Proposal for a Non-Thesis MA Degree Option in the Philosophy Graduate Program

The Philosophy Department requests Senate approval for a change in their MA degree Program in Philosophy. An option for a non-thesis MA degree is requested to augment the existing MA and Ph.D. graduate programs.

The requirements for the proposed degree would be:

For a non-thesis MA, the candidate must satisfy the following requirements:

- Complete at least two semesters in residence at Rice University.
- Complete 42 hours of courses approved for graduate credit in philosophy at Rice University with B- or better.
- Accumulate an overall GPA of at least 3.0.
- Complete at least 30 hours in philosophy at the 500 level.
- Satisfy the departmental logic requirement (Philosophy 505 or examination).
- Complete at least 5 courses in an area of concentration.
- Satisfactorily complete departmental duties.
- File a petition for M.A. Candidacy Approval by FEBRUARY 28 for conferral of a May degree and by OCTOBER 31 for conferral of a December degree. This petition can be obtained from the Graduate Program Coordinator and must be approved and signed by the Department Chair and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

The Department already confers an MA for attainment of candidacy en route to the Ph. D and offers a thesis MA, which requires 30 hours of course credit plus a thesis.

Benefits of the addition of non-thesis MA degree option: Some philosophy graduate students realize after a period of time in graduate work that, although they are capable of completing a Ph. D., they wish to change careers, often to law or business. After their first and during their second year, students are evaluated carefully and some are advised that their prospects of completing a doctorate are poor. Because philosophy students develop specializations slowly, it is often not until toward the end of the second year, when the students have completed the 14 courses required for the doctoral program that the move to an MA track can be confidently recommended. In those cases, students currently require an additional semester or year of work to complete the research thesis requirement.

A non-thesis option would have benefits for the student, the program and the faculty. Students would receive recognition for the 12 hours beyond those required for a thesis MA and would receive the MA without additional work if they meet the other requirements. At the same time, students with established research who chose to leave without finishing Ph.D. work could still write a MA thesis without taking additional course work.

A non-thesis Masters degree in philosophy is a well-established degree. Of the fifty top rated Universities in the US News and World Report ranking, only four do not offer an
MA in philosophy. Of the twenty-one graduate programs ranked between 10 and 30 in the Leiter report on graduate programs in philosophy, 11 offer non-thesis MA programs. (Appendix 1) Yale University offers an MA degree after six one semester courses with no additional requirements. ([http://www.yale.edu/philos/grad_programdescription.html#i](http://www.yale.edu/philos/grad_programdescription.html#i))

A non-thesis MA degree is offered along with a thesis MA in the History department at Rice University—A similar non-thesis MA is offered as an exit degree in English. Thus, there is already a precedent at Rice for the proposed change in the Philosophy Graduate program.

**Degree requirements as they will appear in the General Announcements:**

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- Accumulate an overall GPA of at least 3.0.
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- File a petition for M.A. Candidacy Approval by **FEBRUARY 28 for conferral of a May degree and by OCTOBER 31 for conferral of a December degree.**
  
  This petition can be obtained from the Graduate Program Coordinator and must be signed by the Department Chair and submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

**Resources:** No new resources would be required for this program, the students would be already be taking existing courses from current faculty. All of the tenured and tenure-track faculty (Appendix 3) in the department would be teaching courses for these students. All of the courses for this program are existing courses (Appendix 3) that are already taught and are being taken by the relevant students. No new funds or library or IT resources would be required. There are no startup costs. Some funds will be saved if this degree program is adopted and those resources will be reallocated to promising doctoral candidates.

**SACS requirements:** John Cornwell has advised us that, since no students are admitted specifically to this program, the program need not conform to SACS requirements. (Appendix 4)

**Admission:** No students would be admitted to Rice University to enter this program; the only students who choose to complete the MA degree would be those who have been admitted previously to the doctoral program. All graduate students are evaluated every
semester and given feedback on their progress in the program and advice about the options available.

**Intellectual rigor:** We believe that the additional twelve credits, the logic requirement, the 500 level requirement and concentration requirement make this degree at least as rigorous as the thesis MA. We believe it is very comparable to, or exceeds in its rigor, most of the 20 extant non-thesis MA programs at Rice University (Appendix 5). A partial list of peer institutions offering a non-thesis MA is in Appendix 1. A letter of support from Dean of Humanities Nicolas Shumway is attached (Appendix 6).

