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# Do prior studies matter?

## Predicting proficiencies required to excel academically in law school at Makerere University, Uganda

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Predicting  
proficiencies  
required to  
excel

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Introduction of law school admission examinations has increased the debate regarding the relevance of prior studies for the enrollees in the program. The key issues of contention are whether prior studies reliably predict academic achievement of enrollees, and demonstrate proficiencies required for admission in the program. The purpose of this paper is to use administrative records of law students at Makerere University – over a four-year stipulated period of bachelor's studies – to investigate the above-mentioned issues further.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Panel data of 2,485 records enable us to explore time variant and invariant factors in the course of bachelor's candidature.

**Findings** – About 81 per cent of differentials in academic achievement was found to be due to variation across students. In addition to confirming prior academic attainment as a contributing factor to variations in academic achievement, our findings affirm that competence in literature, history and divinity predicts success on the program.

**Research limitations/implications** – Competence in these subjects (literature, history and divinity) certainly demonstrates proficiencies required by a student of law. Thus, admission based on competence in these subjects provides insights into proficiencies required by enrollees to excel academically in the program.

**Originality/value** – Unlike prior studies, this study explores time-variant factors in the course of bachelor's candidature, and is based on subjects taken during prior studies (secondary education) rather than a pooled index or weighted score adopted on admission to the program.

**Keywords** Education, Performance, Higher education

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

There is overwhelming evidence in support of successful performance of enrollees who have excelled academically in the past (Alfan and Othman, 2005; Duff, 2004; DeBerard *et al.*, 2004; Navarro *et al.*, 2011; Shultz and Zedeck, 2011; Wamala, 2013). This evidence is supported by studies across disciplines, for example, accounting and business economics (Duff, 2004; Alan and Othman, 2005), business management and national statistics (Halpern, 2007; Hoskins *et al.*, 1997), nursing (Navarro *et al.*, 2011) and actuarial science (Wamala, 2013). In the recent past, however, there has been a shift in admission criteria of various graduate and undergraduate programs from attainment of enrollees in their prior studies to application of pre-entry examinations. Although eligibility to sit for the examinations is based on attainment of enrollees in their prior studies, admission is mainly based on the outcome of the



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examination. A major disadvantage of the examination is that it reinforces racial and class privileges, according to Kidder (2000, 2001, 2003) and the Society of American Law Teachers as cited by Shultz and Zedeck (2011). The consensus regarding racial and class differentials in enrollments is that better performance in such examinations is more likely among the affluent candidates compared with their less advantaged counterparts. In any case, universities also seek to admit students with the strongest academic potential. Thus, the aspect of class differentials may not be a key issue as long as enrollees are able to excel academically. Unlike the traditional approach to admission, administering pre-entry examinations questions the relevance of enrollees' attainment in prior studies to predicting their academic achievement in a program. Particularly, administering examinations for admission to law school suggests that the program requires a unique approach to admission when compared with the requirements for other undergraduate programs. In any case, a generalization of this argument to admission of law students across institutions and/or countries would be questionable. Thus, an assessment of this issue is required to provide a basis for informed choices regarding admission to the program in various institutions and countries.

#### *Proficiencies for studying law*

Students intending to enroll in a law program are required to possess certain qualities that would enable them to excel academically and professionally, subsequently. The grounding for the qualities is to a greater part assumed to be obtained from prior studies. In affirming the relevance of prior studies in building proficiencies required by prospective students of law, the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) 2012-2014 Undergraduate Catalogue stipulates that "the core curriculum is built on the assumption that the foundations of the general part of a student's education are laid in secondary school" (UTSA, 2013, p. 3). Pertaining to admission to law school, the UTSA, 2012-2014 Undergraduate Catalogue stipulates that enrollees should be able to demonstrate proficiency in four major areas:

- (1) *Communication*: Writing in English, critical proficiency in oral and graphic communication as well as ability to identify and formulate problems and draw conclusions.
- (2) *Conceptual approaches and history of arts*: Ability to comprehend factual concepts and human creativity.
- (3) Political and economic dimensions of a society.
- (4) Cultural diversity including nature as well as limits of knowledge and academic fields.

