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The LSAT Myth

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THE LSAT MYTH

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Predicting which students will perform well in law school may seem like an impossible task, but law schools endeavor to do so everyday, and the primary tool they use to make such predictions is the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), a standardized, 101-question multiple-choice examination. Over the past couple of decades, the LSAT has become "the single most important factor in the entire law school application process."[1] It is more important than the undergraduate grade point average (UGPA), the reputation of the undergraduate institution, or the rigor of the undergraduate major.[2] This article explores whether the LSAT warrants such prominence.

Using statistical and anecdotal evidence, this article analyzes recent graduates of Marquette University Law School (MULS) to ascertain whether: (1) the LSAT is a valid predictor of three-year performance in law school; (2) the LSAT is a better predictor of law school performance than the UGPA or the reputation of the applicant's undergraduate institution; (3) an applicant's undergraduate major is useful in predicting law school performance; and (4) an applicant's age at the time of entry into law school is a valid predictor of law school performance.[3]

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The statistical and anecdotal analyses of MULS's 1998 and 1999 graduating classes produced some noteworthy results. First, the LSAT was a very weak predictor of three-year law school performance at MULS; it was a valid predictor for less than 20% of students. Second, the UGPA was better at predicting law school performance than the LSAT. Third, the reputation of a student's undergraduate institution was also better at predicting law school performance than the LSAT. Fourth, a combination of the UGPA and

1. IAN VAN TUYL ET AL., THE BEST LAW SCHOOLS 31 (2000 ed.).
2. *Id.*
3. THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO U.S. LAW SCHOOL 7 (2001 ed.). Other qualitative factors considered by law schools are the applicant's improvement in grades and graduate work. These factors are not considered in this article.

reputation of undergraduate institution was a better predictor of law school performance than either a combination of the LSAT and UGPA or a combination of the LSAT and reputation of undergraduate institution. Fifth, there was no significant correlation between undergraduate majors and law school performance. Finally, there was no significant correlation between age and law school performance.

These findings support two hypotheses. First, law schools, like MULS, that rely heavily on LSAT scores in the admissions process are not admitting the best available students because there is little correlation between LSAT scores and law school performance. Second, if more reliance were placed on an applicant's UGPA and/or the quality of his or her undergraduate institution, law schools would attract better and brighter students.

The findings in this article should not surprise legal educators, as such findings are consistent with the evidence in the well-known case of *Grutter v. Bollinger*,[4] in which the court stated:

> One such solution would be to relax, or even eliminate, reliance on the LSAT. The evidence presented at trial indicated that the LSAT predicts law school grades rather poorly (with a correlation of only 10-20%) and that it does not predict success in the legal profession at all. If, as its admissions policy states, [the University of Michigan Law School] seeks students who "have substantial promise for success in law school" and "a strong likelihood of succeeding in the practice of law," one wonders why the law school concerns itself at all with an applicant's LSAT score.[5]

II. THE LSAT'S PREEMINENCE

The LSAT's ascendency in law school admissions is attributable to at least three factors. First, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), the entity that administers the LSAT test, proclaims that not only do "LSAT scores help to predict which students will do well in law school,"[6] but they are better at predicting law school performance than any other single factor.[7] And no one questions the LSAC. That is, until now.

Second, excessive reliance on the LSAT is "indicative of the colossal laziness" of law schools.[8] It is simply much easier to admit or reject an applicant on the basis of a three-digit number than on an extensive evaluation of an assortment of seemingly incomparable and indecipherable criteria, such as the quality of undergraduate institutions, the rigor of certain majors, or the

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4. No. 97-CV-75928-DT, 2001 WL 293196 (E.D. Mich. March 27, 2001), at *1.

5. *Id.* at *43.

6. LSAT & LSDAS REGISTRATION & INFORMATION BOOK 121 (2000-2001 ed.).

7. Edward G. Haggerty (Media Relations Specialist for the LSAC), *LSAT: Uses and Misuses*, 70 N.Y. ST. BAR. J. 45 (Jun. 1998).

8. VAN TUYL, *supra* note 1, at 31.

comparability of undergraduate grade point averages at different colleges and universities.[9] Not surprisingly, therefore, the LSAT has become the primary, and, in some cases, sole factor in the admissions process of many law schools.[10]

Third, the *U.S. News & World Report (U.S. News)* annually ranks law schools based on various objective and subjective criteria. One such criteria is the median LSAT score, which comprises 12.5% of each school's ranking.[11] While 12.5% may seem inconsequential, it is one of the few criteria that law schools have the ability to influence or, arguably, manipulate. As a result, there is nothing law schools won't do to maintain the highest possible median LSAT scores, including, at times, automatically rejecting students with sub-par LSAT scores.[12]

III. SAMPLE

This article analyzes the performance of the graduating classes of 1998 and 1999 of Marquette University Law School.[13] During these years, the student body of MULS was comprised of about 500 students.[14] MULS awards one degree, the Juris Doctor (JD). MULS awarded JDs to 140 students in 1998 and 143 students in 1999.[15] MULS is accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools.[16] MULS is ranked in the Third Tier of the *U.S. News and World Report's* survey of U.S.

