils or PhDs (or, in some cases, career-spanning research projects). While one of the main purposes of the dissertation is to enable you to treat a question in more depth than you can otherwise, it is important that you not be unrealistic with regard to the feasible scope of the project: an M.A. dissertation is to be thought of as a very extended essay, not as a very abridged book. If you do have your heart set on a larger project, focus on carving off a manageable piece of that project to tackle in your M.A. dissertation and see this as just one piece of a larger, future whole. If in doubt, your supervisor will be able to guide you as to what is an appropriately-sized topic.

Your dissertation may be on any philosophical topic, so long as the Department has the expertise to supervise and to examine it. It does not have to be on a topic that you have studied on one of your modules. However, it is often a good idea to choose such a topic—especially for conversion students, who can otherwise find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of breadth of understanding. Your dissertation topic can overlap with the topic of one or more of your submitted essays, so long as you avoid duplication of material.

If you need further advice on choosing a topic, please contact the MA Tutor.
PREPARING YOUR DISSERTATION FOR SUBMISSION

Please note the following important points when preparing your dissertation for submission:

• Although dissertations are normally around 10,000 words, the strict maximum word limit is 12,000. Your dissertation must not exceed this. *Examiners are instructed to stop reading when they reach the word limit.*
  
  o The word limit *does not* include: the title, page numbers, final bibliography, candidate number and word count.
  
  o The word limit *does* include: section headings, footnotes, endnotes, citations, appendices, quotations and, of course, the main text.

• Dissertations should be double-spaced, written in a standard font (e.g. 12-point Times New Roman), with normal margins (around 1 inch). Footnotes are generally preferred to endnotes.

• The dissertation should have a clear bibliography at the end listing all the works to which you have referred.

• You may use any recognized academic style for citations and bibliographies, such as Chicago Style or APA Style. Please use the same style consistently throughout your dissertation. Please also note carefully the college’s rules on plagiarism (see below).

SUBMITTING YOUR DISSERTATION

Please note the following important points when submitting your dissertation:

• Dissertations are submitted electronically via Moodle. At some point prior to the submission deadline, a submission tool will be added to the Moodle page for the Dissertation module: to upload your dissertation, click this and follow the instructions. (If you are unsure how to do this, you may contact the Postgraduate Administrator for more detailed directions.)

• Please include your student number in the filename of your uploaded document.
• Your uploaded document must include a cover sheet. Cover sheets will be made available via Moodle prior to the submission deadline.

• There is a penalty for late submission. Any dissertation received after the submission deadline will have its mark capped at 50% (unless you have made a claim of mitigating circumstances and this claim has been accepted—see below).
Plagiarism and ‘Self-Plagiarism’

Birkbeck College defines plagiarism as ‘the submission for assessment of material (written, visual or oral) originally produced by another person or persons, without correct acknowledgement, in such a way that the work could be assumed to be the student’s own’.

Plagiarism is to be deprecated in any circumstances, but if it is done deliberately in order to obtain a qualification, it constitutes a serious fraud. Candidates are warned of the extreme danger of plagiarism, paraphrasing, and having essays or dissertations written or edited by other persons. Any of these is likely to result in the candidate being awarded a lower class than would otherwise have been given, or in many cases in not getting a degree at all. Students should be aware that all submitted work is scanned for plagiarism by TurnItIn software and that several cases of plagiarism have been found over the past few years. The exam board takes a very hard line on cases of deliberate plagiarism.

It is possible to plagiarise accidentally, for instance if you quote someone else’s work in one of your own essays so that it reads as if their words are your own, but forget to credit the person for it. It is also plagiarism to express ideas in your own words, if those ideas were generated by someone else (lecturer, fellow student, great philosopher from the past or whoever) and you have not clearly said so. Of course you may independently come up with ideas that someone else has already had in the past, without realising it; in that case writing them down is not plagiarism. Care is clearly required when directly or indirectly quoting other people so as to avoid the danger of plagiarising by accident.

Any case of deliberate plagiarism, including plagiarism for formative essays, is taken extremely seriously by the Department, and the Department may alert the Examination Board. Serious cases of plagiarism are dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedures of the College and University. If plagiarism is suspected, you may be asked for evidence that what you have submitted is indeed your own work: it is therefore advisable to retain the rough drafts and notes you made for your submitted essays and dissertation. You should consult the MA Tutor if you are in any doubt about what is permissible.
The College guidance on plagiarism may be consulted at:
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support/plagiarism/plagiarism-guide

**PLAGIARISM: SOME EXAMPLES**

As further guidance, here follows a useful set of examples concerning what is, and what is not, plagiarism. This reproduces a document written by Richard Dennis of the Geography Department at UCL (and therefore is not the work of the authors of this Handbook!). You should pay particular attention to *Example 2*, which includes what tends to be the most common form of plagiarism.

*Example 1.* The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

**THIS IS PLAGIARISM. THERE IS NO ATTEMPT TO INDICATE THAT THESE ARE NOT RICHARD DENNIS'S OWN THOUGHTS BUT ARE WORDS TAKEN DIRECT FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO.**

*Example 2.* Marx and Engels noted that the history of all hitherto existing society had been the history of class struggles. Society as a whole was more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. They observed that proletarians had nothing to lose but their chains. They had a world to win.

**THIS IS STILL PLAGIARISM. ALTHOUGH THE IDEAS ARE ATTRIBUTED TO MARX AND ENGELS, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE FORM OF WORDS IS NOT RICHARD DENNIS'S. JUST CHANGING IT INTO THE PAST TENSE DOESN'T MAKE IT ORIGINAL.**

*Example 3.* In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1973 edn., p. 40) noted that 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'. They argued that society was 'more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (p. 41). 'Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory' were 'organised like soldiers ... slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State' (p. 52). They concluded that 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win' (p. 96).

**THIS IS NOT PLAGIARISM, BUT IF ALL YOUR ESSAY CONSISTS OF IS A SET OF QUOTATIONS STITCHED TOGETHER, IT DOESN'T SUGGEST THAT YOU HAVE
THOUGHT ABOUT OR UNDERSTOOD THE CONTENTS OF THE QUOTATIONS. SO RICHARD DENNIS WOULDN'T EARN VERY MANY MARKS FROM ME FOR THIS EFFORT!

Example 4. In one of the most famous first sentences ever written, Marx and Engels (1973 edn., p 40) began The Communist Manifesto thus: ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.’ They went on to exemplify this claim by showing how the structure of society had, in their view, developed into two interdependent but antagonistic classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. The latter comprised factory operatives, who had been reduced to no more than slave labour; but as they became concentrated geographically, in the great factory towns of the industrial revolution, so they had the opportunity to organise themselves politically. Hence, the authors’ conclusion that a communist revolution was not only desirable, but possible, leading them to issue their equally famous final exhortation (p. 96): ‘Working men of all countries, unite!’

