

Career Options

- Attorney
- Book Publishing Professional
- Editor
- Journalist
- Manager
- Mediator
- Philosopher
- Political scientist
- Professor
- Public Relations Professional
- Teacher
- Writer

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is concerned with the most basic questions about the human experience, such as what reality is, what the ultimate values are, and how we know what we know. Philosophy majors are trained to think independently and critically, and to write clearly and persuasively. They may go to work in a number of managerial business and government careers where these skills are appreciated and may be used in leadership positions. Some find that a philosophy major combines well with further training in law, computer science, or religious studies. Those with a graduate degree in philosophy may teach in a college or university setting.

Occupational Opportunities

Philosophy majors find their training useful in a variety of fields. The analytic skills developed in college are easily transferable to a number of professional areas. Students of philosophy tend to have the flexibility and capacity for growth that employers find valuable. Many graduates accept jobs in business, journalism, computer science, public administration, teaching, publishing, and public relations. Teaching positions at the college level are very competitive and require a Ph.D.

Skills & Abilities

Students acquire and sharpen intellectual and practical skills valuable in a range of careers through the process of analysis and critical evaluation that makes up much of the study of philosophy. These skills include the ability to analyze and reason, use verbal argumentation, employ concrete examples, and write effectively and persuasively. The ability to interpret conflicting points of view with accuracy and reach a decision that is rationally and objectively defensible, for example, would typically be used by a mediation attorney, but would be equally important to a diplomat, crisis intervention counselor, or member of a biomedical ethics committee. A sampling of skills and abilities follows:

Problem solving

- Defines problems
- Weighs alternatives
- Identifies solutions
- Evaluates results
- Investigates alternatives
- Applies logic to problems
- Synthesizes ideas

Communication

- Advises
- Arbitrates
- Counsels
- Articulates abstract concepts
- Presents alternative viewpoints
- Writes effectively
- Negotiates

Analysis

- Reads critically
- Logical reasoning
- Interprets data/relationships
- Identifies/clarifies values
- Synthesizes ideas

Research/Project Development

- Writes proposals
- Evaluates information
- Integrates opposing viewpoints
- Compares perspectives
- Organizes ideas/information



Career Snapshot: Philosopher

Two Years

At this stage, the recent philosophy Ph.D. graduate is either in a tenure-track job as an instructor or assistant professor or is working as a part-time or adjunct professor and looking for a job that will eventually lead to tenure. The young assistant professor works long hours, teaching several undergraduate classes and beginning to establish the research and writing record necessary to advance in his or her field. In addition, the recent PhD recipient is expected to present papers at philosophy conferences in order to establish professional contacts and submit his or her work to the scrutiny of other philosophers. In smaller and two-year colleges, there is often less pressure to publish, but these are busy years wherever the young philosopher teaches.

Five Years

A career in academia has begun to take shape at this point. The philosopher has probably published a handful of articles that have begun to establish clear areas of expertise. At this stage, assistant philosophy professors have more control over their teaching schedules; they are likely to be teaching fewer introductory classes and more classes and seminars in their areas of specialization with enrollments consisting of upper-level undergraduates and graduate students. In addition, as academic marketability is determined by a university's specific needs, professors become able to move around more between institutions as they establish themselves in their respective philosophical fields.

Ten Years

By now, philosophers have either made tenure at the university where they started, found another university that will give them tenure, or left the profession. With tenure come the rewards of the philosophical life: the ability to say, write, and teach what one wishes with almost complete freedom.

Additional Resources

U.S. Government's Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://bls.gov/oco>

The American Philosophical Association (APA)
www.apaonline.org

American Catholic Philosophical Association
www.acpaweb.org

Make the Difference
www.makingthedifference.org/federalcareers

The Society for Women in Philosophy
www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/

Idealist – the non-profit career center
www.idealist.org

The School of Practical Philosophy
www.practicalphilosophy.org