

Philosophy

“Philosophy is universal and inescapable. Everyone has a philosophy. Everyone has views about reality, truth, right and wrong, happiness, etc. The question is, is this philosophy plausible, is it true, is it defensible?”

Paul Gray, Professor of Philosophy

Cornell's Department of Philosophy introduces students to some of the deepest and most difficult questions we can ask: questions about human nature and the meaning of life, about the nature of reality, about the possibility and extent of knowledge, about the existence of God, and about morality and how we should live. Students come to know how some of the greatest thinkers in history have answered such questions and how they are addressed by contemporary philosophers.

In addition, understanding the arguments of philosophers in response to these questions requires careful analysis and close study. Students of philosophy acquire the ability to discern the most important features of complex material, learn to assess elaborate arguments, and come to form their own conclusions on difficult and important questions. Philosophy provides a framework for staging a reflective discourse on modern debates such as inequities in gender, race, and class, as well as reproductive and individual rights, environmental issues, and wealth distribution.

Philosophy majors develop advanced and transferable skills such as critical thinking, reading, writing, oral debate, and analytical skills that are applicable to all careers. A philosophy major is an invaluable preparation for law school in particular, and for graduate work in general. Learning to think and reason

well is a foundation for success in any profession. A June 20, 2017, Washington Post article noted that, “Some surveys show that philosophy majors perform better on average than most of their peers on exams for law, medicine and other graduate schools. And research by the salary data site PayScale showed that philosophy majors rank in the top 100 of all academic fields for average mid-career salary, at \$84,100.”

BENEFITS OF ONE COURSE AT A TIME

The One Course At A Time curriculum offers the freedom of long class periods and removes other academic priorities for students. Students truly delve into the intricacies of philosophical theories and discern the implications of different views. This undivided focus affords a rare setting in which philosophical inquiry may flourish. As philosophy professors have longer periods of class time to immerse their students in philosophical topics, students become both familiar and adept at the nature of philosophical discourse.

One Course At A Time also allows for the flexibility to study off campus without interrupting other course work. For example, students can spend a block exploring philosophical pursuits at the Boundary Waters Field Station in northern Minnesota during the Environmental Ethics course. One student embarked on a quest to explore pragmatism at work in environmental issues in the Amazon for a block.

These distinctive opportunities contribute to a deep, rich comprehension of philosophy and its significance to oneself, to current social, political, and ethical issues, and to the world in which one lives.

Faculty Bios & Courses

PAUL GRAY

Professor of Philosophy

Is particularly interested in the history of philosophy, moral and political philosophy, utopian philosophy, philosophy in literature, and existentialism. His courses include Utopia, Marx and Marxism, Philosophy in Literature, and a series of courses on modern and postmodern philosophy. Ph.D., philosophy, The Ohio State University.

GENEVIEVE MIGELY

Associate Professor of Philosophy

Does work in the history of ancient and early modern philosophy, the philosophy of feminism, and the philosophy of law. Her courses include Asian Philosophy, Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy: Seventeenth Century, Philosophy of Feminism, and Philosophy of Law. Ph.D., philosophy, Claremont Graduate University.

JIM WHITE

Professor of Philosophy

Is interested in the theory of evolution and its philosophical implications, the philosophy of mind, the problem of free will, and the relationship between science, religion, and philosophy. He teaches courses that include Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Mind, Evolution and Philosophy, and Analytic Philosophy. Ph.D., philosophy, University of Virginia.



CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

Our small class sizes afford our students many opportunities to engage in discussions, presentations, and group projects. We assign papers in nearly all of our classes and give essay exams. Outside of class, students are engaged in careful, critical reading of philosophical texts, and in thinking and writing about philosophy.

Our course offerings are designed to serve all Cornell students, majors and nonmajors alike. We offer many courses at the 100 and 200 levels that are geared to nonmajors, including Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, and Logic, as well as Environmental Ethics and Ethics and Climate Change. In addition, many of our upper-level courses explore philosophical questions related to other disciplines (Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy in Literature) and are intended to be valuable and understandable for nonmajors.

