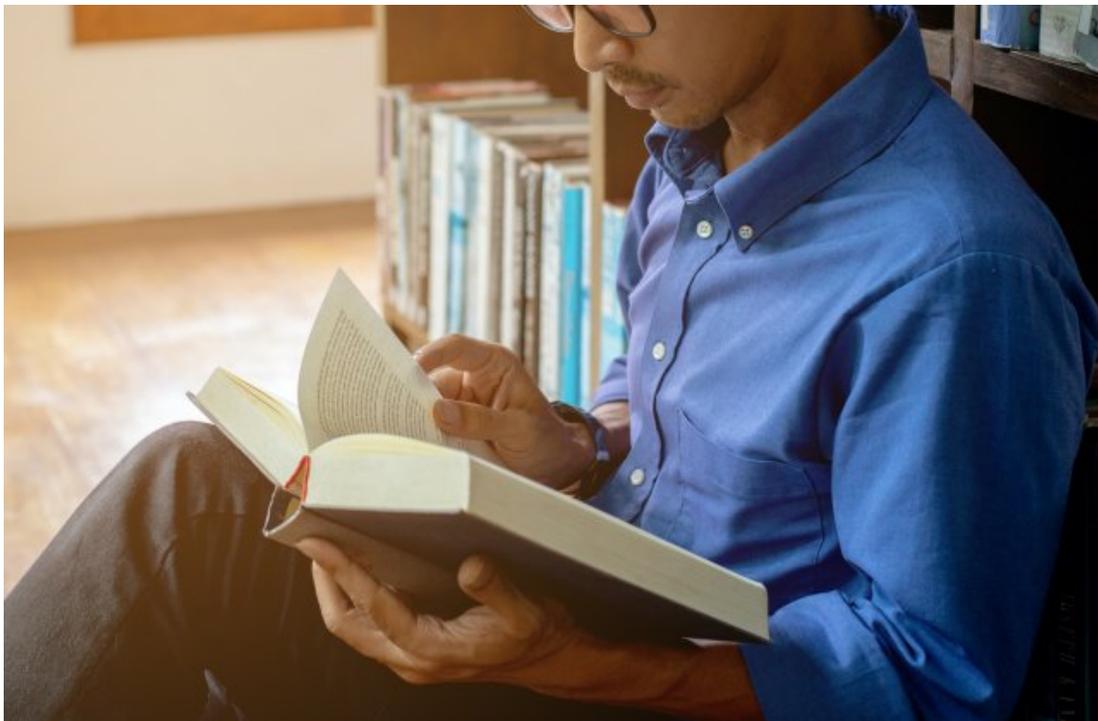


What You Can Do With a Philosophy Degree

Philosophy students learn how to question conventional thinking, which is a marketable skill.



Deep thinkers who are fascinated by abstract concepts such as love, happiness, success and truth should consider pursuing a degree in philosophy. This type of degree is geared toward individuals who not only have a knack for analyzing arguments and assessing their validity, but also possess the creativity and insight necessary to elevate a

theoretical discussion about big ideas.

Because philosophy is an academic discipline that emphasizes logic and rhetoric, it encourages intellectual versatility, experts say.

Amy Morgenstern, who has a Ph.D. in philosophy and is founder of the Blue Stars Admissions Consulting Company in California, explained in an email that studying philosophy "sharpens your mind and trains your ability to process complex thoughts no matter what field you are in."

She notes that the ability to think for oneself is essential for a philosophy major, since it is difficult for a student to do well in a philosophy program unless he or she is innovative. "Student assignments are graded based on the originality of their ideas; if they do not think independently, they cannot excel," she says.

Morgenstern describes philosophy as "the art of digging beneath the surface" to discover essential truths about human existence, and she says that people trained in this academic discipline are equipped to "expand their minds beyond the obvious" and become "thought leaders."

