Philosophy

Chair
- David Cunning

Undergraduate major: philosophy (B.A.)
Undergraduate minor: philosophy
Graduate degrees: M.A. in philosophy; Ph.D. in philosophy
Faculty: https://clas.uiowa.edu/philosophy/people/faculty
Website: https://clas.uiowa.edu/philosophy/

The Department of Philosophy offers programs of study for undergraduate and graduate students. A major in philosophy develops abilities useful for work in many fields and for any situation requiring clear, systematic thinking.

The department also administers the interdisciplinary undergraduate major in ethics and public policy, which it offers jointly with the Departments of Economics and Sociology; see Ethics and Public Policy in the Catalog.

Programs

Undergraduate Programs of Study

Major
- Major in Philosophy (Bachelor of Arts)

Minor
- Minor in Philosophy

Graduate Programs of Study

Majors
- Master of Arts in Philosophy
- Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

Courses

For more detailed descriptions of undergraduate and graduate courses offered during a given semester or summer session, visit the University's MyUI website before early registration.

Philosophy Courses

PHIL:1001 CLAS Master Class 1-3 s.h.

PHIL:1010 First-Year Seminar 1 s.h.
Small discussion class taught by a faculty member; topics chosen by instructor; may include outside activities (e.g., films, lectures, performances, readings, visits to research facilities).

PHIL:1033 The Meaning of Life 3 s.h.
Philosophical investigation of the nature of human life and of what makes human life valuable and/or meaningful. GE: Historical Perspectives.

PHIL:1034 Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness 3 s.h.
Examination of conflict between state power and individual liberty; philosophical and historical examination of theories from Plato through today. GE: Historical Perspectives.

PHIL:1401 Matters of Life and Death 3 s.h.
Contemporary ethical controversies with life and death implications; topics may include famine, brain death, animal ethics, abortion, torture, terrorism, capital punishment. GE: Values and Culture.

PHIL:1636 Principles of Reasoning: Argument and Debate 3 s.h.
Critical thinking and its application to arguments and debates. GE: Quantitative or Formal Reasoning.

PHIL:1861 Introduction to Philosophy 3 s.h.
Varied topics; may include personal identity, existence of God, philosophical skepticism, nature of mind and reality, time travel, and the good life; readings, films. GE: Values and Culture.

PHIL:1902 Philosophy Lab: The Meaning of Life 1 s.h.
Further exploration of PHIL:1033 course material with the professor in a smaller group.

PHIL:1904 Philosophy Lab: Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness 1 s.h.
Further exploration of PHIL:1034 course material with the professor in a smaller group.

PHIL:1950 Philosophy Club 1-3 s.h.
Relevant philosophical debates as they are exhibited in current events, text, and film; participation through discussions and film screenings.

PHIL:2111 Ancient Philosophy 3 s.h.
Ancient Greek philosophy from Thales to Aristotle; pre-Socratic cosmologists, Socrates, ancient medicine and religion, rivalry between sophists and philosophers; primary focus on reaction of Plato and Aristotle to this intellectual inheritance culminating in their greatest achievement, the invention of systematic philosophy.

PHIL:2214 Seventeenth-Century Philosophy 3 s.h.
Varied topics; may include free will, the mind-body problem, existence of God, relationship between God and creatures, science and religion, stoicism, early feminism; Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Margaret Cavendish, Baruch Spinoza, Anne Conway, G.W. Leibniz, Mary Astell, John Locke.

PHIL:2215 Modern Philosophy 3 s.h.
Varied topics; may include free will, the mind-body problem, existence of God, creation versus evolution, subjectivity of perception, limits of cognition, the good life; Rene Descartes, Margaret Cavendish, Baruch Spinoza, Anne Conway, G.W. Leibniz, Mary Astell, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant.

PHIL:2216 Eighteenth-Century Philosophy 3 s.h.
Varied topics; may include appearance versus reality, empiricism and science, the mind-body problem, existence of God, creation versus evolution, subjectivity of perception, limits of cognition, the good life, early feminism; Mary Astell, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant.

PHIL:2343 Philosophy East and West 3 s.h.
A comparative study of Eastern and Western theories and arguments concerning the nature and existence of the self.

PHIL:2402 Introduction to Ethics 3 s.h.
Analytical and historical introduction to ethical theories; issues such as the nature of the goodness, distinction between right and wrong. GE: Values and Culture.
Issues regarding art, aesthetic judgment, and role of art in society; investigation of questions: What is art and what is good art? What is conceptual art? Are aesthetic judgments just a matter of taste, or are some opinions about art better than others? What features of artworks matter for making such judgments, and which don't?; issues pertaining to various arts including painting and sculpture, music, fiction and poetry, performance arts; introduction to artworks and artists.

