

# Timeless Questions

## Philosophy launches new major option and cognate in political and legal theory

Tuesday, May 3, 2022



A UNH PHILOSOPHY CLASS IN SESSION.

The [UNH Department of Philosophy](#) is capitalizing on its strengths in the study of political and legal thought with a new major option and cognate. The [option in political and legal philosophy](#) is a pathway through the philosophy major that allows students to concentrate several of their major courses in these areas. Those who are not philosophy majors can build a base of knowledge with the [three-course cognate](#).

The political and legal philosophy option is designed for students

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who are interested in specializing in the systematic study of the fundamental philosophical questions regarding politics, law and justice and how they apply to contemporary issues. The option allows students to study topics such as the limits of state power, balancing liberty and equality, capitalism vs. socialism, privacy, police ethics and many other issues at the interface of ethics, justice, law and states.

“These are timeless questions with timely applications,” says department chair Nick Smith, “and students engage these issues most productively when they try to bracket political biases. Instead of shouting “Liberal!” or “Conservative!” at each other, we train students to think clearly and civilly discuss the roots of problems that have people marching in the streets.”

The philosophy faculty has particular strengths in these fields. Among its members are leading researchers in ancient political thought, classic and contemporary ethics, economic philosophy, punishment theory, jurisprudence, feminist jurisprudence, and race and law. The department’s discussion-based classes in law, justice and politics are highly enrolled with a reputation for civil and enthusiastic debates on issues of importance to students.

The climate in the Philosophy Department cultivates student-centered discussion, research and action around issues of justice, says Smith. The Socratic Society student organization has been a hub for discussing social issues since 1959, and the Philosophy Department brings about 1,000 high school students to campus annually for its Hosting Young Philosophy Enthusiasts conference to facilitate small group discussion of social issues. Philosophy majors work with faculty to produce cutting-edge research, such as Gordon Unzen ‘21, who completed a senior thesis and Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship on [artificial intelligence and the future of criminal law](#).

The major option and cognate will create new pathways for

students interested in “big picture” questions related to law and justice.

“We hope to enhance our relationship with justice studies, which has been our close partner since its inception,” says Smith, “and students who are drawn to the more theoretical issues in law will be well served with a justice studies/philosophy dual major. We likewise expect increased collaborations with political science and economics students who double major with philosophy to enhance their working knowledge of political and legal theory.”

Smith adds: “But honestly, students from the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, the College of Health and Human Services, and the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture often fall in love with political and legal thought as they imagine careers and leadership roles building just health care and food systems and technology that enhances collective well-being. This program provides a useful bridge between humanities and STEM.”

For more information, visit the [option page](#) and the [cognate page](#).

COMPILED Susan Dumais '88 '02G | College of Liberal Arts

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