



Why philosophy?



Philosophy searches for answers to life's fundamental questions.

They include:

- What should I value most in life?
- How is knowledge different from belief?
- How is my mind related to my body?
- Is freedom possible in a world of cause and effect?
- What is God's relation to humans and nature?
- Are time and space real?
- What are societies and governments for?
- What are beauty, goodness, and truth?

Philosophy cultivates creative thinking, logical reasoning, clear writing, and broad learning. As a result, philosophy majors tend to make more money than other majors and get into graduate programs at higher rates. At Southern Virginia, Christ is the model of wisdom and virtue, which are what philosophy pursues.

Think creatively.

Philosophy challenges assumptions and encourages fresh perspectives.

Jeff White

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2007 with a major in philosophy. I teach high school French and coach track, cross-country, and swimming.

Much of my master's program at Walla Walla University was in educational psychology and philosophy. The skills that I developed in SVU's philosophy classes helped me analyze the topics more deeply than my classmates and professors expected. I could find flaws and strengths in various theories and articulate them in discussions and papers.

I often hear adults say, "I took two or three years of French in school, but all I remember is 'Omelette du Fromage.'" I began to wonder why they retained so little French, so I



Jeff White ('07), Shaina White ('07), and their family

researched the history of language instruction in the U.S. and found that others had noticed the same shortfalls. I learned from their responses and created a new approach for my students. The result has been a happier classroom with students who retain far more French than before.

“I was open to big new ideas and had the skills to determine their viability.”

My philosophy background made a big difference. I was open to big new ideas and had the skills to determine their viability. I didn't have to wait for someone else to show me what was broken and how to fix it.

Reason logically.

Philosophy teaches principles of valid argument.

Sallie McGuire

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2022 with a major in philosophy. I then went to law school at Brigham Young University.

Being at a small liberal arts college allowed me to explore philosophy. The professors were awesome. They were extremely intelligent and dedicated to their students, taking time to answer questions and supplement course materials where it would help.

I loved doing my senior paper. I researched and wrote about a topic with the assistance of a professor I



Sallie McGuire ('22)

knew, having taken several classes from him. The project gave me tools for thinking and analysis.

The philosophy major has prepared me well for law school, which involves a lot of analytical thinking. One has to understand complex topics and then apply one's understanding to situations given in the classroom, on the final exam, and one day by a future client. Philosophy helped me learn how to articulate my thoughts, evaluate comparisons, and think critically not only about the principle involved in a case, but also about side effects and how much weight they should be given.

“The philosophy major has prepared me well for law school, which involves a lot of analytical thinking.”

To SVU students considering a philosophy major, I would say, “Try it!” It helps you think critically about the world around you, gain more self-awareness about why you think the way you do, and maybe consider what you want to change about your thoughts.

Art Furler

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2009 with a major in philosophy. I'm a facilities manager for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“Philosophy has helped me professionally with strong writing, reasoning, and problem-solving skills.”

My study of philosophy has shaped how I approach problems, evaluate claims, and perceive the world. We're barraged with opinions presented as fact, so I'm grateful to have learned how to test claims rigorously to determine what's true and defensible.

Philosophy has helped me professionally with strong writing, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. It has helped me consider many approaches to what gives a thing its identity, which is surprisingly relevant to everything from historic building renovation to product development. I use Aristotle's notion of the mean when balancing values like frugality and excess in project management. A utilitarian perspective helps me assess the distribution of scarce resources and its impact on customer satisfaction and brand management.



Art Furler ('09, right), Cimone Furler ('10), and their son

Students considering a philosophy major should talk with a philosophy professor about what they hope to do professionally and how philosophy can benefit them. My former classmates are teachers, business executives, entrepreneurs, homemakers, and programmers. They have all found tremendous value in their philosophy degree. While some areas of study prepare students narrowly for a specific career path, a philosophy major develops a skill set that is highly agile, transferrable, and respected.

Write clearly.

Philosophy aims to describe complex issues in straightforward sentences.

Ian Loveless

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2015 with a philosophy major and a mathematics minor. I'm a bioinformatician. I use statistics and computer programming to analyze biomolecular data.

