DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 171 TM 034 476

AUTHOR	Pashley, Peter J.; Thornton, Andrea E.
TITLE	Crafting an Incoming Law School Class: Preliminary Results. LSAC Research Report Series.
INSTITUTION	Law School Admission Council, Newtown, PA.
REPORT NO	LSAC-RR-99-01
PUB DATE	1999-05-00
NOTE	15p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Admission (School); *College Applicants; College Entrance Examinations; *Diversity (Student); Ethnic Origins; Grade Point Average; Higher Education; *Law Schools; Law Students; Racial Differences; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	Law School Admission Test

ABSTRACT

This report proposes an approach to formalize the law school admission process by first requiring law schools to delineate the characteristics they want their incoming classes to possess (e.g., types of undergraduate major, percent of in-state versus out-of-state residents, and levels of cultural diversity). These are then used as constraints on the selection of an incoming class or admit pool. A separate optimizing variable (e.g., average Law School Admission Test score or undergraduate grade point average) is used to choose among the subsets of applicants who satisfy the stated constraints. This common selection problem can be solved through the procedure known as constrained optimization. There are two important features of this approach. Applicants are not ranked in relation to each other, and applicant attributes are not weighed as being more or less important than other applicant attributes. Instead, an optimal subset of applicants is chosen to be admitted because they, as a group, satisfy certain constraints while simultaneously possessing certain maximal characteristics. This method leads to the crafting of incoming law school classes. Racially or ethnically diverse admit pools can be chosen without resorting to the use of race/ethnicity indicators. (Author/SLD)

TM

Crafting an Incoming Law School Class: Preliminary Results

Peter J. Pashley and Andrea E. Thornton
Law School Admission Council

Law School Admission Council
Research Report 99-01
May 1999

LAW Services

A Publication of the Law School Admission Council

The Law School Admission Council is a nonprofit corporation that provides services to the legal education community. Its members are 196 law schools in the United States and Canada.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Each law school possesses unique characteristics that may reflect its goals, funding sources, location, etc., and these unique features translate into specialized admission practices. Clearly, no one admission model can be applied blindly to all law schools. However, there are some common practices shared by most law schools. Roughly speaking, most law schools attempt to attract and admit highly credentialed individuals, while at the same time seeking out individuals who possess other attractive characteristics. Special consideration may be given to applicants who might otherwise be foreclosed from a legal education or those who demonstrate an interest in pursuing a particular career after law school. The composition of incoming classes may also be driven in part by an aspiration to address implicit or explicitly stated mission goals of the law school.

More specifically: most law schools attempt to attract and admit those applicants who will be most likely to succeed at that law school. The measures most often used to predict applicants' success in law school are their Law School Admission Test (LSAT) scores and undergraduate grade-point averages (UGPAs), or some combination of these variables. Other measures may also be useful in predicting success at particular law schools.

As importantly, most law schools also attempt to attract and admit individuals who may bring other attributes (besides high LSAT scores and UGPAs, for example) to their classes. These additional attributes may enrich the law school experience for all or may further the goals of the law school. Applicant attributes that might enrich the law school experience could include strong leadership qualities or unique work experiences. Applicant attributes that might address law school goals could include a low-income background or a rural upbringing.

The approach proposed here formalizes the admission process by first requiring law schools to delineate the characteristics they want their incoming classes to possess (e.g., types of undergraduate majors, percent of in-state versus out-of-state residents, and levels of cultural diversity). These are then used as "constraints" on the selection of an incoming class or admit pool. A separate "optimizing" variable (e.g., average LSAT or UGPA) is used to choose among the subsets of applicants that satisfy the stated constraints. This is a common selection problem in the field of operations research and can be solved by a procedure known as constrained optimization.

Consider the following simple example: A law school wishes to select from a 1,000-person applicant pool a 200-person admit pool, who as a group have (1) an average age over 25; and (2) the highest average LSAT score. One way to accomplish this task would be to enumerate by hand all groups of 200 persons, chosen from the applicant pool, whose average age is at least 25. Then among these groups, the one group of 200 persons with the highest average LSAT score would constitute the optimal admit pool.