Philosophy majors tend to outperform others on standardized tests such as the GRE, LSAT and GMAT, according to score data released by testing agencies. A [Wall](#)

[Street Journal analysis](#) of the long-term earning potential of people with various college majors revealed that philosophy majors tend to get raises and promotions more quickly than individuals with other majors, and a result of this rapid career progression is that philosophy majors' mid-career earnings are usually double the size of their starting salaries.

In addition, [a statistical analysis](#) conducted by FiveThirtyEight analytics company in 2015 revealed that, among bachelor's degree recipients with just a college degree, philosophy majors had the fourth-highest median annual salary – \$81,200 – with earnings that eclipsed that of majors that are often presumed to be more useful, such as business.

Perhaps because of the discipline's emphasis on questioning orthodoxy, avoiding dogmatism and proposing new ideas, alumni of philosophy programs often go on to become influential innovators. Here are some examples of prominent and accomplished philosophy degree recipients:

- Nobel Prize-winning poet T.S. Eliot.
- Golden Globe-winning filmmaker Wes Anderson.
- Trailblazing vocalist, writer and rapper Dessa.
- Pulitzer Prize laureate and Nobel Prize-winning novelist Pearl S. Buck.
- Record-winning NBA coach Phil Jackson.

Some philosophy students have become powerful attorneys, judges and politicians. Examples include U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, U.S. Rep John Lewis and U.S. Supreme Court justices Stephen Breyer and David Souter. There are many business titans with philosophy degrees, such as billionaire investor George Soros and PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel, and even some high-profile religious leaders including Pope John Paul II.

Though the number of philosophy bachelor's degrees granted by U.S. colleges and universities dropped precipitously between 2013 and 2016, the number of college grads in this field modestly increased between 2016 and 2018, according to Eric Schwitzgebel, a professor of philosophy at the [University of California—Riverside](#).

Philosophy faculty say that the knowledge gained via philosophy coursework is especially applicable to career paths that involve the consideration and resolution of ethical dilemmas, such as legal, policy and government jobs. Philosophical training can also come in handy in the tech sector, since an understanding of how and why people think in a particular way is useful when creating artificial intelligence technology, according to faculty.

Further, because alumni of philosophy programs tend to excel at speaking and writing, they often choose communication-focused professions, including jobs in

advertising, marketing and communications, faculty say.

Philosophy degree recipients say their degree is relevant to each job listed below:

- Account executive at a public relations or marketing firm.
- Attorney.
- Bioethicist.
- Communications director.
- Marketing director.
- Ontologist.
- Policy analyst.
- Philosophy professor.
- Research assistant.

Michael Bennett McNulty, an assistant professor of philosophy at the [University of Minnesota—Twin Cities](#), notes that philosophy coursework gives students skills that they can use in a wide array of career paths, such as the abilities to argue persuasively and identify propaganda.

McNulty says that the emphasis on logic in philosophy courses makes the field somewhat comparable to math. He notes that philosophy degree recipients are often "spectacular writers" and suggests that they have widely applicable skills.

Derek Turner, a professor of philosophy at [Connecticut College](#), suggests that a common misconception about the field of philosophy is that a person needs to be especially arrogant, argumentative or combative in order to excel in this subject. There's also a perception that a philosophy student nitpicks arguments made by others.

"Our discipline has this kind of baggage, and it's really sad, and many of us are trying to change that," Turner says.

Turner says prospective philosophy students should expect a philosophy class to be a "joint inquiry." He describes an ideal philosophy class as a collaborative environment where "people from all different places in life with different intellectual interests can get together and just explore questions together and sort things out."

Many philosophy degree recipients say their education gave them writing skills that they've used throughout their careers.

Michael Ares, a philosophy grad who owns the MDA Corporate Marketing firm in Georgia, says philosophy courses taught him how to convince people to change their opinion – a useful skill in the business world.

"Persuasive writing, which is, very simply, trying to get something done, trying to change people's minds – that's

what philosophers do," he says. "I say that I'm in the business of changing people's minds."

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