

## The 2-4 Project

## Philosophy Department

### § 1. Overall picture of the project

**Goal:** To review the transition period from course work to independent scholarship so that a student may produce a thesis of quality in a reasonable amount of time.

A main **obstacle** for this transition is a delay in being advanced to candidacy.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, our **sub-goal** is to help students satisfy the following requirements for their timely candidacy:

- (i) Course requirements
- (ii) Two qualifying papers
- (iii) Prospectus exam

In principle, students are expected to meet these requirements in three years and advance to candidacy at the end of their third year or the beginning of their fourth year. The Graduate School puts those who have not done so on academic hold for the first semester of their fourth year. In the next section, we present a discrepancy between the principle and the reality.

There is a range of ways to approach the matter, for example, from revising the requirements to implementing policing mechanisms but with no change of requirements. Again, the question --- what requirements to revise, if any, and/or how to reinforce the system --- poses many different possibilities. One efficient way to tackle the issue, we believe, is to look into the current situation in the department so that we may find the best ways that fit with our needs. So, we have inquired how much timely candidacy has been delayed in recent years and what mainly has held students back from advancing to candidacy.

---

<sup>1</sup> At the same time, we are perfectly aware that timely candidacy is only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a successful completion of the Ph.D.

## §2. Current statistics on candidacy

Let us present some simple statistics relevant to our purpose:<sup>2</sup>

Years admitted	Numbers admitted	Numbers advanced to candidacy (length of time for advancement)
2001	2	1 (3.5yrs)
2002	6	5 (3 yrs: 1 person 3.5 yrs: 3 people 4 yrs: 1 person <sup>3</sup> )
2003	4 <sup>4</sup>	1 (3yrs)

The data set is not that large, but one thing that is clear is that advancing to candidacy at the end of the third year has been the exception not the rule.

One of the 2001 students and one of the 2002 students had to withdraw from the program or have not registered for a while precisely because neither of them met any of the requirements by their 3.5 years.

When we look at the data for the students admitted in 2004, things do not seem to be better. Their third year is half over, but out of 6 students, one student finished the two qualifying papers,<sup>5</sup> and one student finished one (and almost the other one), but none of the other four students handed in their first qualifying paper yet. It will not be easy for the four students to advance to candidacy by the end of their third year.

---

<sup>2</sup> The item 'years admitted' does not refer to the actual year a student was admitted in the following case: If a student was admitted for 1999 but withdrew in 2002 and was readmitted in 2004, then we assign 2001 as the admitted year for the student.

<sup>3</sup> The student finished the language requirement in the second semester of the fourth year, but otherwise everything was completed by the first semester of the fourth year,

<sup>4</sup> One of the three (who have not finished the requirements) has finished his third year, while the other two have finished their 3.5 years.

<sup>5</sup> The student published her two papers in a foreign language in a foreign journal, and we would like to address related issues in the next section.

One question is where students get stuck in the requirements and do not make the deadline for candidacy. The following observations, we believe, are relevant to the question:

- (1) The average time between the second qualifying paper and the prospectus exam is about a semester.
- (2) Based on the length of time for candidacy presented above and (1), students seem to struggle more at the start of and/or completion of qualifying papers. For example, two students who have withdrawn from the program did not start their qualifying papers even in their first semester of the fourth year.
- (3) The majority of the students had TIs and they tend to finish them in the fall semester of the next year.

### §3. Meetings with students

We held one general meeting with graduate students. The Chair, Michael Della Rocca, and the three review committee members, Karsten Harries, Shelly Kagan, and Sun-Joo Shin, attended the meeting. Also, several students wrote e-mail and came to our office individually with questions and suggestions. The following items emerged out of this correspondence:

- The students acknowledge widespread delay for candidacy and at the same time unproductive anxiety over the qualifying papers and the prospectus.
- They request clearer guidelines for these two requirements.
- There is a strong request for a mentor being assigned to each student before a dissertation advisor is decided on. A mentor does not have to be an expert in a student's future dissertation topic, but one who can keep an eye on him/her until the student advances to candidacy.
- More formal evaluation is desirable.
- Interestingly, some blamed the past track record for allowing delayed candidacy.
- A student raised a question about the necessity of the language requirement.