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9. Recently, the LSAC has acknowledged the "historic overreliance on the LSAT." Jess Bravin, *Law School Admission Council Aims to Quash Overreliance on LSAT*, THE WALL STREET J., Mar. 29, 2001, at B1.

10. At Marquette University Law School, the LSAT constitutes 65% of an applicant's Index Score. The applicant's undergraduate grade point average comprises the remaining 35%. The Index Score is often the sole factor in determining whether an applicant is admitted into law school.

11. *News You Can Use: Best Graduate Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, Apr. 10, 2000, at 74.

12. MULS exemplifies this point. Like most law schools, MULS has a rolling admissions process. At some point in the late spring or summer, MULS establishes a median LSAT goal. For students who apply after that point, the LSAT often serves as a 100% threshold. Those at or above the median LSAT goal are considered for admission; those below are not.

13. May, August and December graduates are included in the pool.

14. MULS commenced a part-time program in 1997. The analyses in this article do not include any students from this program, as none graduated before 2000.

15. Because the pool is comprised exclusively of graduates, it does not include MULS students who (a) transferred to other law schools, (b) withdrew voluntarily, or (c) were dismissed for academic reasons. These three groups would not consist of many students, considering that MULS's annual attrition rate is typically about 3%. And a significant portion of this 3% occurs before the end of the first year.

16. *See ABA Approved Law Schools, at* http://www.abenet.org/legaled/approvedlawschools/ alpha.html (last visited May 25, 2001).

law schools.[17] Considering its size and reputation, MULS is representative of many American law schools.

IV. VARIABLES

This article analyzes the predictive validity of five factors used by law schools in the admissions process. The correlation between these variables and law school grade point averages (LGPA) is examined below using statistical and/or anecdotal evidence.

LSAT Score. The first factor analyzed in this article is the applicant's LSAT score.[18] All of the students in this study were tested under the post-1991 version of the LSAT, which has a minimum score of 120 and a maximum score of 180. The LSAT scores were reported to MULS by the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), an affiliate of the LSAC. The LSAT scores of MULS's 1998 graduating class ranged from 144 to 165. The top 25th percentile scored from 158 to 165; the bottom 25th percentile scored from 144 to 152. The LSAT scores of MULS's 1999 graduating class ranged from 145 to 167. The top 25th percentile scored from 157 to 167; the bottom 25th percentile scored from 145 to 153.

Undergraduate Grade Point Average. The UGPAs used in this study are those compiled by and reported to MULS by the LSDAS. The UGPAs of MULS's 1998 graduating class ranged from 1.88 to 3.95 on a 4.0 scale. The UGPAs of the top 25th percentile ranged from 3.46 to 3.95; the UGPAs of the bottom 25th percentile ranged from 1.88 to 2.86. The UGPAs of MULS's 1999 graduating class ranged from 2.15 to 4.0 on a 4.0 scale. The UGPAs of the top 25th percentile ranged from 3.47 to 4.0; the UGPAs of the bottom 25th percentile ranged from 2.15 to 2.90.

Reputation of Undergraduate Institution. The third factor analyzed in this article is the reputation of an applicant's undergraduate institution as measured by the *U.S. News and World Report's* most recent college and university rankings.[19] For purposes of this article, institutions grouped in the *U.S. News'* "Top 50 National Universities" and "Top 50 National Liberal Arts Colleges" are considered "Superior Undergraduate Institutions."

Undergraduate Major. The fourth factor analyzed in this article is the applicant's undergraduate major. For purposes of this article, undergraduate majors are divided into six categories: social sciences (*e.g.*, sociology, political

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17. *News You Can Use: Best Graduate Schools,* U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 10, 2000, at 77.

18. MULS generally considers the applicant's highest LSAT score in the admissions process. VAN TUYL, *supra* note 1, at 22 (listing the law schools that use the highest LSAT score).

19. *News You Can Use: America's Best Colleges,* U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Sep. 11, 2000, at 104-30. These rankings are by no means fool-proof, but they are nonetheless heavily relied upon in the admissions process.

science, economics, history, geography, anthropology, psychology, international and foreign studies, government, pre-law); humanities (*e.g.,* English, classical studies, foreign languages, art history, philosophy); natural sciences and math (*e.g.,* biology, chemistry, zoology, mathematics, engineering); business (*e.g.,* accounting, finance, management, marketing, business administration); communication (*e.g.,* communication, journalism, speech communication); and others (*e.g.,* physical education, nursing).

