

# PHILOSOPHY MAJOR

## MAJOR DESCRIPTION

The Major in Philosophy provides students with a solid grounding in historical knowledge and skillful reasoning as they explore perennial human questions about the nature of reality, truth, knowledge, values, reason, ethics, beliefs, and the individual's place in relation to society.

Wesleyan's philosophy curriculum is organized into three broad categories: history, value, and mind and reality. Historical courses focus primarily on classical philosophical texts. Courses in the value area engage with ethical, political, and cultural practices. Mind and reality courses consider philosophical questions about language, reasoning, and the nature of reality.

The philosophy major at Wesleyan offers two tracks: general philosophy and social justice. The general philosophy track encourages students to explore issues and approaches from various historical periods and cultural traditions. The social justice track emphasizes philosophers' roles as theorists and as agents of social and political change.

Intellectually curious students who consider themselves open-minded, cerebral, and analytical, with a strong passion for discourse and debate, may gain great satisfaction from the study of philosophy.

The philosophy major's emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication prepares graduates for a wide range of professions, including writing, law, education, business and management, research, and academia.

## ADMISSION TO THE MAJOR

Because philosophy encompasses subjects in other disciplines, such as economics, government, mathematics, physics, psychology, and religion, students considering philosophy as a major are strongly advised to choose a balanced combination of solid liberal arts courses consistent with Wesleyan's General Education Expectations.

Prospective majors should pay particular attention to the prerequisites for intermediate and advanced courses when planning their schedules. Among other courses, PHIL201, PHIL202, PHIL205, PHIL212, and PHIL231 are required or recommended for various subsequent courses.

Students who intend to apply for the social justice track will work with an advisor to submit a concentration proposal by the end of drop/add during their fifth semester.

## MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

To complete the philosophy major's required coursework, both the general philosophy track and social justice track require at least ten courses, including eight PHIL courses.

### General Philosophy Track

The general philosophy track encourages students to explore a range of issues and approaches from various historical periods and cultural traditions.

Courses must include:

- One History course
- One Value course
- One Mind & Reality course
- Two Advanced seminars taken as juniors/seniors
- Five electives, including up to two non-PHIL
- Optional Thesis Project

Of the ten courses counted toward the general major track, at least eight must be offered by the Department of Philosophy; as many as two may be given in other programs (e.g., College of Letters, Religion) that are relevant to the student's plan of study in philosophy and are approved by the philosophy faculty.

### Social Justice Track

The social justice track emphasizes philosophers' roles not only as theorists but also as agents of social and political change. Philosophical methods of conceptual and contextual analyses and careful argumentation provide important tools for grappling with real-world injustices. The social justice track supports students in tailoring their philosophical understanding and skills around a particular concern in an area of social justice, such as human rights, equality, social responsibility, environmental justice, etc.

Courses must include:

- One History or One Mind & Reality course
- Five-course concentration, including two non-PHIL
- Two advanced seminars taken as juniors/seniors
- Two electives from PHIL
- Optional Thesis Project

At the core of the social justice major track is a social justice concentration that brings together a student's specific interests in social justice. Majors will submit proposals for acceptance to the track that will include three philosophy courses and two non-philosophy courses that fit together in a coherent concentration.

Below are two sample concentrations:

Sample Concentration 1: Human Rights in China  
 PHIL272  
 Human Rights Across Cultures  
 PHIL278  
 Political Philosophy  
 CEAS271

Political Economy of Developing Countries

CEAS297

Chinese Politics

PHIL263

Modern Chinese Philosophy

Sample Concentration 2: Challenging The Carceral State

PHIL214

Reasoning About Justice

PHIL368

The Ethics of Captivity

ANTH302

Critical Perspectives on the State

PHIL211

Critical Philosophy of Race

GOVT159

The Moral Basis of Politics

## COURSE LIST

The introductory philosophy courses (200-249) are intended for both prospective majors and non-majors. (General-Education-only courses, with course numbers below 200, do not count toward the major.)

Intermediate courses (250-300) are generally not appropriate for first-year students, and some have explicit prerequisites. Intermediate-level classes tend to introduce students to a particular area of philosophy or to the discipline's historical development at a higher level and in more depth than introductory classes.

Advanced courses (301-399) are typically organized as seminars for majors and other students with significant related preparation. Students often participate in exploring an area of particular relevance to a professor's research program. Advanced classes may focus on a particular figure in the history of philosophy or on a topic of contemporary importance.

## COURSES FOR NON-MAJORS

Courses numbered below **250** are designed to be appropriate as first courses in philosophy. In addition, many of our courses numbered **250** and above are of interest to majors in related departments. (For example, students majoring in neuroscience or psychology often take PHIL286.)

## STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

The Major in Philosophy equips students with the following knowledge and skills:

- Open-minded learning and constructive, critical engagement with the ideas and values of others.
- Close reading to follow and evaluate paths of reasoning
- Recognizing alternative ways of framing and addressing a problem

- Knowledge and appreciation of multiple philosophical approaches, thinkers, traditions, and themes
- Appreciation of historical and cultural differences
- Recognizing connections across the philosophy curriculum and beyond
- Understanding how philosophical inquiry both relates to and challenges their own perspectives and priorities

Graduates will be well prepared for success in a wide range of careers and life paths, including but certainly not limited to graduate work in philosophy.

## LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Knowledge of foreign languages is particularly useful for the study of philosophy and indispensable for serious study of the history of philosophy. It is therefore strongly recommended that students achieve reading fluency in at least one foreign language.

## PRIZES

The Department of Philosophy annually awards the Wise Prize for the best paper written in philosophy in the current year. This prize is usually awarded to a senior thesis written in philosophy, but it is not restricted to philosophy theses.

## TRANSFER CREDIT

Students who entered Wesleyan as first-year students may count up to two courses taken outside Wesleyan toward the 10 required to fulfill the major. These should be pre-approved by the student's advisor. Under special circumstances, such as a full year spent studying philosophy at a British university, it is possible to count more external credits toward the major. Students transferring into Wesleyan should review their academic histories with their departmental advisor as soon as possible to determine which will be counted toward the major requirements.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Philosophy colloquia.

Every year the department arranges a series of public presentations of papers by visiting philosophers or Wesleyan faculty or students.

Majors Committee and Philosophy Club.

The department encourages its majors to attend departmental talks and social events. Students are also encouraged to organize student-led events and discussions.

## **HONORS**

To qualify for departmental honors in philosophy, a student must achieve an honors level of performance in courses in the department, must declare the intention to work for departmental honors at the beginning of the senior year, must register for senior thesis tutorials in each semester of the senior year, and must write a thesis at an honors level. Theses must be submitted in accordance with Honors College procedures and will be judged by a committee made up of members of the department.