The Philosophy Major: An Excellent Preparation for Law School

According to the American Bar Association, undergraduates who are planning to attend law school should take classes that help them develop the skills of problem solving, critical reading, and writing and editing. Many students find that taking philosophy classes help them do exactly that! Several alumni of the University of West Georgia’s Philosophy Program went on to earn law degrees and are now working in the legal profession.

Two of our recent graduates—Amy Hayes ('14) and Andrew McKown ('12)—are currently finishing their law degrees at Emory University in Atlanta. As undergraduates, both Amy and Andrew majored in philosophy because they wanted a solid preparation for law school, and they both credit their philosophical studies (and a lot of hard work!) for the success they’re currently experiencing as law students. We recently asked them about their law school experiences and how studying philosophy at UWG helped prepare them for the rigors of law school.

What did you think philosophy might do for you as a pre-law and law student?

Amy: I thought that philosophy would help me enhance my critical thinking skills, writing abilities, understanding of arguments (both generally and structurally), and interpretation skills. … I was hoping that a background in philosophy would help me become a law student who could deeply analyze complicated situations/hypotheticals that would most certainly be thrown my way in law school.

Andrew: The main virtues of the philosophy major for law school are that you read dense material, learn to analyze arguments, and get familiar with logic. These are the three sections of the LSAT, and you’ll use these skills in everything you do in law school.

What is the main virtue of the philosophy major for students interested in law school?

Amy: The logic courses really helped with the LSAT [Law School Admission Test], and all of the lessons on Socrates, Rawls, Mills, Hart, and Dworkin have proven to be very useful when I have needed to argue a difficult position in a case. Those lessons helped me dig deeper into the text of laws and opinions than my opponent typically does.

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Did philosophy do anything else for you? What is the main virtue of philosophy more generally?

Amy: Philosophy taught me how to think deeply about things as opposed to merely taking them at face value. It taught me to think about why something is the way it is—it taught me about why I “know” something that I know. How can I know that I exist? When will I cease to exist? What does it mean to “know” something? If I “know” something, do I know that something in its entirety or do I merely know the puzzle pieces that make up that something? Why is something right or wrong, and how is it that we know something is right or wrong? Although philosophy did not provide me with the answers to these questions, it taught me how to know to even ask the questions in the first place.

Andrew: I think philosophy made me a better thinker and writer. Almost everything in law is doing some kind of philosophy, and every semester I came across philosophers we studied at West Georgia in my textbooks. Several articles we read in my philosophy classes have appeared on past LSAT tests, and I even had a question on my criminal law exam. (continued on p. 2)
Did you take any non-philosophy courses as electives that might interest or be useful to pre-law students?

Amy: I wish that there had been a requirement to take Public Speaking or a course that taught the art of debate. I didn’t take anything like this out of fear of talking to people, but those are skills that were needed from Day One in law school.

Andrew: The most beneficial elective for me was taking public speaking. At some point in law school everyone will be graded on getting up in front of a room full of people and giving oral arguments, so it’s a big advantage knowing how to calm your nerves, how to stand, and how to speak clearly.

Did you have a minor? If so, has it proven useful?

Amy: Yes. I minored in English. It has been useful because writing well is critical in law school and beyond. It is very difficult to advocate zealously for a client if you don’t possess great writing skills.

Any advice for philosophy majors interested in law school?

Amy: Try to present at as many student conferences as possible. Start prepping for the LSAT at least one year before taking the test. Strive to have the best GPA possible so that there are more options when it comes to deciding on a law school. Don’t overload on courses during the last year as an undergrad because the first year of law school is relentless and exhausting. Volunteer with public service organizations/charities.

Andrew: Since the LSAT is the most important factor in getting accepted [to law school], you need to start practicing early. Everyone should take Symbolic Logic even though it isn’t required. The logic that appears on the LSAT doesn’t go beyond what you learn in Critical Thinking, but you get so familiar with the basics doing proofs in Symbolic Logic that you’ll automatically see things a few steps ahead. This is crucial because you literally can’t spare a few seconds to stop and think something out, and a lot of people aren’t able to finish every question before time is called. It isn’t necessary to spend money on a prep course. I recommend studying on your own and taking every past official LSAT test you can find. The prep books from Manhattan and PowerScore are both good and will teach you everything you need to know. There are several law school forums online with good advice along the way. Other than that, pick a school close to where you want to practice. Networking with people around you while you’re in school is important for finding a job. Don’t spend all day in the library and try to have fun.