After SVU, I earned an M.S. in biostatistics at The Ohio State University. I then worked at Henry Ford Health in Detroit where I found my love of computer programming and artificial intelligence. I'm now earning a Ph.D. in computational mathematics at Michigan State University.

Majoring in philosophy gave me the ability to think critically. When we run into problems with data or coding, I am able to find solutions that many of my more seasoned colleagues overlook.

Much of what I do involves writing papers and giving presentations. Thanks to my philosophy major, I already had plenty of experience in that department. As I started my career, my colleagues were astounded by my ability to write clearly and explain my point of view. The skills I learned trying to explain arguments in a clear and concise manner have been invaluable.

Similarly, I learned how to dissect papers and pull out the salient points.



Ian Loveless ('15), Hannah Loveless ('16),
and their children

“As I started my career, my colleagues were astounded by my ability to write clearly and explain my point of view.”

Travis Chisholm

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2020 with majors in philosophy and classical studies. I teach middle school science and ninth-grade Spanish. I also coach track and cross-country and am pursuing a master's degree in exercise physiology.

Growing up, I had so many questions but didn't know how to ask them. Philosophy provided the language I needed to discover myself, to learn who I truly am.

I went to SVU to study music education and become a band director, but Reason and the Self hooked me on philosophy. We talked about formulating arguments with justifiable premises. We read from Plato about Socrates, life, and death and from Descartes about the possibility of being deceived by an evil demon. We learned about becoming good human beings and our role in society. I wanted to know more, so I enrolled in more philosophy classes.



Travis Chisholm ('20), Genny Chisholm ('18),
and their son

“I feel that my life has been honorably blessed by studying philosophy and that I’m a better human being because of it.”

Philosophy taught me to be intellectually humble, to have an open mind. If an idea seemed untenable to me at first, it was probably because I didn’t know enough about the topic. Philosophy drove me not to settle for simple answers but to search for more satisfying ones. This is, perhaps, the greatest skill that philosophy has given me.

I teach at a public charter school. I didn’t know anything about teaching science, but they needed a science teacher. They also needed someone to coach cross-country and track and field. I had competed in both sports at SVU but hadn’t coached them. Thanks to my philosophy courses, I knew how to do research. I knew which sources were good and which were bad. I was able to learn what I needed to know to succeed in my new roles.

In my master’s program, I’m expected to research and write extensively on a variety of topics. I rely on the skills that philosophy taught me to communicate effectively.

I feel that my life has been honorably blessed by studying philosophy and that I’m a better human being because of it.

Learn broadly.

Philosophy pursues truth, beauty, and goodness.

Catherine Reynolds

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2013 with majors in English and philosophy. I've been married for ten years, have five kids, and am currently homeschooling them. My majors complemented each other greatly.

I had intended to go to law school but decided that I really wanted to be a full-time mom instead. The logic classes in the philosophy major helped me study for the LSAT, but those skills easily transferred to real-world situations I face as a stay-at-home mom. When is there a day in which you don't need to be logical? My English major taught me how to organize my thoughts on paper and find the right words to express them. I am so grateful for the skills I learned from my majors.

When I arrived at Southern Virginia, I wanted to be an English major. Then I took Reason and the Self. I was



Catherine Reynolds ('13), Lucas Reynolds ('13), and their children

hooked. It was fun and engaging. I loved the deep thinking it caused me to do. I took more classes and figured, "Why not do two majors?" Deep thinking is a valuable whether one is writing English papers, pondering philosophy, or making hard decisions in life. Years later, I am grateful I did the extra work to complete the philosophy major.

In one of my first philosophy classes, I told my peers what stance I had chosen to take in my paper. They questioned me, saying, "You used scriptures as quotes in your paper?" They thought it would not be what the professor wanted to hear. Thankfully, my professor was open to my perspective. That was a confidence-building experience that helps me stand up for what I believe today. I learned that just because something isn't popular doesn't mean it isn't

valuable. I also enjoyed the Chinese philosophy class and often think of it when I see quotes from Confucius randomly posted in airports or other public places. My ethics, epistemology, and religion and belief classes really helped me solidify some of my moral beliefs and better understand why I have them.

“I took more classes and figured, ‘Why not do two majors?’”

