

Why Study Philosophy?

The ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, once said that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Philosophy provides students with the tools they need to critically examine their own lives as well as the world in which they live. Philosophers are, by definition, “lovers of wisdom” (from the Greek “philo” = love and “sophia” = wisdom). Have you ever wondered why many of your professors have a Ph.D. or “doctor of philosophy” even if they do not teach philosophy? Philosophy is the oldest academic discipline and as such has no natural boundaries. Philosophers strive to uncover wisdom in every dimension of human existence. The tools one acquires through a philosophical education can be applied to any discipline and will help you to see connections between those disciplines. Consequently, philosophy is of use to students contemplating majors in any field. The philosophy courses at IUS seek to involve students in clear, reflective thought on philosophical issues of major importance and to introduce them to the ideas of several great philosophers. In the first section of this document, you will find information on the general benefits of studying philosophy. Sections two through four, discuss the advantages philosophy majors have over other majors pursuing a graduate education. Section five contains some links to other perspective on the value of a philosophical education.

[Section One: General Benefits of a Philosophical Education](#)

[Section Two: Philosophy Prepares Students for Law School Admissions Test \(LSAT\)](#)

[Section Three: Philosophy Prepares Students for the Graduate Record Exam \(GRE\).](#)

[Section Four: Philosophy Prepares Students for the Graduate Management Admissions Test \(GMAT\)](#)

[Section Five: Other Perspectives on the Value of a Philosophical Education.](#)

Section One: General Benefits of a Philosophical Education

The curriculum at IUS includes interesting courses in general philosophy, ethics and logic; additional courses in the history of philosophy, and upper level courses in such areas as symbolic logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, theories of knowledge, and bioethics are also offered. Readings center on writings by the great philosophers. The goals of our program are as follows:

1. Comprehension and Interpretation

Through the study of philosophy at IUS, students should increase their abilities to understand and to restate accurately in different words positions or arguments with which they initially disagree or which are entirely new to them. Students should also develop the skill of temporary detachment or neutrality so that they are better able to discern the strengths and weaknesses in such positions.

2. Analytical Reasoning

Students should be able to make distinctions which are helpful for understanding and evaluating complex positions, arguments, or issues.

3. Synthetical Reasoning

Students should improve their awareness of the importance of holding coherent and integrated views. They should develop skills in organizing and integrating their ideas in a systematic way.

4. Critical Thinking

Students should develop an independence of thought through which they take responsibility for understanding and evaluating ideas in careful, responsible ways.

5. Skills in Evaluation

Students should improve their ability to make reasoned judgments on such matters as moral and aesthetic preferences and to present cogent arguments to support their positions. Students should also improve their awareness of the factors that are involved in making sound evaluations.

6. Ethical Reasoning

Students should improve their skills in making responsible, rational judgments on issues of moral rightness and wrongness as well as on matters of moral character. Students should be able to make use of classical ethical theories in formulating these judgments.

7. Openness to New Ideas

Students should increase their ability to reflect upon their own views and consider whether other positions are stronger. They should be able to make modifications when their own careful thinking indicates that this is appropriate.

8. Improving Skills in Extended Written and Spoken Presentation

Students should develop the ability to present comprehensive interpretations and arguments clearly, accurately, and without prejudice in both written and oral forms.

9. Understanding Philosophical Reflections on Other Disciplines

Students should increase their understanding of basic philosophical issues and theories associated with areas such as social and political theory, science, and religion.

10. Appreciation of the Diversity of Intellectual History

Students should gain an increased appreciation of the variety of philosophical reflections, arguments, and positions that have been developed in different ages and contexts.

11. Gaining Knowledge of the Philosophical Tradition

The students should have an awareness and understanding of issues and positions that have been prominent in the philosophical tradition.

Section Two: Philosophy prepares students for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

According to data collected by Law School Admissions Council, philosophy majors do better than any other major on the LSAT with the exception of physics/mathematics majors. Whereas philosophy majors have a mean score of 157.4 on the LSAT, physics/mathematics majors attain a slightly higher mean of 158.9. Even so, philosophy majors score *much* higher than business majors (mean: 149.6) or education majors (mean: 148.9).¹

The following statements provided by the American Bar Association discuss the specific advantages that philosophy affords students pursuing a career in a law-related profession.

”In assessing a prospective law student’s educational qualifications, admissions committees generally consider the chosen curriculum, the grades earned, and the reputation of the colleges attended. They also view favorably scholastic honors, awards, and special recognition. Solid grades in courses such as logic, philosophy, and abstract mathematics are generally considered a plus. [...] [L]aw schools will respect your pursuit of subjects you find challenging. This is especially true if the courses you take are known to be more difficult, such as philosophy, engineering, and science. Also, look for courses that will strengthen the skills you need in law school. Classes that stress research and writing are excellent preparation for law school, as are courses that teach reasoning and analytical skills.” – from “Education,” from The Council on Legal Education and

¹ *Official Guide to ABA-approved Law Schools 2003-2004*, published by the Law school Admissions Council (LSAC).

