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Predictive Validity of the LSAT: A National Summary of the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies

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Executive Summary

Since the inception of the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) has sought to evaluate and ensure its validity for use in the law school admission process. As predictive validity is an important component in the overall evaluation of test validity, LSAC has carried out annual predictive validity studies, also called LSAT Correlation Studies, since the test was first administered. The LSAT Correlation Studies evaluate the effectiveness of LSAT scores, undergraduate grade point average (UGPA), and the combination of LSAT scores and UGPA for predicting a student's first-year average (FYA) in law school. The purpose of this report is to summarize the results of the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies. The results presented serve to document and support the predictive validity of LSAT scores for use in the law school admission process. This study also provides national longitudinal data for law schools to examine against their school-specific correlation study results in order to gain additional insight into the admission process at their individual law school. Results indicate that, in comparison to UGPAs, LSAT scores are a better predictor of law school performance, and that the combination of LSAT scores and UGPA continues to be the best predictor of FYA.

Introduction

For over 50 years, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) has offered to conduct correlation studies on the predictive validity of the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), evaluating LSAT score as well as other predictors of law school performance.

An increasingly large number of law schools have chosen to participate in these studies over the years, as these studies are offered free of charge to participating law schools and provide valuable validity information about the LSAT (see Anthony, Dalessandro, & Reese, 2013; Anthony, Duffy, & Reese, 1999; Anthony, Harris, & Pashley, 1997; Diamond-Dalessandro, Stilwell, & Reese, 2005; Thornton, Suto, Anthony, & Liu, 2005; Stilwell, Diamond-Dalessandro, & Reese, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011; Wightman, 1993).

The general concept of validity is broad, encompassing the accumulation of data to support a particular use of a test. The particular type of evidence obtained from the correlation studies is referred to as *predictive validity*. Predictive validity is concerned with the relationship between a predictor variable and a criterion variable or, more

specifically, the degree to which a variable can predict (or correlate with) a future outcome. Although an important component, predictive validity is just one of the many types of validity evidence compiled to support the LSAT's use in the law school admission process.

A limited amount of information is available to evaluate the predictive validity of the LSAT. Generally, both LSAT score and undergraduate grade point average (UGPA) are among the available data across all law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) and English language common-law law schools in Canada. As both of these are quantifiable measures, many schools use this information to aid in admission decisions. If this (or any other) quantifiable information is relied on in the selection process, the burden is on the score user to obtain evidence that there is a relationship between the quantified variables and the outcome of interest to the admission committee—usually, success in law school.

The major purpose of this study, therefore, is to provide evidence to support the predictive validity of the LSAT score in the admission process. This report summarizes, at the school level, results obtained from the 2013 and 2014 Correlation Studies. It also provides a snapshot of longitudinal school-level results for cross-validation purposes.

Methods

Sample

The data used in this study were obtained from the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies. The LSAT Correlation Studies combine data from each entering class with the data from up to two previous entering classes, as available, since research has shown that three classes of data can be expected to produce stable results. Thus, the data used in the 2013 LSAT Correlation Studies included data from students entering law school in the fall of 2012 combined with data from up to two previous entering classes, as available; and the data used in the 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies included data from students entering law school in the fall of 2013 combined with data from up to two previous entering classes, as available.¹

Although the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies were based on data at the test-taker level, in this study all results are reported at the school level. For more

¹ Canadian schools were excluded from this report because they did not participate in LSAC's Credential Assembly Service. Schools not accredited by the ABA and some schools that had grading scale changes were also excluded from this report. Only fall-entering full-time students with complete data were included in this study.

detailed data at the test-taker level, the user is referred to the correlation study specific to their school.

During the period from 2013 to 2014, 194 schools participated in the LSAT Correlation Studies. Of these, 151 schools participated across both study years (2013 and 2014). The summary data presented in this report reflects only those results from the 151 schools that participated across both study years.

