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Annual
Survey Results

RELATIONSHIPS
MATTER



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The Law School Survey of Student Engagement is part of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, a research center in the School of Education devoted to studying the student experience. In addition to LSSSE, CPR houses the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the NSSE Institute, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE).

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Christensen, C., & Deo, M.E. (2019, August). *Relationships Matter*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.



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We should leverage the positive, influential relations that students report with faculty, staff, and peers to help them help themselves.

As the LSSSE annual report concludes, “[r]elationships with faculty, administrators, and peers are among the most influential aspects of the law student experience.” With this information, as educators, we must leverage our strengths, resources, and relationships to help students understand and navigate non-cognitive factors that can impact their success in law school and on the bar examination.

Thanks to research conducted by our colleagues in education and psychology, we have more knowledge than ever before about the significance of student perception in learning. Perceptions—how an individual interprets fact and events—affect students’ behavior and motivation to learn. For example, assume a student earns a score of 80% on a formative assessment exercise. How the student perceives that score could impact the student’s reaction and ultimate success in the course. Many students, who are accustomed to receiving high grades, could consider this score a failure and interpret it as a sign that they are not learning or up to the task. This reaction could hamper learning and ultimate success. But other students could accept this score as a sign that they need to improve in certain areas and adopt a growth mindset that motivates them to work even harder.

How students react to the 80% score might also trigger other social constructs that could affect their motivation, health, and confidence. For example, a student’s resilience or grit can determine whether the student will persist or give up. A student’s sense of belonging, possibly to a cohort of high-performing students, could diminish when feeling overwhelmed by the materials and workload or by performing below their own expectations. Scores could also trigger feelings of being an imposter: someone who does not acknowledge his or her own abilities and accomplishments, but instead feels like a fraud hiding in someone else’s world. Or stereotype threat could distract a student from performing up to par when worrying about how to disprove perceived stereotypes. These constructs create internal barriers that prevent students from engaging fully in the learning process.

For over forty years, I knew these barriers existed. But, I discovered it wasn’t just me after speaking with hundreds of law students and lawyers. It is truly remarkable that we can now use data to identify the barriers and suggest successful interventions.

We know that how students perceive an event is influenced by their training, mindset, and relationships. In an ongoing study, cognitive psychologists and legal educators have collaborated in a Productive Mindset Intervention Study¹ examining how a sense of belonging and growth mindset influence individuals taking the California bar exam. Preliminary results from the July 2018 exam have been very encouraging and show that interventions applied before and during the bar review period can improve a taker’s ability to study for the exam, even as stress and doubt increase. This research continues with the July 2019 exam.

Given these evidence-based strategies, our responsibility is to educate our students to help them recognize self-imposed barriers and develop strategies to overcome them. Not only will this knowledge benefit our students during law school, but it will also prepare them for the challenges they will face while studying for the bar exam and practicing law.

We should leverage the positive, influential relations that students report with faculty, staff, and peers to help them help themselves. This year’s LSSSE report shows that 76% of students report a positive relationship with professors, 79% consider at least one administrator or staff member as someone they can approach for advice, and 76% report that their peers are friendly, supportive, and contribute to a sense of belonging.

We should encourage faculty, staff, and peers to remind a student who is encountering a stressful event to examine all possible interpretations instead of grasping a negative version that will inhibit their growth and progress. We can guide students to shift their thinking to consider a “glass half full” view rather than jumping to a “half empty” perspective.

We can also reach out to those students who have not yet developed relationships and have become isolated. The chances are high that isolated students have adopted a fixed mindset and resigned themselves to poor performance because they do not believe they can be successful and feel like a fraud. We should take affirmative steps to identify these students rather than allow the obvious outcomes to occur. Identifying isolated students should involve a collaboration of not only faculty and staff, but especially student services, academic support, and student leaders.

Thus, by growing relationships we can lead our students to the growth mindset needed to help them perform their best in and out of law school.

¹Victor D. Quintanilla & Sam Erman, *Productive Mindset Interventions Mitigate Psychological Friction and Improve Well-Being for Bar Exam Takers*, 3 AccessLex Institute: Raising the Bar, Jan. 2020.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Meera E. Deo

LSSSE Director
Professor of Law
*Thomas Jefferson
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Relationships are critical. Law students who build strong connections with faculty, administrators, and classmates are more likely to appreciate their legal education overall and also have better academic and professional outcomes.

The 2018 LSSSE Annual Report focuses on these relationships, on what law schools do well and where we can improve. LSSSE data make clear that the vast majority of students not only have positive interactions in law school, but that they draw from these connections to maximize their success in school and beyond.