While the above simple task could be accomplished by hand, it would be exceedingly tedious and time consuming. A more complex problem, say one that involved 20 constraints, would be all but impossible to solve by hand. Fortunately, there are computer programs that can solve such problems, even extremely complex problems, in seconds. In practice, the actual numbers and types of constraints used will, of course, vary from law school to law school.

Note two very important features of this approach: (1) Applicants are not ranked in relationship to each other, and (2) applicant attributes are not weighted as being more or less important than other applicant attributes. Rather, an optimal subset of applicants is chosen to be admitted because they, as a group, satisfy certain constraints, such as an average age of at least 25, while simultaneously possessing certain maximal characteristics, such as the highest average LSAT score.

In this way, we propose the crafting of incoming law school classes according to a set of predetermined specifications, rather than the ranking of applicants. Empirical results presented in this paper demonstrate that this approach can select admit pools that are similar to those actually chosen by law schools. By using a variety of admit pool constraints, it is also shown that racially or ethnically diverse admit pools can be chosen without resorting to the use of race/ethnicity indicators.

Introduction

As architects of each new first-year class, every admission professional's work affects the very nature of his or her law school. Admission professionals must often juggle the sometimes conflicting desires of law school deans and faculty with the realities of their applicant pool. Most seek to attract and admit an incoming class that is academically capable of excelling in (or at least surviving the rigors of) law school, while being simultaneously interesting and diverse. Special considerations may also be given to applicants who might otherwise be foreclosed from a legal education or those who demonstrate an interest in pursuing a particular career after law school. The composition of incoming classes may also be driven in part by an aspiration to address implicit or explicitly stated mission goals of the law school.

In crafting an entering class, each law school must answer a series of questions, including:

- What constitutes an optimal admit pool, and how is it recognized as such?
- How can different applicant factors, especially standardized test scores, be effectively and fairly employed in the selection process?
- How does one build a diverse (in a broad sense) entering class when the use of certain criteria, such as an applicant's race or ethnicity, is prohibited?

These questions are addressed here through a proposed approach to formalizing the admission process. Components of this approach include defining the goals of the law school in general and the admission office in particular. Characteristics of the desired entering class are then delineated and measures of those characteristics agreed upon. After these have been collected from all applicants, a set of applicants is selected (i.e., the admit pool) that optimally satisfies the expected characteristics of the entering class. This proposed selection among applicants is a complex one that is best undertaken with a computer algorithm. Fortunately, such algorithms are widely available commercially, or even downloaded off the Internet free of charge.

A common misconception associated with this admissions approach, and the use of a computer-selection algorithm in particular, is that it might somehow remove the human factor that is so critical to admission decisions, or even eliminate the need for reading applicant files. In fact, no software package or statistical approach could replace the work of admission professionals, nor should it. One way to view this proposed computer-selection algorithm is to liken it to composing text with a modern-day word processor. Such software packages make writing more convenient and provide spelling and grammar checks, but they cannot replace the core creative process writers must provide.

Background

For many law schools, applicants' scores from the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) are very strong determinants of their probability of admission. The reasons for this are clear. The LSAT is consistently among the best indicators of first-year law school success, at least in terms of predicting first-year law school grades. The prediction of first-year grades is further enhanced when LSAT scores are combined with applicants' undergraduate grade-point averages (UGPAs)—the combination of which is commonly referred to as the "index." For admission professionals who must deal with large applicant volumes, LSAT scores, whether alone or in combination with UGPAs, provide convenient measures with which to differentiate among law school candidates. In addition to the demonstrated utility and convenience of LSAT scores, there has been recent pressure imposed on law schools to place well in various annual rankings (e.g., the *U.S. News and World Report* annual ranking of law schools), which are often heavily driven by LSAT averages for entering classes. Clearly, conditions and reasons for the excessive use of the LSAT are present.

