

ME? MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY?

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For most students arriving at college, philosophy is the one subject they've never had before so it's natural that it's one of the last they consider majoring in. It's also natural to wonder what the major is good for--after all, few people ever plan to be professional philosophers! Yet, year after year, students switch their major to philosophy, and others tell us they wish they'd discovered it sooner so they could have done so.

What these students discovered - surprising as it sounds - is that philosophy is the single most useful major in the entire undergraduate curriculum! (Yes, useful!)

It's true, of course, that not many people become professional philosophers. But neither do most history majors become historians or English majors go on to become novelists. The fact is that most students don't pick a major because they plan to make their living in that field. They choose a major based on their interests and on how well it will prepare them for the widest possible number of occupations after college. If you are deciding that way too, we can say this for certain: If you have the interest, philosophy is best possible major - hands down.

Let me explain.

Philosophy deals with theories about the most basic beliefs and values that people have. These include topics like the nature of reality and human nature, the nature and sources of knowledge and morality, the proper structure for society and government, and the nature of religious belief. It also studies theories about the nature of science, art, language, and law. In this way, every philosophy major is exposed to the most influential interpretations of the most important issues people face across the entire spectrum of human experience.

But more than simply learning about these issues, philosophy includes a keen training in logic and critical thinking - in the ability to argue and debate the truth of the various theories and viewpoints that are studied. It sharpens one's ability to spot difficulties, pose questions, and to weigh the evidence for and against the reasons given for any view on any topic. (A bank V.P. once told me that his logical training was the most valuable thing he got in his entire undergraduate education - even more valuable than his business courses.)

Even from this short description you may be able to see why a philosophy major is the best possible background for anyone who wants to deal with the public or who wants to write - whether as a novelist, or news reporter. It is also the very best major for those thinking of pursuing any sort of career in religion. And it should come as no surprise that law schools consider it the best background for the Law SAT and a career in law. (Speaking of

standardized tests, the highest GRE scores consistently come from three majors: math, physics, and philosophy.)

But there's more. It seems that a solid background in the influential viewpoints over a wide range of issues, and an ability to think logically about them, is also splendid training for a career in business according to several top business schools. But what may be most surprising of all is that the records of some of the best medical schools show philosophy as the undergraduate major of some of their most outstanding alumni!

So, if you have doubts about the major that's best for you - especially if you are presently an undeclared major - why not make an appointment at the philosophy department to talk over your interests with one of our faculty? Philosophy might, at least, be the ideal minor subject for you even if you decide not to major in it.