



# **Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum**

## **Philosophy A/T/M**

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## 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The *Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum: Philosophy* will guide the writing of the *Philosophy A/T/M* course.
- 1.2 This paper has been prepared in consultation with Professor Christian Barry of the Australian National University and the deliberations of the *Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum: Philosophy* writing panel.
- 1.3 The paper should be read in conjunction with The Shape of the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum located at:  
[http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/bsss\\_course\\_development\\_consultation](http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/bsss_course_development_consultation)

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The *Philosophy* course will be the basis of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in ACT senior secondary schools.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies is reviewing the Philosophy curriculum in the five-year course development cycle of improvement and renewal.
- 3.2 All courses under development are required to meet Board design specifications and to align with Board requirements for the senior secondary curriculum. These specifications align with ACARA course design specifications and provide teachers with flexibility to plan, teach and assess according to the needs and interests of their students.
- 3.3 The *Philosophy* course is to be redeveloped under the Humanities and Social Science Framework rather than under a *Philosophy Framework* located at:  
[http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/437300/Humanities\\_and\\_Social\\_Sciences\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/437300/Humanities_and_Social_Sciences_Framework.pdf)

Philosophy aims to make sense of the human condition and the world. They “examine what it means to be human and... ask questions about society and its influences” (HASS Framework) and “deal logically and critically with what can be subjective, complex and imperfect information” (HASS Framework). Philosophy student will undertake critical textual analysis, argumentation, and critical inquiry similar to other HASS subjects such as *Religion*, *Global Studies* and *History*. If philosophy is the ‘Love of Wisdom’ and students engage in the search for wisdom, students having some success in that search will be, as the *HASS Framework* suggests, well equipped for living their own lives well.

The rationale for this framework describes Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS):

*Humanities and Social Sciences is the study of how people process and document the human experience and their place in it. It seeks to empower students to better understand humankind, society, and culture, and communicate ideas for the future. Humanities and Social Sciences examines what it means to be human and to ask questions about society and its institutions.*

*By analysing how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of the world, it promotes empathy and understanding. It also requires students to deal critically and logically with what can be subjective, complex, and imperfect information.*

*Humanities and Social Sciences courses provide a context for the contemporary world and a framework for students to assess possible, probable, and preferred futures critically and creatively for themselves, and the world in which they live. It empowers students to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, complex, and interdependent world.*

*The study of Humanities and Social Sciences promotes well-rounded, thinking, analytical young citizens equipped for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century globalised world.*

*Courses written under this framework focus on concepts from a discipline or draw ideas from a number of disciplines. The analytical, critical and communication skills taught in Humanities and Social Sciences will be valuable for future study, work, or profession. (p.5)*

**3.4** All courses based on this framework should enable students to:

- compare and contrast theories, concepts, and principles
- critically analyse concepts, principles, ideas, and change
- synthesise different interpretations, representations, and perspectives
- evaluate significance of information, processes, and concepts
- apply critical and creative thinking skills
- reflect on own thinking and learning
- communicate creatively and critically in a range of modes for a variety of purposes.

**3.5** Concepts from the Humanities and Social Sciences Framework (page 6) build on ACARA's F-10 Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum:

- identity
- society
- change
- culture
- environment
- relationships
- empathy
- responsibility
- values.

**3.6** All courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate should enable students to develop essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners. The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum. While developing all capabilities, in particular, the *Philosophy* course will engage with the capabilities of Creative and Critical Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Understanding, and Literacy.

The General Capability of Critical and Creative Thinking will be developed by *Philosophy* through the critical examination of theories, perspectives, texts, and arguments. In developing creative and logical solutions to problems in Philosophy, and in framing ideas clearly and coherently, students will become adept and logical thinkers, which is a fundamental skill applicable to all contexts.

*In the Australian Curriculum, students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives, and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking involves students thinking broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours, and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination, and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.*

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/critical-and-creative-thinking/>

The General Capability of Intercultural Understanding will be developed by their engagement with diverse perspectives, the philosophy of different cultural contexts, and in critically analysing and reflecting on their own place within a dynamic and changing world.

