

Applying to grad school in philosophy

by maxhgns

So, you're applying or thinking of applying to grad school in philosophy? Cool. Despite its initially guide-like structure (and my comments), what follows is basically just a compendium of links that you might find useful. I certainly did during my two admissions cycles (first for my MA, then for my PhD). Unfortunately, nobody had gathered them all together at the time, and so I spent hours obsessing over Google, trying to find out as much as possible. Hope they help! (I am, of course, happy to answer any questions you might have to the best of my ability.)

Where to apply?

Probably the best place to start your search for schools is by looking at the list of graduate programs ranked by Brian Leiter's Philosophical Gourmet Report [<http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/default.asp>] (you can access the Reports from previous years from each Report's homepage). Don't just look at the overall rankings, however: pay close attention to other things that are written on the site. In particular, you should be looking even more carefully at the specialty rankings [<http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/breakdown.asp>]. For a different perspective, you could consult the Hirsch number rankings for every PhD-granting department in the US [http://el-prod.baylor.edu/certain_doubts/?page_id=774].

When the time comes, remember that while these rankings are useful for deciding to which programs you should apply, you should not be using them to base your decision of which program to *attend*. For that, you'll want to consider the funding package you're being offered, your fit in the department, their placement record, what other grad students there have to say, etc. Speaking of which, when you're deciding between departments, remember to email the students there! Most departments will be happy to offer to put you in touch with some students, which is great—but remember that they're unlikely to choose unhappy students to represent them. Most departments list their grad students' university email on their website; there's no harm in sending a preliminary email asking if they'd mind answering some questions. Usually, there's no problem at all.

Lastly, remember to look at past years' course offerings in the departments you're considering. They'll paint a better picture of what you can expect, and whether that's any good for you.

For a more comprehensive guide-type picture (complete with an application timeline and a breakdown of costs), I recommend checking out Trevor Hedberg's excellent guide to grad school in philosophy, available at

https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:puoWB6DPgKkJ:philosophy.utk.edu/hedberg_grad_apps_guide.pdf+expectations+grad+school+philosophy&hl=en&gl=ca&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEsgbnpLskbUrhNS6weHteRqflDMftqkraYpxgCu98orZplQ1ZiLLxQAqr_0fQ5hHwJld-GhV1x25M1CiOli1qhJaVTxoImbJy90aIK-

[JoLwkAzsKoKj25Q6ECBDcyVIhLet4_PN&sig=AHIEtbSrugbABFgDM9oTp4woS6WrE1bScA](#)].

For some criticism of the Leiter rankings (much of it is no longer à propos, but it's still useful to keep you thinking and to avoid overemphasizing them), check out Richard Heck's page on the subject [<http://frege.brown.edu/heck/philosophy/aboutpgr.php>], as well as the correspondence that ensued [<http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/rankings.html>]. Zachary Ernst has also made public some criticisms of the PGR: [http://web.missouri.edu/~ernstz/Home_files/emperor-1.pdf]. Finally, for some insight on female-friendliness and the Gourmet Report, check out [http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/Female_Friendly.html].

Heck also has some good advice on choosing graduate programs [<http://web.archive.org/web/20041011221134/www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~heck/aboutpgr/html/choosing.html>]. Keith DeRose also has some thoughts on choosing graduate programs [http://el-prod.baylor.edu/certain_doubts/?p=635].

Eric Schwitzgebel has a very long and informative series on philosophy grad school applications that you can find at <http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2007/10/applying-to-philosophy-phd-program-part.html> (note that the link goes to part VII, but I'm linking to it because there's a link to every other section right at the beginning of that part).

The University of Chicago also has some advice on the process: <http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/undergraduate/advice.html> and [<http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/prospective/admissions.html>].

Brown University has a page with some advice at [<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Philosophy/grads-advice.php>].

Once admissions start rolling in, you can check to see if someone has been accepted/rejected/waitlisted at a particular programme by using the Grad Café's search function, located at [<http://www.thegradcafe.com/survey/index.php>]. They also have a forum (not all that well frequented or useful, but there nonetheless) at [<http://forum.thegradcafe.com/>].

