

PHILOSOPHY: A VERSATILE DEGREE

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY'S VALUE FOR ANY CAREER PATH

A recent survey of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that of all the practical and intellectual skills that employers are looking for in potential employees, the “ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing” and “critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills” are the most important. These are precisely the sorts of skills that the standardized tests for admittance to graduate, business, and law school are designed to test for, and the data demonstrate that philosophy majors do *extraordinarily* well on them.

Whatever your chosen career path, majoring or double-majoring in philosophy can give you a competitive edge on the job market. Employers know that philosophy majors are well trained in ethics and critical thinking. They know philosophy majors will be good communicators, and are well trained in the basic skills of reasoning and problem solving. They naturally expect philosophy majors to be disciplined, determined, ambitious, agile, open minded, and highly intelligent. These are the traits that will take you beyond entry level positions into mid- and high-level positions. Indeed, a recent study of 1.2 million people reported in the *Wall Street Journal* found that the mid-career median salary of philosophy majors is \$81,200—the highest among all humanities and social science majors except economics. As a recent article in *Forbes* magazine points out, “if you looked at the pay of people 15 years out, philosophy is in the top 10%.” Whether you’re headed for a career in business, information technology, social services, law, or the health professions, having majored or double-majored in philosophy will distinguish you from the pack.

PHILOSOPHY MAJORS EXCEL AT TESTS FOR ADVANCED DEGREES

Graduate Record Examination (GRE):

The GRE is required for many areas of graduate school. In a three year study (2001–2004), people taking the GRE for philosophy graduate school scored highest in verbal reasoning (even ahead of English majors) and highest in analytical writing (even ahead of engineering majors) and scored high in quantitative reasoning (ahead of accounting majors).

Law School Admission Test (LSAT):

Philosophy majors typically do extremely well on the LSAT, outperforming students who major in political science and criminal justice. In 2007-2008, economics, philosophy and theology majors averaged 157.4, surpassed only by majors in physics and mathematics (who averaged 160).

Graduate Management Admission Test

(GMAT): Business schools use the GMAT to measure potential for success in graduate programs, including MBA programs. Philosophy majors tend to score higher than every major except mathematics, physics, and engineering. In five years, from 2006 to 2011, the average score for philosophy majors was higher (by as much as 100 points) than the average score for every kind of business major (with the single exception of actuarial science in 2008-2009). Profile of GMAT Candidates: Five Year Summary 2006-2011, pp. 11-13.

Philosophy majors excel in a wide variety of paths because they learn broadly useful reasoning skills. These skills foster depth of expertise and flexibility. In an uncertain economy, one where most individuals change jobs and careers over the course of their life, the broadly useful skills that philosophy majors learn are more important than ever.

Businesses value Philosophy

“Want Innovative Thinking? Hire from the Humanities”

Harvard Business Review, March 31, 2011. As Amos Shapira, the CEO of Cellcom, the leading cell phone provider in Israel, put it: “The knowledge I use as CEO can be acquired in two weeks...The main thing a student needs to be taught is how to study and analyze things (including) history and philosophy...”

“Philosophy is Back in Business”

Business Week, January 12, 2010. “Forget economics. Philosophy offers a deeper, broader way of thinking to help guide companies through times made tougher by overspecialized experts.”

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Questions?

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331 Moral Problems in Medicine
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340 Aesthetics
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364 Metaphysics: God, Minds, and Matter
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483 Philosophy of Biology
485 Philosophy of Physics
490 Independent Study
496/596 Ecology and Society
535 Contemporary Political Philosophy

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A PHILOSOPHY COURSE?

Philosophy courses tend to focus on fundamental questions about life, reality, and knowledge. In a philosophy course, students will read thought-provoking works. Students develop skills to interpret controversial points of view charitably, identify unstated assumptions, and distinguish relevant information from unimportant rhetorical flourishes. They are able to assess positions and their alternatives and identify underlying points of agreement and disagreement. Although there may be no single “right” answer, it is not true that any answer is just as good as another. Students are expected to provide reasons that make a clear case for accepting their point of view. Philosophy courses tend to be highly discussion-oriented and writing-intensive, improving clarity of presentation and argumentative rigor. Especially in courses numbered 300 and higher, enrollment is limited to facilitate discussion and provide students opportunities to engage with their peers and the professor. More than most other majors, philosophy encourages students to examine and develop their own points of view, rather than uncritically accept the current state of research. These skills of charitable interpretation and independence of critical thought enable philosophy majors to excel in a variety of career paths and lifelong activities.

