DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

QUESTIONING ANSWERS
Our focus at Reading is the real world. We root our teaching in current issues, viewing modern developments - be it ‘fake news’, climate change, or artificial intelligence - through a philosophical lens. Our aim is to open minds to the big questions: Who are we? How do we know? How should we live? We help students acquire the means to find answers for themselves.

“Philosophers should be, as Seneca put it, ‘lawyers for humanity’. Make what you think and feel count; the examined life has global dimensions.”

Martha C. Nussbaum
American philosopher

We believe that teaching philosophy should be about equipping students for a lifetime of exploration with all the resources that imagination and critical rigour can provide. That is why we have removed final exams from our assessment methods, focusing instead on developing your research and presentation skills for the future.

Reading is a place to thrive in. Shape your future with us.

Professor David Oderberg
Head of the Department of Philosophy

www.reading.ac.uk/philosophy
Emma’s research into chronic pain demonstrates how philosophers are leaving their armchairs behind to apply their learning to real-world problems, across a variety of disciplines.

The project on pain is run through the University of Reading’s Centre for Cognition Research, of which Emma is the Director. It is truly interdisciplinary, involving colleagues from the Departments of Philosophy, Psychology, History, English and Typography, as well as clinicians and patients. The University is creating a generation of interdisciplinary researchers who will naturally seek out other people thinking about the same problems, regardless of which discipline they are from.

Emma believes that a better understanding of the concept of pain will lead to improved methods of assessing, communicating and treating pain. She works with various pain support networks and the Royal Berkshire Hospital pain clinic, which is designed for patients who have exhausted all the regular routes for pain management. The clinic recommends a range of different therapies, including workshops on how to live with pain, and mindfulness.

Emma hopes that her research into the assessment of pain will lead to the design of therapeutic interventions that help patients to cope with pain better, making a huge difference to their everyday lives.

“Philosophy doesn’t take place in a vacuum. The way philosophers think about issues have real-world applications, and can advance our understanding of a variety of problems, moving us towards a solution.”

OUT-THINKING PAIN

Professor Emma Borg
FAIR ENOUGH?
The issue of fairness is very topical in ordinary life and political culture, as well as in philosophical circles. Everyone agrees that fairness is important, but disagree about what fairness is. I hope to reduce such disagreement and thereby the social conflict it causes.

Growing up surrounded by racial and other forms of discrimination in the 1960s’ American south, Brad turned to philosophy in the hope that a better understanding of fairness could improve the world.

Ideas about fairness ripple through everyday thinking, and yet all around us there is disagreement about what is fair. A particularly striking illustration is that different political parties each put themselves forward as the party of fairness, but disagree about what fairness requires.

Many people think that fairness requires that people get what they deserve. A partly overlapping set of people think that fairness requires that, when there is enough to go around, everyone gets what he or she needs. But there is often contention about what desert requires. There is also contention about the extent of need. And when desert and need come into conflict, there is contention about which is more important.

Brad is working with a former University of Reading philosophy student who is now the Senior Education Coordinator for Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC): a not-for-profit institution providing training in Global Citizenship to school teachers. Brad is also involved with Ethical Reading, a not-for-profit group trying to push organisations to be more ethical. Through his collaboration with RISC and Ethical Reading, Brad aspires to disseminate an appealing conception of fairness across different age groups. Ideally, this is a conception of fairness that would win agreement and thus reduce conflict.
Shalini is a global philosopher who approaches social and political issues which are both globally and personally relevant—such as race, gender, debt, war and terrorism—using cross-cultural philosophy to develop new perspectives.

To establish a cross-cultural view, Shalini teaches Chinese, Indian, Native American and Aboriginal, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist philosophy. By integrating philosophical perspectives from a variety of cultures, she encourages a dialogue with her students at the University of Reading about how these different approaches can be used to tackle current issues.

To develop alternative approaches to contemporary issues we need to understand the core concepts and ideas of other philosophical cultures and traditions, before we can have a dialogue about how these might be used to tackle or resolve issues.

Shalini encourages her students to use real-world examples in their work. For example, when looking at gender, students may pick an issue from the media on gender assignment, or differentiating gender on the basis of biological features such as hormone levels at the Olympics. Students investigate these issues using approaches from feminist philosophy and then proceed to compare these with the Buddhist perspectives on gender and identity.

