



The Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) is part of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research (CPR), 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).

## ADVISORY BOARD

### **Bryant G. Garth, Chair**

*Interim Director, American Bar Foundation;  
Co-Director, Center for Empirical Research  
on the Legal Profession  
University of California, Irvine School of Law*

### **Richard A. Matasar**

*President  
RAM Higher Education Consulting Group*

### **Ajay K. Mehrotra**

*Professor of Law & History  
Northwestern University,  
Pritzker School of Law*

### **Rachel F. Moran**

*Distinguished and Chancellor's Professor of Law  
University of California, Irvine School of Law*

### **Camille A. Nelson**

*Dean and Professor of Law  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa,  
William S. Richardson School of Law*

### **Lauren K. Robel**

*Val Nolan Professor Emerita  
Indiana University, Bloomington*

### **Kellye Y. Testy**

*President and CEO  
Law School Admission Council*

## LSSSE STAFF

### **Meera E. Deo**

*LSSSE Director  
The Honorable Vaino Spencer  
Professor of Law  
Southwestern Law School*

### **Chad Christensen**

*LSSSE Project Manager*

### **Jacquelyn Petzold**

*LSSSE Research Analyst*

## CENTER FOR POSTSECONDARY RESEARCH

### **Allison BrckaLorenz**

*Project Manager, FSSE*

### **Angie Miller**

*Research Analyst*

### **Jennifer Brooks**

*Project Services Manager*

### **Brian Motley**

*Data Analyst*

### **James S. Cole**

*Project Manager, BCSSE*

### **Lucy A. LePeau**

*Director*

### **Kevin Fosnacht**

*Research Analyst*

### **Hien Nguyen**

*Webmaster*

### **Robert M. Gonyea**

*Associate Director,  
Research & Data Analysis*

### **Christen Priddie**

*Postdoctoral Scholar*

### **Jewel Bezy**

*Finance Manager*

### **Bob Whiteside**

*Senior Office Administrator*

### **Jillian Kinzie**

*Interim Co-Director,  
NSSE*

### **Shimon Sarraf**

*Assistant Director,  
Survey Operations  
& Project Services*

### **Simon Brooks**

*Office Assistant*

### **Cindy Ann Kilgo**

*Interim Co-Director, NSSE*



# Table of Contents

- 4 QUICK FACTS
- 5 FOREWORD
- 6 DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE
- 7 INTRODUCTION
- 8 LAW STUDENTS ARE WELL-EQUIPPED FOR ONLINE LEARNING
- 9 SATISFACTION RATES ARE HIGH
- 11 ONLINE STUDENTS ARE LEARNING AS MUCH AS IN-PERSON STUDENTS
- 12 ONLINE DISCUSSIONS FEATURE DIVERSE VOICES
- 12 ONLINE STUDENTS NEED TAILORED CAREER SERVICES
- 13 ONLINE LEARNING MAINTAINS STRONG RELATIONSHIPS
- 14 CONCLUSION

JACQUELYN PETZOLD,  
MEERA E. DEO, AND CHAD  
CHRISTENSEN, LSSSE 2022  
ANNUAL REPORT: SUCCESS WITH  
ONLINE EDUCATION (2022).

## Quick Facts

### PARTICIPATING LAW SCHOOLS

The 2022 LSSSE Survey collected responses from over 13,000 law students at 70 law schools in Spring 2022. The law schools participating in LSSSE closely resemble ABA-approved law schools overall in terms of enrollment size and affiliation (public/private).

### OBJECTIVES

LSSSE provides data to law schools to improve legal education and inform decision-making and compliance efforts, enhance student success, facilitate internal assessment and analysis, and support research on legal education.

### SURVEY

The LSSSE survey is administered online to all students at participating law schools. Each participating student takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the survey.

### AUDIENCE

LSSSE's audience includes law school administrators and faculty, current and prospective law students, alumni, advisory boards, trustees, institutional researchers, accrediting organizations, and researchers studying legal education.

### DATA SOURCES

LSSSE data include survey responses and comments from JD and LLM students enrolled at participating law schools.





