

# Philosophy

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## Undergraduate Degree Programs

**General B.A., 3- or 4-Year, Philosophy**

**Honours B.A., Philosophy**

**Honours B.A., Philosophy, Arts and Business, Regular**

**Honours B.A., Philosophy, Arts and Business, Co-op**

**Joint Honours with Philosophy**

**Minor in Philosophy**

**Option in Philosophy**

Philosophers are concerned with fundamental questions about knowledge, values, and the nature of the universe. What is the nature of truth? What can we know about the world? What kinds of actions are moral? What does it mean to be a person? Our common-sense assumptions about these matters are often the hardest to justify. Philosophy forces us to re-examine these assumptions; it is the discipline that takes nothing for granted.

Philosophy is not only the sum of these topics, however. It is also a set of methods for thinking about these problems, including tools for reasoning about reasoning itself. The habits of critical analysis, clear expression, and careful argumentation learned in Philosophy at Waterloo are skills which apply to virtually every academic and professional context. Philosophy is not just inherently interesting; it is a means of acquiring capacities for reasoning and communication that few other programs even attempt to teach.

Our Philosophy Department carries on teaching and research in many divisions of Philosophy. There is an emphasis on interdisciplinary work, integrating the conceptual tools of Philosophy with the approaches of many other disciplines. The key areas of philosophical study at Waterloo include the following:

### **Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science**

Both the philosophy of mind and cognitive science pursue fundamental questions concerning the nature and function of mind, including consciousness, the nature of persons, and the relation between human, machine, and animal intelligence. These two areas blend together, with the philosophy of mind emphasizing conceptual aspects and Cognitive Science emphasizing the empirical, yet with substantial overlap. These topics connect Philosophy with Psychology, Neuroscience, and Computer Science.

### **Logic and Language**

The study of good reasoning ranges from the broadest informal considerations of what it is reasonable to believe to the sophisticated formal study of valid argument forms, often conducted using algebraic concepts and methods. This mirrors a range of ways of studying human language, from the applied to the theoretical. The study of logic and language considers the nature of truth and meaning, along with higher-order questions of whether there is a single correct system of logic, and how logic and natural languages

## Courses in the Major

Introduction to Philosophy  
Critical Thinking  
Great Works  
Philosophy of Sex and Love  
Gender Issues  
Philosophy Through Science Fiction  
Philosophy in Literature  
Professional and Business Ethics  
Probability and Decision Making  
Ethics  
Biomedical Ethics  
Introduction to Formal Logic  
Philosophy of Mind  
Introduction to Cognitive Science  
Introduction to the Philosophy of Science  
The Existentialist Experience  
Ethics and the Engineering Profession  
Human Rights  
Violence, Non-violence and War  
Non-Classical Logics  
Theories of Knowledge  
Theories of Reality  
Philosophy of Mathematics  
Philosophy of Language  
History of Ancient Philosophy  
History of Modern Philosophy  
20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy  
Modern Feminism  
Seminar in Cognitive Science

## **Studying Philosophy as a Combined Degree**

Philosophy has long been a central component of a liberal arts education, and is today an excellent adjunct to studies in Mathematics and the sciences. A Philosophy education at Waterloo emphasizes the analysis of ideas, careful reading and scholarship, and clear argumentation. Whatever other disciplines one studies, these skills are likely to be highly valued.

## **The Student Experience**

uWaterloo Philosophy students participate in smaller classes with opportunity for extensive contact with professors. Our Philosophy Society (or “*PhilSoc*”) organizes various activities where students meet to enjoy

interrelate. Logic has close affinities with Mathematics and Computer Science; the philosophy of language with Linguistics and Psychology.

### **Moral and Political Philosophy**

Ethics concerns how we should live our lives. Moral philosophers study such concepts as rights, goodness, virtue, and responsibility. Political philosophy is the related study of the various systems of political and social organization. Political philosophers consider which systems of government are best, and what standards make a government count as good. Moral and political philosophy have application to issues as diverse as human rights, the treatment of women and minorities, biomedical ethics, and the question of moral justifications for war. There are important conceptual relations between moral philosophy and many other disciplines, including Political Science, Law, Women's Studies, and International Relations.

### **Epistemology and the Philosophy of Science**

What is knowledge? This most general question introduces related philosophical issues: What does it mean to be justified in a belief? How confident should we be about our most fundamental assumptions? Are there limits to knowledge? Is science a special way of acquiring knowledge? Epistemologists and philosophers of science are generally interested in understanding and clarifying notions like that of the scientific method and evidence. Many such philosophers work partly in a scientific field: Physics and Biology are common areas of philosophical investigation.

### **Metaphysics**

Some of the deepest and broadest questions deal with the nature of reality itself. Can reality be known? Is everything physical? Specific metaphysical questions are pursued in the philosophy of mind (What are minds?), philosophy of science (Does time have a direction? How should we interpret quantum mechanics?), and philosophy of mathematics (What is the nature of number?), as metaphysics overlaps with other fields. Other classic metaphysical topics include causation, the nature of free will, and the existence of God (or gods). The work of metaphysicians overlaps with research in such disciplines as Physics, Mathematics, and Psychology.

### **The History of Philosophy**

No way of thinking can be well understood without considering the historical ideas that partly shape it. The history of Philosophy informs not just contemporary Philosophy, but a great deal of current thinking in science, politics, economics and culture. Studying the work of past philosophers is both interesting in its own right and an excellent introduction to issues that continue to engage philosophers. Historians of philosophy produce and study high-quality scholarship that illuminates the thinking of past philosophers and that draws out the continuing relevance that these thinkers have for contemporary debates. History of Philosophy often intersects with work being done in such disciplines as English, French, Classics, and History.

### **Careers**

Some Philosophy students go on to graduate school in Philosophy and eventually work as professors. Most, however, find other work or go on to further study in other fields. Our graduates find success in law, teaching, management, public relations, the clergy and many other careers that reward breadth of thinking, critical analysis, and advanced communication skills.

philosophical discourse and socializing. Friday afternoons, students may attend talks by philosophers in the department's colloquium series. In addition, the Philosophy Learning Commons (Hagey Hall 335) provides students with a comfortable space for quiet study, discussion, and meetings, as well as with further opportunities for interaction with graduate students, faculty, and staff.

### **Co-operative Programs in Arts**

Honours Philosophy students may pursue co-operative education through:

**Arts and Business Co-op** - a direct entry program through which students complete their honours major and core Arts and Business courses in areas such as accounting, economics, languages, history, political science, business management, and leadership training. Five paid work terms alternate with academic terms on a four-month rotation. All students spend eight months on campus during their first year.

There are four optional specializations available for Arts and Business Co-op students:

Digital Arts Communication  
Global Engagement  
Human Resources Management  
International Trade

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**For more information about Philosophy, please visit:**

[www.philosophy.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.philosophy.uwaterloo.ca)

**For admission information, questions about your application, or to arrange a campus visit please call:**

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