

LSAC RESEARCH REPORT SERIES

■ **Analysis of Differential Prediction of Law
School Performance by Racial/Ethnic Subgroups**

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■ **Law School Admission Council
LSAT Technical Report 98-02
March 1998**



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
Methods.	2
<i>Sample.</i>	2
<i>LSAT Version.</i>	2
<i>Variables Used in the Study</i>	3
<i>Analysis Methods.</i>	3
Results.	3
<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	3
<i>Predicting First-year Averages</i>	10
Conclusions	14
References	15

Executive Summary

This study was designed to address questions of differential prediction in the law school admission process for various racial/ethnic subgroups. Such research is essential for assuring that the admission process is fair to all subgroups in the applicant population. Differential prediction was evaluated by comparing the predicted and actual law school first-year average (FYA) for various racial/ethnic subgroups within individual law schools based on regression equations commonly used in the admission process.

The sample used in this study was drawn from 1993, 1994, and 1995 entering law school classes, using data that were available from the Law School Admission Council (LSAC)-sponsored Correlation Studies. Data from 160 law schools, each of which enrolled 10 or more first-year students who identified themselves as Asian American, Black, or Latino were analyzed and reported.

Least-squares regression analyses were carried out to predict FYA using Law School Admission Test (LSAT) scores alone, undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA) alone, and the best predictive linear combination of these two variables. Analyses were carried out separately for each law school included in the study, resulting in three regression lines for each law school. The regression analyses were carried out for the combined group of students included in the study (i.e., combined minority and nonminority subgroups).

The results reported here indicate that FYA tends to be slightly overpredicted for all minority subgroups analyzed when LSAT score, UGPA, or the combination of these two variables are used as the predictors. The most serious overprediction was observed for the use of UGPA alone. The results do not support the concern that the LSAT score or the traditional combination of LSAT score and UGPA result in unfair admission decisions for the racial/ethnic subgroups studied here.

Introduction

Recently, the proportion of minority students in law schools has increased, due in part to efforts to increase racial/ethnic cultural diversity among law school students, and, ultimately, within the legal profession. Between the 1987-88 and 1996-97 academic years, the percentage of Asian American first-year law school students rose from 2.6 to 6.2; the percentage of Black first-year law school students rose from 5.7 to 7.5; and the Latino representation in first-year law school classes rose from 3.3 to 5.1 (American Bar Association, 1989, 1998).

While the representation of these racial/ethnic groups in first-year law school classes is increasing, the difference between minority and nonminority performance on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) remains large. The combination of substantial differences in LSAT scores and the underrepresentation of minorities in law school continues to raise questions about the validity of the test for minority test takers, and about possible differences in prediction of law-school performance as a consequence of relying in whole or in part on LSAT scores.

Indeed, these questions are not new to research sponsored by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), nor are they unique to the LSAT or to the law school admission process. Several studies using LSAT data to investigate questions of differential subgroup validity have been sponsored previously by the LSAC (Linn & Hastings, 1984; Powers, 1977; Schrader & Pitcher, 1973, 1974; Wightman and Muller, 1990). Differential prediction has also been the subject of research studies for other admission-testing programs such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (e.g., Breland, 1979; Willingham, Lewis, Morgan, & Ramist, 1990) and the Graduate Management Admission Test (e.g., Braun & Jones, 1981). Numerous studies focusing on the same questions in the arena of employment testing have also been reported (e.g., Houston & Novick, 1987; National Research Council, 1989; Schmidt & Hunter, 1981). Most of these studies concluded that, although there is evidence of differential prediction for minorities, there is no evidence of bias against those groups. That is, the use of the majority regression or the use of the pooled regression model tends to overpredict minority performance on the criterion variable.

The present study is a partial replication of earlier studies by Powers (1977) and Wightman and Muller (1990), and is designed to address the following questions:

1. Do either of the traditional predictors of first-year law school performance, LSAT score or undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA), or the combination of both of these predictors result in differential prediction for minority applicants?
2. Are the traditional predictors of law school performance systematically unfair to minority applicants? That is, do they tend to underpredict future law school performance for the minority subgroups being studied?

The Wightman and Muller (1990) study included data from Hispanic students as well as from Black and Mexican American students. That earlier study provided limited representation among law schools, including data from 51 schools that had sufficient numbers of Black students, 7 schools that had sufficient Mexican American students, and 13 schools that had sufficient Hispanic students. The present study includes data from Asian American students as well as from Black and Latino students. In addition, the current study provides broad representation among law schools, including data from 110 schools that had sufficient numbers of Asian American students, 139 schools that had sufficient Black students, and 109 schools that had sufficient Latino students.

It is important to replicate the earlier studies not only because the earlier data described entering classes of many years ago, but also because the content and format of the LSAT has changed substantially since those studies were completed. The present study analyzed data from students who entered law school in 1993, 1994, and 1995 who earned LSAT scores on the most recent version of the test and whose scores were reported on the 120 to 180 LSAT score scale.

Methods

Sample

The sample used in this study was drawn from 1993, 1994, and 1995 entering law-school classes. The study included all law schools in the United States and Puerto Rico for which three years of sufficient race/ethnicity data were available and that participated in the 1996 LSAC Correlation Studies. While 172 law schools participated in the correlation studies for those years, after excluding schools for which accurate racial/ethnic data were not available, 160 schools were included in this study. This means that data for approximately 93 percent of those schools participating in the correlation studies for the time period of interest were included here. The total pool included approximately 88,743 law school students across three entering classes. The data from the three classes were combined in order to increase the number of records for minority students, both to assure stability in the analyses and to increase the representation of law schools.

The analyses carried out here focused on the Black, Latino, and Asian American subgroups. The racial/ethnic identity used for the correlation studies data is based on the self-reported racial/ethnic description code provided by students on the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) subscription form. Note that the Latino subgroup consisted of those students who reported themselves as either Hispanic or Mexican American.

Data were analyzed separately by law school for each law school that had 10 or more students from at least one of the minority groups of interest. Among the schools that participated in the 1996 Correlation Studies, 110 had 10 or more Asian American students, 139 had 10 or more Black students, and 109 had 10 or more Latino students. Note that the earlier study by Wightman and Muller required a minimum of 30 minority students per law school as they developed separate regression equations for each subgroup.

