UNDERGRADUATE STUDY IN
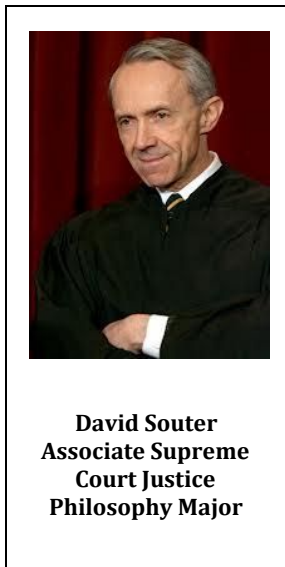# PHILOSOPHY
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES • UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The Philosophy Major at University of Miami

**David Souter
Associate Supreme
Court Justice
Philosophy Major**

1. What is philosophy?

There are several different ways to think about what philosophy is.

One is by subject matter. Most of the subjects you already know about –physics, psychology, economics –were once considered philosophy. In Germany a couple hundred years ago, philosophy was the name of *any* branch of study that was not either law, theology or medicine. That's why the highest degree in most fields is a Ph.D., which is a Doctorate in Philosophy. Philosophy is just about everything.

But philosophy is also the discipline that questions what other fields take for granted. How does causation work? Can you exist after your bodily death? Do computers think? Why is it wrong to Torture people? Is affirmative action just? Could we be massively deceived about our world? Is truth relative?

These questions are not just fun to consider. Answers to them serve as the foundations for the kind of work done by specialists in other fields. And it's by philosophy's overturning old dogmas that new fields of study are created. Philosophy today is just as much about the future as much as it is

the past.

Even so, perhaps the most useful way to think about philosophy is by considering its methods. It is a cliché to say that philosophers think critically. But it is true. And by doing philosophy, you will learn how to think and communicate better than you otherwise could. You will be able to quickly identify and examine the hidden Assumptions others make. You will be able to spot others' fallacies easily. You will be able to construct sound arguments. As a result, those who study philosophy think more rigorously than anyone else. This helps you not only in your career, but in every aspect of your life. You will even be able to spot it if an academic brochure, such as this, is trying to pull a fast one on you. These last two points are connected. *Because* the kinds of issues philosophers focus upon are so abstract and important, it becomes necessary to think in a very logical and hardheaded manner in order to gain any intellectual traction that may lead to progress. You don't learn how to think well by studying the easy stuff.

Mary Higgins Clark
Novelist.
Philosophy Major

2. Careers

Majoring in philosophy is not a way to get a specific job. If you want only that—a job that will not be outsourced overseas right after you accumulate a lot of student loans—you should consider studying to become an electrician, a brickmason, a plumber, or some other skilled trade.

These are lucrative and noble careers.

 If, however, you are instead working on your Bachelor's degree, you probably hope to become some sort of knowledge worker. Such work is vulnerable not only to overseas outsourcing, but also to technological disruption. The average person doing such work will have several different kinds of careers in his or her lifetime. The days that a knowledge worker does the same thing for forty years and retires are almost over. In light of that, how can you best prepare yourself for a world where the ability to acquire knowledge quickly is the new currency?

Stephen Colbert
Comedian
Philosophy Major

It will do you little good just to memorize information that employers can retrieve electronically. It costs them far less to use Google than to hire you. Instead, you must demonstrate to potential employers that you can quickly learn how to do *whatever* they need done. Employers do not want to hire people who (already) know only one particular thing. They want to hire smart people who can adapt as circumstances demand. To do this, you need to show that you are intelligent, that you can analyze problems, and that you know how to write clearly and concisely.

Philosophy, fortunately, is a remarkably hardheaded discipline. We won't name names, but there is a lot of sloppy thinking elsewhere in the academy. Employers do not want employees who merely can recite what others say. They want employees who can understand the strengths and weaknesses of various ways of doing things, and who can teach themselves how to implement the best way. Philosophy teaches you to do just that. Those who have majored in philosophy at UM are now—among other things— professors, physicians, contractors, information systems specialists, pilots, attorneys, statisticians, entrepreneurs, organizational presidents and a host of other professionals.

3. Salaries

Can you major in philosophy and still get a job with a decent salary? That is what every student, and every student's parent, wants to know. Let us look at data. According to Payscale.com, the average salary for a philosophy major straight out of college right now is $39,671. This is slightly lower than the average for all majors ($42,196), which includes things like engineering. Still, it is higher than psychology ($36,424) and about the same as biology ($39,628) and criminology ($40,000). For those who majored in philosophy 15 years ago, the average salary is now $74,764. This is slightly higher than the average for all majors: $73,811. And compare philosophy to the average salary for those who majored in business administration ($64,861) or psychology ($65,619) 15 years ago. Those who major in philosophy acquire the skills to rapidly climb organizational ladders. They do not get stuck at the bottom, doing the same thing over and over and over their entire lives. This is a good thing. For more information, see:

"Study of Philosophy Makes Gains Despite Economy," in The Philadelphia Inquirer, ☐October 15, 2011 ☐

"Business Educators Struggle to Put Students to Work", in The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 21, 2011: ☐

"I Think, Therefore I Earn," in The Guardian, Nov 20, 2007 ☐

"To Beat the Market Hire a Philosopher," in the New York Times, January 10, 1999 ☐

"Philosophers Find the Degree Pays Off in Life and Work", in the New York Times, December 26, 1997 ☐

"How to Get to the Top: Study Philosophy," by Thomas Hurka (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1994).

