

## Information for Potential High School Philosophy Teachers

### What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is both an ancient tradition and a central component of modern pluralistic and democratic societies. It is a way of living, a way of thinking, and even the activity of thinking about thinking itself. Philosophy is based on reasoned argumentation in conjunction with the creative generation of new ways of seeing the world and understanding our place in it. It is often associated with the names and texts of well known thinkers, but is also connected with more recent critiques of those same figures. It asks some of the most fundamental questions we can ask as human beings—questions that are often implicitly or explicitly on the minds of adolescents.

The discipline of philosophy includes several key strands (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, logic, etc), as well as areas of overlap with related disciplines (political philosophy, philosophy of law, philosophy of religion, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, etc.).

Philosophy remains as relevant as ever to our increasingly diverse, complex and cosmopolitan society that faces significant moral, political, and environmental challenges.

### Philosophy in Ontario schools?!

Ontario is the only English-speaking jurisdiction to have created a provincial policy document officiating high school philosophy as an elective course across the jurisdiction.

As of 2010, there are over 30,000 students taking high school philosophy courses, offered at the Grade 11 and Grade 12 Levels:

- “Philosophy: The Big Questions” Grade 11 M (HZB3M)
- “Philosophy: Questions and Theories” Grade 12, University Preparation (HZT4U)

For more information see the Ministry of Education Curriculum Guidelines for Social Sciences and Humanities for Grades 11 and 12 at:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/sstudies1112curr.pdf>

### What background do I need?

The pre-requisite for the high school philosophy course is three full year courses in philosophy. If you have completed a degree in philosophy you should have no trouble meeting these requirements. There may be some interpretation of what qualifies as a philosophy course offered in other related fields, including for example:

- political philosophy,
- philosophy of religion,
- philosophy of history
- philosophy of art
- philosophy of science

### What will I learn?

The aim of teacher education in high school philosophy is not primarily to broaden or deepen your foundation of philosophical knowledge—although that will invariably happen in the course of class discussions. Instead, the aim will be to investigate effective ways to translate philosophical knowledge and expertise into quality lessons, activities, and assignments that are grade appropriate and intellectually engaging for students. A key course aim will be to allow students to tie philosophical thought more directly to teaching and learning in schools in a way that allows them to improve both student learning as well as their own teaching. Course methods will include lectures, discussions, debates, small group activities, a library session, presentations on specific thinkers and foundational/reoccurring philosophical concepts and debates, and guest speakers from key areas of philosophical specialization.

## **Is there a demand for Philosophy Teachers?**

Philosophy courses are going strong in Ontario and continue to increase in enrollment. There are many opportunities for expansion in schools currently offering philosophy classes, particularly as philosophy has only recently been offered as a separate qualification area for teachers. Furthermore, while many schools currently don't offer philosophy courses, experience shows that many principles are open to creating new courses in the area.

Philosophy is also one of a number of teaching subjects at the Intermediate/Senior level that are offered as options for secondary students in the Ontario Curriculum. While teachers will be needed and are hired to teach these optional subjects, candidates considering these subjects should be aware of a significant consideration:

- Securing a teaching position based primarily on optional subjects (particularly if both your teaching subjects are optional subjects) may prove difficult.

The provincial organization for philosopher teachers, the Ontario Philosophy Teachers Association (OPTA), holds an annual conference in Toronto that allows important opportunities for professional development and contact with other philosophy teachers, as well as philosophers with specialization and expertise in various aspects of philosophy.

## **Why teach Philosophy?**

Our research—and experience—indicates that both students and teachers are profoundly transformed by philosophy, both personally (in the way they see themselves and the world) and pedagogically (in their ways of thinking about learning, teaching, and thinking itself). Few subject areas get to the core of what it means to be a human being as philosophy can and does. It is hard to remain unchanged by such an encounter.