Coursework in metaphysics (364), philosophy of science (380, 483, 485, 336, 343), and the theory of knowledge (366, 460) can deepen your understanding of the methods and assumptions of natural science and social science. Coursework in the history of philosophy (310, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318) can expand your understanding of the development of Western thought. Coursework in ethics (230, 235, 330, 430), applied ethics (331, 334, 336), feminist philosophy (338), philosophy of law (332), and social and political philosophy (335, 535) can provide a framework for work in social science, business, criminology, health professions, or safety science. Philosophical study of aesthetics (340) may be of interest to fine arts majors, and study of the mind (465) or free will (450) may be of interest to psychology majors.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A major in philosophy requires 33 credits in philosophy (eleven courses). At least fifteen of these credits shall come from the core curriculum, and at least six credits shall come from courses numbered 400 or above. The core curriculum requires:

One from: 330 (Ethical Theory), 335 (Social and Political Philosophy), or 535 (Contemporary Political Philosophy);

310 (Ancient Philosophy);

Either 314 (17th Century Philosophy) or 315 (18th Century Philosophy);

One from: 364 (God, Minds, and Matter), 366 (Truth, Belief, and Reason), or 380 (Philosophy of Science); and

207 (Introduction to Symbolic Logic)

ADDING PHILOSOPHY AS A SECOND MAJOR

Combining a philosophy major with other majors is a great way to gain knowledge of philosophy and a deeper understanding of the conceptual foundations of the other major. The requirements for philosophy as a second major are the same as the requirements for the major. Philosophy may be designated as the primary or secondary major.

MINOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A minor in philosophy is an excellent complement to any major. The minor in philosophy requires fifteen credits (five courses) in philosophy. At least nine of these credits shall come from courses numbered 300 or above.

LAW SCHOOL AND PHILOSOPHY

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY PROVIDES NECESSARY SKILLS

Many people who are interested in going on to careers in law find philosophy classes truly rewarding, and there are good reasons why. Law schools know that philosophy is one of the best pre-law majors. The skills developed from taking philosophy courses – such as careful, critical writing about detailed arguments – are the very ones needed to succeed in law school.

- engaging in diagnosis (of situations, arguments, or positions)
- thinking clearly and with organization
- discerning and evaluating evidence
- creative thinking; the ability to imagine alternative scenarios
- logic, induction, deduction
- inference to the best explanation
- articulating thoughts concisely, precisely and without ambiguity
- being attuned to the importance of people, their rights and welfare.

HIGHEST SCORES ON LSAT

Philosophy majors typically do extremely well on the LSAT, outperforming students who major in political science and criminal justice. In 2007-2008, economics, philosophy and theology majors averaged 157.4, the highest of any major with over 1000 students to take the exam.

More than anything, law schools are looking for students who have acquired significant analytic skills and the capacity to present arguments in a compelling way. For these reasons, philosophy is widely regarded as an excellent preparation for law school and a career in law. Students who wish to prepare for law school should therefore consider a major in philosophy.

TABLE 1. Average 2007-2008 LSAT Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	No. of students
1	Economics	157.4	3,047
1	Philosophy	157.4	2,184
3	Engineering	156.2	2,197
4	History	155.9	4,166
5	English	154.7	5,120
6	Finance	153.4	2,267
7	Political Science	153.0	14,964
8	Psychology	152.5	4,355
9	Sociology	150.7	1,902
10	Communications	150.5	2,230
11	Business Administration	149.1	1,971
12	Criminal Justice	145.5	3,306

Note: For major fields with at least 1,900 students taking the exam. Source: Michael Nieswiadomy, "LSAT Scores of Economic Majors: The 2008-2009 Class Update"

From The Council on Legal Education and Opportunity, American Bar Association:

"In assessing a prospective law student's educational qualifications, admissions committees generally consider the chosen curriculum, the grades earned, and the reputation of the colleges attended. ...Solid grades in courses such as **logic, philosophy**, and abstract mathematics are generally considered a plus. ... Contrary to popular belief, law schools do not favor political science, criminal justice, and government majors over others. Choose major and elective courses that you will genuinely enjoy, instead of those you were told were required for prelaw students. You are likely to get better grades in a field you find interesting. This is especially true if the courses you take are known to be more difficult, such as **philosophy, engineering, and science**. Also, look for courses that will strengthen the skills you need in law school. Classes that stress research and writing are excellent preparation for law school, as are courses that teach **reasoning and analytical skills**."

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Philosophical Topics of Interest to Students Preparing for Law:

Are we obligated to obey the law? What kinds of punishment are unjust? What is the relationship between morality and legality?

