

Racial and Ethnic Preferences in Admission to the University of Utah College of Law

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AUGUST 2013

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This report summarizes analysis of 2010 admissions data from the law school at the University of Utah. The analysis concludes that race and ethnicity are weighed heavily in admissions to the law school. Evidence of this preferential treatment is found, for example, 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.¹

Test Scores and College Grades of Those Admitted

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

<i>Admittee's Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Median LSAT</i>	<i>Median Undergrad GPA</i>
African American	155.5	3.43
Hispanic	159.0	3.60
Asian	161.0	3.68
White	163.0	3.70

White admittees had the highest median LSAT scores (163.0).² African American median scores were 7.5 points lower, while Hispanic admittee scores were lower by 4. Asian American scores were 2 points lower.

Whites admitted to the law school had the highest median undergraduate GPAs (3.70); median college GPAs for Asian admittees were slightly lower (3.68), followed by the median GPA for Hispanics (3.60). African American admittees had the lowest college GPAs (3.43).

¹ Our data were obtained from the university, and we thank the Utah Association of Scholars for its assistance in obtaining the data. Our findings are consistent with data collected and analyzed by UCLA law professor Richard Sander of the SEAPHE (Scale and Effect of Admission Preferences in Higher Education) Project. Sander found that the law school favored African American and Latino law-school applicants despite weaker academic credentials in 2005-06. The law school in other instances has apparently acknowledged using racial/ethnic preferences. In a December 2010 news story, the dean of the law school denied only that race results in a “per se preference,” and seemed to acknowledge that race was considered, along with a variety of other factors. See http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home/50788330-76/race-amendment-gender-utah.html.csp#disqus_thread. There has also been information on the law school’s website that suggests that race and ethnicity are considered. For example, applicants are told they “may disclose important diversity factors such as your ... racial or ethnic identity”. See <http://www.law.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/Application2010-2011.pdf>.

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.

Non-Admitted Applicants

UU Law School rejected 4 Hispanic, 2 American Indian, 4 Asian, and 155 white applicants who had better test scores *and* grades than the average African American admittee.

Odds Ratios

The odds ratio is similar to a correlation coefficient. It enables one to statistically control for the effects of other variables (in this case, LSAT scores, college GPA, and gender) in predicting admission status based on race/ethnicity. That is, the odds ratio measures the magnitude of the preference given to a racial/ethnic group 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. A *very* strong relationship might be taken to be the rough equivalent of the relative odds of smokers versus nonsmokers dying from lung cancer, which in one well-known study is calculated as 14 to 1.³

Table 2. UU Law School Odds Ratios of Admissions

	Odds Ratio
African American to White	163 to 1***
Hispanic to White	7 to 1***
Asian American to White	4 to 1**

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

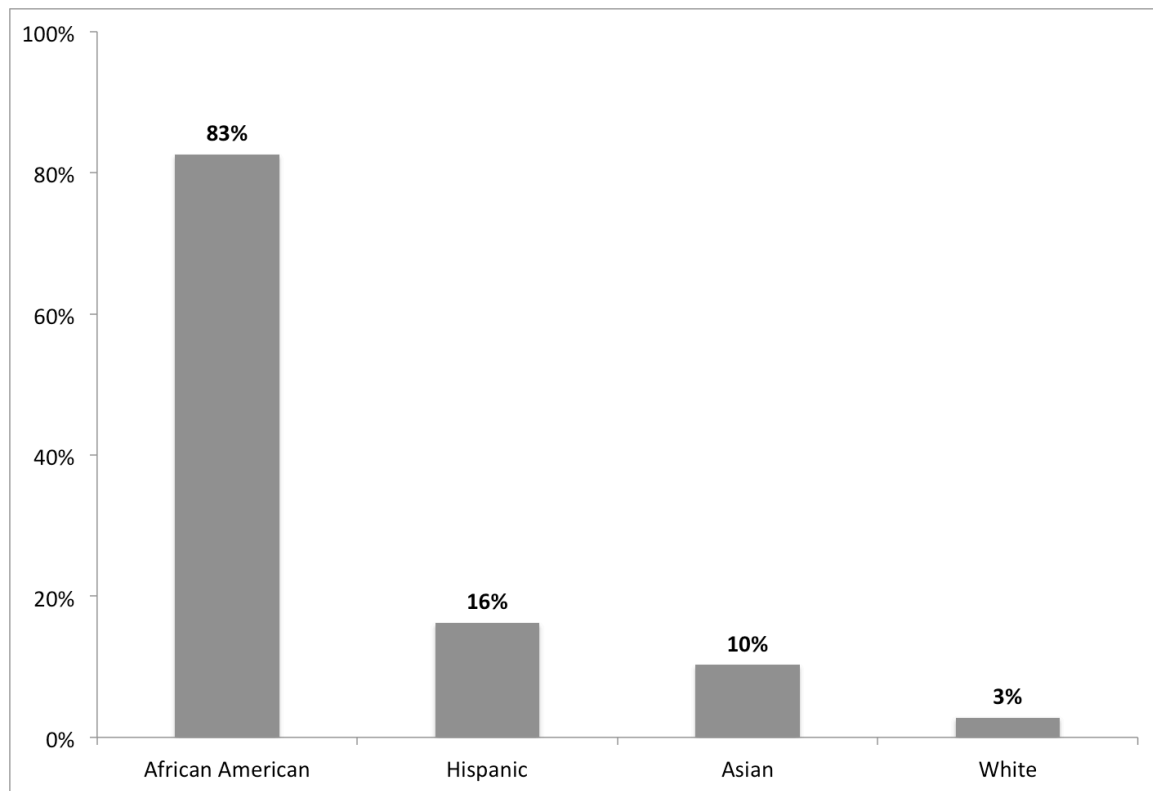
Controlling for test scores, grades, and gender, there was an extremely large, statistically significant odds ratio favoring African American over white applicants (163 to 1). There were also large, statistically significant odds ratio of Hispanic over white applicants (7 to 1) and Asians over whites (4 to 1).

Probability of Admission

This section presents a more intuitive way to grasp the underlying dynamic of preferential admissions. The equations used to calculate odds ratios are converted into estimates of the probabilities of admission for individuals with different racial/ethnic group membership but the same LSAT scores, grades, and gender.

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

Figure 1. Probability of Admission to UU Law School with Median LSAT and GPA of African American Admittees



If an applicant had the same credentials as the medians for African American admittees,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 83% chance of admission, an identically credentialed Hispanic applicant would have only a 16% chance. An Asian applicant would have only a 10% chance, while a white applicant, a 3% chance.

⁴ Statistically significant odds ratios also favor female over male applicants (5 to 1) controlling for test scores, grades, and race/ethnicity.



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