

PHILOSOPHY, BA

Philosophy involves reflection upon and understanding of all phases of human activity. Philosophy especially directs itself to the nature of knowledge and the most basic concepts of human understanding and value: morality, society, art and aesthetic experience, as well as science, politics, and religion.

Philosophy is thus closely involved with other disciplines because, as human activities and quests for knowledge, they and their findings provide the material for philosophical inquiry. The courses (<https://guide.wisc.edu/courses/philos/>) offered by the department are designed to help students develop their own capacities to reflect intelligently on questions of fundamental and lasting significance.

The Philosophy major is intended to meet the needs of students who:

- wish to use philosophy as the organizing core of a liberal education;
- desire to study philosophy in preparation for graduate work in some other field, such as law, government, or theology;
- plan to major jointly in philosophy and one of the social sciences, natural sciences, or humanities; and
- have a professional interest in philosophy and intend to do graduate work in the subject.

HOW TO GET IN

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Requirements	Details
How to get in	No application required. All students who meet the requirements listed below are eligible to declare. For information on how to declare, visit Advising & Careers .
Courses required to get in	None
GPA requirements to get in	None
Credits required to get in	None
Other	None

REQUIREMENTS

UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS

All undergraduate students must complete both the following Core General Education (Core GenEd) and University Degree and Quality of Work requirements. The requirements below apply to students whose first term at UW-Madison or whose earliest post-high school college attendance at any institution is Summer 2026 or later.

Students whose first term at UW-Madison or whose earliest post-high school college attendance at any institution occurred before Summer 2026 should refer to the archived Guide (<https://guide.wisc.edu/archive/>) for the requirements that apply to them.

CORE GENERAL EDUCATION (CORE GENED) REQUIREMENTS

Civics & Perspectives	3 credits of Civics & Perspectives coursework.
Communication & Literacy	6 credits of Communication & Literacy coursework. This requirement may be partially satisfied by a qualifying placement test score. More information: https://go.wisc.edu/qualifyingenglishplacement (https://go.wisc.edu/qualifyingenglishplacement/)
Humanities & Arts	6 credits of Humanities & Arts coursework.
Mathematics & Quantitative Reasoning	6 credits of Mathematics & Quantitative Reasoning coursework. This requirement may be partially satisfied by a qualifying placement test score. More information: https://go.wisc.edu/qualifyingmathplacement (https://go.wisc.edu/qualifyingmathplacement/)
Natural Science & Wellness	Complete both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 credits of Natural Science & Wellness or Natural Science & Wellness + Laboratory coursework. • one course must be in Natural Science & Wellness + Laboratory coursework.
Social & Behavioral Science	3 credits of Social & Behavioral Science coursework.
Total Credits	30 credits.

For more information see the policy (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1095/>).

UNIVERSITY DEGREE AND QUALITY OF WORK REQUIREMENTS

All undergraduate degree recipients must complete the following minimum requirements. Requirements for some programs will exceed these requirements; see program requirements for additional information.

Total Degree	120 degree credits.
Residency	Complete 30 credits in residence. A course is considered "in residence" if it is taken when in undergraduate degree-seeking status and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is offered by UW-Madison and completed on the UW-Madison campus or at an approved off-site location, or • is offered by UW-Madison in an online or distance format, or is completed during participation in a UW-Madison study abroad/study away program.
Quality of Work	Achieve at least the minimum grade point average specified by the school, college, and/or academic program.
Math	Demonstrate minimal mathematics competence by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placing above MATH#160;96, or • successfully completing MATH#160;96, or • successfully completing a more advanced mathematics course such as MATH#160;112, MATH#160;113, MATH#160;114, MATH#160;141, MATH#160;211, or MATH#160;221.

English Language	If required to take the UW-Madison English as a Second Language Assessment Test (MSN-ESLAT), demonstrate minimal English language competence by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • earning credit for ESL&#160;118, or • achieving a qualifying MSN-ESLAT placement test score.
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Language	Complete one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 high school units of a single language other than English, or • one course with the second semester Language designation.
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Major Declaration	Declare and complete the requirements for at least one major.
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COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS: BACHELOR OF ARTS (BA)

Students pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in the College of Letters & Science must complete all of the requirements below. Some courses satisfy more than one L&S degree requirement (visit College of Letters & Science: Requirements (<https://guide.wisc.edu/undergraduate/letters-science/#requirementstext>) for details).