Age. The final factor analyzed in this article is the age of an applicant at the time of entry into law school. For purposes of this article, an applicant is considered "mature age" if he of she was 30 years of age or older at the time of entry into law school.

V. PREDICTIVE VALIDITY

The ability of each of the five variables mentioned above to predict law school performance is analyzed below using statistical and/or anecdotal evidence.

A. *Statistical Evidence*

The LSAC regularly analyzes the correlation between first-year law school grades and LSAT scores. The LSAC uses a statistical model in which:

> correlation is stated as a coefficient for which 1.00 indicates an exact correspondence between candidates' test scores and subsequent law school performance. A coefficient of zero would indicate nothing more than a coincidental relationship between test scores and subsequent performance. The closer to 1.00 the correlation coefficient is, the greater the test's predictive validity. In other words, the closer to 1.00 the correlation coefficient is, the less chance there will be of candidates with high LSAT scores failing in their studies or candidates with low test scores performing at the top of their law school class.[20]

The LSAC's most recent study found that "[c]orrelations between LSAT scores and first-year law school grades ranged from .10 to .66," with a median of .39.[21] But is the LSAT a valid predictor of three-year performance in law school? In theory, the predictive validity of the LSAT should decline after the first year, as three-year law school performance is dependent more on work ethic and dedication (traits consistent with a high UGPA) than natural

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20. LSAT & LSDAS REGISTRATION & INFORMATION BOOK 121 (2000-2001 ed.).

21. *Id.* The LSAC recently commissioned a study of three-year performance in which it concluded that the correlation between LSAT scores and three-year law school performance was similar to the correlation between LSAT scores and first-year performance. LINDA F. WIGHTMAN, BEYOND FYA: ANALYSIS OF THE UTILITY OF LSAT SCORES AND UGPA FOR PREDICTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN LAW SCHOOL 16 (LSAC Research Council Aug. 2000). This study, however, did not analyze individual law schools.

intelligence (a trait consistent with a high LSAT score). The results of this article support such a theory.

1. LSAT/LGPA Correlation

Using the same statistical model as the LSAC (i.e., where 1.0 indicates exact correlation and 0 indicates coincidence), the correlation coefficient for LSAT scores and law school grade point average ("LGPA") for MULS's 1998 graduating class was .192, a very weak correlation by any standard. Indeed, performance on the LSAT accounted for less than 4% of the variance witnessed in law school performance (*i.e.*, an R Square of .037).

The correlation between LSAT scores and LGPA for the 1998 MULS graduating class is described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.192[a]	.037	.030	.31838

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.544	1	.544	5.364	.022[a]
Residual	14.191	140	.101		
Total	14.734	141			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.777		.766	.445
LSAT	1.015	.192	2.316	.022
	1.516E-02			
	.007			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

The correlation coefficient for LSAT scores and LGPA for MULS's 1999 graduating class was even lower than it was for the 1998 class, namely, .179. Again, performance on the LSAT accounted for less than 4% of the variance

witnessed in law school performance (*i.e.*, an R Square of .032), as described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.179[a]	.032	.025	.37587

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.663	1	.663	4.690	.032[a]
Residual	20.062	142	141		
Total	20.724	143			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.264		.199	.843
LSAT	1.332	.179	2.166	.032
	1.860E-02			
	.009			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

There are numerous studies indicating that males generally outperform females on multiple-choice examinations.[22] Thus, in theory the predictive ability of the LSAT—a multiple-choice test—may be worse for females than it is for males. No such disparity was detected, however, for MULS's recent graduates.

In 1998, the LSAT was a better predictor for females than it was for males; the correlation coefficients for LSAT scores and LGPA was .274 for females and .041 for males, with the latter figure being statistically insignificant (*i.e.*, the figure cannot be confidentially distinguished from zero).

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22. *See, e.g.*, Beth Dawson, et al., *Performance on the National Board of Medical Examiners Part 1 Examination by Men & Women of Different Race and Ethnicity*, J. AM. MED. ASS'N 674 (Sep. 7, 1994).

MODEL SUMMARY (FEMALE 1998)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.274[a]	.075	.058	.39952

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.486	1	.486	4.474	.039[a]
Residual	5.972	55	.109		
Total	6.458	56			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
•   b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-.305		-.189	.851
LSAT	1.616	.274	2.115	.039
	2.220E-02			
	.010			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

MODEL SUMMARY (MALE 1998)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.041[a]	.002	-.011	.30345

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1.229E-02	1	1.229E-02	.134	.716[a]
Residual	7.459	81	9.208E-02		
Total	7.471	82			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.606			1.819	.073
LSAT	1.433		.041	.365	.716
	3.359E-03				
	.009				

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

By contrast, the LSAT was a better predictor for males than it was for females in 1999; the correlation coefficients for LSAT scores and LGPA was .105 for females and .227 for males.