The requirements for law enrollees presented by the Alabama State Bar (ASB), an association of lawyers in the USA, do not show otherwise regarding the proficiencies required for candidates in the program. The association identifies the importance of enrollees' grounding in the disciplines, namely, analytical writing, English and literature, political science, government, economics, accounting, history, philosophy, logic, scientific methods and public speaking (ASB, 2013). In affirming the relevance of these disciplines, the *Parent Advising Handbook* of John Hopkins University further stipulates that competence in economics, history, political thoughts and mathematics

provides a basis for building enrollees' grounding of knowledge in resolving disputes (John Hopkins University, 2013). In addition to the aforementioned disciplines, the regulations for admission to the bachelor of law at the University of Canterbury attach importance to knowledge of foreign languages (University of Canterbury, 2013). Their guidelines for admission to the program stipulate that enrollees with science, mathematics, music or art background will only succeed in the program if they possess good language and writing skills. This requirement underscores the importance of language and writing competencies for prospective students of law regardless of their academic background – whether enrollees are from a Science or Arts background. A debatable aspect, however, is whether competence in any language would serve the purpose. The aforementioned proficiencies of studying law are to a great extent in line with factors identified as important for lawyer effectiveness according to Shultz and Zedeck (2011) in citing Shultz and Zedeck (2003). In their study, the factors that relate directly to the aforementioned proficiencies are writing, speaking, analysis and reasoning, problem solving, ability to see the world through the eyes of others and fact finding.

In Uganda, Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) Information on Public Universities Joint Admission requirements for undergraduate programs suggest that any subjects done in their Advanced Level (A-Level) of secondary education are relevant for prospective students to excel academically in the program. However, using the achievement of enrollees in any best-done subjects in their A-Level undermines the relevance of the aforementioned proficiencies. The fact that all lawyers do not spend time in a court room suggests that proficiency in all the aspects may not be required for all candidates in the program. All the same, the above evidence shows that certain proficiencies are required by prospective students of law to excel academically and professionally, subsequently. Despite affirming the need for these proficiencies, no empirical evidence is provided to support these claims. In other words, the relevance of the key subjects identified with the proficiencies required by prospective students of law to excel academically in the program remains uninvestigated particularly from a local perspective.

#### *Admission requirements to studying law*

Although the requirements for admission to the law program may vary across countries, what is common to all institutions is the importance attached to grounding of enrollees in their prior studies. In the USA, a bachelor's degree is a requirement for acceptance into a law school (e.g. UTSA, 2013; ASB, 2013). This, however, is not the case across law schools in other countries and/or institutions. Similar to other African countries, admission to the program in Uganda, in particular, is mainly via successful completion of Ordinary (O-Level) and Advanced (A-Level) levels of secondary education. Thus, admission to the program prior to 2009 was based on a combined weighted score or index. The index represents enrollees' prior academic attainment in their Advanced (A-Level) and Ordinary (O-Level) levels of secondary education. According to the Information on Public Universities Joint Admissions 2005/2006 Academic Year weighting criteria (MoES, 2005), A-Level and O-Level weights are obtained by multiplying each subject grade point by the relevant weighting factor and adding up for all the subjects taken and passed. A similar criterion was adopted for determining the competency of candidates to law school in subsequent academic years.

Particularly, all subjects studied at A-Level are grouped in to four categories and weighted as Essential (weight factor of three), Relevant (weight of two), Desirable (weighted one) or Others (weight of 0.5). Two best done of all A-Level subjects were considered as the essential subjects in the program, while the third best-done subject was considered as the relevant subject. The “General paper” and the rest of the subjects were considered as desirable and others. On the other hand, distinctions 1 and 2 of O-Level grades carry a weight of 0.3, while credits 3–6 carry 0.2; “Passes” 7 and 8 carry 0.1 and a “Failure” carries 0.0 weight. However, the contribution of O-Level grades to combined weighted score is very minimal. All the same, the best candidate for the program is the one with the highest combined weight (MoES, 2005, 2006, 2007). In light of a wide range of subjects taken by enrollees on the Bachelors of Law in their A-Level, it is debatable that the index addresses the aforementioned proficiencies required by an entering student of law.

Particularly, candidates in the program at Makerere University have since 2011 been subjected to a pre-entry examination (Makerere University, 2011). Although eligibility to sit for the examination is based on a pooled index of enrollees’ attainment in their A-Level of secondary education, admission to the program is based solely on the outcome of the examination. The examination is aimed at assessing proficiencies required by prospective students of law. A questionable aspect, however, is whether prior studies would not provide a basis for assessing these competencies. In this study, therefore, we attempt to provide an explanation to this issue based on subjects taken by the enrollees in their A-Level of secondary education. Unlike recent studies directly related to law enrollees (Shultz and Zedeck, 2011; Wamala, 2013), the analysis in this study accounts for time-variant aspects in the course of the bachelor’s studies. Further, a panel analysis approach adopted in this study offers a platform for assessing unobserved aspects of student-related factors during the course of bachelor’s candidature.

### Data and methods

The investigations are based on administrative records of Bachelor of Laws (LLB) students at Makerere University’s School of Law in the 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 enrollment cohorts. Data on 629 students were compiled over the four-year stipulated period of bachelor’s candidature from the Academic Registrar Information System (ARIS). The ARIS is a subsystem of Integrated Tertiary System, an information system used by the University at the time of the study. Based on the four-year period of study in the program, a total of 2,485 complete records of the students were adopted in the analysis.

The academic achievement of students was assessed by the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students in the first, second, third and fourth year of their undergraduate studies. Attainment of enrollees in their prior studies was assessed by:

- a combined weighted index adopted on admission to the undergraduate program. As earlier stated, the index is based on academic attainment of enrollees in their A-level and O-level stages of secondary education; and
- subjects undertaken by the student in their A-Level of secondary education.

These subjects comprised literature, history, divinity, economics, Entrepreneurship, geography, Art, Kiswahili, Luganda, Arabic, music, French and German. However, the

analysis is mainly based on the subjects that are identified in literature to predict the proficiencies required by prospective students of law. The subjects are mainly: Literature (L), History (H), Divinity (D) and Geography (G).

Based on panel data approach, the role of prior academic attainment or subjects in predicting the academic achievement was investigated while accounting for variations in enrollees' characteristics of gender, year of enrollment, nationality and type of entry scheme. A panel represents student's records over the four-year stipulated period of undergraduate study in the program. The investigations were based on two models: In the first model [Model I], the academic achievement (CGPA) was investigated by a weighted score (W) adopted on admission to the program and students' characteristics namely, nationality (N), gender (S), enrollment cohort (C) and entry scheme (E). The functional format of the weighted score – a continuous variables – is determined using multivariable fractional polynomials. The formula for Model I is as follows:

$$CGPA_{it} = (\alpha + \mu_i) + \beta_1 N_i + \beta_2 S_i + \beta_3 C_i + \beta_4 E_i + \beta_5 W_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where  $i$  represents students ( $i = 1, \dots, 629$ );  $t$  is year of study ( $t = 1, 2, 3, 4$ );  $\alpha$  is constant;  $\mu_i$  and  $\varepsilon_{it}$  denotes error terms i.e. student-specific time invariant and variant unobserved heterogeneity, respectively.

In the second model [Model II], the academic achievement was investigated by characteristics of students and the four A-Level subjects that are identified in literature with the proficiencies of studying law. The formula for Model II is:

$$CGPA_{it} = (\alpha + \mu_i) + \beta_1 N_i + \beta_2 S_i + \beta_3 C_i + \beta_4 E_i + \beta_5 L_i + \beta_6 H_i + \beta_7 D_i + \beta_8 G_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

In both models, a random effects (RE) model was adopted based on maximum likelihood estimates. Application of a RE model was based on the assumption that differences across students (panels) have an influence on their academic achievement. Further, the advantage of the RE model is that it allows for the investigation of both time variant and invariant student-related factors over the four-year period of study. The analysis, however, does not account for:

- retakes undertaken by enrollees in the course of the bachelor's study; and
- study option undertaken by enrollees in their third and/or fourth year of law school.

The shortfalls are due to the inability of the ARIS to provide details on these aspects.

Unlike a multiple linear regression (MLR) based on OLS, distinct intercepts ( $\mu_i$ ) are generated for each student ( $i$ ). The intercept includes all aspects of unobserved heterogeneity that are fixed over the length of the panel (Arellano, 2003). The appropriateness of using the RE model over an MLR was investigated using the Breusch–Pagan Lagrange Multiplier (ML) test. The diagnostic test is based on a null hypothesis that there are no variations across panels, i.e. students. In other words:  $Var(\mu) = 0$ . To demonstrate the two types of variations for RE model, equations (1 and 2) could be written as follows:

$$CGPA[Student,t] = X\beta + \varepsilon[Student, t] + \mu[Student] \quad (3)$$

**Results**

The subsequent sections present results on academic achievement of the enrollees, their characteristics and subjects done at the A-Level of secondary education. The results are obtained from the univariate and multivariable analyses on 2,485 records of LLB graduates at Makerere University.

*Academic achievement of enrollees*

As earlier indicated, the academic achievement of students is assessed using their CGPA in the four academic years of their bachelors study. Table I presents a descriptive summary of the academic achievement of the enrollees.

The findings according to Table I show no major variations in mean CGPA obtained by students in the various years of study. The estimates point to a “Lower second” class of degree obtained by a considerable number of graduates in the program.

*Characteristics of students*

Table II presents a descriptive summary of students’ characteristics, namely, gender, year of enrollment, nationality and type of entry scheme.

According to Table II, the students can be characterized as predominantly Ugandan by nationality (91.0 per cent) and on private scheme (60.4 per cent); slightly less than six-in-every ten (59.0 per cent) were females. No major variations were noted with regard to their year of enrollment in the program – 34.2 per cent of enrollees were of the 2005 cohort, 35.8 per cent in 2006 and the rest were of the 2007 enrollment cohort.

*Subjects done at A-Level*

Table III presents a descriptive summary of enrollees’ attainment in the subjects undertaken at their A-Level of secondary education.

From the results in Table III, the main A-Level subjects undertaken by enrollees on the bachelor of law are: economics (86.1 per cent), history (84.9) and divinity (62.7 per cent). Although the estimates are below average, a considerable proportion of students are noted to have offered geography (37.5 per cent) and literature (34.7 per cent) at their A-level. The highest proportions of enrollees in the program were students who obtained grades A and B in the various subjects. This evidence suggests that the students in the enrollment cohorts were highly competent in undertaking undergraduate studies on the basis of the attainment in the various subjects done at their A-Level of secondary education. The debatable aspect, however, is whether attainment of enrollees in any subjects done at A-Level demonstrates the competence required by prospective students of law.

**Table I.**  
Descriptive summary  
of enrollees’  
academic  
achievement

Year of study	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
First	3.01	0.33	2.20	4.00
Second	3.04	0.31	2.23	4.05
Third	3.12	0.30	2.23	4.13
Fourth	3.19	0.29	2.30	4.30

Students' characteristics	Overall		Between		Predicting proficiencies required to excel
	<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)	
<i>Gender</i>					
Female	1,465	58.9	371	59.0	<b>145</b>
Male	1,020	41.1	258	41.0	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Year of enrollment</i>					
2005	843	33.9	215	34.2	<b>Table II.</b> Distribution of students' characteristics
2006	887	35.7	225	35.8	
2007	755	30.8	189	30.1	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Nationality</i>					
Non-Ugandans	224	9.0	58	9.2	
Ugandans	2,261	91.0	571	90.8	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Entry scheme</i>					
Government	993	40.0	249	39.6	
Private (day)	1,220	49.1	312	49.6	
Private (evening)	272	10.9	68	10.8	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	

As earlier stated, a combined weighted score or index represents the performance of enrollees on the basis of all subjects done in secondary education, i.e. O-level and A-level. Prior to 2011, the most competent candidates in the program at the University (including all other public universities in the country) were those with the highest weighted score adopted on admission to the LLB (MoES, 2005, 2006, 2007). Summary statistics on the weighted score in Table IV show that the enrollees in the study were highly competent in undertaking their bachelor's study. The contentious issue, however, is whether a high weighted score based on the 2005-2007 MoES guidelines implies competence of enrollees with regard to the proficiencies required by prospective students of law.

#### *Predictors of academic achievement*

As earlier stated, the investigations are based on two models. Model I denotes the academic achievement of students by their characteristics and selected subjects done at A-Level. Model II denotes the academic achievement of students by their characteristics and the weighted score adopted on admission to the program. Table V presents regression estimates of academic achievement by the variables in the two models. A graphical illustration of the relationship between enrollees' weighted score and academic achievement is presented subsequently in Figure 1.

#### *Regression diagnostics*

Table VI presents an assessment of variation across panels or students using the ML test. The assessment is based on the null hypothesis that there are no variations across students or panels ( $Var(u) = 0$ ).

QAE 24,1	Subjects	Overall		Between	
		<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)
<b>146</b>	<i>Literature</i>				
	N/A	1,623	65.3	411	65.3
	A	472	19.0	119	18.9
	B	242	9.7	62	9.9
	C	112	4.5	28	4.5
	D+	36	1.5	9	1.4
	Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0
	<i>Divinity</i>				
	N/A	926	37.3	235	37.4
	A	921	37.1	233	37.0
	B	520	20.9	131	20.8
	C	106	4.3	27	4.3
	D+	12	0.5	3	0.5
	Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0
	<i>Economics</i>				
	N/A	346	13.9	89	14.2
	A	828	33.3	207	32.9
	B	636	25.6	160	25.4
	C	469	18.9	121	19.2
	D+	206	8.3	52	8.3
	Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0
<i>Geography</i>					
N/A	1,554	62.5	395	62.8	
A	352	14.2	88	14.0	
B	339	13.6	86	13.7	
C	164	6.6	41	6.5	
D+	76	3.1	19	3.0	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>History</i>					
N/A	374	15.1	96	15.3	
A	1,386	55.8	348	55.3	
B	615	24.8	157	25.0	
C	102	4.1	26	4.1	
D+	8	0.3	2	0.3	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Kiswahili</i>					
N/A	2,313	93.1	584	92.9	
A	106	4.3	28	4.5	
B	66	2.7	17	2.7	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	

**Table III.** Attainment of enrollees in the subjects done at A-Level of secondary education

(continued)

Subjects	Overall		Between		Predicting proficiencies required to excel
	<i>N</i>	(%)	<i>N</i>	(%)	
<i>Luganda</i>					
N/A	2,361	95.0	598	95.1	<b>147</b>
A	88	3.5	22	3.5	
B	36	1.5	9	1.4	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>IRE<sup>a</sup></i>					
N/A	2,121	85.4	538	85.6	
A	300	12.1	75	11.9	
B	56	2.3	14	2.2	
C	8	0.3	2	0.3	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Art</i>					
N/A	2,401	96.6	608	96.7	
A	24	1.0	6	1.0	
B	8	0.3	2	0.3	
C	32	1.3	8	1.3	
D+	20	0.8	5	0.8	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Arabic</i>					
N/A	2,433	97.9	616	97.9	
A	36	1.5	9	1.4	
B	8	0.3	2	0.3	
C	4	0.2	1	0.2	
D+	4	0.2	1	0.2	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Entrepreneurship</i>					
N/A	2,389	96.1	605	96.2	
A	84	3.4	21	3.3	
B	8	0.3	2	0.3	
C	4	0.2	1	0.2	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>German</i>					
N/A	2,469	99.4	625	99.4	
A	12	0.5	3	0.5	
B	4	0.2	1	0.2	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	
<i>Music</i>					
N/A	2,473	99.5	626	99.5	
A	12	0.5	3	0.5	
Total	2,485	100.0	629	100.0	

**Notes:** N/A denotes students who did not take a subject in their A-Level of secondary education; <sup>a</sup>Islamic religious education

**Table III.**

Results in Table VI show evidence of significant differences across students ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings according to the intra-class correlation (rho) estimates reveal that about 81 per cent of the variance in CGPA is due to differences across panels or students. Thus, an RE model is the ideal approach for modeling the data rather than a pooled OLS based on a MLR.

*Summary of the findings*

According to Model I, significant variations in academic achievement of enrollees were noted for variables, namely, nationality, year of enrollment, entry scheme, as well as enrollees' performance in literature, divinity, economics and history. These results can be summarized as follows:

- Students who obtained grade A in literature had higher CGPA compared with their counterparts who did not take the subject at their A-Level ( $p < 0.01$ ). No significant variations in CGPA were noted among other grades attained in the subject compared with students who did not do literature at their A-Level ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Students who obtained grade A in divinity had higher CGPA compared with their counterparts who did not take the subject at their A-Level ( $p < 0.05$ ). No significant variations in CGPA were noted among other grades obtained in the subject compared with students who did not take literature at A-Level ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Students who obtained grade B and below in economics were associated with a lower CGPA compared with those who did not take the subject at their A-Level ( $p < 0.01$ ).
- Students who obtained grades A ( $p < 0.05$ ) and B ( $p < 0.1$ ) in history were associated with higher CGPA compared with those who did not take the subject at their A-Level. There was no significant difference in CGPA between students who obtained beyond grade C compared with those who did not take the subject at A-Level ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Enrollees in the 2006 and 2007 cohorts had lower CGPA compared with those in 2005 ( $p < 0.01$ ).
- Students admitted to the program on government scheme had higher CGPA compared with those on the evening arrangement ( $p < 0.5$ ). No significant variations were noted among private students on the day arrangement when compared with those on the government scheme ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Ugandan students had a lower CGPA compared with the international or non-Ugandan counterparts ( $p < 0.1$ ).

**Table IV.**  
Summary statistics  
of the combined  
weighted score

<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
2023	51.8	3.04	44.1	56.5
<b>Note:</b> The maximum possible score is 60				

Independent variables	Coefficient	Model I <sup>a</sup>		Coefficient	Model II <sup>b</sup>	
		Standard error	<i>p</i> -value		Standard error	<i>p</i> -value
<i>Nationality</i>						
Non-Ugandans <sup>†</sup>	1.000			1.000		
Ugandans	-0.067	0.040	0.096	-0.094	0.059	0.113
<i>Year of enrollment</i>						
2005 <sup>†</sup>	1.000			1.000		
2006	-0.081	0.028	0.004	-0.099	0.033	0.003
2007	-0.089	0.028	0.001	-0.158	0.031	0.000
<i>Entry scheme</i>						
Government <sup>†</sup>	1.000			1.000		
Private-evening	-0.089	0.038	0.018	-0.117	0.055	0.033
Private-day	-0.055	0.042	0.198	-0.083	0.049	0.097
<i>Sex</i>						
Female <sup>†</sup>	1.000			1.000		
Male	0.001	0.024	0.696	0.041	0.026	0.112
<i>Literature</i>						
N/A <sup>†</sup>	1.000					
A	0.101	0.036	0.005			
B	0.058	0.043	0.180			
C	0.030	0.059	0.608			
D++	-0.017	0.095	0.860			
<i>Divinity</i>						
N/A <sup>†</sup>	1.000					
A	0.065	0.029	0.026			
B	0.029	0.036	0.409			
C	-0.062	0.058	0.278			
D++	-0.075	0.159	0.639			
<i>Economics</i>						
N/A <sup>†</sup>	1.000					
A	-0.122	0.094	0.196			
B	-0.252	0.094	0.008			
C	-0.330	0.095	0.001			
D++	-0.317	0.098	0.001			
<i>Geography</i>						
N/A <sup>†</sup>	1.000					
A	0.057	0.040	0.152			
B	0.042	0.039	0.276			
C	0.007	0.051	0.894			
D++	-0.068	0.068	0.316			

(continued)

Predicting  
proficiencies  
required to  
excel**149****Table V.**  
Regression estimates  
of academic  
achievement on  
enrollees' prior  
academic attainment  
and their  
characteristics

Independent variables	Model I <sup>a</sup>			Model II <sup>b</sup>		
	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i> -value	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>p</i> -value
<i>History</i>						
N/A †	1.000					
A	0.214	0.085	0.012			
B	0.169	0.087	0.052			
C	0.140	0.097	0.150			
D++	-0.092	0.211	0.665			
Weighted score				0.026	0.009	0.003
Constant	3.220	0.054	0.000	3.331	0.065	0.000

**Notes:** Analysis is based on RE using MLE; where, N/A denotes students who did not do a subject at their A-Level; <sup>a</sup>LR $\chi^2(26)$  = 152.3; *p* < 0.001; *N* = 2,485; rho = 0.814; <sup>b</sup>LR $\chi^2(7)$  = 113.2; *p* < 0.001; *N* = 2,023; rho = 0.809

Table V.

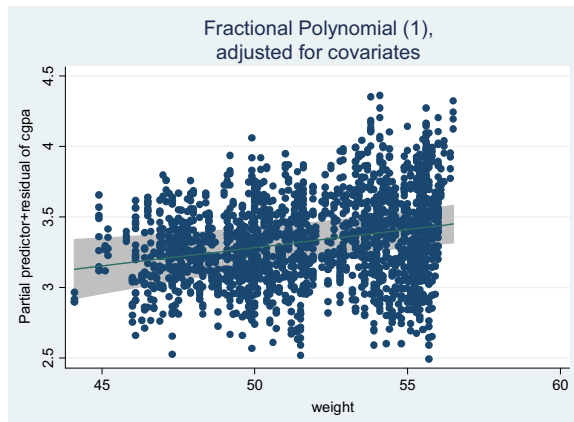


Figure 1. Enrollees weighted score and academic achievement (CGPA)

Regression model	Chibar2	<i>p</i> -value
Model I	2,353.56	0.000
Model II	1,894.37	0.000

**Note:** Likelihood-ratio test of no panel effects

Table VI. Testing for random effects

No significant variation in students' CGPA was noted by sex and student's performance in geography (*p* > 0.05).

According to Model II, significant variations in academic achievement of enrollees were noted for variables, namely, year of enrollment, entry scheme and weighted score adopted on admission to the program. These results can be summarized as follows:

- Enrollees in the 2006 and 2007 cohorts had lower CGPA compared with those in 2005 ( $p < 0.01$ ).
- Students admitted on government scheme had higher CGPA compared with the private students on day ( $p < 0.1$ ) and evening arrangements ( $p < 0.5$ ).
- Students' CGPA increased with their weighted score adopted on admission to the program ( $p < 0.01$ ).

No significant variation in students' CGPA was noted by sex and nationality of the students in the program ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### Discussion

Summary statistics of enrollees' CGPA point to a "Lower Second" class of degree obtained by a considerable number of graduates in the program. Thus, a recent argument of low academic achievement of enrollees in the program (Makerere University, 2012) is highly supported. This evidence points – among other factors – to shortfalls in the criterion adopted in determining the competence of enrollees in the program. It is, therefore, not surprising that the poor performance in the program was attributed – among other factors – to shortfalls among students with regard to comprehension, communication and analytical skills (Makerere University, 2012, p. 1). These shortfalls should not be a surprise as the criterion for admission of the students did not account for proficiencies required by prospective students of law. As a matter of fact, the criterion for admitting these students at the University suggests that any subjects done at A-Level are relevant for enrollment in the program. In other words, using "two best done of all A-Level subjects" as essential subjects in the weighting criteria undermines the relevance of enrollees' grounding in proficiencies required by a prospective student of law. Thus, we are justified to conclude that poor performance in the program is – to a large extent – a result of enrollees who do not possess the appropriate proficiencies despite the academic excellence exhibited in other subjects done at their A-Level of secondary education.