LSAT Version

All students whose data were used in this study were tested with the most recent version of the LSAT. The current version of the test includes five 35-minute sections. One section is a variable section that contains material that is used to pretest new questions or preequate new test forms. The variable section does not contribute to the test taker's score. The other four sections contain items designed to measure analytical (or deductive) reasoning, verbal (or informal logical) reasoning, and reading comprehension. The specific item type makeup is as follows:

Item Type	Number of Items	Time
Reading Comprehension	26 to 28	35 minutes
Logical Reasoning A	24 to 26	35 minutes
Logical Reasoning B	24 to 26	35 minutes
Analytical Reasoning	22 to 24	35 minutes

The total number of scored items is 101 for all the forms analyzed in the current study. A single score derived from the sum of the total number of questions answered correctly across the four scored sections is then equated and reported on an LSAT scale that ranges from 120 to 180. A 30-minute writing sample is administered at the end of the test. This writing assessment is not scored by LSAC, but copies of the writing sample are sent to all law schools to which the test taker applies.

Variables Used in the Study

The variables analyzed in this study are those that are currently used in the LSAC Correlation Studies: first-year average (FYA), undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA), and LSAT score. LSAT score and UGPA are the predictor variables (i.e., the variables that are used to predict performance in the first year of law school). FYA, the measure of performance in the first year of law school, is the criterion variable, or the variable that LSAT and UGPA are used to predict. Only students for whom data are available on each of the three variables were included in this study. Additional operational details related to these three variables are now given:

First-year average. This variable is the average grade earned by the student in the first year of law school. First-year average is provided for each student by the individual law schools. Different law schools use different scales for first-year grades. Data analyses were conducted using FYA on the scale in which the school supplied it. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the individual schools and to allow direct comparison across law schools, FYA values were transformed to a scale having a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Results presented in this report are on the transformed 50/10 scale.

Undergraduate grade-point average. The average grade earned by each student during his or her undergraduate study is computed by the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), or according to LSDAS procedures, by using the computing options selected for the undergraduate school the student attended. Grades computed in this manner are expressed on a scale of 0.00 to 4.33. The UGPA used in these studies are the same as those used in the LSAC Correlation Studies carried out for the individual law schools.

LSAT scores. Only LSAT scores reported on the 120 to 180 score scale were used in this study. For students who present multiple LSAT scores, a single arithmetic average of the multiple scores was used. If any student took the test more than three times, only the most recent three scores were averaged.

Analysis Methods

This study was undertaken to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of using LSAT score and UGPA to predict performance in law school for minority students from a single prediction equation developed from data from White students and minority students combined. In other words, the study seeks to evaluate the potential for differential prediction across Asian American, Black, Latino, and White law school student subgroups. The same analyses that are used in the ongoing predictive validity studies for individual schools that participate in the LSAC Correlation Studies were used in this study. A least-squares regression analysis was used to predict first-year average from UGPA, from LSAT score, and from the combination of the two predictors. The analyses were carried out separately for each law school using the pooled three-year data. Consequently, the implicit assumption of the validity of pooling data across three years within a single law school so as to achieve stable regressions was necessary for the present study as it is for the correlation studies. Additionally, some basic summary statistics (counts, percents, and means) were calculated to compare minority and nonminority test takers.

Results

The results from this study are presented in two sections. The first section includes descriptive data about the minority first-year students. Some descriptive data are also presented for nonminority students for comparative purposes. The results of applying the prediction equations derived using the total group data (i.e., minority and nonminority first-year students) are reported in the second section.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the sample of students within the law schools used in this study are presented in Tables 1-3 and Figures 1a-1d. These data provide information about the number and proportion of minority and nonminority students and the size of the minority groups among the law schools included in this study. This allows for the comparison of LSAT performance, undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA), and performance in first-year of law school (FYA) between minority and nonminority test takers.

Table 1 describes the overall racial/ethnic subgroup breakdown among the 172 schools that participated in the 1996 LSAC Correlation Studies. Table 2 provides similar information for the 160 schools included in the current study. A comparison of the two tables shows that this study is very representative of the LSAC Correlation Studies sample. Of the 84,332 students from the White, Asian American, Black, and Latino racial/ethnic subgroups at the 160 schools included in this study and represented across the three years, 68,164 (80.8 percent) were White; 5,050 (6.0 percent) were Asian American; 6,814 (8.1 percent) were Black; and 4,304 (5.1 percent) were Latino. The percentages of minorities among schools included in this study are similar to the percentages reported by the American Bar Association (1998) for all law schools.

TABLE 1

Number and percentage of Asian American, Black, Latino, and White first-year students among schools that were included in the 1996 LSAC correlation studies

Entering Class	Total	Number of Schools	Asian American		Black		Latino		White	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1993	35,746	166	1,926	5.4	2,717	7.6	1,735	4.9	27,714	77.5
1994	38,693	171	2,305	6.0	2,990	7.7	1,882	4.9	29,515	76.3
1995	36,655	166	2,142	5.8	2,828	7.7	1,755	4.8	27,865	76.0
Pooled Data	111,094	172	6,373	5.7	8,535	7.7	5,372	4.8	85,094	76.6

TABLE 2

Number and percentage of Asian American, Black, Latino, and White first-year students among schools that were included in the current study

Entering Class	Total	Number of Schools	Asian American		Black		Latino		White	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1993	29,008	154	1,565	5.4	2,197	7.6	1,412	4.9	22,519	77.6
1994	30,974	158	1,799	5.8	2,381	7.7	1,473	4.8	23,790	76.8
1995	28,761	154	1,686	5.9	2,236	7.8	1,419	4.9	21,855	76.0
Pooled Data	88,743	160	5,050	5.7	6,814	7.7	4,304	4.9	68,164	76.8

The analyses reported in this study were based on data from 160 American Bar Association-approved law schools. Recall that only schools with at least 10 students from the minority group of interest were included in the analyses. As Table 3 indicates, the sample included 110 law schools that met the sample size requirements for Asian American students, 139 schools that met the requirements for Black students, and 109 schools that met the requirements for Latino students. The data presented in this table reveal that many more schools were included in this study than were included in the Wightman and Muller (1990) study. Two factors seem to have contributed to this increased sample size. First, as mentioned earlier, the Wightman and Muller study only included schools with 30 or more students from the minority group of interest. Examining the 10-29 minority group size column of Table 3 reveals that many more schools were included in these analyses as a result of including schools with 10 or more students representing the minority group of interest. The second factor is the recent increase in representation of minority groups in law school, as reported by the American Bar Association (1998).

