American Philosophical Association

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Philosophy Student Performance on the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)

Philosophy majors consistently perform best or near best on graduate school admission exams, year after year and across various sections compared to other majors. As is clear from the following data, the success of philosophy graduates on the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) is persistent, and despite changes in the content and scoring, students of philosophy regularly outperform their peers.

In the following graphs, "Intended Major" refers to the subject that undergraduate senior students and recent graduates who have taken the exam intend to pursue in graduate school. In the graph above, horizontal distance between points indicates how intended majors of different subjects performed relative to each other, while vertical distance is standardized. Because ETS advises against comparing scores across test sections, we have created three separate graphs to illustrate performance.

As the graphs clearly indicate, intended philosophy majors performed best of all fields in the Verbal and Analytical portions of the exam. In addition, distance between philosophy and the next best scoring majors (Physics, Math, & Economics) is a significantly wider gap than the distance between most points, indicating philosophy graduate majors not only performed best overall, but they did so with a wide margin over other fields.

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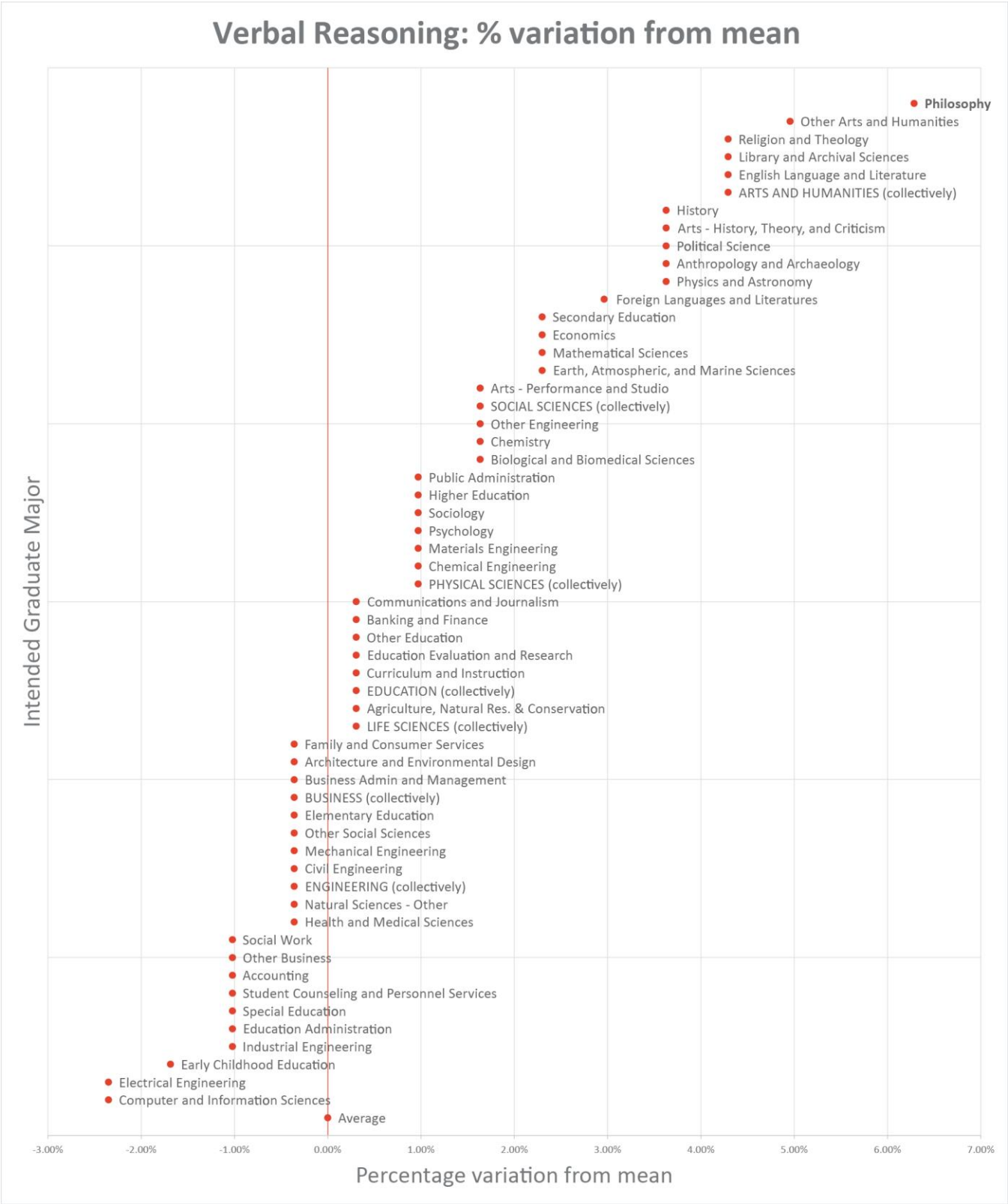