THIS MAY NOT BE A VERY PROFOUND COMMENTARY, BUT AT LEAST I’VE TRIED!

‘SELF-PLAGIARISM’

According to the College’s plagiarism policy (linked above), ‘[a]nother form of plagiarism is submitting work you previously submitted before for another assignment. While this is obviously not the same as representing someone else’s ideas as your own, it is a form of self-plagiarism and is another form of cheating.’

The basic principle here is that candidates cannot receive academic credit for the same work twice over. That is, you cannot submit the same work twice and expect to be rewarded for it both times. For this reason, any material submitted for final assessment that reproduces or duplicates material previously submitted for final assessment will be treated as plagiarised and dealt with as such.

There are four very important points to note with respect to this policy:

• The prohibition on duplication applies not only to work submitted for final assessment on the MA, but to all work submitted for final assessment for any degree at any institution. This means, for example, that you cannot reproduce work submitted as part of an undergraduate dissertation—even if it was submitted at a different university.
• The prohibition applies only to work submitted for final assessment. It does not include work that does not contribute directly towards your final mark on a module, such as formative essays or drafts. On the MA, for instance, the formative essays written as part of Introduction to Philosophy are exempt.

• The purpose of this restriction is not to prevent you from submitting multiple essays on the same topics, but to prevent you from reproducing the same work. The fact that you have previously submitted an essay on freewill, for example, does not preclude you from submitting another essay on freewill, so long as the new essay does not merely repeat material contained in the previous one. Indeed, it is normal for students to develop their ideas on a topic over a number of pieces of submitted work.

• The best way to proceed is to treat one’s previously submitted work as though it were the published work of someone else. You may refer to your previous work—and even quote from it—just as you do the work of others.

If you are concerned about the possibility of self-plagiarism with respect to a specific piece of work, you should seek the advice of your lecturer, your dissertation supervisor, or the MA Tutor.
Mitigating Circumstances

The College defines mitigating circumstances as ‘unforeseen, unpreventable circumstances that significantly disrupt student performance in assessment’, such as acute illness or bereavement. **They do not include known, long-term conditions** such as chronic illnesses or disabilities, which are dealt with by means of reasonable adjustment under the College’s disability policy.

If you feel that your performance in respect of any of your modules has been significantly affected by unforeseen and unpreventable circumstances, please let the MA Tutor or Postgraduate Administrator know **as soon as possible**. In such cases you must submit a **mitigating circumstances form** detailing the relevant circumstances, as well as supporting evidence such as a medical certificate from your doctor. The details of your mitigating circumstances claim are treated in confidence and are considered only by a small sub-panel of the Board of Examiners. The deadline for submission of a claim for mitigating circumstances is normally seven days after the submission deadline for the relevant coursework (or the date of the exam), but you are advised to submit your form as soon as possible.

The normal remedy for valid claims of mitigating circumstances is the offer of a reassessment opportunity. This may take the form of an extension to a submission deadline or an opportunity to resit an exam at a later date (with this treated as a first attempt at that exam).

Please note that **computer failure does not excuse late submissions**. Candidates are advised to take proper computer security measures, such as making frequent back-up copies and storing them away from the computer; making hard copies of drafts close to submission date; and so on. This is entirely the responsibility of the candidate.

Further details of the College policy on claims of Mitigating Circumstances can be found at: [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/mitcircspol.pdf](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/mitcircspol.pdf)
Failed Modules and Reassessment

Although the Department will work to support your studies as best it can, it is nevertheless possible that you may fail one or more of your modules. At postgraduate level, a failing mark is defined as any mark below 50 (see below, Schemes of Assessment).

If you do receive a failing mark on one of your modules, you will normally be offered an opportunity to be reassessed. The deadline for reassessments is in the term following that in which the module was originally taken. Thus for failed Term 1 optional module essays the reassessment deadline will be a date in Term 2, and for failed Term 2 optional module essays the reassessment deadline will be a date in Term 3. For modules assessed by exam, reassessments occur in July so that marks can be returned in September, before the next academic year begins.

Note that postgraduates are permitted only two attempts at each of their modules (excluding cases of mitigating circumstances). This means that, if you also receive a failing mark for a module at the second attempt, then you will fail your degree programme and your enrolment will be terminated. If you are concerned that you may fail one or more of your modules at the second attempt, you should contact your personal tutor (or the MA Tutor) as soon as possible to discuss your situation.
Study Skills

Study Skills sessions are integrated into the *Introduction to Philosophy* module, for conversion students, and into the *Philosophical Research Methods* module, for non-conversion students. All students may also seek advice on study skills in seminars, in dissertation supervisions, and from the MA Tutor. Furthermore, study skills sessions are a regular fixture at Cumberland Lodge.

It may be useful to note that the Birkbeck Students’ Union offers free study skills workshops on topics including revision, exams, and time management. The College Study Skills team also offers free advice sessions and workshops on these topics. Further information can be found on the My Birkbeck website under ‘Student support’; see [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support).
### Deadlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday before the Autumn term begins</td>
<td>New students to inform the Postgraduate Administrator of their option choices for coming Academic Year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday of Autumn Term Reading Week</td>
<td><em>Introduction to Philosophy</em>: Submission deadline for the first formative essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday of Week 7 of the Autumn Term</td>
<td>Full-time students to inform the Postgraduate Administrator of the general subject area in which their dissertation will fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Friday of the Autumn Term</td>
<td><em>Philosophical Research Methods</em>: Submission deadline for written copies of Autumn Term presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday after the Autumn term ends</td>
<td><em>Introduction to Philosophy</em>: Submission deadline for the second formative essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Monday of the Spring Term</td>
<td>Submission deadline for all essays for optional modules taken in the Autumn Term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Friday of the Spring Term</td>
<td><em>Philosophical Research Methods</em>: Submission deadline for written copies of Spring Term presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Monday of the Summer Term</td>
<td>Submission deadline for all essays for optional modules taken in the Spring Term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday of Summer Term Reading Week</td>
<td>First-year part-time students to inform the Postgraduate Administrator of the general subject area in which their dissertation will fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Friday of Summer Term</td>
<td>Continuing students to inform the Postgraduate Administrator of their option choices for the following academic year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; September</td>
<td>Submission deadline for dissertations (full-time and second-year part-time students).</td>
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Schemes of Assessment

SCHEME OF ASSESSMENT FOR WRITTEN WORK

The following scheme of assessment is used by examiners in relation to all submitted essays, dissertations, and exam answers.

