

## Why Major In Philosophy?

Here are few reasons you might want to think about when considering a major in philosophy:

### ***1. Philosophy is interesting***

A philosophical education means studying some of the “big” questions that many people—including some of the greatest minds in human history—have grappled with:

- Can we prove that God does (or does not) exist?
- Does life have meaning?
- Are morals truths absolute or relative to culture?
- Do we know what we think we know?
- Is there more to a good life than happiness?
- Do we have an obligation to always obey the law?
- Is abortion morally right (or wrong)?
- Should there be laws against smoking marijuana?
- Do we have souls or are we just “physical stuff”?
- Do we have free will or are we determined?

Now you may believe that deciding on a major is a serious matter and so satisfying intellectual curiosity is hardly a compelling reason to study philosophy. Such reasoning may seem especially compelling if one sees the point of a university education is to secure a good job. Of course choosing a major is a serious matter, but studies show that almost half of undergraduate students do not work in a profession related to their major.<sup>1</sup> If there is a good chance that you will not work in a field related to your major, then choosing a major that you are interested in may well be an important consideration: succeeding academically is usually easier when you have a genuine interest in the subject. If you have an interest in the “big questions” then this is a good reason to major in philosophy, for it may well help you to succeed at university.

### ***2. Philosophy majors succeed in the corporate world***

For millennia students of philosophy have been lampooned for having their “heads in the clouds”. Empirical research suggests otherwise: philosophy majors do very well in the corporate world. In general, philosophy majors tend to have little trouble finding jobs, with a 98.9% employment rate.<sup>2</sup> It is true that in their initial placement in the corporate world, philosophy majors tend to make less and start lower in the corporate hierarchy than their peers with engineering or business degrees. However, studies consistently show that philosophy majors tend to rise to the top much quicker. This may seem surprising, but as philosopher Thomas Hurka explains:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/winter/art02.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/winter/art02.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cep.unt.edu/times.html>

The more abstract a subject, the more it develops pure reasoning skills; and the stronger a person's reasoning skills, the better he or she will do in any applied field.

This fits the data from business. Corporations report that, though technical skills are most important in low-level managerial jobs, they become less so in middle and top jobs, where the key traits include communication skills, the ability to formulate problems, and reasoning. A liberal-arts education may be weak in the prerequisites for beginning managerial jobs, but provides just what's needed for success at the top.<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, employers are seeking out graduating philosophy majors precisely for their reasoning, writing and communication skills.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Philosophy Majors Do Extremely Well On Graduate Testing**

A philosophy major has long been recognized as providing valuable training for graduate school admission testing. The following table summarizes how well philosophy majors scored (second only to math majors) on the average of LSAT, GMAT and GRE testing<sup>5</sup>.

Major	LSAT	GMAT	GRE (verbal)	GRE (Quantative)	Average
Mathematics adjust box	+12.8%	+13.3%	+2.7%	+26.3%	+13.8%
Philosophy	+8.7%	+11.0%	+17.6%	+4.6%	+10.5%
Chemistry	+7.6%	+7.5%	+2.1%	+18.3	+8.9%
Biology	+4.0%	+3.3%	+5.4%	+8.0%	+5.2%
English	+5.6%	+4.1%	+14.5%	-5.7%	+4.6%
History	+2.9%	+4.6%	+10.8%	-5.5%	+3.2%
Foreign Langs.	+5.7%	+3.3%	+7.9%	-4.2%	+3.2%
Gen. Humanities	+4.7%	+1.8%	+7.3%	-5.0%	+2.2%
Psychology	+0.9%	+0.8%	+3.1%	-4.0%	+0.2%
Political Science	-1.6%	+0.6%	+3.5%	-5.0%	-0.8%
Arts & Music	-.05%	-1.2%	+1.7%	-8.4%	-2.0%
Business	-4.5%	-0.8%	-9.1%	-2.3%	-4.2%

<sup>3</sup> "How to Get to the Top—Study Philosophy" 2 January 1990, *Globe and Mail* (Toronto).

<sup>4</sup>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/education/06philosophy.html? r=3&oref=slogin&oref=slogin>

<sup>5</sup> Table is from

<http://www.libarts.wsu.edu/philo/overview/Grad%20Admissions%20Tests.html> based on data published in the *Chronicle for Higher Education*. Comparable data can be found in Hurka, *op. cit.*

Admin.					
Management	-5.4%	-7.7%	nr <sup>6</sup>	nr	-6.6%
Speech	-2.7%	nr	-6.0%	-14.3%	-7.7%
Sociology	-7.0%	-5.0%	-5.0%	-15.0%	-8.0%
Education	-8.7%	-4.2%	-10.4%	-15.8%	-9.8%

### **More Information:**

Here are some links you might want to explore if you are thinking about majoring in philosophy:

1. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/education/06philosophy.html?\\_r=3&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/education/06philosophy.html?_r=3&oref=slogin&oref=slogin) (*New York Times* article on why one should study philosophy).
2. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2007/nov/20/choosingadegree.highereducation> (*Guardian* (UK) article describes how philosophy majors are increasingly sought by employers).
3. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2004-02-11-college-all-starts-cover\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2004-02-11-college-all-starts-cover_x.htm) (*USA Today* article that describes the activities of four of their top twenty undergraduates who majored in philosophy).

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