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC), the administrators of the LSAT, have always warned users against overuse of and overreliance on LSAT scores. LSAC's *Cautionary Policies Concerning LSAT Scores and Related Services* state "... while LSAT scores serve a useful purpose in the admission process, they do not measure, nor are they intended to measure, all the elements important to success at individual institutions. LSAT scores must be examined in relation to the total range of information available about a prospective law student." But while LSAC has warned against overuse and overreliance, individual law schools have been left to their own devices concerning the proper use of the LSAT.

Besides having to determine the appropriate role of the LSAT at their institutions, some law schools have recently had constraints placed upon them with regard to the use of race/ethnicity as a factor in their admission processes. In particular, public law schools are restricted in their use of race or ethnicity as an admission factor in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi because of the court's decision in *Hopwood*, and in California and Washington State due to ballot initiatives banning the consideration of race in admission. Other states or jurisdictions may follow suit in the future. The *Hopwood* ruling and the ballot initiatives suggest that admissions should be primarily merit driven—which on the surface appears to be a reasonable postulation. Unfortunately, merit can all too easily be equated with performance on the LSAT, or some combination of LSAT score and UGPA.

While LSAT scores and UGPAs are useful measures to help evaluate merit, they certainly are not the only ones available. In addition, the sole use of LSAT scores and UGPAs, either individually or in combination, can have a disparate impact on minority groups, and in particular, African American applicants. This does not mean that these measures are biased against any minority group. In fact, studies indicate that they predict first-year law school grades fairly and equitably across minority groups (Anthony, Reese, & Pashley, 1998). However, attaching too much importance to LSAT scores and UGPAs may disproportionately affect applicants from certain minority groups—applicants who may in fact be capable of contributing significantly to a law school class in very important ways.

Crafting a Class Versus Ranking Applicants

In its *Report to the Faculty and UCLA Community* (1997, p. 2), a UCLA School of Law admissions task force stated the following:

> We also recognize that there is no single dimension of excellence in applicants. Just as there are many different kinds of excellent lawyers—as demonstrated in the diverse replies we received to our informal survey of the faculty—there are many quite distinctive applicants to this law school with demonstrated potential for excellence. We agree with our colleague who responded to the survey with the preface: "There is no 'ideal applicant,' but rather an ideal mix of students in a class." In other words, we believe in a pluralist conception of a great law school.

We could not agree more with these sentiments. One method for achieving a suitable mix of students would appear to be ranking each applicant on a host of factors the law school deems important, combining those separate rankings into an overall number, and selecting a class from the top down. More specifically, empirical data or subjective judgments can be collected from applicants on a variety of factors. Factor scores or factor rankings can then be produced. Empirical data (e.g., LSAT scores) might be used directly as factor scores, or they may be transformed in some way (e.g., UGPAs might be classified into six levels). Subjective judgments would also need to be converted into scores (e.g., evidence of leadership qualities might be rated on a five-point scale). Then all the applicants' factor scores could be weighted in the same way and added together into a composite score for each applicant. The following is a very simple weighting (or regression) equation:

$$\text{Composite Score} = (.5 \times \text{LSAT}) + (10 \times \text{UGPA}) + (3 \times \text{LEADERSHIP})$$

Applicants would then be ranked according to their composite score and the top 30%, for example, would be admitted. All the calculations necessary to rank candidates could be done by hand or very easily with a computer spreadsheet program.

Ranking applicants on a composite score does seem to have a certain intuitive appeal, and the approach is fairly easy to implement. What could be wrong with this approach? We see three main areas of concern. First, it is very hard to predict what type of incoming class such a ranking scheme might produce. While some law schools might value leadership qualities, they may not want an incoming class comprised entirely of leaders. Say a particular law school would be satisfied if 20% of its incoming class showed excellent leadership qualities. It could calibrate its regression equation on data from a previous year, but this would not guarantee the results it wants in the current admission cycle. This would be especially true if candidates realized that the law school valued leadership qualities, and they then, on average, included more evidence of that factor in their files than they did in the previous year.

