Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh

Guide for Honours Students

Honours Philosophy at Edinburgh

In Pre-Honours, you will have taken a combination of courses that introduce various areas of philosophy and other courses – outside courses, and perhaps also courses required for entry into your chosen joint Honours degree.

Your third and fourth year are a chance to focus on your Honours subjects, building on what you’ve learned in first and second year. They give you a chance to develop and explore your own interests within philosophy. Unlike at Pre-Honours, you have a lot of choice in the philosophy courses you take both Honours years.

In Philosophy this year, we’re offering 15 courses for third year students and 33 courses for fourth year students.

What to expect in third year?

• Courses in your third year involve around two hours of seminar with the whole class, and a further hour of faculty-led small group tutorial
• The courses in your third year are more specialised than those you’ve done in Pre-Honours, offering you a deeper understanding of particular topics and figures in philosophy
• In addition, everyone takes a 0-credit dissertation preparation course, looking towards the dissertation in your fourth year - there we’ll explain what’s involved in writing a dissertation

What to expect in fourth year?

• Class sizes in fourth year are even smaller than in third year, and each course involves around two hours of seminars each week
• The courses are also even more focused than those in third year, allowing you to explore particular topics within philosophy in detail and depth
• You will write a dissertation in one of your honours subjects:

All students on a single-honours philosophy degree do a dissertation in their fourth year, though we offer two different ways that you can do this:
Year-long independent dissertation:

• This offers the opportunity to come up with your own project, and to develop it across the year into an 8000-word piece of writing, with the guidance of a faculty supervisor
• In order to do an independent dissertation, you need to propose a topic towards the end of the second semester of your third year – the dissertation preparation course will offer advice on how to write a good proposal
• The independent dissertation replaces 40 credits of courses in your fourth year

Coursework dissertations:

• This involves writing two extended essays of 5000 words, one each semester
• The coursework dissertations don’t replace any of your courses, and so you will enrol in 120 credits of courses as in third year
• Each semester you’ll choose one of your courses to write your coursework dissertation in, on one of the topics covered in that course, instead of doing the usual assessment
• You don’t need to decide which of your courses you’ll do your coursework dissertation in straightaway – you’ll have until the middle of each semester

Things are a bit different for joint-honours students. You’re taking courses outside philosophy in both your third and fourth year, and have the option of writing your dissertation in your other subject (though most other subjects don’t allow coursework dissertations). You should check your degree programme table (DPT) or talk to the Joint Honours Coordinator or your personal tutor if you’re unsure what you need to do for your joint degree.

People in Philosophy

In addition to your lecturers and course organisers, there are a number of people you can come to with comments, suggestions, problems, and criticisms about the honours degree in philosophy:

Head of Philosophy: Dr Nick Treanor (Head.of.Philosophy@ed.ac.uk)

Deputy Head of Philosophy: Dr Alix Cohen (Alix.Cohen@ed.ac.uk)

Undergraduate Teaching Director: Dr Bryan Pickel (Bryan.Pickel@ed.ac.uk)

Honours Coordinator: Dr Aidan McGlynn (amcglynn@staffmail.ed.ac.uk)

Joint Honours Coordinator: Dr Brian Rabern (Brian.Rabern@ed.ac.uk)

Equality and Diversity Director: Dr Filipa Melo Lopes (Filipa.MeloLopes@ed.ac.uk)
Resources and Opportunities

The School of Philosophy, Psychology, and Language Sciences (PPLS) and the university more broadly offer a number of additional resources and opportunities to help you make the most out of your honours years, and set yourself up for taking your next steps:

- **The PPLS Writing Centre** – This allows you to book an hour with one of the writing centre tutors, getting feedback on how to communicate your ideas as clearly as possible (https://writingcentre.ppls.ed.ac.uk/)

- **Careers Services** – Whether you are a 4th year student desperately trying to decide what to do after Uni, or a 1st year looking to plan early for a career within philosophy, *Edinburgh University Careers Service* offers guidance, both general and tailored to your specific needs, both workshops and events, and one-on-one sessions: (https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/about-us/what-we-do/iag-services/school-specific-information/school-of-philosophy-psychology-and-language-science/philosophy)

- **Student Initiative Fund** – This is a fund that any student on a degree run by the School of PPLS can apply to (single honours philosophy and most joint honours degrees count – if you’re in doubt please contact Dr Rabern). It lets you apply for funding for an event or initiative that will benefit the student community. For more details and for examples of the kinds of things you can apply for money for, see the website (https://www.ed.ac.uk/ppls/philosophy/current/undergraduate/funding-student-initiatives)

- **Philsoc** - Edinburgh boasts the oldest and largest undergraduate philosophy society in the world. In addition to an impressive lineup of invited speakers, they put on regular conferences as well as a number of more informal philosophical and social events: (https://www.facebook.com/EdinburghPhilSoc/)

Events and Activities

We have a host of social and academic events throughout the year to help you get to know the faculty in philosophy and your fellow students, and to engage with the subject beyond your classes:

- **Honours Welcome Dinner** – A dinner with students and staff, hosted by the philosophy department – you’re hopefully signed up for this year’s dinner already!

- **Honours Reading Party** – A short trip away from Edinburgh with philosophy staff and honours students, involving a combination of philosophical and social activities, as well as hillwalking. This year it’s 25-27th of October 2019 at Braemar in the Cairngorms National Park – watch your email for further details from Dr Treanor!

- **Department Seminars and Speaker Series** – the department hosts talks in different areas of philosophy throughout the academic year, bringing in philosophers from other departments or inviting our own faculty to present what they are currently working on. We also host
several more specialised speaker series in topics such as philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of science, and epistemology. You are welcome to come to any of these that take your interest – details are on the department’s events page, which will be updated throughout the year: (https://www.ed.ac.uk/ppls/philosophy/events)

• *The Mary Shepherd Conference* – An annual conference on feminist philosophy and philosophy of race, organised by undergraduate students and open to all. The conference is named after Lady Mary Shepherd, a philosopher based in Edinburgh around the same time as Hume, whose work has been mostly forgotten: (https://maryshepherdconference.weebly.com/)