My fellow faculty will likely be as pleased as I am to find that a full 93% of our students recognize that we care about their learning and success in law school. After a decade in legal academia and affiliations at half-a-dozen institutions, I have seen first-hand the significant investment that most professors make in our students. While it is no surprise, it is nevertheless deeply satisfying to see hard data showing that a majority of law students see faculty as mentors, approaching us to discuss course assignments as well as career opportunities. We strive to be the “available, helpful, and sympathetic” professors that most students see us as.

Similarly, law students appreciate the many ways in which student services staff and other administrators enrich their legal education. Over two-thirds of students from the LSSSE sample find administrative staff “helpful, friendly, and considerate,” and note their satisfaction with academic advising, career counseling, and financial aid advising. This will be music to the ears of staff members whose primary goals involve supporting and advising students throughout law school.

Although legal education has a reputation for being inherently competitive, LSSSE data encouragingly reveal that 76% of all students find that their peers are “friendly, supportive, and contribute to a sense of belonging.” While 42% of 1L students note that peer competition creates some stress during law school, that percentage declines significantly by the third year.

In the midst of these vibrant relationships there are some disquieting trends. Students of color tend to have more contact with faculty but rate their interactions less positively than do white students. Smaller percentages of women than men note high levels of satisfaction with administrators. Many relationships that start strong at the beginning of law school diminish or fade by the third year.

We should work to intensify these relationships, bolster and sustain them throughout law school and for all students. In fact, students of color and women students tend to be the most vulnerable and in need of support. We must also maintain the high levels of support that students note when they begin their legal education so that they feel just as encouraged as they near graduation and bar study—a time when many of our students need us most. The LSSSE data tell us that we are successfully building relationships with students and that they rely on these relationships to succeed. Now is the time to reinforce them further.



The selected results are based on responses from over 18,000 law students at 72 law schools who completed the LSSSE Survey in Spring 2018. The law schools participating in LSSSE closely resembled ABA-accredited law schools overall in terms of enrollment size and affiliation (public/private). We feature selected results from the main LSSSE Survey that explore similarities and differences within populations of law school students. We also draw upon responses to a set of optional questions appended to the Survey and given to a subset of the 2018 respondents.

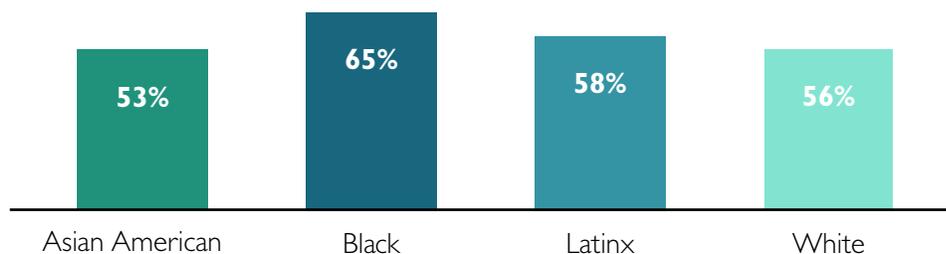
FACULTY

Faculty, administrators, and classmates are key ingredients to law student success. These relationships serve as important ties to the law school and impact student satisfaction, sense of belonging, and academic and professional development. This year's annual report explores relationships and examines the nuances and impact they have on law students. Overall, law students report favorable relationships with their professors, administrators, and peers. More than three quarters of students (76%) report positive relationships with their professors and peers, while 68% report positive relationships with administration.

Student-Faculty Interaction

Faculty are the “lifeblood” of any institution (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007). Professors play a central role in shaping the student experience and student-faculty interaction has a powerful effect on students that reaches far beyond the classroom. LSSSE data reveal that student-faculty

DISCUSS ASSIGNMENTS WITH FACULTY



interaction relates significantly to students' perceptions of their own gains in both academic and personal dimensions; it influences work-related knowledge and skills as well as critical and analytical thinking.

The vast majority of students (76%) report positive relationships with faculty, including interactions both in and out of the classroom.

- 93% believe their instructors care about their learning and success in law school.
- 83% consider at least one instructor a mentor whom they could approach for advice or guidance.

Meaningful interactions vary across student demographics, with notable race/ethnic differences. On multiple dimensions Black and Latinx students report more engagement and interaction with faculty than white and Asian American students. For instance, while a majority of all law students (57%) discuss assignments with faculty “often” or “very often,” 65% of Black students do so, the highest of any racial or ethnic group, followed by 58% of Latinx students, 56% of white students and 53% of Asian American students.