*Students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to simultaneously deconstruct and value their own cultures, languages, and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national beliefs and identities are shaped and reshaped over time, and thus the variable and changing nature of culture. Intercultural understanding involves students learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.*

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/intercultural-understanding/>

Students in *Philosophy* will engage with the General Capability of Ethical Understanding by engaging with the formal study of Ethics. They will learn to apply a rigorous reasoning process to assessing ethical problems and become adept at interpreting ethical propositions. In doing so they will engage logically and thoughtfully with significant ethical questions that divide and unite people and impact on their world locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

*In the Australian Curriculum, students develop ethical understanding as they identify and investigate the nature of ethical concepts, values, and character traits, and understand how reasoning can assist ethical judgement. Ethical understanding involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict, and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others... As students engage with the elements of Ethical Understanding in an integrated way, they learn to recognise the complexity of many ethical issues. They develop a capacity to make reasoned ethical judgements through the investigation of a range of questions drawn from varied contexts in the curriculum.*

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/ethical-understanding/>

Students in *Philosophy* will engage with the General Capability of Literacy by critically analysing text and the precise and nuanced use of words in complex Philosophical texts. Their literacy will be developed in encountering some of the most complex and difficult examples of English expression ever written. Their productive literacy will be further developed in attempting to communicate complex and subtly nuanced ideas accurately and clearly.

*In Philosophy, students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society. Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse, and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas, and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school.*

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/>

## 4. THE CONTEXT OF THE ACT

### 4.1 Courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate:

- provide a variety of pathways, to meet different learning needs and encourage students to complete their secondary education
- enable students to develop the essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners
- empower students as active participants in their own learning
- engage students in contemporary issues relevant to their lives
- foster students' intellectual, social, and ethical development
- nurture students' wellbeing, and physical and spiritual development
- enable effective and respectful participation in a diverse society.

### 4.2 Each course of study:

- comprises an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum
- is based on a model of learning that integrates intended student outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment
- outlines teaching strategies which are grounded in learning principles and encompass quality teaching
- promotes intellectual quality, establishes a rich learning environment, and generates relevant connections between learning and life experiences
- provides formal assessment and certification of students' achievements.

### 4.3 In consideration of the ACT context, and in response to contemporary research and literature, a Philosophy course should include:

- a student-centred pedagogical approach
- diverse philosophical perspectives, including an awareness of their strengths and limitations
- a grounding in traditional and contemporary philosophical writing and methodologies from a range of traditions and schools
- the educational needs of young people with respect to investigating the challenges facing individuals and society
- the Humanities and Social Sciences Framework and Achievement Standards
- the needs of different schools and sectors (government and non-government)
- fostering reflection on meaning, self, ethics, and our role in the world
- creating understanding about, and proposing solutions to, problems using philosophical ideas
- developing the capacity to explore ideas and test propositions constructively and respectfully in verbal and written formats
- developing skills in research and academic integrity.

## 5. AIMS OF THE PHILOSOPHY CURRICULUM

Philosophy is the study of the nature of the human condition and of the world. “The aim is to deepen understanding. The hope is that by doing philosophy we learn to think better, to act more wisely, and thereby help to improve the quality of all our lives.” (Worley, P., 2021) Similarly, the University of Melbourne defines Philosophy as “the critical examination of big questions – foundational questions – about the nature of the world and our place in it.” But these are not entirely abstract and opaque questions without relevance to students lives.

As Stanford University Department of Philosophy argues “Philosophy should be engaged and applied, addressing questions as they arise in the real world and within the practices of other disciplines.” (Stanford University, 2021) As such, this course aims to provide opportunities for deep learning and critical thinking about self, other and the world, allowing for students to engage with myriad experiences and perspectives, whilst developing philosophical tools to both think about and propose solutions to local and global problems.

The current *Philosophy 2018-2022* course has been largely successful with providing students access to a wide range of ideas in developing their capacities to live examined lives and approach their world critically. Feedback suggest that the course might be strengthened in two ways. One area for improvement proposed in the new course is to engage with a greater range of perspective and options, including but not restricted to Western, First Nations Australian, and Asia-Pacific traditions.

Engaging with other traditions and ideas is intended to expand the cultural and global understanding of our students and to allow students from a wide range of cultures to see themselves in the curriculum. The second area for improvement is proposed that the units will be more open in their nomenclature and specifications to allow for greater choices from the array of domains of philosophical inquiry in programs of learning developed by students and teachers.