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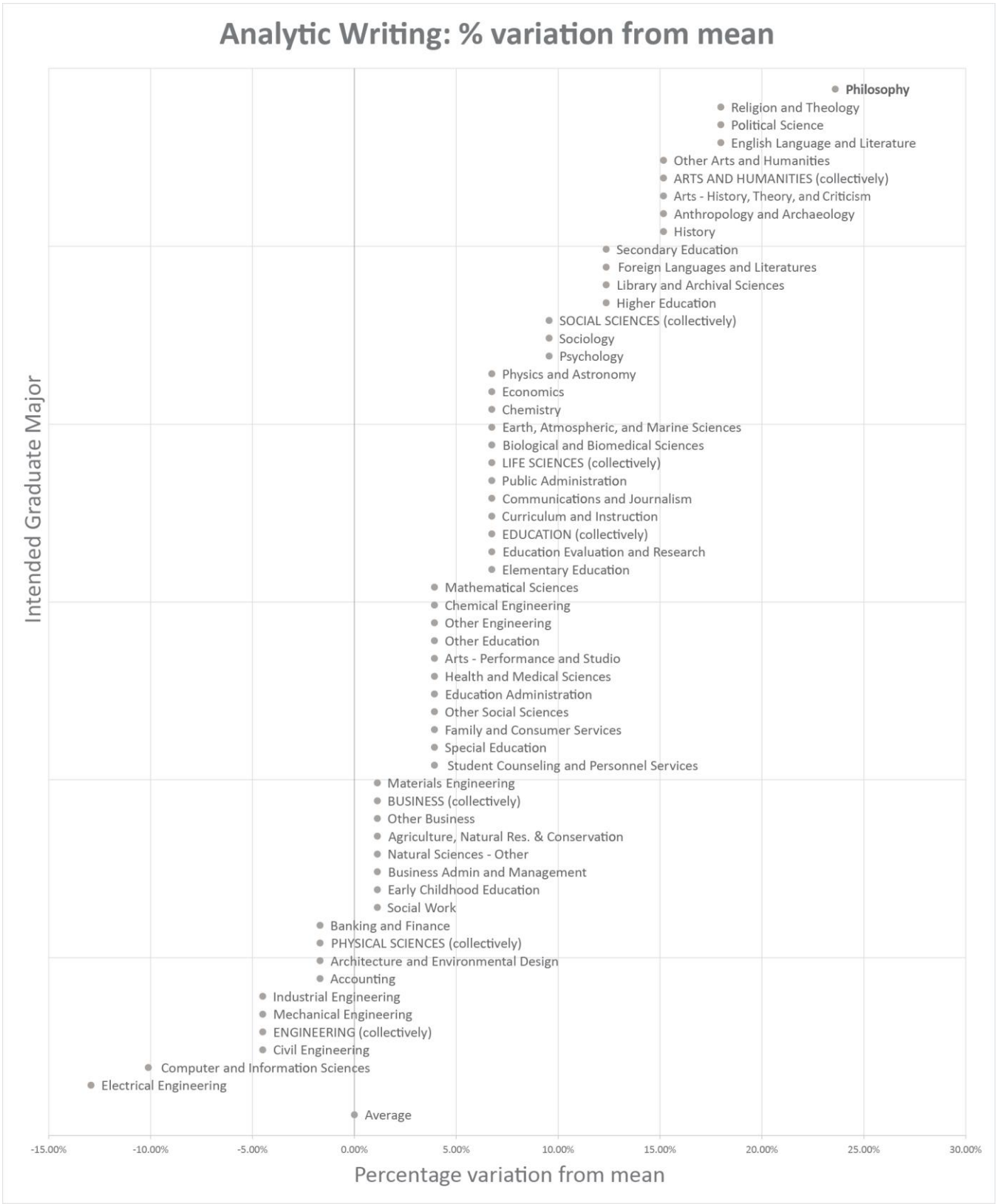

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Mean GRE Score by Intended Graduate Major

Based on the performance of seniors and nonenrolled college graduates who tested between August 1, 2011, and April 30, 2014