Second, the weights given to different factors should have some meaning. LSAT scores and UGPAs are commonly combined into a composite index score. Their weights are chosen statistically to optimally predict first-year grades, and therefore have meaning. We do not believe that there is one criterion (or even multiple criteria) that could be used to statistically weight various academic and non-academic factors. Various weighting schemes could be tried using data from a previous year, but as indicated above, there would be no guarantee that similar results would be achieved during the current admission cycle. That leaves some subjective assessment of weights. Again, we do not know how a person or committee would go about assigning different weights to different factors. Why, for example, would an applicant's LSAT score be weighted by .5 and leadership qualities by 3?

Third, we wonder why anyone would want to add factors together in the first place. One could argue that LSAT scores and UGPAs might be sensibly combined into an index because they are both so-called academic measures. What reason could be given for combining LSAT scores with leadership qualities? Recently, many people have become intrigued with the "whole person" approach to assessing applicants. A ranking scheme starts by assessing the whole person through the evaluation of many applicant factors. But then the multiple factors are combined into one composite score that represents the applicant in the selection process. Rather than reducing every applicant down to one number, we believe that each of their many attributes should independently come into play when they are being considered for selection into a law school.

Constrained Optimization

As stated above, the approach proposed here attempts to select an admit pool or craft an expected incoming class that satisfies certain predetermined pool or class characteristics. This is not achieved by ranking applicants in terms of some single composite score. Rather, a set of candidates is selected which, as a group, optimally satisfies stated pool or class characteristics. While these two concepts may appear similar on the surface, they treat candidates differently and yield different results.

The specific mathematical approach to selecting an incoming class that we are proposing is known in the field of operations research as constrained optimization (see, e.g., Fletcher, 1990). (Note: For now, we will discuss this approach in the context of choosing an optimal admit pool that possesses certain characteristics. How this approach could be applied to choosing an expected incoming class will be discussed in a later section.) As in the case of a ranking system, data on various factors must first be collected from applicants and scaled (i.e., factor-scores produced). Constraints, which are tied to prespecified admit pool characteristics, are then placed on each factor—not for the individual, but for the admit pool as a whole. For example, a law school could establish a constraint that at least 20% of its admit pool should have excellent leadership qualities. Other constraints might involve the age of the applicant, various SES measures, etc.

Sets of admit pools are found that satisfy the entire array of constraints specified by the law school. For example, from a particular law school's 1,000 applicants, say an admit pool of 200 must be chosen that satisfies all predetermined constraints. Unless the array of constraints specified is extremely stringent, many overlapping sets of 200 applicants could satisfy all constraints. The optimal set of 200 is then chosen according to some other criterion or criteria. Reasonable optimization criteria are admit pool average LSAT score, average UGPA, or some average LSAT score/UGPA combination.

To illustrate this approach more concretely, consider a very simple pool consisting of three applicants with the following LSAT scores and ages:

Applicant	LSAT	Age
1	154	20
2	152	22
3	150	24

Let us now assume that we wish to select an admit pool with the following characteristics: the average age of applicants in the admit pool is at least 22 and the size of the admit pool is two applicants. In addition, we want to select the admit pool with the highest average LSAT score. In mathematical terms, this problem could be represented as follows:

Maximize: Average LSAT

Subject to: Average Age $\geq$ 22
Number of Admits = 2

Choosing Applicants 1 and 2 would maximize LSAT, but yield an average age of 21, violating the age criterion. Selecting Applicants 2 and 3 would certainly satisfy the age constraint, as would the selection of Applicants 1 and 3. The latter choice, however, yields a higher average LSAT score. The optimal solution, therefore, is to admit Applicants 1 and 3.

