

PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER

Student News

- Philosophy major **Matthew Blair** (see profile below) was accepted to law school at Campbell University. Congratulations, Matthew!

- Philosophy major **Ben Parker** will be presenting his paper, "Prisons: Epitomizing the American Scheme", this February at the 17th Annual Southern Appalachian Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at UNCA. Congratulations, Ben!

Abstract for Prisons: Epitomizing the American Scheme

This research is an analysis of the United State's prison system, attempting to expose the oppression and racism of its history as not behind us, but instead existing through an insidious hold in the legal, social, and economic paradigm of the United States. In the United States, the incarcerated population is the epitome of an immobilized subject, allowing the structure as a whole to exist in the way it does. The nation's identity is reassured by a fundamental racism. Using research from political philosophers and contemporary sociologists, and grounded on the philosophies of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, the prisons of the United States of America will be considered as the slave ships of modernity.

2016 NCPS and SCCP Conference to be held at Appalachian State University

The joint meeting of the North Carolina Philosophical Society and the South Carolina Society for Philosophy will be held here at Appalachian State University on February 26-7. The keynote speaker is L. A. Paul, Professor of Philosophy at UNC Chapel Hill, and Professorial Fellow in the Arché Research Centre at the University of St Andrews. For more information about this conference, click [here](#).

MAJORS PROFILE

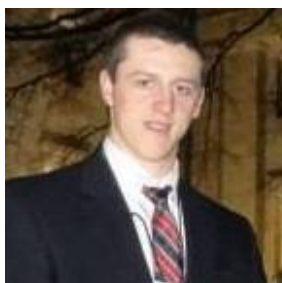
Drake Ellis



"Philosophy is an interesting discipline that allows students to think and explore their own ideas rather than chase a specific answer. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to take a philosophy class in high school, but after experiencing just one philosophy class in college, I knew that it was a major that would prove to be beneficial long after the classes had ended. For me, philosophy is not something that one simply studies for four years in a university and then abandons. Philosophy for me is something that we practice. The deep thinking that philosophy requires is something that I find rewarding in itself, rather than for an alternative end.

I have yet to find a practice in philosophy that I do not enjoy. From classes dealing with philosophical concepts to classes that put those concepts in motion, philosophy continues to peak my interests. My current research interest is in philosophy of education. I plan to become a high school mathematics teacher, and I believe by studying philosophy I am practicing the skill of critical thinking and honing a skill to argue points effectively, both skills that will be necessary in the high school classroom."

Austin Story



"If you have ever asked yourself questions like "Does God exist?" or "is there a meaning and purpose to my life?" you are a philosopher at some level. You pursue the ultimate questions of life, hoping in the end to use the knowledge and wisdom you obtained to increase the quality of your life and the quality of your relationships with the people and world around you. One can think philosophically about almost any issue, challenging conventional wisdom and finding solutions to problems both lay people and scientists may miss. It is truly a lost and underappreciated art. From a young age I have always asked questions, digging deeper to answer questions that were not sufficiently explained to me. I even researched whether Santa Clause was real.

Growing up in a Christian family and community, I asked these questions about God and faith. I remember one day at about 15 years of age, I did not know what I believed any longer after many obvious doubts entered my mind. It was truly an existentially vital moment for me. After that day I wanted to know whether what the faith I grew up with and loved was accurate. I began to read and study theistic and atheistic literature, investigating the arguments proposed by scholars of numerous backgrounds. Faith leading me to science and philosophy, only to strengthen my beliefs may be ironic to some, but it is nonetheless true. Currently I am interested in the philosophy of religion, Meta-ethics and the implications of astrophysics and cosmology for the existence of God. More specifically God's relationship to time, focusing now on the incompatibility of the Kalam Cosmological Argument and William Lane Craig's argument that God was timeless sans creation and temporal since creation. How can a timeless entity who knows no tensed facts come to understand tense? Further I am interested in the problem of evil, the doctrine of the trinity and how the trinity can be explained by abstract objects and the definition of God being a set of proper predicates rather than a conscious reality. I am fond of the analytical philosophical tradition, and investigate the above issues through that lens, though much can be said in favor of the continental tradition. I personally have found no contradiction to faith from science and philosophy, rather support for God's existence. I am not, however, the stereotypical Christian. I believe all propositions must be held up to critical evaluation and investigation. One must change even her most deeply held beliefs to concur with science, logic and reason. Some of my favorite philosophers are David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburn. As you may know, that is one mix of philosophers. I may not agree with all their arguments, but I appreciate their analysis and depth of insights. I look forward to working and studying with you all!"