# Foreword

RACHEL F. MORAN  
DISTINGUISHED AND CHANCELLOR'S PROFESSOR OF LAW  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE SCHOOL OF LAW



As the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation, law schools abruptly turned to online classes to serve their students and keep them safe. The shift departed sharply from a long tradition of in-person instruction. At the outset, many faculty were simply trying to master the technology, but as the pandemic wore on, professors benefited from programs that enhanced their skills in offering classes remotely. **Even after returning to in-person instruction, professors now have the wherewithal to craft hybrid formats that optimize the learning process.**

This was certainly my experience. At first, I simply offered my classes online with modest changes, still showing PowerPoint slides but making use of Zoom's whiteboard and polling functions. Later, as the law school returned to in-person instruction, I decided to experiment with a flipped classroom format. I have recorded lectures that students watch asynchronously. These lectures account for half the instructional time, and I use the remaining in-class time to review key takeaways and answer assigned problems. I divide the class into two sections, so that students have an interactive small-group experience when they attend in person. To ensure that students engage with one another about the material both in and out of class, I break up each section into five teams. Teams are responsible for leading part of the weekly discussion and turning in a handout on designated topics.

Teams post handouts on the course website, and I provide formative feedback on their performance.

Before the pandemic, I did not have the technological know-how to operationalize a flipped classroom. Fortunately, skills acquired during the pandemic allowed me to respond to some alarming findings about COVID-19's toll on law students. Last year, LSSSE reported that the pandemic left students depressed, anxious, lonely, and less able to concentrate.<sup>1</sup> While the core of legal education remained intact, LSSSE found that students lost out on opportunities to interact with faculty and peers. When I saw this report, I knew that I had to tackle the potential harms to learning by revamping my class. Apparently, I was not alone in this regard, as law professors around the country innovated to ensure that students have a high-quality experience, however instruction is delivered.

**The pandemic was a test of our institutional resiliency, and the new LSSSE data show that the legal academy has risen to the challenge.** Law students surveyed this year report high levels of satisfaction with online learning, and this is especially true for part-time students. Students who take courses online say that they are developing the critical thinking and skills necessary to succeed in the profession, just as students who learn in person do. According to this year's report, an unexpected dividend of online learning is that it promotes greater diversity of participation.

**In many ways, the pandemic created a natural experiment that allowed law schools to assess the pros and cons of online learning.**

It's unlikely that we would have made such a dramatic change absent a life-threatening emergency. LSSSE's work capitalizes on this unique opportunity to evaluate whether online learning can be as effective as in-person instruction. So far, the American Bar Association (ABA) has clarified its standards on distance education, but it has not changed the cap of one-third distance learning credit hours for students enrolled at an accredited law school.<sup>2</sup> According to Professor Leo Martinez, who currently chairs the ABA Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, it will be important to gather more data on the effectiveness of remote learning in preparing students to enter the profession.<sup>3</sup>

As discussions about the regulation of online instruction continue, studies like LSSSE's will lay a foundation for evidence-based reform. Leaders in legal education and the legal profession should vigorously support gathering data on alternative formats for delivering instruction. By remaining open to experimentation in ordinary times as well as times of crisis, law deans, professors, and members of the bar can ensure that legal education remains accessible, relevant, and effective in the years to come.

<sup>1</sup> Meera E. Deo, Jacquelyn Petzold, and Chad Christensen, LSSSE 2021 Annual Report: The COVID Crisis in Legal Education (2021).

<sup>2</sup> *A Guide to ABA Approved Distance Education*, ABA, Jan. 21, 2022, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal\\_education/resources/distance\\_education](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/distance_education).

<sup>3</sup> Lilah Burke, ABA Cleans Up Accreditation Rules Surrounding Distance Education for Law Schools, Higher Ed Dive, Aug. 31, 2022, <https://www.highereddive.com/news/aba-cleans-up-accreditation-rules-surrounding-distance-education-for-law-sc/630870>.

# Director's Message

MEERA E DEO, JD, PHD  
DIRECTOR, LSSSE



“May you live in interesting times.” Never in my lifetime has the double meaning of this phrase—as both a blessing and a curse—been more evident than now. The COVID Era has certainly been interesting. We have struggled not only to recover from an ongoing global pandemic, but also to navigate an increase in hate crimes against Asian Americans, the resumption of mass shootings, violence against Black citizens, attacks on women’s health, and much more. Yet careful observation yields notable benefits as well. These unprecedented times have required extraordinary responses from society at large and from legal education in particular; these forced innovations provide us an opportunity to rethink our traditional processes and reimagine expected futures.

Widespread usage of a robust and satisfying form of online legal education is one of the most impressive outcomes to emerge from the shadows of the pandemic. This 2022 LSSSE Annual Report details just how accessible and successful online education has been. For instance, the vast majority

of law students (75% or more) are comfortable with nearly all features of online education, from interacting with faculty and classmates to taking final exams. This comfort leads to excellent learning outcomes, with almost 90% of both online and in-person students agreeing that they are learning to think critically and analytically. Additionally, students are particularly eager to participate in class discussions and ask questions in online courses, with marked gender inclusivity compared to in-person classes. I was also thrilled to find high rates of overall satisfaction with legal education, which are not only consistent with years past but also equivalent for both online and in-person students.