Now consider applying weights to the same set of applicants (i.e., employ a ranking scheme). As described above, we would weight LSAT and age separately, and then add the results together to obtain a composite score for each applicant. The applicants can then be ranked and the top two chosen to be admitted. Weighing the two criteria in this simple example yields only three possible rankings:

a. If LSAT is weighted more than age, Applicants 1 and 2 will be ranked highest.
b. If LSAT is weighted less than age, Applicants 2 and 3 will be ranked highest.
c. If LSAT is weighted the same as age, Applicants 1, 2, and 3 will be equally ranked.

Note that the solution found previously by way of constrained optimization (i.e., admitting Applicants 1 and 3) cannot be achieved by simply weighting the two criteria. In contrast, constrained optimization can be used to choose any combination of applicants for admittance from any applicant pool.

Two other areas in which ranking schemes may produce suboptimal results compared to constrained optimization are now discussed. First, consider the selection of an investment portfolio. One could rank investments (e.g., stocks and mutual funds) in terms of their most recent increases in value, or some combination of various performance measures, and then invest in the top five. However, investment advisors are more likely to suggest a selection of investments that are diverse on many fronts. They may suggest, for example, high-risk stocks balanced with Treasury Bills, precious metal investments balanced with money market funds, and investing in high-tech firms balanced with manufacturing sector investments. To achieve the appropriate mix of investment vehicles, the investment advisor normally starts by assessing the investor's goals and aversion to risk. Using the investor's parameters, the investment advisor builds an investment portfolio. That portfolio might be optimal in the sense that among the feasible sets of diverse investment vehicles, it may be predicted to produce the best average return in the short term, for example. This investment portfolio could be modified later with input from the investor.

Second, employing similar methodology, testing organizations, including LSAC, regularly create new standardized test forms for administration. These test forms must conform to a litany of content specifications, including ranges of individual test question difficulties and a diversity of subject matter, especially when reading passages are used. In fact, about 100 different criteria are considered when assembling LSAT forms. Among the different sets of test questions that might satisfy test form content constraints, the set that provides the most information (in a psychometric manner) about individual test takers is usually said to be optimal.

Ten years ago, test specialists assembled forms by hand, sorting through the available pool of test questions and selecting a subset that appeared to satisfy predetermined content specifications. More recently, computer programs have been developed, at LSAC and elsewhere, to automate the assembly of test forms. One of the first test assembly computer programs to be used operationally was developed by Swanson and Stocking (1993) at Educational Testing Service. Their sophisticated computer program can handle very complex and highly dimensional sets of constraints. Noting the similarities between test assembly and admission selection (i.e., choosing from a given pool, a subset that satisfies certain criteria), Stocking is currently studying the application of the Swanson and Stocking computer program to the latter problem.

The computer algorithm employed in this paper is simpler and more commonly used (at least in the field of operations research) than the Swanson and Stocking computer program and, hence, is more readily available. Specifically, the empirical admission example given in a later section was solved using a technique called linear programming (see, e.g., Fletcher, 1990).

While current automated test assembly programs are very sophisticated and make the job of creating new test forms more efficient, they cannot match the skill of an experienced test specialist. So, for example, LSAC automated test assembly programs are employed to create initial LSAT forms that are used as starting points. Test specialists then modify them by adding and subtracting test questions in order to optimize the final LSAT forms.

Integrating Yield Rates

The above approach would be sufficient if the goal of the admission office was simply to select an admit pool with certain characteristics. This is not usually the case, however. While the admit pool is certainly important, law schools are most interested in the characteristics of the incoming class (i.e., the matriculants). Reconsider the simple example described above. Given an applicant pool of size 1,000, a computer program could select a group of 200 persons who have the highest average LSAT score among all groups of 200 persons whose average age is at least 25. There is no guarantee, though, that the average age of the incoming class will be 25. In fact, if you knew that the older applicants who were included in the admit pool were likely to matriculate elsewhere, you would guess that the incoming class would probably have an average age less than 25.