"Coming into the last semester as an undergraduate student I have never been more anxious to see the direction my path would lead me. Philosophy, to me, is not just a mere course of study. Philosophy could be credited with saving my intellectual life, and even further the reason why I stayed in college. Prior to philosophy I was a business major. As my sophomore year came to a close I would experience a tragedy that would force me to realize I could not continue on a path for the sake of making a good monetary investment (not to say philosophy isn't that as well). Realizing I had to change to something that offered more I switched my major to philosophy. I have always considered pursuing the career of an attorney, although it wasn't until I started studying philosophy that the confidence in my intellectual abilities rose enough to enable the realization that I had, within myself, what it takes to go to law school. I have recently learned that my dreams are on their way to becoming a reality as I have been invited to study at Campbell Law. A big thanks to all the faculty that

have made this possible. The change I saw in their style of teaching and care for students made me question why I ever considered majoring in anything else to begin with."

Faculty Research Interests

Dr. Christopher Bartel

Abstract for "Free Will and Moral Responsibility in Video Games" [*forthcoming in Ethics and Information Technology*]: Can a player be held morally responsible for the choices that she makes within a videogame? Do the moral choices that the player makes reflect in any way on the player's actual moral sensibilities? Many videogames offer players the options to make numerous choices within the game, including moral choices. But the scope of these choices is quite limited. I attempt to analyze these issues by drawing on philosophical debates about the nature of free will. Many philosophers worry that, if our actions are predetermined, then we cannot be held morally responsible for them. However, Harry Frankfurt's compatibilist account of free will suggests that an agent can be held morally responsible for actions that she wills, even if the agent is not free to act otherwise. Using Frankfurt's analysis, I suggest that videogames represent deterministic worlds in which players lack the ability to freely choose what they do, and yet players can be held morally responsible for some of their actions, specifically those actions that the player wants to do. Finally, I offer some speculative comments on how these considerations might impact our understanding of the player's moral psychology as it relates to the ethics of imagined fictional events.

And here is a brief description of my other research:

I am currently pursuing two research projects. The first project examines the moral criticism of violence in video games. This is a debate that, when properly understood, intersects with numerous issues in philosophy. What is the nature of "harm"? Can a person be held morally responsible for actions that are not freely willed? Is it morally wrong to fantasize about immoral things? The second project concerns philosophical debates about the aesthetic appreciation of music. My concern is that philosophers have tended to focus too much attention on the metaphysical concept of the musical work, which has led to the overestimation of the importance of some musical practices over others. My articles have been published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, and *Ethics and Information Technology*.

Dr. Jack Kwong

Over the holidays, my paper “Is Open-Mindedness Conducive to Truth?” was accepted for publication by the journal *Synthese* (see abstract below). My next project will be concerned with the psychological state of hope. Specifically, my aim in exploring this topic is to get clear on its nature (and definition), conditions of applications, and whether it is an intellectual virtue (i.e., whether its acquisition, cultivation and exercise is a cognitive excellence). My suspicion is that it, or at least certain instances of it, is an intellectual virtue.

Abstract for “Is Open-Mindedness Conducive to Truth” (*Synthese*, forthcoming)

Open-mindedness is generally regarded as an intellectual virtue because its exercise reliably leads to truth. However, some theorists have argued that open-mindedness’s truth-conduciveness is highly contingent, pointing out that it is either not truth-conducive at all under certain scenarios or no better than dogmatism or credulity in others. Given such shaky ties to truth, it would appear that the status of open-mindedness as an intellectual virtue is in jeopardy. In this paper, I propose to defend open-mindedness against these challenges. In particular, I show that the challenges are ill-founded because they misconstrue the nature of open-mindedness and fail to consider the requisite conditions of its application. With a proper understanding of open-mindedness and of its requirements, it is clear that recourse to it is indeed truth-conducive.