Mark Lance has some suggestions (which were vigorously discussed) on deciding on a school to attend at [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2013/03/a-common-fallacy-in-deciding-on-graduate-schools-.html>]

Mark Lance has another small piece of advice on web presence here [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2012/10/a-small-bit-of-advice-for-grad-students.html>] and there's a longer discussion on the topic over at Leiter's blog here [<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2013/08/should-graduate-students-use-social-media.html>].

Support Groups

The Who Got In LiveJournal network:

This year (2012-13): <http://who-got-in.livejournal.com/103370.html#comments>

Last year (2011-12): [<http://who-got-in.livejournal.com/103121.html#comments>] (more active than the other) and [<http://who-got-in.livejournal.com/102845.html>]

Year before: (2010-11): [<http://who-got-in.livejournal.com/101985.html>]

You can comb past years' posts, which can be helpful in discovering what to expect, or just post in the thread for your current year. The link above is for the 2010-11 application season thread. If you create an account, you can also request membership for the philprospective LiveJournal community [<http://www.livejournal.com/search/?q=philprospectives&area=default>], where there's some more candid info being shared. Finally, if you want to chat with some people either applying or who are already in grad school somewhere, go to <http://webchat.freenode.net/> and type in "philprospective" in the "channels" field.

Funding

Funding is one of the most crucial things Ev4r! for a grad student. It's also one of the single most important factors for deciding which offer to accept—going into debt for a philosophy degree, after all, is a horrible idea given how awful the job market is and has been for the last few decades (however bad it *was*, it's worse now). Fortunately, most North American departments fund their students; by contrast, getting funding in the UK is notoriously difficult if you're not from the UK, EU, or a developing country (and even then, it's not at all easy).

Getting into grad school is also extremely difficult—by all accounts, each university has enough space for an average of about 1.4% of its applicants each year (but usually needs to admit around 3-5% to fill its slots, since students decline their spots and so on). If you can secure external funding prior to admissions decisions (like a SSHRC grant or a Fulbright scholarship), you can both dramatically increase your chances of admission somewhere, and also get departments that initially rejected you to accept you (since they don't have to bear the burden of funding you). And even if you're accepted with funding, you're usually expected to apply to a panoply of granting agencies on the off-chance that someone will help to fund you. Anticipating these things is very important, because they're bloody time-consuming and your first semester will be hard enough as it is. Accordingly, here are some potential sources of funding:

For Canadian Students:

SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; MA & PhD):

[<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/index-eng.aspx>]

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (Ontario-only):

[<https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/TCONT003465.html>]

FQRSC (Fonds Québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture; Québec-only):

[<http://www.fqrsq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/accueil.php>]

Trudeau Foundation Scholarships:

[http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/community.igloo?r0=community&r0_script=/scripts/folder/view.script&r0_pathinfo={3ebb02c1-4f13-4da9-9ccb-60a9e360ab3c}/program/fellows&r0_l=en&r0_output=xml&r0_ui=public-folder] (the link is split into two parts, unfortunately, so you may have to copy & paste it instead of clicking it)

Commonwealth Scholarship Plan:

[<http://www.scholarships.gc.ca/CSPCdnUK-PBCCdnRoyaumeUni-Eng.aspx>]

Canada Graduate Scholarships (for study abroad, via SSHRC):

[http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/fellowships/cgs_foreign_study-besc_etudes_etranger-eng.aspx]

Fulbright Canada: [<http://www.fulbright.ca/programs/canadian-students/traditional-awards.html>]

Canadian Centennial Scholarship Fund (CCSF):

[<http://www.canadianscholarshipfund.co.uk/information-for-students/eligibility/>]

For American Students:

Fulbright Scholarships (note: these are for Americans wishing to study abroad, or non-Americans wishing to study in the US): [<http://fulbright.state.gov/>]