MODEL SUMMARY (FEMALE 1999)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.105[a]	.011	-.006	.21828

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3.065E-02	1	3.065E-02	.643	.426[a]
Residual	2.763	58	4.764E-02		
Total	2.794	59			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.185			1.744	.087
LSAT	1.253		.105	.082	.426
	6.486E-03				
	.008				

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

MODEL SUMMARY (MALE 1999)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.227[a]	.051	.040	.33221

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.485	1	.485	4.395	.039[a]
Residual	8.940	81	.110		
Total	9.425	82			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant) LSAT	-8.579E-03 1.509 2.038E-02 .010	 .227	-.006 2.096	.995 .039

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

2. UGPA/LGPA Correlation

The correlation between UGPA and LGPA was higher for MULS graduates than the correlation between LSAT and LGPA. In 1998, the UGPA was a much better predictor of law school performance than the LSAT; the UGPA explained three times more variance in law school performance than did the LSAT. The correlation coefficient (.349) for LSAT scores and LGPA for the 1998 MULS graduating class is described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.349[a]	.122	.116	.29615

a. Predictors (Constant), UGPA

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1.658	1	1.658	18.905	.000[a]
Residual	11.928	136	8.771E-02		
Total	13.586	137			

a. Predictors (Constant), UGPA
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.251		11.182	.000
UGPA	.201	.349	4.348	.000
	.275			
	.063			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

The UGPA outperformed the LSAT as a predictor of law school performance again with respect to MULS's 1999 graduating class, as described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.267[a]	.071	.065	.36683

a. Predictors (Constant), UGPA

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1.453	1	1.453	10.799	.001[a]
Residual	18.973	141	.135		
Total	20.426	142			

a. Predictors (Constant), UGPA
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant) UGPA	2.281 .267 .276 .084	.267	8.552 3.286	.000 .001

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

There was no significant variance in the correlation between UGPA and LGPA when males and females were considered separately. In 1998, the correlation coefficients for UGPA and LGPA was .436 for females and .274 for males. Conversely, the correlation coefficients for UGPA and LGPA was .299 for females and .449 for males in 1999.

3. LSAT, UGPA and LGPA Correlation

The correlation coefficient for LSAT scores and UGPA, combined, and LGPA is higher than that for LSAT scores or UGPA alone. This coefficient, however, is mostly attributable to the predictive validity of the UGPA, and not the LSAT. For example, the correlation coefficient for LSAT scores and UGPA, combined, and LGPA was approximately .40 for MULS's 1998 graduating class; however, UGPA alone had a correlation coefficient of nearly .35. The correlation between LSAT scores and UGPA, combined, and LGPA for the MULS's 1998 graduating class is described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.405[a]	.164	.151	.29008

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT, UGPA

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	2.227	2	1.113	13.230	.000[a]
Residual	11.360	135	8.415E-02		
Total	13.586	137			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT, UGPA
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-.310		-.309	.758
UGPA	1.005	.368	4.657	.000
LSAT	.289	.205	2.599	.010
	.062			
	1.622E-02			
	.006			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

These findings held true for MULS's 1999 graduating class, as described more fully in the following tables:

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.326[a]	.106	.094	.36107

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT, UGPA

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	2.174	2	1.087	8.339	.000[a]
Residual	18.252	140	.130		
Total	20.426	142			

a. Predictors (Constant), LSAT, UGPA
b. Dependent Variable: LGPA

COEFFICIENTS[a]

Model	Understandardized Coefficients B Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-.789		-.593	.554
UGPA	1.332	.279	3.489	.001
LSAT	.289	.188	2.352	.020
	.083			
	1.953E-02			
	.008			

a. Dependent Variable: LGPA

4.   Summary of Statistical Findings

The statistical analyses of MULS's 1998 and 1999 graduating classes produced two notable findings. First, the LSAT was a very weak predictor of three-year law school performance; the LSAT accounted for less than 4% of the variance witnessed in law school performance. Second, the UGPA was a better predictor of three-year law school performance than the LSAT. These statistical findings are reinforced by anecdotal evidence in the next section.

B.   Anecdotal Evidence[23]

Statistical analyses are fine and probably provide as much accuracy as possible under the circumstances. But the average applicant wants to know—in "English"—how he or she can expect to do in law school. The reason for such inquiry is obvious.

A legal education is an investment, and, like any investment, should be based, at least in part, on sound economic projections.[24] Before commencing a legal education, applicants should perform a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether law school is a wise investment. This analysis is particularly important for the ever-increasing number of mature age applicants, many of whom have established careers prior to entering law school.

