

Racial and Ethnic Preferences in Admission to the University of Oklahoma

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Center for Equal Opportunity



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This study summarizes our analysis of admissions data from the University of Oklahoma. The analysis sought to determine if race and ethnicity are weighed in law school, undergraduate, and medical school admissions. The study concludes that race and ethnicity are weighed in admissions to all three institutions.

This is especially true at the law school, where African Americans are given heavy preferences and American Indians are given more modest preferences. Evidence of this preferential treatment is found in gaps in LSAT scores and undergraduate grades among those admitted, and—more precisely—by calculating the odds ratios and probabilities of admission across racial and ethnic groups.

There is also evidence of preferential treatment for African Americans in undergraduate admissions, and for preferential treatment of “underrepresented minorities” (that is, African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students) in medical school admissions. Here the evidence is stronger for preferential treatment in medical school admissions. In addition, the performance of the medical school students on the United States Medical School Licensing Examination suggests that African Americans are given more preferential treatment in admissions than American Indian and Hispanic students.¹

University of Oklahoma: College of Law

Test Scores and College Grades of Those Admitted

Table 1. Median LSATs and College GPAs of Those Admitted to OU Law

	Median LSAT	Median College GPA
American Indian	156	3.54
Asian American	157	3.62
African American	153	3.34
Hispanic	154	3.63
White	159	3.60

White admittees had the highest median LSAT scores (159).² African American admittee scores were 6 points lower; Hispanic admittee scores were lower by 5. The American Indian and Asian American scores were 3 and 2 points lower, respectively.

Hispanic and Asian American admittees had the highest median college GPAs (3.63 and 3.62, respectively), while median college GPAs for whites were slightly lower (3.60), followed by the median GPA for American Indians (3.54). African American admittees had the lowest college GPAs (3.34) of the five groups.

Non-Admitted Applicants

OU Law rejected 2 American Indians, 9 Asian Americans, 1 African American, 8 Hispanics, and 105 whites despite higher test scores and grades compared to the median African American admittee.

Odds Ratios

The odds ratio is somewhat like a correlation coefficient and allows for statistically controlling for the effects of other variables (in this case, LSAT scores and college GPA) in predicting admission status. That is, the odds ratio measures the magnitude of the preference given relative to a baseline group (in this instance, whites). An odds ratio equal to or greater than 3.0 to 1 is commonly thought to reflect a strong association; an odds ratio less than 3.0 to 1 but greater than 1.5 to 1 reflects a moderate association; while a relative odds ratio of 1.5 or less to 1 indicates a weak association. Of course, an odds ratio of 1.0 to 1 indicates no relationship.³

Table 2. OU College of Law Odds Ratios

	Odds Ratio
American Indian to White	2.3 to 1 ^{***}
Asian American to White	0.7 to 1 ^{ns}
African American to White	5.5 to 1 ^{****}
Hispanic to White	1.1 to 1 ^{ns}

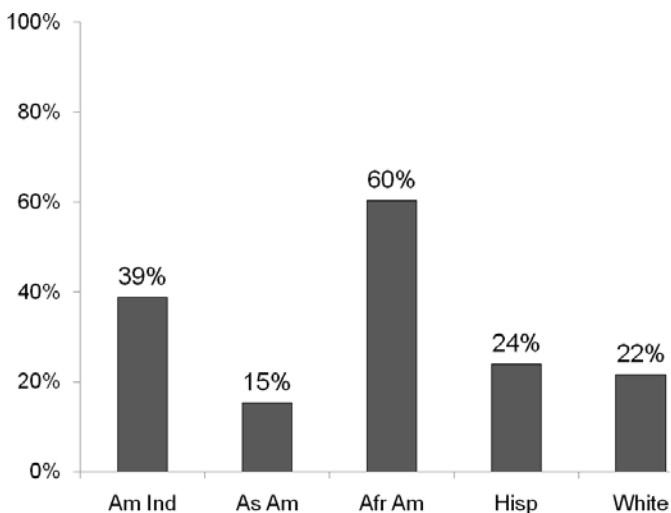
Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, **** $p < 0.0001$; ^{ns}=not statistically significant.

Controlling for test scores and grades, there was a large, statistically significant odds ratio favoring African American over white applicants (5.5 to 1) and a smaller, also statistically significant odds ratio of American Indian over white applicants (2.3 to 1). The odds ratios of Asian Americans to whites and Hispanics to whites were small and not statistically significant.

