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UPDATED WIGHTMAN RACE-BLIND ADMISSION MODEL RESULTS: 2009–2010 APPLICANT DATA

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The consequences of abandoning race/ethnicity as a factor in law school admission decisions was examined by Wightman (1997) through an empirical analysis of 1990–1991 law school applicant data. The author subsequently updated those results based on 2000–2001 law school applicant data (Wightman, 2003). Provided here are some additional updated results based on 2009–2010 law school applicant data. Specifically, actual and predicted admission rates are compared across racial/ethnic subgroups and three applicant-year cycles. The predicted admission rates were derived utilizing a race-blind statistical model.

Data

The 1990–1991, 2000–2001, and 2009–2010 applicant samples were taken from applicant and admission data provided to LSAC by 173, 179, and 194 ABA-approved law schools, respectively. The samples were restricted to applicants who had a reportable LSAT score, who had a reportable undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA), and who applied to and received an admission decision from at least one ABA-approved law school. If an applicant had more than one reportable LSAT score, the mean (or average) of the scores was used.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the three samples. Note that applicants self-identify their race/ethnicity or choose not to respond to that question. Also note that the US Department of Education required significant changes in the way educational institutions collect and report race/ethnicity data starting in the 2010–2011 academic year. These changes included new race/ethnicity categories and allowing for multiple selection. In 2009, LSAC revised the way it collects race/ethnicity data in order to address these changes. To allow for comparisons across the three samples, the racial/ethnic definitions employed by Wightman in her two earlier studies were retained, except for one exception: the Mexican-American subgroup results and the Hispanic subgroup results were combined into the Hispanic subgroup. Also, for the 2009–2010 sample, only applicants who self-identified as one of the racial/ethnic subgroups listed in Table 1 were included in the analyses (i.e., the subgroup samples do not include applicants who self-identified as two or more race/ethnicity categories).

Prediction Model

The logistic regression model used previously by Wightman was employed again here to estimate an applicant's probability of admittance (i.e., admitted or not admitted) to an individual law school given his or her LSAT and UGPA credentials. More specifically, logistic regression LSAT and UGPA weights were estimated separately for each law school and each of the three applicant-year cycles for a total of 546 sets of weights. These estimates were based only on White applicants, but then were applied to the full samples of White and minority applicants. This approach yielded probabilities of admittance for each applicant's law school application. So, for example, there were 5,880 Asian American applicants in the 2009–2010 sample who collectively submitted 56,490 applications (see Table 1). For this subsample, the logistic regression analysis yielded 56,490 probabilities of admittance, or one for every application.

Once the probabilities of admittance were derived, applicants were ranked from highest to lowest within each law school and each applicant-year cycle. For a particular law school within a single application-year cycle, the top *X* ranked applicants were then designated as being "admitted," where *X* equals the actual number of applicants admitted by that school in that admission cycle. In this way, applicants would be predicted to be admitted to some law schools, but not admitted to others, based solely on their LSAT and UGPA credentials. (Of course, some applicants were predicted to be admitted to all the law schools they applied to and some were predicted to be denied by every school.)

Note that the number of White applicants who applied to Puerto Rican ABA-approved law schools was insufficient to produce reliable prediction weight estimates for those schools. Therefore, the Puerto Rican subgroups referred to in Tables 1 and 2 are only comprised of applicants who self-identified as Puerto Rican and applied to at least one ABA-approved law school outside of Puerto Rico.

Results and Caveats

Table 2 provides actual and predicted admission rates by racial/ethnic subgroup. (An applicant was determined to be admitted if he or she was admitted to at least one law school he or she applied to.) Within any particular law school, the number of applicants predicted to be admitted based solely on LSAT and UGPA credentials was set to equal the actual number of applicants admitted to that school. This is a reasonable approach to take if the yield rates (i.e., the probabilities of applicants accepting offers of admission) remain approximately the same. However, if the yield rates were actually lower under the prediction model, the "Predicted Proportion Admitted" values given in Table 2 could be somewhat underestimated.

