

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

SENIOR SYMPOSIUM

2011-12

All philosophy majors at Denison are required to participate in the Senior Symposium. The Symposium is a year-long project, in which you will write a paper on a philosophical topic of your choice and then defend it to faculty and your fellow-students in a student Symposium to be held during the spring semester. The Symposium is meant to be the culminating experience in your philosophy major; it is an opportunity for you to do some substantial philosophical work on your own and discuss it in a public context. What we hope to see from you, quite simply, is your best philosophical work.

The purpose of this document is to acquaint you with the Symposium project and structure in more detail, and to inform you of the relevant dates and deadlines. Please check the dates listed at the end of this document, and let us know *immediately* if you foresee any problems. **Once finalized, the dates for the Senior Symposium itself, and for the pre-Symposium dinner, will not be changed—and attendance at *all* the events is mandatory.**

Alexandra Bradner will serve this year as the Symposium director. You will also be assigned a faculty advisor from the department, and you are expected to work closely with that advisor during the course of the project.

To complete the Senior Symposium project, you must do the following:

- write a project proposal and bibliography that is approved by the department and defend your proposal at the Pre-Symposium Dinner;
- enroll in Philosophy 440 for the spring semester and attend the class sessions;
- write a Senior Symposium paper of approximately 3,500 words;
- present and defend the paper at the Senior Symposium in the spring;
- write and present a commentary on one other student paper during the Symposium;
- serve as moderator for one of the Symposium sessions;
- read each of the student papers, attend all of the Symposium sessions, and participate actively in the discussion at each session.

In addition to an oral communication competency credit (i.e. an “R” credit), you will receive two grades for the Senior Symposium, one for the written paper and one for the overall performance during the Symposium itself. **You must receive passing grades on both the written paper and your overall performance during the Symposium to graduate as a philosophy major.** You will receive Honors for any component where your work is particularly outstanding. If your work on either component receives a grade of Fail, the Department may at its discretion offer you the opportunity to raise your grade to a Pass by doing additional work, to be specified by the Department.

1. The Written Paper

The center of the Senior Symposium project is the written paper. The paper should involve a serious and original analysis of a philosophical problem or text(s), and, as already indicated, should represent your best philosophical work. Accordingly, you should be prepared to devote a significant amount of time over the next six months to planning and writing it. The topic should be something that interests you and about which you believe you will have something important and valuable to say. The department requires that the paper topic be grounded in your course work, which is to say you should select a topic

on which you have written in one or more of your courses. In most cases, you will not be permitted to write on a topic that is new for you. While your paper must be written specifically for the Senior Symposium, you are permitted to develop a portion of a paper previously submitted for one of your courses, and you may submit a portion of your Senior/Honors project if you are writing one. The use of secondary literature is strongly encouraged and will often help you to elucidate philosophical concepts and to develop your own arguments.

You will be assigned an advisor for your paper, and will work closely with that advisor during the entire process. **The final version of your paper, complete with footnotes and bibliography, must be submitted electronically through the Senior Symposium Blackboard site by noon on Friday, March 30, 2012.** (Note that this is the second Friday following Spring Break.) But an equally important deadline comes earlier. A complete *draft* of your paper is due to your advisor by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 2, 2012. The word “draft” can be misleading. This is *not* to be a “rough” draft, but rather a paper that is complete, well-written, and typo-free. The draft must include all footnotes and a complete bibliography. Drafts that are not complete in this sense will not be accepted, and failure to turn in an acceptable draft on that date will be grounds for failure on the entire project. (Note that many advisors will request or even require *other* drafts of the paper along the way.)

Your final written paper will receive a grade of either **Honors**, **Pass** or **Fail** from the department. For a passing grade, your paper must:

- defend a clearly stated thesis with a careful and well constructed argument;
- engage with a focused and relevant selection of literature. (Ways of demonstrating this engagement include providing succinct summaries, quoted passages, and careful analysis of arguments);
- anticipate objections to your thesis and reply to these objections.

2. The Spring Symposium Course: PHIL 440

As part of your participation in the Senior Symposium, you are required to register for the special course PHIL 440 for the spring semester (tentatively scheduled for Thursdays, 6:30 p.m., but we will reschedule it, once everyone has registered). This course will meet on regular basis during the term until the Symposium weekend (and once or twice afterwards as well). The course, which will be led by the Symposium director, will be a workshop in which students will have the opportunity to discuss the paper-writing process and other elements of the Senior Symposium and in particular will engage in peer-editing of each other’s works in progress.

