

HONOURS LEARNING AND TEACHING

Forward Thinking project

This Report forms part of a series of summary reports on philosophy in Australian Universities produced as part of the *Forward Thinking: Learning and Teaching Philosophy in Australian Universities* Project. This series consists of reports on:

- The Significance of the Discipline of Philosophy;
- Philosophy in Australian Universities;
- Undergraduate Learning and Teaching;
- Honours Learning and Teaching;
- Postgraduate Learning and Teaching; and
- Staff Learning and Teaching.

These reports are available on the Forward Thinking Project website:

<http://aap.org.au/forwardthinking/reports/index.html>.

The Forward Thinking project commenced in July 2008 and was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd (ALTC) via a Discipline-Based Initiative Grant. The Australasian Association of Philosophy (AAP) also supported the project. Further information about the project, including the Project Final Report, can be found at:

www.aap.org.au/forwardthinking.

About this Report

This Report is divided into 2 sections: Honours Load, including total student load and student load by philosophy program, and Honours Program, including pre-requisites, structure of program, assessment and examination.

Data in these reports is drawn from a number of sources, including: DEEWR, GCA and the AAP. Data was also drawn from a survey of Heads of Philosophy Programs. Those wishing to do further research may refer to the [datasets](#). Access to some data is restricted to project participants and Heads of philosophy programs. Access may be obtained from the [Executive Officer](#) of the Australasian Association of Philosophy.

Sections of these reports refer to Case Studies developed from issues raised in the surveys and later discussed at round tables on issues and innovations in teaching and learning philosophy. These cover: assessment, evaluation, graduate attributes and teaching philosophy to non-philosophy majors/BA students. Those wishing to pursue these issues further may refer to the [case studies](#).

Project Team: Professor Susan Dodds (University of Tasmania); Professor Ros Diprose (University of New South Wales); Dr Jennifer Duke-Yonge (Macquarie University); Eliza Goddard (Australasian Association of Philosophy/Flinders University); Dr Simon Lumsden (University of New South Wales); Professor Catriona Mackenzie (Macquarie University); Professor Peter Menzies (Macquarie University); Dr Mitch Parsell (Macquarie University); Associate Professor Ian Ravenscroft (Flinders University)

Project contacts: Eliza Goddard, Project Manager, elizagoddard@aap.org.au
Associate Professor Ian Ravenscroft, Project Leader, ian.ravenscroft@flinders.edu.au

Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd.

This work is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence. Under this Licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work and to make derivative works.

Attribution: You must attribute the work to the original authors and include the following statement: Support for the original work was provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Noncommercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

Share Alike: If you alter, transform, or build on this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a licence identical to this one.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the licence terms of this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/au/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 3000, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, PO Box 2375, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or through the website: www.altc.edu.au



Promoting excellence in higher education

Table of Contents

HONOURS LOAD	4
TOTAL LOAD	4
HONOURS LOAD BY INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM	5
HONOURS PROGRAM	6
PRE-REQUISITES FOR ENTRY INTO HONOURS.....	6
STRUCTURE OF HONOURS PROGRAM.	6
ASSESSMENT	6
EXAMINATION OF HONOURS.....	7
PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS (AND POSTGRADUATE STUDY).....	7
GENERAL COMMENTS.....	7
REFERENCES	7
APPENDIX 1: LIST OF AUSTRALIAN PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THE AAP BENCHMARKING COLLECTION	8
APPENDIX 2: LIST OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY	9

Honours Load

Philosophy is offered at honours level in twenty-two philosophy programs.¹ This section of the Honours Report uses data from the AAP Benchmarking Collection.² The AAP collects data from philosophy programs pertaining to their student and staff load and research inputs (grants) and outputs (publications). These data are provided annually by Heads of philosophy programs in Australasia. The data are self-reported by Heads and are most useful for comparisons over time. Twenty philosophy programs are included in the data below. For a full list of philosophy programs included, see Appendix 1 of this Report.

