FIRST EXAMINATION LEARNING GOALS
On successful completion of the First Examination, students are expected
1. to be developing a breadth of knowledge of philosophy and its history
   Assessment: Successful completion of the first part of the distribution requirements, which require a student to take courses across the field of philosophy
2. to have a depth of knowledge in a topic in philosophy and its history
   Assessment: Passing the First Qualifying Paper
3. to be developing the ability to present and defend a philosophical position in oral argument
   Assessment: Passing the First Year Seminar; successful completion of the first part of the distribution requirements
4. to be able to write a short paper (5000 words) at the level of professional philosophy
   Assessment: Passing the First Qualifying Paper; successful completion of the first part of the distribution requirements
5. to be developing the ability to conduct sustained research on philosophical topics
   Assessment: Passing the First Qualifying Paper

SECOND EXAMINATION LEARNING GOALS
On successful completion of the Second Examination, students are expected
1. to have a breadth of knowledge of philosophy and its history
   Assessment: Successful completion of the distribution requirements, which require a student to take courses across the field of philosophy
2. to have a depth of knowledge in a further topic in philosophy and its history
   Assessment: Passing the Second Qualifying Paper (on a different topic from that of the First Qualifying Paper)
3. to be further developing the ability to present and defend a philosophical position in oral argument
   Assessment: Successful completion of the distribution requirements
4. to be able to write a long paper (7,500 words), at the level of professional philosophy
   Assessment: Passing the Second Qualifying Paper
5. to be further developing the ability to conduct sustained research on philosophical topics
   Assessment: Passing the Second Qualifying Paper

After extensive discussion with faculty and students, these new requirements for First and Second Examination were introduced in Fall 2009:

First Examination: A student in the PhD program in Philosophy passes first examination upon completion of (i) First-Year Seminar; (ii) First Qualifying Paper; (iii) one course in each group, A to E.
Second Examination: A student in the PhD program in Philosophy passes Second Examination upon completion of (i) Second Qualifying Paper; (ii) remaining distribution requirements.

Distribution requirements replaced the former system of required ‘core’ courses, and qualifying papers at fixed points in a student’s career replaced written comprehensive examinations that were taken at times chosen by the student. The first qualifying paper, 5000 words in length, is due on the day before the first day of classes of the Spring semester in the student’s second year; the second qualifying paper, 7500 words in length, is due on the day before the first day of classes of the Spring semester in the student’s third year.

The most significant change to the First and Second Examination is the introduction of qualifying papers. Students prepare for these papers by registering their topic and agreed supervisor with the Qualifying Paper Coordinator (QPC) early in the semester prior to the due date of the paper. The student receives extensive feedback from the supervisor, who works with the student to develop the paper into a polished piece of work that could ideally be developed into a conference paper or publication. When the QPC receives the student paper, he or she appoints an examiner expert in the subject area and blind to the student and supervisor. Both the supervisor and examiner write detailed reports justifying their decision to pass or fail the student, edited portions of which are later made available to the student. If both supervisor and examiner pass, the student passes; if there is disagreement, the QPC appoints an additional examiner, whose vote usually decides the matter—although the QPC will on occasion appoint an additional examiner if the decision is sufficiently borderline or ambiguous. When additional examiners are appointed, reports are shared between supervisor and examiners to see if an agreed grade can be negotiated.

The substitution of qualifying papers for comprehensive examinations has two primary goals: to facilitate the acceleration of time to degree by removing comprehensive examinations that were perceived as obstacles to smooth transition from coursework to dissertation, and to serve as more effective benchmarks for progress in the program, by providing students with extensive feedback about their progress directly relevant to their dissertation preparation and professional development (especially in relation to conference papers and publications.)

While we are sure that our qualifying papers contribute to more efficient progress through the program, their effect is hard to estimate, since any measure of consequent student progress is confounded by the increasingly superior quality of our admitted classes in recent years, as a function of greatly improved fellowship packages and the dramatic rise in the national and international standing of the program. However, both faculty and students agree that the detailed preparation and feedback generated by the qualifying papers mark a substantive improvement over the preparation of standardized answers to standardized questions in the comprehensive examinations. While disagreements between examiners were very common in the case of the written comprehensives, they are rare in the case of qualifying papers. We believe that the remarkable consilience of judgments attained in the examination of qualifying papers is a direct function of the depth of justificatory critical feedback that supervisors and blind examiners are required to provide.