It is then proposed that the Philosophy course aims to teach students to apply philosophical ideas and methods as tools to understand the problems and concerns in their lives, and to interrogate their own convictions. The course will aim to interrogate social epistemologies, philosophical ideas, and public argumentation to give students opportunities to reflect on and test their own beliefs using critical and creative thinking skills. For example, the prevalence of anxiety and mental illness besetting young people suggests the value of providing students access to the rich philosophical tradition exploring happiness and the Good Life. Units organised around addressing questions of deep interest to students as the focus will engage students in meaningful debate and encourage them to examine and use of the ideas of their predecessors. This will empower them to ‘stand on the shoulders of giants’ in building meaning, selfhood and well-reasoned beliefs.

The Philosophy course aims to develop:

- an understanding of a range of philosophical ideas from diverse traditions and their respective strengths and limitations
- an understanding of philosophical methodologies
- an understanding of the assumptions, philosophical basis, methodology, evidence, and argument that make up a philosophical proposition
- a philosophical approach to investigating problems
- ethical understanding to clarify beliefs and practise active citizenship
- intercultural understanding by examining other traditions and by interrogating categories and propositions that undermine understanding
- literacy and numeracy skills in reading and producing complex texts
- collaboration and communication skills in engaging constructively in dialogue with others to learn and reflect on ideas
- skills in how to conduct research, communicate research findings, and collaborate effectively.

## 6. STRUCTURE OF THE PHILOSOPHY CURRICULUM

With a focus on developing an understanding of the world around them, students study philosophical ideas and methodologies. Students will be empowered to pursue their own lines of inquiry and be able to ask and begin to answer questions of interest to them.

### RATIONALE

Philosophy empowers students to understand themselves and the world. They investigate the challenges faced by individuals and society and interrogate approaches used to address, and propose solutions to, those challenges. Students critically analyse and deploy philosophical ideas from a range of periods and cultures to understand those problems and critique accepted wisdoms and arguments about solutions.

Students refine analytical and critical thinking skills and learn to question and challenge assumptions about the world around them. Students develop thinking, research, and literacy skills that allow them to evaluate, apply, and communicate philosophical ideas and their conclusions about self, life, and the world logically and coherently.

Philosophical skills, knowledge and understanding support students to become engaged, active, and reflexive citizens. As such, the study of Philosophy provides knowledge, skills and understanding to interpret and change the world, and can be utilised in a wide range of pathways, and for living an examined life.

### UNITS

The units may be delivered in any order.

#### **Knowledge and Knowing**

Students investigate and interrogate the nature of knowledge, its assumptions, and foundations. They evaluate claims to knowledge in a variety of academic and popular contexts. Students critically analyse the epistemologies of knowledge claims by applying established epistemological arguments and their own insights and propositions, including logic and First Nations Australian epistemologies. Students apply their understanding and critical and logical thinking to propose solutions to epistemological problems and communicate their insights. They develop constructive and critical dialogue with other people, existing scholarship, and popular epistemologies to address the perspectives and ideas of others and reflect on their own understanding of truth, knowledge, and wisdom.

#### **Existence and Reality**

In this unit, students explore the nature of existence and reality. They interrogate the philosophical notions of existence and reality by drawing on philosophies from a range of traditions, including Metaphysics. Students examine their assumption of their own existence, and that of others, and apply their experience of this existence to evaluate universal claims about the fundamental nature of how they exist and the reality that they exist in, including notions of origin, self, transformation, and death. Students synthesise their learning of philosophies of existence and reality in critical and creative dialogues with other perspectives, both academic and non-academic. They develop skills relevant to forming philosophical positions, including research, reflection, critical and logical thinking, and clear expression of logical argument.

#### **Construction and Application of Value**

In this unit, students explore the nature of value, including theories of Ethics and Aesthetics. They apply these philosophies to universal and particular human dilemmas and consider the significance and effects of their conclusions. They critically analyse the validity of individual and collective, decision making. They develop skills relevant to forming philosophical positions concerning value, including research, reflection, critical and logical thinking, and the clear expression of arguments. Students refine their own values and their justification of these commitments.

