I would like to welcome my fellow philosophers (new and returning) to a new academic year in Edgecliffe. A particularly warm welcome is extended to those students who are joining our department for the first time. As a new student this time can understandably be intimidating - you are in a new town and it is probable that you may never have studied philosophy before. Fear not! St Andrews is a great place to study and it is a great achievement to have made it here. As for the study of philosophy - as long as you have an open and engaged mind you can make a real success of your first year here with no prior knowledge of the subject. Your work in the department will encourage you to think about things in a way you might not have done before - throwing new challenges and thoughts into your mind. This is a very exciting time indeed! To guide you through your time in the department I have put together this Peer Prospectus with a few (hopefully) helpful hints and tips to make the most of your time here.

Good luck for the year ahead!

Anna McAlpine
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STUDYING PHILOSOPHY AT ST ANDREWS

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

For Freshers, the study of philosophy in St Andrews is a simultaneously stimulating and challenging experience. Please be assured you that none of your lecturers or tutors will expect you to be well versed in philosophical prose when you arrive. The modules that you will study when you arrive will give you a solid introductory grounding in basic philosophical ideas and concepts. These courses will not only provide you with a basic handle on the subject but will also teach you invaluable skills that will guide you through your degree. So basically: turn up to class, read the set texts and you will be FINE.

A RULE TO REMEMBER:

If you ever find yourself stuck or confused by a practical issue, consult your Philosophy Undergraduate Handbook! You can bet that nearly every question you have, whether it be the marking scale to find out how to ace that essay—or just how to write an essay—it will almost definitely be covered in the handbook. You can either pick up a copy from Edgecliffe or save the trees and download it from the philosophy website.
WHO’S WHO IN THE DEPARTMENT?

LECTURERS:

Lecturers are faculty members that teach on the modules. Particularly in your early years, you probably won’t have a lot of one-to-one time with lecturers. However, most lecturers will have set office hours each week - this is time they set aside for students to drop by and ask questions about the course content. Remember your lecturers are extremely knowledgeable in their teaching areas and will be more than happy to help you when you are struggling - office hours are often underused by students but they are the perfect time to seek clarification and advice!

TUTORS:

At sub-honours level your tutor will more than likely be a postgraduate student. You will (normally) have one tutor for the entirety of a module and they will hold weekly tutorials. Your tutor is there to help you process the material taught by the lecturer. They are also your first point of call for questions about set readings, deadlines and coursework. Your tutors are there to facilitate discussion, enhance your learning and with most of them being students themselves they are friendly and non-intimidating.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK

Add ‘St Andrews Philosophy Students’ on Facebook to keep up to date on events happening in the department. This is also a group where you can ask questions to your peers on all things philosophical.
ADVISORS:

Your advisor will be a person who is assigned to you by the university before you arrive. If you are majoring in philosophy then your advisor will probably be a member of staff within the department. You will meet with your advisor during Orientation Week to discuss your module options. If you ever have any problem with module choices it is important to contact your advisor as soon as possible.

SCHOOL PRESIDENT:

That would be me! I am here to act as the main contact point between staff and students in the department. If you ever have any concerns or indeed suggestions on how to improve any aspect of the department then you can direct them to me. I can be contacted by email at: philosophypresident@st-andrews.ac.uk and I am also more than happy to arrange a face to face meeting with you to discuss more in-depth matters!

(You might even be lucky enough to have lectures in this picturesque quadrangle)

CLASS REPS:

This will be some of you! There is a whole section dedicated to the class rep. system coming up but basically this will be a few students who act as representatives for their academic year. This is a great way to get involved in the running of the department and enact real change.
WHAT ARE CLASSES LIKE AT ST ANDREWS?

There is no getting around the fact that there is a massive difference between school and university teaching. There are two main types of teaching methods: lectures and tutorials.

Lectures are to be attended by everyone who is enrolled in the module. This time will be spent by introducing you to the basic ideas and concepts. This will give you the bulk of necessary material for the exam and your coursework.

You will also have tutorials to attend once a week. These sessions are an opportunity for you to critically discuss lecture and reading material with your peers. It is also a great time to ask for help on any areas you found challenging in the lecture.
LECTURE TIPS

#1 The most obvious tip is sometimes forgotten when the effects of freshers week catches up with you, however it is invaluable. Turn up to lectures! Although they are less interactive than tutorials, the lectures will give you the main learning points to help with your further reading.

#2 There is nothing that can compare to a detailed set of lecture notes when it comes to revision time. You might find that your lecturers are kind enough to put lecture slides online for you – remember, though, that these are intended to supplement your own notes, not to be a substitute for your own notes. When exams roll around you will be happy you paid attention!

