

January, 2005
School of Graduate Studies
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Addendum to the Proposal to Offer a New In-Program Degree, the Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)

Matters arose during the discussion of this proposal at the December 8, 2004, meeting of the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs. The following information is provided as a supplement to the proposal, in response to queries tabled at that time.

Is it appropriate to offer “two degrees for the same work completed”?

As was noted at AP&P, the proposed M.Phil, resembles in this regard the (now defunct) three-year Bachelor of Arts degree, which stood on a student’s record if the student subsequently completed) a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree. Other examples of current practice that allow coursework to be counted toward more than one degree are graduate diplomas within graduate programs, and combined graduate degrees.

Is it expected to have an effect on time to degree?

It is not expected that the presence of the M.Phil. in units who elect to offer it will have a major impact on time to completion, but it may have a salutary effect, as suggested by a Dean from Columbia (below). A Dean from Yale offered the opinion that it did not have much effect on time to degree, but does likely shorten time to withdrawal for those who do not complete the doctorate.

What have been the experiences of institutions like Yale and Columbia, where the M.Phil. has been in place for some time?

Information about **Columbia’s** experience was obtained from an Associate Dean (email, 12/14/04). At Columbia, completion of the M.Phil. requirements can lead to a Departmental recommendation that the student receive an M.Phil., but not advance to candidacy. This is not an option in the proposal that is under consideration here.

Dean Beatrice Terrien-Somerville wrote,

“Columbia’s MPhil was first awarded in the late 1960s as an ABD degree. It is useful in the following ways:

- a) As a milestone between coursework/exams stage and the dissertation stage.
- b) In departments where the MPhil exams include the defense of a PhD topic proposal, we think that TTD is reduced. This is because some students feel isolated after the MPhil and if their topic is already approved during the MPhil exam, they are ready to start research right away. In many departments where students take 6 months to a year to bring their topic to their department for approval, TTD is longer.
- c) Some departments use the MPhil/PhD topic stage to evaluate students’ capacity for actually creating an original, independent dissertation. Minds that excel at coursework do not always engage successfully in original dissertation research. Thus, students know that even though they may not be advanced to candidacy for the PhD dissertation stage, at least they earn a degree after their exams. (i.e., a student who passes the MPhil exam but does not pass the PhD topic part of it still receives the MPhil but is not advanced to candidacy for the PhD).”

Information about **Yale's** experience was obtained by telephone interview with Associate Dean Richard Sleight (01/03/05). He was uncertain about when the M.Phil. had been introduced, but confirmed that it was a long-standing feature of their graduate programs. It seems that at Yale the M.Phil. may have been established in all doctoral programs at some time in the past, with the opportunity to opt out. Yale's definition of the degree requirements are copied, below.

Programs in the humanities and social sciences feel that the offering furthers their goals; the M.Phil. is a part of their tradition. In one case, it is used to identify high level education in a field other than a graduate student's primary departmental home. The "M.Phil. Fellowship in Medieval Studies" provides students who are enrolled in departments other than Medieval Studies a fully-funded (third) year of coursework in Medieval Studies; those successfully completing this program are awarded an M.Phil. in Medieval Studies. This work is in addition to that required in a student's own department, which normally takes two years. The stated purpose of this program is to help these graduates compete successfully in the job market, and to pursue productive scholarly careers as medievalists without diluting their training within their specific departmental disciplines.

Programs in the biomedical sciences have modified their use of the M.Phil. or have eliminated it. There is a great deal of flexibility around the degree in the sciences. Dean Sleight noted that it can be a valued milestone, if it is clearly distinct from other masters degrees. He noted that in fields with relatively few courses and examinations, it can be challenging to identify of appropriate criteria for the M. Phil.

FROM THE YALE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES: REQUIREMENTS

Degree of Master of Philosophy

The Master of Philosophy is a degree en route to the Ph.D. The minimum general requirements for this degree are that a student shall have completed all requirements for the Ph.D. except the prospectus and dissertation. Students will not generally have satisfied the requirements for the Master of Philosophy until after two years of study, except where graduate work done before admission to Yale has reduced the student's graduate course work at Yale. In no case will the degree be awarded for less than one year of residence in the Yale Graduate School. Not all departments offer the M.Phil degree.