

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Getting A Job As A Philosophy Major¹

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Unless you turn out to be one of the graduating philosophy majors each year who plan to go to graduate or professional school, you will need to look for a job. It's in the Philosophy Department's interest that you find one: we look better if you do, and it becomes easier for us to recruit new majors. (We also wish you well, of course!) This document is intended to help you.

A job is not going to fall from the sky into your lap. You're going to have to work for it, and to maximize your chances you shouldn't wait till your senior year before taking action.

1. Not Selling Yourself Short

How are philosophy majors viewed by the rest of the world? What do people expect them to be like?

If we are honest, the answers to these questions that spring to mind are not very flattering. There are surely many people, including prospective employers, who harbor a stereotype of philosophy majors as impractical, woolly-minded shooters of the breeze with no useful skills or knowledge. It is therefore crucial to realize that [there are also many people](#), perhaps especially including prospective employers, who view philosophy majors as smart, independent thinkers with outstanding communications skills.

Philosophy majors do get jobs. And they make good money: according to the latest [PayScale College Salary Report](#), the mid-career (10+ years of experience) median salary of employees whose only degree is a BA in Philosophy is \$85,000—which beats out BA's in all other Humanities subjects as well as many vocational BA's and BA's in the sciences.

You actually do have something to offer the world: the study of philosophy cultivates many skills and attitudes that are useful in a

¹ This document is a work in progress. Constructive comments and suggestions would be much appreciated at melnyka@missouri.edu.

wide variety of jobs. Here are some things that philosophy majors typically excel in:

- evaluating arguments
- making a convincing case
- handling abstract concepts
- hard-headed thinking
- presenting ideas
- writing a position paper
- organizing thoughts
- considering alternative points of view
- articulating objections
- disagreeing respectfully
- seeing through fluff and calling out bullsh*t
- mastering detail
- reading critically
- reading carefully.

You will need to counteract the negative stereotype of a philosophy major in the way that you present yourself to prospective employers. (It will first be necessary, of course, not to *be* this stereotype!) You will also need to communicate effectively the many skills and attitudes that, as a philosophy major, you bring to the table.

2. Personal Attributes

Would you hire yourself? Whom among your friends would you hire?

Here are some personal attributes, in no particular order, that are highly valued by employers, pretty much regardless of the job:

- punctuality
- reliability
- ability to take direction
- focus
- attention to detail
- tolerance of boredom
- self-discipline
- conscientiousness
- initiative
- enthusiasm
- commitment
- perseverance
- cheerfulness

- sociability
- cooperativeness
- team spirit
- good manners
- unflappability.

You surely have some, at least, of these attributes, which are independent of your major. Make sure prospective employers know the valuable personal attributes that you have.

3. Improving Yourself

There are many things you can do to make yourself more employable, especially if you start early. One obvious thing is to earn a higher GPA. A high GPA matters to employers because it signals conscientiousness and self-discipline; the subject matter of the courses is secondary unless they are in departments that have a reputation (whether deserved or not) for lacking rigor.

To some extent, you can also cultivate in yourself the skills, attitudes, and personal attributes already noted. Then there are very specific work-related skills that you can acquire too. For example, you can make sure you that not only do you know such familiar Microsoft products as *Word*, *Excel*, and *PowerPoint*, but also photo- and video-editing software, website design software, and so forth. MU's Division of Technology offers a wide range of short [courses](#) on these and other topics; they are free to students.

Humanities majors are often weak in quantitative reasoning. If you're not, then make sure you can document the fact and play it up in applications and interviews. But if you are, then consider taking a quantitative course—a practically-oriented course in [statistics](#), say, or a course in a science in which handling quantitative data is important. Obviously you could go further and minor (or double-major, of course) in a quantitative field.

You could also check out the undergraduate courses offered by the Trulaske College of Business. There are certain business courses (Econ 1014: Microeconomics and Finance 2000: Survey of Business Finance, for example) that can be used toward the Social Science component of the General Education requirements. There is also a business [minor](#) open to College of Arts and Science students.

Paid work, but also internships and work in voluntary organizations, can help you develop—and show that you have—skills and attributes that employers value, e.g., leadership and the ability to work in a team. The time for paid work and the like is summers throughout your college career, of course, not your senior year.

4. The Broad Range Of Possibilities

There are more jobs for which you are potentially qualified than you think, including jobs that most people have never heard of. Here are some jobs that a recent graduating philosophy major² came upon in his researches:

- Technical Writing
- Policy Writing
- Communications
- Journalism
- Marketing
- Management
- Analysis (consulting/financial/engineering)
- Human Resources
- Ethics consulting.

Don't assume that you can figure out a priori which jobs you are unfitted for.

Awareness of these possibilities—and many others—can suggest further ways of tweaking your education to make yourself more employable, e.g., building up a portfolio of your writing, or taking courses in journalism or policy studies. The university offers a staggeringly wide array of courses, and you are not restricted to courses in the College of Arts and Science once you have completed your major requirements, the College's foundation requirements, and the university's general education and other requirements.

5. Help And Advice

Getting hired is a major project, not a Sunday afternoon's work. So get all the help you can. You may not think you need help on, say, writing an effective cover letter or interview etiquette, but you probably do. MU's Career Center offers a [wealth of information, advice,](#)

² Mr Andrew Prigmore, whom I thank both for this list and for other valuable comments.

[and services](#) on these and many other matters. It's worth exploring what they have in some detail. One somewhat helpful external site that they link to is [this](#). You can also drop by (it's in the Lower Level of the Student Success Center in Lowry Mall).

The American Philosophical Association has a page called "[A Non-Academic Career](#)"; it is aimed at PhDs rather than BA's or BS's in philosophy, but is still worthwhile for the latter.

A professor of philosophy at the University of Central Florida, Bruce Janz, has a [wide-ranging defense](#) of the employability of humanities majors, with special reference to philosophy majors. And here is a short article that addresses a [crucial question](#): "How to Talk to Your Parents About Majoring in the Humanities"

The Business Career Fairs organized by the Trulaske College of Business are open to all Mizzou students, and the next fair is scheduled for February 10, 2016 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Mizzou Arena. You might also check out the other [job-search assistance](#) that the College of Business offers to all students (for a fee of \$100).