Issues that arise from advances in knowledge of brain-mind relations: cognitive neuroenhancement, neuroimaging-based lie detection and privacy, changing standards of moral and legal responsibility, justification of punishment, admissibility of neuroimaging in legal contexts.

Examination of basic questions regarding nature of science and scientific knowledge: When is a field of inquiry a science? What counts as evidence in a science, and why? In what sense, if any, is science objective? What are scientific laws, theories, and explanations? If scientific theories are never proven with certainty, are we justified in believing them to be true? Recommendations: background in science (psychology, biology, chemistry, physics).

Major problems; objectivity, historiographic methods and theory of interpretation, nature of historical explanations, historical laws and free will, reducibility of group phenomena to individual actions.

Theories and arguments concerning the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Same as RELS:3645.

A philosophical topic or controversy.

Selected problems.

Guided preparation for pre-law students who plan to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT); exercises in analytical thinking, analytical writing, problem solving; practice developing skills in logical reasoning; reflection on professional skills and goals.

Guided preparation for undergraduate students who plan to enroll in a graduate business program and take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and attend graduate school; exercises in analytical thinking, analytical writing, problem solving; practice developing skills in logical reasoning; reflection on professional skills and goals.

Guided preparation for students who plan to take the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT); exercises in analytical thinking, analytical writing, problem solving; practice developing skills in logical reasoning; reflection on professional skills and goals.

Guided preparation for students who plan to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and attend graduate school; exercises in analytical thinking, analytical writing, problem solving; practice developing skills in logical reasoning; reflection on professional skills and goals.

Engagement and service-learning; philosophical concepts are applied to and extracted from internship work in the community and beyond.

Independent study. Requirements: sophomore or higher standing.

Buddhist theories and arguments concerning nature and existence of the self.

Introduction to metaphysics, epistemology, and moral theory of Plato; topics may include the philosophy of Socrates, Plato's theory of Forms, the tripartite soul, nature of virtue and moral education; Plato's cosmology and assimilation of human nature to the divine; close reading and interpretation of specific texts.

Introduction to metaphysics, epistemology, and moral theory of Aristotle; topics may include Aristotle’s theories of matter and form, causation, motion, change, space, void, time; Aristotle’s philosophy of biology and theory of the soul; unity of virtue, nature of action and choice; the syllogism; combines survey with close reading and interpretation of specific texts.

Descartes' systematic philosophy and impact on current debates; topics may include skepticism, the confusion of everyday experience, the mind-body problem, innate ideas and empiricism, free will, nature and existence of God, science and religion, problem of evil, stoicism.

Comparative and critical examination of metaphysical and epistemological views of 18th-century empiricists, George Berkeley and David Hume; topics may include the theory of ideas, perception, skepticism, limits of knowledge, the mind-body problem, scientific and philosophical method, role of God in Berkeley’s and Hume’s philosophical systems.

Main ideas and major texts of Kant’s metaphysics and epistemology; particular attention given to Critique of Pure Reason.
PHIL:4346 Frege and Russell 3 s.h.
Major issues concerning Frege’s revolution in logic, Cantor’s taming of the infinite, and Russellian synthesis of these revolutions to form Logicist thesis that all of pure mathematics (including geometry) is a branch of the science of logic; central issues in the philosophy of language and analysis of logical form; Russell’s theory of definite descriptions and his logicism as a paradigm for a philosophical solution to mysteries of existence, number, infinite, motion, and Zeno paradoxes.

PHIL:4373 Heidegger 3 s.h.
Main ideas and major texts of Martin Heidegger; early and later periods; particular attention given to Being and Time; focus on Heidegger’s analyses of Being and being-in-the-world.

PHIL:4375 Rawls’s Political Philosophy 3 s.h.
Major works by John Rawls, selected secondary readings; contractarianism, concept of justice, justice as fairness as an alternative to utilitarianism, Kantian foundations, comprehensive and political liberalism.

PHIL:4377 Wittgenstein 3 s.h.
Main ideas and major texts of Ludwig Wittgenstein; early and later periods; particular attention given to Tractatus, Philosophical Investigations, and development of Wittgenstein’s thought.