Dr. Rick Elmore

Book Project:

I am currently finishing work on a book project (co-authored with Peter Gratton, Memorial University) called *The New Derrida* (Bloomsbury). This work explores the continued relevance and evolving character of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s work in light of the significant philosophical developments since his death in 2004 of critical animal studies, speculative realism, continental philosophy of religion, and radical politics and Marxism.

Book Series:

In the fall, I proposed and received a contract to edit a book series, *Ecotones: Ecology and Theory* with Rowman and Littlefield International (co-editor Anthony Paul Smith, La Salle University). The Ecotone Series will publish the best new work being done at the intersection of the humanities and ecology with a particular focus on books that explore the ways in which scientific ecology might challenge and be useful to reconceiving traditional domains of philosophy like metaphysics, epistemology, and political thought, as well as theoretical works that challenge certain un-investigated philosophical and theoretical presuppositions within scientific ecological practice.

Book Chapter:

My article, “Pessimism or the Importance of Indifference, Time, and Violence in Realist Ontologies” was accepted for publication in the forthcoming collection, *Realism and Its Discontents*. Edited by Marie-Eve Morin (Edinburgh University Press). This paper argues that pessimism is best understood as a realist ontology, and that it, therefore, contributes to the resurgent interest in realism found across continental philosophy. In particular, I show how pessimist ontologies emphasizes the importance of time, a notion that is often left out of recent realist accounts of existence. The problem with leaving out an account of time in one’s theory of reality is that it presents reality as implicitly static, a presentation that undermine realism’s claim to be truly realist, that is, not merely formal or abstract.

Conference Presentations:

I had a busy fall semester presentation-wise, giving papers at the annual meetings of both The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) and the International Association of Environmental Philosophy (IAEP). My paper for SPEP, “Open to The Worst: The Feminine, Autoimmunity, and Animality in the Work of Derrida” used the work of philosopher Penelope Deutscher to argue that Derrida problematically limits the ability of non-human animals to be agents of the worst kinds of violence (in particular, genocide), a limiting that, I argued, challenges his stated goal of fundamentally contesting the anthropocentrism (privileging of the human) he sees in the history of Western Philosophy. My paper for IAEP was a critical response to John Clark’s recent book, *The Impossible Community*, which puts forward a quite compelling case for communitarian anarchism. In addition, I gave a paper entitled “We Have Never Been Secular: Deconstruction, Realism, and the Secular,” at the Le Moyne College Religion and Literature Forum in Syracuse New York. In this paper, I argued that recent continental realisms (particularly that of French Philosopher Quentin Meillassoux) challenge the longstanding focus in continental philosophy of religion on the inseparability of the secular and the religious, a challenge that opens up a thinking of a truly post-secular society. I also gave three talks here at ASU, one on what it means to be a socialist, one on Husserlian Phenomenology, and one on the importance of pessimism in the history of philosophy.

Dr. Anna Cremaldi

Aristotle thinks that ethics is a science, and I am interested in the sense in which this is so. (In addressing this topic, we might ask questions like: is ethics like the mathematical sciences, such as Euclid's geometry? Or is it a science more like a science based on observation, such as biology?)

My paper, "Aristotle on the Unity of Definition in the Nicomachean Ethics" (forthcoming in *Southwest Philosophy Review*) argues that the definitions of the moral virtues (e.g. courage) in the central books of the Nicomachean Ethics (II-V) conform to strict standards for scientific explanation. In particular, I argue, those definitions conform to the criteria for unity in scientific definitions outlined in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics II account of definition. Those criteria require that, in the definition of an entity's essence, a single cause be identified as explanatory of all the entity's essential properties. This is a hard criterion to meet, and commentators have doubted whether any non-mathematical science could meet it. Yet, my paper argues, the definitions of several of the virtues are unified definitions, including: courage, generosity, magnificence and pride.

This is a surprising result because it suggests that the affinity between ethics and the demonstrative sciences (paradigmatically, mathematics) is stronger than commentators have traditionally supposed. Moreover, this result generates a puzzle regarding Aristotle's ethics: while Aristotle makes his definitions in the Ethics conform to strict standards of scientific explanation, he also stresses the distance between ethics and demonstrative sciences. The puzzle is: why is Aristotle torn about the nature of ethics as a science?