TABLE 3

Summary of the number of included law schools by size of minority group

Minority Group	Size of Group					Total
	10 -29	30 - 49	50 - 74	75 - 99	100 or More	
Asian American	51	24	17	10	8	110
Black	56	34	29	8	12	139
Latino	61	26	11	4	7	109

Figures 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d provide a graphical display of the number of law schools represented in the present study categorized by the percentage of students in the various subgroups. The numbers displayed on the horizontal axes of these graphs represent the midpoints of the intervals used in these analyses. Figures 1a through 1c reveal that most law schools included in this study have between zero and 10 percent representation for the Black, Latino, and Asian American subgroups, respectively. Figure 1d displays quite clearly that most of the law schools included in this study are made up primarily of White students.

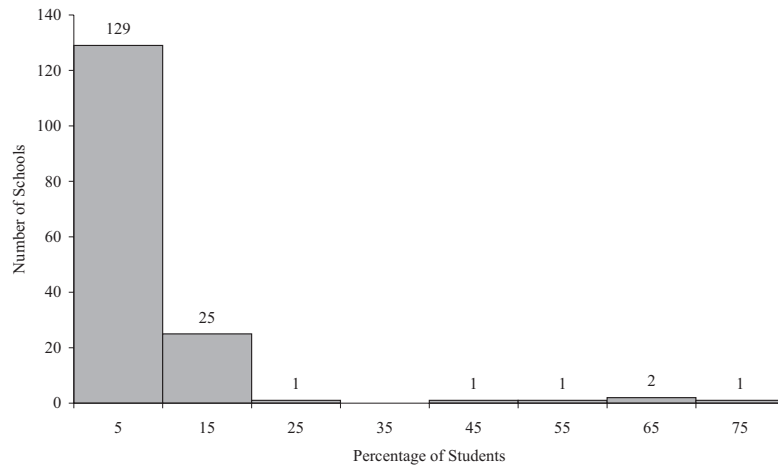


FIGURE 1a. *Frequency distribution of percentage of Black students at the participating law schools*

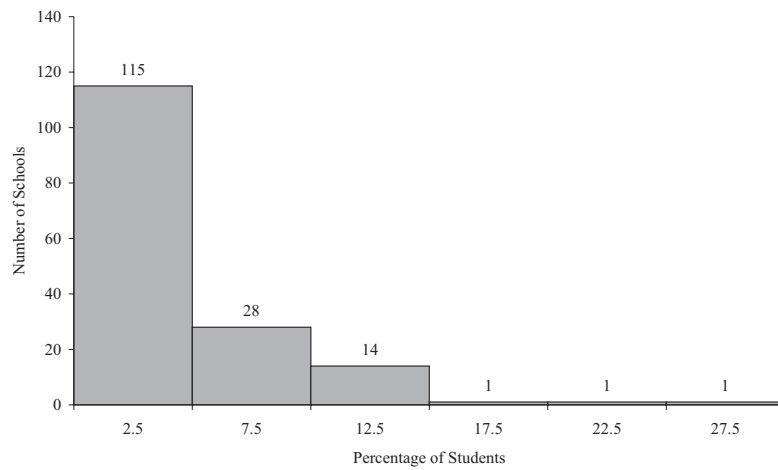


FIGURE 1b. *Frequency distribution of percentage of Latino students at the participating law schools*

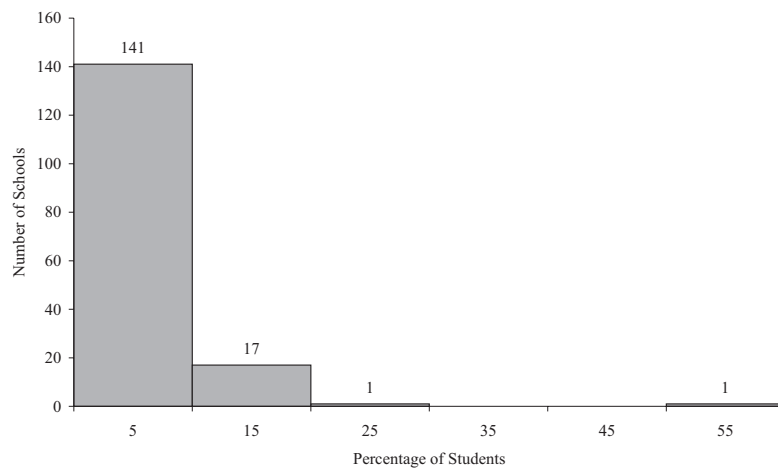


FIGURE 1c. *Frequency distribution of percentage of Asian American students at the participating law schools*

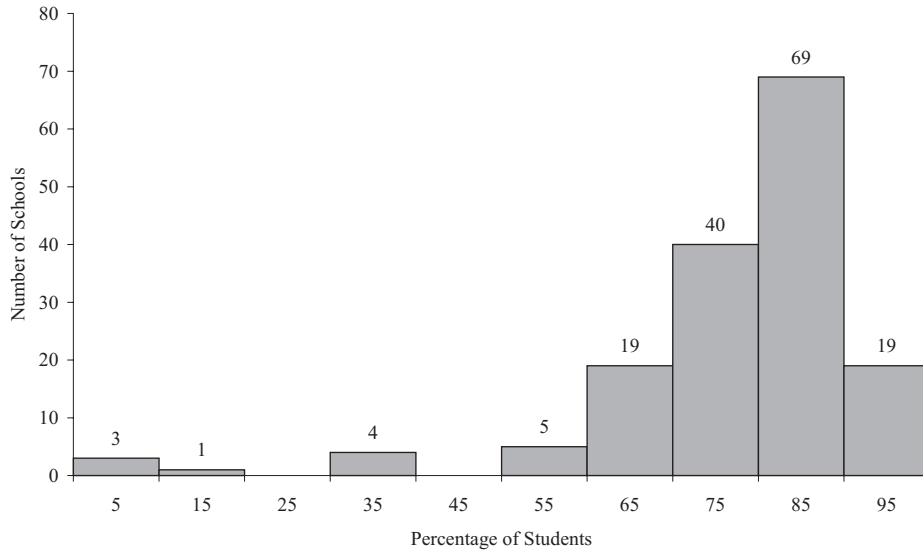


FIGURE 1d. *Frequency distribution of percentage of White students at the participating law schools*

