

# SELECTION GROUPS AND RECRUITMENT INTO THE SWEDISH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Magnus Wikström



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET



# OUTLINE

## THE SWEDISH UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

- Selection instruments
- Selection process

## APPLICANT PERFORMANCE

- Group differences
- Implications for admissions



# THE SWEDISH UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

## SELECTION INSTRUMENTS

- There are two main selection instruments, **school grades** (usually from upper secondary school) and the **SweSAT**.
- Universities can, to some extent, use alternative selection instruments
- Selection is conditional on eligibility, which varies by programme and university



# SCHOOL GRADES

- Students in upper secondary schools are graded by the teachers based on performance indicators tied to the national curriculum
- Course grades are used
- In some subjects and for some courses, national tests are given making it possible to calibrate grades across schools
- The scale A-F (f=fail) is used, which is translated to a numeric system (A=20, B=17,5 ...E=10, F=0)
- Grades are weighted by course length and averaged into a GPA



# SWESAT

- A norm-referenced multiple-choice admissions test
- It was introduced in 1977 as a second chance and became open for all to use in admissions in 1991
- The SweSAT contains a quantitative and an a verbal part, each divided into four subtests
- The scores are reported on a normed scale (0.0-2.0) and equated over time
- It is administered twice a year and individuals can take it as many times as they want
- The best result over the five last years counts in the admission process.



## SELECTION PROCESS

- At least one third of the study places must be allocated on the basis of grades, and one third on the basis of the SweSAT
- A university can decide what instrument to use for the final third (alternative selection)
- The most common is to allocate  $2/3$  of the study places based on grades and  $1/3$  based on the SweSAT
- Applicants can compete using more than one instrument
- There are three different quota groups for grades
- Study places are allocated in proportion to the number of applicants in these groups
- Students are placed in ranked order in the group(s) they compete



# APPLICANT PERFORMANCE

## GROUP DIFFERENCES

On the basis of data from the SweSAT rounds in the autumn of 2011 and spring of 2012, we studied how individuals perform on the two main instruments

Wikström C. and Wikström M. (2017). *Front. Educ.* 2:45

- Individuals in the ages 19-26 are selected
- The study contains 19,000 (22,000) individuals in the 2011 (2012) administration



# GROUP DIFFERENCES

We concentrate on a small number of background variables to describe differences

- Gender
- Age
- Social background
- Immigrant background
- Educational background





# GROUP DIFFERENCES

## SCORE DIFFERENCES

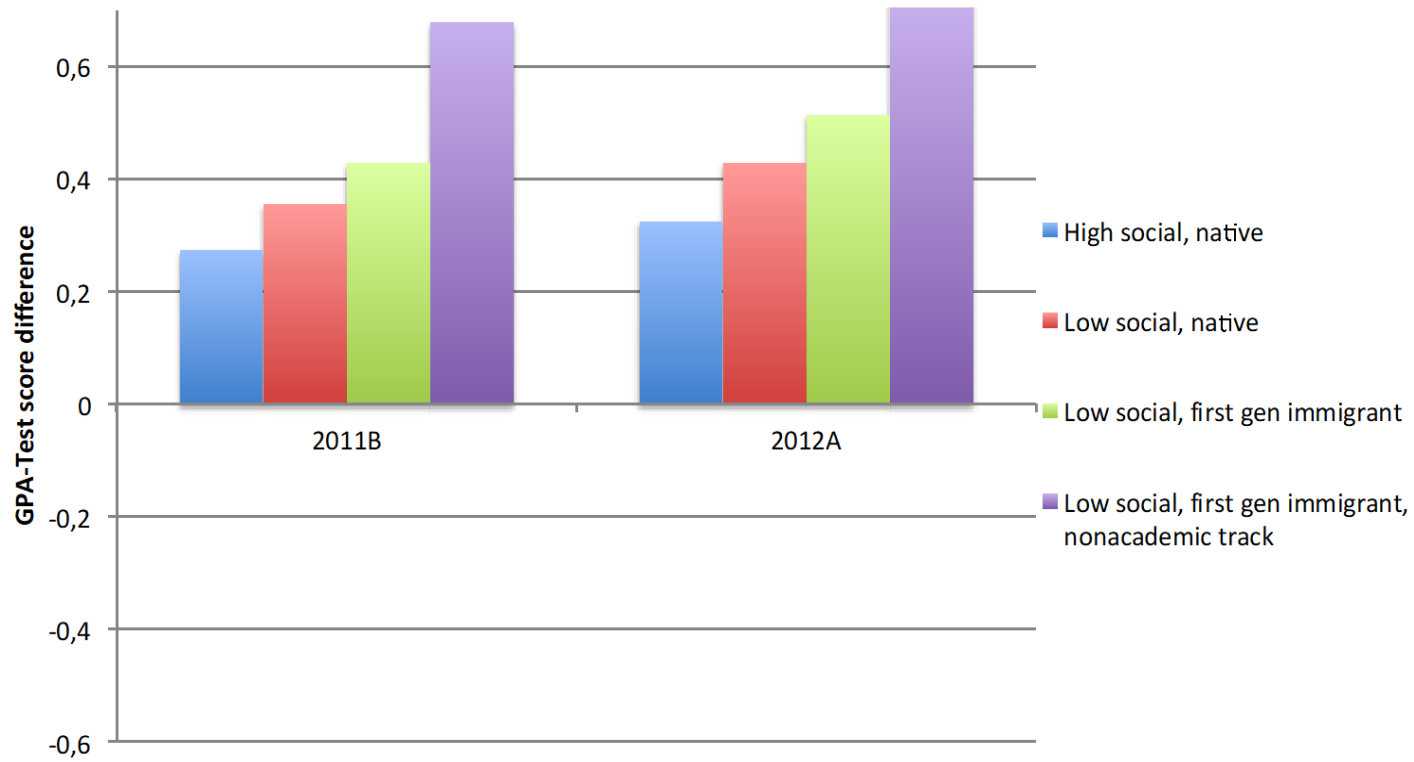
How is a particular group on average ranked in the distribution of grades versus the distribution of the SweSAT?