A better approach would be to take estimated yield rates (i.e., the probability that an admitted individual will matriculate) into account when determining the admit pool. In this way, incoming class characteristics would first be specified (e.g., an average incoming class age of at least 25) and then an "expected" incoming class could be modeled. This approach would still produce an optimal admit pool that possessed certain characteristics. In addition, those admit pool characteristics, when weighted by individual yield rates, should match the desired characteristics of the incoming class.

An Empirical Example

To demonstrate the utility of this approach, we ran actual admission data through our selection algorithm and compared the results with actual admission decisions. For reasons of confidentiality, the particular school that we used will be referred to as Law School X, and the results will be given in terms of differences between actual and modeled values. We did not attempt to model Law School X's admission process exactly, but rather we made some assumptions about what its goals and objectives were. For the sake of simplicity, the admit pool was taken as the focus of our modeling (i.e., yield rates were not used to estimate expected incoming class characteristics).

The data used in this example originated from the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) database, merged with College Board and U.S. Census databases. Actual applicant files were not read, nor were additional data extracted from them. This resulted in a very sparse profile for each candidate. Note that if this approach were to be operationally implemented at Law School X, its goals and objectives would first have to be fully understood. Also, much more data that are available through the review of applicant files would be incorporated into the modeling procedure.

In order to illustrate aspects of our approach from start to finish, we fabricated a mission statement for Law School X: *As a law school, we strive to provide the best legal education possible to all of our students. We attempt to ensure that our students are provided with a diverse environment in which to learn. We also try to provide opportunities to students who might otherwise be foreclosed from pursuing a high-quality legal education.*

This statement may lead us to define the following goals and objectives for Law School X's admissions office: *Through our admissions work, we strive to admit applicants who, as a group, are diverse in terms of undergraduate, cultural, and personal experiences. We give consideration to those less-than-privileged individuals who have had to overcome personal, educational, or environmental adversity. Within the above constraints, we also strive to ensure that the group of applicants we admit exhibit as high academic potential as possible, in terms of undergraduate credentials and standardized test scores.*

While the above law school mission statement and admission office goals and objectives were fabricated by us, they are not totally unrealistic. In fact, the mission statement is in keeping with some of the objectives expressed in various law school catalogues.

The factors used to address the constraints outlined in the above admission office goals and objectives are displayed in Table 1. The constraint values given in the table are based on previously observed admit pool characteristics for Law School X. The first five constraints are related to the average of the corresponding factor (e.g., the average age of the applicants in the admit pool is constrained to be greater than or equal to 26). The next six constraints are related to the proportion of the corresponding factor (e.g., the proportion of in-state resident applicants in the admit pool is constrained to be greater than or equal to 0.35). With the first 10 factors serving as constraints, the goal was to maximize the average index for the applicants in the admit pool.

Differences between actual and modeled results are displayed in the last column of Table 1. For example, the model selected an admit pool of applicants with an average age equal to (after rounding to whole numbers) the actual average age of Law School X's admit pool. The differences found for all constraints were minor.

With a difference of 1, the model admitted a sample with a similar mean LSAT score as those admitted in the actual pool. The average undergraduate grade-point averages were also approximately equal, with a slight difference of 0.1. The total overlap between the modeled and actual admit pools slightly exceeded 75%.

TABLE 1

Constraints and maximization factors used to model Law School X's admit pool, along with results

Factor	Constraint	Difference*
Percent minority representation within area of residency	≥ 24%	−4.2%
Percent minority representation within undergraduate school	≥ 27%	−3.6%
Percent of bachelor degrees or higher within area of residency	≤ 33%	1.9%
Income within area of residency	≤ 38,000	1,500
Age	≥ 26	0
In-state residents	≥ 0.35	0
Undergraduate school location: City (pop. ≥ 50,000)	≥ 0.55	−.02
Undergraduate school location: Town (pop. < 50,000)	≥ 0.35	.02
Undergraduate campus environment: Urban	≥ 0.40	−.03
Undergraduate campus environment: Suburban	≥ 0.40	.02
Undergraduate campus environment: Rural	≥ 0.10	.01
Index = *f*(LSAT, UGPA)**	Maximize	
LSAT		1
UGPA		−0.1

