

1942

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Recommended Citation

Adams, Michael (1942) "The Prediction of Scholastic Success in a College of Law," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*: Vol. 49: No. 1, Article 75.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol49/iss1/75>

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THE PREDICTION OF SCHOLASTIC SUCCESS IN A COLLEGE OF LAW

MICHAEL ADAMS

The present study was undertaken as part of a research program directed toward making available to personnel counselors at the University of Iowa a more adequate basis for advising students who contemplate entering the University College of Law. Specifically, it was the purpose of this study to investigate the value of pre-law grade point averages and certain aptitude test scores as predictive indices of success in first year law at the State University of Iowa.

Because of the variations in grading standards at different undergraduate colleges only those students who completed all of their undergraduate work at the University and who had complete records for one year of work in law were included in the major portion of the study. These students were selected from entering classes for the years 1936 to 1939 inclusive. The number and percentage selected from each class are presented in Table I.

TABLE I
Number and Percentage of Students Selected from Various
Freshman Classes in the College of Law

Year	Total Enrolled*	No. Used	Percentage
1936	85	33	38.82
1937	96	38	39.58
1938	99	39	39.39
1939	107	42	39.25
Total	387	152	39.28

*The total number enrolled in each class includes students completing their pre-law work at other institutions in whole or in part, those who withdrew in the course of the year, and those registered as freshmen for more than one year.

The predictive indices available for this group of 152 students included grade point averages for pre-law work in the College of Liberal Arts, and scores on the Iowa Qualifying Examination. The Iowa Qualifying Examination, administered to all entering freshmen, consists of the Iowa High School Content Examination, Iowa English Training Examination, Iowa Mathematics Aptitude Test, and the Iowa Silent Reading Test. A composite score, consisting of a weighted total of the raw scores on the four examinations, is computed and used in conjunction with the sub-test scores to assist counselors in advising students and to predict scholastic

success at the undergraduate level. The raw scores on the sub-tests and the composite score had been converted to percentiles and were available in this form. It was assumed that these percentiles were equivalent from year to year. For purposes of computation the percentiles were converted to linear scores by the use of Guilford's adaptation of Hull's table (Guilford, 1936).

On the basis of findings of similar studies in other schools of law (Husband, 1939) (Crawford and Gorham, 1940) it was decided that it might be profitable to study the predictive value of the total pre-law grade point averages, the junior year pre-law grade point averages, the pre-law grade point averages in social sciences, and the pre-law grade point averages in physical sciences separately.

The criterion of success in first-year law consisted of the student's final class rank at the close of the academic year. For computational purposes, normalcy was assumed for the class ranks of each year and the ranks converted to linear scores.

RESULTS

The performance of these students in the aptitude tests and pre-law work studied is shown in Table II. The mean linear scores of this group on the Iowa Qualifying Examination composite and sub-tests are definitely superior to the scores of Liberal Arts freshmen as a whole, but the range is very wide. In the case of the qualifying composite the mean linear score of 58.97 is equivalent to a percentile score of about 67 on University norms; but the range extends from the fifth to the ninety-ninth percentile. The mean total pre-law grade point average of 2.58 achieved by these students is also definitely superior to the grade point average of about 2.20 received by students of the Liberal Arts College as a whole. Again the range is wide, however, extending from a grade point average of 1.55 to one of 3.94. From these data we may conclude that the average University of Iowa undergraduate who enters the College of Law at Iowa is definitely superior, as a freshman, on the Iowa Qualifying Examination and maintains this superiority in his pre-law undergraduate work.