What obligations do institutions have to society?

What role do institutions have in the problems of racism or sexism?

What is the nature of coercion?

Does moral responsibility require free will?

Philosophy Classes of Interest to Students Preparing for Law or Policy:

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BUSINESS AND PHILOSOPHY

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

Recent articles in popular business periodicals have demonstrated the value of a degree in philosophy for people who are interested in careers in business or finance. Business employers seek employees who are able to extract key information from dense reports, summarize the information clearly, and assess the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. These critical thinking skills prized by companies are developed in every philosophy course.

"Want Innovative Thinking? Hire from the Humanities"

Harvard Business Review, March 31, 2011. As Amos Shapira, the CEO of Cellcom, the leading cell phone provider in Israel, put it: "The knowledge I use as CEO can be acquired in two weeks...The main thing a student needs to be taught is how to study and analyze things (including) history and philosophy..."

"Philosophy is Back in Business"

Business Week, January 12, 2010. "Forget economics. Philosophy offers a deeper, broader way of thinking to help guide companies through times made tougher by overspecialized experts."

PHILOSOPHY MAJORS OUTPERFORM BUSINESS MAJORS ON THE GMAT

Business schools use the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) to measure potential for success in graduate programs, including MBA programs. Philosophy majors tend to score higher than every major except mathematics, physics, and engineering. In five years, from 2006 to 2011, the average score for philosophy majors was higher (by as much as 100 points) than the average score for every kind of business major (with the single exception of actuarial science in 2008-2009). *Profile of GMAT Candidates: Five Year Summary 2006-2011*, pp. 11-13.

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO STUDENTS PREPARING FOR BUSINESS CAREERS:

What distinguishes right action from wrong action?
What obligations do institutions have to society?
What is power? What is the relationship between power and capital?
What are our obligations to obey the law?
Who owns the rights to property? How should we understand intellectual property?
What is technology?
What distribution of resources is most just?

"I Think, Therefore I Earn"

The Guardian, November 20, 2007. "A philosophy degree has trained the individual's brain and given them the ability to provide management-consulting firms with the sort of skills that they require and clients demand. These skills can include the ability to be very analytical, provide clear and innovative thinking, and question assumptions."

"The Management Myth"

The Atlantic, June 2006. "If you want to succeed in business, don't get an M.B.A. Study philosophy instead."

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Philosophy Courses of Interest to Students Preparing for Business:

In these courses, students learn about philosophical theories that are essential to business practice and values. Businesses shape our lives in numerous ways: as employers, as service providers, and as producers. Individuals in business face moral questions about how to deal with coworkers, customers, vendors, pollution and waste, etc. Moral considerations arise persistently and yet many in business lack the tools to deal confidently and thoughtfully with ethical situations. Similarly, creative yet critical thinking is essential. A gut feeling or instinct is a good starting point, but without careful consideration they can lead to failure. Finally, philosophy students learn clear written and verbal communication, which are essential in business.

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MED SCHOOL AND PHILOSOPHY

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY PROVIDES NECESSARY SKILLS

Many people who are interested in going on to careers in medicine find philosophy classes truly rewarding, and there are good reasons why. Many of the skills and tendencies emphasized are similar - for instance:

- engaging in diagnosis (of situations, arguments, or positions)
- thinking clearly and with organization
- discerning and evaluating evidence
- creative thinking; the ability to imagine alternative scenarios
- logic, induction, deduction
- inference to the best explanation
- articulating thoughts concisely, precisely and without ambiguity
- being attuned to the importance of people, their rights and welfare.

SECOND HIGHEST ACCEPTANCE RATE TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

It's true that few pre-med students choose to major in philosophy. The Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) book for 2000-2001 shows that only 0.5% of medical school applicants were Philosophy Majors in 1998. However, 50.2% of these were accepted, which is the second highest rate (just behind History at 52.7% - Biology majors were a mere 39.9%). In the previous year, the acceptance rate for Philosophy majors was the highest of all at 53%!

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO STUDENTS PREPARING FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL:

Is there a right to die? A right to be helped to die?

When is it right to make a decision on someone else's behalf, "for that person's own good" or does that undermine autonomy?

Is there a way to validate/justify the scientific method?

Are beliefs based on empirical observation the only kind of beliefs that can be known/justified?

How should doctors understand the human body and its relation to the mind?

What do terms like "health" and "harm" mean?

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges:

"Entrance requirements at most medical schools include completion of course work in biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, and English. But keep your undergraduate experience well rounded by also studying humanities and the social sciences. The ideal physician understands how society works and can communicate and write well.

