



Higher School Certificate

DISTINCTION COURSE PROGRAM

An Information Booklet

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Higher School Certificate Distinction Course Program

About this Booklet

The aim of this booklet is to provide an introduction to the Board of Studies Distinction Course Program. Interested students, their parents, teachers and others can use this booklet to find out what the program is, who is eligible and what is involved.

This booklet gives students an introduction to the content covered in the course available, the assessment requirements and the time commitment needed.

Introduction to the Distinction Course Program

The Distinction Course Program consists of a high-level HSC course designed to provide extension study opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented students.

Distinction Course Program Overview

The program is delivered by the University of New England through distance education. It requires students to employ independent learning approaches to study and assignments, to use email communication with their lecturers and fellow students, and to attend residential seminars to interact with their peers and with experts in the field of study.

In 2010 a course of study will be offered in Philosophy.

The Philosophy Distinction Course does not assume any previous study in this area. It is designed to develop philosophical skills across the curriculum and to build on the knowledge, interests and reflective capabilities that students bring to their study. The course begins with Core Studies, which examine central questions in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and political philosophy. Optional studies investigate such issues in greater depth.

To be eligible for the course, students must have completed a Board Developed Course before the program begins. Applications for entry to the Philosophy course are required by mid-November and successful applicants are informed by mid-December.

There are no specific subject prerequisites for studying Philosophy.

Some Commonly Asked Questions

Why do the Distinction Course?

The Distinction Course provides an opportunity for gifted students to undertake a type of study very different from other Higher School Certificate courses. In terms of content, mode of study and contact with university personnel, the course provides a preparation for university study and a broader perspective across the curriculum.

Who can do the Distinction Course?

Exceptional students who have accelerated and completed, ahead of their cohort, all HSC course requirements in a Board Developed Course are eligible to apply to study the Distinction Course. Students will have completed the accelerated course before the year in which they intend to study the Distinction Course.

There are no particular subject prerequisites for Philosophy.

How are students selected?

A selection panel comprising representatives of universities and the Office of the Board of Studies conducts the selection process. The selection criteria include:

- completion of a Board Developed Course
- outstanding achievement in the accelerated course at the HSC examination
- evidence of a pattern of high achievement in all courses studied
- support from the school principal
- school report indicating suitability to study the Distinction Course.

Students are required to submit a formal application to the Office of the Board to undertake the Distinction Course the following year. Application forms are available on the Board of Studies website early in Term 4.

How is the Distinction Course studied?

The course is taught by the University of New England through distance education. The learning materials are delivered to the student's home and consist of modules of work, related readings and assignments. Assignments and the examination are marked by university lecturers and/or members of the course committees. During the course students attend compulsory residential seminars. These seminars provide an introduction to university life, presentations by university lecturers and interaction with other Distinction Course students. Between the seminars, students maintain contact with each other and with the course coordinator via phone and email, as well as using the forums on the Distinction Course website.

The university appoints a coordinator for the course. The coordinator is responsible for the arrangements for, and conduct of, the residential seminars and is the primary contact person for students undertaking the course.

Does my Distinction Course count towards my Higher School Certificate?

No. The two units from the Distinction Course do not count in the 10 HSC units needed for the award of the Higher School Certificate. The marks gained in the Distinction Course, however, may be counted towards the calculation of the ATAR if they are among the student's best 10 units.

How are the Distinction Course results reported on the Higher School Certificate Record of Achievement?

Distinction Course results are reported on the Higher School Certificate Record of Achievement using the grades awarded by the universities, ie HD (High Distinction), D (Distinction), Cr (Credit), P (Pass).

These grades will appear in the columns headed *Examination Mark* and *HSC Mark*. No marks will appear in the columns headed *Assessment Mark* and *Performance Band*. The standards applied in the awarding of these grades are equivalent to those applied at the end of first year university.

How is a student's progress assessed?

Assessment for the Distinction Course will take a variety of forms. Typically, the assessments will be based on written assignments, including essays. The course has a written examination that counts towards the final grade. The specific requirements for the assessment of the course are listed in the course information book that is sent to students at the commencement of the course. A summary of the assessment requirements for the course appears later in this booklet.

What feedback is given during the course?

During the year, the course coordinator is available to give students information about and assistance with their progress in the course. All assignments and the examination are marked

by university personnel and/or members of the course committee. Students receive feedback in the form of comments and grades from the markers and a score in the examination.

The final grade for the Distinction Course is reported on the Higher School Certificate Record of Achievement, which is delivered to students in January.

What happens at the residentials?

There are three residential schools for Philosophy, all held in Sydney. The residential programs are designed to provide input from specialist lecturers and/or stimulus material, and to allow students the opportunity for face-to-face discussions with course coordinators and peers. The program will usually allow time for individual students to receive feedback on their progress from the course coordinator. Attendance at the residentials is a compulsory part of the Distinction Course study.

More details on the residentials, as well as a sample residential program, are included later in this booklet.

Who can help with the work?

In the first instance, students should call on the course coordinators for assistance with Distinction Course work. The coordinator may then direct the student's inquiry to another appropriate person.

How much time will the course demand?

The course is run over one year and will require a minimum of 120 hours' study time.

How much does the course cost?

There is no charge to students for course fees, travel or residential schools.

How to apply

Application forms can be downloaded from the Board's website. Completed forms should be submitted to the Office of the Board of Studies by mid-November.