3. The Senior Symposium Weekend: Presentation, Commentary, and Participation

The Senior Symposium itself will be held on **Friday and Saturday, April 13-14, 2012**. It will begin Friday afternoon and last into the evening, and will continue throughout the entire day on Saturday. Dinner on Friday and breakfast and lunch on Saturday will be provided. In addition, it is traditional for students and faculty to join together for a celebratory banquet after the last paper. During the Symposium, you will present your paper orally, before fellow-students and faculty in the philosophy department. After presenting your paper, you will be expected to respond to a written commentary on your paper by another student, and then to field questions about your paper from all students and from faculty. You will also be expected to write and present a 2-3 page commentary on another student’s paper, and to serve as the moderator for one session of the Symposium. Each student furthermore is expected to participate *actively* in the discussion following each of the papers. This means you are expected to read

each paper in advance and to be prepared to ask questions of the author. You will receive a grade of **Honors, Pass or Fail** from the Department on your overall performance during the Symposium itself. This grade will be based on:

- your oral defense of your paper,
- your written commentary on another paper, and
- your participation in the discussion during each session.

4. The Project Proposal and Bibliography

The final Symposium paper represents the endpoint of a process of development, and accordingly we expect you to begin working on your project *now*. The first step in the process is to choose a topic and to write a Project Proposal and bibliography to be approved by the faculty. The choice of topic is extremely important, and deserves your serious consideration and thought. We encourage you to seek out members of the faculty to discuss your topic. We have much experience with the Symposium process, and can help you narrow down your topic and warn you off from topics that are likely not to be approved. Once you have chosen a topic, you are required to prepare a project proposal where you:

- explain the topic you have chosen and why you think it is worth pursuing;
- discuss the contribution you expect to make to the topic;
- give evidence of previous work in the area of the proposed topic; and
- compile a bibliography of carefully selected, relevant sources

A *draft* of your project proposal, of approximately two typed pages, is to be submitted electronically through the Senior Symposium Blackboard site by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, October 28, 2011. (What was said about the draft of your paper above is also true of your proposal draft. It should not be a “rough” draft.) You will then be assigned a team of two draft advisors. You should schedule a meeting with this team soon thereafter to discuss your proposal and whatever revisions of it are necessary. **A final copy of your proposal must be submitted electronically through the Senior Symposium Blackboard by 4:00 p.m. on Monday, November 14, 2011.** The entire philosophy faculty will then determine whether the proposal passes or fails.

On the evening of Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. the department will hold a Pre-Symposium dinner meeting for all senior majors. At that meeting we will discuss plans for the Senior Symposium, and you will be asked to read and briefly discuss your Senior Symposium proposal. You will also be expected to field questions regarding possible problems and relevant issues with the proposal. After the pre-Symposium dinner, you will be assigned a permanent advisor who will oversee your project from that point onward. You should arrange to meet with your advisor as soon as possible after the meeting to discuss plans for your work on the paper.

Please note that all group meetings about the Senior Symposium held over the course of the year are mandatory, and that all deadlines for proposal and paper drafts and final version are firm. No exceptions! Be warned that if you miss a meeting or a deadline, you could receive a failing grade for all or part of the Senior Symposium.

5. Academic Dishonesty

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Provost's Office, and normally if you are found guilty of academic dishonesty, you will receive a grade of Fail and will not be permitted to graduate as a philosophy major. The Department will also normally recommend to the Associate Provost that the infraction be treated as a type three offense with the sanction to be determined.

6. Summary of Important Deadlines and Dates

PROPOSAL DRAFT DUE	Friday, October 28 th , 4 p.m. Submit your draft to the Symps Blackboard site. Schedule an appointment with your team of draft advisors to receive feedback on your proposal draft by November 4 th .
FINAL PROPOSAL DUE	Monday, November 14th, 4 p.m. Submit your proposal to the Symps Blackboard site. The philosophy faculty will decide whether your proposal passes or fails by November 18 th .
PRE-SYMPOSIUM DINNER	Wednesday, November 30th, 6 p.m. Dinner in Burton Morgan 218. Proposal presentations in Burton Morgan 220.
PAPER DRAFT DUE	Friday, March 2 nd , 4 p.m. Your permanent advisor will meet with you to discuss your draft by March 9 th .
FINAL PAPER DUE	Friday, March 30th, 4 p.m. Submit your final paper to the Symps Blackboard site.
COMMENTARY DUE	Monday, April 9 th , 4 p.m. Submit your commentary to the Symps Blackboard site.
SYMPOSIUM	Late afternoon on Friday, April 13th and all day Saturday, April 14th
SYMPOSIUM DINNER	Date to be determined (either the Saturday or Sunday night of the Symposium). Location to be determined.