I wrote my senior paper on “Just Deserts.” I asked, “Do we really deserve to have fill-in-the-blank just by virtue of being human?” I have pondered that question over the years and have come to a different conclusion than the one in my paper. The question of desert has taken on a new meaning for me as I have pondered how it applies to my political beliefs, how I teach my children, and even how I respond to situations in my own personal development.

Ashley Gardner

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2008 with majors in philosophy and music. I run my own music studio and occasionally teach public school music classes.

I love the Indiana Jones quote: “Archeology is the study of fact, not truth; if it’s truth you’re after, philosophy class is down the hall.” Many classes teach facts, but philosophy teaches us how to seek truth, how to get outside our own minds as much as possible. Philosophy helped me examine my mind in more than a superficial way. It gave me a backdrop for every other field of study by getting at the “why” and not just the “what.” It taught me what questions to ask and why an answer was relevant.



Ashley Gardner ('08, center) and Jenna Stewart Anderson ('08) with Professor Armstrong at Homecoming 2022

My two majors complemented each other well. Beauty, arts, and music are experienced so differently with an understanding of Plato and Aristotle. Classical philosophy leads us to ask questions about what makes something beautiful and to more thoughtful performance.

Many people teach philosophy, but SVU's faculty promote independent thought by making their courses discussion-based. I had assumed that this was the norm until I experienced undergraduate philosophy classes at our local university. There was no dialogue or attempt to bring out students' independent thought. Outside of class, the faculty had no time for student questions. What a stark contrast with SVU where the philosophy professors take time to answer questions and help students develop thesis ideas.

"Philosophy has broadened my experiences in art and music."

Philosophy has broadened my experiences in art and music, aided my understanding of literature and scripture, and affected how I teach my students, my children, and groups at church. I ask myself if my questions are leading to true understanding and what the goal of my teaching is. Is it to cover some facts or to teach independence in one's own learning?

If someone is considering a philosophy major, I would urge them to consider the dire need our world has for people who can examine their own thoughts and those of others. The incredible thing about a philosophy major is that it studies all the literature of thousands of years of people



Ashley and her family

doing just that and allows you to add to their work through your own dialogue and writing.

Make more money.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, philosophy and mathematics majors tie for the largest average increase from starting to mid-career salary.

Derrick Stout

I graduated from SVU in 2008 with a philosophy major.

After six months of teaching English in Taiwan, I started working at an online university. My analytical tendencies, combined with big-picture philosophical thinking, led me to more technical roles where I have been able to increase the scope of my impact on the business. I then moved into digital media organizations like U.S. News, the music industry, and other technology companies such as PayPal where software provided the core value of the business. The training I received at SVU increased my capacity to absorb dense, complicated material and make persuasive,

logical arguments, both of which are key to being effective in complex and fast-moving environments.

If you can see yourself moving on to any of the many advanced degree programs where philosophy majors tend to excel such as law, business, or medicine, then please throw yourself into it and promise yourself that you will do the reading to take full advantage of the program. If you are unsure of what the future holds for you as I was, you will certainly have the potential to grow and learn much about yourself as a philosophy student.



Derrick Stout ('08)

“The training I received at SVU increased my capacity to absorb dense, complicated material and make persuasive, logical arguments, both of which are key to being effective in complex and fast-moving environments.”

Benton Knight

I graduated from SVU in 2021 with a major in philosophy and minors in business and economics. I then became a business analyst for a consulting company.

Philosophy has been the most valuable part of my education related to my work. I use data to give clients insights to inform their decisions. I acquired most of the necessary technical skills on the job, which I think is true for most jobs. My most distinguishing skill has been the ability to think logically and systematically about business questions and problems. I believe that this was developed most in my philosophy major.

Philosophy also helped me grow as a thinker and person. By interrogating life's fundamental questions and studying the ideas of great historical thinkers in small classes with SVU's philosophy faculty, I developed a framework for thinking more clearly and productively about the problems I face in life and work.



Benton Knight ('21)

Philosophy was not on my radar until I took Reason and the Self. I was confident that I wanted to pursue a career in business. I wanted to differentiate myself and study new and interesting things. Philosophy provided a perfect

opportunity for both. It developed critical thinking skills that are applicable to all work, and the major's credit requirement left room for my minors. Coupling a philosophy major with classes specific to one's career path makes one a well-rounded and differentiated candidate in the job market. I plan to pursue a graduate degree in business, and I'm confident that my philosophy major will help distinguish my application in that process, too.

