WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY, AND WHY SHOULD I STUDY IT?

“Philosophy” comes from Greek words meaning “love of wisdom.” Philosophy uses the tools of logic and reason to analyze the ways in which humans experience the world. It teaches critical thinking, close reading, clear writing, and logical analysis; it uses these to understand the language we use to describe the world, and our place within it. Different areas of philosophy are distinguished by the questions they ask. Do our senses accurately describe reality? What makes wrong actions wrong? How should we live? These are philosophical questions, and philosophy teaches the ways in which we might begin to answer them.

Students who learn philosophy get a great many benefits from doing so. The tools taught by philosophy are of great use in further education, and in employment. Despite the seemingly abstract nature of the questions philosophers ask, the tools philosophy teaches tend to be highly sought-after by employers. Philosophy students learn how to write clearly, and to read closely, with a critical eye; they are taught to spot bad reasoning, and how to avoid it in their writing and in their work. It is therefore not surprising that philosophy students have historically scored more highly on tests like the LSAT and GRE, on average, than almost any other discipline. Many of our students combine studying philosophy with studying other disciplines.

The most important reason to study philosophy is that it is of enormous and enduring interest. All of us have to answer, for ourselves, the questions asked by philosophers. In this department, students can learn how to ask the questions well, and how we might begin to develop responses. Philosophy is important, but it is also enormously enjoyable, and our faculty contains many award-winning teachers who make the process of learning about philosophy fun. Our faculty are committed to a participatory style of teaching, in which students are provided with the tools and the opportunity to develop and express their own philosophical views.

Critical Thinking

“It was in philosophy where I learned rigorous critical thinking, a skill that is invaluable when creating art.”
- Donald Daedalus, BA ’05, Visual Artist

“Philosophy taught me to think critically and was the perfect major for law school, giving me an excellent start to law school and my career.”
- Rod Nelson, BA ’75, Lawyer
Tools for Assessing Ethical Issues

“The courses I took for my minor in philosophy ... have provided a valuable framework for my career work in the field of global health and have given me a strong foundation for developing a structured, logical argument in various contexts.”
- Aubrey Batchelor, Minor ’09, Global Health Worker

“Bioethics is an everyday part of medicine, and my philosophy degree has helped me to work through real-world patient issues and dilemmas.”
- Teresa Lee, BA ’08 Medical Student

“The ability to apply an ethical framework to questions that have developed in my career, in taking care of patients ... has been a gift and something that I highly value.”
- Natalie Nunes, BA ’91, Family Physician Analytic Reasoning

“... philosophy provided me with the analytical tools necessary to understand a variety of unconventional problems characteristic of the security environment of the last decade.”
- Chris Grubb, BA ’98, US Marine

“Philosophy provides intellectual resources, critical and creative thinking capacity that are indispensable for success in contemporary international security environment “
- Richard Paz, BA ’87, US Military Officer

Understanding Others’ Perspectives

“... philosophy grounds us in an intellectual tradition larger than our own personal opinions. ... *making+ it is easier to be respectful of and accommodating to individual differences in clients (and colleagues)...”
- Diane Fructher Strother, BA ’00, Clinical Psychologist

“... comprehensive exposure to numerous alternative world/ethical views has helped me with my daily interaction with all different types of people of ethnic, cultural, and political orientation backgrounds.”
- David Prestin, BA ’07, Engineer

Evaluating Information

“Analyzing information and using it to form logical conclusions is a huge part of philosophy and was thus vital to my success in this position.”
- Kevin Duchmann, BA ’07, Inventory Control Analyst

Writing Skills

“My philosophy degree has been incredibly important in developing my analytical and writing skills.”
- Teresa Lee, BA ’08, Medical Student