PLSC 476: Empirical Legal Studies

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Final Exams / Projects

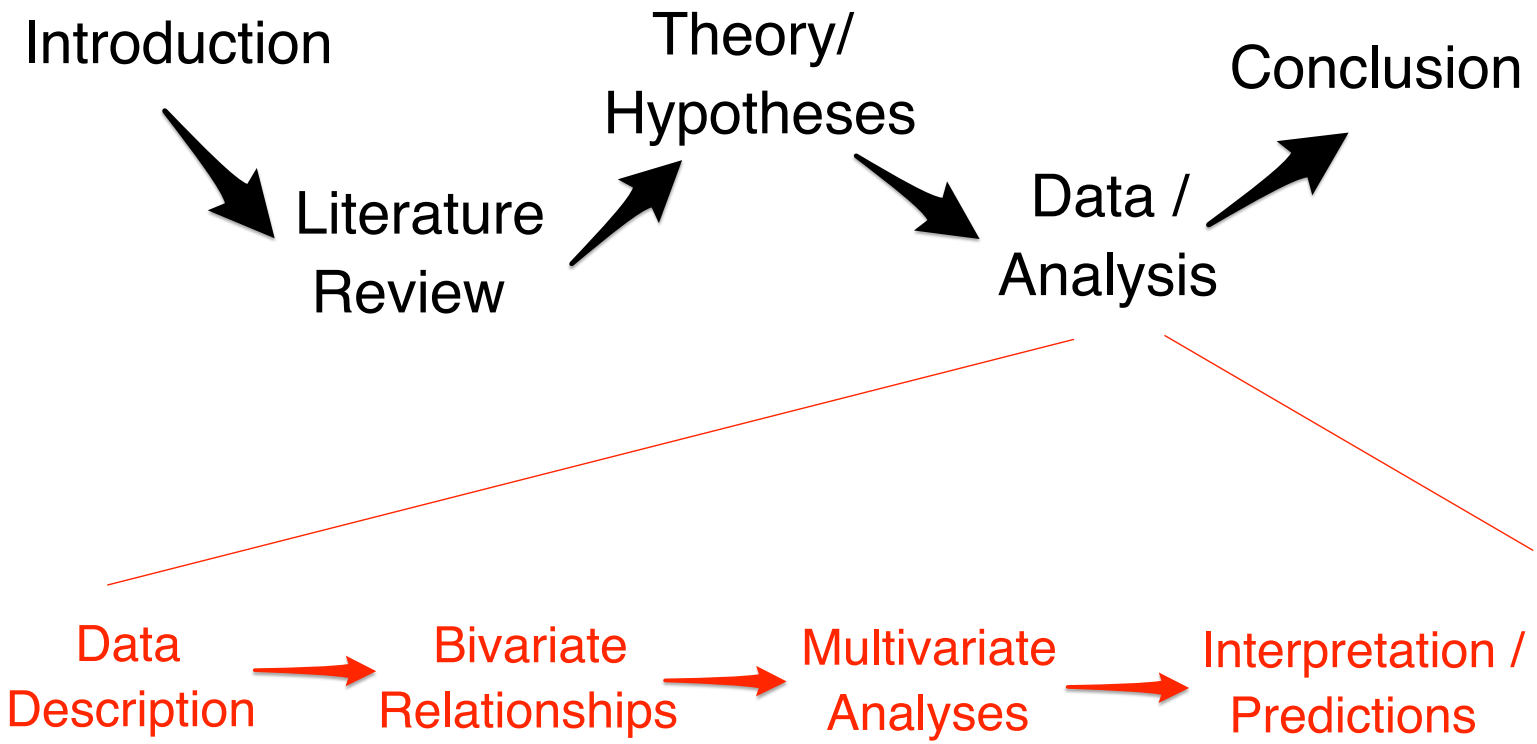
The Final Project

- A short, original piece of empirical research on a topic related to empirical legal studies
- $\approx$ 5000 words, plus figures / tables
- May be either a conventional paper or a "poster" format
- Possible approaches: Original research idea; replication + extension; "reapplication" of in-class ideas
- Due no later than 6:00 p.m. ET on **May 6, 2021**

The Final Exam

- Take-home, "essay"-format, with some "choice"
- General format: use (provided) data to investigate and answer a series of questions about a topic in empirical legal studies
- Distributed electronically on April 29, 2021; due (also electronically) at or before 6:00 p.m. ET on **May 6, 2021**

Research Article Anatomy



Tables

- **Content**. What is the author presenting with the table? Data? Coefficient estimates? A Model? Predictions?