* (Students admitted to law school) – (Students admitted by model)

** Index is a linear combination of LSAT score and UGPA

Neither the race nor ethnicity of applicants were used as constraints in the model. However, ethnic breakdowns were tabulated after the final results were found and are displayed in Table 2. Modeled and actual results are displayed in the two center columns for white, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic applicant subgroups. For example, the model selected an admit pool of which 12.2% were African American applicants, while the actual percent admitted was 13%. Overall, the ethnic subgroup percentages were quite comparable for the modeled and actual admit pools.

The last column in Table 2 represents the percent overlap of the modeled and actual admit pools by ethnic subgroup. For example, of the Asian American applicants who were chosen by the model, 66.7% were actually admitted. While there is a sizable overlap for the white subgroup, the overlap among the other three subgroups was less impressive. This indicates that our selection algorithm chose an admit pool with very similar characteristics as those found in the actual pool, but not necessarily the same applicants.

TABLE 2
Modeled and actual ethnic subgroup percentages of the total admit pool, along with percent overlaps

	Percentage of Total		
Ethnic Subgroup	Model	Actual	Percent Overlap
White	67.8	63.4	81.6
African American	12.2	13.0	58.7
Asian American	8.4	10.0	66.7
Hispanic	1.8	3.3	45.2

Summary and Discussion

In this paper, we have proposed a formalized approach to law school admissions. The fundamental components of this approach are displayed in Figure 1. The law school mission statement guides the admission office goals and objectives, which in turn suggest what applicant factors are important for consideration in the selection process. Data are then captured for each applicant (e.g., LSAT scores, ratings of personal statements, etc.), and are fed into a selection algorithm. Note that we still advocate the review of all applicant files, as indicated in Figure 1, and we suggest that the final admit pool should be scrutinized by admission professionals.

Figure 2 displays components particular to our proposed computer selection algorithm. The applicant pool, along with factors important for consideration in the selection process, are fed into the optimizing algorithm. This produces an admit pool that, as a group, satisfies certain constraints. If yield rates were incorporated in this model, characteristics of an expected incoming class would be targeted.

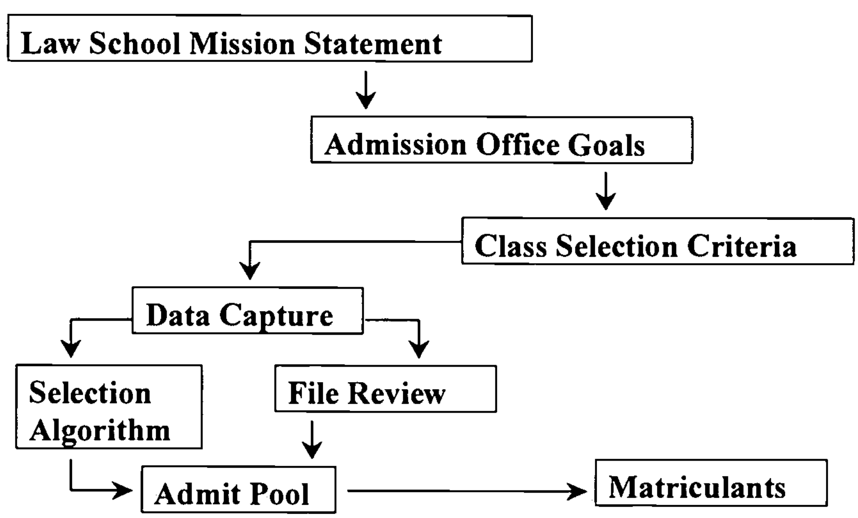

FIGURE 1. *Proposed admission components*

Applications of the Model

This approach could be applied in a number of different ways. A law school might use a computer-selection algorithm to help narrow the applicant pool down to a more manageable size. For example, say a law school receives 2,000 applications and intends to admit approximately 600 of these. The selection algorithm proposed here could be used to select 900 files, from which 600 could be chosen by hand. In this situation, the law school could devote more resources to the thorough review of files in the reduced applicant pool. Some level of review of all files might still be needed, however.

