

What can I do with a philosophy major?

Oh, nothing much...except *everything*.

In short, philosophers excel at [the most valuable job skills](#); they excel in a [wide variety of careers](#); they make [better money than business majors](#); and they have proven themselves famous and notable in a wide variety of publically useful and interesting fields.

Notable examples include U.S. Presidents (Thomas Jefferson), filmmakers (Wes Anderson), musicians (Philip Glass), Popes (John Paul the II), actors (Woody Allen), comedians (Steve Martin), CEOs (AOL-Time Warner), and more.

Let's examine these grand claims in a bit more detail.

How does a philosophy help?

1. [Skills](#):

- **Communication:** A philosophy major means you have spent hundreds of hours reading, writing, listening to, and making arguments in an attempt to communicate clearly. Good philosophy communicates across languages and cultures across generations, centuries, millenia.
- **Argumentation:** A philosophy major means you have read and written dozens of dense, complicated, and sophisticated arguments. Arguments rule the world — public policy, business enterprise, and even religion executes on the practical level what makes the most sense to do, which is determined by arguments.
- **Teamwork:** A philosophy major means you have engaged in hundreds of hours of careful conversation, problem-solving, and verbal interaction especially in a group.
- **Creativity:** A philosophy major encourages (nay, demands) that you learn how to think outside the box. Perhaps because of the dull and boring method of public education most people suffer through, their native creativity is stifled by the time they get to the job force — and employers are desperate for it. They are delighted by someone with a flexible, unconventional, creative mind.
- **Curiosity:** Many philosophers are native-born question-askers. The discipline cultivates this skill exponentially, whether you already have a lot or only a little germ.

These skills are meta-skills — they apply to *every* discipline and *any* career, including husband/wife, father/mother, friend. Of course, they also apply to every working professional.

2. Pay:

Since philosophers tend to be good at the most highly paid skills, they tend to do fun and challenging jobs, and make plenty doing it: They make more than those who major in chemistry, biology, and psychology.

SOME RANKINGS OF UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES BY MEDIAN SALARY

Degree	Starting	Mid-Career	Rank
Chemical Engineering	\$63,200	\$107,000	# 1
Economics	\$50,100	\$98,600	# 5
Physics	\$50,300	\$97,300	# 6
Computer Science	\$55,900	\$95,500	# 7
Mathematics	\$45,400	\$92,400	# 10
Finance	\$47,900	\$88,300	# 14
Philosophy	\$39,900	\$81,200	# 16
International Relations	\$40,900	\$80,900	# 17
Chemistry	\$42,600	\$79,900	# 18
Political Science	\$40,800	\$78,200	# 21
Accounting	\$46,000	\$77,100	# 22
Business Management	\$43,000	\$72,100	# 25
History	\$39,200	\$71,000	# 27
Communication	\$38,100	\$70,000	# 28
Biology	\$38,800	\$64,800	# 34
Psychology	\$35,900	\$60,400	# 39

3. Careers:

- **Administration/Management-** in such diverse areas as personnel, financial aid, or public relations. Employment settings might include college or university, prisons, hospitals, government agencies (county, state or federal), and private companies
- **Business-** The ability to look at old problems and processes in new ways is invaluable in business management, sales, consulting public relations, fund raising, systems analysis, advertising, and banking
- **Insurance-** agent and broker
- **Government-** congressional staff member, federal agencies and bureaus, state and local governments, United Nations, foreign service, and cultural affairs
- **Foreign service & diplomacy.** The philosophical ability to discover unconscious assumptions and work around them is particularly important when working with people of different cultures

- **Journalism**- reporter and critic (books, dance, film)
- **Publishing/Writing**- There's always a shortage of people who are good at expressing themselves on paper (or online), in sales, editing, management, freelance, technical writing for a company or government, and script writer
- **Public service**. Both politicians and career public servants benefit from the ability to identify, define and solve an astonishing variety of problems.
- **Law**. Lawyers are really philosophers trained in a specific sub-field, namely a given country's legal system. They make and critique arguments for a living. Law students are famously subjected to a distinctly philosophical form of on-the-spot classroom quizzes known as the Socratic method.

4. Famous Philosophy Majors

A small percentage of philosophy majors go on to become professional philosophers.

Many hundreds go on into other fields and employ their skills of communication and teamwork to flourish. Notable examples include U.S. Presidents (Thomas Jefferson), filmmakers (Wes Anderson), musicians (Philip Glass), Popes (John Paul the II), actors (Woody Allen), comedians (Steve Martin), CEOs (AOL-Time Warner), and more.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

William Bennett-- former Secretary of Education and Head of the Drug Enforcement Agency

Patrick Buchanan-- former Presidential Candidate and Political Columnist

Angela Davis--Social Activist and Political Philosopher

Jules Debray--Writer and Government Official, France

Rahm Emanuel--Clinton White House Political Advisor

Thomas Jefferson--U.S. President

Vaclav Havel--former President of Czechoslovakia

Aung San Suu Kyi--Human Rights Activist, Nobel Peace Prize Winner

Robert MacNamara--Secretary of Defense and Head of the World Bank

John Silber--former Candidate for Governor of Massachusetts and President of Boston University