TABLE II
Student Performance in the Iowa Qualifying Examination
and

Predictive Index Iowa Qualifying Examination:	Pre-Law Work			Range	
	N	M	S.D.		
1. Composite Score	152	58.97	16.32	Linear Score	18-93
				Percentile	5-99
2. High School Content	152	59.98	16.79	Linear Score	21-93
				Percentile	7-99
3. Silent Reading	152	57.02	16.30	Linear Score	11-93
				Percentile	2-99
4. Mathematics Aptitude	152	58.12	18.23	Linear Score	3-93
				Percentile	1-99
5. English Training	152	53.52	16.09	Linear Score	14-93
				Percentile	3-99
Total Pre-Law G. P. A.	152	2.58	.501	1.55 - 3.94	
Jr. Yr. Pre-Law G. P. A.	152	2.67	.553	1.47 - 4.00	
Soc. Sci. Pre-Law G. P. A.	152	2.65	.490	1.73 - 3.95	
Phys. Sci. Pre-Law G. P. A.	152	2.47	.647	1.17 - 4.00	

TABLE III

Correlation of the Predictive Indices with the Criterion

Iowa Qualifying Examination:	N	r	P.E.
High School Content Examination	152	.376	.049
Silent Reading Test	152	.425	.046
Mathematics Aptitude Test	152	.338	.050
English Training Examination	152	.418	.047
Pre-Law Grade Point Averages:			
Total	152	.668	.031
Junior Year	152	.615	.035
Social Science	152	.642	.034
Physical Science	152	.462	.045
Total*	361	.579	.024
Junior Year*	361	.554	.025

*A supplementary study was made of these two indices for the total group of 361 students who completed the first year of law during the years studied.

Inspection of Table III reveals that a moderate correlation of .47 exists between the composite scores on the Iowa Qualifying Examination and the criterion of success in first year law. The correlations between the sub-tests of the qualifying examination and the criterion range from .34 for the mathematics aptitude test to .42 for the silent reading test. These correlations are too low to justify the use of a regression equation based on qualifying scores alone for purposes of individual prediction. However, inspection of the scatter-diagrams suggests a critical linear score of 35 or 40 in the composite score of the qualifying examination,

since only ten students with linear composite scores below 40 succeeded in surpassing the lowest twenty-five per cent of the total group in first year law grades.

Of the nine indices studied, the total pre-law grade point average constitutes the most valid single index of success in first year law, correlating .67 with the criterion. Attempts to improve the predictive value of this index by the method of multiple correlation yielded almost negligible results, the highest multiple correlation obtained being .68 when the Iowa Qualifying Examination composite scores were added. Although a value of .67 approaches the upper limit of correlations ordinarily found between predictive indices and academic grades, an inspection of the scatter-diagram indicates that considerable caution must be observed in using the total pre-law grade point average in the prognosis of individual performance in law school. It was found, for example, that twenty-one of the thirty-eight students falling in the lowest quarter of the distribution of total pre-law grade point averages for this group surpassed the lowest twenty-five per cent of the total group in first year law grades, three falling in the upper twenty-five per cent of their respective classes. The relationship between total pre-law grade point averages and rank in first year law class is summarized in Table IV.

Table IV

Relationship between Total Pre-Law Grade Point Average and Rank in First Year Law Class.

Total Pre-Law Grade Point Av.	Rank in First Year Law Class			
	Highest 25 %	Second 25 %	Third 25 %	Lowest 25 %
Highest 25% (2.87-3.94)	29	6	1	2
Second 25% (2.46-2.86)	8	16	11	3
Third 25% (2.22-2.45)	4	12	16	6
Lowest 25% (1.55-2.21)	3	9	9	17

CONCLUSIONS

The data seem to warrant the following conclusions for the population included in this study or similar populations:

1. Total pre-law grade point averages are superior to the other indices studied for the prediction of success in first year law. Addition of the other indices by the method of multiple correlation does not materially improve the predictive capacity of total pre-law grade point averages.

2. The correlation between the scores on the Iowa Qualifying Examination and the criterion of success in first year law is too

low to be of much value for individual prediction. However, the data suggest a critical score which might be used by counselors in advising students who seek information concerning their capacity for the study of law.

3. Counselors at the University of Iowa must take into consideration factors other than the qualifying examination scores and grade point averages in appraising the capacity of individual students for success in law school. Somewhat inferior achievement on the qualifying examinations and in pre-law work may apparently be compensated by superior motivation, interest and, possibly, special abilities unique to the study of law.

4. Improvement of our ability to predict law school performance will require the development of tests which evaluate more accurately the specific intellectual characteristics most important for the study of law, methods of measuring objectively the factors of interest and motivation, and improvement of the criterion of success in the law school itself.

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