### **Philosophy in the World**

Students investigate issues in the world, applying philosophical theories and methods to better understand the beliefs, judgements and thinking of the actors involved, and to assist in the construction of their own robust and well-informed beliefs. Students relate the issues to their own lived experience to find parallels and give practical insights into their own behaviour, assumptions and thinking. They develop skills relevant to forming philosophical positions on contemporary issues, including research, reflection, critical and logical thinking, and clear expression of arguments. They undertake constructive philosophical dialogue with other students, existing scholarship, and members of their communities, to test their conclusions about these contemporary issues and develop broader perspectives.

### **Independent Study**

An Independent Study unit has an important place in senior secondary courses. It is a valuable pedagogical approach that empowers students to make decisions about their own learning. An Independent Study unit can be proposed by an individual student for their own independent study and negotiated with their teacher. The program of learning for an Independent Study unit must meet the unit goals and content descriptions as they appear in the course.

Students must have studied at least **THREE** standard 1.0 units from this course. An Independent Study unit requires the principal's written approval. Independent Study units are only available to individual students in Year 12. Principal approval is also required for a student in Year 12 to enrol concurrently in an Independent unit and the third 1.0 unit in a course of study.

## **7. CONSIDERATIONS**

### **7.1 Incorporating a futures orientation**

*Philosophy* equips students to engage in the world in which they live and supports their understanding of multiple experiences of the contemporary world. This aligns with the aim of the Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration, which calls for students to be “active and informed members of the community.” Students undertaking *Philosophy* focus on a course of study that enables them to engage with and understand their world and the multiple paths that a global world offers them.

### **7.2 Philosophy curriculum**

The *Philosophy* curriculum retains an important place in the ACT senior secondary curriculum. The curriculum fosters higher order thinking and the skills of critical understanding that equips students to take an active part in democratic discussion and interrogate Australia's place and role in the world. They will better understand the nature, scope, and personal connection to global issues.

*Philosophy* provides a pathway to tertiary education by developing discipline specific concepts, content, knowledge, and skills. It also develops the capacity for active citizenship that empowers students to become engaged with the broader community.

The *Philosophy* course, in developing student capacity to undertake and understand research methodologies, is consistent with calls from the OECD in the *OECD Learning Framework 2030* that students must take agency in their learning:

*Learning requires the activity and initiative of the learner – it requires the learner's agency. Active learning implies a shift from being a passive recipient of knowledge to being an active agent in the learning process. (OECD, 2018, p.2)*

In this course students will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning on topics of significance to them. Students, in developing knowledge and agency to learn about questions of importance to them, will take the first step in ‘being the change they want to see in the world’.

Similarly, Australian Education Services argues in *Global Perspectives: A Framework for Global Education in Australian Schools* that “[e]nabling young people to participate in shaping a better future for the world is at the heart of global education”.

And further, that

*It emphasises the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places. Global education promotes open-mindedness leading to a new thinking about the world and a predisposition to take action for change. Students learn to take responsibility for their actions, respect and value diversity and see themselves as global citizens who can contribute to a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world.* (Education Services Australia, 2008)

Therefore, “[h]ow schools respond to growing economic interdependence, cultural divides, new digital opportunities and calls for sustainability will have a significant impact on the well-being of all members of the communities they serve” (OECD, 2018). Assisting students to engage actively and critically in their world is then a vital element in preparing them for their future lives. The *Philosophy* senior secondary course is thus well placed to provide students with opportunities to explore critical issues and develop their ethical and conceptual framework for living in a complex, interconnected and changing world.

### **7.3 Equity and opportunity**

The *Philosophy* course provides flexibility and choice for teachers and students. The factors that influence this choice include school and community contexts, local community learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues, and available learning resources.

### **7.4 Connections to other learning areas**

The learning acquired by students in *Philosophy* is interdependent with learning in other areas such as the Sciences, Economics, Politics, Philosophy, Global Studies, History, Geography, the Arts, and English, as *Philosophy* takes texts and data from a range of disciplines as objects of study. Further in exploring epistemology, ethics, contemporary issues and aesthetics, and metaphysics, it builds skills applicable to all subjects. The curriculum for courses will identify where there are links or opportunities to build cross curriculum learning. The connections arise naturally out of the *Philosophy* curriculum.