Dr. Kim Hall

Professor of Philosophy and Director of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies

1. I've been invited to speak this semester at University of Richmond. The title of my March 16 lecture at University of Richmond is "Rethinking the Land Ethic, Crippling Environmentalism." While there, I will also facilitate a joint Queer Theory and Environmental Philosophy course on the topic of Feminist Crip Queer Theory and Environmentalism.
2. I've been invited to present my research on Feminism, Queerness at Disability at UNC-Asheville in a Philosophy course on Philosophy and Disability. That event will take place February 26.
3. My essay, "Crippling Sustainability, Realizing Food Justice" has been accepted for publication in *Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities* edited by Sarah Jaquette Ray and JC Sibara. Also, the press sent the book, including contributor's essays, out for peer review, and the book was accepted for publication. My essay was officially accepted for publication at this stage of the review process, and the reviewers asked for no revisions. The book will be published by University of Nebraska Press.
4. My and Asta Sveinsdottir's proposal for The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy was sent out for peer review and has been accepted by the reviewers and by OUP's board. Our book is now under contract with Oxford University Press. It will be the first handbook of Feminist Philosophy published by Oxford, and we are aiming for 40-50 contributors. Essays will range from 3,000 - 6,000 words, and we will write the introduction to the field. We have various deadlines for various stages (the first in March 2015). The book is scheduled to be completed September 2018.

My co-editor, Asta Sveinsdottir, is Associate Professor of Philosophy at San Francisco State University.

Material Plane

by Neil Nichols II

Material Plane explores the relationship between home and boredom. The perspective on boredom was influenced by Cheshire Calhoun's "Living with Boredom" which proposes the idea that boredom is inevitable. My idea of home and how one's surroundings can affect someone was inspired by my own life experiences growing up in a military family. I have a keen interest in philosophy, science/technology, fantasy stories, and experimenting with form and these topics inform my work as well.