**Time Line for Adoption:** Since no new faculty, courses, funds or resources are required, and since no students are directly admitted to the program, if the program is approved we would adopt it as soon as permissible under University regulations.
Appendix 1  Graduate programs in philosophy ranked between 11 and 30, which offer non-thesis MA degrees:

Brown U  
Columbia  
CUNY  
Florida State  
Georgetown  
Northwestern  
U Mass – Amherst  
U MD – College Park  
U of Illinois – Urbana  
U of Miami  
UC Irvine  
UC Santa Barbara
Appendix 2   Philosophy faculty teaching courses for the non-thesis MA students

Gwendolyn Bradford
Baruch Brody
Steven Crowell
Hugo Tristram Engelhardt Jr.
Melinda Fagan
Richard E. Grandy
Mark Kulstad
Donald Ray Morrison
Casey O’Callaghan
Nicoletta Orlandi
George Sher
Charles Siewert
Graduate Courses offered for non-thesis MA students

501 Seminar Ancient Philosophy
502 Seminar Modern Philosophy
503 Seminar in Theory of Knowledge
504 Seminar in Metaphysics
505 Seminar Mathematical Logic
506 Seminar in Ethics
507 Seminar Social and Political Philosophy
508 Seminar Continental Philosophy
509 Seminar in Aesthetics
512 Seminar Philosophy of Mind
513 Seminar in Philosophy of Science
514 Kant and Hegel
515 Wittgenstein
516 Seminar in Philosophy of Law
518 Husserl and Heidegger
519 Seminar in Analytic Philosophy
521 Seminar in Kant and Hegel
523 Seminar in Kant
524 Seminar in Hegel
525 Seminar in 19th Century Philosophy
526 History of Ethics
530 History of Analytic Philosophy
531 Seminar in Moral Psychology
532 Seminar in Metaethics
533 Consequentialism
534 Liberalism
535 Advanced Topics in Value Theory
536 Seminar in Medical Ethics
542 Topics in Philosophy of Mind
553 Seminar in Philosophy of Language
590 Topics in Philosophy
John Cornell, 7/29/11 3:23 PM -0500, Re: new non-thesis MA in phil

Dear Richard,

Congratulations on becoming Chair (again). Sorry for ignoring and then forgetting about your email. I was traveling when it came in (NYC over the 4th of July was great fun).

1st question:
(1) Are you accepting graduate students directly into this non-thesis MA or
(2) is this a consolation prize for students pursuing a PhD and not able to achieve it or a part of the PhD program that is routinely awarded on the way to the PhD?

If the first option then it is a stand alone program and needs to satisfy everything. If it is the second set of options then I DON'T care about it... even though the Faculty Senate will and you have to provide them with info.

Let's talk about this next week.

Best,

John

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On Jul 29, 2011, at 3:03 PM, Richard Grady wrote:

Dear John,

Since I will become department chairman at midnight, I am emailing to ask your opinion and help with a new non-thesis MA the phil department would like to adopt. The requirements would be 14 suitable courses (perhaps with some distribution constraints, that is still under discussion) and other details to comply with University requirements.

Richard
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th># hours coursework</th>
<th>Some additional non-course-work research-like project?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bioengineering</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil and Environmental</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computational and Applied Math</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical and Computer Engineering</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Studies</td>
<td>33</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>48</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA for professionals</td>
<td>54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA for executives</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA/Master of Engineering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA/Master of Science</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA/MD</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecology and Evolutionary Biology</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>yes - exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics and Astronomy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nanoscale physics</td>
<td>39-42</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsurface geoscience</td>
<td>39-42</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environmental analysis and decision making</td>
<td>39-42</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bioscience research and health policy</td>
<td>39-42</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political science</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business is one department; natural science professional degrees not counted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
October 13, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

I write in support of the proposal from the Department of Philosophy to offer a non-thesis, two-year MA degree. I support this proposal for the following reasons:

• First, we must ensure that only our best students receive a Rice PhD. Currently we have no clean way of terminating graduate students when it becomes apparent that they shouldn’t be in a doctoral program in the first place. Being able to grant less promising students a non-thesis M.A. degree at the end of their fourth semester would give us a mechanism for ensuring that only our best students go on for the PhD while not sending anyone away empty-handed after completing two years of study.

• Second, we need to improve the financial packages we offer our graduate students. Arguably, the greatest problem we face in Humanities graduate programs is the lack adequate financial support. Our average yearly stipends are $15,000 as compared to stipends at peer institutions that range between $24,000 and $28,000. I have therefore promised to return to the department the funds originally intended for a student who is allowed to use only two years of a five-year support package. I will insist that these funds be used to improve stipend offers and not to recruit more students.

In conclusion, for the reasons outlined above, I heartily support allowing the Department of Philosophy to give a two-year, non-thesis M.A. Indeed, I hope that this will become a model for all humanities graduate programs.

Sincerely,

Nicolas Slumway
Dean of Humanities

Cc: Paula Sanders