Opportunity, American Bar Association. (whole article available at: <http://www.abanet.org/cleo/edu.html>)

”Preparation for legal education should include substantial experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual material, for much of what law students and attorneys do involves careful reading and sophisticated comprehension of judicial opinions, statutes, documents, and other written materials. As with the other skills discussed in this Statement, the requisite critical reading abilities may be acquired in a wide range of experiences, including the close reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy or history. The particular nature of the materials examined is not crucial; what is important is that law school not be the first time that a student has been rigorously engaged in the enterprise of carefully reading and understanding, and critically analyzing, complex written material of substantial length. Potential law students should also be aware that the study and practice of law require the ability to read and assimilate large amounts of material, often in a short period of time.” – from “Preparation for Legal Education” Prepared by The Pre-Law Committee of The ABA Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar, June 1996 (whole article available at: <http://www.abanet.org/cleo/edu.html>).

Section Three: Philosophy prepares students for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

The GRE is required by most graduate programs in arts, education, engineering, humanities, life science, physical science, and social science. Success on the GRE is an important part of a successful graduate school application. The exam is broken into three main sections: Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical Writing. As the below statistics make clear, philosophers do extremely well on the GRE.

Students declaring an intention to go to graduate school in philosophy have the *highest* mean scores on the Verbal section of the GRE (mean: 589) of any major. The best score outside of the humanities and arts in this category is physics, with a Verbal mean of 534. Education majors have a mean score of 450, while business majors come in even lower at 446.

The story is much the same for the Analytical Writing section of the GRE. Students declaring an intention to go to graduate school in philosophy get the *highest* mean scores of any major on this section of the GRE (mean: 5.1). The best score outside of the humanities in this category was political science, with an Analytical Writing mean of 4.9. Life and physical sciences majors performed more poorly, however, with the highest mean score again going to physics majors (mean: 4.5). Education majors have a mean score of 4.3, while business majors again come in slightly lower with a mean score of 4.2.

Students declaring an intention to go to graduate school in philosophy score *higher* on the Quantitative section of the GRE than any of the other humanities. Compare the scores of philosophy students in Quantitative (mean: 636) with religion majors (mean: 583) or foreign language majors (mean: 573), for examples, who are the next best two in the humanities. Not surprisingly, majors in the physical sciences and engineering do better in this area than philosophy students do. But philosophy students do better here than *every* major in the life sciences and all but one of the majors in social science (economics students do well here, with mean scores of 706 in this area). Philosophy majors do better than all but the banking and finance students in the business area (whose majors get a mean score of 709 in Quantitative). Education majors fare worse than business majors in this area with a mean score of 534. Compare philosophy students' mean score in Quantitative of 636, however, with accounting majors, who get a mean of 595 in this area. Aren't they supposed to know math?²

Section Four: Philosophy Prepares Students for the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)

The GMAT is required for students applying to Masters of Business Administration (MBA) programs. Much as with the GRE for other graduate programs, success on the GMAT is an important part of a successful MBA application. Although it may come as some surprise, philosophy prepares students for the GMAT *better* than a degree in business.

Philosophy majors have a mean score of 574 which is higher than *any* other humanities major and also higher than *any* business major. Operational management/production majors scored the highest of any business major with a mean of 547.8. Only physical science and engineering majors scored better than philosophy majors on the GMAT with Physics topping the list with a mean score of 611. So much for thinking that a business major is the best preparation for the GMAT!³

Section Five: Other Perspectives on the Value of a Philosophical Education

The American Philosophical Association (APA) is the main professional organization for philosophers in the United States. They have published an [essay by philosopher Robert Audi](#) that provides a brief guide to the discipline. It is aimed at undergraduates and is a must read for any student thinking about majoring in philosophy.

² *Guide to the Graduate Record Examination Program 2005-2006*, published by the Education Testing Service. This section updates statistics from the article 'Philosophy Rocks the Graduate Record Exam,' (<http://www.lclark.edu/~phil/gre.html>).

³ *Profile of Graduate Admissions Test Candidates (2000-2005)*, published by the Graduate Management Admissions Council.

For a perspective outside of philosophy, see this [New York Times article](#) by Carol Cropper on the pay-off of a philosophical education. Likewise, this [Times of London article](#) discusses how philosophy is the quintessential modern discipline and the ultimate transferable work skill.

Want know what kinds of careers await philosophy majors? See this [list of famous philosophy majors](#). Some of the names might surprise you!