Probability of Admission

In this section, we present a more intuitive way to grasp the underlying dynamic of preferential admissions by converting the equations used to calculate odds ratios into estimates of the probabilities of admission for individuals with different racial/ethnic group membership, given the same particular LSAT scores and grades. The probability calculations provide an estimate of the admission chances for members of each group, all with the same test scores and grades.

Figure 1. Probability of Admissions to OU Law School, with Median LSAT and GPAs of African American Admittees



If an applicant had the same credentials as the median African American admittee,⁴ those of other racial/ethnic groups would have had a significantly smaller chance of admission. Specifically, while an African American applicant with these credentials would have a 60% chance of admission, an identically credentialed American Indian applicant would have only a 39% chance of admission, a Hispanic applicant only 24%, a white applicant only 22%, and an Asian American applicant with the credentials of the median black admittee would have only a 15% chance of admission.

University of Oklahoma: Undergraduate Admissions

Despite a relatively high overall admission rate (over 80%), there is evidence of some racial preference in admission.

ACT Scores and High-School Grades of Those Admitted

Table 3. Median ACTs and High School GPAs of Those Admitted to OU

	Median ACT ⁵	Median High School GPA
American Indian	25	3.70
Asian American	26	3.74
African American	22	3.53
Hispanic	24	3.61
White	26	3.68

White and Asian American admittees had the highest median ACT scores (26); the American Indian median was 1 point lower; Hispanic scores were lower by 2 points. African American admittees had the lowest ACT scores (22).

Asian American admittees had the highest high-school GPAs (3.74), followed by American Indians (3.70) and whites (3.68). The median high-school GPA for Hispanic admittees was 3.61; African Americans admittees had the lowest median GPA—3.53.⁶

Odds Ratios for OU Undergraduate Applicants

Table 4. OU Undergraduate Applicants' Odds Ratios

	Odds Ratio
American Indian to White	1.3 to 1*
Asian American to White	0.9 to 1 ^{ns}
African American to White	2.2 to 1****
Hispanic to White	1.2 to 1 ^{ns}

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, **** $p < 0.0001$; ^{ns}=not statistically significant.

Controlling for ACT scores, high-school GPAs, residency, and gender, there was a 2.2 to 1 African American-over-white odds ratio of admission. This odds ratio was statistically significant.

Odds ratios of other groups to whites were roughly 1 to 1 and generally not statistically significant, meaning there was little evidence of preference awarded to American Indians and Hispanics over whites, and whites over Asians, when controlling for other factors.

The admissions preference for African Americans, and evidence of a lesser degree of preference for American Indians, is consistent with the more robust findings of preferential treatment in law-school admissions, discussed earlier.⁷

University of Oklahoma: College of Medicine

MCAT Scores and College Grades of Those Admitted

Table 5. Median MCAT Subscores and College GPAs of OU Medical School Admittees

	Median MCAT Subscore ⁸	Median College GPA
URM	8.33	3.41
Asian American	10.00	3.68
White	9.67	3.64

We examine data on all admittees, but combined American Indians, blacks, and Hispanics (underrepresented minorities or URMs) to give us a sufficient number of cases to do a meaningful analysis while still maintaining the privacy of individual admittees.

In the most recent year for which we have medical school data, the median MCAT subscores for Asian and white admittees, respectively, were 10.00 and 9.67, while for URM admittees it was 8.33; for college GPAs, it was 3.68 and 3.64 for Asian and white admittees, respectively, versus 3.41 for URM admittees.

OU College of Medicine Non-Admitted Applicants

That year, OU College of Medicine rejected 2 Asian and 29 white resident applicants despite higher GPAs *and* higher test scores compared to the median of URM admittees.

Odds Ratios for OU College of Medicine

For analysis of the medical school, the odds ratios were calculated by combining all three of these underrepresented minorities (American Indian, African American, and Hispanic applicants) versus whites at the University of Oklahoma, while Asian applicants were calculated as a separate group.

Table 6. OU College of Medicine Odds Ratios

	1996	1999
URM to White	4.6 to 1****	4.9 to 1****
Asian to White	0.8 to 1 ^{ns}	1.0 to 1 ^{ns}

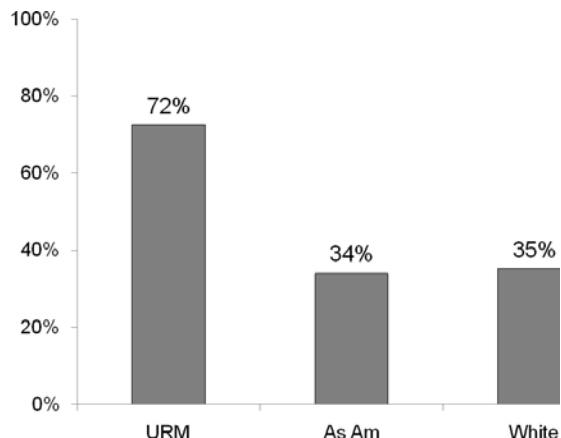
Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$, **** $p \leq 0.0001$; ^{ns}=not statistically significant.

