

## Why Major in Philosophy?

The subject of Philosophy encompasses such fundamental issues as the scope and limits of human knowledge, the ultimate constituents of reality, the sources of value and obligation, and the nature of logic and correct reasoning. Philosophy builds on the findings of many other academic disciplines and, in its methods, stresses clear, rigorous, and systematic thought. The application of philosophical ideas to the practical problems of life has always been a part of the subject, but it is only recently that universities have begun offering courses specifically oriented in this direction. We now offer several courses in applied ethics here at CSUS.

"Philosophy is my favorite subject, but I'm afraid to major in it. What kind of job can a philosophy major expect to get after graduation?" This is a familiar concern among students who have a serious interest in the subject. What can be said in reply? Let's look first at the skills that people well educated in philosophy are likely to have. They can generate ideas on many different sorts of problems and solve them. They can elicit hidden assumptions and articulate overlooked alternatives. They can persuade people to take unfamiliar views or novel options seriously. They can summarize complicated materials without undue simplification. They can formulate and defend policies on a wide range of important issues in business, education, social legislation, and other areas. They can integrate diverse data and construct useful analogies. They can distinguish subtle differences without overlooking similarities. They can also adapt to change, a capacity of growing importance in the light of rapid advances in so many fields. And well-educated philosophers can teach what they know to others. This ability is especially valuable at a time when retraining is so often required.

These representative abilities are quite general, but they bear directly on the range of careers for which philosophers are prepared. Although law school and graduate school in philosophy are popular among those who seek an advanced degree, students who have earned a B.A. in philosophy are well known to have the skills necessary for an enormous range of nonacademic jobs, given an orientation period or a course of (sometimes quite brief) specialty training. Often the sorts of abilities cited above are not even mentioned in descriptions or advertisements for nonacademic positions. But with greater and greater frequency we in universities hear complaints by employers about deficiencies in these capacities. We often hear from business leaders, for example, that many of their employees do not write or speak well, cannot communicate effectively, and lack imagination, ideas, and insight. Moreover, it is these sorts of capacities (together with certain traits of personality) which, for a very wide spectrum of nonacademic careers, contribute most to success. All of this implies that the study of philosophy is much more useful than is commonly believed.

Students who ultimately aim at a career in a field requiring a great deal of technical training, such as medicine or computer science, should not for that reason alone be dissuaded from considering a major in philosophy. Medical schools in particular tend to seek students who have completed the standard pre-med sequence but whose major displays some evidence of a

humanistic orientation and an inquiring mind. In general, even employers in very technically oriented fields know that students who have displayed competence in coursework prerequisite to the field but who are also confident and curious enough to major in something entirely different are likely to be among their best employees.

Those who both love and excel in the subject of philosophy may want to consider the possibility of continuing his or her studies in philosophy with a view to teaching at the college or university level. Any faculty member in the Department would be happy to speak with you more extensively about an academic career in philosophy.