Figure 2a presents the differences between mean LSAT score for Black and White students. In calculating the data presented in this figure, the mean LSAT score was first calculated separately for each racial/ethnic subgroup at each school. The difference between the means for the two subgroups being compared (i.e., LSAT mean for White applicants minus LSAT mean for Black applicants) was then determined. Figure 2a summarized the number of schools displaying each LSAT mean difference observed. Figures 2b and 2c present similar analyses of mean differences for the Black and White subgroups in UGPA, and FYA, respectively. Figures 2a through 2c reveal that White students tend to outperform Black students on each of the predictors, LSAT and UGPA, and on the criterion measure, first-year average in law school.

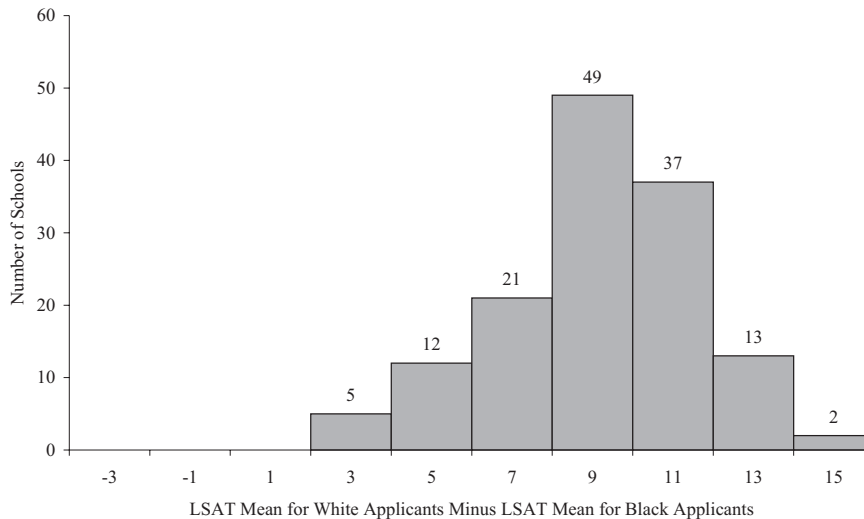


FIGURE 2a. *Frequency distribution of differences between LSAT means for the Black and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

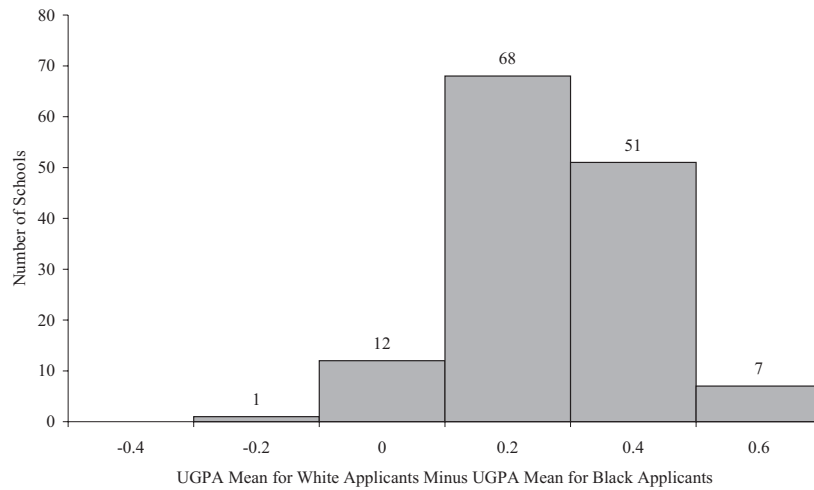


FIGURE 2b. *Frequency distribution of differences between UGPA means for the Black and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

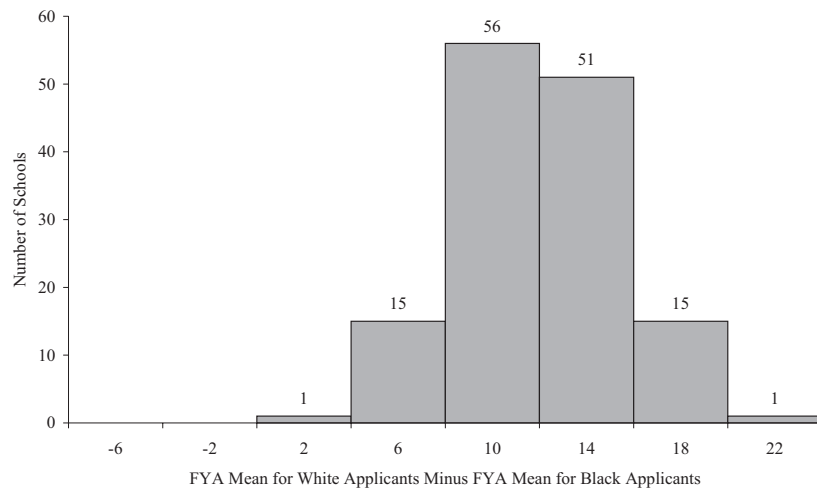


FIGURE 2c. *Frequency distribution of differences between FYA means for the Black and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

Figures 3a through 3c present similar analyses of the mean differences between the performance of White and Latino law students on LSAT, UGPA, and FYA, respectively. Figures 4a through 4c present results comparing the performance of White and Asian American law students on these variables. A pattern of LSAT, UGPA, and FYA differences similar to but less extreme than those observed for the Black subgroup is observed for the Latino subgroup. Differences reported for the Asian American subgroup are smaller than those reported for the other two minority subgroups.