Total Load

The following chart shows total load in honours level for Australian philosophy programs 2001-2007.

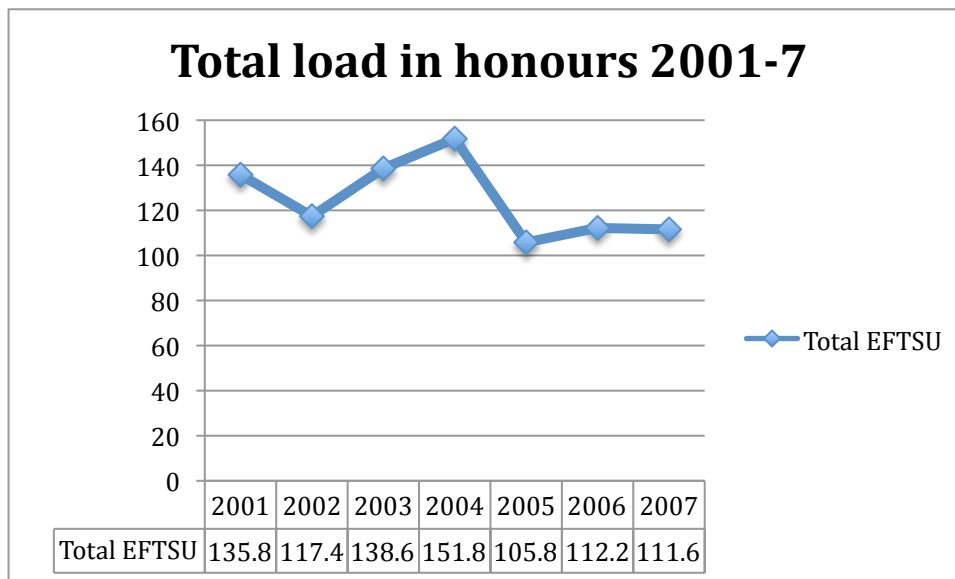


Figure 1: Total honours load of Australian philosophy programs 2001-2007³

Source: *AAP Benchmarking Collection*

¹ Note, this figure does not include History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) programs.

² There are no data for Honours level available from DEEWR. Whilst DEEWR reports student load by year level, including 4+ year, the year level indicates the year in the students' enrolment history in which they enrolled in that unit. For example, if I take a 1st year unit in my second year of enrolment, that unit will show up as a 2nd year unit. For this reason, 4+ years is not an indication of honours years enrolments.

³ Some data are missing for some programs for some years. These are as follows: ANU, 2006 figures used for 2007; University of Melbourne, 2005 figures used for 2006 and 2007; University of New South Wales, University of Queensland and Swinburne University, 2005 figure used for 2006; University of Newcastle, 2003 figures used for 2004, 2005 and 2006; University of New England, 2003 figures used for 2001 and 2002, and 2005 figures used for 2006.

Summary

Total load at Honours level is variable from year to year, though has remained steady over the period 2001-2007. In 2007 total load in honours for Australian philosophy programs was 111.6 EFTSU. In 2001 total load in honours for Australian philosophy programs was 135.8 EFTSU. This may suggest a decline in total load. However, the numbers may be exaggerated by some 'unusual' figures.⁴

The issue of declining numbers of honours students in Arts disciplines is raised in the DASSH BA Scoping Project (Gannaway and Trent 2008). Their case study, 'Advanced Studies',⁵ provides examples of strategies used by some Arts disciplines for dealing with this issue (as well as that of attracting and meeting the needs of exceptional students), including the advanced program in the Bachelor of Philosophy at the Australian National University.

Honours load by individual program

The following table shows load in honours for Australian philosophy programs 2001-2007 by decreasing EFTSU.

