Welcome to Philosophy at St Andrews

Hello and welcome to a new academic year in Edgecliffe! A particularly warm welcome is extended to those of you who are joining our department for the very first time. Being a new student definitely has its challenges: you are in a new town, will need time to adapt to a new environment and you may never have studied philosophy before. Do not worry - St Andrews is a wonderful place, the department is highly supportive and you can be very proud to have made it here!

As for studying philosophy, as long as you have enthusiasm and an open mind, you can truly make the most of your first year here. It is not necessarily a matter of how much prior knowledge you have, but how willing you are to learn more and to apply your knowledge in a multitude of ways! Your work in the department and interactions with others will enable you to think critically about things, academic and non-academic, in ways you might not have done before – this is a very exciting journey to undertake! Moreover, you may end up discovering passions which you might never have thought you would have been interested before. Stay open, stay motivated and do not be afraid to have an opinion!

To guide you through your time in the department, I have put together this Peer Prospectus with a few (hopefully) helpful hints and tips – I hope that it helps you make the most of your time in St Andrews.

Good luck and all the best for the year ahead!

Kyle van Oosterum
Philosophy School President
philosophypresident@st-andrews.ac.uk
https://twitter.com/philopresident?lang=en
STUDYING PHILOSOPHY AT ST ANDREWS

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

For Freshers, studying philosophy at St Andrews is both a stimulating and a challenging experience. Please rest assured 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 in your first year 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 all will be fine!

A RULE TO REMEMBER:

If you ever find yourself stuck or confused by a practical issue consult your Philosophy Handbook! (I tend to keep a copy in my backpack, but you can find it online too). You can bet that nearly every question you have - whether it concerns the marking scale to find out how to ace that essay... or just how to write an essay... - will almost definitely be covered in the handbook. 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 who teach on the course. In your early years, you probably won’t have a lot of one-to-one time with lecturers. However, most lectures 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! If you can’t make their office hours, you can also email your lecturers to ask if they may be able to meet you at another time – do not be afraid, they are here to help!

TUTORS:

At sub-Honours level, your tutor will be either a postgraduate student or a lecturer. You will normally have one tutor for one module and they will hold weekly tutorials. Your tutor is there to lead you through material set by the lecturer for that tutorial – this material and the required readings can be found easily via MMS. Tutors are also your first point of call for questions about the set readings, deadlines and coursework. They are there to facilitate discussion, enhance your learning and, with some of them being students themselves, they are friendly and non-intimidating.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK

Join the group ‘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, prior to your arrival. 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 your 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 have any concerns or suggestions on how to improve an aspect of the department, then you can direct them to me. I can be contacted by email at: philosophypresident@st-andrews.ac.uk or you can come chat to me during my office hours. These are TBC and you can find the updated days and times, once the term starts by following this link: https://www.yourunion.net/voice/academicreps/schoolpresidents/philosophy/.

CLASS REPS:

These will be some of you! There is a whole section dedicated to the class rep. system coming up but, essentially, class reps 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, help represent your peers’ voices 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 attended by everyone who is enrolled on the module. This time will be spent introducing you to the basic ideas and concepts. This will give you the bulk of the necessary material for the exam and your coursework.

You will also have tutorials to attend once a week per module. 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.
#1 Turn up to lectures! Although they are less interactive than tutorials, the lectures will give you the main learning points to grasp the content properly and help you 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 these are to supplement your own notes and NOT to replace them. When exams roll around, you will be happy that you paid attention!

#3 Not only will your lectures be a time to build up a note bank but they 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 that you will not be alone!
# TUTORIAL TIPS

### #1 BE PREPARED

Tutorials are a time to discuss and debate the information in the lectures and set texts. Make sure you have read all texts well in advance to allow you to properly 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 - this will allow you to learn better!

### #3 LISTEN AND QUESTION

As important as it is to speak out, please 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.

You can then question what is being said; if you are unsure or can see an alternative - this is where the debating begins!

### #4 TAKE NOTES

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

TIME

You don’t want to ever feel as though you have to rush through an essay - if you do, it will probably read that way, too. Remember to allow yourself time to thoroughly read your sources, plan, write and edit! I can’t emphasize the planning and reading stages of essay writing enough; cherish them and make the most of them!

RESOURCES

Your starting point for resources will come from the set texts in your module guide and from tutors. Do not feel that these are the only texts you should consult though; you will be rewarded for looking outwith the set texts as long as the material is relevant and of a good standard. Try looking online at Google Scholar/Jstor or search through the library search engines. And check out the subject guide pages for Philosophy: http://libguides.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophy

CHOOSING YOUR SUBJECT

Your word count will probably be quite limited, so you must make sure you stick to the point; clear, concise and coherent writing is highly valued. Thus, when choosing your approach to the question, try to focus 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 to criticize 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 viewed favourably to think outside the box. Don’t be afraid to use first person here!

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 at hand. As you write, remember to check and re-read your work as you go along to make sure that 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 break down 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 – you want to maximize your potential.
CLASS REPS

A Class Rep is someone who is elected to work closely with myself and staff within the department. There are two Class Reps per sub-Honours year and there are also Class Reps for the 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 1 AND VOTING OPENS DURING WEEK 2.

Benefits of being a Class Rep:

1. You will develop your leadership and communication skills.
2. You can make more connections with the staff, people on your courses and make new friends!
3. You can log your hours online to keep track of your contributions in the department. You can also receive volunteering awards, some of which will appear on your transcript!
4. It looks great on your CV - it is never too early to start thinking about those future job hunts.
5. You will get the chance to make some real changes for the benefit of our department.
6. I aim to make Class Rep meetings fun and engaging - all Class Reps should have the chance to put forward their own ideas!
Rufaida: “One of the best things about studying philosophy at St Andrews is the incredible faculty. I’ve had the chance to learn about my favourite topics in philosophy from leading experts, who are helpful, passionate, and very knowledgeable.”

Joss: “Why would I want to study philosophy? What can we know with certainty? Should art ever be censored? Can non-human animals be artists? Equity or equality? Should you always exercise your right to vote? P, Q v R? Why is there something, rather than nothing? Do humans possess free will? – Are you interested? This is why I do philosophy.”

“Studying philosophy at St Andrews has exceeded my expectations. Beyond the course itself (which allowed me to dip into a variety of areas of interest), I was especially overcome by the care provided by the staff. Their dedication to meeting my academic needs and supporting my welfare has allowed me to continue to enjoy my subject immensely, even when faced with my own personal challenges. I couldn’t have asked for any more from the staff here and will be very proud to graduate in single honours philosophy next year.”

… That brings us to the end of this guide - 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 which was contained in this prospectus, please do get in touch with me and I’ll be happy to help where I can.

Have a wonderful first year at St. Andrews and remember to have fun!

Kyle
philosophypresident@st-andrews.ac.uk
https://twitter.com/philopresident?lang=en