	VERBAL			QUANTITATIVE			ANALYTICAL WRITING	
1	**Philosophy**	**160**	1	Mathematical Sciences	162	**1**	**Philosophy**	**4.4**
2	Other Arts and Humanities	158	2	Materials Engineering	162	2	Religion and Theology	4.2
3	ARTS AND HUMANITIES (collectively)	157	3	Physics and Astronomy	161	3	Political Science	4.2
4	English Language and Literature	157	4	Chemical Engineering	161	4	English Language and Literature	4.2
5	Library and Archival Sciences	157	5	Banking and Finance	161	5	Other Arts and Humanities	4.1
6	Religion and Theology	157	6	Economics	160	6	ARTS AND HUMANITIES (collectively)	4.1
7	Physics and Astronomy	156	7	Other Engineering	160	7	Arts — History, Theory, and Criticism	4.1
8	Anthropology and Archaeology	156	8	Industrial Engineering	160	8	Anthropology and Archaeology	4.1
9	Political Science	156	9	ENGINEERING (collectively)	159	9	History	4.1
10	Arts — History, Theory, & Criticism	156	10	Mechanical Engineering	159	10	Secondary Education	4
11	History	156	11	Electrical Engineering	159	11	Foreign Languages and Literatures	4
12	Foreign Languages and Literatures	155	12	Chemistry	158	12	Library and Archival Sciences	4
13	Earth, Atmospheric, and Marine Sciences	154	13	PHYSICAL SCIENCES (collectively)	158	13	Higher Education	4
14	Mathematical Sciences	154	14	Civil Engineering	158	14	SOCIAL SCIENCES (collectively)	3.9
15	Economics	154	15	Computer and Information Sciences	157	15	Psychology	3.9
16	Secondary Education	154	16	Earth, Atmospheric, and Marine Sciences	154	16	Sociology	3.9
17	Biological and Biomedical Sciences	153	17	Biological and Biomedical Sciences	154	17	Physics and Astronomy	3.8
18	Chemistry	153	18	Architecture and Environmental Design	154	18	Economics	3.8
19	Other Engineering	153	**19**	**Philosophy**	**153**	19	Chemistry	3.8
20	SOCIAL SCIENCES (collectively)	153	20	BUSINESS (collectively)	153	20	Earth, Atmospheric, and Marine Sciences	3.8
21	Arts — Performance and Studio	153	21	Other Business	153	21	Biological and Biomedical Sciences	3.8
22	PHYSICAL SCIENCES (collectively)	152	22	Other Arts and Humanities	152	22	LIFE SCIENCES (collectively)	3.8
23	Chemical Engineering	152	23	Agriculture, Natural Res. & Conservation	152	23	Public Administration	3.8
24	Materials Engineering	152	24	Natural Sciences — Other	152	24	EDUCATION (collectively)	3.8
25	Psychology	152	25	Accounting	152	25	Curriculum and Instruction	3.8
26	Sociology	152	26	Religion and Theology	151	26	Communications and Journalism	3.8
27	Higher Education	152	27	Political Science	151	27	Education Evaluation and Research	3.8
28	Public Administration	152	28	Secondary Education	151	28	Elementary Education	3.8
29	LIFE SCIENCES (collectively)	151	29	LIFE SCIENCES (collectively)	151	29	Mathematical Sciences	3.7
30	Agriculture, Natural Res. & Conservation	151	30	Other Education	151	30	Chemical Engineering	3.7
31	EDUCATION (collectively)	151	31	Business Admin and Management	151	31	Other Engineering	3.7

Data Source: http://www.ets.org/s/gre/pdf/gre_guide.pdf

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The above table depicts the average score for each of the three sections in the GRE. Philosophy is the best performing major overall, ranking first in the verbal and analytical writing sections of the test and 19th in the quantitative portion. And these data are consistent from year to year, both before and after the recent revision of the GRE. (Tests taken beginning August 1, 2011, score the verbal and quantitative portions of the exam on a scale of 130-170. Tests prior to that date score those sections on a scale of 200-800.) Data from 2001 through 2004 and from 2006 through 2009 show philosophy students ranking first in the verbal and analytical writing sections, and 15th and 14th in the quantitative section, respectively.

Data also show philosophy students outperforming their peers by wide margins in the verbal section, by at least thirty points prior to the 2011 GRE revision and by three points after the revision. The charts on the following page illustrate this in data from 2011 to 2014, showing that philosophy students, on average, consistently do best overall, best relative to other fields, and best in both verbal reasoning and analytical writing specifically, as measured by GRE scores.