More information

The Board publishes information about Distinction Courses on its website (www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au) and in the *Board Bulletin*. Students who think they may be interested in studying the Distinction Course should inform their school and discuss arrangements.

Philosophy Distinction Course

Nature of the Course

The Distinction Course in Philosophy does not assume any previous study in this area. It is designed to offer accelerated students the opportunity for the development of philosophical skills applicable across the curriculum, to impart a knowledge of philosophy and to build on the knowledge, interests and reflective capabilities that students will bring to their study. The Distinction Course in Philosophy makes available the study of current and perennial questions about human existence and thought.

To engage in philosophical inquiry requires imagination, thoughtfulness, careful and critical examination, and the ability to reason well. It challenges our horizons and cultivates considered judgment. The course provides students with the opportunity to attain a level of competence in philosophy by acquiring the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are characteristic of philosophy. While the course is pitched at a high level in selected areas, it is not exhaustive and is not intended to replace introductory courses traditionally offered to students in their first year of university. Rather, this course is specifically designed to meet the interests of accelerated students, the constraints of external delivery and the needs of contemporary education in a diverse society.

Commencing with fiction stories that provoke philosophical curiosity, the course continues with the consideration of a balanced range of issues, and students move on to develop their philosophical skills and explore more abstract questions through the reading of classical and contemporary sources. Areas and topics have been chosen to challenge and extend students, as well as for their importance and interest.

The course begins with Core Studies, comprising four compulsory modules and a reasoning workshop. This section requires students to develop the ability to formulate sustained, well-reasoned arguments and to examine central questions in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and political philosophy. Students then undertake Optional Studies, which are extensions of the four core modules, giving them the opportunity to investigate issues in greater depth. These studies are designed to increase students' capacities to analyse philosophical problems and to formulate their own positions in relation to these problems.

Structure of the Course

The course is divided into Core Studies and Optional Studies. The Core consists of four compulsory modules and makes up two-thirds of the course time. The Optional Studies make up the remainder of the course. Students choose to study two options out of a possible four. Each option is an extension of one of the core modules. There are also three residentials, each of two days' duration.

The format of the course is:

- First residential
Module 1 (Time and Cause) and Module 2 (Self Concept)

- Second residential
Module 3 (Morality, Religion and Happiness) and Module 4 (Reality and Credibility)

➤ Third residential
Optional Studies

Assessment for the course is by assignments and examination. The assessment scheme is summarised below:

Core Module 1 - Short written assignment	5%
Core Module 2 - Short written assignment	5%
Core Module 3 - Short written assignment	5%
Core Module 4 - Short written assignment or written test or viva test	5%
Core Modules 1–4 - Written examination	40%
Subtotal:	60%
Two Options - A written assignment on each option	20% each
Each assignment to be 1500–2000 words	
Subtotal:	40%
TOTAL:	100%

Residential Schools

There are three 2-day residential schools, at which attendance is compulsory. Residential schools provide students with the opportunity for face-to-face discussion and peer interaction, which is so important in philosophical inquiry. The first residential school includes a reasoning workshop to develop the vocabulary and skills needed for the formulation and critical evaluation of arguments. The second residential school provides an opportunity for discussion of issues and feedback on assignments. The third residential school offers workshops on the options and an opportunity for library research and discussion of the written assignments for the options.

First residential school

(At the beginning of the course) This will include:

- an introduction to Philosophy
- lectures and workshops on reasoning
- an introduction to Module 1 (Time and Cause) and Module 2 (Self-concept)
- an introduction to library resources.

Second residential school

(On completion of Core Modules 1 and 2) This will include:

- discussion of issues selected from Modules 1 and 2
- workshops on assignments
- workshops on writing and presenting arguments
- a preview of Module 3 (Morality, Religion and Happiness) and Module 4 (Reality and Credibility).

Third residential school

(On completion of Core Modules 3 and 4) This will include:

- discussion of issues selected from Modules 3 and 4
- workshops to introduce the Options
- an introduction to writing research assignments.

Sample Residential School Program

Saturday

- 9.00–9.30 am - Check-in
- 9.30–10.10 am - Lecture 1 on Module Three: Introduction
- 10.15–11.00 am - Group discussion on Lecture 1
- 11.00–11.30 am - *Morning Tea*
- 11.30 am–12.10 pm - Lecture on Module Three
- 12.15–1.00 pm - Discussion
- 1.00–2.00 pm - *Lunch*
- 2.00–2.40 pm - Lecture on Module Three
- 2.45–3.30 pm - Discussion
- 3.30–4.00 pm - *Afternoon Tea*
- 4.00–4.40 pm - Lecture on Module Two
- 4.40–6.00 pm - Optional essay feedback
- 6.00–7.00 pm - *Dinner*
- 7.00–8.00 pm - Optional essay feedback
- 8.00 pm – Film (video) relevant to course

Sunday

- 9.00–9.40 am - Discussion of film
- 9.50–10.30 am- Lecture on Module Four
- 10.30–11.00 am - *Morning Tea*
- 11.10–11.45 am - Discussion
- 11.50 am–12.30 pm - Lecture on Module Four
- 12.30–2.00 pm - *Lunch*
- 1.15–2.00 pm - Optional essay feedback
- 2.00–2.45 pm - Discussion
- 2.50–3.30 pm - Lecture
- 3.30–3.50 pm - *Afternoon Tea*
- 3.50–4.30 pm - General discussion on Module Four