Cross-cultural conversations of this sort broaden the perspective of both partners in the conversation, allowing new ideas and approaches to arise. Shalini believes that every tradition has its limitations, and thus philosophical conversation across different cultures is mutually enriching.

By questioning core concepts and beliefs we take for granted, and by approaching contemporary issues with a broader and more philosophical mindset, Shalini believes that we can positively impact attitudes and help to achieve social change.

My own multicultural background instilled a need in me to take account of different traditions and cultures, and to realise that there isn’t just one truth and one approach.
LIVING IN COLOUR
“I am proud of the fact that my research has become thoroughly interdisciplinary, uncovering cool and unexpected facts about meaning and colour.”

Nat is working across disciplines to understand the nature of linguistic meaning, leading to unexpected real-world applications.

Nat’s main research area is the philosophy of language, and he is particularly interested in the meaning of colour words, such as ‘green’ and ‘red’. Nat believes that understanding the meanings of such words requires collaboration across academic disciplines and he works with linguists, psychologists, and researchers in the digital humanities to better understand how language and colour interact.

In his third-year module “Colour” at the University of Reading, Nat connects classic philosophical debates with contemporary findings in psychology and linguistics to ask and answer questions about whether different languages shape the way people perceive and cognise colour, and how ordinary conceptions of colour line up with our best understanding of colour science: are colours physical properties, or do they depend on our eyes and minds? Can the meanings of colour words be different for different people?

Nat’s aim in his research is to improve our understanding of how experimentation in linguistics and psychology should inform theories of linguistic meaning, but his research has also had unexpected real-world applications. For example, his research on context-sensitive words inspired a graphic design firm in New York City to create a context-sensitive typeface, “Visage”, which was used on T-shirts and promotional materials for the Yale University art museum.

Dr Nat Hansen

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We offer a range of learning and assessment methods, which focus on developing the skills you need for an ever-changing future.

There are no end-of-year examinations for any course in the Philosophy Department. This means you will benefit from a full three terms of teaching each year, and will be assessed through a variety of methods — including essays, presentations, group work and blog posts — which aim to support different learning styles to enable you to reach your highest potential.

The no-exams aspect of the course allows me to really concentrate on researching, planning and perfecting my essays in all three terms, and writing something that I’m really proud of.

Rhiannon Snook
BA Philosophy

Developing your skills

Our methods are designed to teach you the skills you need step-by-step throughout your degree, aiming to prepare you for each new module, and each new academic year, as well as your future career.

Year 1 modules focus on developing two vital skills: making your own arguments and assessing the arguments of others. We teach you to present your ideas, orally and in writing, in a clear and effective way. Year 2 modules focus on developing your skills of research and enquiry, and how to effectively present arguments in public. Year 3 modules focus on developing independent research and self-awareness.

In 2019, we achieved a 96% overall satisfaction score for BA Philosophy in the National Student Survey. Our courses are designed to enable you to become a fully independent learner, able to reflect critically on your progress and strengths, and on the goals you wish to achieve.

Rhiannon Snook
BA Philosophy

Choose from a vast breadth of modules and study philosophy connected to the world around you.

Our interdisciplinary approach to teaching and research is grounded in the real world. The modules we teach stem directly from our academics’ research, which is informed by current events and problems, such as democracy, freedom, religion and climate change.

Thought-provoking modules

We offer a wide array of modules on subjects ranging from biomedical ethics, climate justice, philosophy of crime and law, and Indian philosophy, to colour, experimental philosophy, death, and speech attacks.

Apart from “Reason and argument” in your first year, every module you take is your choice. You can either choose diverse modules to broaden your knowledge, or themed modules to focus your interests, enabling you to make an informed choice as to how to specialise as you progress through your degree.

If your passion lies in ethics, you can specialise in this area on our BA Ethics, Value and Philosophy degree.

Explore another perspective

You can opt to study another subject alongside philosophy on our joint degrees, or you can take modules in other subjects, either to complement or diversify your studies. Popular choices include history, classical studies, politics, English literature and psychology.

Studying philosophy at Reading has given me greater confidence in my ability to understand, recognise and remain informed of arguments used in everyday politics, current affairs and ethics.

Will Burgess
BA and MRes in Philosophy graduate

The philosophy modules on offer at Reading range from the practical and applied, such as “Climate justice”, to the deep and fundamental, like “Free will and responsibility”: this mixture gave me great training in critical thinking, problem-solving, and argumentation.

