

WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

Why Study Philosophy?

Valpo philosophy students explore and analyze the views and research methods of humanity's greatest thinkers, from both Western and non-Western traditions. In doing so, they come to understand how ideas about the meaning of human life, the sources of value, human freedom, the nature of knowledge, and so on, have shaped history and culture. They also become better able to recognize and grapple with the ideas that shape human life today, and to devise creative alternatives to them.

Apart from the intrinsic interest of the subject matter and the humanistic values served by mastering it, there are strong practical reasons to study Philosophy. It is a well-supported fact that the study of Philosophy succeeds in developing a balanced mix of conceptual creativity and high-level critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills better than any other Major field. This is borne out by the fact that, in rankings by undergraduate major, Philosophy students regularly [perform better](#) than every other major on the verbal and analytical writing sections of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and perform better than any other humanities major on the quantitative reasoning section. Philosophy majors are also among the highest-scoring groups of students on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), [regularly outscoring](#) students from other majors that are often thought to be "the right majors" for people wanting to go into Law or Business.

If you are interested in Philosophy but too concerned about career-preparation to put all of your eggs in the philosophical basket, why not consider Philosophy as a minor or a second major? We frequently have students combine their studies in Philosophy with studies in Theology, Business, History, Classics, Political Science, Psychology, English, and many others.

What Can You Do With A Philosophy Degree?

It is a popular myth that a degree in Philosophy only qualifies someone to teach Philosophy. That's one option, of course, but it's an option that usually requires an advanced degree in philosophy (M.A. or Ph.D.). In fact, the general reasoning skills that enable Philosophy majors to do so well on standardized tests are so broadly applicable that the real challenge isn't to think of fields in which they're crucial, but to think of fields in which they aren't. Thus, Jordan Kotick says that the correct response to the question "what can you do with a philosophy degree?" is "absolutely anything you want." And Kotick should know. After earning a Bachelor's in Philosophy and Economics and then a Master's in Philosophy, Kotick landed a job as Vice President and Technical Market Strategist at J.P. Morgan Chase. He is now Global Head of Technical Analysis at Barclays Capital. (You can read about his move from Philosophy to Finance [here](#).) In short, a degree in Philosophy can be excellent preparation for further study and/or a successful career in many fields.

... my studies as a philosophy major at Valparaiso University changed my life, improving my writing, sharpening my thinking skills, and exposing me to the most important questions that can be asked. Studying philosophy prepared me for demanding coursework at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. I am a better pastor than if I had not majored in philosophy, and the skills acquired through philosophy will augment performance in any vocation.

-Pastor Christopher Jackson ('01), Saint John's
Lutheran Church, Lexington, Kentucky

I attribute a lot of my success [as a USAF Air Battle Manager] to my philosophy training at Valparaiso University. Philosophy and being in the midst of battle may not seem to go together, but the ability to think clearly under pressure is crucial to saving the lives of our military personnel. ... The technical nature of my work lends itself to an engineering background, but the study of philosophy makes me a better problem solver than my peers. When teaching my students how to handle life and death situations, I find myself relying on my philosophy training, not my understanding of radar.

-Shannon M. Bachman ('01), Capt. and Air Battle
Manager Instructor, USAF

I can say without any doubt that the philosophy department at Valparaiso was a crucial part of my formation as a clear writer, a serious thinker, and a passionate debater. These skills have been tremendous assets to my pastoral ministry and to my professional writing. While I don't often find myself explaining the intricacies of Aristotle or Kant to Bible study classes, the rigor of my philosophical studies at Valpo ensured that I have an extremely solid intellectual foundation from which to teach, preach, and counsel.

-Steven Zittergruen ('02), ELCA Minister and writer for
Augsburg Fortress Press

...my studies in philosophy helped a lot in preparation for what I have had to do thus far in law school. Philosophy gave me the critical reading and analytical skills needed to understand the case law and statutes that I have to read.

-Laura Wagner ('07), First year student at Marquette
University School of Law

My education in philosophy has been fundamental in my intellectual, personal, and career development, ... It has undoubtedly enhanced my

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legal education and career, which involve argumentation at almost every step. As an added bonus, because the ability to evaluate the statements and positions of others comes as a package deal with the ability to evaluate one's own arguments and beliefs, those who use this skill to assess themselves stand to become more principled, more thoughtful, and, ideally, better people. It is difficult to overstate the value of studying philosophy, and I would strongly encourage anyone with an interest to pursue it.

Kathryn Dalzell ('04), Graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law, Executive Editor of Virginia Law Review (06-07)

Other successful graduates include:

- Gregory Karpenko ('95): Attorney, Fredrikson & Byron's Litigation Group, Minneapolis, MN; Named a Rising Star in 2005 and 2006 by *Minnesota Law & Politics* magazine.
- Joseph Yarbrough ('02): Assistant Professor of Classics & Early Christian Literature, Ave Maria University (Ph.D. in Philosophy, Cornell University)
- Jack Lyons (VU '93), Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Arkansas

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