This major can be paired with either the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree requirements.

BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Communication	Complete both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part A: one course with the Communication A designation or eligible UW Placement Score; and • Part B: one course with the Communication B designation
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Quantitative Reasoning	Complete both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part A: one course with the Quantitative Reasoning A designation or eligible UW Placement Score; and • Part B: one course with the Quantitative Reasoning B designation
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Ethnic Studies	one 3+ credit course with the Ethnic Studies designation
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Language	Complete either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the fourth unit of one language other than English; or • the third unit of one language other than English and the second unit of an additional language.
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L&S Breadth: Humanities	Complete 12 credits with the Humanities or Literature designation, which must include at least 6 credits with the Literature designation.
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L&S Breadth: Social Sciences	Complete 12 credits with the Social Science designation.
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L&S Breadth: Natural Sciences	Complete 12 credits with the Natural Science, Biological Science, or Physical Science designations, which must include both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one 3+ credit course with the Biological Science designation, and • one 3+ credit course with the Physical Science designation.
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Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) Coursework	at least 108 credits
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Depth of Intermediate/Advanced work	at least 60 credits at the Intermediate or Advanced level
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Major	Declare and complete at least one major.
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Total Credits	at least 120 credits
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UW-Madison Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 credits in residence, overall; and • 30 credits in residence after the 86th credit
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Quality of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.000 in all coursework at UW-Madison • 2.000 in Intermediate/Advanced level coursework at UW-Madison
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NON-L&S STUDENTS PURSUING AN L&S MAJOR

Non-L&S students who have permission from their School/College to pursue an additional major within L&S only need to fulfill the major requirements. They do not need to complete the L&S Degree Requirements above.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MAJOR 27 CREDITS AND 8 COURSES IN PHILOS ([HTTPS://GUIDE.WISC.EDU/COURSES/PHILOS/](https://guide.wisc.edu/courses/philos/))

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
PHILOS 211 or PHILOS 511	Elementary Logic Symbolic Logic	3-4
PHILOS 430	History of Ancient Philosophy	3-4
PHILOS 432	History of Modern Philosophy	3-4
5 advanced PHILOS courses of at least 3 credits from below:		15
PHILOS 430	History of Ancient Philosophy	
PHILOS 432	History of Modern Philosophy	
PHILOS 440	Existentialism	
PHILOS/ ENVIR ST 441	Environmental Ethics	
PHILOS 454	Classical Philosophers	
PHILOS/ RELIG ST 501	Philosophy of Religion	
PHILOS 503	Theory of Knowledge	
PHILOS 504	Special Topics in the Theory of Knowledge	

PHILOS 506	Study Abroad in Philosophy
PHILOS 511	Symbolic Logic
PHILOS 512	Methods of Logic
PHILOS 516	Language and Meaning
PHILOS 520	Philosophy of the Natural Sciences
PHILOS 522	Special Topic
PHILOS/ ENVIR ST 523	Philosophical Problems of the Biological Sciences
PHILOS/ ECON 524	Philosophy and Economics
PHILOS 530	Freedom Fate and Choice
PHILOS 541	Modern Ethical Theories
PHILOS 543	Special Topics in Ethics
PHILOS 549	Great Moral Philosophers
PHILOS/ ED POL 550	Philosophy of Moral Education
PHILOS 551	Philosophy of Mind
PHILOS 553	Aesthetics
PHILOS 555	Political Philosophy
PHILOS/ GEN&WS 556	Topics in Feminism and Philosophy
PHILOS 557	Issues in Social Philosophy
PHILOS 560	Metaphysics
PHILOS 562	Special Topics in Metaphysics
PHILOS 567	Topics in Contemporary Philosophy
PHILOS/ MATH 571	Mathematical Logic

Additional credits—if necessary—to achieve 27 for the major **3**

Total Credits **27**

DISTRIBUTION

Of the 27 credits, at least 1 course is required from each category ('Metaphysics and Epistemology' and 'Value Theory'):

Category 'Metaphysics and Epistemology'

Complete one course:

Code	Title	Credits
PHILOS/ RELIG ST 501	Philosophy of Religion	3-4
PHILOS 503	Theory of Knowledge	3
PHILOS 504	Special Topics in the Theory of Knowledge (Bayesian Epistemology)	3
PHILOS 504	Special Topics in the Theory of Knowledge (Epistemic Ideals)	3
PHILOS 516	Language and Meaning	3
PHILOS 520	Philosophy of the Natural Sciences	3
PHILOS 530	Freedom Fate and Choice	3
PHILOS 551	Philosophy of Mind	3
PHILOS 560	Metaphysics	3
PHILOS 562	Special Topics in Metaphysics (Consciousness)	3
PHILOS 567	Topics in Contemporary Philosophy	3

Category 'Value Theory'

Complete one course:

Code	Title	Credits
PHILOS 241	Introductory Ethics	3-4
PHILOS 454	Classical Philosophers (Aristotle's Ethics)	3
PHILOS 541	Modern Ethical Theories	3
PHILOS 549	Great Moral Philosophers	3
PHILOS 555	Political Philosophy	3

RESIDENCE AND QUALITY OF WORK

- 2.000 GPA in all PHILOS courses and courses that count for the major
- 2.000 GPA on 15 upper-level credits in the major, taken in residence¹
- 15 credits in PHILOS, taken on campus

HONORS IN THE MAJOR

Students may declare Honors in the Philosophy Major in consultation with the Philosophy undergraduate advisor.

HONORS IN THE PHILOSOPHY MAJOR: REQUIREMENTS

To earn Honors in the Major in Philosophy, students must satisfy both the requirements for the major (above) and the following additional requirements:

- Minimum 3.300 University GPA
- Minimum a 3.500 GPA for all PHILOS and major courses
- One *additional* course from either the Metaphysics and Epistemology or Value Theory categories with a grade of B or better
- PHILOS 681 (for 1-3 credits) and PHILOS 682 (for 3 credits) with a grade of AB or better.²

FOOTNOTES

¹ Courses between PHILOS 400–699 are considered upper-level in the major.

² Students will not be permitted to write a Senior Honors Thesis unless they have taken at least one advanced course on the topic on which they will be writing. Credits earned by writing a Senior Honors Thesis will not count toward the 27 minimum credits required for the major.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1. Ability to think critically about arguments.
2. Ability to interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them logically.
3. Ability to communicate precisely and concisely in both writing and speech.
4. Familiarity with the history of Western philosophy and the major debates within that tradition.

5. Ability to be engaged citizens who think carefully and well about their responsibilities to others.
6. Ability to exchange reasons about controversial matters respectfully and with the aim of uncovering the truth.
7. Interpretative charity and intellectual honesty, which includes appropriate attribution to others of their ideas, and recognition and frankness about the limitations of one's own ideas.

FOUR-YEAR PLAN

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This Four-Year Plan is only one way a student may complete an L&S degree with this major. Many factors can affect student degree planning, including placement scores, credit for transferred courses, credits earned by examination, and individual scholarly interests. In addition, many students have commitments (e.g., athletics, honors, research, student organizations, study abroad, work and volunteer experiences) that necessitate they adjust their plans accordingly. Informed students engage in their own unique Wisconsin Experience by consulting their academic advisors, Guide, DARS, and Course Search & Enroll for assistance making and adjusting their plan.

First Year

Fall	Credits Spring	Credits
Communications A	3 Ethnic Studies	3
PHILOS 101	3-4 Foreign Language (if needed)	4
PHILOS 210	3-4 I/A MATH, STAT or COMP SCI (for BS degree)	3
Physical Science Breadth	3 PHILOS 241	3-4
Foreign Language (if needed)	4 PHILOS 211 (Quantitative Reasoning B)	3-4
	14	16

Second Year

Fall	Credits Spring	Credits
PHILOS 430	3-4 Communication B	4
Literature Breadth	3 PHILOS 432	3-4
Social Science Breadth	4 I/A MATH, STAT, or COMP SCI (for BS degree)	3
INTER-LS 210	1 Social Science Breadth	4
Biological Science Breadth	3	
	15	15

Third Year

Fall	Credits Spring	Credits
Metaphysics and Epistemology category course	3-4 Value Theory category course	3-4
Natural Science Breadth	3 PHILOS 400+ Electives	3-4
Literature Breadth	3 Electives	7
Electives	5	
	15	15

Fourth Year

Fall	Credits Spring	Credits
PHILOS Electives	3 PHILOS 500+ Electives	3
Electives	12 Electives	12
	15	15

Total Credits 120

ADVISING AND CAREERS

ADVISING AND CAREERS DECLARE OR CANCEL THIS MAJOR

Please follow the process described on the Philosophy website (<https://philosophy.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program-2/major-declaration/>).