George Soros
Investor
Philosophy Major

Majoring or double majoring in philosophy may not be the quickest path to wealth. But it is a good path for lifelong happiness. These salary averages are for people with no academic degree beyond the Bachelor's degree. But can majoring in philosophy help you if you choose to go to graduate or professional school instead?

4. Graduate school

If you might go to graduate school, but aren't sure in what, majoring in philosophy is the best preparation available.

To enter graduate school, you will have to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). The GRE has three sections: Analytical Writing, Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning. Educational Testing Services compares average GRE scores by intended major. For the Analytical Writing section, philosophy majors scored higher than every other major (4.4 out of 5). ☐ ☐For the Verbal Reasoning section, philosophy majors scored higher than every other major (160 out of 170). For the Quantitative Reasoning section, philosophy majors scored 153 out of 170, which is higher than

every other Humanity major.

Those majoring clearly do better on the GRE than those of any other major. Those who major in philosophy as an undergraduate are often admitted to graduate programs in other fields, because admissions committees understand how well prepared philosophy students are.

5. Professional school

If you instead hope to go to professional school, majoring in philosophy is still the best preparation available. To apply to **law** school, you will have to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Of majors with at least 1900 students taking the LSAT, philosophy and economics are tied for the highest score (157.4 out of 180). Only the comparatively few physics/math majors did better (160). A study of the 2001 Law School Entering Class by Professor Carol Leach of Chicago State University shows that the overall acceptance rate for philosophy majors is second only to physics majors.
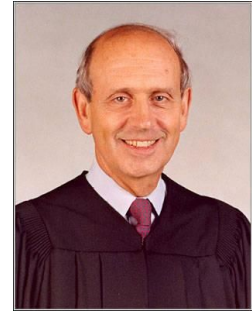

Arian Foster
Houston Texans
Philosophy Major

To apply to **medical** school, you will have to take the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). The MCAT does not publish average scores by specific major. But they do report that humanities majors (29.4), which includes philosophy, score better than those majoring in biological sciences (28.1). The most recent available data report that philosophy majors are admitted to medical school at the second highest rate of all majors (50.2% admitted).

Note further that the format of the MCAT is changing, and will soon add "a new 'Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills' section [that] will test students' reasoning ability by having them analyze, evaluate, and apply information provided in passages from a wide range of social sciences and humanities disciplines, including ethics and philosophy..."

To apply to **business** school, you will have to take the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT). In 2010-11, the average GMAT score for philosophy majors was 599, third only to math and physics. The average for undergraduate business majors was 525. The overall average was 494. If you want to get an MBA, studying philosophy is very good preparation. Those who major in philosophy are highly prized by admissions committees at a wide variety of professional schools.

**Stephen Breyer
Associate Justice of
the Supreme Court
Philosophy Major**

6. Standing apart from the crowd

What will distinguish you from the dozens or hundreds of other people applying for the same jobs and graduate school slots you are?

At UM alone, there are over 600 biology majors, over 600 criminology majors, over 700 psychology majors, and over 1,600 business administration majors. Do you want a resume that's nearly identical to all those other applicants? In the philosophy department, there are about 100 majors. You can get the individualized attention and support you need to become a better student and a better person. If you felt lost or overlooked in high school, but you still want to go to a real research university, majoring in philosophy at UM is probably one of the best options you have. UM has a few nationally ranked degree programs. The Department of Philosophy has one of them: Our department are currently ranked 31 in the world.

7. Details

The Department of Philosophy offers a wide range of courses at the undergraduate level that cover every major area of philosophy as well as its history. Students can major or minor in the subject.

In addition, the department sponsors two undergraduate philosophy organizations: the Philosophy Club, which is open to all UM undergraduates, and Phi Sigma Tau, a chapter of the National Honor Society in Philosophy.

Both groups afford students regular opportunities to meet, eat, and talk philosophy with each other and with graduate students and faculty in the department. All undergraduates who are interested in philosophy are welcome to participate in these philosophical events.

The Philosophy Major and Minor A major in philosophy consists of a minimum of ten courses, each passed with a grade of C- or higher, with an overall GPA of 2.0.

Elective courses may be chosen to fit individual needs. Required courses for the major are either Philosophy 210 or 215, either 271 or 272, twelve credits at the 300 level (including one course

from 330-332 and two courses from 340-345), and six credits at the 500 level.

A minor in philosophy consists of a minimum of five courses, each passed with a grade of C- or higher with an overall GPA of 2.0. At least three of the courses must be at the 200-level or above, and at least one of these three courses must be at the 300-level or above. The major and the minor should be planned with the advice of the department.

Pre-Med, Pre-Law Major and Minor Tracks

The Department offers major and minor tracks for students wishing to enhance their Pre-Law studies with relevant Philosophy coursework.

A **Pre-Law Major Track** in Philosophy consists of a minimum of ten courses, each passed with a grade of C- or higher, with an overall GPA of 2.0. Required courses for the track are either 210 (Formal Logic) or 215 (Logic and Law), either 271 or 272 (1 course in history of philosophy), either 330 (Ethics) or 331 (Social and Political Philosophy), either 332 (Philosophy of Law) or 333 (Philosophical Foundations of Criminal Law), two of either 340 (Epistemology), 341 (Philosophy of Language) or 343 (Philosophy of Science), 2 500-level courses, and any 2 additional PHI courses.

A **Pre-Law Minor Track** in Philosophy consists of a minimum of five courses, each passed with a grade of C- or higher, with an overall GPA of 2.0. Required courses for the track are either 210 or 215, either 330 or 331, either 332 or 333, one of either 340, 341 or 343, and any other PHI course.

To discuss whether and how to major, double-major or minor in philosophy, see:

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