Thinking about Law School?
Major in Philosophy!

UMSL students looking to prepare themselves for law school, and for a career in law, should consider pursuing a major in Philosophy. There are two main reasons to do so. First, the study of philosophy provides students with training in analytic thinking and logical argumentation, both of which are essential to success in law school and in the practice of law. Second, a major in philosophy also allows students to examine many of the current moral, political, and legal issues that are of interest to lawyers, judges, and legal scholars, while understanding the philosophical background to these issues. Let's consider these reasons in greater detail.

It has long been recognized that a major in Philosophy in an excellent way to prepare for law school because of the training in analytic reasoning and writing provided within philosophy courses. Philosophy majors perform exceptionally well on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), as well as on other tests which emphasize analytic reasoning and writing.

The following table shows the average scores on the LSAT according to major:

Average 2007-2008 LSAT Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	No. of students
1	**Philosophy**	**157.4**	**2,184**
1	Economics	157.4	3,047
3	Engineering	156.2	2,197
4	History	155.9	4,166
5	English	154.7	5,120
6	Finance	153.4	2,267
7	Political Science	153.0	14,964
8	Psychology	152.5	4,355
9	Sociology	150.7	1,902
10	Communications	150.5	2,230
11	Business Administration	149.1	1,971
12	Criminal Justice	145.5	3,306

Note: For major fields with at least 1,900 students taking the exam.
Source: Niaswiadomy, Michael "LSAT Scores of Economics Majors: The 2008-2009 Class Update," *Journal of Economic Education*, Vol 41(3) July-September 2010:331-333

Also, data collected by the Educational Testing Service (available here: [*link to ETS LINK*]) shows that Philosophy majors had the *highest scores* on both the Verbal Reasoning and the Analytic Writing sections of the GRE.

It's no surprise, then, that the acceptance rate for Philosophy majors applying to law schools is *higher than* the acceptance rate for applicants majoring in Economics, Political Science, History, Psychology, Accounting, Business Management, and most other majors. (A study of the 2001 Law School Entering Class by Professor Carol

Leach of Chicago State University shows the overall acceptance rate for Philosophy majors to be the *second highest*; only Physics majors were admitted at a higher rate.)

Consider the following excerpt from American Bar Association's Council of Legal Education and Opportunity (full publication available here: *Link to ABA LINK*:):

In assessing a prospective law student's educational qualifications, admissions committees generally consider the chosen curriculum, the grades earned, and the reputation of the colleges attended…Solid grades in courses such as **logic, philosophy**, and abstract mathematics are generally considered a plus…Law schools will respect your pursuit of subjects you find challenging. This is especially true if the courses you take are known to be more difficult, such as **philosophy**, engineering, and science. Also, look for courses that will strengthen the skills you need in law school. Classes that stress **research and writing** are excellent preparation for law school, as are courses that teach **reasoning and analytical skills**.

The American Bar Association has recommended that students looking to study law find a college curriculum that emphasizes the following "Core Skills and Values":

* Analytic / Problem Solving Skills
* Critical Reading
* Writing Skills
* Oral Communication / Listening Abilities
* General Research Skills
* Task Organization / Management Skills
* Public Service and Promotion of Justice

In particular, The ABA notes that "[y]our legal education will demand that you structure and evaluate arguments for and against propositions that are susceptible to reasoned debate" and "[y]ou should seek as many experiences as possible that will require rigorous and analytical writing, including preparing original pieces of substantial length and revising written work in response to constructive criticism." (Full statement available here: link to http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law.html)

In a philosophy classroom, your professors and classmates will challenge you to engage in reasoned debate about complex problems, to argue for or against certain propositions, and to defend views against objections. You will be expected to read arguments carefully, to analyze the structures and assumptions of these arguments, and to write logically, clearly, and precisely. In short, we'll train you to think and write like a lawyer.

Additionally, in philosophy, you'll also be able to explore topics and issues that may be relevant to your future legal studies or your career as a lawyer. For example, those interested in working in environmental law may benefit from an environmental ethics course. Those interested in the legal issues arising from developments in medicine and technology may wish to study bioethics or the philosophy of science. Those interested in working in corporate law might find a business ethics course to be relevant. Issues concerning criminal responsibility are covered in the philosophy of mind and in our course on the philosophical foundations of criminal justice. Issues concerning evidence and justification are discussed in epistemology. We also offer relevant courses in logic, ethical theory, political theory, and, of course, the philosophy of law.