The UWG Philosophy Program offers a pre-law track for philosophy majors who are thinking about law school or who have an interest in questions are the intersection of law and philosophy. Students in the pre-law track take courses in the Philosophy of Law, Political Philosophy, and Professional Ethics, and they can also take the Symbolic Logic course that many find valuable as a preparation for the LSAT. For more information about our degree and our classes, visit https://www.westga.edu/phil or contact Dr. Riker, the Director of the Philosophy Program, at wriker@westga.edu.
PHIL 2020-01: Critical Thinking, Dr. Walter Riker
Should we regard non-human animals as "persons"? What does religion tell us about our relationship to animals? Do we have good reason to deny that some animals have natural rights? Is it moral to keep animals in zoos? In this class you will learn to recognize and evaluate different kinds of arguments. You will then apply these skills to assessment of philosophical arguments that deal with our relationships with other animals. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area B1.

PHIL 2130-E01: Introduction to World Religions, Dr. Rosemary Kellison
This course revolves around two central questions: how has the world shaped religion(s), and how have religions shaped the world? As we move through an introductory survey of some of the world's major religious traditions, including indigenous religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and selected new religious movements, we will pay special attention to the ways in which these traditions have been shaped by historical, political, and geographical changes in the world—and will also consider how these traditions and their communities have influenced these changes. Over the course of the semester, we will seek both to understand the significance and relevance of religion in world history and to begin to grapple with some of the important philosophical questions addressed within religious communities as well as by those who study them. 100% online course. No face-to-face meetings required. Required for religion-track majors and minors.

PHIL 2130-E02: Introduction to World Religions, Dr. Rosemary Kellison
Same description as PHIL 2130-E01 above.

PHIL 2010-01: Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Josh Dohmen
My aim is to introduce you to some main areas of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, social and political philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and the philosophy of religion), by studying five major figures whose thought encompasses many of these fields. By doing so, we will see the ways in which our different philosophical beliefs are intimately connected. First, we will read two of Plato's dialogues to investigate what philosophy is and why we should practice it. Second, we'll move on to discuss René Descartes's Meditations, in which he questions what we are, what we can know, and whether or not we are justified in believing in God(s). Third, we will consider Karl Marx's writings to see the ways in which our understandings of humans, of history, and of politics are importantly related. The fourth figure we will consider is W.E.B. du Bois who considers knowledge, identity, and education throughout his writings. Fifth, we will turn to Simone de Beauvoir to consider how her existentialist views and her appeals to history and biology are inseparable from her political ideal of women's liberation. By thinking about the connections between these thinkers and the aspects of their thought, we will be better able to understand our own lives and ideas in relation to the various questions philosophers ask. Please note that based on feedback from students this semester, I may change some of the readings. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area C2.

PHIL 2010-02: Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Josh Dohmen
Same as above.

PHIL 2010-03: Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Josh Dohmen
Same as above.

PHIL 2010-04: Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Walter Riker
In this course we will consider several central questions in philosophy. There are good prudential reasons for obeying the law—is there also a moral duty to obey it? Do we ever have a moral duty to break the law? Can we be free or responsible for our actions in a deterministic universe? Does "knowledge" require certainty, that is, that we cannot be wrong? Can we prove that God exists? If God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, then why does evil exist? Philosophers aren't the only people who ask these questions, so as we consider answers to these questions, we will think about what is means to take a "philosophical" approach to a problem. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area C2.

PHIL 2020-01: Critical Thinking, Dr. John Garner
This course provides an introduction to logical reasoning and critical thinking. In division one, we will study the power of Socratic questioning and Aristotelian logic. We will discern the differences between deductive and non-deductive reasoning, the temptations of argumentative fallacies, and the clear and unclear uses of language. In division two, we will engage in open, critical discussion about controversial ethical and socio-economic questions, including the demands of charity, the purpose of a business, and the ethics of practices like marriage and voting. In division three, students will present their own work on a topic of their choice relating to the class. Overall, this course helps us understand whether we should be persuaded...
by others' arguments, by the media, or by our pre-existing beliefs. It helps us to reason better, to be self-questioning, to make better arguments, and to evaluate more accurately the arguments of others. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area B1.

PHIL 2020-02: Critical Thinking, Instructor TBA
An investigation of logical fallacies and patterns of valid reasoning in primarily oral by also written discourse. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area B1.

PHIL 2020-03: Critical Thinking, Instructor TBA
See description for PHIL 2020-02 above.