#3 Not only will your lectures be a time to build up a note bank but there will also be the invaluable opportunity to ask questions. Never be afraid to ask a question or wait and speak to the lecturer once they have finished – if you are confused about something the chances are you will not be alone!
TUTORIAL TIPS

#1 PLANNING

Tutorials are a time to debate and discuss the information in the lectures and set texts. Make sure you have read all texts well in advance to allow you properly to assess your stance on the information. Word of warning: Philosophy texts often need to be read more than once to fully comprehend what is being said!

#2 SPEAK UP

It can feel intimidating but remember to go for it and speak up. By sharing your ideas you will help start discussion and debates. Everyone is going to make mistakes - in some ways this will allow you to learn better!

#3 LISTEN AND QUESTION

As important as it is to speak out - remember to let others talk as well. By listening to your peers you will often find new ways of approaching an idea that you hadn’t thought of before. Then question what is being said if you are unsure or can see an alternative - this is where the debating begins.

#5 MAKE NOTES

By making notes in the tutorial these can supplement you lecture notes. The notes you make in the tutorials will often go into more depth than your lecture notes as you really try to make sense of more complex issues. These will be great to reference when writing coursework and during revision time when you may have forgotten some of the finer details.
SOME ESSAY ADVICE

TIME

You don’t want to ever feel that you have to rush through an essay – if you do, it will probably read that way. Remember to allow yourself time to thoroughly read your sources, and to plan, write and edit!

RESOURCES

Your starting point for resources will come from the set texts in your module guide, and suggestions from lecturers and tutors. Do not feel that these are the only texts you should consult, though; you will be rewarded for going beyond the set texts as long as the material is relevant and of a good standard. Try looking online at Jstor or search through the library catalogue.

(Edgecliffe on an autumnal evening)

CHOOSING YOUR SUBJECT

Your word count will probably be quite limited so you must make sure you stick to the point. When choosing your approach to the question try to focus in on one specific aspect and explore that one point in detail as opposed to trying to write less detailed arguments on a wider range of issues.
CREATIVITY

In philosophy we like to hear and read interesting and new ideas. Do not be afraid in your essays to criticise a view or put forward your own take on one (provided you can back up your reasons behind it). As long as you can argue your case and it is relevant to the question it will be looked on favourably to think outside the box.

ANSWER THE QUESTION

This might sound like the most obvious thing in the world but trust me when you get too focused or excited on one area of an argument it can be very easy to lose sight of the task in hand. As you write remember to check in and re-read as you go to make sure you are staying on track and answering the set question.

PROOF-READ

Another obvious one yet it is another area where an essay can easily be let down. If you fail to proof read your work then it can make your essay look rushed and unfinished. The marker will not be impressed by an essay riddled with spelling errors and sentences that don’t make sense. It is often helpful to print out a copy of your essay and read it through for mistakes before you submit it online.

CHECK YOUR HANDBOOK

Remember what was said before – if in doubt check the handbook! There are pages dedicated to essay writing in philosophy and also a detailed breakdown of what is expected for each grade. I often find it useful to have the marking criteria in front of me as I write so as to make sure that I am ticking all of the boxes to get the best grade I can.
CLASS REPS

A Class Rep is someone who is elected to work closely with myself and staff with in the department. There are four Class Reps per sub-honours year and there are also Class Reps for honours and post-graduate courses. As a Class Rep you would act as the first point of contact for students on your courses to talk to if they had any concerns or suggestions.

NOMINATIONS TO RUN AS A CLASS REP OPEN IN WEEK ONE AND VOTING OPENS DURING WEEK TWO.

Benefits of being a Class Rep:

1. You will develop your leadership and communication skills.
2. You can make more connections with people on your courses and make more friends!
3. It looks great on your CV – it is never too early to start thinking about those future job hunts.
4. You will get the chance to make some real changes for the benefit of our department.
5. I aim to make Class Rep meetings fun and engaging – I want all Class Reps to have the chance to put forward their own ideas!
FROM THE STUDENTS

Sally: The staff really make the Philosophy Department; each member seems truly invested in the success and wellbeing of their students. You can rest assured that your lecturers and tutors will go above and beyond to provide you with more than just a quality education - they will enrich your academic lives.”

Connie: “I’ve really enjoyed studying philosophy for my first two years at St Andrews. The lectures are always inspiring, and due to the small class sizes there’s plenty of room for discussion both in lectures and tutorials.”

Katherine: “Studying philosophy at St Andrews has altered the way I think, challenging me to solve problems I never knew existed. The skills I’ve acquired have most certainly helped me excel in my other subject too. I’ve found philosophy to be both insightful and challenging but whenever I’m in doubt, this department offers the support and guidance needed.”

END NOTE

That brings us to the end of this guide... and the rest is up to you! Once again, best of luck for the year ahead. If there is anything that you want more information on that was contained in this prospectus please get in touch with me and I’ll be happy to help where I can.

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