In addition to celebrating these successes, this Annual Report reveals opportunities for improvement. While students report strong relationships with faculty, their interactions with staff have suffered, both for online and in-person students. We must

“ Widespread usage of a robust and satisfying form of online legal education is one of the most impressive outcomes to emerge from the shadows of the pandemic. ”

find ways to make academic support and career services more accessible to online students. As always, disaggregating the data by age, year in school, and other factors reveals the importance of targeted approaches to reach our most vulnerable students so that everyone can maximize their full academic and professional potential.

Online education is here to stay. LSSSE data reveal that half (50%) of all law students this past year enrolled in at least one course that was mostly or entirely online. Even after most students, faculty, and staff have returned to campus, various forms of online instruction endure. Whether students participate in law school online, in-person, or through a hybrid model, I have faith that readers of this Annual Report will take note of our findings and continue initiatives to help pave the way toward a more flourishing future for them all.

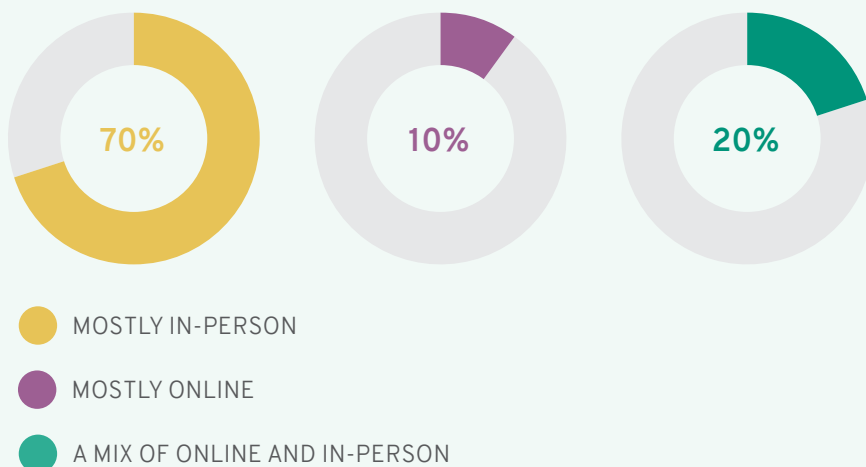
# Introduction

The 2021-2022 academic year was a continuation of the law school experiment with online education. Many of society's institutions—including law schools—hurriedly adapted their functions to the online environment in the spring of 2020 in response to COVID-19. By the 2021-2022 school year, law schools were able to be more thoughtful and intentional about how their online courses were structured and delivered. For the second time, LSSSE offered a Topical Survey Module on “Experiences with Online Learning” to capture student perspectives on online education. The addition of two questions to the core LSSSE survey about the number and type of online courses also sheds light on how students' primary mode of instruction affects various aspects of their law school experience, including interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students; participation in class discussion; and engagement with academic and career services. This Annual Report shares findings on student experiences with online

education. Law schools now know how to offer instruction online, which makes it a more feasible curricular option going forward. The general assessment of online legal education offered in this report can drive decision-making as the world moves beyond the crisis phase of the pandemic and into a new era of considering whether and how to expand or reverse changes that were originally forced by the public health emergency.

According to data from the 2022 survey, 50% of LSSSE respondents took at least one course taught mostly or entirely online. All law schools offered at least some online courses. A full 70% of students took mostly in-person courses, 10% took mostly online courses, and 20% had a balanced mix of online and in-person instruction. Online courses were most likely to be synchronous (78%) followed by a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous (19%). Only 3% of law students say their courses were typically asynchronous.

## Mode of instruction



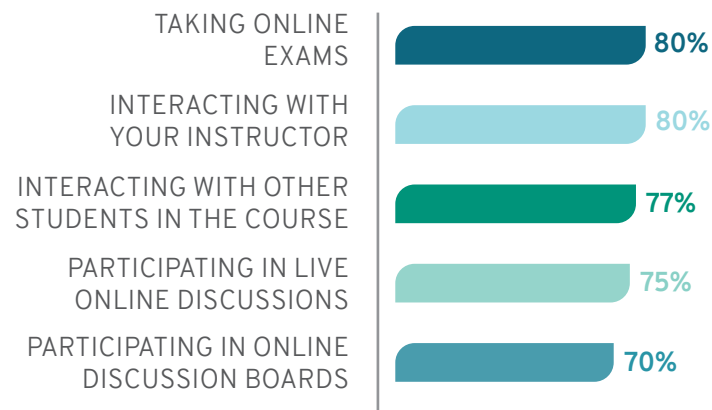
# Law students are well-equipped for online learning