Charlie Blunden
BA Philosophy graduate

> How you’ll learn

> Get real
Our philosophy degrees aim to prepare you for your future career, with 95% of our philosophy graduates in work or further study within six months of graduation.¹

We will support you to undertake placements and gain practical, hands-on experience in a field you may be interested in. You can also apply for a paid summer placement in our Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP), working with an academic on their research.

**Professional placement year**
Transfer to a 4-year programme and complete a professional placement year, gaining invaluable experience and putting your knowledge into practice. Our Placement Coordinators will support you throughout securing a placement, during the placement and while transitioning back to university life.²

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**Shape your future**
Our degrees aim to develop your transferable skills, including: communicating ideas clearly and precisely, formulating complex problems, criticising arguments effectively, engaging in productive debate, and developing high-quality literacy skills.

Previous graduates have gone on to work in a variety of institutions, including: Parliament, GlaxoSmithKline, Virgin Atlantic Airways, Barnardo’s, Lyons Davidson Solicitors, Columbia Records and various schools. Other graduates choose to continue their studies at postgraduate level.

"The Department was keen to show me opportunities outside the curriculum that enhanced my academic experience: lectures, conferences, workshops, summer schools and seminars. This gave me the edge I needed in applying successfully to Oxbridge master’s programmes."

Harry Tappenden
BA Philosophy

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**Community is at the heart of our Department and we strive to create a friendly and inclusive environment.**
Students and staff regularly socialise in relaxed, informal settings. Enjoyable social events mark the year, from Welcome Week right through to the end-of-year Summer Philosophy Day.

Our academics get to know you through our personal tutor system and small-group teaching. You will meet with your personal tutor at least once a term, although you are welcome to drop in at any time, and your tutor will aim to support you in pursuing your goals and aspirations.

"There’s a very friendly and inclusive philosophical community at Reading. The good relationships I developed with staff and other students through platforms like the philosophy society really benefited my academic progress, and helped support my professional aspirations."

Josh Matthews
BA Philosophy graduate

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**Creating memories**
You will be warmly welcomed by the philosophy society through a range of social events, from staff vs. student rounders, to study advice sessions, film nights and meals out. The society also produces an undergraduate philosophy journal, Lateralis, which you are welcome to get involved in. Join the society to build great friendships and create memories that will last a lifetime.

"Go global" Apply to study abroad as part of your degree, broadening your horizons, enhancing your studies and developing your skill set. You can study abroad for either a term or a year at a university in Europe, North America, Canada or Australia.¹

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¹ Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey 2015–16.
² Subject to availability, see inside back cover.
Year 1 introduces life’s big questions and trains you in the methods of rigorous argument. Choose from optional modules such as: “Radical philosophy”, challenging our deepest beliefs about society and politics; and “The meaning of life”, asking what makes life worth living.

COURSES

OUR PHILOSOPHY DEGREES
- BA Philosophy
- BA Ethics, Value and Philosophy

OUR JOINT DEGREES
- BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- BA Art and Philosophy
- BA History and Philosophy
- BA Philosophy and Classical Studies
- BA Philosophy and English Literature
- BA Philosophy and International Relations
- BA Philosophy and Politics
- BA Psychology and Philosophy

YEAR 1

Compulsory module*
Reason and argument

Optional modules*
Global justice
Radical philosophy
The meaning of life
The right and the good
Mental machines
Elementary logic
Writing the philosophical essay
**YEAR 2**

Year 2 modules focus on enduring philosophical problems, develop further analytical skills, and trace the development of ideas through history.

You will have the opportunity to work on semi-independent research projects with a supervisor, in which you devise your own research questions.

Ethics, Value and Philosophy students deepen their knowledge of normative and moral philosophy through their two compulsory modules, while their other modules are typically taken in philosophy, with the option to take one module from another subject area.

Philosophy, Politics and Economics students can continue pursuing all three subjects, or focus on any two of the three.

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**Optional modules**

- Ignorance, doubt and relativism: the nature of knowledge and how we acquire it
- Global philosophies: non-Western and multicultural perspectives on philosophy
- Meaning of the mind: the nature of the mind and of language
- From scepticism to therapy: Hume, Kant and Wittgenstein: leading figures in the history of philosophy
- Ethical argument: approaches to morality and ethics
- Oppression, inequality and enemies of democracy: leading themes in current political philosophy

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**YEAR 3**

In Year 3 you study your chosen areas of philosophy in much greater depth.