Black and Latinx students are more likely to talk with faculty outside of class.

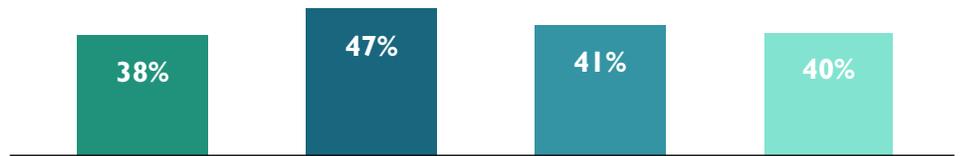


The pattern of Black and Latinx students enjoying higher rates of engagement with faculty persists across multiple dimensions. For example, Black students (47%) are more likely to discuss career or job search with faculty than Latinx (41%), white (40%), or Asian American (38%) students. Black and Latinx students are also more likely to talk with faculty outside of class.

KEY

- Asian American
- Black
- Latinx
- White

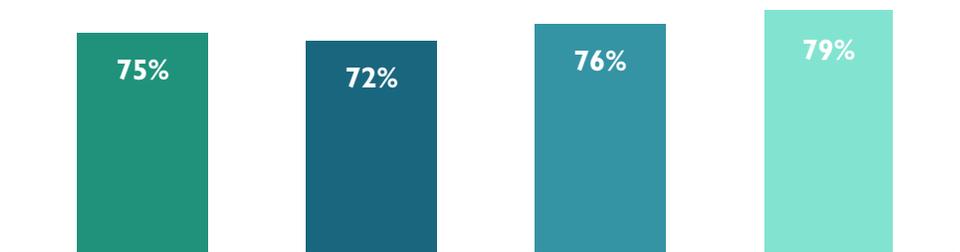
CAREER/JOB SEARCH DISCUSSIONS WITH FACULTY



DISCUSSIONS WITH FACULTY OUTSIDE CLASS



POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FACULTY



The vast majority of students find faculty available, helpful, and sympathetic. Interestingly, this sentiment does not directly track interaction with faculty, as a higher percentage of white students report favorable relationships with faculty than Black and Latinx students.

ADVISING

A majority of students are pleased with the quality of advising and their relationships with administrators:

- 69% are satisfied with academic advising and planning.
- 66% are satisfied with career counseling.
- 64% are satisfied with job search help.
- 70% are satisfied with financial aid advising.
- 68% report that administrative staff are helpful, friendly, and considerate.

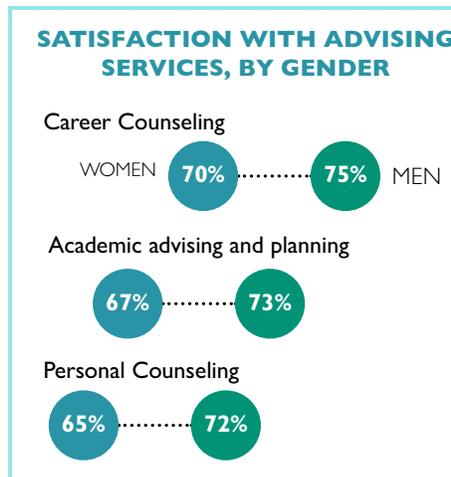
Relationships

The quality of relationships with advisors and administrators is both positive and relatively consistent across race, gender, and year in school. Seventy percent of 1L students (and 67% of 2Ls and 3Ls) report that administrative staff are helpful, considerate, and flexible.

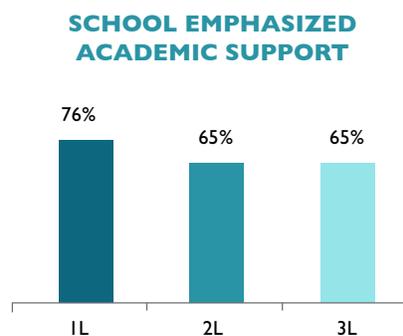
Seventy-nine percent (79%) of students consider at least one administrator or staff member as someone they could approach for advice or guidance on managing the law school experience. Higher percentages of Black students (87%) rely on these relationships than students from other racial backgrounds (79% for Asian American, white, and Latinx students).

Interactions with academic support personnel drive whether a student would choose to attend the same law school again as well as overall satisfaction with their law school experience. Though students

report positive relationships with administrative staff, satisfaction with advising services is less consistent and more varied across race/ethnicity, year in school, and gender.