Controlling for test scores, college GPAs, residency, and gender, the odds ratios of URMs to whites in 1996 and in 1999 were about 5 to 1.⁹

Probability of Admission

Transforming the odds ratios into probability models, we can get an estimate of the likelihood of admission for an Asian American or white applicant with the same test score and grades as URM admittees.

Figure 2. Probability of Admissions to OU Medical School, with Median MCAT Score and GPA of URM Admittees



If a white or Asian applicant had the same credentials as the median URM admittee,¹⁰ that applicant would have had a significantly smaller chance of admission. That is, URM applicants would have a 72% chance of admission, compared to 34% for an Asian American and 35% for a white applicant with the same qualifications.

USMLE Scores

Of additional interest is the performance of the different racial and ethnic groups on United States Medical Licensing Exam Step 1, which is typically administered after the second year of medical school.

Table 7. OU Medical School Licensing Exam (USMLE Step 1)

	Not Taken	Failed	Passed
American Indian	47%	1%	51%
Asian American	37%	4%	59%
African American	41%	19%	41%
Hispanic	28%	8%	64%
White	32%	5%	63%

Here we were able to disaggregate the URM category,¹¹ and in doing so we found that Hispanics performed at roughly the same level as whites and Asians. African Americans, however, performed much below all other groups (that is, they were the group most likely to fail or not take the exam, and their scores were the lowest); American Indians' performance fell between the performance of Hispanics and African Americans.

For the medical school, then, the evidence of preference for African Americans in particular is in line with what was found with respect to law school and undergraduate admissions.

Endnotes

¹ Data for undergraduate and medical school applicants were obtained directly from the University; law school data from the University were provided through the Scale and Effect of Admissions Preferences in Higher Education (SEAPHE) Project. We thank the Oklahoma Association of Scholars for its assistance in obtaining the data. The law school data cover 2005 and 2006, the undergraduate data are from 2005 to 2007, and the medical school data cover 1996 and 1999 (see previous CEO study, *Preferences in Medical Education: Racial and Ethnic Preferences in Admission at Five Medical Schools*, <http://ceousa.org/pdfs/multimed.pdf>). An applicant whose race/ethnicity was listed as “unknown” or “mixed” or “other” was excluded from calculations.

² LSAT scores range from 120 to 180 (see <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/lsat-score.asp>). Thus, by our calculations, a 5-point gap in LSAT scores, for example, arithmetically would be equal to a 100-point gap in combined math and verbal SATs.

³ See David E. Lilienfeld and Paul D. Stolley, *Foundations of Epidemiology*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 200-202.

⁴ I.e., African American admittees’ median LSAT score and college GPA.

⁵ An ACT score of 26 can be converted to a combined (math+verbal) SAT score of 1190. An ACT score of 25 equals a 1150 on the SAT, while a 24 score on the ACT equals a 1110. Lastly, a score of 22 on the ACT converts to an SAT score of 1030. <http://www.act.org/solutions/college-career-readiness/compare-act-sat/#.UHGNv5jA-So>.

⁶ When using the black admittee median as a benchmark, we find that OU’s undergraduate program admitted all American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic applicants with higher test scores and grades than the median black admittee. Two African Americans and 23 whites were rejected with higher test scores and grades.

⁷ A combination of high admission rate and the relatively small black-white odds ratio results in very high estimated probabilities of admission if an applicant had the black admittee median ACT score and high-school GPA. For all applicants, regardless of race/ethnicity, the probability of admission is greater than 95% with the same academic credentials as median black admittees.

⁸ The MCAT is a standardized test required of all medical school applicants. There are four parts to the MCAT, creating subscores for verbal reasoning, physical sciences, biological sciences, and writing. The medical school provided a mean MCAT subscore.

⁹ For a detailed report, see *Preferences in Medical Education: Racial and Ethnic Preferences in Admission at Five Medical Schools*, <http://ceousa.org/pdfs/multimed.pdf>.

¹⁰ I.e., URM admittees’ median MCAT score and college GPA. The probability equation also controlled for residency (assuming in-state residency) and gender (assuming the applicant is male).

¹¹ Oklahoma provided cumulative USMLE data from 1993 to 1996.



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