- **Organization**. Columns and rows, of course, but always keep in mind what each one is.

- **Role**. What point does the table make? How does it fit into the larger argument or set of arguments that the author is trying to make?

Figures

- **Content**. Again: Data? A Model? Predictions? Coefficient estimates? Equilibria (as in game theory)?

- **Organization/Type**. This can take on a bunch of different forms, some of which we've already discussed.

- **Role**. As with tables: What point does the figure make? How does it fit into the larger argument or set of arguments that the author is trying to make?

Sheldon & Krieger (2004)

Q: What drives law students' well-being?

- Outcome: "Subjective well-being" (SWB): positive / negative affect + life satisfaction
- Explanations: "Self-determination theory"
  - Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation
  - Extrinsic can be external / introjected (not good) or identified (good)
  - Motivations: "autonomous" (good) vs. "controlled" (bad)
- Data: $\approx$ 240 Florida State Law students (beginning August 2000)
- Followed over three years, measured at four times (8/2000, 3/2001, 11/2001, 11/2002)

Table 3. Study 1: Changes in well-being, values, and motivation from August 2000 to March 2001

Variables	Time		
	August	March	*p*-level for the difference
Well-being			
Aggregate SWB	4.85	3.88	<0.01
Positive affect	3.79	3.29	<0.01
Negative affect	2.47	2.66	<0.01
Life satisfaction	3.53	3.25	<0.01
Symptoms	1.95	2.21	<0.01
Beck depression	6.12	7.94	<0.01
Values			
Relative intrinsic value orientation	5.14	4.75	<0.01
Financial success (E)	3.29	3.30	0.82
Appealing appearance (E)	2.31	2.47	<0.01
Social popularity (E)	2.31	2.30	0.87
Community contribution (I)	3.87	3.74	<0.01
Personal growth (I)	4.49	4.44	0.18
Emotional intimacy (I)	4.69	4.64	0.11
Motivation for goals			
Relative self-determination	4.27	3.65	<0.01
External motivation (C)	1.57	1.76	<0.01
Introjected motivation (C)	2.38	2.34	0.64
Identified motivation (A)	4.29	4.17	0.12
Intrinsic motivation (A)	3.93	3.57	<0.01

E = extrinsic value, I = intrinsic value, C = controlled motivation, A = autonomous motivation.

Table 4. Study 1: Correlations between changes in motivations/values and changes in well-being

	Decrease in well-being				
	Aggregate SWB	Positive affect	Negative affect	Life satisfaction	Physical symptoms
Decreases in relative intrinsic value orientation	0.17*	0.15*	−0.07	0.15*	−0.04
Decreases in relative self-determined motivation	0.19**	0.13^{+}	−0.18*	0.10	−0.26**

$^{+}p < 0.010$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$.

Summary

- "(S)tudents evidenced large declines in positive affect and life-satisfaction, and large increases in negative affect, depression, and physical symptomology, from the beginning to the end of their first year of law school."
- "(S)tudents declined in their endorsement of intrinsic values over the first year ... In addition, students felt less self-determined in their law school goals by the end of the year, specifically pursuing their goals less for reasons of interest and enjoyment, and more for reasons of pleasing or impressing others."
- (the study) "found significant correlations between the changes in motivation and values and the changes in SWB."
- "(S)tudents who attained high first semester grade-point averages in turn evidenced significant shifts towards high-stress, money-oriented legal career preferences, and significant shifts away from more service- oriented career preferences."