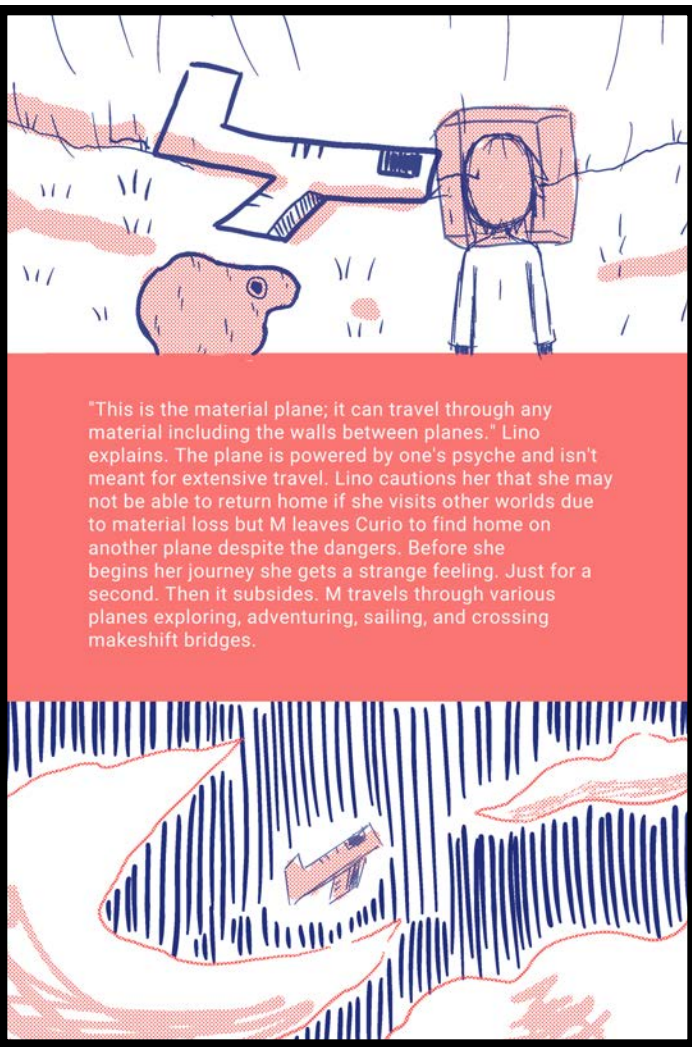
neil nichols ii

M has never been this bored before. This is a new level of boredom. M lays in her bed feeling light-headed. She gets the urge to crawl under her blanket. M finds a tunnel waiting for her beneath her blankets. Her stomach is spinning. Her hands are throbbing. Then she feels a crushing numbness. Then there's an empty void. M wakes up in a strange new world. Well this is new M thinks to herself. A mysterious life-form approaches. "Hello there traveler my name is Lino" the mystery being said. "Hey...my name is M and where exactly have I traveled to?" "Why you're in the Curio plane" Lino replies. Lino begins showing M around and explaining the situation to her. Apparently once one's boredom reaches catastrophic levels one begins to phase into other planes of existence. The Curio plane is a common planes where one can end up phasing into. The plane is one of many curiosities and bored minds are often drawn here. M enjoys Curio but feels that Curio is unfit as a new home. Lino suggests a way for M to return home but M has something else in mind.



M has lived in Homi for a while now.
Happily. Climbing. Swinging, Building. But...

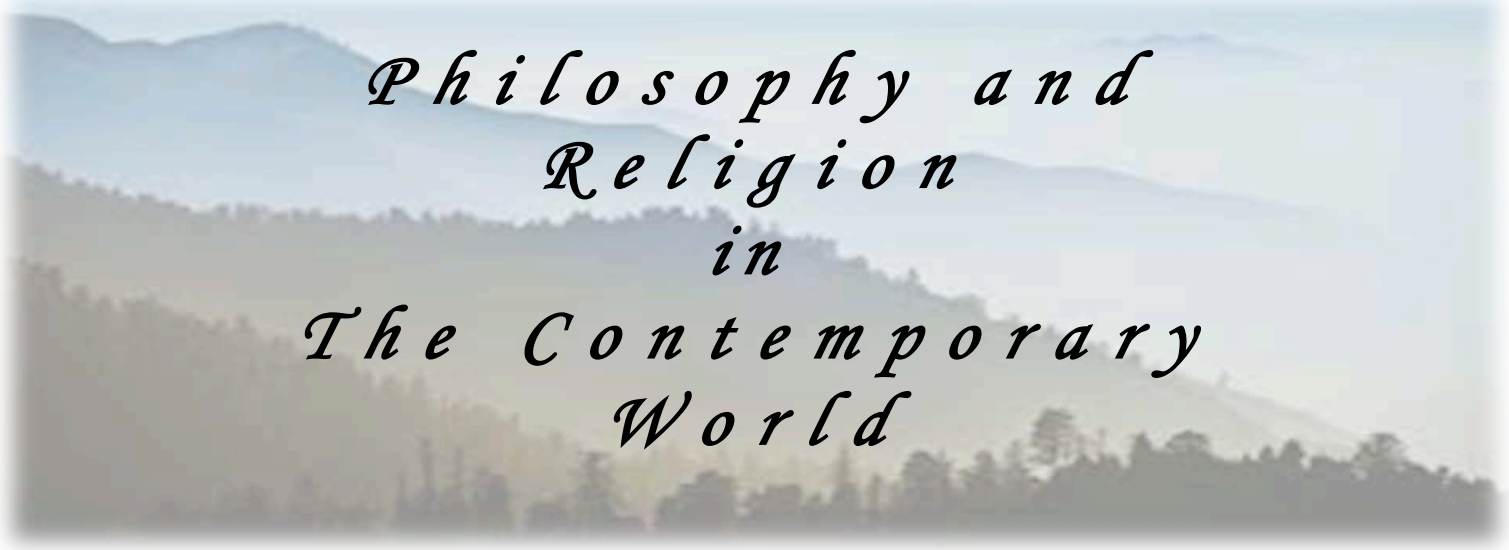
"Now I have become the embodiment of boredom"
M says to herself. M is literally watching paint dry.
Nothing here excites me anymore she thinks to
herself. My senses are dulled; It pains me to pay
attention to anything she continues.



APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

We meet every Thursday at 7pm in room 119 of I. G. Greer. Open to all majors and no dues! We encourage anyone who is interested in learning about philosophical ideas and influential figures. Most of us are beginners, so don't afraid to come check us out! Past topics have included everything from Descartes and normative ethics to anarchy and Harry Potter.