“Coupling a philosophy major with classes specific to one's career path makes one a well-rounded and differentiated candidate in the job market.”

Get into graduate school.

On average, philosophy majors outperform all or most other majors on the GRE, LSAT, and GMAT and in medical school admission rate.

Dan Cline

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2016 with a philosophy major and a biology minor. I'm now a family medicine doctor, having finished medical school at the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences.

Philosophy taught me how to think and speak clearly. As a doctor, I have to justify my decisions quickly and efficiently. Ancient philosophers had some incorrect ideas about human physiology, but they taught me how to reason about difficult questions.

I took a bioethics course in medical school. We discussed moral problems related to organ transplantation, abortion, death and dying, and genetic research. Many of my classmates struggled with ambiguity, preferring black-and-white answers. Philosophy equipped me to reason through the problems and make arguments to defend my positions.

SVU's philosophy major gave me flexibility. I was in student government, orchestra, and choir while completing the philosophy major and the prerequisites for medical school. That was a big plus for me.

Philosophy is everywhere, as my wife, Randi, found out early in her master's program in history. She says, "If

I could, I would encourage history majors to take more philosophy classes. I never realized how vital it was when analyzing methodological approaches or using historical empathy. My first two graduate classes were focused solely on different philosophers and the ways they influenced and changed historical approaches. I have often applied these methods to my gospel study and have witnessed a



Dan Cline ('16), Randi Jones Cline ('15), and their children

wonderful increase in my faith and understanding of the gospel. I was not fond of philosophy when I took it at SVU because it was too 'gray.' Now I depend on those skills in my everyday life."

"I was in student government, orchestra, and choir while completing the philosophy major and the prerequisites for medical school."

Tyler Moon

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2021 with a major in philosophy. I then went to the University of Minnesota for a master's degree in healthcare administration.

“My philosophy major was brought up in all my graduate school application interviews and was consistently viewed in a positive manner.”

What I appreciate most about my philosophical studies at SVU is the relationship I had and continue to have with the professors. I went to them with questions or simply to talk. I gained important insights from each of them. I know that access to faculty is the SVU way and separates Southern Virginia from other universities, but the philosophy professors take it to a different level. They are incredible mentors and a big reason for my acceptance into and success in graduate school.

I also appreciate my philosophy classes and the skills I learned in them. Analytical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills are developed throughout the courses. In my



Tyler Moon ('21) , Natalie Moon ('19), and their son

senior paper, I was able to bring them together to research and write something that I was truly proud of.

Philosophy at SVU also taught me to love learning. I'm not a lover of school. I've always had a difficult time reading textbooks or studying for tests and assignments that I felt I "had" to do. Philosophy helped me gain an appreciation and interest in learning and reading. The material was insightful and allowed me to take from it what I put into it. I gained the ability to think critically. I wasn't being told the correct answer to everything. I found a lot of value in that.

In graduate school, I've used philosophical skills in every class and internship experience. My graduate classes have focused primarily on management, finance, and problem-solving. I give presentations almost every week on various projects. I've had to analyze case studies in which it's difficult to identify the root problems and challenges. I use skills that philosophy taught me: strong written and oral communication, analytical thinking, research, problem-solving, interpretation, and open-mindedness. I have even gone back to some of my undergraduate philosophy papers to remind myself of the different methods that I used for writing and presenting papers.

“During my final round of interviews, my philosophy major was discussed in four separate interviews with the company’s senior vice presidents.”

My philosophy major was brought up in all my graduate school application interviews and was consistently viewed in a positive manner. The interviewers cared about my reasons for choosing the major, which allowed me to explain my commitment to my education and my desire to better myself as a person. I've accepted a job at Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) Healthcare, the largest healthcare provider in the U.S. During the final round of

interviews, my philosophy major was discussed in four separate interviews with the company's senior vice presidents. Each one found value in my major and emphasized that it showed I was someone willing to consistently learn and think outside the box to find solutions.