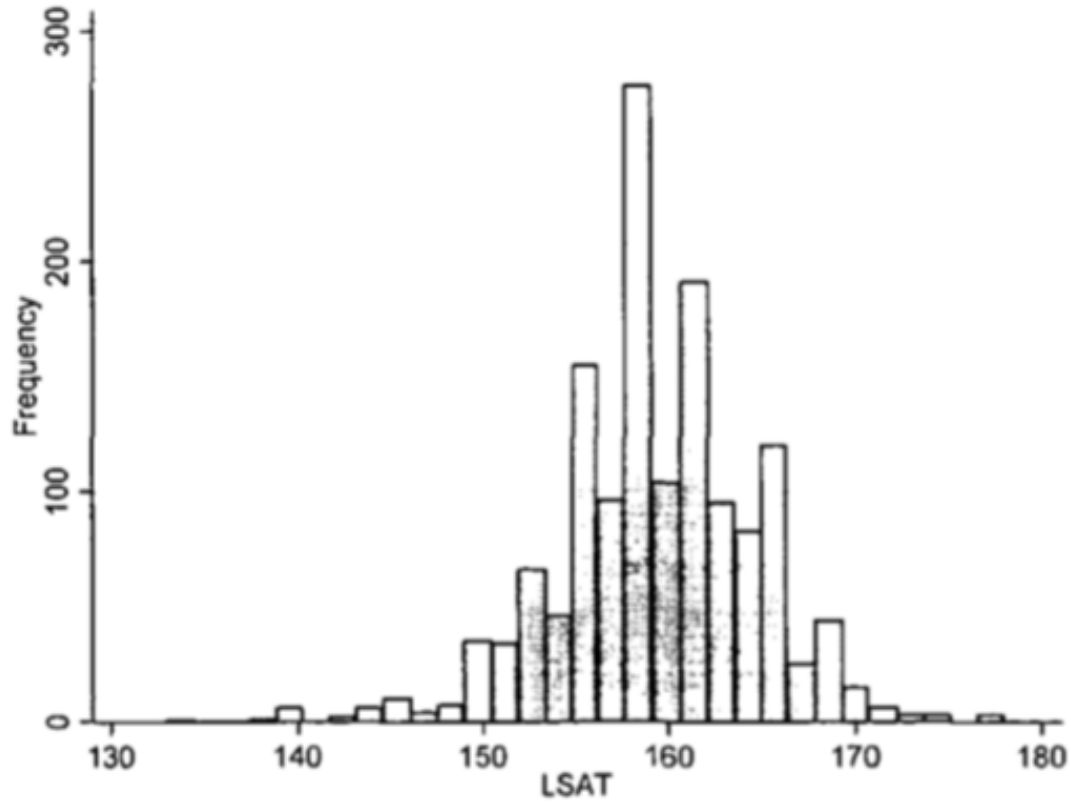
Marks & Moss (2016)

Q: What determines law school "success"?

- "Success" = law school GPA...
- Possible predictors:
  - LSAT scores / undergraduate GPA
  - College major
  - Previous employment (type + duration)
  - Criminal history / graduate degree(s)
  - Demographic variables...
- Data: $N \approx 1400$ law students over six years (2005-2011) at two law schools (CU & CWRU)

Marks & Moss (2016) Figure 1

Figure 1: LSAT distribution summary charts.



Marks & Moss (2016) Regression Table

Table 2: OLS Regression Results for Model 1 (Dependent Variable: Cumulative LGPA) and Model 2 (Dependent Variable: First-Year LGPA)

Variables	*Model 1: Cumulative Law School GPA (LGPA)*	*Model 2: First Year Law School GPA (1L GPA)*
Traditional factors		
Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)	0.016*** (9.31)	0.030*** (12.63)
Adjusted LSAT college median (LCM)	0.003*** (3.55)	0.004** (2.98)
Adjusted undergraduate GPA (UGPA)	0.272*** (12.44)	0.328*** (11.22)
Ethnicity		
African American	−0.155*** (3.77)	−0.170** (3.35)
Latino/a	−0.148*** (3.29)	−0.148** (2.52)
Asian American	−0.154*** (5.81)	−0.130*** (3.77)
Native American	−0.173** (2.28)	−0.188** (1.97)
Employment duration		
1–3 years	0.032 (1.47)	0.032 (1.16)
4–9 years	0.109** (2.88)	0.110** (2.49)
10+ years	0.014 (0.25)	0.081 (1.11)
Employment type		
Teaching	0.082^{+} (2.20)	0.086^{+} (1.80)
Legal	0.022 (0.69)	0.015 (0.35)
Business	−0.023 (0.75)	−0.025 (0.61)
Technology	−0.05 (1.55)	−0.077^{+} (1.85)
Military	−0.119^{+} (2.25)	−0.231** (3.43)
Public service	0.043 (1.17)	0.068 (1.44)
College major		
Science, tech., engineering, math (STEM)	0.066** (2.65)	0.061^{+} (1.90)
Economics, accounting, finance	0.058** (2.30)	0.032 (0.97)
Psychology, sociology, anthropology	−0.006 (0.30)	0.011 (0.38)
Art, music, drama	−0.038 (0.80)	−0.084^{+} (1.33)
Environmental sciences	0.022 (0.42)	0.012 (0.17)
Liberal arts, history	−0.001 (0.08)	0.016 (0.70)
Other factors		
No work experience & rising college GPA	0.033 (1.45)	0.053^{+} (1.82)
Criminal history	−0.119** (3.39)	−0.137** (2.99)
Graduate degree	0.030 (1.22)	0.037 (1.16)
University of Colorado law student	−0.209*** (10.12)	−0.225*** (8.33)
College leadership	0.018 (0.67)	0.019 (0.51)
Gender male	0.014 (0.89)	0.015 (0.72)
Constant	−0.821** (2.70)	−3.470*** (8.21)
Adjusted R^2	0.26	0.28
Observations	1,419	1,317

NOTES: Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses. $^{+}p<0.10$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$.

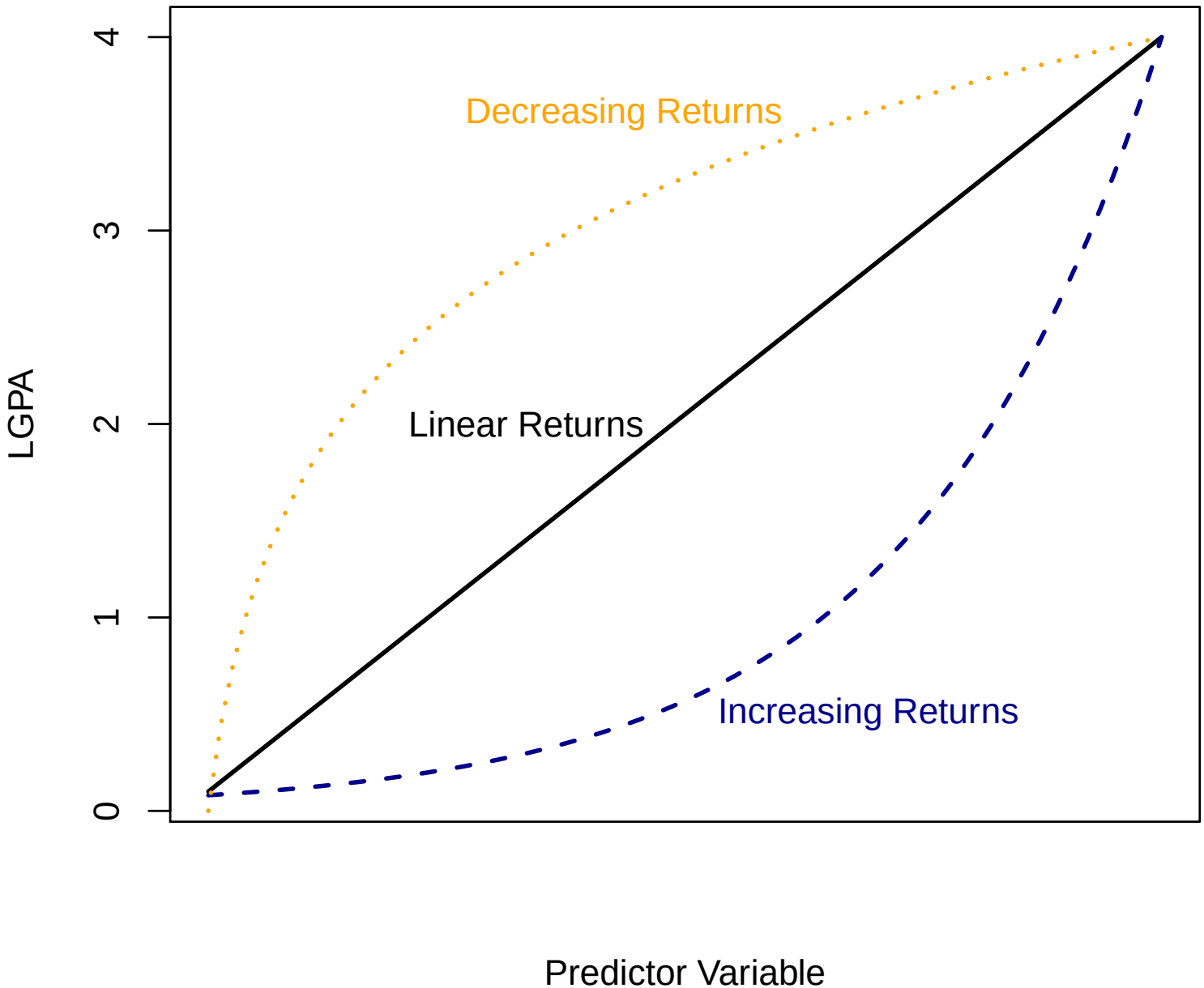
Marks & Moss (2016) Summary Table

Table 3: Summary of Magnitudes of Variable Correlations with LGPA (Model 1)

Positive Predictors	*Negative Predictors*	*Nonpredictive (No Correlation w/LGPA)*
LSAT*** (best fit: linear) • +1 LSAT pt. ≈ +0.02 LGPA **UGPA***** (best fit: increasing returns) • if UGPA < 3.4: +0.08 UGPA ≈ +1 LSAT • if UGPA ≥ 3.4: +0.04 UGPA ≈ +1 LSAT (consistent across all college qualities) **LCM***** (best fit: decreasing returns) • +1 LCM pt. ≈ +0.2 LSAT • LCM < 152 ≈ additional −1 LSAT **Major**: STEM;** EAF** • STEM major ≈ +4 LSAT • EAF major ≈ +3½ LSAT **Work duration**: 4–9 yr.** • 4–9 yrs.' work ≈ +6½ LSAT **Work type**: Teaching* • Teaching ≈ +5 LSAT **UGPA rising ≥ 0.3**, if enter law school right after college (not sig.: $p = 0.126$) • Rising GPA ≈ +2 LSAT	**Negative disciplinary or criminal record**** • Neg. rec. ≈ $-7^1/_3$ LSAT **Work type**: Military;+ Sci/tech (not sig.: $p = 0.110$) • Military ≈ $-7^1/_3$ LSAT • Sci/tech. ≈ −3 LSAT **Demographics**: Person of color self-ID (** to ***) • Person of color self-ID ≈ −9 to −10 LSAT (but partly b/c a portion enter w/lower scores)	**Work duration**: 10 or more years **Work type**: All other than teaching & military (i.e., law, sci./tech., business, public service) **Majors**: All other than STEM/EAF (i.e., social or political sciences; history; liberal arts; fine arts; environment) **Demographics**: Gender (no discernible M/F difference) **Prior graduate degree** (any) **Major college leadership role** (any)

**$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

Returns...


LGPA
0
1
2
3
4
Decreasing Returns
Linear Returns
Increasing Returns
Predictor Variable

Summary & Discussion

- Important predictors:
  - LSAT
  - UGPA
  - college selectivity ("LCM")
  - STEM + Economics/Finance majors
  - work experience
  - criminal record (-)

- Other analyses: "splitters," high-variance applicants, etc.

- How would you do this differently?
  - Alternative measure(s) of "success"?
  - Alternative predictors?
  - Selection bias?