

**BOR Academic Advisory Committee for Philosophy**  
**“The Value of a Philosophy Degree”**  
**November 2017**

The popular notion that the study of philosophy has little economic value is demonstrably false. Undergraduate training in philosophy is of great economic value, both to students who earn Bachelor’s degrees in philosophy and to the State of Georgia. Moreover, training in philosophy has intellectual benefits that are important to our democratic society. These intellectual benefits are also important to individuals themselves.

### **1. What is Philosophy?**

Philosophy studies the most fundamental questions that human beings face in all cultures. These questions can be grouped into two main areas: “how does the world work?” and “what is our place in the world?”

Some representative questions of philosophy are:

- What is the best form of society?
- Are there objective facts about what is right and wrong, or is morality dependent on individuals’ subjective beliefs or on the culture in which they live?
- Are abortion, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, and other controversial actions and policies, morally permissible?
- What is the nature and purpose of business activity, and what moral obligations are associated with it?
- What are the moral obligations physicians, lawyers, and other professionals, have to society generally?
- What does it mean to be human?
- To what extent are actions really free?
- Why would God—all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful—allow evil to exist?
- What is the difference between knowledge and mere opinion?

Nearly all human beings have opinions about such topics. Philosophy seeks to replace mere opinion about them with rationally-supported opinions and knowledge.

### **2. Intellectual Benefits of Undergraduate Training in Philosophy**

A large part of undergraduate education in philosophy involves considering the views of some of the most influential thinkers in history. This is important to the development of cultural literacy in our students. It helps them become informed citizens. But undergraduate education in philosophy is far from memorization of the ideas of past thinkers. The study of philosophy requires students to *do* philosophy themselves, that is, to engage with influential philosophical theories and positions in a critical way, to articulate their own responses to those theories and positions, and to support their responses with reasons and evidence.

Any philosophy course, no matter what the specific content, is a course in critical thinking. It emphasizes above all else the importance of evidential support and argumentative strength. A course in philosophy has been a success only if students have come to demonstrate their ability to support

claims with clearly articulated, logically strong arguments and to differentiate between sound and unsound arguments. It is in this philosophical activity—activity which can include extensive writing assignments, in-class discussions, and oral presentations—that students develop skills that are valuable in any number of different professions: the ability to write with clarity and precision, to argue rigorously, and to think critically.

In short, training in philosophy develops critical thinking and communication skills that can be applied in any professional context. Therefore, the successful completion of an undergraduate degree in philosophy can benefit any student, no matter what his or her ultimate professional goals might be.

### **3. Employment Benefits of Undergraduate Training in Philosophy**

*Forbes*, *Business Insider*, and *Harvard Business Review*, among others, have recently featured articles that highlight the value of a philosophy degree for the tech industry and business more generally. They cite a variety of factors in making this assessment, in addition to critical thinking and communication skills.

For instance, a recent *Business Week* article focused on the way training in philosophy teaches individuals to keep ethics and character in mind as they make decisions and take action.<sup>1</sup> Philosophy encourages a deeper and broader way of thinking about how we should act. Those interested in developing a more ethical corporate sector, or more socially responsible business practices generally, are encouraged to hire philosophy majors. This is in line with the results of a recent survey of employers conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (“Raising the Bar”), wherein 75% of employers surveyed said colleges should place more emphasis on “the ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions.”<sup>2</sup>

In a recent *Forbes* article, the president and general manager of MonsterTRAK (a division of Monster.com) is quoted as saying that philosophy majors are “change agents,” and that this is something that more and more employers are seeking.<sup>3</sup> An article in *Harvard Business Review* points out that while many undergraduate business and STEM programs teach students to deal with specific business and tech problems, they do not teach them to deal well with “what if?” problems, with problems that cannot be analyzed in conventional ways.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy undergraduates, in contrast, are trained to grapple with complexity and ambiguity, and encouraged to innovate, to create, to think “outside-of-the-box.” This is in part why another *Forbes* article recently called liberal arts degrees “tech’s hottest ticket.”<sup>5</sup> Business and industry seek creative and innovative employees with the ability to understand complex and ambiguous situations and to anticipate new threats as well as opportunities.

