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Careers and Employment

# Philosophy

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## What is Philosophy, Exactly?

Philosophy is the attempt to get clear about very fundamental (though often deceptively simple) questions that don't naturally belong to the other arts and sciences, and also to use the techniques of rigorous argument to arrive at defensible and reasonable positions on them.

It's not easy, nor does it come naturally to everyone. But there is an undeniable thrill in joining a collaborative enterprise that has been going on for 2500 years, and making one's own contribution to clarifying and answering some of the deepest questions we can ask about the world and our place in it.

## Why Study Philosophy?

Why study Philosophy? Curiosity about the 'big questions' concerning reality, meaning, and morality is a good reason. All these topics – and many others besides – remain very active topics of philosophical discussion. You will need to be patient, however. Making progress in philosophy (even in properly understanding the questions it asks) requires care, and attention to detail. But the questions are important and well worth studying for their own sakes.

Another reason for studying the subject is to develop the habits and skills of good reasoning. The exercise of thinking hard can produce astonishing and paradoxical results, revealing how many things we ordinarily take for granted. Philosophy will teach you habits of

rigor, of constructive doubt, and of clear thinking. These are useful skills, not just vocationally, but in all areas of life.

Studying philosophy, and other humanities disciplines, can also contribute to your personal and moral development. Philosophical knowledge can help you to cultivate your own ethical orientation, and to construct an internal framework for understanding the world around you.

“Why study philosophy? ... It's always a good thing to know, no matter what you go on to study – to be able to think critically, to challenge your own point of view. Also, you need to be a citizen in this world. You need to know your responsibilities. You're going to have many moral choices every day of your life. And it enriches your inner life. You have lots of frameworks to apply to problems, and so many ways to interpret things. It makes life so much more interesting. It's us at our most human. And it helps us increase our humanity. No matter what you do, that's an asset.

Rebecca Goldstein, *The Atlantic*,  
February 27 2014.

## Employment Outcomes

Many students are also interested in the more tangible aspects of an education in philosophy. In addition to discipline-specific knowledge, the core of an education in philosophy involves

learning the skills of rational argument. It is no surprise that graduates who have majored in philosophy are prized by employers for their analytic and critical thinking skills. Because philosophy straddles the humanities and the sciences, philosophy graduates are comfortable bridging the two cultures, and are able to evaluate and analyse relevant evidence, no matter its character and source. The emphasis in philosophy on flexibility and rigor means that philosophy students find themselves in an impressively wide range of careers

after graduation.

Of course, teaching (at both tertiary and secondary level), consulting, and the public service are perennially popular destinations for philosophy graduates. But recent data from LinkedIn shows the breadth of options open to philosophers. Worldwide, nearly half a million LinkedIn members studied philosophy at university. The top 20 fields they ended up working in break down in Table 1, ordered by percentage of philosophy graduates ending up in the given field.

Rank	Field	Percentage %
1	Education	12.6
2	Media and Communication	9.6
3	Entrepreneurship	8.0
4	Community and Social Services	7.2
5	Operations	6.5
6	Sales	6.1
7	Legal	5.6
8	Consulting	5.5
9	Research	5.4
10	Information Technology	4.5
11	Arts and Design	4.5
12	Administrative	4.3
13	Marketing	4.0
14	Finance	3.7
15	Program and Project Management	3.4
16	Human Resources	3.3
17	Support	3.2
18	Healthcare Services	3.1
19	Engineering	2.5
20	Business Development	2.2

Table 1: *LinkedIn Field of Study Explorer, 2014-08-08.*

And the top 20 corporate employers of philosophy graduates may surprise you too: data on this is summarised in Table 2. Yes, Starbucks is on there – but the employers who are really interested in philosophy graduates are financial, tech, and consultancy firms, who appreciate the adaptability and analytic skills the study of philosophy encourages.

What about salaries? Very few philosophers would accept that the value of your life is to be measured by the money you make. But while money isn't everything, it is something! And, it turns out, philosophers are well rewarded for the work they do – especially when compared to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Table 3 gives a representative selection from a 2008 *Wall Street Journal* report on mid-career salaries (10 years after starting work) for graduates reporting a specific field of study. Philosophy is the highest ranked of the humanities and social

sciences by salary. And since the careers philosophy students pursue tend to be intellectually stimulating, our graduates often find their work to be personally rewarding too.

Moreover, the above facts and figures serve to rebut those tired clichés about unemployed philosophers. On the contrary: the study of philosophy is associated with highly developed transferable skills, prized by any employer who wants articulate employees with highly developed problem solving and analytical abilities.

**On the Other Hand...**

“Thinking of the value of the humanities predominately in terms of earnings and employment is to miss the point. ... A true liberal-arts education furnishes the mind with great art and

Rank	Employer	Rank	Employer
1	IBM	11	Wells Fargo
2	PwC	12	Oracle
3	Deloitte	13	Bank of America
4	Google	14	Citi
5	Microsoft	15	Starbucks
6	Accenture	16	AT&T
7	EY	17	HSBC
8	Apple	18	Education Nationale
9	Hewlett-Packard	19	Thomson Reuters
10	JPMorgan Chase	20	Amazon

*Table 2: LinkedIn Field of Study Explorer, 2014-08-08.*

Rank	Major	Median Mid-career Salary (USD)
1	Chemical Engineering	107,000
5	Economics	98,600
6	Physics	97,300
7	Computer Science	95,500
10	Mathematics	92,400
16	Philosophy	81,200
18	Chemistry	79,900
19	Marketing	79,600
21	Political Science	78,200
27	History	71,000
31	Journalism	66,700
33	Art History	64,900
35	English	64,700
39	Psychology	60,400
41	Sociology	58,200

Table 3: *Wall Street Journal*, ‘Salary Increase By Major’, data collected 2008.

ideas, empowers us to think for ourselves and appreciate the world in all its complexity and grandeur. Is there anyone who doesn't feel a pang of desire for a meaning that goes beyond work and politics, for a meaning that confronts the mysteries of life, love, suffering and death? ...

