

WILL YOUR PHILOSOPHY DEGREE GET YOU A JOB? STUDYING PHILOSOPHY AS PART OF A NON-ACADEMIC CAREER

Philosophy and Skills

Unlike medicine, law or veterinary science, philosophy is not a vocational degree – it does not provide automatic entry into specific professions in the non-academic workforce. But your philosophy degree can still be of great benefit when joining the workforce. Studying philosophy will have provided you with an advanced level of generic skills that are immensely useful in a wide range of jobs, in such diverse fields as **Journalism and Media, Government and Public Administration, Computing, Law, Education and Research.**

As a student of philosophy, you will have picked up the following generic skills and attributes:

- **the ability to analyse and evaluate arguments.** Philosophy teaches you to be able to distinguish between good arguments and bad arguments, irrespective of their subject matter, and thus to be able to make informed decisions and recommendations on contentious issues.
- **clarity of thought.** Philosophy helps you to separate distinct issues, consider them independently and think out the consequences of positions on them. This makes the philosophy graduate an effective learner; you will have the general skills for thinking about problems and tasks, and framing and evaluating solutions.
- **advanced communication skills.** Philosophy graduates have had to meet very exacting requirements in communicating their ideas, both in written and oral form. You will have learnt how to frame, express and convey ideas, your own and other people's, in a clear and convincing way.
- **breadth of vision.** Philosophy graduates are accustomed to being exposed to new and confronting ideas, and have an appreciation of the value of different perspectives on life, society and knowledge.

Although you will have gained these skills and attributes from studying the works of philosophers, they have a general application outside philosophy as well. For example, many of the principles of argument analysis are universal – what characterises a successful argument in philosophy can be much the same as what characterises a successful argument in fields such as politics, public policy or education. Further, the study of philosophy requires the processing of difficult texts, and of information that initially may seem obscure, so that you become experienced at gaining insight into unfamiliar subject matter.

Philosophy graduates often mention that the skills they learn from studying philosophy are invaluable to their career, and can put them ahead of other graduates:-

“Given that I'm in the business of building arguments and testing hypotheses, deciding how to lay out data based on what I want to argue, and framing research findings, clear and critical thinking is essential. I think that it's not something other candidates for the kind of jobs I do have training in – and it really makes or breaks you in terms of performance”

“In general I've found that studying philosophy honed skills I've used a lot at work ... breaking down complex points into its parts and talking about how they relate. ... It's also generally useful when communicating with a wide range of stakeholders on a project I've often resorted to the kinds of analytical skills I developed in philosophy to help people be really clear about what they want or expect from a project as well as challenging interpretations and spin on research findings.”

Selling a Philosophy Degree

However, philosophy graduates should not expect potential employers to automatically recognise their skills. In a recent study, graduates who reported that philosophy helped them get a job were those who reported they actively sold their skills to prospective employers:-

“I don't think that having a degree in philosophy in and of itself made a difference to my potential employer – I think it was more how I marketed it that got them interested, not so much that I'd done it.”

“The employer found it initially hard to understand the relevance of philosophy to the job but after explanation was impressed with the skills I could bring.”

Thus the critical issue for philosophy graduates is how to *market* their skills to potential employers. The following points should be kept in mind when applying for non-academic jobs after completing a philosophy degree.

- Be sure to thoroughly research the job you're applying for, in order to see whether and how your skills make you a suitable applicant.
- The benefits gained from studying philosophy can frequently be tied to the selection criteria that are addressed in a job application. The skills specified as essential or desirable in selection criteria are often the generic ones that you, as a philosophy graduate, will have. For example, many jobs ask for candidates to demonstrate critical, analytical, and communication skills. Tying your philosophy degree into the selection criteria will alert prospective employers to the benefit of your studies before the interview stage is even reached.
- Be prepared for potential employers to be sceptical about the merits of a philosophy degree for the particular job at hand. Never assume that a potential employer is familiar with the benefits that a philosophy degree brings. This is a critical time in which the skills gained in studying philosophy can be put to use, in particular, the ability to put forward one's own position in a clear and convincing manner.
- Many employers may actually be interested in your study of philosophy. Don't be embarrassed about your studies: take this as an opportunity to promote the skills you have acquired.
- In an interview, inform a potential employer of the benefits of a philosophy degree, but don't be defensive or aggressive about it. Remember that interviewers will be concerned about your ability to get along with others in a workplace, and a belligerent attitude will probably count against you.
- Research shows that interviewers often decide very quickly whether or not they are going to employ someone, i.e., before the completion of the interview. Thus initial reports need to be made quickly and briefly.
- An employer may be prepared to provide you with on the job training, to fill any skills gaps. However, they are unlikely to do so unless they think it worth their while. It is up to you to convince them that this is the case. Remember that philosophy gives you skills which enable you to learn quickly within new fields.
- Many philosophy departments have statements about the aims of individual courses, mentioning the particular skills you will have developed through your studies. These statements should be taken along to an interview as support for your claim that your study has given you these skills.
- Your breadth of vision may well be of value to any potential employer who is concerned about your ability to adapt to a new working environment or unfamiliar field of knowledge, and even your ability to deal with diverse people.