Philosophy

Philosophy lies at the heart of the human enterprise. Whether in one’s personal life, in the study of other academic disciplines, or in the public sphere, philosophical issues are unavoidable. Each person must decide what values and meaning will motivate his or her life and what principles will govern his or her interaction with others. Philosophy is also central to a liberal arts education. This has been true from the inception of the liberal arts and is no less true today. It is the discipline that asks fundamental questions about various ways of knowing, what makes acts right or praiseworthy, what sorts of things are real, and what constitutes a good argument. The Philosophy Department is the place at Macalester where all of these issues can be explored systematically. Students may major or minor in philosophy.

Faculty


Samuel Asarnow, assistant professor, specializes in ethics, action theory, and metaethics. He regularly teaches introduction to philosophy, ethics, ethical theory, bioethics, epistemology, and the philosophy of race and gender. His research concerns foundational questions about morality and rational action, with a specific focus on the nature of human motivation. His research on this topic has been published in the journals Ethics, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, and Philosophical Studies. More broadly, Asarnow wants to know whether there is meaning in life, and if so, what it is.

Janet Folina, professor, specializes in the history and philosophy of mathematics. She also works on the philosophy of science and on the epistemological foundations of mathematics and science. She is the author of Poincaré and the Philosophy of Mathematics. Her current research interests include the philosophy of mathematics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concepts of mathematical proof and mathematical understanding, and the role of diagrams and other visual representations in mathematics.

Martin Gunderson, DeWitt Wallace Professor of Philosophy, specializes in ethics. He is also interested in the philosophy of law and bioethics and, within these areas, right-to-die issues, civil liberties, and human rights. He is co-author of AIDS: Testing and Privacy and has published numerous articles in the areas of bioethics and ethics.

Joy Laine, adjunct professor, specializes in the philosophy of mind and language. Her work in these areas encompasses both Western and Indian philosophical traditions. She has published articles in the areas of personal identity and Indian philosophy, and has written entries for the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy on topics in Indian philosophy. She is currently working on a book, Philosophical Persons, in which she examines the development of philosophical theories of personal identity and how such theories relate to broader cultural concerns.

Diane Michelfelder is professor and former provost and dean of the faculty at Macalester. Her teaching and research unfold at the intersection of twentieth-century European philosophy and the philosophy of technology. Much of her current and published work focuses on the ethical and social implications of emerging technologies, particularly the Internet. In 2014–2015 she taught Critical Thinking, Ethics, Ethics and the Internet, and Philosophical Worlds: Heidegger and Wittgenstein. A past president of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, she was instrumental in forming IPET (the Forum on Philosophy, Engineering and Technology) and is currently co-editor in chief of the journal Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology.
Philosophy

Recent Topics Courses
The Philosophy Department offers a wide
selection of courses, including three logic
courses, several ethics courses, a history
sequence, and several courses that focus
on the philosophy of more specific areas
such as science, mind, language, law,
and mathematics. In addition, recent
seminars and topics courses include:

Animal Ethics
Aristotle and Virtue Ethics
Contemporary Metaphysics and
Epistemology
Ethical Theory
Identity
Law/Ethics of Genetic Engineering
The Life of the Spirit: Hegel and
Kierkegaard
Philosophical Worlds: Heidegger and
Wittgenstein
Philosophy of Yoga
Race and Gender
Rights of Non-Human Animals
Rivers, Humans and Environmental
Justice
To Engineer is Human
Wittgenstein

Honors Projects
Ziv Ben-Shahar ’18 (Chicago), “The Ethics
and Regulation of Personalized Pricing”
Logan Stapleton ’18 (St. Paul), “Animals,
Machines, and Moral Responsibility in a
Built Environment”

Special Opportunities
The Philosophy Department regularly
publishes a journal of student work, the
Macalester Journal of Philosophy.
The philosophy club, which meets
weekly, is a student-run organization
that sponsors speakers and discussions
on various philosophical topics and
organizes field trips to local events.

Each year students have the opportunity
to present philosophy papers at the
Minnesota Philosophical Society spring
conference. While at Macalester, students
in philosophy undertake various service
projects, internships, and independent
studies. Recent internships have included
work with grassroots environmental
organizations, battered women’s shelters,
women’s advocacy groups, Mixed Blood
Theatre, the Minnesota legislature and
the Minnesota Advocates for Human
Rights.

Internships
William Kann ’19 (Marion, Iowa), intern /
lab tech support at Blue Bay Technologies
in Excelsior, Minn.
Haley Mimbs ’19 (Nesbit, Miss.), mental
health advocate at Supportive Living
Solutions in Minneapolis
Jensen Vu ’19 (Rabun Gap, Ga.),
Minnesota Budget Project, legislative
intern
Logan Stapleton ’18 (St. Paul), Marketing
and Communications Intern at the East
Side Area Business Association

After Macalester
The study of philosophy does not
necessarily mean one will become a
philosopher. While many students do go
on to PhD programs in philosophy, others
find the ethical and analytical emphasis
of philosophy to be ideal preparation for a
variety of careers.

Madeleine Wright ’18 (San Mateo,
Calif.) is a paralegal student in Hamline
University’s Paralegal Certificate
Program.
Alexander Watson ’17 (Reston, Va.) is a
math teacher with the Peace Corps in Liberia.

Honors Projects
Ziv Ben-Shahar ’18 (Chicago), “The Ethics
and Regulation of Personalized Pricing”
Logan Stapleton ’18 (St. Paul), “Animals,
Machines, and Moral Responsibility in a
Built Environment”

Visitors
Through its annual Colloquium Series, the
Philosophy Department invites a variety
of prominent philosophers to campus to
discuss their current research. Recent
speakers include:

Jason Decker, professor of philosophy,
Carleton College, “Dogma and
Conspiracy”
Robert DiSalle, professor of philosophy
of science, University of Western
Ontario, “Laws and Necessities: On
the ineffective Reasonableness of
Mathematics”
Jessica Gordon-Roth, assistant professor
of philosophy, University of Minnesota,
“Recovering Early Modern Women
Writers: Some Tensions”
Justin Smith, professor of philosophy
of science, University of Paris VII Diderot,
“Racial Difference and Biological
Taxonomy in Early Modern Philosophy”
Jerry Gaus, James E. Rogers Professor of
Philosophy at the University of Arizona,
“Morality from the Bottom Up.”
Debra Satz, Marta Sutton Weeks
Professor of Ethics in Society, Stanford
University, “The Government’s Provision
of In Kind Goods: A Defense”

Larry Hickman, professor emeritus,
philosophy, Southern Illinois University
Carbondale

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