PHIL 2020-04: Critical Thinking, Dr. Josh Dohmen
This course aims to introduce students to two different, but related, sets of critical thinking skills. The first are formal skills that help us identify and evaluate arguments. The second are more personal, emotional, and social skills to help us better share our ideas and arguments with others and to help us be more critical of our own beliefs. These skills will be largely introduced by the textbook, Intellectual Empathy. In the end, I hope you will not only be better able to think critically in the sense of understanding arguments, but also in the sense of engaging in self-evaluation while also evaluating others' arguments and beliefs. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area B1.

PHIL 2020-05: Critical Thinking, Instructor TBA
See description for PHIL 2020-02 above.

PHIL 2020-06: Critical Thinking, Dr. Josh Dohmen
Same as PHIL 2020-04 above.

PHIL 2020-07: Critical Thinking, Geoffrey Lundeen
See description for PHIL 2020-02 above.

PHIL 2020-08: Critical Thinking, Dr. Carmen Zinn
See description for PHIL 2020-02 above.

PHIL 2020-09: Critical Thinking, Dr. Carmen Zinn
See description for PHIL 2020-02 above.

PHIL 2030-01: Introduction to Ethics, Instructor TBA
An introduction to the central concepts in ethics and an exploration of such contemporary ethical issues as abortion, genetic engineering, euthanasia, and capital punishment. Fulfills Core Area C2. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor and toward the religion minor.

PHIL 2030-02: Introduction to Ethics, Dr. Robert Lane
Everyone has beliefs about morality, and to some extent we all agree about what actions are right and wrong; for example, we all agree that murder is wrong and that helping those less fortunate than us is right. But there are many moral questions about which people disagree: is abortion immoral? what about physician-assisted suicide? is it wrong to spend money on expensive cars and homes when people in other parts of the world are dying from malnutrition? do non-human animals have rights? This course will enable you critically to evaluate your own beliefs about concrete ethical issues like these. We'll also be dealing with more theoretical questions, such as: where does morality come from? (God? society? or somewhere else?); what makes an ethical argument good or bad?; and what general rules or principles ought we to live by? No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, so if you want to start thinking critically about morality, this course is a great place to begin. Fulfills Core Area C2. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor and toward the religion minor.

PHIL 2030-03: Introduction to Ethics, Dr. Robert Lane
Same as PHIL 2030-02 above.

PHIL 2030-04: Introduction to Ethics, Dr. Robert Lane
Same as PHIL 2030-02 above.

PHIL 2130-01: Introduction to World Religions, Dr. Rosemary Kellison
This course revolves around two central questions: how has the world shaped religion(s), and how have religions shaped the world? As we move through an introductory survey of some of the world's major religious traditions, including indigenous religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and selected new religious movements, we will pay special attention to the ways in which these traditions have been shaped by historical, political, and geographical changes in the world—and also consider how these traditions and their communities have influenced these changes. Over the course of the semester, we will seek both to understand the significance and relevance of religion in world history and to begin to grapple with some of the important philosophical questions addressed within religious communities as well as by those who study them. Required for religion-track majors and minors.

PHIL 2130-02: Introduction to World Religions, Katie D'Entremont
A comparative study of the beliefs and practices of several world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This course not only explores the history of these faiths and their early doctrinal and communal development, but their place in today's world. Required for religion-track majors and minors.

PHIL 3100-01: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Dr. John Garner
Ancient philosophy, starting with the Greeks, decisively influenced the Western intellectual tradition. It impacted the religious traditions, which often defined themselves through agreement with or opposition to Greek thought. It influenced later conceptions of science in both its rationalist and empiricist versions. And, finally, it developed into the philosophical branches of ontology, epistemology, and ethics that have been studied ever since. In this course, we will begin by reading Plato and Aristotle to see how they raise foundational questions in science, religion,
and ethics. Then we will explore competing “life philosophies” (e.g. Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Augustine) prevalent the early B.C.E. era, when the great Western religions were also in development. Finally, we will learn how Medieval thinkers in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (e.g. Avicenna, Al-Ghazālī, Maimonides, and Aquinas) influenced one another in surprising ways in the fields of theology, natural philosophy, ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor.

PHIL 3410-01: Existentialism, Dr. John Garner  
This course examines both atheistic and religious existentialism through thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, DeBeauvoir, and Fanon. To provide relief, we will also read selections from figures who influenced, drew from, or challenged existentialist themes, such as Weil, Heidegger, Lévinas, Girard, or Castoriadis. Students are encouraged to think through the big questions existentialists raise about the meaning of human existence, including whether there is any purpose for our existence, how we define ourselves, whether there are any reasons to be moral, and whether human existence is inherently meaningful. We will analyze theories in terms of the ramifications for the way we live our lives. Counts toward the philosophy major and the philosophy minor.

