



# PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT HANDBOOK

## INFORMATION & GUIDELINES

2017-2018

## **Welcome to the Department of Philosophy**

The Department of Philosophy at Vassar has compiled this Handbook to help current and prospective majors and correlates in Philosophy make the most of our program. The Handbook offers information for all those who want to learn more about philosophy at Vassar.

The information offered here is meant to give a general introduction to the Philosophy Department. This handbook will not answer every question you might have. For further explanations or for details relating to a specific situation, please contact the Department Chair, Professor Jeffrey Seidman, (845-437-5537, e-mail [jeseidman@vassar.edu](mailto:jeseidman@vassar.edu)), or if you are a major or correlate, your advisor.

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## **Faculty**

Vassar has one of the largest, most diverse philosophy departments of any liberal arts college in the country. Faculty specializations include Eastern as well as Western philosophies, Ancient through Modern philosophy, Continental and Analytic approaches, Applied as well as Theoretical Ethics. In addition to teaching the philosophy curriculum, members of the department teach in multidisciplinary programs such as Cognitive Science, Women's Studies, and the Science, Technology and Society.

**Giovanna Borradori**, Professor of Philosophy. Diplome D'Etudes Approfondis, Université de Paris VIII-Vincennes à Saint Denis; Laurea and Doctorate in Philosophy, Università degli Studi di Milano. Ms. Borradori's special interests include 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Continental thought, philosophy of architecture, and the intersection between aesthetics and politics.

**Jennifer Church**, Professor of Philosophy, B.A. Macalester College; M.A., Ph.D., University of Michigan. Ms. Church specializes in the philosophy of mind: perception, emotion, imagination, self-knowledge, and expressive meaning.

**Marco Dees**, Adjunct Assistant Professor, M.A., M.Litt., University of St. Andrews; Ph.D., Rutgers University. Marco Dees's research is primarily in metaphysics, the philosophy of science, epistemology, and applied ethics. He is most interested in asking what the world is fundamentality like. For example, are space and time fundamental? What are the most fundamental properties and laws? Part of his research develops the idea that we should look for accounts of reality that avoid redundant structure.

**Li Kang**, Visiting Professor, B.A. Wuhan University; M.Phil. University of St. Andrews; Ph.D. Syracuse University. She has research interests in metaphysics, Buddhist philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and the philosophy of science. Her current research focuses on the interconnected nature of things. It involves systematically developing viable Buddhist alternatives to familiar positions in contemporary analytic metaphysics.

**Jamie Kelly**, Associate Professor, B.A. English and Philosophy, M.A. Philosophy, Carleton University; Ph.D. Philosophy, Boston University. Mr. Kelly's area of specialization is social and political philosophy. His other interests include ethics and philosophy of law.

**Barry Lam**, Associate Professor, B.A. Philosophy, English, University of California, Irvine. M.A., PhD, Philosophy, Princeton University. Areas of specialization include epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of science.

**Uma Narayan**, Professor on the Andrew W. Mellon Chair in the Humanities. B.A., Bombay University; M.A., Poona University; Ph.D., Rutgers University. Her primary areas of interest are social and political philosophy, with an emphasis on the legal aspects of social and political issues and feminist theory. Current interests include ethical and political aspects of contemporary globalization such as water privatization, microcredit and development aid.

**Osman Nemli**, Visiting Professor, B.A. and M.A Trinity College, and his M.A; Ph.D. Emory University. His research focuses on 20th century Continental philosophy, primarily social and political philosophy, and aesthetics. More generally, he is interested in the history of philosophy and the relation between politics and ethics. His publications includes essays on Adorno's phrase 'after Auschwitz', and critiques of political economy.

**Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa**, Visiting Professor, B.A., Brown University, PhD MIT. Ortiz-Hinojosa specializes in Philosophy of Mind and Epistemology. Her current research is on the epistemology and taxonomy of the imagination, including how imagination brings us knowledge and what makes imagination different from other mental capacities. She also has research interests both in other areas of philosophy of mind, such as the nature of mental representation, mental causation, and the philosophy of mental illness, and in feminist epistemology and feminist political philosophy, bioethics, and ancient philosophy.

**Christopher Raymond**, Assistant Professor. B.A, Brown University; Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin. Mr. Raymond's area of specialization is ancient Greek philosophy. His other interests include 19th-century European philosophy, aesthetics and ethics.

**Jeffrey Seidman**, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair, B.A., St. John's College in Annapolis, B.Phil., D.Phil, Oxford University. Mr. Seidman's primary interests include moral philosophy, moral psychology, the philosophy of action, and the theory of practical rationality.

**Bryan Van Norden**, Professor of Philosophy, B.A., University of Pennsylvania; Ph.D., Stanford University. Mr. Van Norden's areas of specialization are Chinese philosophy (especially Confucianism) and ethics.

**Douglas Winblad**, Associate Professor. B.A, University of California, Berkeley; Ph.D., Harvard University. Mr. Winblad's interests include metaphysics and epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and Wittgenstein.

### *Emeriti Professors of Philosophy*

**Jesse Gene Kalin**, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Film, Andrew W. Mellon Professor Emeritus of Humanities, B.A., Stanford University; Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley. Mr. Kalin's special interest is moral theory, with early essays focused on ethical egoism, prudential rationalism, Kant and the foundation of ethics.

**Michael McCarthy**, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. Mr. McCarthy is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Yale University. He retired from Vassar in 2007 after over forty years of teaching. His special interests include the history of philosophy, both ancient and modern, ethics, political philosophy and philosophical anthropology.

**Mitchell Miller**, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, B.A., Stanford University; M.A., Ph.D., State University of New York at Buffalo. Mr. Miller concentrates on the history of philosophy with special focus on the pre-Socratics, Plato, the late medieval thinkers, and Hegel.

**Michael Murray**, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy on the James Monroe Taylor Chair, B.A., University of Notre Dame; M.A., University of Texas; Ph.D., Yale University. Mr. Murray's interests lie in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Continental philosophy, Derrida, deconstruction, hermeneutics, and existential thought.

**Garrett L. Vander Veer**, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. Mr. Vander Veer is a graduate of Yale University and the author of two books, on F.H. Bradley and one on philosophical skepticism. Otherwise he has broad interests.

### **Interns**

The Philosophy Interns, Henry Krusoe and Jenny Wang, will serve as contact persons for Philosophy Majors. They regularly offer office hours during which they help beginning students with their class work. Their office is Rockefeller 413. Office hours are listed on their door as well as in the Philosophy Department Office in Rockefeller 209.

### **Philosopher's Holiday**

Philosopher's Holiday is the Philosophy Department speakers program, which has been in existence since 1943. It has brought many distinguished speakers including Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Albert Camus, Nancy Frazer, Seyla Benhabib, Donald Davidson, Jaegwon Kim, Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Alisdair MacIntyre, Thomas Nagel, Derek Parfit, Stanley Rosen, John Searle, Peter Strawson, Michael Waltzer, Drew Hyland, Tuliya Kristeva, Richard T. Bernstein, and Simon Critchley.

## **Declaring and Advising**

### **Declaring a Philosophy Major**

Once you have made your decision to major in Philosophy, follow these three steps:

1. Get a “Declaration of Major” form from either the Office of the Registrar or the Administrative Assistant in the Philosophy Department Office (Rockefeller 209).
2. Meet with the Department Chair. The Chair will sign the declaration form and assign your major advisor.
3. Return the declaration form to the Registrar’s Office.

### **The Advisor**

In general, any faculty member in the Department can serve as an advisor for any philosophy major. Students may request a particular faculty member, but the Chair, who must make sure that advising duties are distributed evenly among the faculty, makes the ultimate decision.

### **The Field of Concentration Card**

When you declare, the Department Chair will give you a yellow field of concentration card. This card will help you map out a possible course schedule that meets College and Department distribution requirements. Fill it out in pencil: you will likely end up changing this card several times in your college career as faculty go on leave, new courses are added, and your interests shift. Make three copies: one for yourself, one for your department file, and one for the Dean of Studies.

### **When to See Your Advisor**

**You must meet with your advisor before registering for classes and when adding or dropping a course.** (Please don’t wait until the last day of Pre-registration, the Add Period, or the Drop Period to do this!) The advisor will work with you to make sure that you are completing the necessary requirements. Ultimately, however, it is your responsibility to fulfill both the College and Department requirements necessary for graduation.

If you are considering spending a semester or a year away from Vassar, please be sure to discuss your plans with your advisor early on in the process.



## **Requirements**

### **The Requirements for a Concentration (Major) in Philosophy:**

#### **12 units, distributed as follows:**

**100-level:** Majors must take PHIL 125, Logic. They must also take two additional 100-level courses, at least one of which must be Philosophy 101 (History of Western Philosophy: Ancient), Philosophy 102 (History of Western Philosophy: Modern), Philosophy 110 (Early Chinese Philosophy), Philosophy 121 (Introduction to Zen: Literature and Culture) Philosophy 180 (Tragedy & Philosophy: Ancient and Modern Perspectives), Philosophy 121 or 104.

**200-level:** Majors must take one course from each of the following:

- Cluster 1: Philosophy 220 (Metaphysics), 222 (Philosophy of Language), 224 (Philosophy of Mind), 226 (Philosophy of Science), and 228 (Epistemology).
- Cluster 2: Philosophy 205 (Nineteenth Century Philosophy), 215 (Phenomenology and Existential Thought), 240 (Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics), and 284 (The Frankfurt School).
- Cluster 3: Philosophy 210 (Neo-Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism), 234 (Ethics), 238 (Social and Political Philosophy), 250 (Feminist Theory) & 236 (Philosophy of Law), 281 (Mahayana Buddhism)

**300-level:** Three 300-level seminars, two of which must be differently numbered. The department will not entertain any requests to count a seminar under a number different from the one it is assigned in the curriculum.

**300-301** –(Senior Thesis) ***Two semesters:*** The Thesis is optional. Majors should consult with their Faculty Advisor about opting to write a Senior Thesis. Students who choose not to write a Senior Thesis will take an upper-level course instead (i.e. a 200-level or 300-level course). Writing a thesis is not required to receive departmental honors.

**302** –(Senior Thesis) ***One semester:*** Special permission by the Department Chair is required.

**NRO Policy:** After the declaration of major, no required philosophy courses may be elected NRO.

**Field Work and Independent Courses:** No Field Work Course or Independent Course can count toward satisfaction of requirements for the major.

### **Recommendations:**

In consultation with a Faculty Advisor, individual routes through the major can be designed to give the student a representative acquaintance with major traditions in philosophy, competence in the skills of philosophic investigation and argument, and opportunities for exploration in areas of special interest. German, French and ancient Greek are languages of particular importance in Western philosophy; Chinese will be of special interest to those taking Philosophy 110, 210 or 350.

### **Correlate Sequences**

The Philosophy Department offers six different Correlate Sequences. In each Sequence a total of 6 units is required. The required 300-level seminar may be taken twice if the topics differ; students may also petition to count an appropriate Philosophy 280.

Correlate Sequence in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: Philosophy 101 or 102; Philosophy 240 and 242; either 205 or 215; two appropriate 300-level seminars. Advisors: Ms. Borradori and Ms. Church.

Correlate Sequence in Analytic Philosophy: Philosophy 125 and either 102 or 105; 2 units from Philosophy 220, 222, 224, 226, 228; two appropriate 300-level seminars, including Philosophy 310. Advisors: Ms. Church, Mr. Lam and Mr. Winblad.

Correlate Sequence in Comparative Philosophy: Philosophy 110 or 121 and either 101 or 102; Philosophy 210 or 281 and 234; two appropriate 300-level seminars, including Philosophy 350. Advisor: Mr. Van Norden.



Correlate Sequence in Continental Philosophy: Philosophy 101 or 102; both Philosophy 205 and 215; Philosophy 240; Philosophy 284; two appropriate 300-level seminars, including Philosophy 340. Advisor: Ms. Borradori.

Correlate Sequence in Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy: 1 unit at the introductory level, either Philosophy 101, 105, 106 or 110; 3 units at the intermediate level, selected from Philosophy 205, 234, 236, 238 or 250; two appropriate 300-level seminars, including Philosophy 330. Advisors: Ms. Narayan, Mr. Seidman and Mr. Kelly.

Correlate Sequence in the History of Western Philosophy: Philosophy 101 and 102; Philosophy 205 and 215; two appropriate 300-level seminars, including Philosophy 320. Advisor: Mr. Raymond.

Correlate Sequences may be designed for other subfields in philosophy; for example, Philosophy and Gender, Philosophy of Science, and Classical Philosophy. Interested students must obtain approval from the Department for any Correlate Sequence prior to the beginning of their senior year.

### **The Senior Thesis**

The Senior Thesis is a substantial essay--at least 7500 words long (about 25 pages), not including the cover page, abstract, bibliography, and table of contents--on a topic of your own choosing. The thesis is a unique opportunity to focus and extend the range of interests that you may have developed over the preceding years of course work.

The Senior Thesis is not required either to complete a Major in Philosophy or to be considered for Departmental Honors. Majors who do not write a senior thesis must take an additional upper level course.