#### §4. Proposals for timely candidacy

Based on the statistics in the second section and on the meetings with graduate students, we focus on three crucial aspects surrounding the delayed candidacy;

- (i) to help students start the process earlier,
- (ii) to clarify guidelines as much as possible, and
- (iii) to implement a mentor system and an evaluation process more formally.

Unless we say otherwise, we keep the existing guidelines in “Information and Guidelines for Graduate Students in the Ph.D. Program in Philosophy.” Please note that we do not intend to change the basic framework or the main content of the requirements, but we make slight modifications or add more structure to the existing policy so that the transition from course work to independent scholarship may go more smoothly, which is the main purpose of the 2-4 project.

##### (1) To clear the road for an early jump start for candidacy:

**TI's** have been contributing to a delay in many stages of students' advancement. We propose **September 1** as the official departmental deadline for the completion of TI's.

##### (2) To lay out clearer guidelines for the qualifying papers and the prospectus exam and to reduce unnecessary anxiety over them:

We suggest that the following policies or revisions of policies be adopted for the **qualifying papers**:

- Qualifying papers should be graded just pass-fail.
- At the end of a term, an instructor is given the following list of choices for each student who writes a term paper --- Is the paper suitable as a qualifying paper?
  - a. Yes. (*If publishable, please don't spare that comment.*)
  - b. Yes, but with revision.
    - (*Further comments are highly recommended.*)
  - c. Maybe, but with substantial revision.
    - (*Further comments are highly recommended.*)
  - d. No.

- We abolish the current policy that a paper already published in a refereed journal counts as a passing qualifying paper.
- Another change is that we do not accept qualifying papers written in languages other than English.

We suggest the following clarifications for the **prospectus exam**:

The prospectus should state the problem, why it is important, discuss how it will be approached, what work has been done on it, etc., including the bibliography, but not be an outline of the thesis. The length should be about 15-20 pages, without including the bibliography.

In addition to this, an advisor may require the following: The prospectus should demonstrate the ability to put forth his/her own arguments on the issue. Even though it does not have to be conclusive, the student should show some of the main arguments of the thesis. In this case, it can be more or less a chapter of the thesis.

#### **Beyond the prospectus exam:**

Beginning the semester after the prospectus exam, the prospectus committee checks in on the candidate and sends a dissertation progress report to the DGS every semester.

(3) To provide a more systematic supportive mechanism for the transition:

We have suggestions in four different areas.

- (i) mentoring
- (ii) evaluation
- (iii) seminar for those who are in the transition period
- (iv) meeting among graduate students, the chair, and the DGS.

**Mentoring:** Toward the end of their second year (i.e. when the coursework is almost over), a faculty member will be assigned for each student as a mentor. The mentor does not have to be in the same area that the student is interested in as a thesis topic, and does not have to have had the student in his/her class, either. The mentor is responsible for

checking on his/her student's progress, especially, writing qualifying papers, and for keeping the DGS informed about any problem, until an advisor is determined for the prospectus exam.

**Evaluation:** Two levels of evaluations will be implemented.

Class performance evaluation:

At the end of the term, an instructor is required to write up an evaluation for each graduate student, which includes not only a paper of the student but also his/her participation, presentation, etc., and this evaluation will go into the student's file. This form of evaluation shall not be accessible to the student. (Of course, an instructor is always free to give out his/her evaluations to the student.)

Annual evaluation:

Sometime between the spring semester break and the end of the academic year, we will have an annual evaluation. Either the DGS or the advisor will convey the relevant result of the evaluation to each student.

**Work-in-progress seminar**

We will have a seminar once a year where students will present their work-in-progress (for qualifying papers, chapters of the thesis, or other publications) and discuss other students' work. So far, we have offered this style of a seminar twice (including this semester). After seeing the result, we do not rule out the possibility to make it a requirement for those who are advanced to candidacy.

**Meetings among students, the DGS, and the chair**

Once a semester there will be a general meeting with students, the chair, and the DGS. Before the meeting, we will make up a list of agenda so that the meeting will be more focused and efficient. Input from students for agenda will be crucial.

The DGS will conduct a meeting among the same year students so that common issues may be addressed in the meeting.