Variables

The following variables were included in this study:

- **First-year average (FYA).** The FYA is the average grade earned by each student in the first year of law school. As different law schools use different scales for first-year grades, FYA values were transformed to a scale with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. For the school-level analyses presented here, student FYA data were aggregated within schools.
- **Undergraduate grade point average (UGPA).** The average grade earned by each student during his or her undergraduate study is computed by LSAC's Credential Assembly Service and is expressed on a scale from 0.00 to 4.33. For the school-level analyses presented here, student UGPAs were aggregated within schools.
- **LSAT score.** LSAT score data were obtained from the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies. All LSAT data used in this study were based on the version of the LSAT that includes four 35-minute scored sections, with total LSAT score reported on a 120–180 scale. The scores used in this study were aggregated within schools across test takers. If a test taker took the LSAT more than once, the average of the reportable LSAT scores for that test taker was used.

Analyses

Correlation and Regression

Correlations. A correlation describes the linear relationship between two variables. Correlation values can range between -1 and 1 , where a positive correlation indicates that high values on one variable are indicative of high values on the other variable, a negative correlation indicates that low values on one variable are indicative of high values on the other variable, and a correlation of 0 indicates that there is no relationship between the two variables under study. Note that a perfect positive or negative correlation of 1 or -1 , respectively, is never observed in practice. Rather, correlations

are evaluated based on the strength of the positive or negative relationship between two variables. The correlations between each pair of variables included in this study were evaluated (i.e., FYA, LSAT, and UGPA).

Adjusted Correlations. When LSAT scores and UGPAs are factors that influence the admission process, presenting correlations based only on those who were accepted to and attended an individual law school can lead to an underestimation of the true correlation. This phenomenon is called *restriction of range*. Simply put, using data that includes a more homogeneous population (i.e., only those students admitted versus all students who applied) reduces the variability in scores. This reduction in variance leads to smaller correlations. To compensate for the restriction of range, correlation coefficients were adjusted using the Pearson–Lawley multivariate correction to represent the correlation more accurately (see Gulliksen, 1950; Lord & Novick, 1968, pp. 146–147).

Regression. In addition to calculating correlations between pairs of variables, multiple regression analysis was also applied. The purpose of multiple regression in this study was to predict FYA on the basis of *both* LSAT score and UGPA. A multiple correlation value, denoted as R , indicates the correlation between the predicted FYA and the actual FYA when LSAT and UGPA are used as combined predictors. Values of R range between 0 and 1. The amount of variance in FYA accounted for by each predictor variable (LSAT and UGPA) was also evaluated and presented.

Cross-Validation

A primary purpose of conducting validity studies for most schools is to obtain the best possible prediction weights so that they can be applied to the application credentials of the subsequent year's applicant pool to aid in the decision process. That is, data from past experience is used to make future predictions. When results from the correlation studies are used in this way, the most relevant question to ask is: How well do the equations from previous first-year classes predict the performance of future first-year classes?

To answer this question, a cross-validation study was conducted. Specifically, the prediction equations calculated from the 2013 LSAT Correlation Studies at the school level were used to predict an FYA for each member of the 2014 fall-entering first-year class. Then, the correlation between the predicted FYA and the actual FYA earned by the members of the 2014 fall-entering class was calculated. These calculations were performed separately for each school, using each school's unique multiple regression model.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Summary statistics for schools participating in the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies are presented in Table 1. The average within-school sample size for each correlation study was approximately 562 and 530 for the 2013 and 2014 study year data, respectively. The size of the samples is primarily a consequence of including the most recent 3 years of student data in the study when available. The advantage gained from using 3 years of data is found in the stability of the weights applied to the two predictor variables rather than in the magnitude of the correlation coefficients.

Results in Table 1 show that the mean, median, and standard deviation of LSAT scores and UGPAs were very similar across the 2 study years. LSAT scores for the 2 study years ranged from a low mean of 146.92 to a high mean of 170.31 and from 145.60 to 169.81 for the 2013 and 2014 study year data, respectively. These ranges are in line with historical results observed by Anthony et al. (2013) and suggest that the differing characteristics of law schools are well represented in this report.