This is done for the

- GPA vs. normed SweSAT score
- Course grades in Mathematics and English vs. the (normed) scores on the quantitative and verbal parts of the SweSAT



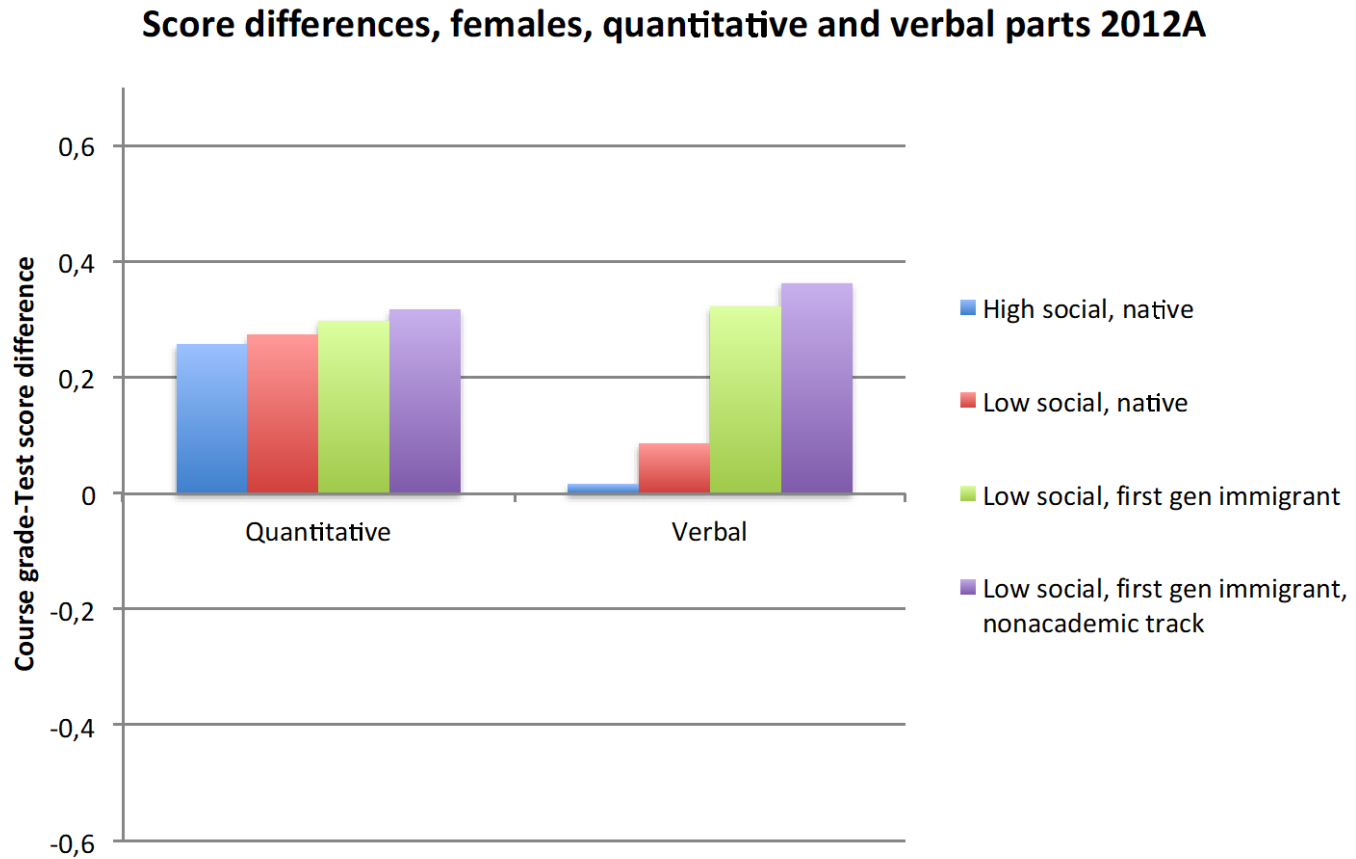
### Score differences, females





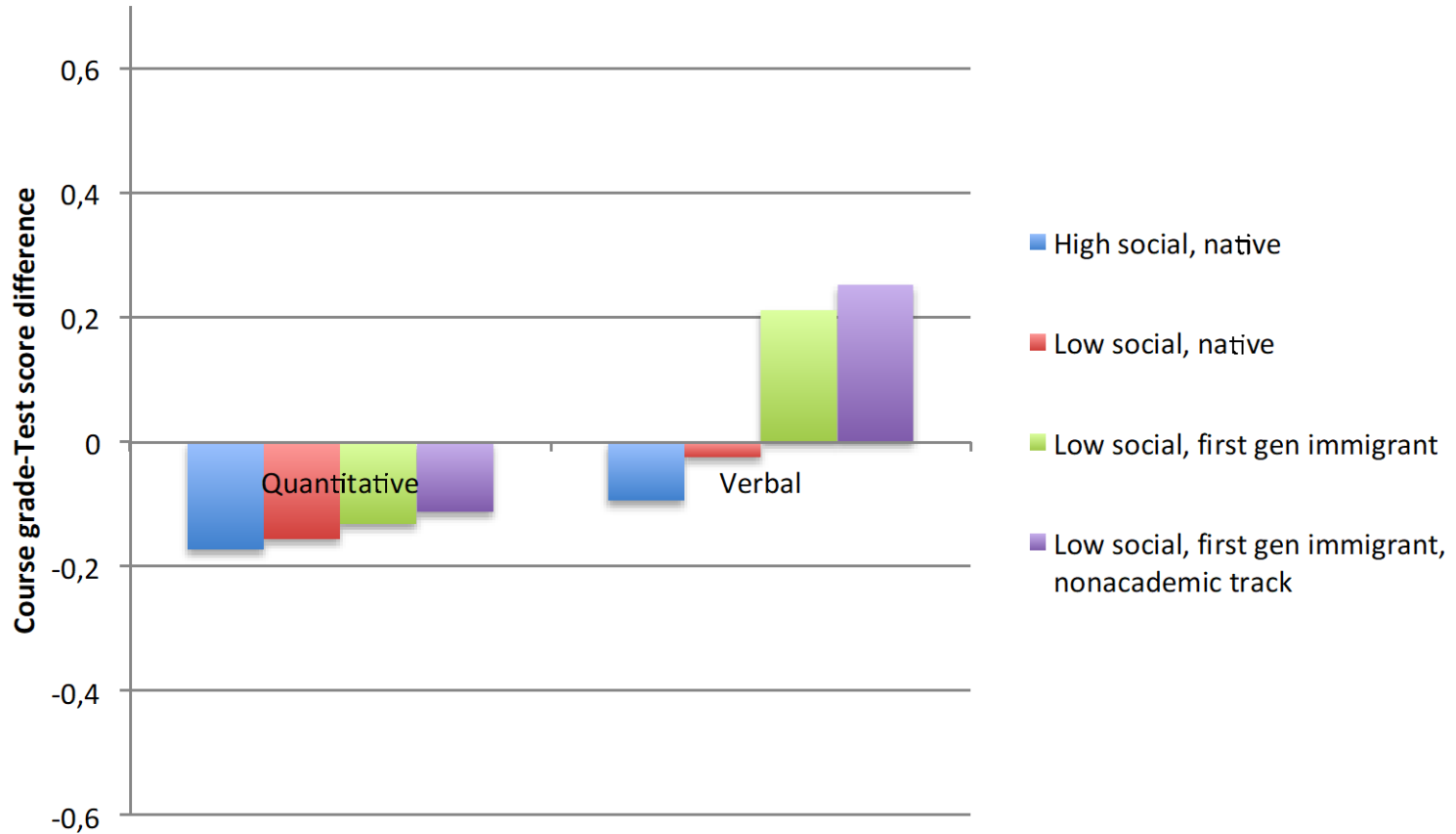
### Score differences, males







### Score differences, males, quantitative and verbal parts 2012A





# IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMISSIONS

**Does the SweSAT have the potential to function as a second chance to higher education studies?**

**What groups benefit from the test in relation to the SweSAT?**

The score differences suggest that certain groups benefit from the test.

Suppose 50 per cent of applicants are admitted to higher education

## **Two scenarios**

1. Admission by school grades
2. Three out of ten (15 per cent) is admitted by the SweSAT



# IMPLICATIONS

Who are the students admitted by the SweSAT in scenario 2 that would not have been admitted by school grades in scenario 1?

- About 5,5 per cent of the applicants in the bottom half of the GPA distribution belong to this group
- About 85 per cent are male (43 percent in the top half of the GPA distribution are men)
- About 7 per cent have immigrant background (9 per cent in the top half of the GPA distribution)
- They are on average one year older than individuals in the top half of the GPA distribution