

Philosophy as a Practical Major

(Or, How to Convince Your Parents that It Is a Good Idea to Major in Philosophy)

Most students major in philosophy out of a love of asking “the big questions” and learning to reason well about them. However, philosophy majors also face a common misperception that philosophy is less “practical” than other majors. They sometimes have to endure jokes. (But what are you going to *do* with that? Ask “philosophical” questions like “Do you want fries with that?”)

While the following might not help you think of a witty rejoinder to the jokes, it should give you plenty of reason to see that it is a gross misperception that philosophy is impractical as a major.

The Philosophy Major as Career Preparation

The quick answer to the question of what you can do with a philosophy degree is: Almost anything. Chapman philosophy students are quite successful in pursuing a wide range of careers, including business, law, medicine, journalism, and computer programming, just to name a few.

There are several reasons why majoring in philosophy offers excellent training for a wide range of careers. First, majoring in philosophy develops skills of critical thinking, including the ability to understand issues from multiple perspectives and envision creative solutions to problems. Think about it this way: If you can reason and write clearly about abstract and controversial matters like the existence of God or the nature of free will, then you will have a relatively easy time reasoning and writing about more straightforward matters. As a writer for *The Times of London* (August 15, 1998) notes, philosophy is “the ultimate transferrable work skill.” Second, philosophy majors tend to be well-rounded individuals, able to converse and reason about a wide range of topics. These attributes can give philosophers an edge in a tight job market and in gaining admission to professional programs in medicine, business, and law.

The key is to market your skills as a philosopher well to potential employers, and there are lots of signs that employers are increasingly pre-disposed to see the value of majoring in the [humanities](#), and [philosophy](#) in particular.

The Philosophy Major as Preparation for Grad School

For many careers, training beyond an undergraduate degree is required, and what you choose to major in as an undergraduate is not fixed. For example, it does not matter what you major in if your goal is to be a doctor, go to law school, or do an MBA, so long as you take courses along the way that allow you to meet entrance requirements.

Majoring in philosophy is excellent preparation for graduate studies in a wide range of fields. For one thing, philosophy majors rock entrance to exams for graduate, medical, law, and business schools. Consider,

- **Medical School:** Philosophy majors have a [higher acceptance rate to medical school](#) (just over 50%) than any other major (including biology, which has an acceptance rate of 35%).
- **Law School:** Philosophy majors outperform all majors (tying economics) on the graduate entrance exam for law school (the LSAT).
- **Master in Business Administration (MBA):** Philosophy majors outperform even business majors (by 15%!) on the graduate exam for an MBA (the GMAT).
- **Graduate School:** Philosophy majors outperform all other disciplines on the [Verbal and Analytic/Writing sections of the GRE](#). They outperform all humanities disciplines on the [Mathematics section of the GRE](#).