To achieve a pass mark (50-59), a student must demonstrate:

• A good understanding of the nature and significance of the question under consideration;
• An ability to present his or her thoughts in an ordered and coherent fashion;
• An ability to reflect upon the outlines of the problem by showing
  a) EITHER a good knowledge of some existing attempts to answer the question in such a way as to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the philosophical concepts employed
  b) OR an ability to think independently about the problem in a relevant and coherent fashion.

To achieve a merit mark (60-69), a student must demonstrate:

• A very good understanding of the nature and significance of the question under consideration;
• An ability to present his or her thoughts in an ordered and coherent fashion that demonstrates notable philosophical lucidity;
• An ability to reflect upon the outlines of the problem by showing
  a) EITHER a thorough knowledge and critical grasp of some existing attempts to answer the question in such a way as to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the philosophical concepts employed;
  b) OR an ability to think independently about the problem in a relevant and coherent fashion, constructing a well ordered case from the materials discussed.

To achieve a distinction mark (70 and above), a student must demonstrate:

• An excellent understanding of the nature and significance of the questions under consideration;
• An ability to present his or her thoughts in an ordered and coherent fashion that is also either especially perceptive or sustained;
• An ability to reflect upon the question by showing
  a) EITHER a detailed knowledge and deep understanding of some existing attempts to resolve the problem, including some or all of the following: an appreciation of the complexities of the views discussed; an ability to exercise independent and plausible judgement on the merits of the views discussed; an ability to present arguments and/or examples in support of the judgements made;
b) OR an ability to think independently about the problem in a relevant, coherent, sustained and systematic fashion, showing an ability to present arguments to support the position defended, and to anticipate and respond to potential difficulties or objections.

SCHEME OF ASSESSMENT FOR DISCUSSION

The following scheme of assessment is used by examiners in relation to seminar participation, which is a formal part of assessment in the Philosophical Research Methods module. In addition, all students are encouraged to reflect on the following scheme in relation to their own seminar contributions (see also our Good Practice Policy).

To achieve a pass mark (50-59), a student must:

- Treat his or her fellow discussants with courtesy and respect;
- Play an active role in the discussion without dominating it;
- Contribute in ways that are broadly relevant both to the stated discussion topic and to the contributions of others;
- Present his or her thoughts in a somewhat ordered and coherent fashion;
- Advance the discussion by means of contributions that demonstrate either knowledge of relevant ideas and concepts or independent critical insight into the topics at hand.

To achieve a merit mark (60-69), a student must:

- Treat his or her fellow discussants with courtesy and respect;
- Play an active, non-dominating role in the discussion and, where appropriate, make some attempt to encourage others to do so too;
- Contribute in ways that are relevant to the stated discussion topic and that show evidence of attention having been paid to the contributions of others;
- Present his or her thoughts in an ordered and coherent fashion;
- Advance the discussion by means of contributions that demonstrate either knowledge and understanding of relevant ideas and concepts or independent critical insight into the topics at hand supported by careful argument.

To achieve a distinction mark (70 and above), a student must:

- Treat his or her fellow discussants with courtesy and respect;
- Play an active, non-dominating role in the discussion and, where appropriate, make a serious attempt to encourage others to do so too;
- Contribute in ways that are precisely targeted at the matter at hand and that show evidence of careful thought having been given to the contributions of others;
• Present his or her thoughts in an ordered and coherent fashion that demonstrates notable lucidity;
• Advance the discussion by means of contributions that demonstrate **EITHER**
detailed knowledge and deep understanding of relevant ideas and concepts **OR**
independent critical insight into the topics at hand, supported by careful argument and an ability to anticipate potential difficulties and objections to the position defended.
How Your Degree Is Calculated

To determine your final degree class, a mark is calculated based on the credit-weighted average of the marks obtained in the various components of the degree. This weighting is as follows:

- Each optional module counts for 15 credits;
- *Introduction to Philosophy* counts for 30 credits;
- The Dissertation counts for 60 credits.

Marks obtained on *Introduction to Philosophical Argument* and on *Philosophical Research Methods* do not factor into the final calculation of your degree (although each must be passed—by conversion and non-conversion students respectively—in order to graduate).

Based on this weighted average, students are awarded one of the following:

- **Distinction**: You will be awarded a Distinction if you achieve an average result of **70% or above** as well as a distinction mark in the dissertation
- **Merit**: You will be awarded a Merit if you achieve an average result of between 60% and 69%.
- **Pass**: You will be awarded a Pass if you achieve an average result of between 50% and 59% and no more than 30 credits as a Compensated Fail (i.e., between 40% and 49%).
- **Fail**: You will be considered to have failed if you achieve an average result of below 50% or more than 30 credits as a Compensated Fail or below.

**Exit Awards**

Should you fail to achieve the number of credits necessary for a pass, you may nevertheless qualify for an exit award. There are two.

If you have passed all of the elements of the MA in Philosophy *except for the Dissertation*, you may be awarded a **Postgraduate Diploma in Philosophy**.

If you have passed four optional modules (or two optional modules plus *Introduction to Philosophy*), you may be awarded a **Postgraduate Certificate in Philosophy**.

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Advice and Consultation

Advice and Support

You should consult the MA Tutor about any aspect of study causing you difficulty. There will be a meeting with the MA Tutor during the Induction Evening. If you miss it, you can contact the Tutor to make an appointment. You should remain in touch throughout the course. The MA Tutor in 2016-17 is Dr Michael Garnett.

Many MA students at Birkbeck are part-time. The shortage of time such students experience can make for difficulties. The members of the Department are well aware of this, and are prepared to do what they can to minimize difficulties. There are bound to be times when pressures of employment and other commitments make attendance at lectures, reading or written work difficult to manage. Our experience has shown that such periods do not mean that you fall hopelessly behind. By consulting the MA Tutor, you can usually overcome problems associated with periods of reduced attendance (whether studying part-time or full-time).

We also have a Personal Tutor System for all MA students. The Tutor to MA Students acts as your Personal Tutor until you are assigned a dissertation supervisor (typically, at the end of Term 1 for full-time students, and at the end of Year 1 for part-time students). Once you are assigned a dissertation supervisor, your supervisor takes over the role of Personal Tutor. The Personal Tutor system is designed to offer you additional advice and guidance during your time at Birkbeck. You should contact your Personal Tutor if you encounter financial or personal difficulties which affect your studies. In addition, the Tutor for MA Students remains available to you for any advice and help s/he can offer throughout your degree.

