

Cornell Law School

J.D. degree and Ph.D. or M.A. degree in Philosophy

Students who want to concentrate in jurisprudence or legal philosophy may coordinate their studies toward the J.D. degree and a graduate degree in philosophy, completing both degrees a year sooner than would otherwise be possible. That coordination is possible because a candidate for a J.D. degree may take a limited amount of course work outside the Law School in each of the four terms in the second and third years. Joint degree students devote those electives to courses in philosophy. When appropriate, other Law School courses also count toward a graduate philosophy degree.

While the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program normally takes five years (twelve courses in two years plus three years for the dissertation), and the Master of Arts (M.A.) program normally lasts two years (six courses in one year plus a year for the thesis), a joint program of studies leading to the J.D. and Ph.D. degrees lasts seven years instead of eight, and one leading to the J.D. and M.A. degrees lasts four years rather than five, without sacrifice of training in either field.

A student in the program may begin law study in the first year or after a year of course work in philosophy. Once law study is begun, it is continued until completion of the J.D. degree.

A student seeking J.D. and M.A. degrees who begins in the Law School devotes the first three years to law study and takes one course in philosophy during each of the upperclass terms. By the time the J.D. degree is completed, the student has also completed nearly all required master's degree course work and is ready to begin full-time study of philosophy. During the fourth year, the student devotes the fall term to any remaining philosophy course requirements and to preparation for the master's thesis. The thesis is completed during the spring term. A student pursuing a Ph.D. degree uses the fourth year to complete all or nearly all the courses required. After completing any remaining required courses, the student works full-time on the doctoral dissertation.

A student working toward the M.A. degree who begins by taking a year of graduate-level course work in philosophy and moves to the Law School the next year has by then completed the required course work in philosophy. The student takes a directed reading and writing course in philosophy during each term of the upperclass Law School years in order to write the master's thesis. A candidate for the Ph.D. degree who enters the Law School in the second year has by then completed half the required course work in philosophy and takes one course in philosophy each semester during the upperclass Law School years. After completing the J.D. degree, the student returns to full-time study of philosophy, first completing any remaining course requirements and then writing the doctoral dissertation.

Each student in the program is supervised by a Special Committee of at least two members for M.A. degree candidates and at least three members for Ph.D. degree candidates. Special Committees include at least one member from each field (with at least two members from philosophy on Ph.D. degree committees).

Students who want to enter the joint degree program must apply to both the Law School and the Field of Philosophy in the Graduate School. A student may apply to the program before matriculating in either law or philosophy and may, after acceptance for admission, decide in which discipline to spend the first year. A student may also apply and be admitted to the program after having begun the first year in either law or philosophy.

Funding provided by the Graduate School or College of Arts and Sciences is normally available only during years spent in the philosophy department; it is not available while the candidate is in the Law School.