While the Wightman methodology provides some insight into the consequences of race-blind admissions, it is important to note that LSAC would not recommend making admission decisions solely on the basis of an applicant's LSAT and UGPA credentials under any circumstances. The LSAT provides those making admission decisions with a standardized measure of skills critical to success in law school, but it is not a perfect predictor of law school success. LSAC's *Cautionary Policies Concerning LSAT Scores and Related Services* (http://www.LSAC.org/LSACResources/Publications/PDFs/CautionaryPolicies.pdf) provides some guidelines for users of LSAT scores, including:

- Do not use the LSAT score as a sole criterion for admission.

- Evaluate the predictive utility of the LSAT at your school.

- Do not use LSAT scores without an understanding of the limitations of such tests.

- Avoid improper use of cut-off scores.

- Do not place excessive significance on score differences.

Finally, caution is recommended when interpreting the results provided here. The predicted admit rates are based on only one methodology; others could yield different results. Sample definitions and exclusions changed over the three admission cycles reported on here. That fact should also be taken into consideration, even though great effort was made to ensure that the results are as comparable as possible.

References

Wightman, L. F. (1997). The threat to diversity in legal education: An empirical analysis of the consequences of abandoning race as a factor in law school admission decisions. *New York University Law Review, 72*, 1–53.

Wightman, L. F. (2003). The consequences of race-blindness: Revisiting prediction models with current law school data. *Journal of Legal Education, 53*, 229–253.

Table 1

Number of Applicants, Number of Applications, and Mean Number of Applications by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

	Number of Applicants	Number of Applications	Mean Number of Applications	Mean LSAT*	Mean UGPA
2009–2010 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	5,880	56,490	9.6	155.2	3.25
Black	9,196	57,817	6.3	144.1	2.95
Hispanic	5,698	42,398	7.4	149.5	3.16
Native American	388	2,649	6.8	150.0	3.10
Puerto Rican	559	3,869	6.9	148.6	3.16
White	51,310	349,152	6.8	155.3	3.33
2000–2001 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	4,658	31,629	6.8	153.3	3.20
Black	7,404	31,340	4.2	143.3	2.87
Hispanic	3,909	19,727	5.0	148.3	3.04
Native American	505	2,064	4.1	149.2	3.06
Puerto Rican	569	2,577	4.5	145.7	3.05
White	47,541	216,997	4.6	153.9	3.23
1990–1991 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	3,711	23,317	6.3	33.2	3.07
Black	7,083	29,362	4.1	25.0	2.70
Hispanic	3,413	16,703	4.9	30.0	2.93
Native American	489	2,113	4.3	30.3	2.87
Puerto Rican	628	3,078	4.9	27.6	2.89
White	72,742	329,864	4.5	34.4	3.09

*Since June 1991, the LSAT has been reported on a 120–180 scale, and prior to that on a 0–48 scale. The approximate means (standard deviations) associated with each scale are 150 (10) and 30 (8), respectively.

Table 2

Number and Proportion of Students Admitted Compared with Those Predicted to be Admitted to Law School by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

	Number of Applicants	Number Admitted	Proportion Admitted	Predicted Proportion Admitted	Residual (Actual – Predicted)
2009–2010 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	5,880	4,073	.69	.60	.09
Black	9,196	4,238	.46	.24	.22
Hispanic	5,698	3,454	.61	.46	.15
Native American	388	265	.68	.49	.19
Puerto Rican	559	326	.58	.43	.15
White	51,310	38,976	.76	.72	.04
2000–2001 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	4,658	3,418	.73	.66	.07
Black	7,404	3,706	.50	.31	.19
Hispanic	3,909	2,587	.66	.53	.13
Native American	505	360	.71	.53	.18
Puerto Rican	569	315	.55	.38	.17
White	47,541	37,286	.78	.75	.03
1990–1991 Racial/Ethnic Subgroups					
Asian American	3,711	2,312	.62	.40	.22
Black	7,083	3,435	.48	.10	.38
Hispanic	3,413	1,980	.58	.28	.30
Native American	489	302	.62	.31	.31
Puerto Rican	628	324	.52	.16	.36
White	72,742	42,287	.58	.55	.03