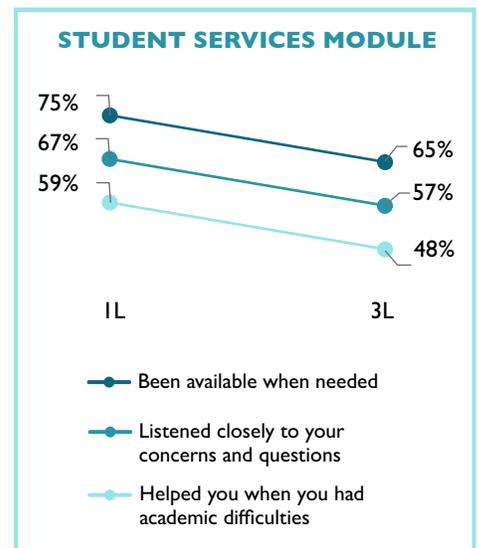


Sixty-nine percent of all respondents report that their law school provides the support they need to succeed academically, with higher perceptions of support among 1L students.



Similarly, academic advising, career counseling, and job search help are key support services that students appreciate greatly when they begin law school, though they are more dissatisfied as graduation nears.

In addition to the core Survey, LSSSE offers four topical modules that schools can opt into. The Student Services Module examines the law student experience in the contexts of academic and career advising. Consistent with data from the main LSSSE Survey, the Student Services Module data show that as students move closer to graduation they report less engagement and contact with advisors¹.



¹The question asked, "During the current school year, to what extent has student and advising services done the following?" Data combines the responses "very much" and "quite a bit."

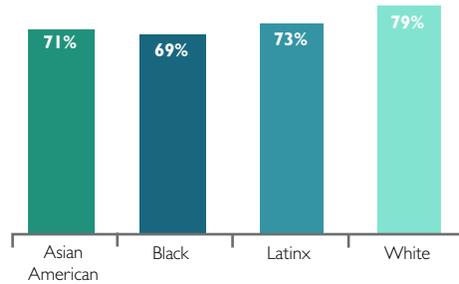
STUDENTS

Decades of research on student engagement and student learning demonstrate the importance of peer interactions. Engaging with classmates in meaningful ways contributes to a deeper sense of belonging and enhances understanding of classwork, leading to better academic and professional outcomes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; NSSE, 2013).

[Law school's] greatest asset is its diverse and mature student body. I have benefited so much from my peers, who are from all over the world and all over the professional spectrum.
- 3L Student

While law school is an inherently stressful and anxiety-producing endeavor, the vast majority of students (76%) report that their peers are friendly, supportive, and contribute to a sense of belonging.

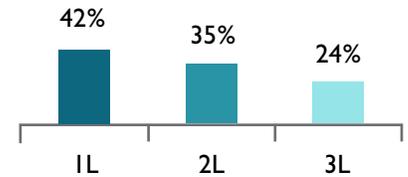
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS



There are noticeable variations by race/ethnicity. White students are most likely to report positive relationships with peers (79%), as compared to Black (69%), Asian American (71%), and Latinx (73%) students.

The Student Stress Module examines law student stress and anxiety—their sources, impact, and perceptions of support offered by law schools to manage stress and anxiety. One question asks directly about various sources of stress and anxiety that students may face in school.

STRESS FROM PEER COMPETITION



While high percentages of students report that academic performance (77%) and academic workload (76%) produce stress or anxiety, competition amongst peers does not create or magnify these feelings for most students. Students report that competition amongst peers is most significant during the first year of law school but sharply declines each year. Forty-two percent of 1L students report that peer competition is a source of stress or anxiety. By the third year of law school that number drops to 24%.





CONCLUSION

Relationships matter. Relationships with faculty, administrators, and peers are among the most influential aspects of the law student experience. These connections deepen students' sense of belonging and enhance their understanding of class work and the profession. Feeling connected to and supported by their law school results in meaningful outcomes to students' academic and professional development. The most significant,

positive drivers to both overall student satisfaction and whether or not a student would attend the same law school are relationships. Students benefit from many different types of substantive interactions and relationships. Some connections occur

organically; however, law schools should endeavor to create opportunities for students to work meaningfully with faculty, staff, and peers. Fostering a collaborative environment, both in and out of the classroom, is critical for student success.

Relationships matter. Relationships with faculty, administrators, and peers are among the most influential aspects of the law student experience.

Gappa, J. M., Austin, A. E., & Trice, A. G. (2007). *Rethinking faculty work: Higher education's strategic imperative*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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