Two factors comprise the cost-benefit analysis of a legal education. The first is the cost of a legal education, a factor easy to calculate once an applicant chooses a particular law school. Most law schools accurately estimate law school expenses in their application materials. The cost of a three-year legal education, including tuition, housing, food, books and supplies, may exceed $125,000.[25] For many students, a large portion of this amount will be financed at rates ranging from 8.25% to 9.5% for periods of up to twenty years.[26] As a consequence, some students leave law school with long-term debt exceeding $200,000.[27]

The second factor is the salary an applicant may expect upon graduation. Unlike the cost of law school, this factor is less predictable. While the starting salaries at major law firms exceed $130,000, the median starting salary for the

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23. The prediction rates contained in this section are not based on generally accepted statistical models and, therefore, may not be as accurate as the statistical evidence in the preceding section.

24. There are, of course, non-economic reasons for attending (or not attending) law school. The importance of these factors varies widely among candidates and, in any event, are beyond the scope of this article.

25. LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION COUNCIL, *supra* note 3, at 31.   This figure excludes opportunity costs.

26. The rates and terms quoted are those in effect for students entering law school in the Fall Semester, 2000.

27. This figure includes principal and interest for the maximum terms of the loans.

graduating class of 1998 was $45,000.[28]   If an applicant had reasonable assurance that he or she could secure a position in a major law firm upon graduation, law school may be a sound investment. Positions in major law firms, however, are generally reserved for those students who graduate at or near the top of their law school classes.

Applicants currently have access to the 25th and 75th LSAT and UGPA percentiles for each law school.[29] In order to make a sound cost-benefit analysis, however, applicants need to be able to predict—by comparing their LSAT scores and UGPAs with the LSAT and UGPA percentiles of various law schools—their chances of graduating in the top 25% of their law school class. Only then can a realistic cost-benefit analysis be conducted. This article endeavors to take some of the guess-work out of the application process by providing applicants with statistical and anecdotal evidence for use in projecting law school success.

For the following anecdotal analyses, the term "strong performance" is used to connote academic success in law school. Strong performance is defined as the top 25% of each graduating class. In 1998, thirty-five students graduated in the top 25% of their law school class; students in this group graduated from MULS with grade point averages exceeding 3.382 on a 4.0 system. In 1999, thirty-six students graduated in the top 25% of their law school class; students in this group graduated from MULS with grade point averages exceeding 3.338.

The top 25% was chosen because of the numerous benefits and advantages conferred upon this group (or at least parts thereof). The top 25% is often the cut-off used by major law firms to screen applicants. It is also used by many law schools to determine academic scholarships, law review membership, and clinical, extern and moot court opportunities. Many judges also use this figure to screen judicial clerkship applicants. Strong performance in law school can open many doors and lead to a successful, lucrative career.

By contrast, the term "weak performance" is used to connote a lack of academic success in law school. Weak performance is defined as the bottom 25% of each graduating class. In 1998, thirty-five students graduated in the bottom 25% of their law school class; students in this group graduated from MULS with grade point averages below 2.891. In 1999, thirty-five students graduated in the bottom 25% of their law school class; students in this group graduated from MULS with grade point averages below 2.965.

The following chart summarizes the predictive ability of the LSAT, UGPA and reputation of undergraduate institutions based on anecdotal evidence derived from MULS's 1998 and 1999 graduating classes. On this chart, 100%

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28. LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION COUNCIL, *supra* note 3, at 35.
29. *News You Can Use: Best Graduate Schools*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., Apr. 10, 2000, at 73-77.

represents a perfect predictor and 25% represents random chance. The following charts are explained in more detail in Sections 1 - 3, *infra*.

	Prediction Rate of Strong Performance —1998	Prediction Rate of Weak Performance —1998	Prediction Rate of Strong Performance —1999	Prediction Rate of Weak Performance —1999	Average Rate of Prediction
LSAT SCORE	28.9%	35.3%	32.5%	21.6%	29.6%
UGPA	34.2%	48.6%	41.7%	37.1%	40.4%
SUPERIOR UNDERGRAD. INSTITUTION	44.7%	n/a	30.8%	n/a	37.8%

The following chart summarizes the predictive validity of various combinations of the LSAT, UGPA, and reputation of undergraduate institution based on anecdotal evidence derived from MULS's 1998 and 1999 graduating classes.