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics for 151 schools participating in the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies^a

Variable	Year	Mean	SD	25 th %ile	50 th %ile	75 th %ile	Minimum	Maximum
Sample size	2013	561.85	255.62	383	519	669	121	1,621
	2014	529.74	239.57	355	465	647	97	1,416
LSAT	2013	156.44	4.91	152.95	155.72	159.86	146.92	170.31
	2014	155.69	5.05	151.95	155.22	159.00	145.60	169.81
UGPA	2013	3.37	0.18	3.24	3.37	3.51	2.92	3.78
	2014	3.36	0.18	3.23	3.36	3.49	2.89	3.80

^aLSAT and UGPA are based on average values calculated within each school.

Correlation and Regression Analyses

The top half of Table 2 presents the mean correlation (r) between each pair of variables analyzed in this study across schools. The bottom half of Table 2 presents the mean multiple correlation (R) across schools that was obtained via multiple regression using a combination of LSAT score and UGPA as a predictor of FYA.

TABLE 2
Summary correlations between study variables for law schools participating in the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies: Matriculant

	Year	Mean	SD	25 th %ile	50 th %ile	75 th %ile	Minimum	Maximum
LSAT with FYA ^a	2013	0.37	0.08	0.31	0.37	0.43	0.13	0.56
	2014	0.39	0.08	0.33	0.38	0.44	0.19	0.56
UGPA with FYA ^a	2013	0.25	0.08	0.21	0.26	0.32	0.02	0.40
	2014	0.26	0.08	0.20	0.25	0.32	0.06	0.42
LSAT with UGPA ^a	2013	-0.07	0.14	-0.17	-0.06	0.04	-0.55	0.24
	2014	-0.05	0.15	-0.16	-0.03	0.05	-0.53	0.28
LSAT & UGPA with FYA ^b	2013	0.47	0.07	0.42	0.47	0.53	0.26	0.63
	2014	0.48	0.07	0.44	0.48	0.53	0.31	0.64

Note: First-year results for matriculants indicate data obtained from students who completed their first year of law school.

^aCorrelation (r).

^bMultiple Correlation (R).

As can be seen in Table 2, for both of the study years evaluated in this report, the combined use of LSAT score and UGPA was a stronger predictor of FYA than either LSAT alone or UGPA alone. Additionally, LSAT score had a stronger positive relationship with first-year performance in law school than did UGPA. These results are consistent with findings from earlier LSAT validity summary reports (Anthony et al., 1997, 1999, 2013; Diamond-Dalessandro et al., 2005; Evans, 1982; Schrader, 1976; Stilwell et al., 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011; Thornton et al., 2005; Wightman, 1993).

The data presented in Table 2 suggest that the results across the 151 law schools that participated in the 2013 and 2014 Correlation Studies are very consistent with each other. The size of the median correlation coefficient is virtually identical for both study years, and the range of the distributions is very similar. More importantly, the data in Table 2 show that the best model for predicting FYA is consistently the model that combines LSAT score and UGPA, where “best model” is defined as the model that provides the highest correlation between the predictors and the criterion.

Figures 1 and 2 graphically illustrate the distributions of the correlations reported in Table 2. Together they provide a snapshot of the usefulness of LSAT score and UGPA in providing information about first-year performance in law school. Across both study

years, the correlations are relatively normally distributed, but the concentration of correlations varies depending on the predictor(s) being evaluated. Moving from the top figure (UGPA alone) to the bottom figure (LSAT score and UGPA combined) of Figures 1 and 2, the concentration of correlation coefficients shifts from lower to higher. More specifically, results indicate considerably lower correlations resulting from using UGPA alone (top figure), slightly lower correlations resulting from using LSAT score (middle figure), and the highest correlations using both predictors combined. The correlation coefficients derived from the combined predictors are concentrated at the highest section of each graph because the combined predictors produce the highest correlation with FYA. This pattern is consistent across both years of study and, of course, is consistent with the summary data reported in Table 2.

The correlation distributions presented in Figures 1 and 2 may also be useful for individual law schools interested in understanding how their correlation study results compare to those of other schools that have taken part in the correlation studies. This can be accomplished by locating the law school's correlations on the graphs provided.

