

## *Section 1: Preparing for Graduate Study in Philosophy\**

Graduate school in philosophy is the natural option for many undergraduate majors in philosophy. You should though aim for graduate school only if you have good reason to believe that you are a very promising student. Very few majors in any discipline go on to graduate work and a career as an academic. This applies also to philosophy. Graduate school is difficult, and academic jobs, especially good academic jobs, are scarce. As you begin to seriously think about the possibility of going on to graduate school in philosophy, be sure to talk to those philosophy professors who know you reasonably well in an academic setting to get a realistic sense of your chances at success in graduate school. To begin, here are some things you need to know about professional philosophy:

- You need a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy); not just an M.A. (Master of Arts). An M.A. degree usually takes 2-3 years to complete and typically involves coursework, exams and sometimes the completion of a written thesis. A Ph.D. is a more advanced degree and typically takes 5-8 years to complete depending on the program. Expect to do 2-3 years in coursework, qualifying exams as well as complete a dissertation which is a book-length independent research project of an important issue in your field (see *Section 2: What to Expect in Graduate School*).

Students in some Ph.D. doctoral programs earn M.A. degrees along the way. Most of the best doctoral programs don't even offer a separate M.A. degree (though they may award a "terminal" M.A. to Ph.D. students who do not pass to PhD candidacy). There are some M.A. programs whose graduates go on to more elite Ph.D. programs. Such "feeder" M.A. programs are usually for students who were not undergraduate philosophy majors or did not attend institutions with a strong, mainstream philosophy major. However, there is no guarantee that an M.A. at one of these programs will lead to admission at an elite Ph.D. program.

- There are three main kinds of academic jobs in philosophy: (1) positions at research universities with graduate programs, (2) positions at liberal arts or state universities that do not have graduate programs, and (3) positions at community colleges. A Ph.D. is necessary for the first two sorts of academic jobs. An M.A. is required and a Ph.D. is preferred but not always required for the third sort. The main responsibilities of any academic are research, teaching, and service (departmental, university, and professional). The importance of these three kinds of duties varies depending on the sort of program one is in (research tends to dominate at research programs, teaching at liberal arts colleges etc.).
- Be realistic about your chances of admission into graduate school: Top programs receive approximately 150-250 applications and admit between 5-15%. Anywhere from one quarter to one half of those who start Ph.D. programs fail to complete the degree. You should be certain of your commitment to completing the program before you decide to attend graduate school.

- There are many more Ph.D.'s than there are academic positions – especially if you are interested in a position in a research program, as there is enormous competition for these jobs. Most of the better students at top programs (top 25 programs roughly) eventually get tenure-track jobs of some kind, though not necessarily at research universities, and these tenure-track jobs often come only after one or two one-year jobs at different institutions. The job success rates at lower-ranked programs are lower.
- Be flexible. While the very best students from the very best programs often receive multiple job offers, many highly qualified Ph.D.s have more limited options. You must be flexible geographically and willing to move, for instance, taking one or more one-year jobs before finding a tenure-track position. Tenure is a professor's permanent job contract, granted after a probationary period of six or seven years. A faculty member in such a probationary position is said to be in a "tenure-track appointment."

---

\* This section is a revised version of David Brink's "Graduate Study in Philosophy" @ <http://philosophy.ucsd.edu/faculty/dbrink/GraduateStudy.pdf>.