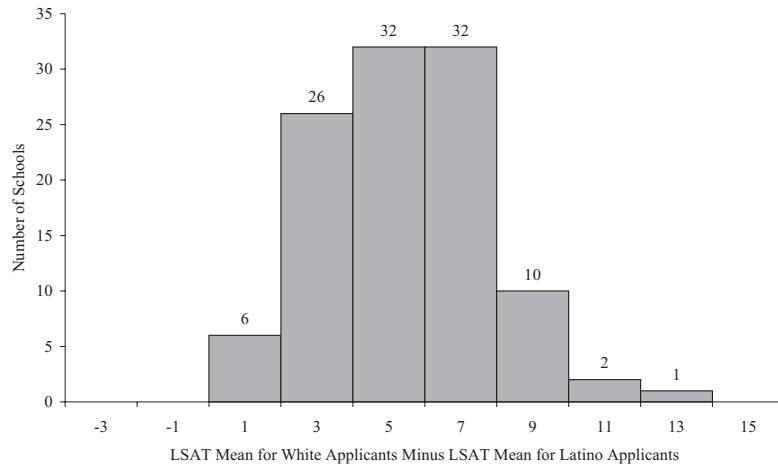


FIGURE 3a. *Frequency distribution of differences between LSAT means for the Latino and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

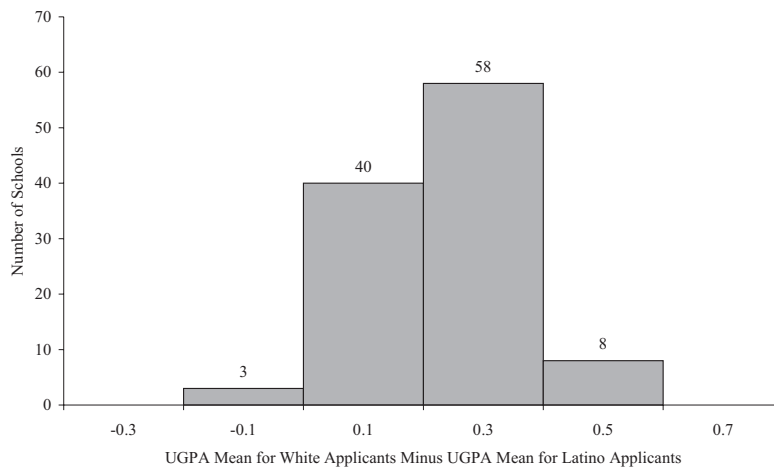


FIGURE 3b. *Frequency distribution of differences between UGPA means for the Latino and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

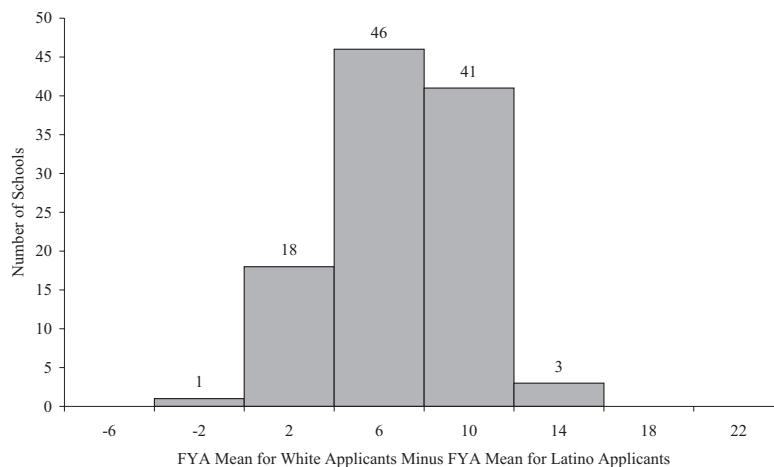


FIGURE 3c. *Frequency distribution of differences between FYA means for the Latino and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

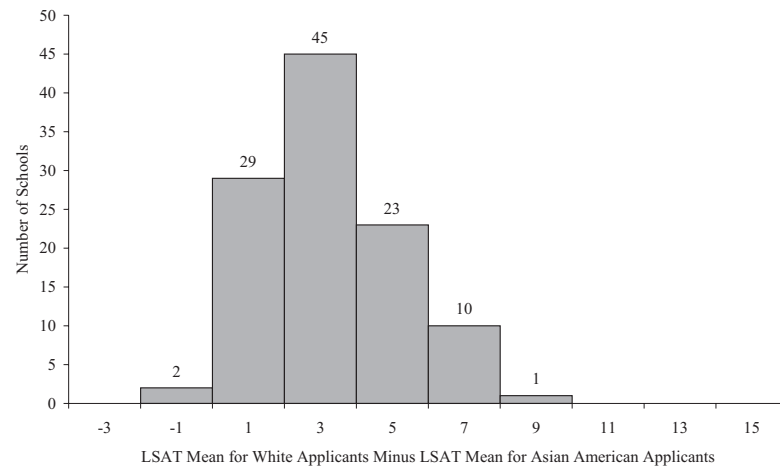


FIGURE 4a. *Frequency distribution of differences between LSAT means for the Asian and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

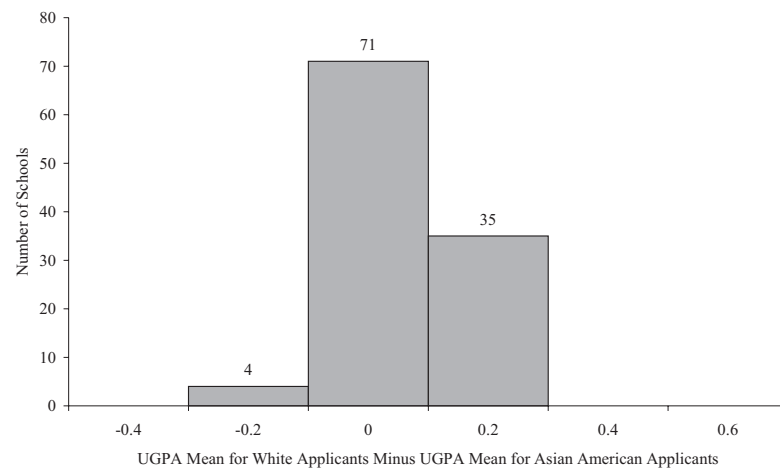


FIGURE 4b. *Frequency distribution of differences between UGPA means for the Asian and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