	Prediction Rate of Strong Performance —1998	Prediction Rate of Weak Performance —1998	Prediction Rate of Strong Performance —1999	Prediction Rate of Weak Performance —1999	Average Rate of Prediction
LSAT AND UGPA	28.6%	77.8%	42.9%	42.9%	44.7%
LSAT AND SUPERIOR UNGRAD.	42.9%	n/a	41.7%	n/a	42.3%
UGPA AND SUPERIOR UNDERGRAD.	80%	n/a	50%	n/a	65%

1. Law School Admission Test

The LSAT scores of MULS's 1998 graduating class ranged from 144 to 165. The top 25th percentile scored from 158 to 165. Thirty-eight students in the 1998 graduating class scored in the top 25th percentile (158 and above) on the LSAT.[30] If the LSAT were a perfect predictor of strong performance, the thirty-five students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class could all be expected to come from these thirty-eight. If the LSAT were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 9.5 (or 25%) of these students

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30. In some instances, the number of students in the LSAT percentiles is greater or less than the number of students in the corresponding law school graduation percentiles. This is due to ties in LSAT scores.

could be expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1998 class. As it turns out, only eleven of the thirty-eight students from the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class. This is a prediction rate of 28.9%, just slightly better than random chance. Even more disturbing is the fact that eight students in the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. This means 21.1%—nearly a quarter—of the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class.

The bottom 25th percentile of the 1998 graduating class scored from 144 to 152 on the LSAT. There were thirty-four students in this group. If the LSAT were a perfect predictor of weak performance, all thirty-four students in this group could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. If the LSAT were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 8.5 (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. As it turns out, twelve of the thirty-four students from the bottom 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. This is a prediction rate of 35.2%. By contrast, eight students in the bottom 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class. This means that 23.5%—nearly a quarter—of the bottom 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class.

The LSAT scores of MULS's 1999 graduating class ranged from 145 to 167. The top 25th percentile scored from 157 to 167. Forty students in the 1999 graduating class scored in the top 25th percentile (157 and above) on the LSAT. If the LSAT were a perfect predictor of strong performance, the thirty-six students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class could all be expected to come from these forty. If the LSAT were no better at predicting performance than random chance, ten (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1999 class. As it turns out, only thirteen of the forty students from the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class. This is a prediction rate of 32.5%. By contrast, seven students in the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. This means that 17.5% of the top 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class.

The bottom 25th percentile of the 1999 graduating class scored from 145 to 153. There were fifty-one students in this group. If the LSAT were a perfect predictor of weak performance, all thirty-five students who graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class could have been expected to come from this group. If the LSAT were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 12.75 (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. As it turns out, only eleven of the thirty-one students from the bottom 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. This is a prediction rate of 21.6%, a percentage below random chance. By contrast, eleven students in the bottom 25th LSAT percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class. This means that 23.5%

of the bottom 25th LSAT percentile—nearly a quarter of the total and more than the number who graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class—graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class.

In sum, the LSAT prediction rates ranged from a high of 35.3% to a low of 21.6% on a scale in which 100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The average prediction rate of the LSAT for the graduating classes of 1998 and 1999 was 29.6%, a figure just slightly above random chance. And, contrary to a common misconception in the industry, the LSAT was a slightly better predictor of strong performance (30.7%) than weak performance (28.5%).[31] These results are consistent with the statistical analyses in the preceding section of this article.

2. Undergraduate Grade Point Average

The UGPAs of MULS's 1998 graduating class ranged from 1.88 to 3.95 on a 4.00 scale. The UGPAs of the top 25th percentile ranged from 3.46 to 3.95. Thirty-five students in the 1998 graduating class had UGPAs in the top 25th percentile (3.46 and above). If the UGPA were a perfect predictor of strong performance, all of the students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class could all be expected to come from these thirty-five. If the UGPA were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 8.75 (or 25%) of these students could be expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1998 class. As it turns out, twelve of the thirty-six students from the top 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class. This is a prediction rate of 34.2%. By contrast, only five (14.3%) students in the top 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class.

The UGPAs of the bottom 25th percentile of the 1998 class ranged from 1.88 to 2.86. There were thirty-five students in this group. If the UGPA were a perfect predictor of weak performance, all thirty-five students in this group could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. If the UGPA were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 8.5 (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. As it turns out, seventeen of the thirty-five students from the bottom 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1998 class. This is a prediction rate of 48.6%. By contrast, only four students (11.4%) in the bottom 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class.

The UGPAs of MULS's 1999 graduating class ranged from 2.15 to 4.00 on a 4.00 scale. The UGPAs of the top 25th percentile ranged from 3.47 to 4.00. Thirty-six students in the 1999 graduating class had UGPAs in the top 25th percentile (3.47 and above). If the UGPA were a perfect predictor of strong

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31. These percentages, of course, do not include students who failed to complete law school at MULS.

performance, all of the students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class could be expected to come from these thirty-six. If the UGPA were no better at predicting performance than random chance, nine (or 25%) of these students could be expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1999 class. As it turns out, fifteen of the thirty-six students from the top 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class. This is a prediction rate of 41.7%. By contrast, only four (11.1%) students in the top 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class.

