

Missoulian Guest column (4/10/2018)

Want to get a good-paying job? Major in philosophy

JIM MURRAY

A degree in philosophy is one of the best springboards for a great job. I base this belief on 35 years of experience in law, law enforcement, legal education, the business of insurance and the representation of many Fortune 100 companies such as IBM, Boeing and Kraft Heinz. At the core of my success in all of these endeavors was my training in philosophy.

I graduated in 1976 from the University of Montana with a degree in philosophy and took courses in moral philosophy, the philosophy of mind, and legal and political theory at Oxford and Harvard.

My training in philosophy (from all three universities but especially UM) prepared me to: 1. think critically across subject matters; 2. identify, evaluate and construct viable chains of reasoning; 3. consider in a constructive but critical fashion alternative perspectives on the same subject; and, perhaps most important to me, 4. write and speak clearly on complex topics.

These four skills drove my success in jury trial work and appellate argument, in the teaching of trial advocacy, in analyzing moral issues surrounding wiretaps and undercover operations while working at the FBI, in forming my own law firm and in serving on the executive, business and compensation committees of two Legal 100 law firms. (As an added side benefit, these skills also put me in a high income bracket.)

The list of well-known business leaders and executives who majored in philosophy is extensive: venture capitalist Peter Thiel, former HP CEO Carly Fiorina, activist investor Carl Icahn, former FDIC chair Sheila Bair, hedge

fund manager George Soros, former Fannie Mae CEO Herbert Allison, Jr., former Time Warner CEO Gerald Levin, [Overstock.com](https://www.overstock.com) founder and CEO Patrick Byrne, Flickr co-founder Stewart Butterfield, LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, global security software company Trend Micro CEO Eva Chen and many more.

Indeed, as recently as February of 2018, billionaire technology entrepreneur Mark Cuban predicted that in less than 10 years, a philosophy degree will be "worth" more than a traditional computer science degree. He views previously lucrative jobs in industries like accounting and computer programming as subject to the powers of automation, especially given the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence. To remain competitive, Cuban advises opting for degrees such as philosophy that teach students how to think in a critical, big-picture way.

Philosophy training values a rigorous standard of writing and argumentation. It helps us discard bias and prejudice, to reject fuzzy reasoning and misplaced analogies.

I apply these same standards of clarity and simplicity in thinking, writing and speaking to scores of lawyers who work with and for me. The one guarantee of success in law is good writing. It trumps every other attribute. In my experience, lawyers actually argue very little over money — they go to war over the best writers. I am always in search of philosophy majors.

A higher education that unites the liberal arts, and especially philosophy, with the STEM curriculum is what provides enduring crucial abilities and thereby enables new career trajectories. Any given topic or piece of knowledge in today's STEM courses could well be tomorrow's FORTRAN. Thousands of years before us, and thousands of years after us, the "... pleasures arising from

thinking and learning will make us think and learn all the more" (Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics").

A philosophy major helps students make good money. It just happens to have added advantage of nurturing the human attributes that form the basis of a rational, moral and just society.

Jim Murray is a 1976 University of Montana graduate in philosophy, a Rhodes Scholar, a 2014 Distinguished Alumni and a UM Foundation trustee.

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