

Attending Graduate School in Philosophy

Basic Information

Sacramento State does not offer an M.A. or a Ph.D. in Philosophy. Here is some basic information for students who are interested in working towards a graduate degree.

Applications for graduate school are usually due during the beginning of the year—January through February. These will be considered for application for the *next* school year starting in September.

A graduate school application for a Ph.D. program in philosophy will usually require:

1. Full official undergraduate transcripts
2. Graduate Record Exam scores
3. A personal statement about who you are, why you want to do philosophy, what your goals are, what your strengths and interests are, etc.
4. A minimum of three letters of recommendation from philosophy (preferably) professors.
5. A completed application form for their program
6. Money- \$40-80
7. A writing sample

Requirements for applications to program's offering only an M.A. vary considerably. Most Ph.D. programs do not accept applications from students who are only interested in earning an M.A..

Basic Advice

The two most common mistakes made by potential graduate students are (1) failure to do strong work as an undergraduate and (2) failure to prepare adequately for the GRE. With regard to the first mistake, it is important to understand that strong letters from faculty members are essential, and that faculty typically will not write strong letters for students who have not been serious about their undergraduate studies. Besides your GPA, one important measure of your seriousness is whether you are participating in the Philosophy Honors Program. Regarding the second mistake, many students are under the impression that the GRE either does not matter much or that it is not possible to significantly improve one's performance by studying for it. Neither of these is true. The GRE matters very much to most institutions with a strong Ph.D. program, and it represents the only real path to overcoming an unimpressive undergraduate GPA. It is a very straightforward matter to study for the GRE's, and practice tests are highly indicative of how well you can expect to do on it at any given state of preparation.

Whether studying philosophy in graduate school is a good idea for you depends on what you are hoping to achieve by doing it. Some students go to graduate school because they want to teach philosophy; others because they hope a background in philosophy will help them satisfy other career goals; still others because they simply want to study philosophy at a higher level, regardless of the economic value of the degree. The reasonableness of applying to graduate school varies a great deal depending on how you have performed as an undergraduate and your personal goals. You should get to know several philosophy professors and ask them for frank advice about your plans as they are probably in the best position to advise you concerning your likelihood of succeeding in a philosophy program. On the other hand, professors are not necessarily the best source of advice on the current state of the profession. So it is important for you to read about this on your own.

Here are a few good links to get you started:

- [A basic schedule for applying to graduate school.](#)
- [The Philosophical Gourmet Report](#)
- [Applying to graduate schools in philosophy.](#)