If problems arise in connection with a specific module the person to contact is the convenor of the module.

Consultation and Class Representatives

Individual students can approach any member of staff with questions or comments on the course. Please take advantage of the opportunities that exist for informal
communication with us. Telephone numbers and email addresses are listed at the front of this Handbook.

In addition to informal channels of communication there is also a formal system of student-staff consultation. MA students will be asked to elect class representatives, whose role is to provide a channel of communication between students and staff. Representatives should keep in touch with the opinion of the students in their year. The names of student representatives, with contact details, will be posted on the Department’s web site.

Class Representative Consultations are held in Terms 1 and 2. Through these consultations, the MA Tutor keeps representatives informed of developments in the Department, and class representatives voice the comments, suggestions, and complaints of their peers.

The Minutes of Student-Staff Exchange Consultations are discussed by staff at Department meetings, and any relevant feedback is sent to class representatives.
Personal Issues

Discussing personal issues with the Department’s staff

Your Personal Tutor will be pleased to give you all the help, advice and support they can, in complete professional confidence. All other members of the administrative and academic staff are also available to talk to in professional confidence, and you are welcome to make an appointment with any member of staff you wish; in particular, you may make an appointment to see the MA Tutor, or the Head of Department if you feel that they may be able to help you.

Harassment

We wish to ensure that while you are here you can at all times enjoy a secure and comfortable learning environment. Therefore if anyone associated with the Department or the wider College intimidates you, sexually harasses you, or makes you uncomfortable in any way by their behaviour towards you, please tell your Personal Tutor (or any other member of staff) at the earliest opportunity and we shall take appropriate steps.

The College has strict rules that define harassment and absolutely forbid it: see the document ‘Dignity at work and study (eliminating and preventing harassment)’, online at: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hr/policies_services/Dignity_at_work_and_study

Counselling

The Counselling Service is funded by the College but is run by the Students’ Union at arm’s length from the College. The Counselling Service is professional, independent and easily accessible. It is also completely confidential: no one in College or in the Department of Philosophy need know if you use its services. To book, or for further information, phone 020 7631 6335 or drop by the Students’ Union office on the fourth floor of the Malet Street extension building. Alternatively you can visit the website: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/su/support/counsel/.
Birkbeck students also have access to the counselling service provided by the University of London Central Institutions Health Centre, which offers additional resources that complement the services the Student Union provides.

**STUDENT HEALTH**

Birkbeck subscribes to the Gower Street Practice, located just around the corner from the Malet Street main building at 20 Gower Street. Students living in central London can register with the doctors for full NHS general practitioner services, but other students can also benefit from the facilities. Consultations are free and completely confidential. In addition to normal GP services, the Gower Street Practice offers psychotherapy and cognitive behaviour therapy, and is experienced in helping students. For further information, call the Practice on 020 7636 7628, or visit [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/health](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/health).

**THE CHAPLAINCY**

The London University Chaplaincy serves the University community by offering pastoral counselling, and support and guidance in matters of faith and spiritual development for all students and staff of the Christian and Jewish traditions, and also those with no religious background. The Senior Chaplains will be happy to take your initial enquiries and refer you to a specific College Chaplain should that be appropriate. See [http://www.london.ac.uk/chaplaincy.html](http://www.london.ac.uk/chaplaincy.html).
Disability

At Birkbeck there are students with a wide range of disabilities including dyslexia, visual or hearing impairments, mobility difficulties, mental health needs, medical conditions, respiratory conditions. Many of them have benefited from the advice and support provided by the College’s Disability Office.

The Disability Office

The College has a Disability Office located in room G12 on the ground floor of the Malet Street building. We have a Disability Service Manager, Mark Pimm, and a Disability Advisor, Steve Short.

Mark is your first point of referral for disability enquiries at the College whilst Steve is for dyslexia. They can provide advice and support on travel and parking, physical access, the Disabled Students Allowance, special equipment, personal support, examination arrangements etc. If you have a disability or dyslexia, we recommend you come to our drop-in session where we can discuss support and make follow up appointments as necessary. The drop-in sessions are between 4pm and 6pm Monday to Friday.

The Disability Office can also complete an Individual Student Support Agreement form with you, confirming your support requirements and send this to relevant Departments at the College so they are informed of your needs.

Access at Birkbeck

Birkbeck's main buildings have wheelchair access, accessible lifts and toilets, our reception desks have induction loops for people with hearing impairments and we have large print and tactile signage. Disabled parking, lockers, specialist seating in lectures and seminars and portable induction loops can all be arranged by the Disability Office.

The Disabled Students Allowance

UK and most EU students with disabilities on undergraduate and postgraduate courses are eligible to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The DSA usually
provides thousands of pounds worth of support and all the evidence shows that students who receive it are more likely to complete their courses successfully. The Disability Office can provide further information on the DSA and can assist you in applying to Student Finance England for this support.

THE PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Some students need a personal assistant to provide support on their course, for example a note-taker, sign language interpreter, reader, personal assistant, disability mentor or dyslexia support tutor. Birkbeck uses a specialist agency to recruit Personal Assistants and they can assist you with recruiting, training and paying your personal assistant. Please contact the Disability Office for information on this scheme.

SUPPORT IN THE DEPARTMENT

The provision which can be made for students with disabilities by Departments is set out in the Procedures for Students with Disabilities. This is available from the Disability Office and on the disability website (see below).

As mentioned above the Department will receive a copy of your Individual Student Support Agreement from the Disability Office. This will make specific recommendations about the support you should receive from the Department.

Whilst we anticipate that this support will be provided by the Programme Director, tutors and administrators, the Department of Philosophy also has a Disability Liaison Officer, Dr Florian Steinberger. If you experience any difficulties or require additional support from the Department Office, then the Disability Liaison Officer may also be able to assist you.

SUPPORT IN IT SERVICES AND LIBRARY SERVICES

There is a comprehensive range of specialist equipment for students with disabilities in IT Services. This includes software packages for dyslexic students (e.g. Claroread and Inspiration), screen reading and character enhancing software for students with visual impairments, specialist scanning software, large monitors, ergonomic mice and
keyboards, specialist orthopaedic chairs etc. For advice and assistance please contact Disability IT Support. There is also a range of specialist equipment in the Library including a CCTV reading machine for visually impaired students as well as specialist orthopaedic chairs and writing slopes. The Disability Office refers all students with disabilities to the Library Access Support service who provides a comprehensive range of services for students with disabilities.

**Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia)**

Mature students who experienced problems at school are often unaware that these problems may result from their being dyslexic. Whilst dyslexia cannot be cured, you can learn strategies, which make studying significantly easier. If you think you may be dyslexic you should contact the Disability Office who can screen you and where appropriate refer you to an Educational Psychologist for a dyslexia assessment. These assessments cost £215. Some students can receive assistance in meeting this cost from their employer. In exceptional cases students may receive assistance from the Access to Learning Fund.

**Examinations**

Students with disabilities and dyslexia may be eligible for special arrangements for examinations e.g. extra time, use of a word processor, amanuensis, enlarged examination papers etc. In order to receive special arrangements a student must provide medical evidence of their disability (or an Educational Psychologists report if you are dyslexic) to the Disability Office. For School examinations you should contact your Programme Director to request special arrangements at least 2 weeks before the examination. For main College summer examinations you are given the opportunity to declare that you require special provision on your assessment entry form. Students who require provision should then attend an appointment with the Disability Office to discuss and formalise the appropriate arrangements. The closing date for making special examination arrangements in College examinations is the 15th March and beyond this date consideration will only be given to emergency cases.
FURTHER INFORMATION

Full information on disability support can be found at
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/disability

For further information or to make an appointment to see Mark or Steve, please call
Steve Short (Disability Advisor) on 020 7631 6336 or email disability@bbk.ac.uk.
Alternatively you can go to the Disability Office in room G12 between 4pm and 6pm
Monday – Friday.
Activities and Events

London University is host to many philosophical societies and conferences, and students are encouraged to take advantage of this rich programme of events. Meetings are regularly collated by the Institute of Philosophy into a Fixtures List, available at http://www.philosophy.sas.ac.uk/?q=fixtureslist. You are also encouraged to attend the department study weekend and the regular talks organised by the Birkbeck Philosophy Society and the Birkbeck Institute for Humanities.

Department Study Days

Every term the Department runs a weekend Philosophy Study Day (normally on a Saturday). Each day is a structured programme of philosophical events, including talks, discussions, and informal social gatherings over food and drink. Our weekend study days offer students a chance to immerse themselves in philosophy, and get to know fellow students and staff. Attendance is free of charge.

Birkbeck Philosophy Society


The students of the Department run a Philosophy Society. We encourage all students to join. The Society generally holds meetings three or four times a term at which a philosopher from another university presents a paper followed by discussion. These meetings give you the opportunity to see a wide range of philosophers in action, including some of the most distinguished people working in the subject. Information about the programme of events can be found on the Philosophy Society’s webpage. Posters advertising their events may be displayed in the Department and in the Malet Street building.

Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/bih
The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities arranges a programme of conferences and workshops on current intellectual issues in the Humanities. It often invites prominent philosophers to speak, and you can find its programme on its website.

THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY
http://www.aristoteliansociety.org.uk
We strongly recommend that you join the Aristotelian Society. This world-famous society arranges a programme of distinguished speakers every academic year. Meetings are held fortnightly on Monday afternoons in Senate House. The paper for each meeting is circulated in advance. Speakers introduce their papers and then answer questions from the audience. There is a reduced membership fee for students.

THE INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY
http://www.philosophy.sas.ac.uk
The Institute of Philosophy is part of the University of London’s School of Advanced Studies. It runs a series of lunchtime seminars. It also puts on several one-day conferences each year on a variety of philosophical topics, and invites speakers from around the world. (The conferences are usually held during the day on Fridays, but sometimes run on into Saturdays.) In addition, the Institute arranges one-day Graduate Conferences for research students. Information about the programme of events can be found on the Institute’s website.

THE JACOBSEN LECTURE
The University of London Jacobsen Lecture is held annually and is given by a specially invited philosopher of international standing. Details will be available on the Institute of Philosophy’s website (see above). Attendance is free.

THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY
http://www.royalinstitutephilosophy.org
Each year, the Royal Institute of Philosophy puts on a lecture series in which distinguished speakers address a common theme. The lectures are free to the public and take place on Friday evenings at 5.45 p.m. Information about the current lecture series and the location can be found on the RIP website.
The Department Office is situated in Room G05 on the Ground Floor of 30 Russell Square, and is open in term time from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. (during vacations it is open until 5.00 p.m.). It is staffed by three Administrators. The Postgraduate Administrator is the first port of call for postgraduate students. (The other two are the Undergraduate Administrator and the Team Leader; both will do their best to help you if the Postgraduate Administrator is unavailable.)

Your Contact Details and Email Account

When you start your course you will need to give the College and the Department your contact details: please update any changes to your ‘mybirkbeck’ student profiles (www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck). Note that we cannot take change of address details by email or over the phone.

All students must have an active email address, and must check their email regularly: this is how the Department will keep in touch with you, and it is vital for speedy communication. If you wish, you can obtain a Birkbeck email address from IT Services. It is up to you whether you use your private email address or a Birkbeck address, but you must let the Office know your preferred email address: this is the one we will use to contact you. If your preferred email address changes you must notify the Office straightaway. All Teaching Tutors and Personal Tutors can be contacted by email.
**IT SERVICES**

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/its

020 7631 6543

ITS provide a wide range of network services to support the teaching & learning, research and administrative activities of College staff and students. ITS facilities and services include:

- Extensive campus data network providing high speed connectivity to the Internet
- Purpose-built computer classrooms equipped with up-to-date networked PCs and high-quality printers (at least one open 24 hours a day)
- Wide range of general software applications (e.g. word-processing, email, web) and specialist packages
- Wireless connectivity to the College network from your laptop or other personal computer equipment
- Facilities for students with special needs, including technical support and advice on the use of assistive technologies to help with specific disabilities
- Helpdesk with extended opening hours for general computing queries
- Practical, hands-on training workshops on general applications and self-training materials to enable you to work at your own pace
- Remote access to College electronic resources and services from home or work

Access to all IT services is controlled by using a username and password. These are provided to all registered students of the College along with personal storage space on a networked file server.

**THE COLLEGE LIBRARY**

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/

Library Help desk: 020 7631 6063

The **College Library** is situated in the main building on Malet Street. The entrance is on the ground floor and the upper levels can be accessed by stairs or a lift. Your College ID card gives you automatic use of the Library. You need to bring your card with you every time you visit the Library to activate the turnstile at the entrance. Library opening times during term are:

Mon-Fri 10.00-22.30, Sat-Sun 10.00-20.00.
Help Desk times during term are:

Mon-Fri 11.00-22.15, Sat 10.00-13.00, 14.00-19.45, Sun 10.00-19.45

Postgraduates may borrow up to 15 items, which can be renewed if not requested by another reader. Most books can be borrowed for 3 weeks. Some books, videos and DVDs can only be borrowed for 1 week, and certain items in heavy demand may be 1-day loans or reference only items. Fines are charged for the late return of items, but you can sign up for email reminders to help you avoid fines.