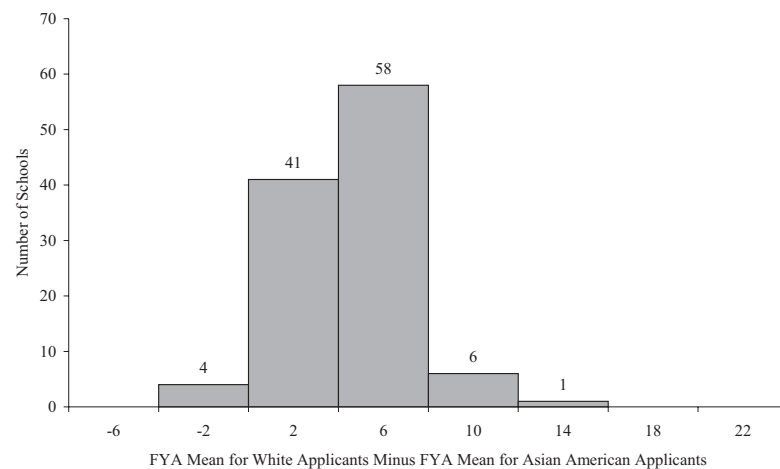


FIGURE 4c. *Frequency distribution of differences between FYA means for the Asian and White subgroups at the participating law schools*

Predicting First-year Averages

The primary research question addressed by this study was whether or not LSAT, UGPA, or the combination of these two predictor variables differentially predicted FYA for minority groups as compared to majority law school students. Predictions were made by deriving separate multiple- regression equations for the total group of law school students, within each individual law school, using LSAT alone, UGPA alone, and the combination of LSAT and UGPA to predict law school FYA. Comparisons between the predicted and actual FYA were then made for each subgroup based on each regression equation. The calculations and comparisons were made using each school’s own grading scale, but all of the first-year averages were converted to a scale where the mean for the total group was set to 50 and the standard deviation to 10. The conversion was made to preserve the confidentiality of the data and to allow comparisons across law schools.

Figures 5a through 5c show the differences between predicted and actual first-year average means for White and Black law students using LSAT only, UGPA only, and LSAT and UGPA combined as the predictor variables, respectively. Note that a negative value indicates that the regression equation underpredicted the mean performance of a minority subgroup in a law school, while a positive difference indicates that the regression equation overpredicted the mean performance of a minority subgroup in a law school.

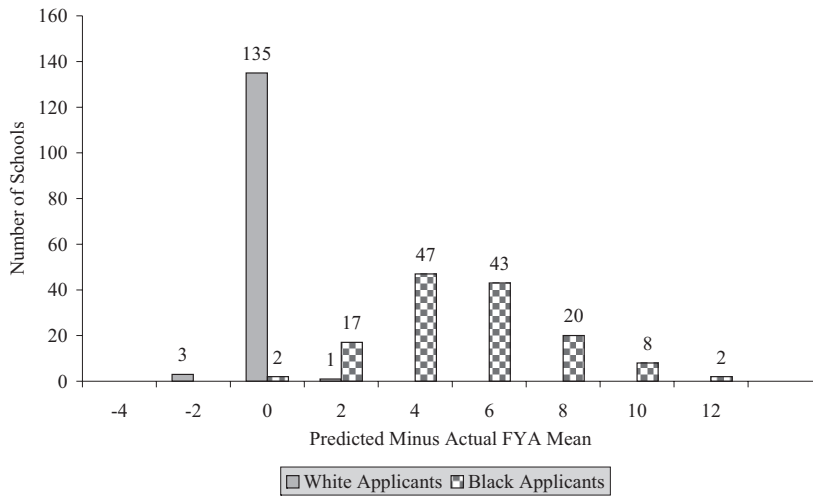


FIGURE 5a. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Black and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score as the predictor variable

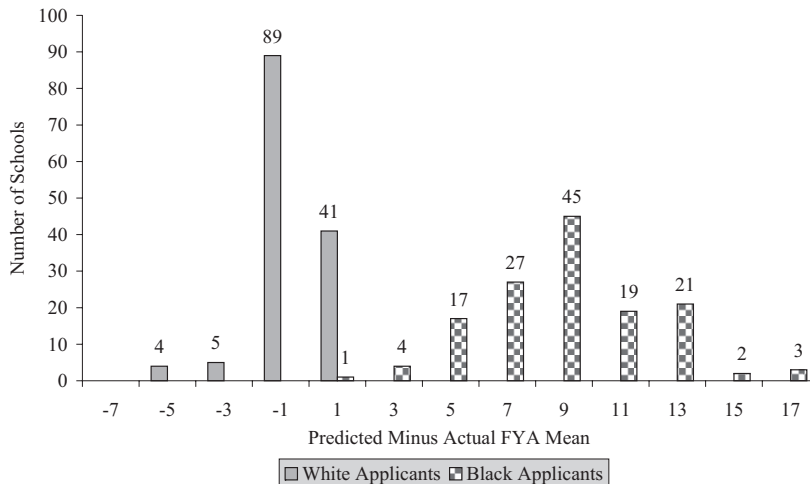


FIGURE 5b. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Black and White subgroups at participating law schools using UGPA as the predictor variable