I transferred to SVU with a 2.7 GPA and graduated with a 3.5. I applied to ten Master of Healthcare Administration (MHA) programs, was accepted by all ten, and decided to attend the number two program in the country. I will finish the program in May 2023 and have a job lined up at HCA Healthcare's corporate office. I'm not sharing this to boast, but because I believe I couldn't have accomplished any of it without a philosophy major and the guidance and mentorship of SVU's philosophy professors.

Serve God and neighbor.

At Southern Virginia, Christ is the model of wisdom and virtue. Philosophy pursues both.

Andrew Evans

I graduated from Southern Virginia University in 2014 with a major in philosophy. I then went to BYU where I earned J.D. (juris doctor) and MPA (master of public administration) degrees.

What I most appreciated about philosophy at SVU was the close interaction I had with bright minds. In our small classes, I got to know my peers and professors. I learned their philosophical biases and how to respect them. There were diverse viewpoints in our little cohort.

Studying philosophy changes your mind. It keeps you humble. You read and think about big, profound,

comprehensive ideas every day. You see history's most intelligent minds debating and building on each other's ideas. I found myself agreeing with one philosopher one moment and then being persuaded by his opponent the next. As I saw intelligent minds disagree, I developed an openness to new ideas and to having my ideas challenged.



Andrew Evans ('14)

I had to present papers and ideas in my philosophy courses. None of the professors let me get by with simple or shallow thoughts. It was rigorous, but it prepared me for the mental exertion that adulthood demands.

“Studying philosophy at SVU increased my faith.”

Studying philosophy at SVU increased my faith. Seeing incredibly bright professors who happened to be priesthood leaders disagree about the philosophies of men gave me confidence that I could embrace the ideas without losing my faith. Since graduating from SVU, I have found it easier to spot weak arguments for or against faith. I'm not intellectually intimidated by the philosophies of men. I have

studied them and know their underpinnings, flaws, and strengths. I cannot let my own faith be shallow.

I've not always received the highest grades, but there is no academic or intellectual challenge that I'm afraid of. This is due to the philosophical training I received at SVU.



Andrew and his family

“I’m not intellectually intimidated by the philosophies of men.”

How has philosophy helped me in graduate school and work? First, by improving my writing. I wrote all the time in the major, so writing became second nature. Second, by strengthening my ability to solve problems. Philosophy taught me to think in frameworks and to look at problems from different angles. This has been incredibly useful when making tough decisions at work, church, or home. Third, by making me a better reader. Whether reading academic papers in graduate school, stuffy legal decisions in law school, or wordy technical manuals in my current job, I can read these texts quickly and comprehensively due to my philosophical education. Fourth, by making me unafraid of

having my ideas criticized. In most white-collar, knowledge-worker jobs, people spend a lot of time in meetings presenting and evaluating ideas. Philosophy taught me to think critically about ideas and to accept criticism of my own ideas.

Philosophy is a springboard to understanding the world. Philosophy gives you a foundation for studying other disciplines because there is a philosophy behind every discipline.

“The foundational thinking skills of a philosophy major are the best intellectual training an undergraduate degree can offer.”

The foundational thinking skills of a philosophy major are the best intellectual training an undergraduate degree can offer. Philosophy doesn't teach factual sciences like anatomy or hard skills like how to use a spreadsheet, but those things can be learned on the job or by watching YouTube. What philosophy offers is a Ranger School of critical thought. You won't get that kind of intellectually empowering experience outside of a college environment.

Links to further reading:

Why Study Philosophy? (Compiled by Tomas Bogardus)

"Salary Increase by Major" (*The Wall Street Journal*)

"The Earning Power of Philosophy Majors" (*The Atlantic*)

"A Case for Majoring in Philosophy" (*Forbes*)

"I Think, Therefore I Earn" (*The Guardian*)

"Tech Has a Big Talent Gap, and Companies Are Hiring Philosophy Majors, Says the CEO of CA Technologies"
(CNBC)

"A Harvard Medical School Professor Makes the Case for the Liberal Arts and Philosophy" (*The Washington Post*)

"Why I Was Wrong About Liberal Arts Majors" (*The Wall Street Journal*)



Professors Armstrong, Jones, and Gessell

Join us.

To learn more, take philosophy classes, attend Philosophy Club, talk with a philosophy professor, and visit the [philosophy entry](#) in the university catalog.

QR code for philosophy major and minor requirements:

