

LAW SCHOOL AND PHILOSOPHY

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY PROVIDES NECESSARY SKILLS

Many people who are interested in going on to careers in law find philosophy classes truly rewarding, and there are good reasons why. Law schools know that philosophy is one of the best pre-law majors. The skills developed from taking philosophy courses – such as careful, critical writing about detailed arguments – are the very ones needed to succeed in law school.

- engaging in diagnosis (of situations, arguments, or positions)
- thinking clearly and with organization
- discerning and evaluating evidence
- creative thinking; the ability to imagine alternative scenarios
- logic, induction, deduction
- inference to the best explanation
- articulating thoughts concisely, precisely and without ambiguity
- being attuned to the importance of people, their rights and welfare.

HIGHEST SCORES ON LSAT

Philosophy majors typically do extremely well on the LSAT, outperforming students who major in political science and criminal justice. In 2007-2008, economics, philosophy and theology majors averaged 157.4, the highest of any major with over 1000 students to take the exam.

More than anything, law schools are looking for students who have acquired significant analytic skills and the capacity to present arguments in a compelling way. For these reasons, philosophy is widely regarded as an excellent preparation for law school and a career in law. Students who wish to prepare for law school should therefore consider a major in philosophy.

TABLE 1. Average 2007-2008 LSAT Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	No. of students
1	Economics	157.4	3,047
1	Philosophy	157.4	2,184
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: Michael Nieswiadomy, "LSAT Scores of Economic Majors: The 2008-2009 Class Update"

From The Council on Legal Education and Opportunity, American Bar Association:

"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. ... Contrary to popular belief, law schools do not favor political science, criminal justice, and government majors over others. Choose major and elective courses that you will genuinely enjoy, instead of those you were told were required for prelaw students. You are likely to get better grades in a field you find interesting. 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**."

WHY I SHOULD MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

Questions?

E-mail

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201 Introduction to Philosophy
206 Introduction to Logic and Scientific Reasoning
207 Introduction to Symbolic Logic
230 Moral Theory and Practice
235 Ethical Issues in A Diverse Society
310 Ancient Philosophy
314 17th Century Philosophy
315 18th Century Philosophy
316 19th Century Continental
317 20th and 21st Century Continental Philosophy
318 20th and 21st Century Anglo-American Philosophy
330 Ethical Theory
331 Moral Problems in Medicine
332 Philosophy of Law
334 Environmental Ethics
335 Social and Political Philosophy
336 Bioethics and Biotechnology
338 Feminist Philosophy
340 Aesthetics
343 Philosophy of Technology
350 Philosophy of Religion
364 Metaphysics: God, Minds, and Matter
366 Truth, Belief and Reason
380 Philosophy of Science
430 Value Theory
450 Persons and Causes (Free Will)
460 Epistemology and Metaphysics
465 Brains, Minds, and Computers
483 Philosophy of Biology
485 Philosophy of Physics
490 Independent Study
496/596 Ecology and Society
535 Contemporary Political Philosophy

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A PHILOSOPHY COURSE?

Philosophy courses tend to focus on fundamental questions about life, reality, and knowledge. In a philosophy course, students will read thought-provoking works. Students develop skills to interpret controversial points of view charitably, identify unstated assumptions, and distinguish relevant information from unimportant rhetorical flourishes. They are able to assess positions and their alternatives and identify underlying points of agreement and disagreement. Students are expected to provide reasons that make a clear case for accepting their point of view. Philosophy courses tend to be highly discussion-oriented and writing-intensive, improving clarity of presentation and argumentative rigor. Especially in courses numbered 300 and higher, enrollment is limited to facilitate discussion and provide students opportunities to engage with their peers and the professor. More than most other majors, philosophy encourages students to examine and develop their own points of view, rather than uncritically accept the current state of research. These skills of charitable interpretation and independence of critical thought enable philosophy majors to excel in a variety of career paths and lifelong activities.

Philosophical Topics of Interest to Students Preparing for Law:

Are we obligated to obey the law? What kinds of punishment are unjust? What is the relationship between morality and legality?

What obligations do institutions have to society?

What role do institutions have in the problems of racism or sexism?

What is the nature of coercion?

Does moral responsibility require free will?

Philosophy Classes of Interest to Students Preparing for Law or Policy:

206 (Introduction to Logic and Scientific Reasoning) * 207 (Introduction to Symbolic Logic) * 230 (Moral Theory and Practice) * 235 (Ethical Issues in A Diverse Society) * 330 (Ethical Theory) * 331 (Moral Problems in Medicine) * 332 (Philosophy of Law) * 334 (Environmental Ethics) * 335 (Social and Political Philosophy) * 336 (Bioethics and Biotechnology) * 338 (Feminist Philosophy) * 343 (Philosophy of Technology) * 430 (Value Theory) * 450 (Persons and Causes, Free Will) * 535 (Contemporary Political Philosophy)

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A major in philosophy requires 33 credits in philosophy (eleven courses). At least fifteen of these credits shall come from the core curriculum, and at least six credits shall come from courses numbered 400 or above. The core curriculum requires:

One from: 330 (Ethical Theory), 335 (Social and Political Philosophy), or 535 (Contemporary Political Philosophy);

310 (Ancient Philosophy);

Either 314 (17th Century Philosophy) or 315 (18th Century Philosophy);

One from: 364 (God, Minds, and Matter), 366 (Truth, Belief, and Reason), or 380 (Philosophy of Science); and

207 (Introduction to Symbolic Logic)

ADDING PHILOSOPHY AS A SECOND MAJOR

Combining a philosophy major with other majors is a great way to gain knowledge of philosophy and a deeper understanding of the conceptual foundations of the other major. The requirements for philosophy as a second major are the same as the requirements for the major. Philosophy may be designated as the primary or secondary major.

MINOR IN PHILOSOPHY

A minor in philosophy is an excellent complement to any major. The minor in philosophy requires fifteen credits (five courses) in philosophy. At least nine of these credits shall come from courses numbered 300 or above.