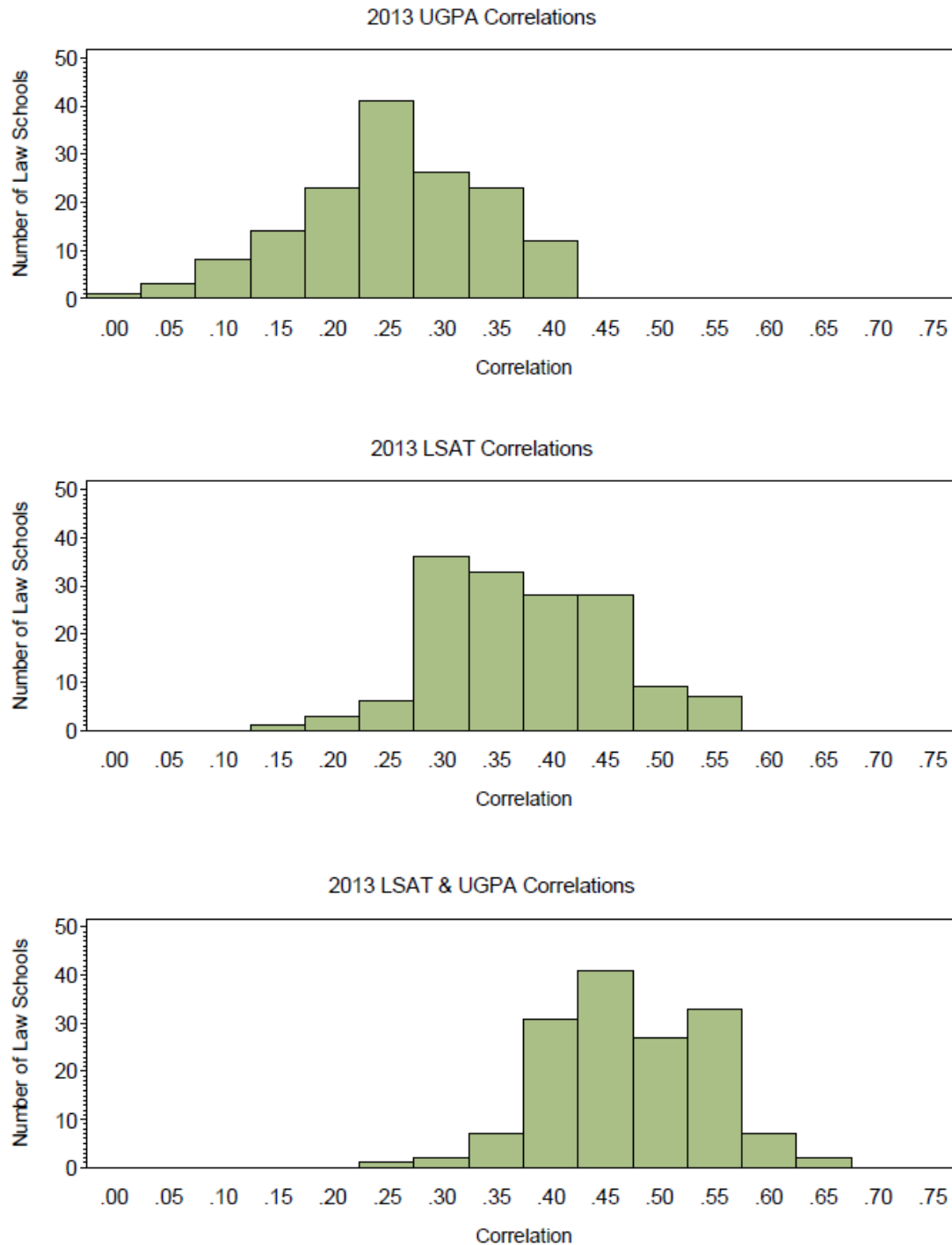


FIGURE 1. Distribution of 2013 school-level correlations for predictor variables. The top figure shows UGPA correlations with FYA, which range from 0.02 to 0.40; the middle figure shows LSAT correlations with FYA, which range from 0.13 to 0.56; and the bottom figure shows FYA correlations with LSAT and UGPA combined, which range from 0.26 to 0.63. The horizontal axes in all three figures represent the correlation calculated within a specific school between the variables of interest. The vertical axes reflect the number of law schools for which the correlation was observed.