David Souter--Supreme Court Justice

ARTS AND LETTERS

Wes Anderson--Filmmaker and Writer (*Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic*) Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

Mary Higgins Clark--Mystery Writer

Joseph Chaikin--Theatre Director
Ethan Coen--Filmmaker and Writer (*Raising Arizona, Hudsucker Proxy, Fargo, The Big Lebowski, Oh Brother Where Art Thou, Romance and Cigarettes*) Philosophy, Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts
Umberto Eco--Novelist and Semiologist
Ken Follett--British Writer
Michael Frayn--Novelist
Northrup Frye--Literary Critic
Martin Gardner--Essayist
Philip Glass--Composer
Rebecca Goldstein--Novelist
Claude Lanzmann--Film Maker
Michael Lerner--Editor/Publisher Tikkun Magazine
Ira Levin--Writer
James Michener--Writer
Iris Murdoch--Novelist
Steve Reich--Composer
Meyer Schapiro--Art Critic
Alexander Solzhenitsin--Writer
Wallace Shawn--Playwright and Actor, BA in History from Harvard, studied Philosophy at Oxford
Susan Sontag--Writer
David Foster Wallace--Novelist
Elie Wiesel--Writer

RELIGION

Joseph Bernardin--Cardinal, Chicago
Shaykh Hamza Yusuf--Muslim leader, Arabic scholar
Mircea Eliade--Religious Studies
Martin Luther King, Jr--Minister & Civil Rights Leader
Madelyn Murray O'Hair--Famous Atheist
Pope John Paul II—Pope and Vicar of Christ
Willard Scott—Meteorologist, NBC, American University, Religious Studies
Michael Lerner--Editor/Publisher Tikkun Magazine
George Pires -- Nobel Peace Prize (1958)
George Stephanopoulos -- Political Commentator, Masters degree in theology at Balliol College, Oxford University, England, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia University and graduated summa cum laude in political science.
Shane Battier -- Professional Basketball Player, Duke University, Religious Studies

SOCIAL STUDIES

Gertrude Himmelfarb--Historian
Herbert Simon--Economist, and Nobel Laureate
C. Vann Woodward--Historian

SPORTS

Phil Jackson--Coach, Chicago Bulls
Michael McKaskey--Owner, Chicago Bears
Aaron Taylor--Offensive Tackle, Green Bay Packers
John Elway, Quarterback, National Football League
Mick Schmidt--former Philadelphia Philly

PERFORMERS

Woody Allen--Director and Comedian
John Chancellor--News Broadcaster
Harrison Ford--Actor
Chris Hardwick--MTV Host
Bruce Lee--martial arts & actor
Jay Leno, Comedian and Host of The Tonight Show
Amy Madigan--Actress
Steve Martin--Comedian, Actor ([See this page from his alma mater!](#))
Dennis Miller--Comedian
Stone Phillips--News Broadcaster
Brad Roberts--Crash Test Dummies
Susan Sarandon--Actress
Gene Siskel--Movie Critic
Steve Thomas--Host for TV Show, This Old House
Alex Trebek--Host for TV Show, Jeopardy

BUSINESS

Mark Hulbert--financial columnist FORBES magazine
Carl Icahn--CEO, TWA Airlines
Gerald Levin--CEO, Time-Warner, Inc.
George Soros--Financier & Money Manager
Moses Znaimer--Owner of CITY-TV and MUCH-MUSIC, Toronto

CANADIAN and other recent additions to the list

Beverly McLachlin (Canadian Chief Justice)

Ed Broadbent (leader of Canada's federal NDP 1970's and 1980's, Ph.D in Philosophy)

Pierre Trudeau (Former Canadian Prime Minister)

Paul Martin (Canadian Prime-minister in waiting?)

Max Yalden (former Language Commissioner of Canada)

John Roberts (former Canadian liberal cabinet minister)

Dave Thomas (one of the "Mackenzie Brothers" on SCTV).

Don Harron (Canadian comedian, author of ANNE OF GREEN GABLES libretto)

Robert Weaver (doyen of Canadian literature, head of CBC's ANTHOLOGY)

Rick Salutin (columnist for THE GLOBE AND MAIL)

John Mighton, (Canadian playwright, winner of Governor General's award for drama)

Adam Zimmerman (retired CEO of Noranda Inc; one of Canada's largest Mining companies)

Moses Znaimer, (Owner of CITY-TV and MUCH-MUSIC, Toronto)

Brad Roberts, (Singer Songwriter for CRASH TEST DUMMIES)

Mike Brierley (Captain of the England Cricket Team in the 1980s was previously a university philosophy lecturer).

Steve Allen (writer & comedian)

David Duchovny (actor on X-FILES)

Peter Hoeg (author of SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW)

Kate Millett (author of SEXUAL POLITICS)

Bob Moses (civil rights activist)

Robert Motherwell (painter)

Patricia Rozema (film-maker, I'VE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING)

Neil Peart (drummer for rock group, RUSH)