For students from the UK: (note that most funding in the UK comes through your institution, which can make things more difficult)

AHRC Awards (MA and PhD): [<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/BGP.aspx>]

If you click through, just about every scholarship available in UK is listed here: [<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/>]

Other Students:

Chevening Scholarships: [<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/what-we-do/scholarships/>]

Some helpful lists

A large compendium of resources for students:

[<http://www.umsl.edu/~piccininig/Resources%20for%20Students.htm>]

Graduate Guide to Aesthetics in North America

[<http://aesthetics-online.org/graduate/guide.pdf>] (2012! Yay! It has some serious omissions, though. Poop.)

[<http://www.aesthetics-online.org/graduate/guide.pdf>] (2007—dated, but still relevant)

Graduate Guide to Aesthetics in the UK

[[http://www.british-aesthetics.org/uploads/GraduateGuide\(2004-5\).pdf](http://www.british-aesthetics.org/uploads/GraduateGuide(2004-5).pdf)] (2004-05 was the most recent I could find—it's **quite** out of date, although still a good place to start looking)

List of feminist/feminist-friendly departments

[<http://www.apaonline.org/documents/governance/committees/GradPrograms2009.pdf>]

The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP)'s list of strong continental schools: [http://www.spep.org/?page_id=76]

Schwitzgebel's advice on how to write a personal statement (complete with successful samples):

[<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.ca/2012/04/bleg-statements-of-purpose-personal.html>]

Job Listings

The Philosophy Job Wiki helps to give an idea of what the market is like. Official job listings and search updates can be had at [<http://phylo.info/jobs>], while unofficial listings and updates are at [<http://phylo.info/jobs/wiki>].

From the people who brought us PhilPapers, there's now PhilJobs: [<http://philjobs.org/jobs>]

HigherEdJobs [<http://www.higheredjobs.com/faculty/search.cfm?JobCat=89>]

Jobs in Philosophy [<http://www.jobsinphilosophy.org/>]

The Chronicle of Higher Education [<http://tinyurl.com/3zlljzn>]

Jobs in Bio-Ethics [http://ajobonline.com/bioethics_jobs.php]

The American Philosophical Association's Jobs for Philosophers (JFP) listing (pay-only; the link adjacent will take you to where the jobs are supposed to be listed, although it's currently impossible to find the JFP)

[http://www.apaonline.org/APAOnline/Resources/APAOnline/Resources/Philosophy_Organizations.aspx?hkey=c96cf3fd-20f0-4d53-b23a-720d5012d8dc]

Blogs to follow: (these often have info relevant to grad students)

The Philosophy Applicant Blog [<http://philosophyapplicant.wordpress.com/>] was started in 2011 for this very purpose! I've collaborated with its author, and so most of the info here is now also there, and there are some other helpful tidbits there as well. Give it a look.

Leiter Blog [<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/>]

Feminist Philosophers Blog [<http://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/>]

Philosophers Anonymous [philosophersanon.blogspot.com]

The Philosophy Smoker (a job market blog) [<http://philosophysmoker.blogspot.com/>]

Crooked Timber [<http://crookedtimber.org/>]

Thoughts, Arguments, and Rants [<http://tar.weatherson.org/>]

The Philosopher's Cocoon [<http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/>] is for early-career philosophers. Trawling through its pages will reveal a number of useful threads, especially come time to apply for jobs.

On Women in Philosophy:

Tenured/tenure-track faculty women at 98 U.S. doctoral programs in philosophy

[http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/doctoral_2004.html]

Other places to look for data would be a 2007 report presented by Sharon Crasnow at the APA (courtesy of SWIP): [<http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/stats.html>] Berit Brogaard comments at [<http://lemmingsblog.blogspot.com/2007/04/apa-report-status-of-women-in.html>].