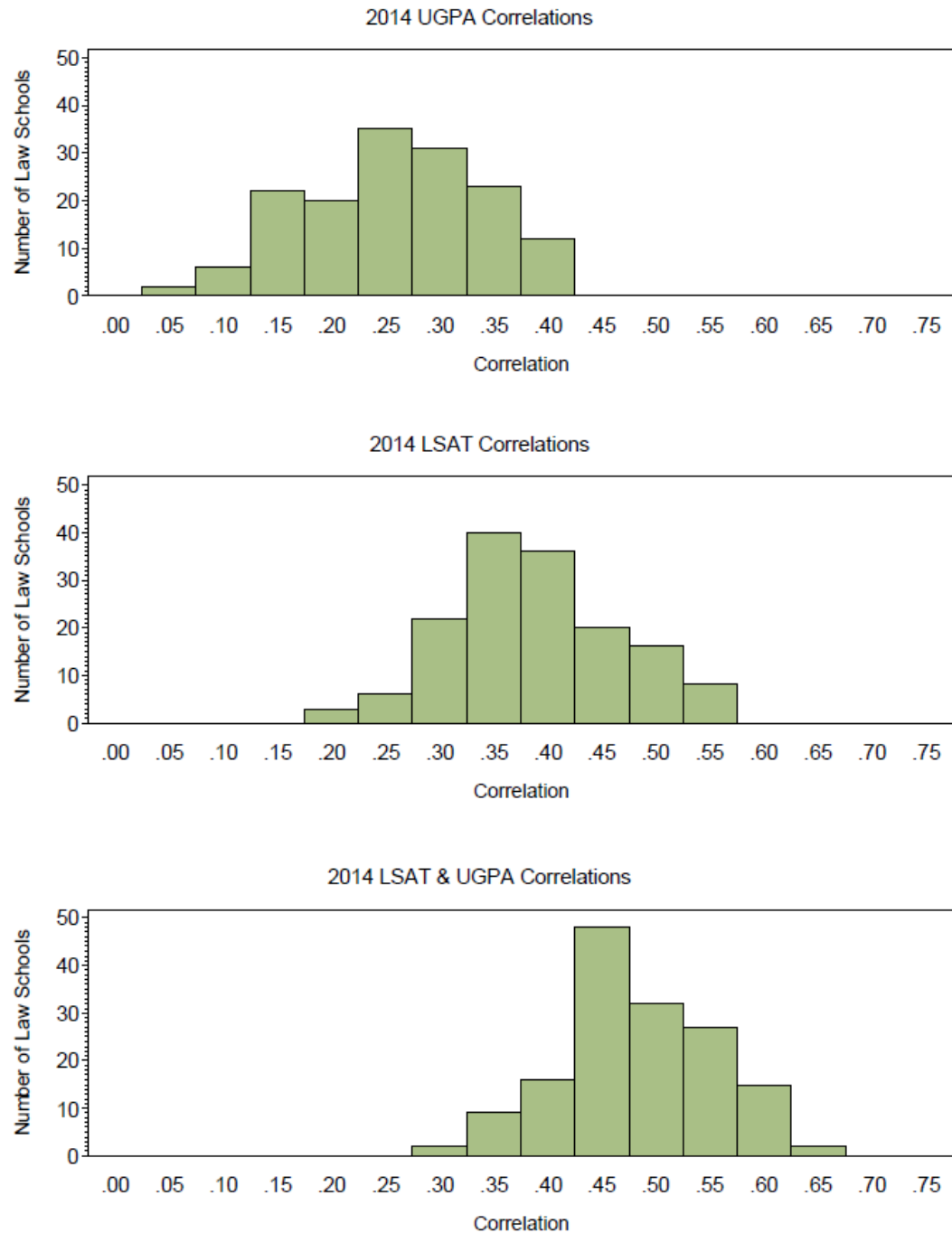


FIGURE 2. Distribution of 2014 school-level correlations for predictor variables. The top figure shows UGPA correlations with FYA, which range from 0.06 to 0.42; the middle figure shows LSAT correlations with FYA, which range from 0.19 to 0.56; and the bottom figure shows FYA correlations with LSAT and UGPA combined, which range from 0.31 to 0.64. The horizontal axes in all three figures represent the correlation calculated within a specific school between the variables of interest. The vertical axes reflect the number of law schools for which the correlation was observed.