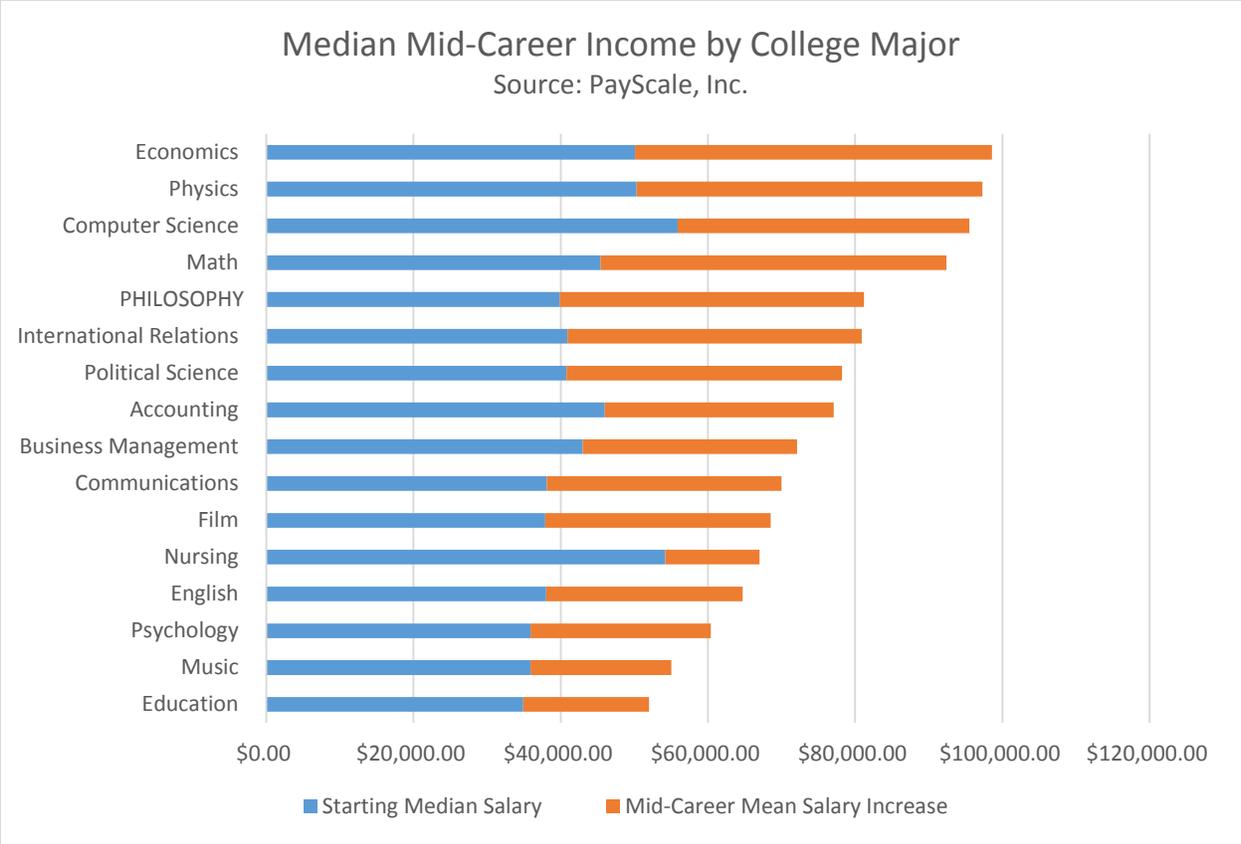
Philosophy as a Second Major

The philosophy major at Chapman is designed to be combined easily with other majors, and double-majoring is encouraged. The pedagogical reason for this has to do with the interdisciplinary nature of philosophy. Courses in philosophy of mind, for example, examine fundamental questions that emerge from psychology and neuroscience. Courses in philosophy of science, literature, law, and religion, explore fundamental questions arising in these disciplines. Courses in business, medical, and environmental ethics offer students an opportunity to explore ethical dimensions of different fields. Many philosophy majors choose to double-major because they find that their study of philosophy enhances their other major, and their other field of study makes them a better philosopher.

Double majoring has a practical payoff as well. It means you don't have to choose between being a philosopher and another discipline. You could even do that MBA your parents are pressuring you to do. Majoring in philosophy also offers to give you an edge in your career goals.

Major in Philosophy, Make Big Bucks

It is also a myth that majoring in philosophy will sentence you to a life of poverty. [Wall Street Journal data \(from Payscale\)](#) on starting and mid-career incomes by major suggest that philosophy majors statistically do not make less than those majoring in other disciplines. In fact, by mid-career philosophy majors tend to greatly surpass many other fields that have higher starting salaries (for example, accounting, nursing, and business management majors). Philosophy majors, on average, increase their salaries 102% from starting to mid-career.



In short, majoring in philosophy is a good choice for practical as well as intrinsic reasons.

Links to Further Resources

A helpful list of possible careers chosen by many philosophy majors is available [here](#).

There are several online lists of famous philosophers, including [here](#) and [here](#).

Loyola Marymount University maintains [an excellent website](#) with resources for students considering a philosophy major.