Many of our modules apply the tools of philosophy to practical problems facing contemporary society, while others explore connections with other academic subjects, such as politics, linguistics, and cognitive science. You will be taught in small groups with in-class discussions, and one-on-one meetings with the lecturer.

Guided by your supervisor, you will carry out an independent research project exploring a topic of your choice in either the Dissertation or the Independent learning module.

Ethics, Value and Philosophy students take at least five modules from among a selection in ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics.

Philosophy, Politics and Economics students continue to divide their modules between either three or two subjects.

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**Optional modules**

- Are we free?
- Biomedical ethics
- Colour
- Contemporary consequentialism and contractualism
- Crime and violence
- Death
- Early analytic philosophy
- Environmental ethics
- Ethical intuitionism
- Experimental philosophy
- Fairness
- Future people and climate ethics
- God and religious belief
- Happy, good and meaningful lives
- Metaphysical paradoxes
- Philosophy of literature
- Speech attacks: bullshit, lies, propaganda, silence
- The scandal of film
- The science of consciousness
- Tyranny, rhetoric and lies
- Virtues and vices
- Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mind and action

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*These modules run regularly, and are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available on these courses.
Disclaimer
This brochure was issued in 2019 and is aimed at prospective undergraduate students wishing to apply for a place at the University of Reading (the University) and start a course in autumn 2020. The University makes every effort to ensure that the information provided in the brochure is accurate and up-to-date at the time of going to press (Sept 2019). However, it may be necessary for the University to make some changes to the information presented in the brochure following publication—for example, where it is necessary to reflect changes in practice or theory in an academic subject as a result of emerging research; or if an accrediting body requires certain course content to be added or removed. To make an informed and up-to-date decision, we recommend that you check www.reading.ac.uk/ready-to-study.

The University undertakes to take all reasonable steps to provide the services (including the courses) described in this brochure. It does not, however, guarantee the provision of such services. Should industrial action or circumstances beyond the control of the University interfere with its ability to provide the services, the University undertakes to use all reasonable steps to minimise any disruption to the services.

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Modules disclaimer
Sample modules are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available on each course. The sample modules listed may be compulsory (core) or optional modules. Information is correct at the time of going to press (Sept 2019) but the University cannot guarantee that a module appearing in this list will definitely run. Teaching staff on specific courses or modules mentioned in this brochure may be subject to change.

For optional modules, the University cannot guarantee that all optional modules will be available to students who may wish to take them, although the University will try to ensure that students are able to take optional modules in which they have expressed interest at the appropriate time during their course. Optional modules vary from year to year and entry to them will be at the discretion of the Course Director.

Joint courses disclaimer
Our joint courses may have extra requirements, including English language requirements. Please check the individual course pages on our website for further details.

Year abroad and placement fees
Some courses include an optional or compulsory year abroad or placement year. During this year you will only pay a partial fee which is currently set at 15% of the normal tuition fee. Check the website for the latest information: www.reading.ac.uk/fees-and-funding.

Placements disclaimer
Programmes with a Professional Placement Year (also known as ‘Year in Industry’ or ‘Placement Year’) are fully dependent on students securing their own placement opportunity, normally through a competitive recruitment process. The University provides dedicated career and application support for placement year students. Students who do not secure a placement or who are unable to complete the placement year due to extenuating circumstances, have the option to transfer to a three year variant of their programme with agreement from their school/department.

Study abroad disclaimer
The partnerships listed are correct at the time of publication (Sept 2019). For up-to-date information on the University’s partnerships contact studyabroad@reading.ac.uk.

Where Study Abroad is not a compulsory part of the degree programme, the University of Reading cannot guarantee that every applicant who applies for the scheme will be successful. Whilst efforts are made to secure sufficient places at partner institutions, the number of places available and the University’s partners can vary year-on-year. In all cases, the University cannot guarantee that it will be possible for applicants to choose to study abroad at a particular institution. Further, certain courses and/or institutions may require you to satisfy specific eligibility criteria. It can be a competitive process. For further information on the University’s Study Abroad Scheme please contact studyabroad@reading.ac.uk.