When LSAT score and UGPA were both included as predictors in a linear regression model to predict FYA, LSAT score, on average, accounted for more of the variance predicted by the model than did UGPA, although there are some schools for which this was not the case. As shown in Table 3, the mean variance accounted for by LSAT score was approximately 58% and 59% for 2013 and 2014, respectively, whereas the mean variance accounted for by UGPA was approximately 42% for 2013 and 41% for 2014. The mean proportion of variance accounted for by LSAT score was found to be similar to values observed in previous studies (see Anthony et al., 2013).

TABLE 3
Percentage of variance accounted for by predictor variables

Variable	Year	Mean	SD	25 th %ile	50 th %ile	75 th %ile	Minimum	Maximum
LSAT	2013	58.37	6.94	53.65	58.65	62.04	41.64	85.88
	2014	59.08	6.45	54.80	59.47	63.89	42.86	78.96
UGPA	2013	41.63	6.94	37.96	41.35	46.35	14.12	58.36
	2014	40.92	6.45	36.11	40.53	45.20	21.04	57.14

As described in the Methods section, due to the homogeneity of the correlation study sample (i.e., including only students who were accepted to and attended law school), the correlations reported in Table 2 may be underestimated. Table 4 presents correlation coefficients for these variables, corrected to represent what we would expect to be observed for the total applicant pool, including both matriculants and those who applied but did not matriculate.

As expected, the correlations are consistently higher for the total applicant pool (Table 4) than for matriculants (Table 2). A comparison of the matriculant and total applicant pool groups shows that the mean validity coefficients (correlations) for LSAT with FYA increased 0.22 and 0.20, for the 2013 and 2014 study years, respectively. The difference in mean validity coefficients for the UGPA between matriculant and total applicant pool groups was less pronounced, at 0.18 and 0.17 for the 2013 and 2014 study years, respectively.

Generally, comparing the 2013 and 2014 study years, the ranges of the correlations were slightly larger for the 2013 study year. However, for each combination of variables, the mean and median values of the validity coefficients tended to be similar, if not equal. In 2013 and 2014, the observed mean correlations for LSAT score with UGPA were 0.26 and 0.27, respectively. Median correlations for LSAT score with UGPA were 0.25 and 0.27 for the 2013 and 2014 study years, respectively.

TABLE 4

Summary correlations between pairs of variables across law schools participating in the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies: Total applicant pool

Variables	Year	Mean	SD	25 th %ile	50 th %ile	75 th %ile	Minimum	Maximum
LSAT with FYA ^a	2013	0.59	0.06	0.54	0.59	0.63	0.35	0.74
	2014	0.59	0.06	0.55	0.60	0.64	0.42	0.78
UGPA with FYA ^a	2013	0.43	0.06	0.39	0.43	0.47	0.15	0.57
	2014	0.43	0.06	0.39	0.44	0.47	0.28	0.55
LSAT with UGPA ^b	2013	0.26	0.06	0.23	0.25	0.30	0.10	0.45
	2014	0.27	0.06	0.24	0.27	0.31	0.11	0.46

^aAdjusted for restriction of range.

^bBased on all applicants.

One important finding to note from Table 2 above is that the mean correlation for LSAT score with UGPA for matriculants is close to 0 and negative for both study years, ranging from -0.55 to 0.28. This suggests that a number of law schools may to some degree be employing a *compensatory admission model*. A compensatory admission model allows schools to admit students based on some other evidence of their ability to do well in school. For example, this type of model allows a high LSAT score to compensate for a low UGPA or, conversely, a high UGPA to compensate for a low LSAT score in making admission decisions. Law schools that rely heavily on a compensatory admission model tend to have negative correlations for LSAT score with UGPA.

Table 5 presents the mean correlations for LSAT score with FYA, UGPA with FYA, and the combination of LSAT score and UGPA with FYA, grouped by the correlation of LSAT score with UGPA.