The UGPAs of the bottom 25th percentile of the 1999 graduating class ranged from 2.15 to 2.90. There were thirty-five students in this group. If the UGPA were a perfect predictor of weak performance, all thirty-five students in this group could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. If the UGPA were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 8.75 (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. As it turns out, thirteen of the thirty-five students from the bottom 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the bottom 25% of the 1999 class. This is a prediction rate of 37.1%. By contrast, only seven students (20%) in the bottom 25th UGPA percentile graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class.

In sum, the UGPA prediction rates ranged from a high of 48.6% to a low of 34.2% on a scale in which 100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The average prediction rate of the UGPA for the graduating classes of 1998 and 1999 was 40.4%, a figure significantly higher than the LSAT prediction rate.

3. Quality of Undergraduate Institution

Thirty-six students from MULS's 1998 graduating class graduated from "Superior Undergraduate Institutions," which, for the purposes of this article, is defined as institutions listed in the *U.S. News'* "Top 50 National Universities" and "Top 50 National Liberal Arts Colleges." If attending a Superior Undergraduate Institution were a perfect predictor of strong performance, all of the students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1998 class could have been expected to come from these thirty-six. If attending a Superior Undergraduate Institution were no better at predicting performance than random chance, nine (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1998 class. As it turns out, sixteen of the thirty-six students who graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 class. This is a prediction rate of 44.4%. By contrast, only six (16.7%) students who graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1998 class.

Thirty-nine students from MULS's 1999 graduating class graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions. If attending a Superior Undergraduate

Institution were a perfect predictor of strong performance, all of the students who graduated in the top 25% of the 1999 class could have been expected to come from these thirty-nine. If attending a Superior Undergraduate Institution were no better at predicting performance than random chance, 9.75 (or 25%) of these students could have been expected to graduate in the top 25% of the 1999 class. As it turns out, twelve of the thirty-nine students who graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1999 class. This is a prediction rate of 30.8%. By contrast, only five (12.8%) students who graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1999 class.

In sum, the prediction rates for students who graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions ranged from a high of 44.4% to a low of 30.8% on a scale in which 100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The average prediction rate of the UGPA for the graduating classes of 1998 and 1999 was 37.8%, a figure significantly higher than the LSAT prediction rate.

4. Law School Admission Test and Undergraduate Grade Point Average

Seven students from 1998 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's top 25th percentile. Of these seven, only two graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class. This is a rate of 28.6%, which is far lower than the prediction rate of UGPAs alone. Of the seven students who scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's top 25th percentile, one (14.3%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class.

Nine students from 1998 graduating class scored in MULS's bottom 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's bottom 25th percentile. Of these nine, seven (77.8%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class and none graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 graduating class.

Seven students from 1999 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's top 25th percentile. Of these seven, only three graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class. This is a rate of 42.9%, which is nearly identical to the prediction rate of UGPAs alone. Of the seven students who scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's top 25th percentile, one (14.3%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class.

Seven students from 1999 graduating class scored in MULS's bottom 25th LSAT percentile and had UGPAs in MULS's bottom 25th percentile. Of these seven, three (42.9%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class and none graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 graduating class.

In sum, the prediction rates of the LSAT and UGPA, combined, ranged from a high of 77.8% to a low of 28.6% on a scale in which 100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The prediction rates of

these combined factors for strong performance was quite similar to the prediction rate of the UGPA alone. The prediction rates of these factors for weak performance, however, was higher than that of either the LSAT or UGPA alone.

5. Law School Admission Test and Quality of Undergraduate Institution

Seven students from 1998 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions. Of these seven, three graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class. This is a rate of 42.9%, which is lower than the prediction rate of Superior Undergraduate Institutions alone. Of the seven students who scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions, one (14.3%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class.

Twelve students from 1999 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions. Of these twelve, five graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class. This is a rate of 41.7%. Of the twelve students who scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions, one (8.3%) graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class.

In sum, the prediction rates of the LSAT and Superior Undergraduate Institutions ranged from a high of 42.9% to a low of 41.7% on a scale in which 100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The average prediction rate of these factors was 42.3%, which is significantly higher than the LSAT prediction rate and similar to the UGPA and Superior Undergraduate Institution rates.

6. Undergraduate Grade Point Average and Quality of Undergraduate Institution

Five students from 1998 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th UGPA percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions. Of these five, four graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class. This is a rate of 80%. Of the five students who scored in MULS's top 25th UGPA percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions, none graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1998 graduation class.

Four students from 1999 graduating class scored in MULS's top 25th UGPA percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions. Of these four, two graduated in the top 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class. This is a rate of 50%. Of the four students who scored in MULS's top 25th UGPA percentile and graduated from Superior Undergraduate Institutions, none graduated in the bottom 25% of MULS's 1999 graduation class.