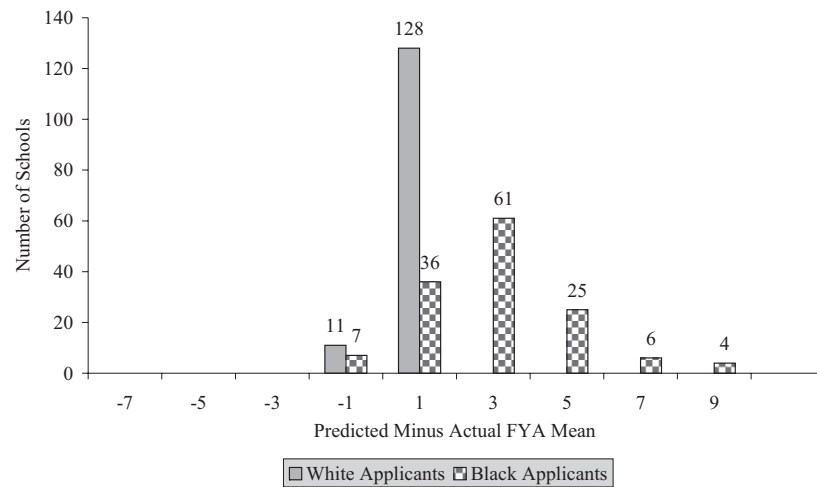


FIGURE 5c. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Black and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score and UGPA as the predictor variables

Figure 5a reveals that when first-year average is estimated from a regression equation based on data from the White and minority groups combined, LSAT alone emerges as an accurate predictor of law school performance for the White subgroup, but tends to overpredict the performance of Black students. Figure 5b reveals that UGPA alone overpredicts the performance of Black law school students to a greater extent than LSAT alone and slightly underpredicts the performance of White law students. Finally, the combination of LSAT and UGPA, presented in Figure 5c, is the most accurate predictor of law school performance for Black students among the prediction equations studied here. However, performance of Black law students is still slightly overpredicted by this combination of variables.

The results for the Latino subgroup, presented in Figures 6a through 6c, reveal a similar pattern to the results observed for the Black subgroup, though performance of this subgroup is overpredicted to a lesser extent than that observed for the Black subgroup. Results for the Asian American subgroup, presented in Figures 7a through 7c, are also similar. However, the overprediction for this subgroup is the least severe observed in this study.

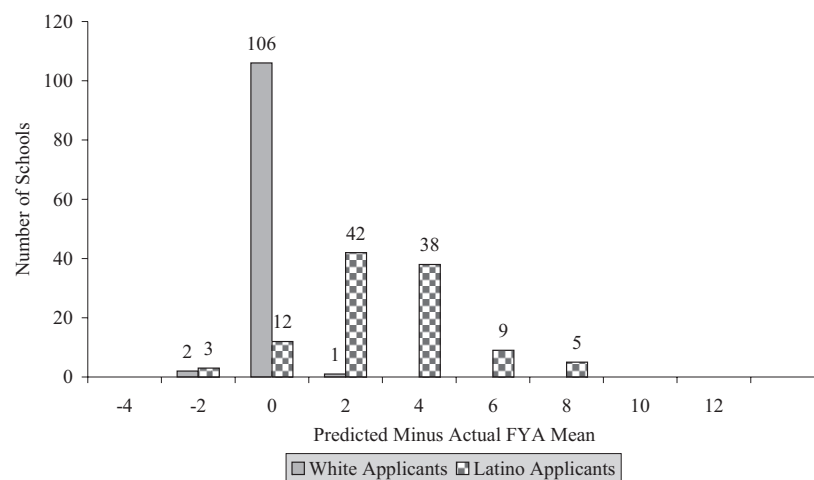


FIGURE 6a. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Latino and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score as the predictor variable

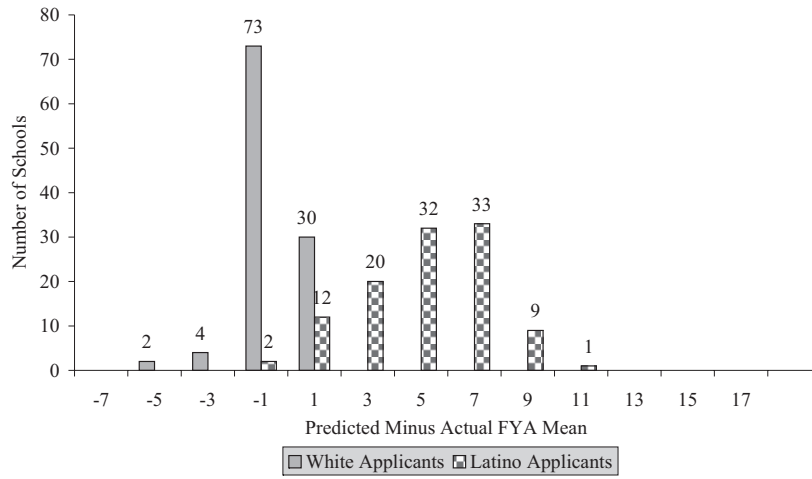


FIGURE 6b. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Latino and White subgroups at participating law schools using UGPA as the predictor variable

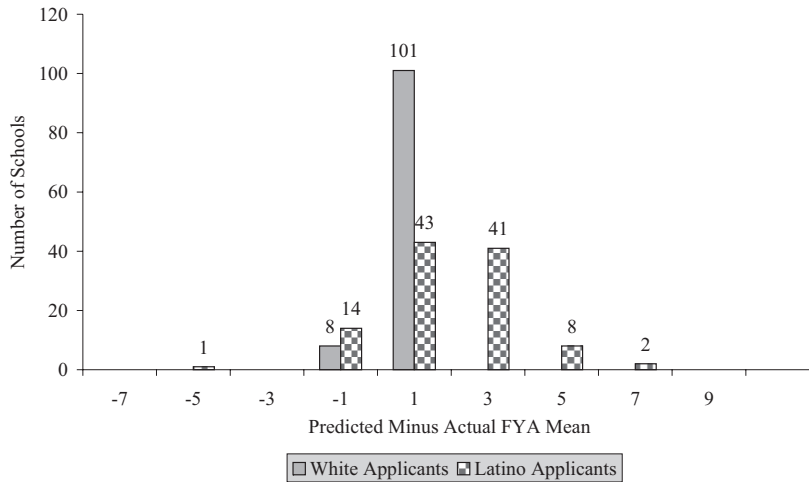


FIGURE 6c. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Latino and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score and UGPA as the predictor variables

