

Philosophy Department Learning Outcomes for the Major

Revised 5/2/17

I. The aims of philosophy education

Philosophical thinking is reflective and critical conceptual activity concerned with some of the most enduring and challenging questions. It seeks to address them through creative critical thinking, reasoned analysis and argumentation, and thoughtful discussion. The study of philosophy develops skills in careful and flexible, imaginative thinking, critical analysis, sound reasoning and argumentation, objective evaluation, clear and persuasive writing, and toleration of uncertainty. The major program in philosophy is designed to provide a broad exposure to the major areas of philosophy as well as a strong grounding in the history of the Western philosophical tradition. The program emphasizes the close reading and critical evaluation of classic texts. Philosophy students can expect to develop sophisticated interpretive, analytic and expository skill that will enable them to engage in original, critical reflection on their own.

II. Learning Outcomes for the philosophy major

Expectations for philosophy majors¹

Students who major in philosophy should gain and be able to demonstrate the following knowledge and skills:

A. General Philosophical Literacy

1. Philosophy majors should gain and demonstrate a broad understanding of some of the major figures in the history of Western philosophy.
2. Philosophy majors should gain and demonstrate an understanding at an advanced level of some of the main topics/issues/ideas/themes in the history of philosophy and those that are central to contemporary philosophical thought, including ethics, metaphysics, theory of knowledge, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language.
3. Students should gain and be able to demonstrate skills of formal logic, including the abilities to understand the logical symbolism used in contemporary philosophical texts and to carry out logical proofs and derivations within a formal system.

B. Engagement in philosophical inquiry, research, and analysis

1. Philosophy majors should be able to use key conceptual frameworks, including ethical (normative), epistemological, metaphysical, etc.
2. Philosophy majors should be able to conduct independent research.
 - Students should exhibit a high level of research, thinking, and writing skill.
 - Students should be able to develop their own interpretations and analyses of philosophical texts.
 - Students should be able to defend their interpretations with good reasoning.
 - Students should be able to advance an original question into a concise and manageable project.
 - Students should demonstrate the ability to create a research plan for further investigation.
 - Students should be able to locate and properly utilize good philosophical sources.

- Students demonstrate discrimination in reviewing literature on any philosophical topic.
- Students should demonstrate their knowledge of important resources for source materials.
- Students should demonstrate information literacy to distinguish between good and poor sources.
- Students should demonstrate their ability to navigate properly both library and online research tools, including standard reference works, online data bases, and relevant scholarly books and articles.
- Students should demonstrate mastery of proper attribution methods.
- Students should be able to take on and see through to completion an extended project independently.

C. Reading skills

1. Students should read and be able to comprehend important primary texts.
2. Philosophy majors should demonstrate abilities to approach and comprehend dense and difficult (primary) philosophical texts.
 - Students should know the difference between primary and secondary sources.
 - Students should demonstrate an ability to follow complex reasoning in philosophical texts.

D. Thinking, reasoning, and argumentation skills

1. Philosophy majors should be able to recognize important issues and to identify important claims/concepts in texts and reasoning.
2. Philosophy majors should demonstrate the ability to decipher the intellectual structure of a philosopher's argument.
3. Philosophy majors should be able to critique and evaluate reasoning.
4. Philosophy majors should be able to engage in good reasoning, to construct sound and persuasive arguments, and to think philosophically in-depth for themselves.

E. Writing/Communication Skills

1. Philosophy majors should demonstrate their ability to communicate complex philosophical ideas, concepts, analyses, and arguments—their own as well as those of other philosophers—effectively in writing and orally.

¹ In developing these Learning Outcomes, the Lehigh Philosophy department drew from the following sources:

- University of Buffalo, "Department of Philosophy Learning Goals" (www.buffalo.edu/cas/philosophy/undergrad-study/learninggoals.html)
- Rochester University, "Department of Philosophy Learning Objectives and Assessment Plans for the BA major" (www.rochester.edu)
- University of California at Santa Cruz, "Philosophy Department Undergraduate Program Learning Objectives" (www.philosophy.ucsc.edu/undergraduate/PLO%20/index.html)
- The American Historical Association History Tuning Project (www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core)