Our upper-level (300-level) courses are more demanding and specialized and are more appropriate for students who are farther along in their academic careers. We also offer courses in more specific areas of philosophical inquiry, which would be of interest primarily to philosophy majors. The department's courses cover a wide spectrum of philosophical study, from the ancient Greeks to modern and contemporary philosophers, and from Asian philosophy to existentialism.

To enhance the philosophy major, a Senior Seminar is required of all majors to hone advanced philosophical skills and research. This capstone course is designed as a culminating experience for majors that showcases their breadth of philosophical knowledge, their sophisticated skills of comprehension and analysis, and their range of philosophical thinking and argumentation.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

With One Course At A Time students are able to pursue research opportunities off campus without interrupting their classes. Some students also receive grants through the Cornell Summer Research Institute to work with professors; in 2017 a student

worked with Professor Migely on "A More Inclusive Union: Women Philosophers in the Modern Period." Others become Cornell Fellows and are funded to pursue their research or to intern for two blocks. One student recently spent two blocks as a Cornell Fellow with an international volunteer organization in Ecuador's Amazon rainforest, while simultaneously producing her philosophy thesis.

Philosophy students often present their work at Cornell's annual Student Symposium, and the department has sponsored the Iowa Philosophical Society Conference. A few majors have also attended a summer philosophy seminar at the University of Colorado Boulder.

AFTER CORNELL

ALUMNI CAREERS

The professions our majors have pursued vary widely from a career in the military (2013) to being an educator of classics (2012) to teaching high school math (2000) to acting (1993) to publishing (1996) to work in international relations (2000). Following are examples of what our philosophy majors are doing now:

Business analyst, EMD Strategies, Arlington, Virginia (Class of 2017)

Loan servicing specialist, Wells Fargo, Des Moines, Iowa (Class of 2017)

Episcopal Service Corps, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Class of 2016)

Medical scribe, Regions Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota (Class of 2016)

Web copywriter, hibu, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Class of 2014)

Senior research analyst, the Lewin Group, Washington, D.C. (Class of 2013)

Quality assurance coordinator, Pfizer, St. Louis, Missouri (Class of 2012)

Programmer, Position-Tech, Sycamore, Illinois (Class of 2012)

Litigation assistant, Earthjustice, Washington, D.C. (Class of 2012)

Associate Attorney, Levy, Leff & DeFrank, New Haven, Connecticut (Class of 2011)

Owner, Alei Lounge Club & Tapas Bar, Kunming, Yunnan, China (Class of 2010)

Attorney, University Research Park, Madison, Wisconsin (Class of 2010)

Assistant public defender, Waterloo, Iowa (Class of 2010)

Judicial law clerk, Federal Court for the Southern District, Des Moines, Iowa (Class of 2009)

United States Air Force intelligence officer, United States Armed Forces, Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana (Class of 2009)

Physician, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa (Class of 2007)

Content manager, Wizards of the Coast, Seattle, Washington (Class of 2005)

Executive director, Global Zero, Washington, D.C. (Class of 2004)

GRADUATE SCHOOL

We have had a number of recent majors go on to graduate work in philosophy. Some have used their philosophy major in preparation for a law degree or a career in medicine. Others have gone on to do graduate work in international relations, classics, and psychology.

J.D., DePaul University School of Law, Chicago (Class of 2017)

M.S., analytics, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois (Class of 2017)

J.D., William & Mary Law School, Williamsburg, Virginia (Class of 2016)

J.D., Drake University Law School, Des Moines, Iowa (Class of 2016)

J.D., Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C. (Class of 2013)

Master of Public Policy, George Mason University, Washington, D.C. (Class of 2013)

J.D., Quinnipiac University School of Law, Hamden, Connecticut (Class of 2011)

J.D., University of Wisconsin Law School, Madison, Wisconsin (Class of 2010)

J.D., Drake University Law School, Des Moines, Iowa (Classes of 2010, 2009)