Most law students have access to the space, connectivity, and equipment necessary for online education. The vast majority (89%) of law students have adequate physical space at home to accommodate online course participation. Similarly, 90% of law students have sufficient internet service to participate in online courses. Nearly all (95%) have adequate hardware, such as a laptop or tablet capable of accessing the features of their courses. Furthermore, more than nine in ten (92%) appreciate that course platforms are user-friendly.

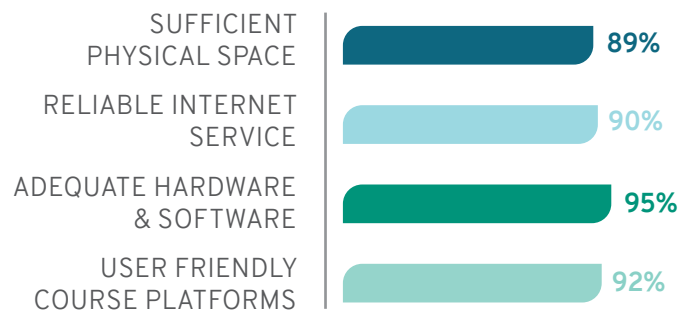
Law students are “mostly comfortable” or “very comfortable” with nearly all aspects of attending online classes, including taking online exams (80%), interacting

with instructors (80%) and other students (77%), and participating in live online course discussions (75%). Interestingly, comfort with nearly all aspects of online learning increases as a function of student age. For example, fewer than two-thirds (62%) of students aged 23-25 are “mostly comfortable” or “very comfortable” with participating in live online discussions compared to the vast majority (86%) of students over forty. Nearly identical proportions of students in those age categories feel comfortable interacting with their instructors online. This finding suggests that younger students—who make up the bulk of traditional law school students—may need more help accessing course features and more encouragement to participate in online classes.

## Comfort with aspects of online learning

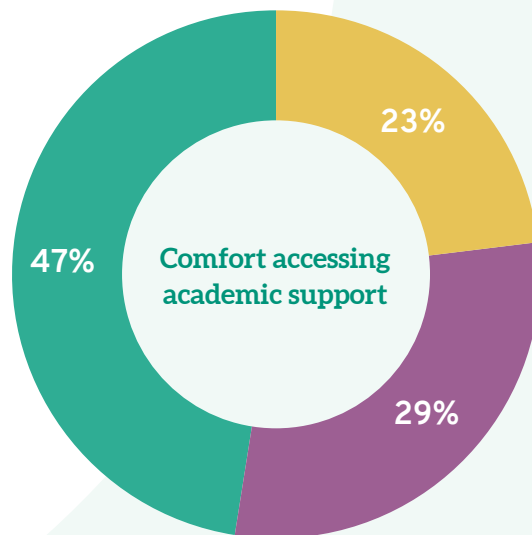


## Access to online courses

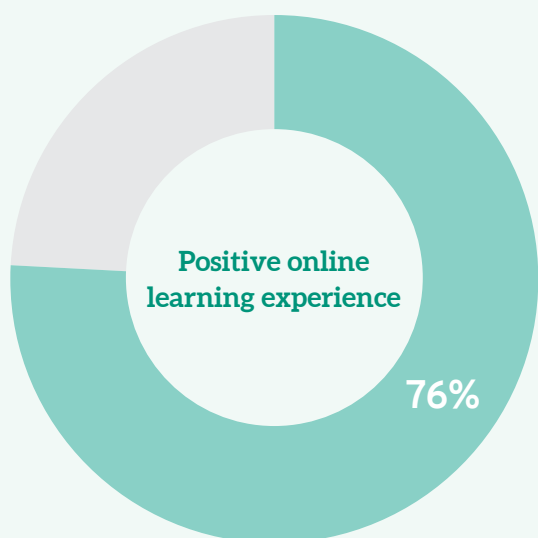
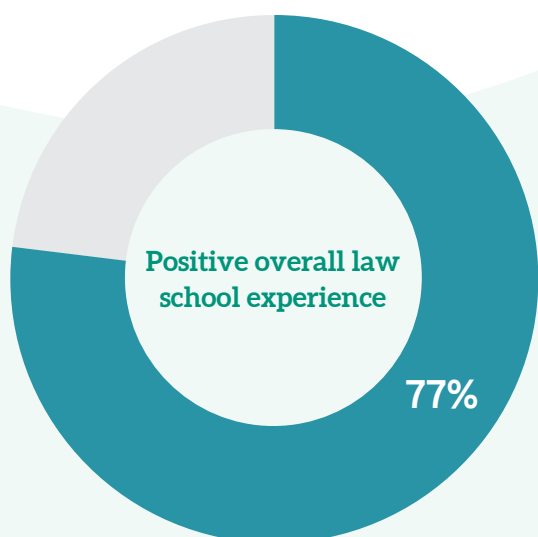




