

MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science & Medicine: Senior Examiner's Report 2023-24.

Overall results

The MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science & Medicine (HPSM) was taken by 27 students this year. 14 achieved a Distinction (70-79) overall, 10 received a High Performance (65-69), and 3 received a Pass (60-64).

Starred distinction (80+)	Distinction (70-79)	High performance (65-69)	Pass (60-64)	Total
0	14	10	3	27

Prizes

The **Jennifer Redhead** prize for the best overall performance on the MPhil essays was awarded to Sandra Liwanowska. The **Rausing Prize** for the best MPhil dissertation was awarded to Stefanie Mrozinski. Additionally, this year's departmental **McConnell Prize** — for an outstanding performance on an essay or dissertation based on an object in the Whipple Museum's collection — was awarded to Nicolas Medrano for his HPSM Essay 1.

External examiner

Professor Charlotte Sleigh was the external examiner for the HPSM MPhil for the second consecutive year. Professor Sleigh remarked upon the 'high quality overall' of the student work across both the MPhil and the HPS Part III course, noting some of it to be 'superb', and additionally complimented the 'thoughtful and rigorous' marking and 'engaged and thoughtful' discussions at examiners meetings. In addition, Professor Sleigh included several specific recommendations for both the Part III and MPhil programs (in her joint report), which we will endeavour to build upon in future years, which I'll list below, together with suggestions for recommendations from internal examiners. We are very grateful to Professor Sleigh for her excellent, honest and detailed report, for her work and commitment to this role throughout the year, and for continuing for a third year.

Recommendations

The external examiner noted that the overall high quality of work across the MPhil was not accompanied by the average marks for essays, noting the course to be, on the whole, assessed more strictly than comparable programs in the UK. It can be noted that both this year and last year no student achieved a 'Starred Distinction' overall. The examiners discussed at length the issue of grading, and assessors will be strongly make a more liberal use of high marks to better reflect the quality of work. We also discussed at length how to ensure parity of marking between philosophy of science and history of science, and will continue to monitor this issue throughout the following year to ensure that marking is consistent and fair.

The following points apply to both the HPSM MPhil and HPS Part III:

1. We continue to monitor the issue of Chat GPT and similar language models, and to what extent it can be identified and discouraged.
2. On the introduction of self-certified extensions: it is important that students are aware that these are to be used only if necessary, and are not simply a de facto later deadline. We have considered how to deal with the possibility of a large proportion of essays being submitted at a later date than the advertised deadlines and adjusted examiner meeting dates to accommodate this, and it has been made clearer to students in the course information that essays that are not assessed prior to the final examiners meeting (e.g. due to extensions) may in some cases not be eligible to receive certain student prizes.
3. Assessors will once again be encouraged to use a full range of marks, and to use the 'confidential comments' boxes to give a clear explanation of how joint marks are agreed (or if there's a failure to agree a joint mark) in the case that individual assessor marks are far apart.

4. During the final examiners' meeting, the external examiner raised concerns about the different marking schemes for Part III and the HPSM MPhil. This is due to the difference in marking structures between undergraduate and postgraduate courses within the university, but we are aware of the need to clearly communicate to assessors the difference in how work is to be marked between the two programs.

Matt Farr
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