"It should be strongly emphasized that a science major is not a prerequisite for medical school, and students should not major in science simply because they believe this will increase their chances for acceptance"

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Philosophy Courses of Interest to Students Preparing for Medical School:

In these courses, students learn about philosophical theories that underlie medical practice, research, and values. It is hard to think of many fields in which moral considerations come up as much as in medicine, and yet many in medicine lack the tools to deal confidently and thoughtfully with ethical situations. Similarly, many medical professionals lack a grounding in the views that ground medical policy: the respect for autonomy that leads us to allow refusal of treatment, or the sense of rights that keeps us from harvesting organs from unwilling live donors. Similarly, theoretical issues form the basis for our ideas about the scientific method, scientific progress, the knowledge we gain from medicine, and other issues explored in the Philosophy of Science.

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PHILOSOPHY & COMPUTER SCIENCE

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY DEVELOPS COMPUTER SCIENCE SKILLS

People who are interested in pursuing careers in engineering may find philosophy classes truly rewarding, and there are good reasons why. There are many overlapping skills. Philosophy helps develop them in broader contexts:

- identifying problems, weaknesses, and strengths (of situations, arguments, or positions)
- thinking clearly and with organization
- discerning and evaluating evidence
- creative thinking; the ability to imagine alternative scenarios
- logic, induction, deduction
- inference to the best explanation
- articulating thoughts concisely, precisely and without ambiguity

PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS OF INTEREST TO COMPUTER SCIENTISTS

How should we understand and protect intellectual property?

Who owns the rights to intellectual property?

What is technology and how does it relate to science?

How can we develop and use technology in a morally responsible manner?

Is it morally permissible to genetically modify foods?

How should we balance the interests of technological innovation and preservation of the environment?

Is there a way to validate/justify the scientific method?

Are beliefs based on empirical observation the only kind of beliefs that can be known/justified?

If determinism were true, would that undermine free will and moral responsibility?

What is the nature of consciousness?
Can there be artificial intelligence?

Can evolution account for design?

VALUE OF PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS IN TECHNICAL FIELDS

Philosophy as an academic discipline simply tries to focus this methodology on very tough questions and problems: "What is the right thing to do?", "How does science give us knowledge?", "How does language work when it takes the form of a proof?", "Do we have free will?", "What is the relationship between the mind and the body?" In fact, in its attempts to solve these problems, it is not at all unlike engineering in its methods. What is unique about philosophy is its excitement about addressing problems for which there is very little in the way of empirical data, and for which it is not clear that an experiment could be devised to obtain empirical data.

Thus philosophy is very much at home in an environment that focuses on science and engineering. Philosophers are often interested in scientific discoveries and technological solutions. Scientists and engineers trained in philosophy can think more deeply about the conceptual foundations of their methods and the ethical implications of their activities.

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Philosophy courses tend to focus on fundamental questions about life, reality, and knowledge. In a philosophy course, students will read thought-provoking works. Students develop skills to interpret controversial points of view charitably, identify unstated assumptions, and distinguish relevant information from unimportant rhetorical flourishes. They are able to assess positions and their alternatives and identify underlying points of agreement and disagreement. Although there may be no single “right” answer, it is not true that any answer is just as good as another. Students are expected to provide reasons that make a clear case for accepting their point of view. Philosophy courses tend to be highly discussion-oriented and writing-intensive, improving clarity of presentation and argumentative rigor. Especially in courses numbered 300 and higher, enrollment is limited to facilitate discussion and provide students opportunities to engage with their peers and the professor. More than most other majors, philosophy encourages students to examine and develop their own points of view, rather than uncritically accept the current state of research. These skills of charitable interpretation and independence of critical thought enable philosophy majors to excel in a variety of career paths and lifelong activities.

PHILOSOPHY COURSES OF INTEREST TO STUDENTS IN COMPUTER SCIENCE:

201 (Introduction to Philosophy) * 206 (Introduction to Logic and Scientific reasoning) * 207 (Introduction to Symbolic Logic) * 230 (Moral Theory and Practice) * 332 (Philosophy of Law) * 330 (Ethical Theory) * 334 (Environmental Ethics) * 336 (Bioethics and Biotechnology) * 343 (Philosophy of Technology) * 364 (God, Minds, and Matter) * 366 (Truth, Belief, and Reason) * 314 (17th Century Philosophy) * 315 (18th Century Philosophy) * 318 (20th and 21st Century Anglo-American Philosophy) * 380 (Philosophy of Science) * 450 (Persons and Causes, Free Will) * 460 (Epistemology and Metaphysics) * 465 (Brains, Minds, and Computers) * 483 (Philosophy of Biology) * 485 (Philosophy of Physics) * 496 (Ecology and Society)

