Philosophy

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Requirements for the Major in Philosophy
The major consists of eight courses, which must include Philosophy 111, 112, and 223; at least one other course from the group numbered in the 200s; and two from the group numbered in the 300s. The remaining two courses may be from any level. Courses in which D grades are received are not counted toward the major.

Requirements for the Minor in Philosophy
The minor consists of four courses, which must include Philosophy 111 and 112 and one course from the group numbered in the 200s. The fourth course may be from any level. Courses in which D grades are received are not counted toward the minor.

First-Year Seminars
Topics in first-year seminars change from time to time but are restricted in scope and make no pretense to being an introduction to the whole field of philosophy. They are topics in which contemporary debate is lively and as yet unsettled and to which contributions are often being made by more than one field of learning. For a full description of first-year seminars, see pages 147–57.

[27c. Moral History.]

Introductory Courses
Introductory courses are open to all students regardless of year and count towards the major. They do not presuppose any background in philosophy and are good first courses.

   The sources and prototypes of Western thought. We try to understand and evaluate Greek ideas about value, knowledge, and truth.

   A survey of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy, focusing on discussions of the ultimate nature of reality and our knowledge of it. Topics include the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, the existence of God, and the free will problem. Readings from Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and others.
Our society is riven by deep and troubling moral controversies. Examines some of these controversies in the context of current arguments and leading theoretical positions. Possible topics include abortion, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, sexuality, the justifiability of terrorism, and the justice of war.

Does God exist? Can the existence of God be proven? Can it be disproven? Is it rational to believe in God? What does it mean to say that God exists (or does not exist)? What distinguishes religious beliefs from non-religious beliefs? What is the relation between religion and science? Approaches these and related questions through a variety of historical and contemporary sources, including philosophers, scientists, and theologians. (Same as Religion 142.)


Intermediate Courses
What are the causes of historical development? Is history progressive? Do freedom and reason manifest themselves in history? A study of the development of political philosophy and philosophy of history in nineteenth-century German philosophy from Kant through Hegel to Marx.

[210c. Philosophy of Mind.]

Examines issues central for physicians, biological researchers, and society: cloning, genetic engineering, biological patenting, corporate funding for medical research, use of experimental procedures, and others.

How should one live? What is the good? What is my duty? What is the proper method for doing ethics? The fundamental questions of ethics are examined in the classic texts of Aristotle, Hume, Mill, and Kant.

[222c. Political Philosophy.]

The central problem of logic is to determine which arguments are good and which are bad. To this end, we introduce a symbolic language and rigorous, formal methods for seeing whether one statement logically implies another. We apply these tools to a variety of arguments, philosophical and otherwise. We also demonstrate certain theorems about the formal system we construct.

Focuses on the problems of time, but also addresses some questions covering space, and some concerning the general structure, of which time and space might be considered interpretations. Considers some ancient views (Plato and Aristotle), some early modern views (Newton and Leibniz), and some contemporary disputed questions (e.g., is time to be thought of in such terms as “earlier”/“later,” or rather, “past”/“present”/“future”?).
Courses of Instruction


Science is often thought of as the paradigm of rational inquiry, as a method that gives us an unparalleled ability to understand the nature of the world. Others have doubted this rosy picture, and have emphasized historical and sociological aspects of the practice of science. Investigates the nature of science and scientific thought by looking at a variety of topics, including the demarcation of science and non-science, relativism and objectivity, logical empiricism, scientific revolutions, and scientific realism.


Metaphysics is the study of very abstract questions about reality. What does reality include? What is the relation between things and their properties? What is time? Do objects and persons have temporal parts as well as spatial parts? What accounts for the identity of persons over time? What is action, and do we ever act freely?


An examination of some key figures and works in the development of analytic philosophy. Particular attention is given to theory about the nature of physical reality and our perceptual knowledge of it, and to questions about the nature and function of language. Readings from Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, W. V. O. Quine, Gilbert Ryle, and others.