For this semester philosophy club is going to be looking for three new officers to replace the graduating seniors. In the meantime, we're going to talk about Marxism, philosophy of religion, social and political topics, historical and contemporary philosophy of mind theories, Kant, and any other current events that warrant more philosophical discussion. Speakers will include the Elmore brothers, Dr. Kim Hall, Dr. Schilbrack, Dr. Haplan, and Dr. Carter. It's going to be a fun semester! For more information, contact Christina Falceto (falcetoch@appstate.edu)



Philosophy and Religion in The Contemporary World

February 17 Room 201B (Table Rock)

Dr. Chris Bartel

Video Games, Violence, and Imaginary Desires

Is it morally wrong to play violent video games? This question is part of a more general issue: is it morally wrong to fantasize about immoral things? After examining some recent debates concerning violence in video games, I will argue that it genuinely is immoral to enjoy some violent video games. The issue comes down to why the player is motivated to commit certain acts of violence. When players commit imaginary acts of violence in order to satisfy some immoral desire, then the imaginary act is itself immoral.

March 1 Room 169 (Three Top)

Dr. Matt Ruble

Philosophers, Psychopaths and Neuroethics

Psychopaths are among the most inimical members of society. But are they specifically *morally responsible* for the violence and harm they do? The specific mental illness that the psychopath suffers from is alleged to render him constitutively incapable of acting morally. Moreover, significant neuro-empirical evidence appears to strongly support this conclusion. Case closed, right? Not for moral philosophers!

April 12 Room 420 (Parkway Ballroom)

Dr. Laura Ammon

Robots, Cyborgs, and Gods: Religion and the Future

Envisioning the human future gives us a way to understand the present and past as well as insight into ways humans hope for and imagine a better (or worse) world. The future is a canvas upon which we paint our dreams, hopes, and fears and the future is the place where we can watch the present played out to its logical conclusion. Authors of science fiction, like authors of religious texts, like authors of scholarly tomes, are in dialog with a community of other thinkers, people wrestling with the questions of humanity, identity, meaning, the future and the past. In this talk I will explore strange new worlds and seek out new life forms and human potentials. When is a human a human and more than a human? While uploading human consciousness into a robotic body or creating hybrid bodies is still mostly science fictional, the beginning of lives lived in machines can be seen in online communities. Technologies from cellphones to artificial limbs -- many 'robotic features' -- augment humans now. What's the next step and how will religion fit?

Why Major in Philosophy?

Careers for Philosophy Majors

- Law
- Health Professions
- Local, State, and Federal Government
- Business
- Information Technology
- Science

Source: <http://www.philosophy.umd.edu/undergraduate/careers>

Philosophy Top Earner in the Humanities

According to The Atlantic ("The Earning Power of Philosophy Majors"), philosophy is the top humanities bachelor degree in the ranking in terms of employment and income.

Source: <http://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2015/09/philosophy-majors-out-earn-other-humanities/403555/>

Thinking of Going to Law School? Pursue a Philosophy Major

- "[The] study of philosophy provides students with training in analytic thinking and logical argumentation, both of which are essential to success in law school and in the practice of law... [A] major in philosophy also allows students to examine many of the current moral, political, and legal issues that are of interest to lawyers, judges, and legal scholars, while understanding the philosophical background to these issues".
- "Philosophy majors perform exceptionally well on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT)."
- "It's no surprise, then, that the acceptance rate for Philosophy majors applying to law schools is **higher than** the acceptance rate for applicants majoring in Economics, Political Science, History, Psychology, Accounting, Business Management, and most other majors."

Source: <http://www.umsl.edu/~philo/Undergraduate%20Program/Pre->

Philosophy Majors Changing the Business World

According to the Huffington Post, philosophy majors will become entrepreneurs who "[shape] the business world". Some highlights:

- "Philosophy develops strong critical thinking skills and business instincts."
- "Former philosophy students have gone on to make waves in the tech world."
- "Philosophers (amateur and professional) will be the ones to grapple with the biggest issues facing their generation."
- "Philosophy students are 'citizens of the world.'"

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/05/why-philosophy-majors-rule_n_4891404.html

Philosophy Majors Dominate in GRE Scores

"Philosophy students reigned supreme in two of the three sections however, suggesting a 'love of wisdom' will serve you well." Source: <http://www.physicscentral.com/buzz/blog/index.cfm?postid=5112019841346388353>