Women in TT-jobs in philosophy (see comment 12 for Canadian numbers):

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/12/women-in-tenure-track-philosophy-jobs.html#more>]

Women in ranked Anglophone departments outside the US:

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/12/women-in-ranked-anglophone-departments-outside-the-us.html#more>]

Other useful links:

PhilPapers is a handy compendium of online books and articles. Subscribing to different forums is an easy way of keeping abreast of new developments: [<http://philpapers.org/>]

A thread on Leiter's blog about choosing a writing sample:

[<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/08/choosing-a-writing-sample-to-submit-with-grad-school-applications.html>]

Brian Keeley has a great breakdown of what you should/could be doing each of your first four years in a grad programme in order to prepare for the job market. You can find the document at [<http://mugwump.pitzer.edu/~bkeeley/work/ADVICE.HTM>]

The Phil Information Wiki [<http://philprospective.wikia.com/wiki/2010>] was compiled during the 2009-10 application season to give applicants a better idea of the number spots, applications, and some other info from various departments. Have a look at it so that you know what you're getting into.

More discussion on whether to go to graduate school [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2013/04/rothman-on-whether-to-go-to-graduate-school.html>]. The article being discussed is here [<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/04/graduate-school-advice-impossible-decision.html>].

Career Development Advice from the Young to the Young (and the rest of us) [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2013/06/advice-from-the-young-to-the-young-and-the-rest-of-us.html>].

Some more advice on polishing up your application package: [<http://philosorapters.posterous.com/2011/02/tips-for-creating-exceptional-graduate.html>]

A Leiter-based discussion of how to determine areas of specialization (AOS) and areas of competence (AOC): [http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2007/05/what_are_the_cr.html]

Someone's blog post about the application process (with links to resources): [<http://triple-f.blogspot.ca/2012/11/applying-to-graduate-school-in.html>]

The Philosopher's Annual [<http://www.pgrim.org/philosophersannual/index.html>] is an attempt to pick some of the best articles each year. Accordingly, it's worth checking up on those articles if you're looking to kill some time.

The Chronicle of Higher Education has a post on managing one's arrival to a graduate program in its "ProfHacker" series that may be of use: [<http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/an-open-letter-to-new-graduate-students/26326>]

Mohan Matthen on the NRC and Gourmet data [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2012/11/graduate-schools-combining-nrc-and-gourmet-data.html>].

The Partially Examined Life [<http://www.partiallyexaminedlife.com/category/podcast-episodes/>] is a fantastic philosophy podcast by a few people who used to be in academic philosophy, are no more, but are still interested in learning about what's going on. They meet and talk about a book or article for a couple of hours, and record the conversation. It's a fantastic resource (and reading companion), especially if you want to brush up on something.

Philosophers talking about their books via podcast: [<http://newbooksinphilosophy.com/>]

Some (general) advice on transferring: [<http://www.kosmosonline.org/group-post/transferring-graduate-schools-making-it-or-breaking-it>]

Ten Minute Philosophy Puzzles via podcast:
[<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/philosophy/nip/tenminutepuzzle/>]

Job Market and Publishing advice:
[<http://sites.google.com/site/aidanmcglynn/adviceforwannabephilosophers>]

More publishing advice, from Thom Brooks this time: [<http://the-brooks-blog.blogspot.com/2011/09/publishing-philosophy.html>] Following the link will take you to the PDF, located here: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1085245]

On writing (and proposing) a book: [<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/08/deciding-to-write-a-book-and-getting-published-some-questions.html>]

Calls for papers in philosophy:
[<http://philevents.org/>] (formerly [<http://philosophycfp.blogspot.com/>])

The London Philosophy Study Guide [<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/philosophy/LPSG/>] is basically a reading list of the important (canonical) works in most subfields. The degree for which it was written no longer exists, so it's not being updated any more. Also, you won't find the most recent work there either. Finally, it does contain Martin Stone's plagiarized work in medieval philosophy and philosophy of religion.

Dawn Phillips's report on the some of the problems facing junior philosophers in the UK and some steps to fix them: [<http://www.bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/phillips-improving-careers.pdf>]

The PhD Comics Forum [<http://www.phdcomics.com/proceedings/>] have a handy discussion forum, although it's dominated by engineers and other scientists. It's a friendly place.