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A major in philosophy requires 33 credits in philosophy (eleven courses). At least fifteen of these credits shall come from the core curriculum, and at least six credits shall come from courses numbered 400 or above. The core curriculum requires:

One from: 330 (Ethical Theory), 335 (Social and Political Philosophy), or 535 (Contemporary Political Philosophy);

310 (Ancient Philosophy);

Either 314 (17th Century Philosophy) or 315 (18th Century Philosophy);

One from: 364 (God, Minds, and Matter), 366 (Truth, Belief, and Reason), or 380 (Philosophy of Science); and

207 (Introduction to Symbolic Logic)

ADDING PHILOSOPHY AS A SECOND MAJOR

Combining a philosophy major with other majors is a great way to gain knowledge of philosophy and a deeper understanding of the conceptual foundations of the other major. The requirements for philosophy as a second major are the same as the requirements for the major. Philosophy may be designated as the primary or secondary major.

MINOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A minor in philosophy is an excellent complement to any major. The minor in philosophy requires fifteen credits (five courses) in philosophy. At least nine of these credits shall come from courses numbered 300 or above.

PHILOSOPHY AND ENGINEERING

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY DEVELOPS ENGINEERING SKILLS

People who are interested in pursuing careers in engineering may find philosophy classes truly rewarding, and there are good reasons why. There are many overlapping skills. Philosophy helps develop them in broader contexts:

- identifying problems, weaknesses, and strengths (of situations, arguments, or positions)
- thinking clearly and with organization
- discerning and evaluating evidence
- creative thinking; the ability to imagine alternative scenarios
- logic, induction, deduction
- inference to the best explanation
- articulating thoughts concisely, precisely and without ambiguity

PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS OF INTEREST TO ENGINEERS

What is technology and how does it relate to science?

How can we develop and use technology in a morally responsible manner?

Is it morally permissible to genetically modify foods?

How should we balance the interests of technological innovation and preservation of the environment?

Who owns the rights to property? How should we understand intellectual property?

Is there a way to validate/justify the scientific method?

Are beliefs based on empirical observation the only kind of beliefs that can be known/justified?

If determinism were true, would that undermine free will and moral responsibility?

What is the nature of consciousness? Can there be artificial intelligence?

Can evolution account for design?

VALUE OF PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS IN TECHNICAL FIELDS

Philosophy as an academic discipline simply tries to focus this methodology on very tough questions and problems: "What is the right thing to do?", "How does science give us knowledge?", "How does language work when it takes the form of a proof?", "Do we have free will?", "What is the relationship between the mind and the body?" In fact, in its attempts to solve these problems, it is not at all unlike engineering in its methods. What is unique about philosophy is its excitement about addressing problems for which there is very little in the way of empirical data, and for which it is not clear that an experiment could be devised to obtain empirical data.

Thus philosophy is very much at home in an environment that focuses on science and engineering. Philosophers are often interested in scientific discoveries and technological solutions. Scientists and engineers trained in philosophy can think more deeply about the conceptual foundations of their methods and the ethical implications of their activities.

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

Questions?

E-mail

Prof. Annemarie Butler
butlera@iastate.edu

201 Introduction to Philosophy
206 Introduction to Logic and Scientific Reasoning
207 Introduction to Symbolic Logic
230 Moral Theory and Practice
235 Ethical Issues in A Diverse Society
310 Ancient Philosophy
314 17th Century Philosophy
315 18th Century Philosophy
316 19th Century Continental
317 20th and 21st Century Continental Philosophy
318 20th and 21st Century Anglo-American Philosophy
330 Ethical Theory
331 Moral Problems in Medicine
332 Philosophy of Law
334 Environmental Ethics
335 Social and Political Philosophy
336 Bioethics and Biotechnology
338 Feminist Philosophy
340 Aesthetics
343 Philosophy of Technology
350 Philosophy of Religion
364 Metaphysics: God, Minds, and Matter
366 Truth, Belief and Reason
380 Philosophy of Science
430 Value Theory
450 Persons and Causes (Free Will)
460 Epistemology and Metaphysics
465 Brains, Minds, and Computers
483 Philosophy of Biology
485 Philosophy of Physics
490 Independent Study
496/596 Ecology and Society
535 Contemporary Political Philosophy

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