**Introductory tours**: New students should sign up for an introductory tour of the Library at the start of the academic year. The session will last about half an hour. The tours will take place during the first few weeks of term and will be advertised on the Library website.

**What the Library contains**: As well as books and printed academic journals, the Library contains many electronic resources: journals, databases and books. You can access these from anywhere within College using your IT Services username and password. The majority of these resources can also be accessed online even if you are not in College.

You can use the library website to:

- Search the Library catalogue, renew your books and reserve items that are out on loan.
- Read articles in electronic journal titles and newspapers.
- Search databases such as *The Philosophers Index*, *Historical Abstracts*, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and *JSTOR*.
- Read electronic books via Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Access past exam papers.
- Work through LIFE – an online tutorial designed to help you make the most of the Library.

**Further information and help**: If a book you want is not available in the Library, or you need help with using the resources or finding information, please ask at the Help Desk (020 7631 6063).
OTHER LIBRARIES

Birkbeck students can also use a range of other libraries. As a Birkbeck MA student, you are entitled to use **Senate House**, which is the main University of London Library, with a large philosophy collection ([http://www.ull.ac.uk](http://www.ull.ac.uk)). This library is located in the Senate House on Malet Street. In order to receive a Senate House library card you will need to show your Birkbeck Student ID card.

You also have reference-only access to most University of London college libraries. In addition, the SCONUL Access Scheme gives you reference and/or borrowing access to over 170 other higher education libraries around the UK. See the College Library website for more information.

**BIRKBECK STUDENTS’ UNION**


020 7631 6335

Birkbeck Students’ Union promotes welfare issues, represents students’ interests on College committees and provides social activities via events and societies. All degree students are automatically members of the union and are entitled to use the facilities and services. Birkbeck Union is affiliated to the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Mature Students’ Union.

**CATERING FACILITIES**

There are canteens and snack bars in the Malet Street and Gordon Square buildings. Other institutions such as SOAS, Senate House and the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine also have cafés and refectories, which Birkbeck students can use during the day. ULU has bars and refectories in its building at the north end of Malet Street.
NURSERY

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/nursery

020 7679 4634

For Birkbeck students who find evening attendance difficult because they have young children, the College operates a well-equipped evening nursery at moderate cost. It is staffed by qualified and experienced nursery staff, and is open from 5.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. (Monday to Friday) during term time. It accepts children aged between 2 and 10.

For further information, please contact the Nursery Manager at nursery@bbk.ac.uk.
After your Philosophy M.A.

**FURTHER STUDY**

The Department has a flourishing community of around 50 research students, and is committed to providing them with a first-rate and professional philosophical training. It offers both an MRes in Philosophy and an MPhil/PhD. Many Birkbeck students who plan to do a PhD begin by being registered for the MRes.

The MRes in Philosophy offers research-based training in philosophy at post-Master's level and serves as a foundation for starting an individual PhD project. It is ideal for self-motivated, committed students who already have a good philosophy qualification and wish to progress to pure research in some area of the subject. Students who pass the MRes will be equipped with the essential research skills needed to proceed to PhD research. They will complete a substantial supervised research project in a shorter time than that required for a PhD.

Students whose initial application is for the MPhil/PhD are expected to have a clear idea of their thesis topic at the application stage; and it is advisable, though not essential, to contact a member of staff who works in your area and ask them to comment on your thesis proposal if you are making an MPhil/PhD application.

*Entry requirements for the MRes:* A good MA (upper second or equivalent) in philosophy or, in exceptional circumstances, an excellent (first-class or equivalent) BA in philosophy. Students who do not meet these exact criteria may still be considered for entry if they demonstrate the required level of intellectual potential and commitment.

*Entry Requirements for the PhD:* Applicants are only admitted to do a PhD if they have an exceptionally strong background in philosophy, an appropriate Masters-level qualification, and a focused and manageable thesis proposal.

For more information on our research degrees, see:

[http://www.bbk.ac.uk/philosophy/prospective-students/research-degrees/research-degrees](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/philosophy/prospective-students/research-degrees/research-degrees)
Students considering making an application may wish to consult with our Research Admissions Tutors. In 2016-17 these are Prof. Hallvard Lillehammer (for the MRes) and Prof. Susan James (for the PhD).

THE CAREERS SERVICE

The Specialist Institutions’ Careers Service is part of The Careers Group, University of London. SICS works exclusively with adult and degree specialist students. They help both career-changers and those wishing to develop their career further. They offer a FREE advice, guidance, job vacancy and information service on the 4th floor, ULU Building, Malet Street opposite Waterstones. For a more detailed look at the services please go to http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/sics.

For evening students The Careers Group (the parent organisation) also provides information resources available at Stewart House, 32 Russell Square until 8.00 p.m. every Wednesday. No appointment is necessary; just turn up.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/alumni

The Department is keen to keep in touch with its alumni. We hope you’ll join the Birkbeck alumni so we’ll be able to keep you informed of Department Events.
Appendix: Optional Modules in 2016-17

This document is a list of optional modules available to MA students in 2016-17. Any module scheduled before 6pm in 2016-17 will be scheduled after 6pm if it runs in 2017-18, and (with a small number of exceptions) vice versa. For details, please consult the departmental office. Part-time students should plan accordingly!

For further information, please contact the Postgraduate Administrator, the MA Tutor, or the module coordinator (listed below).

Topics in Ancient Philosophy
Prof. Anthony Price
Spring, Fridays 6-8pm.
This year the topic will be Plato and Aristotle on pleasure. This broadly falls within ethics, but also within moral psychology and philosophy of mind. We shall start with Plato’s Republic (Book IX), continue with his Philebus, and proceed to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Books VII & X).
Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)
Preliminary Reading:
• Plato, Republic IX 580d-588a (many good translations, use whatever you have);
• Plato, Philebus, tr. & com. Dorothea Frede (Hackett – the translation, but not notes or introduction, which are really needed for this difficult dialogue, comes in the Cooper Hackett compilation).
• Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VII chs 11-14, X chs 1-6 (tr. Ross/Brown, in Oxford World Classics; or in Barnes/Kenny Aristotle’s Ethics, Princeton, with no notes but a useful index).
• The relevant chapter of any introduction to the Nicomachean Ethics (Jim Urmson, Blackwell’s; David Bostock, OUP; Gerald Hughes, Routledge; Michael Pakaluk, CUP); also Bostock, ‘Pleasure and Activity in Aristotle’s Ethics’, Phronesis 33 (1988): 251-272.