In this study, the subjects that positively predict the academic achievement of enrollees in the program are literature, history and divinity. These subjects are in line with the proficiencies of communication, conceptual approaches and history of arts as well as political and economic dimensions of a society (ASB, 2013). High academic achievement of the students who obtained high grades in literature, history and divinity should not be surprising as competence in these subjects enhances enrollees' analytical and reasoning as well as problem-solving skills (Shultz and Zedeck, 2011). Particularly, higher CGPA of students who obtained grade A in divinity and history at their A-Level compared with those who did not take the subject does not reveal otherwise with regard to the proficiency of understanding of cultural diversity including nature as well as limits of knowledge and academic fields. Likewise, these findings support the evidence by the association of lawyers in the USA (ASB, 2013) that identifies enrollees' grounding in analytical writing, English and literature, history and philosophy as important disciplines for a student of law. However, the majority (65.3 per cent) of students were enrolled in the program without taking literature in their A-Level of secondary

education. This evidence does not argue well with regard to the proficiencies of communication, writing and analytical skills. Thus, recent evidence attributing high failure rates of enrollees in the program to shortfalls in the aspects of comprehension, communication and analytical skills (Makerere University, 2012, p. 1) is highly justified. A similar conclusion can be made about enrollees who did not take divinity (37.3 per cent) and history (15.1 per cent) in their A-Level with regard to the proficiencies of understanding of conceptual approaches and history of arts as well as political and economic dimensions of societies.

The findings regarding the weighted score or index adopted on admission to the program confirm the attainment of enrollees in prior studies as a predictor of their academic achievement. However, the illustration in Figure 1 points to a weak relationship between attainment in prior studies and academic achievement of enrollees. This is probably due to the admission criterion of enrollees in the study that did not account for competencies in any particular subjects done in A-Level of secondary education. This is demonstrated by the use of “two best done of all A-Level subjects” as essential subjects in the weighted score or index adopted on admission to the program. Based on the admission criterion of the enrollees, a high weighted score does not necessarily imply a high competence in undertaking a Bachelor of Laws. This evidence implies that a high failure rate in the program is certainly an issue of students admitted without the required proficiencies to excel academically in the program. Worth noting is that significant variations in academic achievement were only observed between students of the government entry scheme and privately sponsored evening students. This is probably because the minimum weighted score on admission to the program is usually lowest among the latter group (MoES, 2005, 2006, 2007). Thus, adopting a similar minimum weighted score for admission of all privately sponsored students would go a long way in enhancing the academic achievement of privately sponsored evening students.

In summary, admission of students on the basis of an index of prior studies that does not take into consideration the proficiencies required by prospective students of law is limited in predicting their academic achievement. This limitation could be overcome by assessing the competence of enrollees on the basis of the subjects identified in the study as predictors of academic achievement in the program. In addition to predicting the academic achievement of enrollees, attainment in these subjects can also be adopted as a basis for assessing the proficiencies required by prospective students of law to excel academically in the program. Thus, the criteria for admission to a Bachelor of Laws should consider competence of enrollees in the subjects, namely, literature, history and divinity rather than focusing solely on a pooled index of enrollees attainment in their secondary education. To this end, we are justified to conclude that prior studies provide a basis for predicting competencies required by prospective students of law to excel academically in the program. Assessing the competence of enrollees on the basis of their attainment in these subjects would serve as a cost-free alternative to administering pre-entry examinations to prospective students of law. However, this study is limited in providing an understanding of how well pre-entry examinations predict proficiencies required by prospective students of law. Further research is, therefore, required to establish an understanding of this aspect.

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**Further reading**

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