In sum, the prediction rates of the UGPA and Superior Undergraduate Institutions ranged from a high of 80% to a low of 50% on a scale in which

100% represents perfect prediction and 25% represents random chance. The average prediction rate of these factors was 65%, which is significantly higher than the prediction rate of either (a) the LSAT and UGPA combined or (b) the LSAT and Superior Undergraduate Institutions combined.[32]

7. Undergraduate Major

There is a belief among some admissions officials that students from the so-called rigorous undergraduate disciplines, such as natural sciences, math and engineering, are generally smarter and, therefore, make better law students.[33] But is this true?

For purposes of this article, undergraduate majors are divided into six categories: social sciences (*e.g.,* sociology, political science, economics, history, geography, anthropology, psychology, international and foreign studies, government, pre-law); humanities (*e.g.,* English, classical studies, foreign languages, art history, philosophy); natural sciences and math (*e.g.,* biology, chemistry, zoology, mathematics, engineering); business (*e.g.,* accounting, finance, management, marketing, business administration); communication (*e.g.,* communication, journalism, speech communication); and others (*e.g.,* physical education, nursing).

The prediction rates of undergraduate majors for the graduating class of 1998 are set forth in the following chart.

Major	Representation in Graduating Class	Representation in Top 25% of Graduating Class	Representation in Bottom 25% of Graduating Class
Social Sciences	62.1%	62.9%	54.3%
Humanities	11.4%	14.3%	14.3%
Business	12.9%	17.1%	8.6%
Natural Sciences and Math	6.4%	5.7%	8.6%
Communications	5.7%	0%	11.4%
Others	1.4%	0%	2.9%

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32. It was not possible to test the predictive validity of all three factors combined because there were no students in either the 1998 or 1999 graduating class who (a) scored in MULS's top 25th LSAT percentile, (b) had a UGPA in MULS's top 25th percentile, and (c) attended a Superior Undergraduate Institution.

33. Conversely, some applicants with degrees in natural sciences and math "think that they cannot or should not apply to law school because they lack a liberal arts degree." PETERSON'S LAW SCHOOLS 4 (2000 ed.).

The prediction rates of undergraduate majors for the graduating class of 1999 are set forth in the following chart.

Major	Representation in Graduating Class	Representation in Top 25% of Graduating Class	Representation in Bottom 25% of Graduating Class
Social Sciences	52.4%	47.2%	65.7%
Humanities	9.8%	11.1%	11.4%
Business	19.6%	19.4%	14.2%
Natural Sciences and Math	11.2%	16.7%	2.9%
Communications	4.9%	5.6%	2.9%
Others	2.1%	0%	2.9%

These results seem to indicate that there was no significant correlation between majors and either strong or weak performance in law school. The only notable variance was the underperformance in 1998 by students with social science majors. This discrepancy, however, was not repeated in 1999.

8. Age of Student

There is a presumption among admissions officials that older students perform better in law school. This belief is based on the fact that older students are generally more mature and have significantly more life experience than the typical 23-year-old college graduate.

For purposes of this article, an applicant is considered "mature age" if he of she was 30 years of age or older at the time of entry into law school. The prediction rates of mature age students for the 1998 graduating classes are set forth in the following chart:

Total Mature Age Students	Mature Age Students in Top 25% of Graduating Class	Mature Age Students in Bottom 25% of Graduating Class
15.7%	11.4%	17.1%

The prediction rates of mature age students for the 1999 graduating classes are set forth in the following chart:

Total Mature Age Students	Mature Age Students in Top 25% of Graduating Class	Mature Age Students in Bottom 25% of Graduating Class
16.1%	16.7%	14.3%

The results of this analysis seem to indicate that there is little or no correlation between age and performance in law school.

VI. CONCLUSION

Using statistical and anecdotal evidence, this article analyzed recent graduates of MULS to ascertain whether: (1) the LSAT is a valid predictor of three-year performance in law school; (2) the LSAT is a better predictor of law school performance than the UGPA or the reputation of the applicant's undergraduate institution; (3) an applicant's undergraduate major is useful in predicting law school performance; and (4) an applicant's age at the time of entry into law school is a valid predictor of law school performance.

The statistical and anecdotal analyses of MULS's 1998 and 1999 graduating classes produced the following results. First, the LSAT was a very weak predictor of three-year law school performance; it was a valid predictor in fewer than two out of ten cases. Second, the UGPA was better at predicting law school performance than the LSAT. Third, the reputation of a student's undergraduate institution was also better at predicting law school performance than the LSAT. Fourth, a combination of the UGPA and reputation of undergraduate institution is a better predictor of law school performance than either a combination of the LSAT and UGPA or a combination of the LSAT and reputation of undergraduate institution. Fifth, there was no significant correlation between undergraduate majors and law school performance. Finally, there was no significant correlation between age and law school performance.

NOTE