PHIL:4379 Quine 3 s.h.
Evaluation of Quine’s attempt to restructure philosophy so that ontological questions are questions of “what there is” and methods for answering such questions are methods of natural (empirical) sciences; central issues pertaining to Quine’s thesis that this naturalization program also applies to physics, mathematics, logic; comparison of Dewey’s pragmatist and evolutionary reconstruction in philosophy to that of Quine and others (e.g., Carnap, Russell, Wittgenstein); major themes involving Quine on set theory, modal logic, the a priori; and the thesis that meaning is translation and translation is indeterminate.

PHIL:4480 Analytic Ethics 3 s.h.
Exploration of central meta-ethical questions: Are there objective values, and if there are, can we gain knowledge of what has such value? Should we always act so as to bring about the best consequences? If not, why not? Can we derive moral conclusions from scientifically established facts about the world? If not, does this undermine the idea that we can offer sensible arguments for ethical conclusions?

PHIL:4481 Issues in Philosophy of Law 3 s.h.
Nature of law and legal interpretation; natural law theory and positivism; critical legal theories.

PHIL:4482 History of Ethics 3 s.h.
Thomas Hobbes’ 1651 publication, Leviathan, set British moral philosophy on a new course, rejecting most of the presuppositions of theistic natural law theory, shocked and outraged many of his contemporaries, and set in motion a debate about the nature of morality that continues today in philosophical ethics; focus on debate between sentimentalists (Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith) who regarded morality as a matter of human attitudes and emotions, and rationalists (Samuel Clarke, Ralph Cudworth, Richard Price) who regarded morality as analogous to mathematics.

PHIL:4485 Political Philosophy 3 s.h.
Political philosophy topics; may include obligation to obey the law, secession, nature of rights, limits of state power, just distribution of property, feminist criticisms.

PHIL:4586 Topics in Metaphysics 3 s.h.
In-depth exploration of metaphysical problems: material constitution, persistence of objects and persons through time, problem of universals, mind-body problem, free will and determinism.

PHIL:4587 Epistemology 3 s.h.
Theories of nature, structure, and extent of knowledge and rational belief; investigation of questions: Do we really know as much as we are inclined to think we do? Can we rule out the possibility that we are dreaming or being systematically deceived right now? And if we can’t, what reason do we have for thinking that things are as they seem to us to be?

PHIL:4588 Philosophy of Mind 3 s.h.
Foundational questions about the mind: What is the mind, and how is it related to the brain? What makes minds so special? How do we know if other animals, or even other people, have minds? Can things without brains, such as aliens or computers, think? What is consciousness? Are we mere machines, lacking free will, if neuroscientists can explain the mind?: recent research in related sciences including neuroscience, psychology, cognitive ethology (animal cognition).

PHIL:4589 Philosophy of Language 3 s.h.
Main issues in contemporary philosophy of language; topics may include theories of meaning, truth, belief, interpretation, translation, speech acts, performatives, rule following, reference, naming, propositional attitudes, metaphor. Same as LING:4589.

PHIL:4590 Foundations of Cognitive Science 3 s.h.
Cognitive science defined as the study of individual agency; its nature, mechanisms, and patterns; development of cognitive science from historical roots in psychology, computer science, neuroscience, philosophy, linguistics; key issues; motivations for and varieties of cognitive explanations; models of cognitive architecture; nature of information processing; relation between cognitive processes and experimental tasks; relation between cognitive and neural theories, models, explanations.

PHIL:4691 Mathematical Logic 3 s.h.
Presentation of logic as the science that studies kinds of structure; different axiom systems, decidability, model theoretic semantics, Gödel’s incompleteness theorems; topics include nature of logic, mathematics, type-theories, set-theoretical paradoxes.

PHIL:4692 Modal Logic 3 s.h.
Presentation of systems of logic designed to capture concepts of necessity and possibility; different axiom systems, semantics, nonexistent objects; topics include nonclassical systems, nature of possible worlds, relevant entailment, transworld identity, and counterparts inhabiting parallel worlds.

PHIL:4694 Philosophy of Science 3 s.h.
Issues in the nature of science and scientific knowledge considered in greater depth; nature of causation, kinds of relations that might hold between sciences and scientific theories, and varieties of explanation. Requirements: prior course work in philosophy.

PHIL:4696 Philosophy of the Human Sciences 3 s.h.
Explanation and understanding, theorizing about human nature, reducibility of collective facts to facts about individuals, values and ideology, freedom and causality.

PHIL:4798 Topics in Philosophy 3 s.h.
A single philosopher or philosophical problem.
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<td>PHIL:4920</td>
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<td>PHIL:6100</td>
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