“The nature of jobs is changing,” says investor Mark Cuban.<sup>6</sup> In the future, employees will need to be adaptable, free thinkers who communicate well. Cuban pointed to philosophy as an example of one degree that will do well in tomorrow’s market. “When the data is all being spit out for you, options are being spit out for you, you need a different perspective in order to have a different view of the data.”

### **4. Financial Benefits of Undergraduate Training in Philosophy**

According to Payscale.com’s College Salary Report for 2016, the mid-career median salary of a worker holding an undergraduate degree in philosophy (and no other degree) is \$84,100. This is

in the top 25% of all majors and more than majors such as chemistry, computer science, accounting, biological sciences, systems, advertising, marketing, finance and banking, and nursing.<sup>7</sup>

These figures reflect earnings of those who hold only an undergraduate degree in philosophy. Many college students who complete bachelor's degrees in philosophy go on to earn graduate degrees in various fields. The evidence suggests that their undergraduate training proves very beneficial when it comes to gaining admission to graduate programs in business, law, and other professions.

- Business: Only three majors (physics, mathematics, and engineering) have higher scores than philosophy on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).<sup>8</sup>
- Law: Only five majors (economics, classics, policy studies, math, and linguistics) have higher scores than philosophy on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT).<sup>9</sup>
- Other Disciplines: Only four majors (math, economics, materials engineering, and physics) have higher scores than philosophy on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). The GRE is a standardized exam that is required for graduate work in a wide range of fields.<sup>10</sup>

The successful completion of a graduate degree, be it in business, law, or some other area, greatly increases an individual's earning potential.

## **5. How Do Philosophy Graduates Benefit the State of Georgia?**

By preparing individuals for high-paying jobs, undergraduate degree programs in philosophy contribute to the economic vitality of Georgia.

Moreover, Georgians who have college-level training in philosophy are better insulated against foolish opinions and everyday nonsense. They can understand and evaluate the arguments of public figures, and they are better protected against the sometimes slippery claims of advertisers and salespeople. They better understand the philosophical foundations of our democracy. The United States was the first nation founded on philosophy rather than religion, ethnicity, or force, and both the US Constitution and the Constitution of the State of Georgia incorporate ideas inherited from the Western philosophical tradition. Furthermore, by studying Western and non-Western traditions comparatively, students develop intercultural competence and become globally engaged.

## **6. Conclusion**

A philosophy degree opens many doors and closes very few. It is of great value to society and the student pursuing it, both financially and personally. The State of Georgia greatly benefits from its University System offering students the employment and life opportunities that come with an undergraduate degree in philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/BusinessWeekPhilosophy2010.pdf>

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- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2009\\_EmployerSurvey.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2009_EmployerSurvey.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> [http://www.forbes.com/2008/03/27/jobs-workforce-graduates-careers-cx\\_mk\\_0327philosophy.html](http://www.forbes.com/2008/03/27/jobs-workforce-graduates-careers-cx_mk_0327philosophy.html)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://hbr.org/2011/03/want-innovative-thinking-hire>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/georgeanders/2015/07/29/liberal-arts-degree-tech/#4e184db25a75>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/mark-cuban-liberal-arts-is-the-future-2017-2>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.payscale.com/college-salary-report/majors-that-pay-you-back/bachelors?page=23>
- <sup>8</sup> <http://blog.prep4gmat.com/majors-with-the-highest-and-lowest-gmat-scores/>
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.lsac.org/lisacresources/data/applicants-by-major> (Only majors with 100 or more test takers are counted.)
- <sup>10</sup> [https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre\\_guide\\_table4.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre_guide_table4.pdf)