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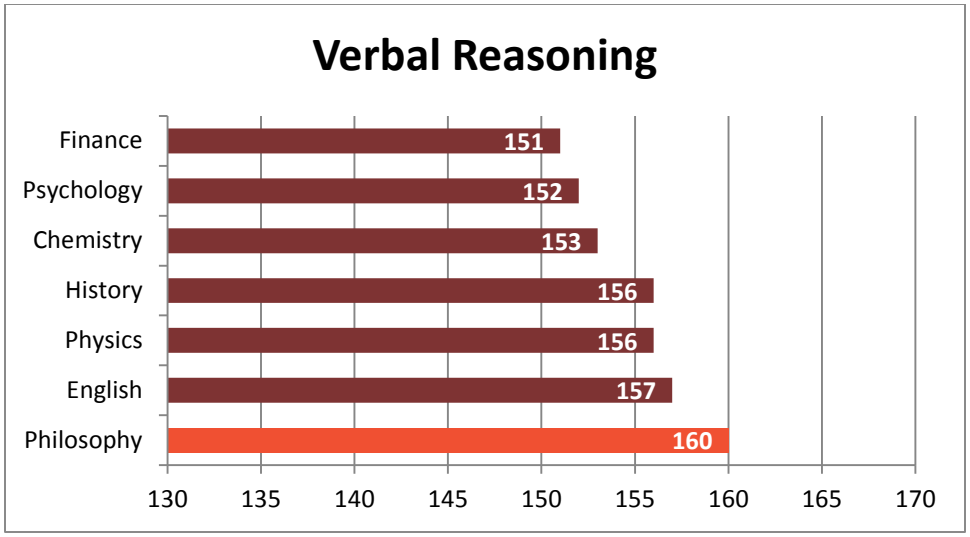

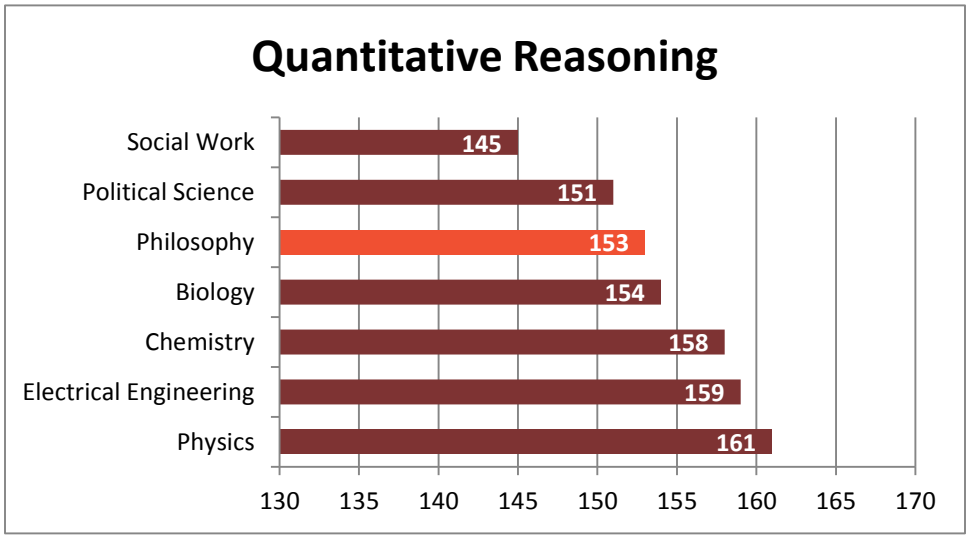

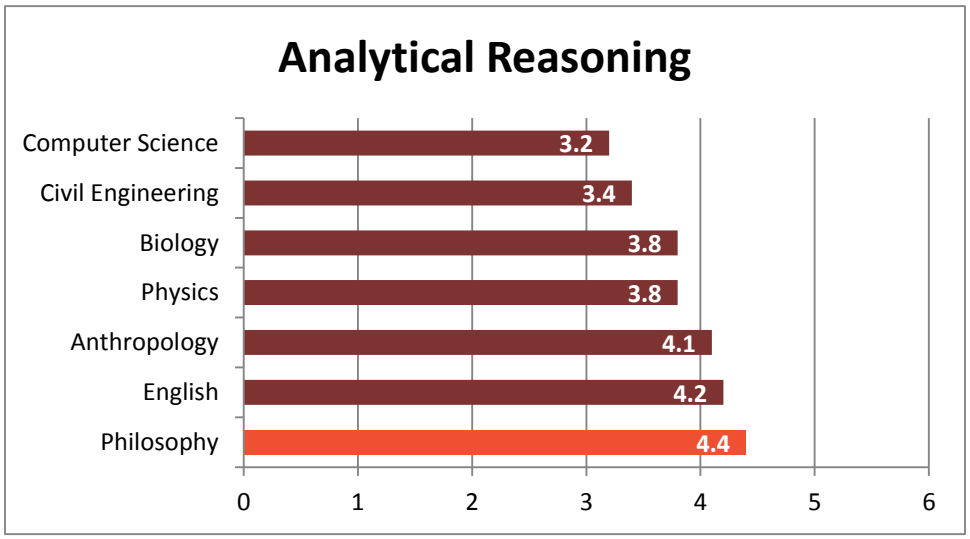

Data for tests taken August 2011 to April 2014, from ETS.

Charts based on Physics Central blog post "Best Majors for GRE Scores: Still Physics and Philosophy," August 20, 2012.

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