I'm glad that students who major in disciplines like philosophy may eventually make as much as or more than a business major. But that's far from the main reason... we should invest in the humanities.”

Scott Samuelson, ‘Would You Hire Socrates?’, *Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 2014.

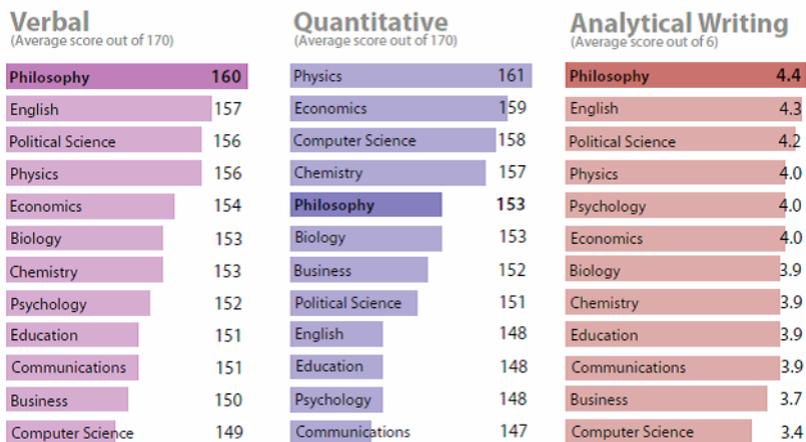
## Further Study

Many philosophy students don't go straight into the workforce after graduation, but return to study for a postgraduate degree, either in philosophy or another field. It is not uncommon for students to feel that they have only scratched the surface of the philosophical problems that interest them by the end of their undergraduate degree, and the pursuit of a masters or doctoral degree gives the opportunity to do in depth research into the issues a student finds most gripping. Philosophy also provides a good launch pad for postgraduate and professional qualifications in cognate disciplines.

Whether or not an individual student

# THE POWER OF PHILOSOPHY

GRE SCORES BY INTENDED GRADUATE MAJOR, 2011-12



Source: Educational Testing Service; data available at [https://www.ets.org/s/gradoffreq\\_guide\\_table1.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/gradoffreq_guide_table1.pdf)

Figure 1: Ty Fagan, 'The Power of Philosophy'.

wishes to proceed to a postgraduate degree, majoring in philosophy is associated with exceptional preparedness for further study. We can see this in the comparative results of philosophy and other majors in postgraduate applications, using the standard entry exam in the US, the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). This is a prerequisite for admission to all masters and doctoral programs, in every arts and sciences field.

The [official GRE data \(2011–4\)](#) shows that students intending to study for a PhD in philosophy – generally those who studied philosophy at the undergraduate

level – score highest in aggregate on the GRE, and come top of all majors in both the 'Verbal' and 'Analytical Writing' components. (Philosophers are not too shabby at the 'Quantitative' component either: they come top in all three sections amongst all arts and humanities majors.) All this is made visually evident in a very nice graphic comparing selected majors by Ty Fagan, displayed as Figure 1.

Of course, one thing that philosophy will teach you is that correlation is not causation; perhaps students who are likely to go on to study philosophy are also highly skilled at the GRE. But it is striking nevertheless how well philosophy

students compare to those with other backgrounds on a standard common task; it would be surprising if their choice to study philosophy had **nothing** to do with their subsequent performance.

Philosophy students also tend to do strikingly well on the LSAT, which is the standard admissions test to law school in the US.

## Philosophy at Adelaide

The Discipline of Philosophy at Adelaide is a vibrant program, active in both research and teaching across a broad spectrum of contemporary philosophy. Our research has been rated 4 (out of 5) in the most recent national research evaluation exercise ([ERA 2012](#)), denoting that we are ‘above world standard’ in our research track record and environment, making us one of the University’s [areas of research strength](#).

Our areas of particular research and teaching focus are in contemporary philosophy, especially:

- > Aesthetics and the philosophy of art;
- > Cognitive science and philosophy of mind and psychology;
- > Epistemology and the theory of knowledge;
- > Logic;
- > Moral and legal philosophy;
- > Metaphysics and philosophy of science.

We regularly offer a wide range of courses in all these areas, at levels from first year undergraduate all the way through to masters level.

A number of our students stay on for honours or postgraduate qualifications, and we have a very active Philosophy Club (established for more than 70 years), bringing postgraduates, undergraduates, and faculty together in informal and convivial discussions of philosophical issues.

## Further Detail

This document is available to download in electronic form; in that format, all the sources are linked so you can explore the detail for yourself. You can find it at:

[www.hss.adelaide.edu.au/philosophy/Phil\\_Careers.pdf](http://www.hss.adelaide.edu.au/philosophy/Phil_Careers.pdf)

Some other articles of relevance to the topic of this booklet include:

- > Carolyn Gregoire, ‘[The Unexpected Way Philosophy Majors Are Changing The World Of Business](#)’, *Huffington Post*, March 05, 2014.
- > Edward Tenner, ‘[Is Philosophy the Most Practical Major?](#)’ *The Atlantic*, October 16, 2011.

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