The Chronicle of Higher Education Forum [<http://chronicle.com/forums/>] They occasionally have interesting articles, some of the advice in the forum is useful, and there are some interesting stories. Dominated by people in English and engineering, as far as I can see.

Why Study Philosophy [<https://sites.google.com/site/whystudyphilosophy/>] regroups some facts, studies, and suggestions.

For some levity:

Hyperbole and a Half [<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/>] is the funniest blog ever. It's entirely irrelevant to applications, but it might help to pick you up when you're down. I'm entirely unaffiliated with it, but it's still worth shamelessly plugging it!

PhD Comics [<http://www.phdcomics.com/>] has some amusingly accurate cartoons about life as a grad student.

Dinosaur Comics [<http://www.qwantz.com/index.php>] Between this strip and the Philosoraptor (just type it into Google Images), you've got your prehistoric insights covered.

A chunk of unorganized links to advice and discussions that may prove helpful, most from the websites linked to above:

<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2007/01/philosophy-grad-school-applications.html>

(Schwitzgebel's reflections from the perspective side of the adcom)

<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.ca/2011/10/sorry-cal-state-students-no-princeton.html>

(Schwitzgebel on undergrad pedigree and grad admissions)

<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/search/label/applying%20to%20grad%20school> (All of Schwitzgebel's grad-school related posts, handily organized!)

http://community.livejournal.com/who_got_in/101985.html?thread=16354657#t16354657

(Advice—some from me!—on how to choose between different options)

http://www.spep.org/?page_id=78 (SPEP's advice on choosing continental programmes/ranking, which is very applicable to other programmes)

http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2007/04/phd_admissions_.html (Admissions in the US)

http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp_guide_for_web.pdf (Employability for philosophy grads; bear in mind this comes from the UK)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2008/04/any-pattern-to.html> (Some ruminations on admissions from 2008)

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/philosophy/Undergraduate%20Resources/Honours/PostgradApplications/PGAppsUK.htm> (Info on applying for a postgraduate degree in the UK)

<http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/gradapp/results.htm> (What to do once the good news arrives)

<http://tar.weatherson.org/2010/03/08/advice-for-incoming-grad-students/> (Advice for incoming students)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2008/03/how-do-uk-phds.html> (UK PhDs on the North American market)

<http://www.philosophyetc.net/2007/06/getting-most-out-of-grad-school.html> (Getting the most out of grad school)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/10/departmental-placement-officer-seeks-advice.html#comments> (some thoughts on tailoring job applications for teaching-centred universities)

<http://homepages.ed.ac.uk/ejua35/journals.html> (Some journals on the web)

http://el-prod.baylor.edu/certain_doubts/?page_id=823 (Journal rankings and citation & rejection rates)

<http://masi.cscs.lsa.umich.edu/~crshalizi/chomsky-on-postmodernism.html> (Noam Chomsky on postmodernism--because it's a worthwhile read, even for those who disagree)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/09/good-career-paths-for-undergraduate-philosophy-majors.html> (Career paths for undergraduate philosophy majors)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/09/philosophers-annual-top-papers-of-2010.html> (Philosophers' Annual top papers of 2010)

<http://www.guerrillaradioshow.com/> (A philosophy-related radio program)

And, finally, a pile of threads from the New APPS blog which can be of interest/provide useful perspective:

On making the first cut when hiring:

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/09/hiring-best-practices-the-first-cut.html#more>]

On reference letters:

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/09/hiring-best-practices-reference-letters.html#more>]

Strategic thoughts on entering the job market:

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/09/a-strategic-thought-on-entering-the-job-market.html#more>]

Surviving the first cut:

[<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/09/dont-fall-to-the-first-cut.html#tpe-action-resize-410>]

On not being an asshole to whoever hires you: [<http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/09/your-obstreperousness-might-be-ruining-it-for-other-people.html#more>]