### **7.5 Role of digital technologies**

Students and teachers integrate a growing range of online information, tools and applications of diverse origins and perspectives. These include digitised online materials such as data sets, books, newspapers, and images, as well as other online resources including databases, reference works and indexes to library holdings.

### **7.6 Clarity of curriculum**

The curriculum is substantial and flexible. It is sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience but avoids excessive prescription that would hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills. The curriculum document is expressed clearly in terms that are accessible to a new teacher, while allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.

### **7.7 Breadth and depth of study**

Content descriptions specify the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to learn and that teachers are expected to teach. Teachers are required to develop a program of learning that allows students to demonstrate all the content descriptions.

A program of learning is what a college provides to implement the course for a subject meeting students’ needs and interests. It is at the discretion of the teacher to emphasise some content

descriptions over others. The teacher may teach additional (not listed) content if it meets the specific unit goals providing that it does not duplicate content in other units.

### 7.8 The nature of the learner

The courses address the needs of diverse learners and cater for Tertiary (T), Accredited (A) and Modified (M) levels of study.

### 7.9 General capabilities

Skills and understanding related to personal and social capability, literacy and ICT are further developed and used in *Philosophy*, as are thinking skills and creativity. In addition, capabilities such as self-management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical awareness, and social competence are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area.

### 7.10 Cross curriculum perspectives

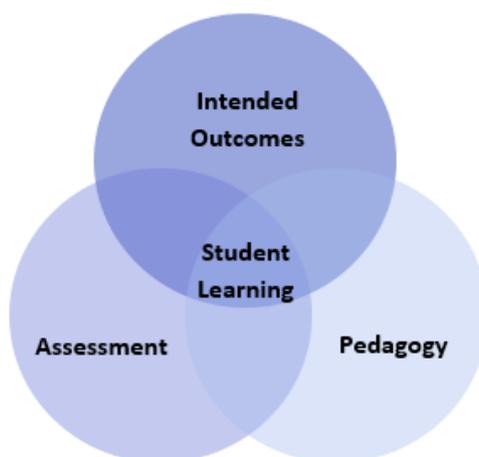
Each of these perspectives, Indigenous education, sustainability, and Australia's links with Asia, are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area. Curriculum documents are explicit as to how the perspectives are dealt with in each course and how links can be made between learning areas. These perspectives mitigate against the tendency for eurocentrism in *Philosophy*.

## 8. PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The underpinning beliefs and learning principles for the development of the ACT Board of Senior Secondary School curriculum as are follows:

### 8.1 Underpinning beliefs

- All students are able to learn
- Learning is a partnership between students and teachers
- Teachers are responsible for advancing student learning.



### 8.2 Learning Principles

1. Learning builds on existing knowledge, understandings, and skills.  
*(Prior knowledge)*
2. When learning is organised around major concepts, principles, and significant real-world issues, within and across disciplines, it helps students make connections and build knowledge structures.  
*(Deep knowledge and connectedness)*
3. Learning is facilitated when students actively monitor their own learning and consciously develop ways of organising and applying knowledge within and across contexts.  
*(Metacognition)*

4. Learners' sense of self and motivation to learn affects learning.  
(*Self-concept*)
5. Learning needs to take place in a context of high expectations.  
(*High expectations*)
6. Learners learn in different ways and at different rates.  
(*Individual differences*)
7. Different cultural environments, including the use of language, shape learners' understandings and the way they learn.  
(*Socio-cultural effects*)
8. Learning is a social and collaborative function as well as an individual one.  
(*Collaborative learning*)
9. Learning is strengthened when learning outcomes and criteria for judging learning are made explicit and when students receive frequent feedback on their progress.  
(*Explicit expectations and feedback*).

## 9. CONCLUSION

The *Philosophy* course is to be developed under the *Humanities and Social Sciences Framework*. The study of Humanities and Social Sciences promotes critical and creative thinking and intercultural understanding, equipping young citizens for the demands, challenges, and distinct opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The *Philosophy* course equips students to analyse themselves and their world, and local, national, and global issues and the problems and opportunities that they face in the contemporary world.

## 10. REFERENCES

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## 11. READINGS

Additional readings for the preparation of this Shape paper:

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