

Senior, 19, to Attend Law School in the Fall  
By Naomi McMillen



Not everyone can say that they will attend law school by the age of 19, but criminology and socio-legal studies double major Jamie Richardson can. At an age when most students are still deciding their major, Richardson has completed the degree requirements for two concentrations and will be entering her first year of law school in the fall.

As a resident of Washington State, Richardson was able to participate in the Running Start Program, which allows junior and senior high school students to enroll in community college and concurrently earn their high school diploma and associate's degree. When she began her studies at the University of Denver two years ago, she was already well on her way to obtaining her bachelor's degree.

It was during her participation in the Running Start Program where Richardson first discovered her passion for law.

"During my junior year of high school I enrolled in a criminal justice class at Green River Community College simply because it filled a graduation requirement. But I absolutely fell in love with law," Richardson said. "When a young prosecutor for the state came and spoke in my class as a guest speaker I was enamored by the work that she did and the romantic notion of how law can be used to help others. I knew right then that I wanted to pursue law throughout my undergraduate studies," she said.

Richardson has gained further practical experience in the legal field through an internship in the Major Crimes Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office, which is responsible for prosecuting federal crimes in Colorado.

"I was given hands on experience in the field that I hope to eventually enter, which will be invaluable knowledge during law school. More importantly, I was able to gain insight into the reality of being a prosecutor and ultimately received confirmation that prosecution is the career that I want to pursue," she said.

Richardson has used the knowledge she gained from her internship to complete a senior thesis exploring a topic she is very passionate about: false confessions in capital murder cases.

"Jamie applies Donald Black's (sociology, University of Virginia) new theory of social time to explain the types of cases in which false confessions are most likely to occur," said Scott Phillips, associate professor in the department of sociology and criminology. "Her research demonstrates that the more serious the capital murder the more likely the defendant is to falsely confess. Her research strongly implies that police use more aggressive interrogation tactics in more serious cases, leading to a higher rate of false confessions."

“The central finding of Jamie’s senior thesis is remarkable,” Phillips added. “Although she has more work to do, she has completed data collection and data analysis. Given her strong writing skills, I am certain the final product will be a compelling thesis that we can later revise and publish, perhaps in a law review or a peer-reviewed social science journal.”

On campus, Richardson participates in a student volunteer service organization, DU Service and Change, where she has served on the board since her freshman year, as well as on the Student Conduct Review Board, which helps review and determine appropriate outcomes for students who have violated the University honor code. For the past year, she has also worked as a grader for introductory undergraduate classes in the criminology department.

After obtaining her degree from DU this spring, Richardson will begin law school in the fall. She will likely attend the University of Washington in Seattle, but is keeping her options open. “It’s important that I attend a law school that is dedicated to public service law because, as an aspiring prosecutor, it will be my field of study,” she said.