Philosophy of Art
Dr. Stacie Friend
Spring, Mondays 2-4pm.
Is art a domain entirely autonomous from other aspects of our lives, such as religion or politics? Does it matter to the value or interpretation of an artwork who made it or why? Are immoral works of art less valuable as art? In this module we address such questions by focusing on our evaluation of art. Artworks may have different kinds of value: financial, sentimental, cognitive, historical, anthropological, ethical, political, and so on. Yet we typically deny that an artwork is great solely because it costs a great deal or is very old. So what explains the value of art qua art? Since the eighteenth century philosophers have argued that a work’s quality turns on its aesthetic value, including its beauty, traditionally conceived as an autonomous value determined by our experience of the work’s perceptual or intrinsic features (a view known as ‘aesthetic
More recently, the traditional view has come under attack by those who argue that the aesthetic or artistic value of an artwork cannot be separated from contextual considerations, including the artist’s intentions, the ethical character of the work, its potential to enhance our understanding of the world, and so forth. After some discussion of the nature of art, we consider arguments for the traditional view, and then examine several different objections to that view. We also look at alternative conceptions of the value of art.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**
- Helpful overviews of many of the topics covered in this module may be found in the *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics, 3rd edition*, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (Routledge, 2013).

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**Berkeley and Leibniz**

Dr. Sarah Patterson

*Spring, Tuesdays 2-4pm.*

Berkeley and Leibniz were the originators of two of the most unusual philosophical systems of the Early Modern period. Berkeley (1685-1753) famously denied the reality of matter, claiming that nothing exists but minds and ideas. Leibniz (1646-1716) maintained that the world consists of an infinity of monads or ‘spiritual automata’, each perceiving the whole from its own point of view. He also, notoriously, claimed that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds. By placing these two thinkers in historical context, we will seek to understand how they developed and defended their seemingly counterintuitive views, and what we can learn from them today.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**
- Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713)
- Leibniz, *Monadology* (1714)

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**The Biology of Evil**

Prof. Ken Gemes

*Autumn, Fridays 6-8pm.*

In enlightenment rhetoric, as developed by philosophers such as Descartes and Kant, evil is typically configured as a species of error, a failure or misapplication of the faculty of reason. As such, evil is treatable, indeed it may be ultimately eradicated, through the ever widening influence of education and the light of reason. In the 19th century a new medical/biological model of evil became prominent. On this model evil is seen as some kind of bodily infection which needs to be isolated or destroyed before it further infects the greater populace.

The first aim of this course is to trace the rise of this new model of evil and its embodiment in the 19th century discourse on degeneration. The second aim is to examine through case studies how elements of the discourse of degeneration were inflected in literature, philosophy and psychology.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**

**Fiction and Language**

Dr. Stacie Friend

*Autumn, Wednesdays 6-8pm.*

When we go to the bookstore to buy a novel, we look for the sign leading us to fiction; if we want a history of the twentieth century, we go to the non-fiction section. Given how common is our traffic with fictional narratives, it may come as a surprise that the concept of fiction has been the source of numerous philosophical puzzles. In this module we focus on puzzles in the philosophy of language. One is whether fiction is constituted by a special use of language. For example, when Jane Austen wrote, ‘Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence’, she does not seem to be referring to anyone or asserting anything that we are supposed to believe. So what exactly is she doing? And what are readers doing when they talk about fiction? The critic who writes ‘Emma Woodhouse is a well-drawn character’ appears to make a true claim, but how can that be if there is no Emma? In this module we consider debates over such topics as the interpretation of authorial utterance, the possibility of reference to fictional characters, and the truth of statements about fiction. We will start by working through some relevant background in the philosophy of language, before moving to the issues in fiction.

This module assumes some intermediate-level metaphysics; those without such a background are advised to contact the module coordinator before registering.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**
• John Searle, ‘The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse’, *New Literary History* 6 (1975); also reprinted in numerous collections.

**Hegel**

Dr. Andrew Huddleston

*Spring, Thursdays 6-8pm.*

In this course, we explore the philosophy of G.F.W. Hegel. We will spend half the course reading excerpts from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the book he presented as the ‘introduction’ to his philosophical system. We will go on to consider material from Hegel’s ethics, his political philosophy, his aesthetics, and his philosophy of history. The course includes a combination of primary and secondary literature and will seek to provide a comprehensive introduction to this rich, but difficult thinker.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**
• Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (Routledge, 2005).

**The Idea of Freedom**
Dr. Michael Garnett  
*Autumn, Wednesdays 2-4pm.*

The focus of this module is the concept of political liberty. It explores each of the three major traditions of theorising freedom: the ‘negative’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as the absence of external obstacles), the ‘republican’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as independence from dominating power), and the ‘positive’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as the pursuit of a particular form of life), looking along the way at key figures such as Hobbes, Bentham, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx. It also goes on to consider broader political questions such as: What is the relation between freedom and poverty? Does subjection to propaganda reduce freedom and, if so, how? Can processes of enculturation and socialisation themselves be oppressive and undermining of freedom?

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**  

**The Philosophy of Kant**
Dr. Andrew Huddleston  
*Autumn, Tuesdays 2-4pm.*

In this module, we focus on the work of Immanuel Kant. We will consider his ‘Copernican turn’ in epistemology and metaphysics, his moral philosophy, and his aesthetics. Texts studied will include selections from his *Critique of Pure Reason*, his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and his *Critique of Judgment*.

**Assessment:** Two essays, to a combined total of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**  
• Those seeking a preliminary introduction to Kant may wish to consult Paul Guyer’s book *Kant* (Routledge, 2006), or Allen Wood’s book of the same title (Blackwell, 2005).

**Advanced Topics in Metaphysics**
Dr. Alex Grzankowski  
*Autumn, Thursdays 6-8pm.*

This installment of Advanced Topics in Metaphysics will be a focused study of the metaphysics of intentionality and the metaphysics of intentional objects. When we think, we think about things. But what are the things about which we think? Some seem to be ordinary objects such as the Prime Minister but some seem to be extraordinary. We sometimes think about things that don’t exist such as Pegasus or about possible but non-actual things such as a golden mountain. Some of our acts of thinking seem to be directed upon propositions – I might think *that it will rain tomorrow*. In this module we will take up three main topics. First, the nature of what are apparently intentional *relations*. If to think is to enter into a relation with what we think about, we require
relata for the relation. We, then, may need to countenance an array of “intentional objects”. Or, despite first appearances, perhaps to think about something isn’t to enter into a relation with something. Second, we will consider the nature of potential candidates for being intentional objects such as Meinongian objects, merely possible objects, and fictional objects. Finally, we will consider the nature of propositions. Are there any propositions? If there are, are they representational entities? Can they be reduced to any other category such as sets or properties or are they perhaps sui generis entities?

