

Why Study Philosophy?

*In a New Generation of College Students, Many Opt for the Life Examined - By WINNIE HU
New York Times Published: April 6, 2008*

“People sitting under trees and talking about stupid stuff - I mean, who cares?” Ms. Onejeme recalled thinking at the time. But Ms. Onejeme, now a senior applying to law school, ended up changing her major to philosophy, which she thinks has armed her with the skills to be successful. “My mother was like, what are you going to do with that?” said Ms. Onejeme, 22. “She wanted me to be a pharmacy major, but I persuaded her with my argumentative skills.”

Once scoffed at as a luxury major, philosophy is being embraced at Rutgers and other universities by a new generation of college students who are drawing modern-day lessons from the age-old discipline as they try to make sense of their world, from the morality of the war in Iraq to the latest political scandal. The economic downturn has done little, if anything, to dampen this enthusiasm among students, who say that what they learn in class can translate into practical skills and careers. On many campuses, debate over modern issues like war and technology is emphasized over the study of classic ancient texts.

Rutgers, which has long had a top-ranked philosophy department, is one of a number of universities where the number of undergraduate philosophy majors is ballooning; there are 100 in this year’s graduating class, up from 50 in 2002, even as overall enrollment on the main campus has declined by 4 percent.

At the City University of New York, where enrollment is up 18 percent over the past six years, there are 322 philosophy majors, a 51 percent increase since 2002. “If I were to start again as an undergraduate, I would major in philosophy,” said Matthew Goldstein, the CUNY chancellor, who majored in mathematics and statistics. “I think that subject is really at the core of just about everything we do. If you study humanities or political systems or sciences in general, philosophy is really the mother ship from which all of these disciplines grow.”

Nationwide, there are more colleges offering undergraduate philosophy programs today than a decade ago (817, up from 765), according to the College Board. Some schools with established programs like Texas A&M, Notre Dame, the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, now have twice as many philosophy majors as they did in the 1990s.

David E. Schrader, executive director of the American Philosophical Association, a professional organization with 11,000 members, said that in an era in which people change careers frequently, philosophy makes sense. “It’s a major that helps them become quick learners and gives them strong skills in writing, analysis and critical thinking,” he said.

Mr. Schrader, an adjunct professor at the University of Delaware, said that the demand for philosophy courses had outpaced the resources at some colleges, where students are often turned away. Some are enrolling in online courses instead, he said, describing it as “really very strange.”...“The discipline as we see it from the time of Socrates starts with people face to face, putting their positions on the table,” he said.

The Rutgers philosophy department is relatively large, with 27 professors, 60 graduate students, and more than 30 undergraduate offerings each semester. For those who cannot get enough of their Descartes in class, there is the Wednesday night philosophy club, where, last week, 11 students debated the metaphysics behind the movie “The Matrix” for more than an hour.

An undergraduate philosophy journal started this semester has drawn 36 submissions — about half from Rutgers students — on musings like “Is the extinction of a species always a bad thing?” Barry Loewer, the department chairman, said that Rutgers started building its philosophy program in the late 1980s, when the field was branching into new research areas like cognitive science and becoming more interdisciplinary. He said that many students have double-majored in philosophy and, say, psychology or economics, in recent years, and go on to become doctors, lawyers, writers, investment bankers and even commodities traders.

As the approach has changed, philosophy has attracted students with little interest in contemplating the classical texts, or what is known as armchair philosophy. Some, like Ms. Onejeme, the pre-med-student-turned-philosopher, who is double majoring in political science, see it as a pre-law track because it emphasizes the verbal and logic skills prized by law schools — something the Rutgers department encourages by pointing out that their majors score high on the LSAT. Other students said that studying philosophy, with its emphasis on the big questions and alternative points of view, provided good training for looking at larger societal questions, like globalization and technology.

“All of these things make the world a smaller place and force us to look beyond the bubble we grow up in,” said Christine Bullman, 20, a junior, who said art majors and others routinely took philosophy classes. “I think philosophy is a good base to look at a lot of issues.”

Frances Egan, a Rutgers philosophy professor who advises undergraduates, said that as it has become harder for students to predict what specialties might be in demand in an uncertain economy, some may be more apt to choose their major based simply on what they find interesting. "Philosophy is a lot of fun," said Professor Egan, who graduated with a philosophy degree in the tough economic times of the 1970s. "A lot of students are in it because they find it intellectually rewarding."

Max Bialek, 22, was majoring in math until his senior year, when he discovered philosophy. He decided to stay an extra year to complete the major (his parents needed reassurance, he said, but were supportive). "I thought: Why weren't all my other classes like that one?" he said, explaining that philosophy had taught him a way of studying that could be applied to any subject and enriched his life in unexpected ways. "You can talk about almost anything as long as you do it well."

Jenna Schaal-O'Connor, a 20-year-old sophomore who is majoring in cognitive science and linguistics, said philosophy had other perks. She said she found many male philosophy majors interesting and sensitive. "That whole deep existential torment," she said. "It's good for getting girlfriends."