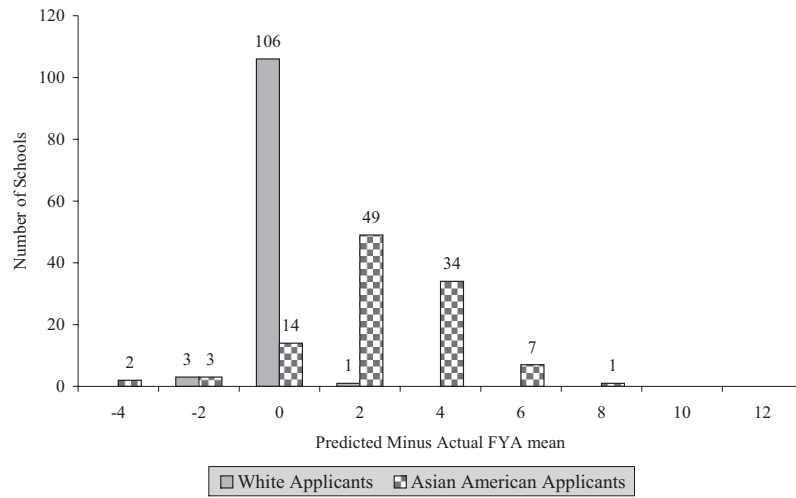


FIGURE 7a. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Asian American and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score as the predictor variable

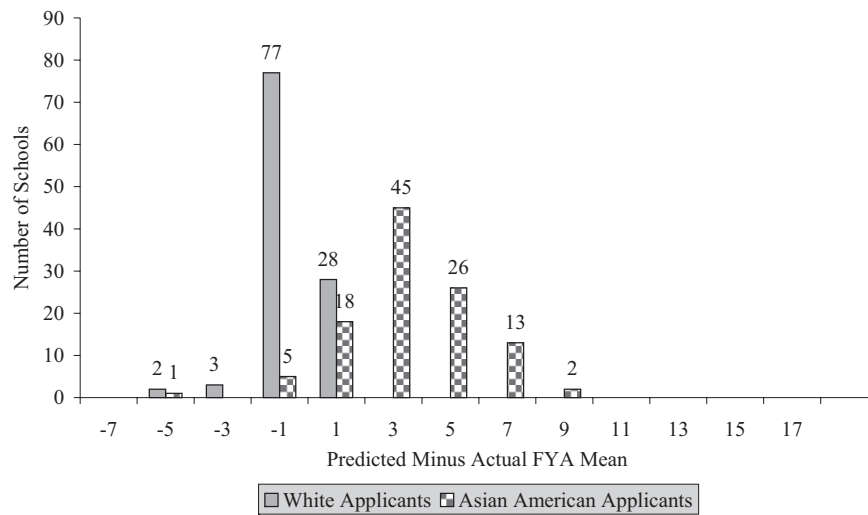


FIGURE 7b. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Asian American and White subgroups at participating law schools using UGPA as the predictor variable

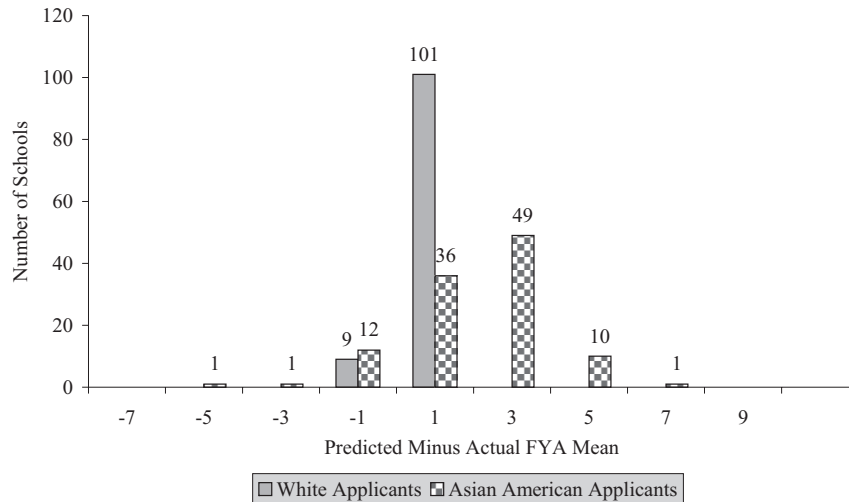


FIGURE 7c. Frequency distributions of differences between predicted and actual FYA means for Asian American and White subgroups at participating law schools using LSAT score and UGPA as the predictor variables

Conclusions

This study analyzed data from 160 law schools, each of which enrolled 10 or more first-year students who identified themselves as a member of one of three minority groups—Asian American, Black, or Latino. The present study, like earlier studies of its kind, was conducted to determine whether evidence exists of differential prediction for members of different racial/ethnic subgroups. More importantly, results of this study were evaluated to determine if the current practices used to predict law school performance are unfair to certain minority subgroups. Use by admission committees of a regression equation that systematically excludes members of some minority subgroup by underpredicting the performance of its members or overpredicting the performance of some other group could result in admission decisions that are unfair to minority group members.

Regression equations derived by combining data for all minority and nonminority students included in this study were used to evaluate differential prediction of law school FYA when LSAT alone, UGPA alone, and LSAT and UGPA combined were used as predictors. The use of UGPA alone as a predictor seems to produce the most differential prediction for all three of the minority groups studied. The data confirm that using the combination of LSAT and UGPA produces the least amount of differential prediction, as compared to using either predictor alone for each of the subgroups studied. This is true for every school in the study.

While the use of LSAT and UGPA in combination resulted in the most accurate prediction of first-year law school performance, it is worth noting that none of the regression equations studied would serve to systematically exclude members of the three minority groups studied here. Performance of the minority students tended to be slightly overpredicted rather than underpredicted for all three of the regression models evaluated. The performance of White students was slightly underpredicted by the use of UGPA alone, but this difference was greatly diminished in the regression equation combining LSAT and UGPA.

At least two caveats should be remembered while evaluating the results of this study. First, only differences in *average* predicted performance were analyzed. That is, individuals within a subgroup that is overpredicted on average may still be themselves underpredicted in terms of their individual law school performance. Second, differential prediction is only one aspect of an overall construct validity evaluation. Other aspects, such as the strength of the correlation between a predictor and a criterion variable, should also be considered when deciding whether prediction equations are equitable and valid.

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