



Student News

Special Edition

You can do a lot with a philosophy degree!

If you think the only use you can put a philosophy degree to is mountain sitting and navel contemplation—think again.

A degree in philosophy will train you for the rigors of almost any demanding job, whether in academia, law, business or any number of other areas that require writing, verbal and reasoning skills.

"Philosophy is challenging," says philosophy Professor Ed Sherline. "You develop skills in reading comprehension, logical reasoning, problem-solving and other aspects of critical thinking. And you can't take a philosophy course without writing a number of papers. By the time you graduate, your writing ability will have improved considerably."

Many philosophy majors plan to pursue graduate work. A philosophy degree will prepare them to pursue graduate work in a variety of fields: cognitive sciences, artificial intelligence, mathematics, law, business and any other

area that requires abstract, rigorous reasoning.

In law school, for instance, students don't memorize laws, they learn to reason about cases and opinions.

"A law professor told me, 'All we're doing in law schools is teaching them to be philosophers,'" Dr. Sherline says. He points out that philosophy majors score very high on the LSAT, the test students are required to take before entering law school. The only majors that score above philosophy in the LSAT are economics and math.

"Prelaw students should major in what interests them," Dr. Sherline says. "Many of our majors plan on going to law school, but they are in philosophy for the love of wisdom."

Artificial intelligence (AI) is another area where a philosophy degree can be put to good use. Computer science Professor Karl Branting, whose specialty is artificial intelligence, holds an undergraduate degree in philosophy, as well as a law degree

and a Ph.D. in computer science. AI uses the same symbolic logic in programming and reasoning that philosophy uses. One essential area of philosophy is exploring how humans gain knowledge, a key question in artificial intelligence, which seeks to emulate experts in a variety of fields.

If your plans include going for an advanced business degree, you should know that philosophy majors score among the highest of any major GMAT, the test required for entry into graduate school. Those with an undergraduate business degree scored among the lowest on the GMAT.

"If you want to go to grad school in business, don't major in business, major in philosophy with a minor in business," Dr. Sherline says. "Philosophy develops those fundamental skill you can't obtain if you are just loaded with facts. Graduate programs in general are looking for people who can think well."

If your plans don't include

an advanced degree, you could still benefit from a philosophy degree, for the very reasons that would be valuable in graduate school: writing, verbal and reasoning skills.

"As an end degree, philosophy won't get you a certification and allow you to hang out your shingle and become a guru," Dr. Sherline says. "But companies that understand the rigors that a philosophy degree requires are just as willing to hire a philosophy major as any other kind of major." Philosophy majors are in the same boat, he says, as English, history, fine arts or many other majors without advanced degrees.

If you can't make up your mind about what you want to major in, take a look at some of the philosophy courses that explore various areas on a theoretical level. Investigating the philosophy of literature or science or ethics or any number of other areas will help the generalist or dabbler focus in on what most interests him or her.