Philosophy program	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Grand Total
University of Sydney	11	17.7	10.5	9	17	19.3	19.0	103.5
La Trobe University	17.5	9.5	11	22.8	6.9	5.7	4.9	78.3
University of Melbourne	12	9	18.1	22	2.4	2.4	2.4	68.3
Monash University	6.4	5	9	8.8	10	14	10.0	63.2
University of Queensland	10	5	12	12	7	6.6	8.1	60.7
ANU Faculties	7.5	8.7	10.2	7.5	7.8	9.3	9.3	60.3
Flinders University	8.9	8	7.4	9.9	10	6.5	4.7	55.4
University of Adelaide	3	5.5	8.9	10.6	5.3	6.5	11.5	51.3
University of Tasmania	12	6	6.1	8.3	6.4	6.4	5.7	50.9
Deakin University	12.3	8.4	6.6	8	5.4	5.9	4.1	50.7
Macquarie University	11.5	6.3	8.6	6	6	3.8	6.3	48.5
Swinburne University of Technology	5	6	5	5	6	6	6.0	39
University of New England	6	6	6	3.3	4.5	4.5	4.5	34.8
University of Western Australia	2	3.5	2.6	4.6	2.9	1.8	5.8	23.2
Murdoch University	1	4	5	4	2	4	1.0	21
University of New South Wales	1.3	2.3	2.8	4.5	3	3	3.5	20.4
University of Newcastle	6	3	2	2	2	2	1.0	18
University of Wollongong	2.4	1.5	1.5	0.5	0.5	1	3.8	11.15
Australian Catholic University	0	1	1.3	1	0.7	3.5	0.0	7.5
Griffith University		1	4	2				7
Monash University Bioethics					0	0	0.0	0
Grand Total	135.8	117.4	138.6	151.8	105.8	112.2	111.6	873.15

⁴ See, particularly La Trobe University in 2004 and University of Melbourne in 2003 and 2004. For further details see Table 1.

⁵ Available online at: <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp/studies>

Table 1: Honours load by philosophy program 2001-7
Source: *AAP Benchmarking Collection*

Summary

Whilst honours figures for most philosophy programs are variable for the years 2001-7, with some programs showing a decline (and some remaining the same), some programs – at the University of Adelaide, University of Sydney and Monash University for example – show increases in honours load from 2001-2007.

It is encouraging to note that some programs report increasing numbers of honours students or good flow-on from majors.

Honours program

Data used in the following subsections on pre-requisites, structure of honours programs, assessment and examination are drawn from the responses to the survey of philosophy programs. Twenty-two Heads (discipline coordinators or others) responded to the survey. For a full list of respondents see Appendix 2 of this report. For a full list of survey questions see Appendix 2 of the [Final Report](#).

Pre-requisites for entry into Honours

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to any requirements for admission to honours in their program and whether there are any mandatory pre-honours units. A very rough pattern emerges of requiring a major in Philosophy with credit or distinction average in Philosophy units. But there is also considerable variation from this pattern among departments. Some impose a no Fail grade in any unit restriction (for example, Notre Dame). Practically all departments do not have mandatory pre-honours unit, though University of Queensland requires Introduction to Logic (Note that some programs have mandatory capstone units for philosophy majors, for example, University of Melbourne)..

Structure of honours program.

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to whether any components of their honours program are compulsory. A rough pattern emerges of requiring thesis, coursework and attendance at honours/thesis workshop. A number of philosophy programs noted completion of an honours unit concerned with research methods.

Assessment

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to the assessment requirements for honours students. There is much variation in assessment. But many have a pattern: 15-18,000 word thesis worth 40 or 50% and 3 x 5000 word essays worth 60 or 50%. University of Western Australia, University of Queensland, and Melbourne University depart widely from this pattern. University of Western Australia is the only institution with exams.

Examination of honours.

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to how honours work is examined. While there is again much variation, a rough pattern emerges: two examiners mark each piece of work but supervisors do not mark theses. A minority of institutions use external examiners.

Provision of information to students (and postgraduate study)

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to whether their program pursues any specific strategies for raising honours enrolments. Most departments report use of a range of methods for informing students of honours program: letters to promising students, information sessions, and individual recruitment of talented students.