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies).

Preliminary Reading:
- Crane, T. (2012). *The Objects of Thought*. OUP. Chapter 1

Philosophy of Mind
Dr. Sarah Patterson

*Autumn, Wednesdays 6-8pm.*

What are minds? What is the nature of thought, consciousness and sensory experience? Can they be explained in purely physical terms? Are there good reasons to think that our minds are in some way separate from our bodies? If so, how can our minds have effects in the physical world? In this course we will examine and evaluate some of the answers that philosophers have given to questions such as these.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
- Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind* (OUP)

Moral Responsibility
Dr. Michael Garnett

*Autumn, Tuesdays 6-8pm.*

The idea that people can be held accountable for their actions is central to much of our moral and political thinking. Yet a little reflection on it reveals some deep philosophical problems. We know that we are shaped, to a very large extent, by forces beyond our control, such as our culture, genes and upbringing. What room, if any, does this leave for personal responsibility? Our modern scientific conception sees human minds as in some way reducible to neurological states and events. What room does this leave for freewill, besides (perhaps) the operations of randomness? When we act, what we actually bring about depends not only on our intentions but also on the world outside and so, to a large extent, on luck. Can we be fully accountable for the results? This module explores contemporary research on these and other problems. It also considers the implications of these debates for our personal relationships (and attitudes such as indignation, resentment, gratitude, praise, blame and love), for our practices of punishment, and for our theories of distributive justice.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary reading:

The Philosophy of Nietzsche
Dr. Andrew Huddleston and Prof. Ken Gemes

Spring, Thursdays 2-4pm.

This course seeks to explain and examine Nietzsche’s philosophy, concentrating particularly on his critique of morality and his moral psychology. While focusing on Nietzsche’s texts, principally his On the Genealogy of Morality, we will be examining his key ideas including, the death of God, nihilism, life affirmation, the ascetic ideal, perspectivism, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and his criticisms of the ascetic ideal, the will to truth and Judeo-Christian morality.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:

Philosophy, Business and Society
Prof. Hallvard Lillehammer

Spring, Tuesdays 6-8pm.

Business managers, civil servants, advertisers, sales representatives and employers are all practical philosophers. They may not think explicitly in terms of philosophical arguments and theories, but every strategic decision they make is based on philosophical assumptions that can be articulated and assessed. This module examines some of the central philosophical issues that arise in the course of professional life, including truth; manipulation; trust; freedom; integrity; responsibility; and detachment.

No prior philosophical training is required to take this module. Each topic will be introduced without theoretical prerequisites, and the discussion of each topic will be illustrated with concrete examples from actual professions and real life.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary reading:

Philosophy and Gender
Prof. Susan James and New Appointment

Spring, Thursdays 6-8pm.

This module will be in two parts. In the first part, the topic will be the history and current discussion of gendered conceptions of freedom, focusing on the question of how far the republican conception of freedom can take gender difference into account. We’ll look at the historical use of the republican conception to defend the rights of women (e.g. by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill). We'll then turn to issues
surrounding the relation of dependence and independence in contemporary feminist debate. Topics will include: adaptive preferences; same-sex relationships and citizenship; complicity in oppression; and the ethic of care.

The topic for the second part has not yet been determined.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**

**Philosophical Logic**
Dr. Florian Steinberger

*Autumn, Thursdays 2-4pm.*

Any philosophy department worth its salt requires its students to take at least a first class in logic. The reason for this, it is usually claimed, is that logic is the science of “good reasoning” or of “correct inference”. Hence, studying logic is supposed to teach us to reason well and to properly evaluate the reasoning of others. But what exactly is the connection between logic and good reasoning? After all, logic is concerned with abstract relations of logical consequence between truth-bearers, whereas reasoning is a psychological process by which we form and revise attitudes like beliefs via mental acts like inferring. In what sense, then, can the former be a source of standards of good practice for the latter? This will be the guiding question of the course. In our examination of it, we will encounter a number of central issues in philosophical logic and in neighboring fields. Here are some examples: Is there but one correct logic, or might there be several? What form might a non-classical logic take? What form might a principle of rationality take? What is the relation between logic and subjective probability theory?

This module presupposes some familiarity with basic symbolic logic.

**Assessment:** Two essays, to a combined total of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies).

**Preliminary Reading:**

**Philosophy of Science**
Dr. Robert Northcott

*Spring, Wednesdays 2-4pm.*

We take our children to medical doctors rather than faith healers; we pay NASA rather than astrologers to send rockets to the moon; and no one’s volunteering for a return to medieval dentistry. But exactly what is it that makes science special? Answering this question turns out to be surprisingly tricky. In seeing why, we’ll look at scientific method, paradigm shifts, whether we should really believe in invisible entities like genes and Higgs bosons, and critiques of science from, e.g., feminists. We’ll look at other topics too: evolution versus creationism; why modern science only came into being recently and in the West; and in what sense science progresses. Along the way, finally, we’ll also cover a fair amount of history of science and indeed of science itself.
Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
• Peter Godfrey-Smith: *Theory and Reality: an introduction to philosophy of science* (University of Chicago Press)

Political Power
Prof. Susan James

*Spring, Wednesdays 6-8pm.*

Some of the most pressing political questions we confront are about the nature and extent of political power.
• What makes power political? For example, is there a defensible distinction between political and personal power?
• Who (or what) exercises political power? Does political power lie, for instance, with sovereigns of states and state officials, or is it more widely distributed?
• Is political power inherently violent or does it also take non-violent forms?
• Can we distinguish political power from political authority, and what might we gain by doing so?

As these questions indicate, political power is not a free-standing notion, and a full investigation of it would have to take account of its relation to a range of political phenomena, including the state, sovereignty, legitimacy, ideology, discrimination, oppression and freedom. This would be a huge project, and the course does not aim to be comprehensive. In any given year we shall focus on a manageable set of interconnected questions related to political power, and will use a specific set of philosophical texts (some historical and some contemporary) to help us investigate them. We shall draw on our own experiences of political power to test and deepen our philosophical conclusions.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
• Stephen Lukes, *Power: A Radical View.*

*Modules that are suspended in 2016-17 but likely to run again in 2017-18:*

  - Advanced Topics in Epistemology
  - Evolution and Philosophy
  - Morality, Nature and Evolution
  - Philosophy of Psychology
  - Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy