

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 department. 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 may have. For further explanations or for details relating to a specific situation, please contact the department chair, Professor Narayan at ext. 5531 or, e-mail at umnarayan58@yahoo.com philosophy department office at x-5530 or, if you're a major or correlate, your advisor. You may use the department administrative assistant as a resource as well, RH 209 or, e-mail at camonfred@vassar.edu

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Faculty

Vassar has perhaps the largest, most diverse philosophy faculty of any liberal arts college in the country. Their specializations include Eastern as well as Western philosophies, Ancient through Modern philosophy, Continental and Analytic approaches, and applied as well as Theoretical ethics. In addition to teaching the philosophy curriculum (listed above), members of the department teach in multidisciplinary programs such as Cognitive Science, Asian Studies, Women's Studies, and the Science, Technology and Society program. All members of the department have numerous scholarly publications.

Giovanna Borradori: Professor of philosophy, Diplome D'Etudes Approfondis, Universite de Paris VIII-Vincennes a Saint Denis; Laurea and Doctorate in Philosophy, Universita degli Studies Milano. Ms. Borradori's special interests include 19th and 20th century continental thought, post-modernism, and philosophy of architecture.

Jennifer Church: Professor of philosophy, B.A. Macalester College; M.A., Ph.D., University of Michigan. Ms. Church specializes in the philosophy of mind: representation, emotion, subjectivity, imagination, and embodiment.

Jesse Kalin: Professor Emeritus of philosophy (1971 – 2005), B.A. Stanford University; Ph.D., University of California at Berkeley. Mr. Kalin's primary interests include ethics and the philosophy of film.

Jamie Kelly: Assistant professor of philosophy, B.A., M.A., Carleton University; Ph.D., Boston University. Mr. Kelly's interests include political philosophy, ethics, legal philosophy, and Kant.

Barry Lam: Assistant professor of philosophy, B.A. University of California, Irvine; M.A., Ph.D., Princeton University. Mr. Lam's areas of specialization include epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language.

Michael McCarthy: Professor Emeritus of Philosophy

Mitchell Miller: Professor 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 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 19th and 20th century continental philosophy, Derrida, deconstruction, hermeneutics, and existential thought.

Uma Narayan: Chair: Professor of philosophy on the Andrew W. Mellon Chair in the Humanities, B.A., Bombay University; M.A., Poona University; Ph.D., Rutgers University. Ms. Narayan's primary area of interest is social and political philosophy, with an emphasis on legal aspects of social and political issues. Other interests include ethics and feminist theory.

Jeffrey Seidman: Assistant professor of philosophy, B.A., St. John's College in Annapolis, B.Phil., D.Phil, Oxford University. Mr. Seidman's primary interests include moral philosophy, the philosophy of action, and the theory of practical rationality. He also has interests in metaphysics, epistemology, and ancient philosophy.

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 of philosophy, A.B., University of California, Berkeley; Ph.D., Harvard University. Mr. Winblad's special interests include epistemology, philosophy of language, and Wittgenstein.

Interns

The interns will serve as assistants to the professors for philosophy majors, correlates or any student in a philosophy class. The purpose of the academic intern is to help council students who may need clarification on a concept or topic, to share and get feedback on an idea or to help with structuring papers and required writing for philosophy classes. The academic interns will also at times set up discussion groups before a guest lecturer visits or, if a group of students have the desire to meet in smaller group to go over a topic covered in class. The interns' office hours are listed on the door of the department office, Rockefeller Hall 209 and on the intern's office, Rockefeller Hall 206.

Visiting Speakers

Philosopher's Holiday

Philosopher's Holiday is a speakers program that has been in existence at Vassar since 1943. It has brought such distinguished speakers as Hanna Arendt, Richard J. Bernstein, Judith Butler, Albert Camus, Drucilla Cornell, Donald Davidson, Jaegwon Kim, Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Alisdair MacIntyre,

Mary Mothersill, Thomas Nagel, Derek Parfit, Stanley Rosen, John Searle, Peter Strawson, Michael Waltzer, Monique Wittig, Drew Hyland, and Simon Critchley.

Following each talk, there is an extended discussion between the speaker, faculty and students. Interested students and faculty are welcome at dinner with the speaker afterwards, where discussion may continue.

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, who will sign the declaration form and assign a major advisor.
3. Return the declaration form to the Registrar’s Office. (Note: If you declare when you are a first-year student, you must get the signature of your current advisor before handing in the 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, since 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 advisor, 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. (Don't wait until the last day of Pre-registration, the add period, or the drop period to do this!) The advisor's job is to work with you to make sure you are completing the necessary course requirements, but ultimately it is your responsibility to see that you have fulfilled the college and department requirements necessary for graduation. Also, if you are considering spending a semester or year away from Vassar, be sure to discuss your plans with your advisor early on in the process.

Requirements

The Requirements for a Concentration (Major) in Philosophy:

The Philosophy major requires a total of 12 units.

100-level: Majors must take two of the 100 level courses, one of which must be Philosophy 101 (History of Western Philosophy: Ancient) or Philosophy 102 (History of Western Philosophy: Modern).

200-level: Majors must take Philosophy 230 (Logic). They 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 260 (Philosophy and the Arts).

Cluster 3: Philosophy 210 (Neo-Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism), 234 (Ethics), 238 (Social and Political Philosophy), 250 (Feminist Theory) and 270 (Queer Theory).

300-level: Three 300-level seminars, two of which must be differently numbered; and 300-301 (senior thesis). The department will not entertain any requests to count a seminar under a number different from the one it is assigned in the curriculum.

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

Recommendations:

Individual programs should be designed, in consultation with a faculty advisor, 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. Students considering a concentration in philosophy are advised to take Philosophy 101 and 102 early in their careers. German, French, and Greek are languages of particular importance in Western philosophy; Chinese will be of special interest to those taking Philosophy 110, 210, or 350.

Correlate Sequence

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 as equivalent to a 300-level seminar.

Correlate Sequence in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art: Advisors: Ms. Borradori, Ms. Church and Mr. Murray

Correlate Sequence in Comparative Philosophy: Advisor: Mr. Van Norden

Correlate Sequence in Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Advisors: Mr. Kelly, Ms. Narayan and Mr. Seidman

Correlate Sequence in Continental Philosophy: Advisors: Ms. Borradori and Mr. Murray

Correlate Sequence in the History of Western Philosophy: Advisor: Mr. Miller

Correlate Sequence in Analytic Philosophy: Advisors: Ms. Church, Mr. Lam and Mr. Winblad

Correlate sequences may also be designed for certain other subfields in philosophy—for instance: philosophy and gender, philosophy of science, classical philosophy.

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. It provides an opportunity to focus and extend interests that have developed over the preceding years of course work.

The collection of past theses, available in the department office, represents a variety of possible approaches:

1. Review of a standard position or a standard interpretation of some text; exposure of problems with this standard approach; and presentation of a fresh alternative.
2. A point-by-point comparison of two positions or two philosophers, highlighting their similarities and differences and showing how one can be used to deepen or undermine the other.
3. Exposition of the thought of some thinker, and extension of it to a new area of concern.
4. Exploration of the various 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. Spelling out an original argument concerning a philosophical topic.

Majors should begin planning the thesis during spring semester of their junior year, arriving on campus for fall semester of senior year with an outline of the project. During the fall semester there should be regular meetings with the thesis advisor to discuss readings and partial drafts.

The critical deadlines are:

***Monday, September 14, 2009** - (second Monday after start of fall semester) : THESIS OUTLINE DUE

***Friday, January 22, 2010** – (first Friday after start of winter break)
THE FIRST DRAFT IS TO BE HANDED IN TO YOUR ADVISOR

***Tuesday, March 23, 2010** – (first Tuesday after end of spring break)
THE FINAL DRAFT IS DUE IN THE DEPARTMENT OFFICE
(This draft is prepared with the help of the advisor's guidance and written comments on the first draft.)

***Early May 2010** - Faculty evaluation completed and grades reported to advisees.

Note: Thesis deadlines are of crucial importance. The chair of the department is responsible for granting extensions; these will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances. Those who fail to meet either the January deadline (first draft of thesis) or the March deadline (final draft of

thesis) without having been granted an extension by the chair will not be permitted to graduate in May.

Theses will be given a letter grade. In addition, there is the Philip Nochlin Prize, an award for a thesis judged by the faculty to be of exceptionally high quality; recipients of the Nochlin Prize are invited to give a public presentation of their thesis at the end of spring semester.

Honors and Prizes

There are several different ways that the philosophy department honors the academic achievements of its majors.

Interns

Juniors with a record of outstanding work in philosophy are selected each year to be department interns during their senior years. Interns receive a basic stipend (which can be in addition to, or instead of, a normal work-study stipend) and are asked to perform a variety of tasks for the department, including tutorial assistance for philosophy students throughout the year.

Graduate 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 in philosophy in the junior and senior years and a student's achievement in the senior thesis. Philosophical growth and achievement in both independent and 300-level work will usually be counted more heavily than will a student's average performance in philosophy classes.

A student will be awarded departmental honors only 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

Finally, there are several prizes, each of which carry a modest stipend, that may be granted at the end of each academic year:

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

The Harry Ordan Prize, in honor of the father of Vassar graduate Mark Ordan, is given for scholarly excellence to a senior who may possibly go on to a career in teaching.

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

Conferences

There are several off-campus philosophy conferences during the year that may be of interest to students — either as forums for the presentation of student papers or as occasions for listening to philosophers from around the world present and discuss their work. Notices of such conferences will be posted on the bulletin board outside the department office. A recent major describes her experiences at two conferences as follows:

I presented a paper titled *Emotions, Gender and Kantian Morality* at a two day conference at the University of North Florida. The conference was organized into two panels arranged by theme and historical time period that ran simultaneously. The format consisted of a 40-minute presentation of the paper followed by 10-15 minutes for questioning and a five-minute break between speakers. The audiences were a mix of professors, students and other interested members of the community. They ranged in number between 10 and 25 for the student papers — larger audiences attended the featured speakers. The professors at the University of North Florida were very helpful and accommodating. It was nice to talk to people from other schools about different philosophical subjects that we had all studied. These talks gave me a sense of a larger philosophical community around the country.

I also presented the same paper at the SUNY Oneonta Undergraduate Conference. This conference offered cash prizes and the possibility of publication for a portion of its participants. The conference featured Lama Karma Tsultrim Gyamtso, who gave a lecture and guided meditation on Tibetan Buddhism, and Hazel Barnes, a well-known existentialist and translator of works by Sartre from the University of Colorado, who spoke on philosophy, gender and existentialism. All panels were organized by theme. The audiences in each panel were somewhat larger than those at the Florida conference and ranged from 15-45 people. This time we were given only 20 minutes to present our papers, to be followed by

10 minutes of questions. I received the award for the 2nd best paper in the conference from a non-Oneonta school and a publishing agreement. The comments, critiques and questions presented to me in response to my appearances at both conferences were helpful in developing the paper and my thoughts on the subject.

If you are interested, either the President's office or the Philosophy Department can probably help with conference expenses, but you should make plans and submit a request as early as possible.

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 four to six years of concentrated study, so it is a significant commitment of time and effort. But it is also an extraordinary opportunity for pursuing a love of the subject in the company of other 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. In recent years, there have been about 60 tenure-track positions advertised in the U.S. each year and there are hundreds of applications for each job. On the other hand, graduates with good records from the best graduate schools have a fairly 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 beneficial in pursuing 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 very keen, especially for admission into the leading graduate schools. It is recommended that you apply to many schools and to 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 departments to apply to, you should do the following four things:

1. Look at Web pages on graduate schools in philosophy. One site to look at is <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 have been arguments pro and con about its balance, however, so it would be a good idea to discuss with your Vassar faculty how to assess what you learn from it.
2. Discuss your plans with those faculty most familiar with your interests and capacities and with those who might have special knowledge about certain schools and faculty members.
3. Ask for university catalogues from the institutions that interest you, and write to the Directors of Graduate Study of each particular department asking for any further information that it might have to offer. The departmental Director is the person of whom to ask any very specific questions you have about a program.
4. 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 North American 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 faculty members to write a letter, or even a large number of letters, on your behalf. (Remember: present faculty have relied on their own teachers in just this way.) You should, however, be as considerate about time as you can be. Two weeks is the very minimum amount of time that

should be given between the date of your request and the date it is due. Don't be hesitant checking back to see if the recommendation has been written; occasionally, something slips through the cracks. Finally, be sure to let your recommenders know where you are 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)

HOW STUDENTS PERFORMED ON GRADUATE ADMISSIONS TESTS

The following are percentages by which the mean score of test-takers from specific undergraduate majors differed from the mean score of all test-takers who indicated their major, as reported in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 58, No. 4:

	<u>LSAT</u>	<u>GMAT</u>	<u>GRE</u>	
			<u>VERBAL</u>	<u>QUANTITATIVE</u>
HUMANITIES				
Arts and Music	-0.5%	-1.2%	+1.7%	-8.4%
English	+5.6%	+4.1%	+14.5%	-5.7%
Foreign Languages	+5.7%	+3.3%	+7.9%	4.2%
History	+2.9%	+4.6%	+10.8%	-5.5%
<u>Philosophy</u>	+8.7%	+11.0%	+17.6%	+4.6%
Other Humanities	+4.7%	+1.8%	+7.3%	-5.0%
SOCIAL SCIENCES				
Anthropology	+4.0%	----	+16.4%	-1.7%
Economics.	+9.6%	+7.3%	+0.8%	+12.4%
Government	+3.3%	+4.6%	----	----
Political Sciences	-1.6%	+0.6%	+3.5%	-5.0%
Psychology	+0.9%	+0.8%	+3.1%	-4.0%
Sociology	-7.0%	-5.0%	-5.0%	15.0%
Other Social Sciences	-0.9%	+0.3%	-0.4%	-7.2%
SCIENCES				
Biology and				
Biological Sciences	+4.0%	+3.3%	+5.4%	+8.0%
Chemistry	+7.6%	+7.5%	+2.1%	+18.3%
Mathematics.	+12.8%	+13.3%	+2.7%	+26.3%
Physics	----	----	+6.6%	+29.5%
Other Science	+2.8%	+0.8%	+3.5%	+14.5%