The Department of Philosophy encourages our students to begin working on their career exploration and preparation soon after arriving on campus. Philosophy students develop important and widely marketable skills, like the ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems. This means that having a major in Philosophy provides excellent preparation for a variety of careers.

Studying philosophy can also help you get into graduate school. Philosophy students excel on standardized tests like the GRE, GMAT, and LSAT. They rank first among all majors on the verbal and the analytical sections of the GRE. Philosophy students also tend to do better than just about any other major on the LSAT. With a mean score of just over 157, they are second only to Physics students. When it comes to the GMAT, Philosophy students rank in the top five of all majors, and they consistently have higher scores than Business students (including Management, Finance, Accounting, and Marketing).

STUDY ABROAD

Learning in Letters & Science emphasizes discovery, growth, understanding different perspectives, and challenging yourself, which makes studying abroad an excellent fit for many L&S students: studyabroad.wisc.edu (<https://studyabroad.wisc.edu/>)

As a university with global influence, we have more than 300 study abroad programs (<https://studyabroad.wisc.edu/programs/>) in over 80 countries. These vary in length, academic focus, teaching format, language requirements, cost, and level of independence. There are many programs to complement every major (<https://studyabroad.wisc.edu/academics/major-advising-pages-maps/#L&S>) and any year of college (including the final semester)—and all meet UW–Madison's high academic standards. Students admitted into Letters & Science can even choose a short program in the summer before they start college or their whole first year: studyabroad.wisc.edu/launch (<http://studyabroad.wisc.edu/launch/>). Talk with your academic advisor about how studying abroad might fit with your academic plan.

SUCCESSWORKS

SuccessWorks (<https://successworks.wisc.edu/>) at the College of Letters & Science helps you turn the academic skills learned in your classes into a fulfilling life, guiding you every step of the way to securing jobs, internships, or admission to graduate school.

Through one-on-one career advising, events, and resources, you can explore career options, build valuable internship and research experience,

and connect with supportive alumni and employers who open doors of opportunity.

- What you can do with your major (<https://successworks.wisc.edu/what-you-can-do-with-your-major/>) (Major Skills & Outcomes Sheets)
- Make a career advising appointment (<https://successworks.wisc.edu/make-an-appointment/>)
- Learn about internships and internship funding (<https://successworks.wisc.edu/finding-a-job-or-internship/>)
- Try “Jobs, Internships, & How to Get Them,” (<https://successworks.wisc.edu/canvas/>) an interactive guide in Canvas for enrolled UW–Madison students

RESOURCES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

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UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS

The Department of Philosophy has received generous support in order to fund two scholarships each academic year (<https://philosophy.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program-2/scholarships/>).

The **Charles Manthey Winter Philosophy Scholarship** is given to a student majoring in Philosophy who will graduate within the next four terms of the award and who has at least a 3.500 grade point average over the past two terms, and who can demonstrate financial need.

The **Colonel Jerome Ellis Goodrich, USMC (retired), Scholarship** is awarded to an undergraduate student majoring in Philosophy with academic merit and financial need, and who is a U.S. citizen.

Applications for these scholarships are typically due in early April and winners are honored at our annual Awards Banquet in May.

We also have an annual paper prize called the **Temkin Undergraduate Essay Prize in Value Theory**. This prize recognizes an outstanding essay in value theory, where this is construed quite broadly to include topics in political philosophy, philosophy of law, metaethics, applied ethics, etc. Essays are typically submitted in early April and the winner is also honored at our Awards Banquet.

If you have any questions about these scholarships or essay prizes, you may send an email to frontoffice@philosophy.wisc.edu.