

## **Major in Philosophy: Conception of Philosophical Education**

Philosophy is centrally concerned with the idea of knowledge, and what it takes to have knowledge *about* matters of consequence to human beings. So, for example, philosophy is distinguished from other disciplines that concern themselves with morality in that we care not just about what it is to be moral, but how one can come to *know*, to be *rationally justified* in one's beliefs about, what it is to be moral. Similarly, philosophy is distinguished from other disciplines that care about political, empirical or mathematical truth in that we care not just about what the truth is, but also about what is required in order for one's beliefs about that subject matter to be rationally grounded.

Beliefs cannot be rationally grounded unless alternatives have been considered and reasonably evaluated with care. Good philosophical method therefore involves a reflective commitment to open-mindedness. But open-mindedness is not blind; it is not an endorsement of all views, it is the endorsement of a commitment to consider the arguments for and against all views, regardless of the origin of those views and regardless of the origin of those arguments. In this way philosophy develops the capacity to see the world from the perspective of other individuals and other cultures. An able student of philosophy, when presented with a theory or claim and a set of arguments for and against it, is in a position to determine whether or not there are *conclusive* reasons for accepting or rejecting the theory. When there are no conclusive reasons, this is either because the arguments for (or against) the position employ premises irrelevant to the truth of the claim, or because those arguments employ premises whose truth is an open question. Able philosophy students can differentiate between the two kinds of cases, and when the problem lies in premises whose truth is an open question, they can identify these open questions. When a question is open this may be because there is simply no way at all to justify one answer to the question over others, or it may be that the evidence which would answer it is so far unavailable. Able philosophy students can distinguish between these cases. Doing so is important: when questions are open in the sense that no answer could, even in principle, be justified, differences in opinion about the 'right' answer really are *simply* differences in opinion. When questions are not open in this sense, but the evidence that would decide them is unavailable, differences in opinion about the right answer are rationally legitimate, even if some are, necessarily, mistaken. The ability to distinguish between these different kinds of open questions, and between questions that are and those that are not open, is a crucially important skill in a multi-cultural society. The failure to recognize these differences has been, and is, the root of much evil and more intolerance. Philosophical education is meant to students in a position to see how some claims depend on others, to recognize when these more foundational claims are open, and to convey that understanding in written prose. We think students who can meet the following objectives are well-educated in this sense.

### **List of Major Objectives:**

What should a philosophy student know, and what should he or she be able to do?

1. Students should be able to reconstruct any given philosophical theory from a written exposition.
2. Students should be able to reconstruct a system of arguments offered in defense of a philosophical theory.
3. Students should be able to critically evaluate merits of particular arguments and systems of such, identifying those that are invalid, those that are valid, and those that, while valid, rely on contentious premises.
4. Students should be able to construct philosophical theories in their chosen sub-domain.
5. Students should be able to construct a defense of a philosophical theory in chosen sub-domain.
6. Students should be able to identify the open questions upon which a controversy depends, while taking into account a diversity of perspectives.
7. Students should be able to convey understanding of a philosophical position and its defense in written form.
8. Students should be able to construct extended argumentative essays in clear prose.
9. Students should be able to use semantic methods to assess the validity of arguments in sentential logic, and should be able to construct derivations in 1<sup>st</sup> order logic.
10. Students should be familiar with a range of important contemporary theories in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and social and political philosophy.
11. Students should be familiar with central philosophical theories in ethics, metaphysics and epistemology in ancient philosophy, and the place these theories in the history of ideas.
12. Students should be familiar with the transitional early modern philosophical theories of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and social and political philosophy, and with the place of such theories in the history of ideas.
13. Students should know how to construct essays which conform to standards of professional ethics—how to properly reference ideas developed by others, how to assess positions and arguments with an open mind (avoiding, e.g., straw-man and ad-hominem arguments, while developing and assessing the most crucial and strongest arguments on either side).
14. Students should be familiar with a diversity of opinions regarding the origins and nature of moral obligations, the relation between law and morality, and the proper forms and limits of political association and other social institutions, and they should be familiar with a diversity of views regarding the metaphysical realities underlying these opinions, e.g. what sorts of things are entitled to moral standing and on what basis such standing is sometimes denied (gender, race, religion, species) and whether or not moral obligations are objective.

### Mapping of Major Objectives to University Objectives

Major Objective	University Objective
1	Critical Thinking
2	Critical Thinking
3	Critical Thinking, Ownership of Learning
4	Critical Thinking, Communication, Ownership of Learning, Personal and Professional Development
5	Critical Thinking, Communication, Ownership of Learning, Personal and Professional Development
6	Critical Thinking, Diversity , Ownership of Learning, Personal and Professional Development,
7	Communication
8	Communication, Ownership of Learning
9	Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Personal and Professional Development
10	Knowledge, Ownership of Learning, Personal and Professional Development
11	Knowledge, Diversity, Ownership of Learning
12	Knowledge, Diversity, Ownership of Learning
13	Knowledge, Diversity, Ownership of Learning, Personal and Professional Development
14	Knowledge, Diversity, Personal and Professional Development

### Mapping of University Objectives to Major Objectives

University Objective	Major Objective
Knowledge	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Critical Thinking	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9
Communication	4, 5, 7, 8
Diversity	6, 11, 12, 13, 14
Ownership of Learning	3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13
Personal and Professional Development	4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14