PHIL 3205-01: Theories of Religion, Dr. Rosemary Kellison  
In this course, we will examine some of the most important developments in the Western academic study of religion from the nineteenth century to the present. Among the topics we will study are: how religion should be defined and whether it is “special” compared to other aspects of human social life; the question of whether and how religion scholars can study people’s beliefs and experiences; the role of ritual and practice in religion; how religion is used to create community identities—and draw boundaries around those communities; the relationship between religious studies and European colonialism; and the role religion plays in social power structures. Fulfills a requirement for religion-track majors, can be used more generally for the philosophy major or minor.

PHIL 3250-01W: Islamic Thought, Dr. Rosemary Kellison  
In this course, we will examine some of the most important historical developments in Islamic thought, focusing especially on the areas of Islamic theology, jurisprudence and ethics, and political theory. In each case, we will consider both premodern and modern thinkers. A major focus of the course will be to draw connections between these theoretical developments and themes and contemporary events in the Islamic world, including the emergence of modern Islamic republics, the rise of Islamism in its political and militant forms, the Arab Spring, and contemporary theological and legal debates among Muslims. Fulfills a requirement for religion-track majors, can be used more generally for the philosophy major or minor.

PHIL 4115-01W: Political Philosophy, Dr. Walter Riker  
We will examine central features of modern liberal democratic societies (e.g., the US, France, and Germany) such as universal human rights, democracy, and capitalism. We will consider mainstream defenses and responses to them. Counts toward the philosophy major and the philosophy minor.

PHIL 4300-01W: Senior Seminar, Dr. Janet Donohoe  
This course serves as a capstone to the study of philosophy at UWG. It is required for all graduating seniors in philosophy. This semester’s topic is Environmental Phenomenology which means we will be studying texts that address many aspects of the environment through the phenomenological method. We will be asking questions about how we experience the environment, what the environment is, how space and place are related, what it means to be embodied beings in relation to a world, and how differing conceptions of environment effect our experiences.

Registration is nearly here!

Remember: If you are a philosophy major, you must meet with an advisor before you will be able to register for classes. If you have completed 61 or more hours, you should meet with your faculty advisor in Philosophy. If you have not yet completed 61 hours, then you should meet with someone in the Advising Center. The registration schedule is posted below. Be sure to meet with your advisor before your time to register.

Summer/Fall 2017 On-Time Registration Dates for CURRENTLY* enrolled students:

Current Seniors & all Graduate level students – March 27
Current Juniors ss# ending in 50-99 – March 28
Current Juniors ss# ending in 00-49 – March 29
Current Sophomores ss# ending 50-99 – March 30
Current Sophomores ss# ending 00-49 – March 31
Current Freshmen ss# ending 00-49 – April 3
Current Freshmen ss# ending 50-99 – April 4

Open Registration – Begins April 10, 2017 (Students who are currently serving a one-term suspension, are readmitted, or are admitted as a transient must wait until Open Registration to register.)

*Currently enrolled students are those taking courses in the current term, Spring 2017.

IMPORTANT! See your advisor before your assigned date to register, and your advisor or department will remove your advisement hold.
17th Annual Meeting of the Minds
Do Race and Gender Really Matter?
Famous Philosophers Discuss the Question.

Wednesday, March 29, 2017
7:00 pm
Kathy Cashen Auditorium

Looking for something to read this summer?

Your professors recommend these books.

**Professor Dohmen**

**Professor Donohoe**

**Professor Garner**

**Professor Kellison**

**Hi-Phi Nation**
(a new philosophy podcast sponsored by NEH & Duke University, available on iTunes and Google Play).

**Professor Lane**

**Professor Riker**

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Philosophy Program Awards Gathering!

This year the Philosophy Program’s Awards Ceremony and End-of-Year Gathering will take place at American Pie (927 Maple St, Carrollton, GA 30117). We will meet on April 20 from 3:30–5:00 p.m. All philosophy majors are invited to attend. The Philosophy Program will provide pizza and soft drinks for attendees.

At the gathering we will bring the year to a close and recognize several of our majors for their outstanding work in philosophy. The Gordon Watson Award honors our most outstanding major. We will also honor the top major in the Pre-Law Track with the Outstanding Pre-Law Student Award, as well as our Best New Major. Phi Sigma Tau will officially induct its newest members. And more!

If you would like to join us, please RSVP directly with Dr. Riker (wriker@westga.edu) by April 13 so that we can let American Pie know approximately how many people to expect.