The collection of past theses, kept in the Department Office, represents a variety of possible approaches:

1. Review of a standard position or issue, or a standard interpretation of a given text; exposure of problems with this standard approach; and presentation of a fresh alternative.
2. Point-by-point comparison of two positions or two philosophers, highlighting their similarities and differences, and showing how one's ideas can be used to deepen, strengthen, or undermine the other.
3. Exposition of the thought of one thinker and extension of it to a new area of concern.
4. Exploration of the assumptions underlying or implied by a particular point of view, together with an account of the origins of these assumptions, and a

critical evaluation of them.

5. Presentation of an original argument concerning a philosophical topic.

During the Spring term of their Junior Year, majors who elect to write a Senior Thesis will begin planning their work in consultation with their Thesis Advisors. An outline of the Thesis is due in the early part of the Fall Semester of the senior year. During this term there should be regular meetings with the Thesis Advisor to discuss readings and partial drafts. A first draft of the Thesis is due following Winter Break; the final draft is due shortly after Spring Break.

### **Critical Deadlines:**

**Wednesday, September 13, 2017:** Thesis outline due.

**Friday, October 6, 2017:** Last day to drop Thesis.

**Friday, January 26, 2018:** The first draft of your thesis is due.

**Tuesday, March 27, 2018:** The final draft--prepared with the help of the advisor's guidance and written comments on the first draft--is due.

*The faculty will complete its evaluations in early May. Students must note that Thesis deadlines are of crucial importance. The Chair of the Department is responsible for granting extensions and they will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances.*

Theses are graded by the Department as a whole and will be given a letter grade. Excellent theses will be eligible to receive the Philip Nochlin Prize for a thesis of exceptionally high quality. Recipients of the Nochlin Prize are invited to give a public presentation of their work at the end of the Spring Semester.

### **Departmental Honors**

Each department sets its own criteria for granting a degree "with honors" to its graduating majors. The Philosophy Department faculty will assess each student's overall performance in philosophy classes taken at Vassar, paying special attention to work completed in the junior and senior years, including a student's Senior Thesis, if available. Philosophical growth and achievement in both independent and 300-level work will be counted more heavily than a student's average performance in philosophy classes.

A student will be awarded Departmental Honors if his or her work exhibits originality, a broad and deep grasp of the field, and a high degree of clarity relative to the difficulty of the subject matter.

## **Prizes**

There are several prizes that may be granted at the end of each academic year, each of which carries a modest stipend.

**The Philip Nochlin Prize**, in honor of a former Vassar philosophy professor, is given for exceptionally good senior theses.

**The Michael McCarthy and Mitch Miller Prize**, was established in 2013 by Mark Ordan, Class of 1979, to honor the extraordinary contributions of Professor Emeritus Michael McCarthy, who taught philosophy at Vassar from 1968 to 2006 and Professor Emeritus Mitch Miller, who taught philosophy at Vassar from 1968 to 2013. It is awarded to graduating seniors or exceptional juniors for their excellence in philosophy.

**The Vernon Venable Prize**, in honor of a former Vassar philosophy professor, is given for overall excellence in philosophy.

**The Jamie Nisse Greenberg Philosophy Prize**, in honor of a former Vassar graduate Jamie Nisse Greenberg. Jamie was an exceptional student in the Department of Philosophy who had a strong passion for his work and intended to continue studying the philosophy of language in graduate school. The prize goes to students who have shown similar dedication to their work and plan to study philosophy at the graduate level.

## **The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy**

*The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy* emerged out of a desire to provide a platform for undergraduate thought and engagement with compelling themes of philosophical interest. The motivating theme of the Journal is inclusion: as an undergraduate publication that is interested in broadening the boundaries of the philosophical field, the Journal has a focus on exploring philosophically important topics from the perspective of diverse disciplines. The theme of the academic year 2014-2015 was “Non Humans” and the theme of 2015-2016 was “Nature.” A digital version of the *Journal* can be found at <http://philosophy.vassar.edu/students/journal/>

## **Conferences**

There are several off-campus philosophy conferences during the year that may be of interest to students. Notices of conferences will be posted on the bulletin board outside the Department Office.

## **After Graduation**

### **A. Pursuing Study in Philosophy**

The main reason for going on to graduate school in philosophy should be a strong love of philosophy and a desire to make it a continuing part of your life. Finishing a Ph.D. in philosophy takes averagely six years of concentrated study, so it is a significant commitment of time and effort. But it is also an extraordinary opportunity for pursuing this ancient subject in the company of equally dedicated students and faculty.