Investigates several philosophically important results of modern logic, including Gödel’s incompleteness theorems, the Church-Turing Theorem (that there is no decision procedure for quantificational validity), and Tarski’s theorem (the indefinability of truth for formal languages). Discusses both the mathematical content and philosophical significance of these results.

Prerequisite: Philosophy 223 or permission of the instructor.

235c - ESD. Topics in Feminist Theory. Spring 2010. Sarah Conly.

Examines central questions in feminist theory. What is gender? Is gender natural or is it a social construction? How many genders are there? What makes someone a woman? Can what it is to be a woman change? Can men become women? Can women become men? What is the difference, if any, between gender and sex? Addresses these and other central issues in feminist philosophy. (Same as Gay and Lesbian Studies 235 and Gender and Women’s Studies 236.)


An introduction to legal theory. Central questions include: What is law? What is the relationship of law to morality? What is the nature of judicial reasoning? Particular legal issues include the nature and status of privacy rights (e.g., contraception, abortion, and the right to die); the legitimacy of restrictions on speech and expression (e.g., pornography, hate speech); the nature of equality rights (e.g., race and gender); and the right to liberty (e.g., homosexuality).


Examines contemporary work in this diverse and exciting area. African philosophers raise many questions: Given the variety of African cultures, is there a distinctive outlook African philosophers share, and if so, what is it? How should academic philosophers regard indigenous philosophy? Are their distinctive African concepts of beauty, truth, and the good life? What “counts” as African? Examines these and other ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical questions. (Same as Africana Studies 249.)
258c. Environmental Ethics. Spring 2009. LAWRENCE H. SIMON.

What things in nature have moral standing? What are our obligations to them? How should we resolve conflicts among our obligations? After an introduction to ethical theory, topics to be covered include anthropocentrism, the moral status of nonhuman sentient beings and of nonsentient living beings, preservation of endangered species and the wilderness, holism versus individualism, the land ethic, and deep ecology. (Same as Environmental Studies 258.)

291c–294c. Intermediate Independent Study in Philosophy. THE DEPARTMENT.

Advanced Courses

Although courses numbered in the 300s are advanced seminars primarily intended for majors in philosophy, adequately prepared students from other fields are also welcome. Besides stated prerequisites, at least one of the courses from the group numbered in the 200s will also be found a helpful preparation.

334c. Free Will. Fall 2009. SCOTT SEHON.

Do we have free will and moral responsibility? Can we have free will and moral responsibility if determinism is true? More broadly, can we have free will if all human behaviors can be explained scientifically? Readings from contemporary sources.

Prerequisite: One course in philosophy.

[337c. Hume.]

[346c. Philosophy of Gender: Sex and Love. (Same as Gay and Lesbian Studies 346 and Gender and Women’s Studies 346.)]

375c. Metaphysics of the Self. Fall 2008. MATTHEW STUART.

Examines metaphysical theories about our nature, the unity of consciousness, and our persistence over time. Readings include classic early modern texts (Locke, Hume, Reid, Butler), important twentieth-century contributions (Shoemaker, Williams, Parfit), and Eric Olson’s 2007 book What Are We?

392c. Advanced Topics in Environmental Philosophy. Spring 2010. LAWRENCE H. SIMON.

Examines philosophical, moral, political, and policy questions regarding various environmental issues. Possible topics include the ethics of climate change policy, our obligations to future generations, benefit-cost analysis vs. the precautionary principle as a decision-making instrument, and the relationship between justice and sustainability. (Same as Environmental Studies 392.)


An in-depth examination of a topic of current philosophical interest. Students read recent books or journal articles and invite the authors of those works to discuss them with the group. Typically, this involves visits by two or three guest philosophers per semester. Limited to philosophy majors; others with permission of the instructor. May be repeated for credit.

401c–404c. Advanced Independent Study and Honors in Philosophy. THE DEPARTMENT.