***I think, therefore I earn- Jessica Shepherd - The Guardian,
Tuesday 20 November 2007***

Philosophy graduates are suddenly all the rage with employers. What can they possibly have to offer?

"A degree in philosophy? What are you going to do with that then?" Philosophy students will tell you they've been asked this question more times than they care to remember. "The response people seem to want is a cheery shrug and a jokey 'don't know'," says Joe Cunningham, 20, a final-year philosophy undergraduate at Heythrop College, University of London. A more accurate comeback, according to the latest statistics, is "just about anything I want".

Figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show philosophy graduates, once derided as unemployable layabouts, are in growing demand from employers. The number of all graduates in full-time and part-time work six months after graduation has risen by 9% between 2002-03 and 2005-06; for philosophy graduates it has gone up by 13%. It is in the fields of finance, property development, health, social work and the nebulous category of "business" that those versed in Plato and Kant are most sought after. In "business", property development, renting and research, 76% more philosophy graduates were employed in 2005-06 than in 2002-03. In health and social work, 9% more.

The Higher Education Careers Services Unit (Hecsu), which also collates data of this kind, agrees philosophers are finding it easier to secure work. Its figures show that, in 2001, 9.9% of philosophy graduates were unemployed six months after graduation. In 2006, just 6.7% were. On average, 6% of all graduates were unemployed six months after graduation.

In 2001, 9.3% of philosophy graduates were in business and finance roles six months after graduation. In 2006, 12.2% were. In 2001, 5.3% were in marketing and advertising six months after graduation. In 2006, 7.3% were.

It is particularly significant that the percentage finding full-time work six months after graduation has risen, since the number of philosophy graduates has more than doubled between 2001 and 2006. In 2001, UK universities produced 895 graduates with a first degree in the discipline; in 2006, they produced 2,040.

And it is so popular with its graduates that many go on to postgraduate study rather than join the workforce. Charlie Ball, who runs Hecsu's labour market analysis, says: "More philosophy graduates are being produced, and they are much less likely to be unemployed than five years ago."

Philosophers have always come in handy in the workplace with their grounding in analytical thinking. Why, only now, are they so prized by employers?

Lucy Adams, human resources director of Serco, a services business and a consultancy firm, says: "Philosophy lies at the heart of our approach to recruiting and developing our leadership, and our leaders. We need people who have the ability to look for different approaches and take an open mind to issues. These skills are promoted by philosophical approaches."

Fiona Czerniawska, director of the Management Consultancies Association's think tank, says: "A philosophy degree has trained the individual's brain and given them the ability to provide management-consulting firms with the sort of skills that they require and clients demand. These skills can include the ability to be very analytical, provide clear and innovative thinking, and question assumptions."

Deborah Bowman, associate dean for widening participation at St George's, University of London, which offers medicine and health sciences courses, says philosophers are increasingly sought after by the NHS: "Graduates of philosophy who come in to graduate-entry medicine, or to nursing courses, are very useful. Growth areas in the NHS include clinical ethicists, who assist doctors and nurses. Medical ethics committees and ethics training courses for staff are also growing. More and more people are needed to comment on moral issues in healthcare, such as abortion." Being on an ethics committee of the NHS is something Cunningham is looking into. "It would be a direct application of my skills," he says.

The popular philosopher Simon Blackburn, a professor at Cambridge University, sees the improving career prospects of philosophy graduates as part of a wider change of public perception. "I guess the public image of a philosopher has tended to concentrate on an ancient Greek in a toga, or some unwashed hippy lying around not doing very much," he says. "I do

detect a change in the way the public sees philosophers. I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who come to philosophy events nowadays."

Blackburn can take some credit. The user-friendly books on philosophy that he and other philosophers such as AC Grayling, Stephen Law, Julian Baggini, Nigel Warburton and Alain de Botton write have made their way into the mainstream.

Those in charge of designing university courses have also become sensitive to claims that their subject has no relevance to the modern day. Blackburn says: "In the years after the second world war, there was a sort of Wittgensteinian air about philosophy, which meant practitioners were proud of the fact that they appeared slightly esoteric and were not doing anything practical. There was very little political philosophy, and moral philosophy was disengaged from people's actual moral problems, and that did lead to the subject being marginalised. That has changed. Political philosophy is a central part of the Cambridge course."

Jonathan Lowe, professor of philosophy at Durham University, agrees that courses' concern with the real world has accelerated in the past five years "It's probably because of the new financial arrangements for students that courses have had to prove they are applicable to real world issues," he says. "And the teaching methods have changed. There are more student-led sessions. Students have to argue on their feet and give presentations. That probably shows at interviews."

News that employers and the public hold philosophers in higher regard should presumably be cause for celebration? Not entirely, says Blackburn. "It is also slightly worrying, because people turn to philosophers when they feel less confident and more insecure."

What Can You Do With A Philosophy Degree?

Illinois State University Department of Philosophy:

As you think about the career opportunities a philosophy major provides, there are three things to consider:

- What professional or career skills will I gain from majoring in philosophy?
- Why/how are these skills valuable?
- What types of employment will be open to me?