Most graduate programs in philosophy offer substantial financial aid to accepted students, which make it possible to go to graduate school without falling deeply into debt. This aid may be in the form of tuition waivers, fellowships, or opportunities to teach.

Jobs in philosophy — that is, jobs teaching philosophy at a college or a university — are scarce and there are typically hundreds of applications for each job. However, graduates with good records from the best graduate schools in a given field have a reasonably good chance of finding a job in philosophy.

It is possible to earn an M.A. rather than a Ph.D. in philosophy. Completing an M.A. in philosophy usually takes between two and three years of study, and it too can be a deeply rewarding experience. An M.A. will not enable you to teach philosophy at a college or a university, but it can be helpful in the pursuit of various other possible careers, including careers in law, government, publishing, college administration, and high-school teaching. (See section B below)

The competition for acceptance into graduate programs in philosophy is steep. It is recommended that you apply to a minimum of five schools ranked at different levels. The most important factor in determining whether you are admitted will be your overall record of achievement, as indicated not only by your overall grades but also the depth and seriousness of your philosophical studies. The key evidence of accomplishment that you will submit with your application will be your transcript, a written statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and, for most programs, a sample of your philosophical writing. Your statement of purpose should be carefully crafted in consultation with Vassar faculty. Other factors, largely out of your control, include the strength of the competition in any given year and the balance of interests or background studies or experiences a department seeks in its graduate student body.

**In order to determine which programs to apply to, you should do the following five things:**

1. Look at individual web pages of graduate schools in philosophy.
2. Look at portals such as <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com>. This is currently the most detailed and up-to-date resource on a wide range of graduate schools in the United States. There has been sustained debate on its balance, which privileges programs with an Analytical rather than Continental approach to philosophy. It would be a good idea to discuss with a Vassar faculty how to assess what you learn from it.
3. Examine your plans with a Vassar faculty most familiar with your interests and capacities as well as with those who might have special knowledge about certain programs.
4. Write to the Director of Graduate Study or Chair of any department you are interested in if you need any further information.
5. Consult the last 3-5 years of the September issues of the journal *The Review of Metaphysics*. In the back of each September issue is a complete list of all graduate schools, giving the size of the faculties, the number of students, a list of current dissertation titles and the faculty members who directed them. The latter is important because it can give you a concrete idea of what sorts of dissertations get written at a given school, and who is active in the work of directing them. Naturally it is essential to look at a program's record over a number of years in order to make your sampling representative.

Do not be bashful about asking Vassar faculty members to write a letter on your behalf. Present faculty has relied on their own teachers in just this way. You should, however, be as considerate about their time as you can. Four weeks is the minimum amount of time between the date of your request and the date the letter is due. Closer to the deadline, you are encouraged to check back with the faculty to see if the recommendation has been filed. Finally, be sure to let your recommenders know where you have been accepted and your plans. We are interested!

## **B. The Uses of Philosophy in Non-Academic Careers**

The American Philosophical Association's Brief Guide for Undergraduates includes these useful remarks:

[The] value of a field of study must not be viewed mainly in terms of its contribution to obtaining one's first job after graduation. Students are

understandably preoccupied with getting their first job, but even from a narrow vocational point of view it would be shortsighted to concentrate on that at the expense of developing potential for success and advancement once hired. What gets graduates initially hired may not yield promotions or carry them beyond their first position, particularly given how fast the needs of many employers alter with changes in social and economic patterns. It is therefore crucial to see beyond what a job description specifically calls for. Philosophy need not be mentioned among a job's requirements in order for the benefits derivable from philosophical study to be appreciated by the employer, and those benefits need not even be explicitly appreciated in order to be effective in helping one advance.

It should also be emphasized here that — as recent studies show — employers want, and reward, many of the capacities which the study of philosophy develops: for instance, the ability to solve problems, to communicate, to organize ideas and issues, to assess pros and cons, and to boil down complex data. These capacities represent transferable skills. They are transferable not only from philosophy to non-philosophy areas but from one non-philosophical field to another. For that reason, people trained in philosophy are not only prepared to do many kinds of tasks; they can also cope with change, or even move into new careers, more readily than others.

[But] the long-range value of philosophical study goes far beyond its contribution to one's livelihood. Philosophy broadens the range of things one can understand and enjoy. It can give one self-knowledge, foresight, and a sense of direction in life. It can provide, to one's reading and conversation, special pleasures of insight. It can lead to self-discovery, expansion of consciousness, and self-renewal. Through all this, its contribution to one's private life can be incalculable [and] its benefits for one's public life as a citizen can be immeasurable (pp 6-8).