

# Major Possibilities: Philosophy



## *Summary*

- Philosophy is a mode of engaging thoughtfully and critically with the grounding ideas and assumptions of human practices. Such thinking includes reflection on the relationship between different forms of knowledge and the material world, as well as reflection on the intertwining social, historical and geographical forms of power and human community.
- Philosophy majors learn strong research, writing and analytical skills that are broadly applicable in many occupations.
- Of Philosophy undergraduates, 52 % eventually go on for a higher degree, in law school or with a PhD program, 30 % work as clergy or in other religious positions, 30 % work in the private, for-profit sector called executive administration and managerial, 5 % work as writers, editors, broadcasters, and public relations specialists, and the rest are scattered in a broad range of occupations (2000 Occupational Outlook Handbook).

## *Philosophy major synopsis*

Courses in philosophy develop a wide range of intellectual abilities and offer a unique opportunity for students to develop their own modes of thoughtful and critical engagement with different domains of knowledge and practice. The emphasis is on primary texts and a careful discussion of them and their ideas. The curriculum aims to cultivate philosophy as a self-reflective practice and therefore emphasizes the history of Western philosophy as vitally important to contemporary philosophy. Students take classes on ethics, religion, race, culture, feminism, and more, as well as history classes on philosophical movements.

## *Sample occupational areas*

### **Law**

No special coursework is required for law school, but a Philosophy major can leave graduates well equipped for the rigors of law school. Many skills that are needed for philosophy majors—such as analyzing dense written material and reasoning through both profound and mundane questions—are important to the study of law, as well. Lawyers can be described as philosophers trained in specifics of a country's legal system. Law students are famously subjected to a distinctly philosophical form of on-the-spot classroom quizzes known as the Socratic Method, based on the teaching style of the famous philosopher.

### **Healthcare professions**

Philosophy graduates are well-represented in the medical profession, both as practitioners and administrators. Traditionally, medical schools look favorably upon candidates with a liberal arts degree, especially from philosophy departments. Career paths in medicine can be in psychiatry, orthopedics, dentistry, oncology, etc. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, Philosophy majors had the highest acceptance rates out of all the majors that applied to medical school. Graduates with a degree in Philosophy stand out in their applications because they are more unique than the biology and pre-med majors.

### **Business**

Philosophy majors, when going into an interview, have an advantage over other applicants because their major shows that they are intrigued by difficult and fundamental problems, that their interests are broad, that they have a good head, and that they express themselves well. The ability to look at old problems and process them in a new way is invaluable in the business world. Students thinking of going for MBA degrees do not need to major in business or economics alone; the best MBA schools like to admit students who have shown interests in other areas, such as history, languages, and philosophy, in addition to finance and management.

### **Communications**

People with degrees in Philosophy can choose from a variety of occupations in communication, such as journalism, public relations, editing, marketing, and advertising. Philosophers have the skills necessary to be good communicators, in both speaking and writing. Philosophy is one of the best possible majors for aspiring journalists, especially at schools that may not offer a separate Journalism major. Aside from teaching students to write well, analyze facts critically, and developing research skills, courses in ethics, political philosophy, and the history of ideas expand students' conceptual repertoire and provide essential background knowledge for informed journalists whose work will make a positive contribution towards educating their society. In public relations, an ability to help justify an institution's work, its future projects, and to develop consistent policies on controversial issues, can also be a vital asset for PR work with larger organizations. Even if a student majors in Communications, a minor in Philosophy would still be an invaluable addition to a future career in communications.

### **Foreign Service and diplomacy**

Like political science or government, a Philosophy major is often excellent preparation for positions in state or national civil services, policy research institutions, jobs as congressional aides and researchers, and so on. If you are planning to go on to take an advanced degree in public policy, government administration, international affairs, or similar programs, an undergraduate major in philosophy will provide an excellent basis for further study in applied political fields. In international affairs when working with people of different cultures in occupations such as ambassador or cultural advisor, the philosophical ability to discover unconscious assumptions and work around them is particularly important.

## Religion and Ministry

Students who go on for advanced degrees in theology or into seminaries to study for the ministry often start with an undergraduate degree in philosophy, which is often as good as a theology or religious studies major for these purposes. It is good to have some training in philosophy if planning to work in areas related to theology. Both fields deal with various ways in which human beings have tried to understand and give expression to the nature and meaning of reality, knowledge, the self, values, and the purpose of human life.

