The Major in Philosophy

United States Military Academy
West Point, New York

"It is to the skills and lessons I acquired in the study of art, philosophy, and literature that I turned most frequently and used each and every day to understand, to communicate, to educate, and to motivate others in helping me accomplish my military responsibilities."

GEN(Ret) Eric Shinseki, ’65, former Chief of Staff of the Army and former faculty member of the Department of English and Philosophy.

Visit us online at: http://www.usma.edu/dep/SitePages/default.aspx
Or on Facebook: Department-of-English-and-Philosophy-USMA

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The Philosophy Community at West Point

Philosophy Forum
Guest lectures and activities for Philosophy majors and all cadets interested in Philosophy

Ethics Debate Team
Regional and national competitions

Mid-Hudson Philosophy Society
Annual conference of faculty and Philosophy majors from five neighboring colleges

Ethics of War Annual Conference
Partnership with Villanova University involving invited speakers and student presentations

Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs
Panel discussions on global issues of moral, legal and political significance

Army Cyber Institute
Lectures on topics related to Cyber Ethics

Undergraduate Conferences and Journals
Opportunities for cadets to present, defend, and publish their own work

Our Philosophy Faculty have studied at:

Stanford
Oxford University
Columbia

Rutgers University
The University of Michigan
Harvard

The University of Edinburgh
The University of Texas
Notre Dame

The University of Colorado
Yale
Loyola

UC - Berkle

NYU
The University of Tennessee
The University of Virginia

The University of Pennsylvania

Philosophy majors with Dr. Richard Schoonhoven at the Fall Majors’ Social at Cullum Hall

"We will have to think our way, not bludgeon our way, into the future. There will be more options, but also more ambiguity in dealing with the challenges we face…. Leaders preparing for service at the strategic level must possess an educational foundation that enables creative and critical thinking in an environment of complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty."

GEN(Ret) Martin Dempsey, ’74, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former faculty member in the Department of English and Philosophy

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Why Major in Philosophy?
Philosophy is the original home of Critical Thinking, rigorous analysis, and systematic argumentation. Its work demands clarity, objectivity, sound reasoning, fairness, and good writing. The study of Philosophy builds conceptual skills exportable to any branch of the Army and to all professions, skills essential to leadership.

Ethical Reflection
Philosophy provides the future officer a rational framework in which to understand the ethical principles behind duty and right conduct. Philosophy both trains the mind and enlarges the self.

Cultural Awareness
Philosophy reveals the mind and values of distant cultures: ancient Greece and Rome (seeking the good life); the Far East (the goal of inner happiness); early Modern Europe (science in conflict with religion). Philosophical study develops an appreciation of the universal character of humanity.

Education for Life
Philosophy enriches the self. Its concerns are fundamental, enduring, and important: the place of the mind in physical nature; moral value; the problem of evil; the limits of human knowledge; freedom and necessity; state and individual; the existence of God.

Philosophy Matters.
“Studying philosophy has broadened my perspective and provided me the necessary tools to effectively build consensus with host-nation leaders, locals, and both national and international partners. It has made me a far more reflective-thinker; I better examine problems, analyze critical information, and articulate arguments that compel action. Philosophy develops many of the competencies and attributes necessary to excel in the Army and on the battlefield.”
- Major Tim Leone ’03

“Military professionals deal with the deepest questions of life, duty, and justice every day. From questions of how a unit ought to be justly led, to what good action and leadership look like, to what is morally permissible in war—these are the kinds of questions that philosophers seek answers to and which can be readily applied to our profession as United States Army Officers.”
- Major John Madden ’05

What You Can Study
- Aristotle and Plato
- Contemporary Philosophy
- Cyber Ethics
- Descartes and Locke
- Eastern Thought
- Kant
- Logic
- Military Ethics
- Philosophy of Mind
- Philosophy of Religion
- Philosophy of Science
- Political Philosophy
- Theory of Knowledge