

Advice for Philosophy Undergrads from Underrepresented Groups

We asked philosophers...

What advice would you give to underrepresented groups who are considering graduate study in philosophy?

It's crucial to start building your community—in your graduate program, your local neighborhood or city, and in your discipline. Graduate school can be very insular and demanding. You might be tempted to do armchair philosophizing, by yourself, in your apartment. But it is really the relationships you develop at conferences, workshops, social events, and local outreach initiatives that nourish you—especially for those of us who are underrepresented. So get involved. Talk to people about your work. And allow yourself and your thinking to be supported and transformed.

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Putting together a group of mentors early on in your graduate career can be a good strategy for everyone, but especially graduate students who are members of one or more underrepresented groups. Sometimes it can be isolating and overwhelming to be the only member of a particular under-represented group in your department or cohort, and it may not be possible before you start graduate school to know what the particular issues might be at your institution. Talking to graduate students and faculty in the department before enrolling is often helpful, but many times people may not want to fully disclose what it is like to be a member of an under-represented group in that department. Cultivating mentors with a variety of perspectives and vantage points from within your discipline is helpful, of course, but it is also useful to consider mentors outside of philosophy, especially if you are a member of an under-represented group that has very small numbers in philosophy. Finding others who have managed to navigate similar challenges and frustrations can be helpful not just in affirming that it is indeed possible to become a philosopher despite obstacles and frustrations (you knew this!), but for learning approaches that have borne success, as well as what hasn't worked as well.

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