## Sample job titles

### Art, Media, and Entertainment

Author  
Archeological Assistant  
Archivist  
Arts Consultant  
Critic  
Editor  
Freelance Writer  
Journalist  
Producer/Director  
Public Relations Coordinator  
Publisher

### Government, Service, and Education

Administrator  
Ambassador  
Defense Attorney  
Foreign Service Officer  
Information Systems  
Judge  
Lawyer  
Missionary Worker  
Museum Guide  
Nursing Home Director

Professor  
Public Policy Manager  
Public Service Official  
Real Estate Attorney  
Researcher  
Salvation Army Worker  
Social Worker  
Teacher

### Industry and Commerce

Administrative Assistant  
Banker

### Business Administration

Business Administrator  
Claims Adjuster  
Consultant  
Counselor  
Employee Interviewer  
Entrepreneur  
Financial Consultant  
Insurance Underwriter  
Lobbyist  
Management Analyst/Trainee  
Sales Analyst

## Sample internship employers of SU students

American College of Dublin (Ireland)  
American Studies Program (Washington, DC)  
Art Palace (Austin, TX)  
CAPA London Program  
CATO Institute (Washington, DC)

Central Texas Marketing (Austin, TX)  
First United Methodist Church (Georgetown, TX)  
Pace University (New York City, NY)  
Office of U.S. Representative Lon Burnam (Austin, TX)  
The American University (Washington, DC)

## Sample full-time employers of SU grads

Administration Assistant (UT System)  
Community Support/Job Coach  
Content Editor (Expert Village)  
GIS Specialist (Landworks, Inc.)  
Kindergarten Preparedness Teacher (Children's Center of Austin)  
Legal Assistant (Smith Robertson Law Firm)

Location Specialist (Supportkids.com)  
Management Trainee (Enterprise Rent-A-Car)  
Officer Candidate (TX National Guard)  
PSW Technologies  
Publishing Work (Lerner)  
Volunteer (AmeriCorps)

## Professional Associations

American Philosophical Association: [www.apaonline.org](http://www.apaonline.org)  
American Philosophical Practitioners Association: [www.appa.edu](http://www.appa.edu)  
American Philosophical Society: [www.amphilsoc.org](http://www.amphilsoc.org)  
American Society for Aesthetics: [www.aesthetics-online.org](http://www.aesthetics-online.org)  
American Society for Philosophy, Counseling & Psychotherapy: [www.aspcp.org](http://www.aspcp.org)  
Society of Christian Philosophers: [www.siu.edu/~scp/](http://www.siu.edu/~scp/)  
The Society for Women in Philosophy: [www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/](http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/)

## Additional Web resources

Academic Position Network: [www.apnjobs.com](http://www.apnjobs.com)  
Guide to College Majors in Philosophy: [www.worldwidelearn.com/online-education-guide/arts-humanities/philosophy-major.htm](http://www.worldwidelearn.com/online-education-guide/arts-humanities/philosophy-major.htm)  
Fordham University: [www.fordham.edu/philosophy/undergraduate/careers.htm](http://www.fordham.edu/philosophy/undergraduate/careers.htm)  
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)  
Philosophy Now: [www.philosophynow.org](http://www.philosophynow.org)  
Philosophy Pages: [www.philosophypages.com](http://www.philosophypages.com)  
The Galilean Library: [www.galilean-library.org/philosophy.php](http://www.galilean-library.org/philosophy.php)  
University of Maryland: [www.philosophy.umd.edu/deptwebsite/undergraduateprogram/careers/careers-philosophy-majors.html](http://www.philosophy.umd.edu/deptwebsite/undergraduateprogram/careers/careers-philosophy-majors.html)

## Career Services' print resources

50 Best Jobs for Your Personality  
Careers for Scholars and Other Deep Thinkers  
Careers in Law  
Philosophers at Work: Issues and Practice of Philosophy  
Opportunities in Nonprofit Organization Careers  
Jobs and Careers with Non-Profit Organizations  
Opportunities in Religious Service Careers

Philosophers at Work  
The Legal Career Guide: From Law Student to Lawyer  
The WetFeet Insider Guide to Careers in Non-Profit and Government Agencies  
Vault Career Guide to Media and Entertainment  
Vault MBA Career Bible