

PHI 599: Dissertation Seminar

Fall 2021

Instructor: Boris Kment

Time and Place: Friday, 1:00–3:00, 201 Marx

This course is intended to give graduate students who are working on their dissertations the opportunity to collect feedback on work in progress, such as dissertation chapters and free-standing papers. Each session will focus on the work of one class participant and will have the format of a conference session.

Course participants should make sure to attend the first meeting (September 3), since it is during that meeting that we will decide who will be author, presenter, and commentator during each of the remaining sessions.

Participants should plan to attend all meetings of the seminar.

Author's responsibility

If you're the author for a given session, you should distribute your paper (max. 10,000 words) ahead of time. The paper should be accompanied by a note addressing the following questions.

(a) *What are you planning to do with the paper in the *near* future?*

Are you planning to turn it into a dissertation chapter, a journal paper, a conference presentation, a job talk? If you're still somewhat unsure about this, just describe your current state of reflection.

(b) *Who is the intended audience?*

Are you writing for the general philosophical reader? For readers who are specializing in X, Y, or Z?

(c) *Which aspects of the paper would you most like to get help with?*

Feel free to list up to 5 issues (max. 1 page) with the paper that you would like to see addressed. These issues can take many different forms. Here are some examples.

- You think that there is a serious objection to your account, or to one of your arguments, and you would like to find a good response.
- You'd like to find a way to make such-and-such parts of your paper clearer.
- You want to find a good way of shortening your paper.
- You'd like to make such-and-such parts of your paper simpler and more accessible to readers.
- You're looking for ways of presenting your ideas that will make them seem interesting and exciting to a larger audience.
- You are struggling to find a good way of describing the essence of the paper / of writing the introduction or conclusion section.

Session Format

Each session will consist of the parts listed below.

1. Presentation (max. 10 minutes)

The main ideas and arguments of the week's paper are presented by somebody other than the author. The presentation should be purely expository. Presenters should save their comments for the discussion.

2. Comments (max. 10 minutes)

Comments can take different forms. If you are the commentator, you might, for example,

- explain what you take to be the core strengths of the paper, if you think that the paper in its current form underemphasizes them.
- suggest ways of clarifying, developing, or further supporting ideas in the paper.
- offer ways of reconceptualizing the project (e.g., by restating the goals of the project or the questions that the paper is aiming to address).
- ask clarificatory questions.
- raise an objection.
- point out relevant literature that should be discussed in the paper but isn't.
- provide new information (not contained in the paper) about how the paper fits into the ongoing debate and what contributions it makes, or fails to make.

3. Author's reply (max. 5 minutes)

4. Discussion

Everybody should come prepared with a question, comment, or suggestion. Your contribution to the discussion can take many forms. For example, you might

- provide comments of any of the kinds listed in the "Comments" section above.
- suggest ways of addressing objections to the paper that were raised by the commentator or by the author.
- address some of the points that the author said s/he wanted to get help with.

The presenter and the commentator should use handouts. The use of a handout by the author is optional. The presenter and the commentator should coordinate before the session to make sure that the parts of the paper that the commentator is planning to talk about are covered by the presenter.