The computer-selection algorithm could also be run after a preliminary admit pool had been chosen, using traditional methods, but before all admittees had been notified. In this case, the selection algorithm might then be used to check whether all constraints had been satisfied. If all constraints had not been satisfied, the selection algorithm could identify applicant files that might be revisited and selection adjustments that might be made to optimize the admit pool.

Of course, individual law schools would need to decide for themselves when to employ the selection algorithm and how best to use the information that it yields. However, note that in all cases the work of admission professionals will remain the most critical component of the admission process.

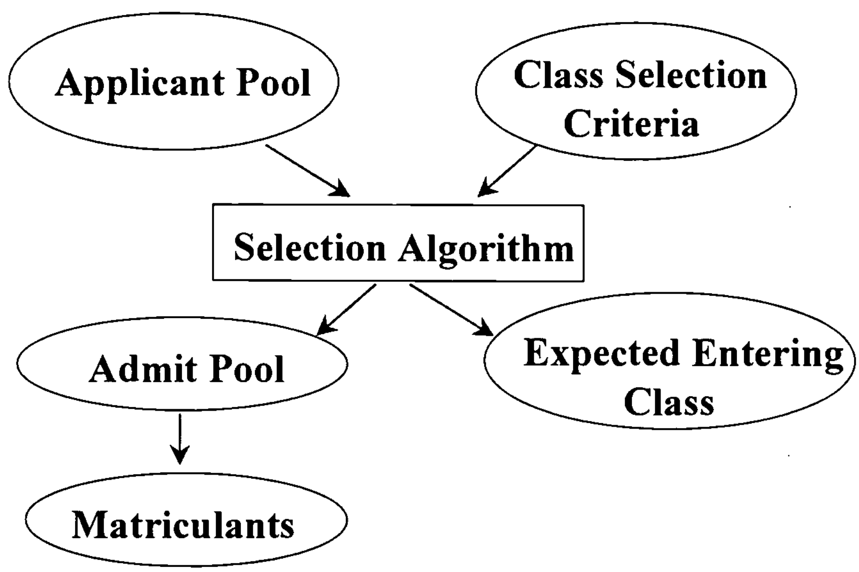

FIGURE 2. *Inputs to and outputs from the selection algorithm*

Future Directions

One of the initial steps we undertook was to visit numerous law schools in the U.S. and Canada to interview admission professionals and to familiarize ourselves with common admission practices. We are currently visiting various law schools to review samples of applicant files. Applicants of particular interest to us are those who our model misclassified (i.e., applicants whom our selection algorithm admitted into a law school, but who were actually denied admission, or vice versa). By reviewing these files, we are uncovering many important factors that are not currently available to us. In the future, we hope to use some of these factors to improve the model's selection of incoming classes. In the next phase of our research we plan to perform some large-scale admissions modeling. This will involve reading and extracting information from applicant files.

We envision the final outcomes of this project to include a formalized and delineated approach to admission work and associated computer software. As already mentioned, our approach is intended to be flexible enough to assist or supplement the work of admission professionals in most law school settings.

References

Admissions Task Force (1997). *Report to the faculty and UCLA community: The admissions policies of the UCLA School of Law.* Los Angeles, CA: University of California—Los Angeles.

Anthony, L., Reese, L., & Pashley, P. (In press). *Analysis of differential prediction of law school performance by ethnic subgroups.* (LSAT Technical Report 98-02). Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council.

Fletcher, R. (1990). *Practical methods of optimization.* Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Swanson, L., & Stocking, M. L. (1993). A model and heuristic for solving very large item selection problems. *Applied Psychological Measurement, 17*, 151-166.