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to whether their program provides honours students interested in postgraduate study with information about their options. Practically, all departments report that they supply information about postgraduate study to honours students. Supervisors or honours coordinators do much of this informally. Some institutions have dedicated information sessions.

Heads of philosophy programs were surveyed as to how many of their honours students have gone on to postgraduate study in philosophy each year. Most departments report small numbers of honours students proceeding to postgraduate study. A notable trend is that practically all departments try to channel their honours students into their postgraduate programs. There is concern that this may have an adverse effect on the training of the next generation of academics.

.

General Comments

Some departments report increasing numbers of honours students or good flow on from majors. A number report difficulties in offering special honours courses given small staff numbers. One department reports difficulties in offering solid undergraduate basis for honours program given the amount of ARC-funded teaching buyouts.

References

Gannaway, D., and Trent, F. (2008), *Nature and Role of Arts Degrees in Contemporary Society*, Report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Available online at: http://dassh.edu.au/projects_ba

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF AUSTRALIAN PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS included in the AAP Benchmarking collection

- School of Philosophy, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, [Australian Catholic University](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of Cultural Inquiry, [Australian National University](#)
- Discipline of Philosophy, School of Humanities, [University of Adelaide](#)
- Philosophy, School of International and Political Studies, [Deakin University](#)
- Program of Philosophy, School of Humanities, [Flinders University](#)
- Philosophy and Ethics, Arts, Languages and Criminology, [Griffith University](#)
- Philosophy, School of Communication, Arts and Critical Inquiry, [La Trobe University](#)
- Program of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, [Macquarie University](#)
- Philosophy and Bioethics, School of Philosophical, Historical & International Studies, [Monash University](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, [Murdoch University](#)
- Philosophy, School of Philosophy, Anthropology and Social Sciences, [University of Melbourne](#)
- Philosophy and Religious Studies, School of Humanities and Social Science, [University of Newcastle](#)
- Philosophy, School of Humanities, [University of New England](#)
- School of History and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, [University of New South Wales](#)
- Philosophy, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, [University of Queensland](#)
- Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry, Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, [Swinburne University of Technology](#)
- Program of Philosophy, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, [University of Sydney](#)
- School of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, [University of Tasmania](#)
- Discipline of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, [University of Western Australia](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of English Literatures & Philosophy, [University of Wollongong](#)

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMS that participated in the survey

- School of Philosophy, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, [Australian Catholic University](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of Cultural Inquiry, [Australian National University](#)
- Discipline of Philosophy, School of Humanities, [University of Adelaide](#)
- Discipline of Philosophy, School of Behavioural & Social Sciences & Humanities, [University of Ballarat](#)
- Philosophy, School of Humanities, [Bond University](#)
- Philosophy, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, [Charles Sturt University](#)
- Philosophy, School of International and Political Studies, [Deakin University](#)
- Program of Philosophy, School of Humanities, [Flinders University](#)
- Philosophy, School of Communication, Arts and Critical Inquiry, [La Trobe University](#)
- Program of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, [Macquarie University](#)
- Philosophy and Bioethics, School of Philosophical, Historical & International Studies, [Monash University](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, [Murdoch University](#)
- Philosophy, School of Philosophy, Anthropology and Social Sciences, [University of Melbourne](#)
- Philosophy and Religious Studies, School of Humanities and Social Science, [University of Newcastle](#)
- Philosophy, School of Humanities, [University of New England](#)
- School of History and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, [University of New South Wales](#)
- School of Philosophy and Theology, [University of Notre Dame](#)
- Philosophy, School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, [University of Queensland](#)
- Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry, Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, [Swinburne University of Technology](#)
- Program of Philosophy, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, [University of Sydney](#)
- University of Western Sydney
- School of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, [University of Tasmania](#)
- Discipline of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, [University of Western Australia](#)
- Philosophy Program, School of English Literatures & Philosophy, [University of Wollongong](#)