A major in philosophy provides the finest in a liberal arts education. A liberal arts education helps you gain basic skills in critical thinking, argumentation, communication, information management, design and planning, research and investigation, and management and administration. These skills are absolutely essential for success in virtually every career path, especially in today's information age.

Career Related Skills

- **Critical Thinking Skills:** the ability to identify the key issues in decision-making or problem solving; to identify a general principle that links together related problems, points, data; to define the parameters of a problem.
- **Argument Skills:** the ability to use argumentation techniques to persuade others; to reason from premises to conclusions; to assess the implications of a position which has been taken.
- **Communication Skills:** the ability to summarize the content of a message clearly and objectively; to differentiate fact from value; to express one's point of view without violating others' rights; and to explain ideas and principles to others.
- **Information Management:** the ability to sort data; to compile and rank information; to compile and evaluate information; and to use this information to solve problems.
- **Design and Planning Skills:** the ability to look at a problem from different angles and identify alternative courses of action.
- **Research and Investigation Skills:** the ability to seek out information; to identify problems and needs; to systematically define a problem; to formulate questions relevant to clarifying a particular problem, topic, or issue.
- **Management and Administration Skills:** the ability to analyze tasks and set priorities; to identify resource materials useful in the solution of a problem.

Why Are These Skills Valuable?

First, these are basic skills. 'Basic skills' are the reasoning, researching, planning, and communication tools you need to successfully communicate, problem-solve, and argue effectively. All employers are looking for people who have these skills and you are more likely to be hired and eventually advance in your career if you possess these skills.

Second, according to Lawrence R. Malnig and Anita Malnig in their book, "What Can I Do With A Major In...?" "Business leaders most frequently cite the ability to learn in new situations and the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and interpret data information management as two of the most important qualities that successful executives must possess" (Malnig, 147). All of the skills in the above list provide you with the ability to learn in a new situation. In fact, corporate executives of a number of large companies find that "students of the humanities [including philosophy] tend to learn fast and advance quickly." (Careers for Philosophers, American Philosophical Association publication, p.31).

Third, all of these skills are often referred to as transferable skills. They are not job-specific. You can take these skills with you from one setting to another. This is critical given the latest prediction that in your professional/career lifetime, you can expect to hold 10-12 jobs in three to five different fields.

Fourth, these skills prepare you to be a life-long learner both professionally and personally, a value that has already been mentioned. These skills also help you find personal satisfaction while pursuing just about any area of interest such as reading, writing, sports, gardening, music, chess, and politics for example.

What Kind Of Job Opportunities Exist For A Philosophy Major?

There are many areas of employment open to graduates with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. These areas include:

- **Administration/Management** - in such diverse areas as personnel, financial aid, or public relations. Employment settings might include college or university, prisons, hospitals, government agencies (county, state or federal), and private companies
- **Business** - management, sales, consulting public relations, fund raising, systems analysis, advertising, and banking
- government - congressional staff member, federal agencies and bureaus, state and local governments, United Nations, foreign service, and cultural affairs
- **Insurance** - agent and broker
- **Journalism** - reporter and critic (books, dance, film)
- **Publishing/Writing** - sales, editing, management, freelance, technical writing for a company or government, and script writer
- **Pre-professional Training** - A philosophy major also provides excellent undergraduate preparation for law school, MBA programs, medical school, and seminary:
- **Education** – Philosophy majors are well prepared to pass their intellectual formation on to future generations of students whether as teachers or college professors.

On the standardized tests for law school (LSAT), philosophy majors rank the third highest in performance (mathematics majors are first and economics majors are second). On the GMAT (standardized test for graduate level business programs) philosophy majors rank the second highest (with mathematics majors first). Philosophy majors rank first on the standardized verbal tests for graduate school (GRE/verbal).

Some Famous Philosophy Majors

Bertrand Russell

Stephen Breyer, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court

Rudi Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City

Thomas Jefferson, U. S. President

Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense

Richard Riorden, Former Mayor of Los Angeles

David Souter, Supreme Court Justice

George Stephanopoulos, former Press Secretary

Carl C. Icahn, corporate raider

Frank Moran, founder of Plante and Moran

George Soros, financier and philanthropist

Wes Anderson, director, *The Royal Tannenbaums*

Pearl Buck, Nobel Prize for Literature

Ethan Coen, filmmaker

Umberto Eco, novelist

Martin Gardner, author

Richard Gere, actor

Philip Glass, composer

Bruce Lee, martial artist and actor

Elmore Leonard, author

Iris Murdoch, author

Bertrand Russell, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

Jean-Paul Sartre, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

Gene Siskel, movie critic

Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Ture, civil rights leader

Phil Jackson, NBA coach

Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

Madelyn Murray O'Hare, civil rights activist

Pope John Paul II, religious leader

Mario Savio, civil rights leader

Albert Schweitzer, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

John Stoltzmann, winner of the World Poker Open

PLEASE NOTE: The Holy Spirit College Philosophy Program does not guarantee that all philosophy majors will win a Nobel Prize!