Correlations for LSAT with UGPA were negative for 63% ($n = 95$) of the schools in 2013 and 62% ($n = 93$) of the schools in 2014. Results also show that the correlations with FYA for either predictor alone and for the two predictors combined are consistently higher for schools where the correlation of LSAT score with UGPA is positive.

TABLE 5

Mean correlations of LSAT and UGPA with FYA in law schools, grouped by the correlation of LSAT score with UGPA

Year	LSAT with UGPA	No. of Schools	LSAT & UGPA		
			Combined	LSAT Alone	UGPA Alone
2013	Less than 0.0	95	0.46	0.35	0.22
	0.0 to 0.2	53	0.52	0.42	0.31
	Greater than 0.2	3	0.52	0.45	0.35
2014	Less than 0.0	93	0.45	0.36	0.22
	0.0 to 0.2	54	0.51	0.43	0.31
	Greater than 0.2	4	0.58	0.51	0.39

Cross-Validation

Results cross-validating the correlation between the predicted FYA and the actual FYA for the 2014 class, using the 2013 prediction equations, are shown in Table 6. As can be seen, the correlations obtained from the cross-validation are very similar to the correlations reported in Table 2. The combined LSAT and UGPA multiple correlations for the 2013 and 2014 study years were 0.47 and 0.48, respectively, with $SD = 0.07$ for both study years. The correlation between the predicted FYA and the actual FYA for the 2014 class, using the 2013 prediction equations, was 0.50 ($SD = 0.10$).

TABLE 6

Cross-validated multiple correlation, using 2013 prediction equations, for the 2014 class data

Correlation	Mean	SD	25 th %ile	50 th %ile	75 th %ile	Minimum	Maximum	% >0.4
Predicted FYA and Actual FYA	0.50	0.10	0.44	0.50	0.56	0.07	0.74	85.43

Additionally, when the equations from the immediately preceding year were used to predict FYA for each school using their school-specific prediction equation, the correlation between predicted and actual FYA exceeded 0.40 for approximately 85% of the schools. This result is slightly higher than results reported in previous studies (Table 7).

TABLE 7

Percentage of schools exceeding the correlation coefficient of 0.4

Author (Study Year)	LSAT Correlation Studies	Percentage
Evans (1982)	1977	73%
	1978	74%
	1979	82%
Wightman (1993)	1990–1992	86%
Anthony et al. (1997)	1995–1996	75%
Anthony et al. (1999)	1997–1998	82%
Thornton et al. (2005)	1999–2000	81%
Stilwell et al. (2005)	2001–2002	82%
Diamond-Dalessandro et al. (2005)	2003–2004	70%
Stilwell et al. (2007)	2005–2006	68%
Stilwell et al. (2009)	2007–2008	77%
Stilwell et al. (2011)	2009–2010	80%
Anthony et al. (2013)	2011–2012	79%

Conclusion

This national summary of the 2013 and 2014 LSAT Correlation Studies lends continued support for the validity of the LSAT for use in the law school admission process. Major findings from this study are summarized as follows:

- Of the variables studied in this report, the combination of LSAT score and UGPA is the most robust predictor of academic performance in the first year of law school. The mean multiple correlation of FYA with the combined predictors of LSAT score and UGPA was 0.47 and 0.48 for the 2013 and 2014 study years, respectively. This correlation is similar to multiple correlation coefficients reported for previous correlation study years.
- In evaluating LSAT scores and UGPAs separately, LSAT scores continue to be a better predictor of law school performance than UGPA. The mean validity coefficients (correlations) for LSAT score as a predictor of FYA were 0.37 for 2013 and 0.39 for 2014, compared to mean validity coefficients for UGPA as a predictor of 0.25 for 2013 and 0.26 for 2014.
- Grouping schools by the magnitude of the correlation of LSAT score with UGPA, it was found that the validity coefficients increased when the correlations between the predictors increased. This relationship provides some indication of the impact of the restriction of range resulting from using only matriculated students on the estimates of validity, particularly in schools using a compensatory admission model.

- Cross-validation studies support the use of regression equations based on previous first-year classes to predict future performance of law school applicants.

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