While many students are comfortable participating in online courses, nearly three in ten (29%) students in online classes are “not at all comfortable” or only “a little comfortable” accessing learning support services such as an academic success center or a writing center. Additionally, almost a quarter of students (23%) answered “not applicable” to their experience, indicating that they either are not aware of these services or do not access them at all. With less than half of online students (47%) being “mostly” or “very” comfortable using academic support services, online students face barriers to accessing the entirety of the law school resource portfolio.



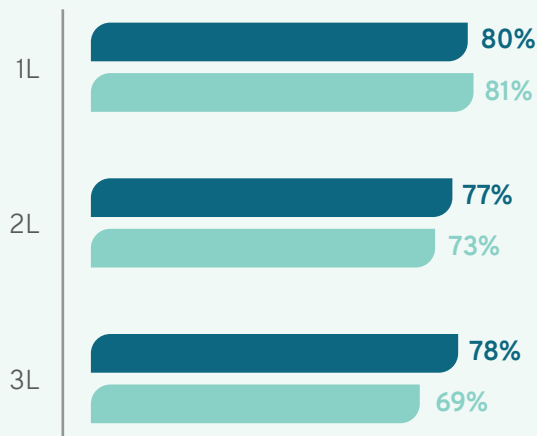
- NOT APPLICABLE
- NOT AT ALL OR A LITTLE COMFORTABLE
- MOSTLY OR VERY COMFORTABLE



## Satisfaction rates are high

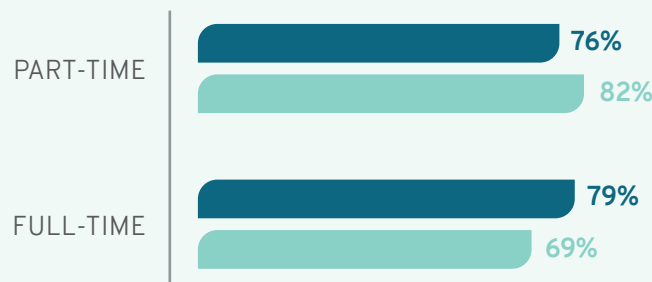
Most law students remain quite satisfied with their law school experience, a consistent finding since the LSSSE inaugural survey in 2004. In 2022, over three-quarters (77%) of students evaluated their entire educational experience as “good” or “excellent.” Similarly, 76% of students enjoy “good” or “excellent” online courses. Additionally, students who take most or all of their courses online are slightly more likely (27% compared to 24% of students attending in-person) to feel that their law school helps them cope “quite a bit” or “very much” with non-academic responsibilities such as work and family. The flexibility of online attendance may make law school easier to balance with other life demands when students can attend from anywhere with an internet connection. Satisfaction likely has different dimensions for students in different circumstances, and online classes offer students another avenue for optimizing their experience.

Positive overall law school experience



Interestingly, there are stark differences in satisfaction with law school based on mode of instruction and class year. First-year students who attend mostly online are more likely to say they would attend law school again if given the choice to start over (88% for mostly online compared to 81% for mostly in-person) and more likely to attend the same law school. Both sets of 1L students are equally satisfied with their entire law school experience. However, second- and third-year students who attend in-person courses are more satisfied than their online peers, with the largest disparity among 3Ls. Slightly more than two-thirds of online 3Ls (69%) rate their experience good or excellent compared to over three-quarters (78%) of in-person 3Ls. Perhaps second- and third-year students who committed to law school before the full scope of pandemic disruption are less satisfied with learning online than first-year students who chose to start law school during the acute phase of the pandemic.

Positive overall law school experience



Part-time students are particularly enthusiastic about online learning. More than four in five part-time students who attend mostly online have a “good” or “excellent” law school experience compared to just three in four part-time students who attend classes in person. Full-time students as a whole are more satisfied with their overall experience when attending classes on campus.

● MOSTLY IN-PERSON ● MOSTLY ONLINE



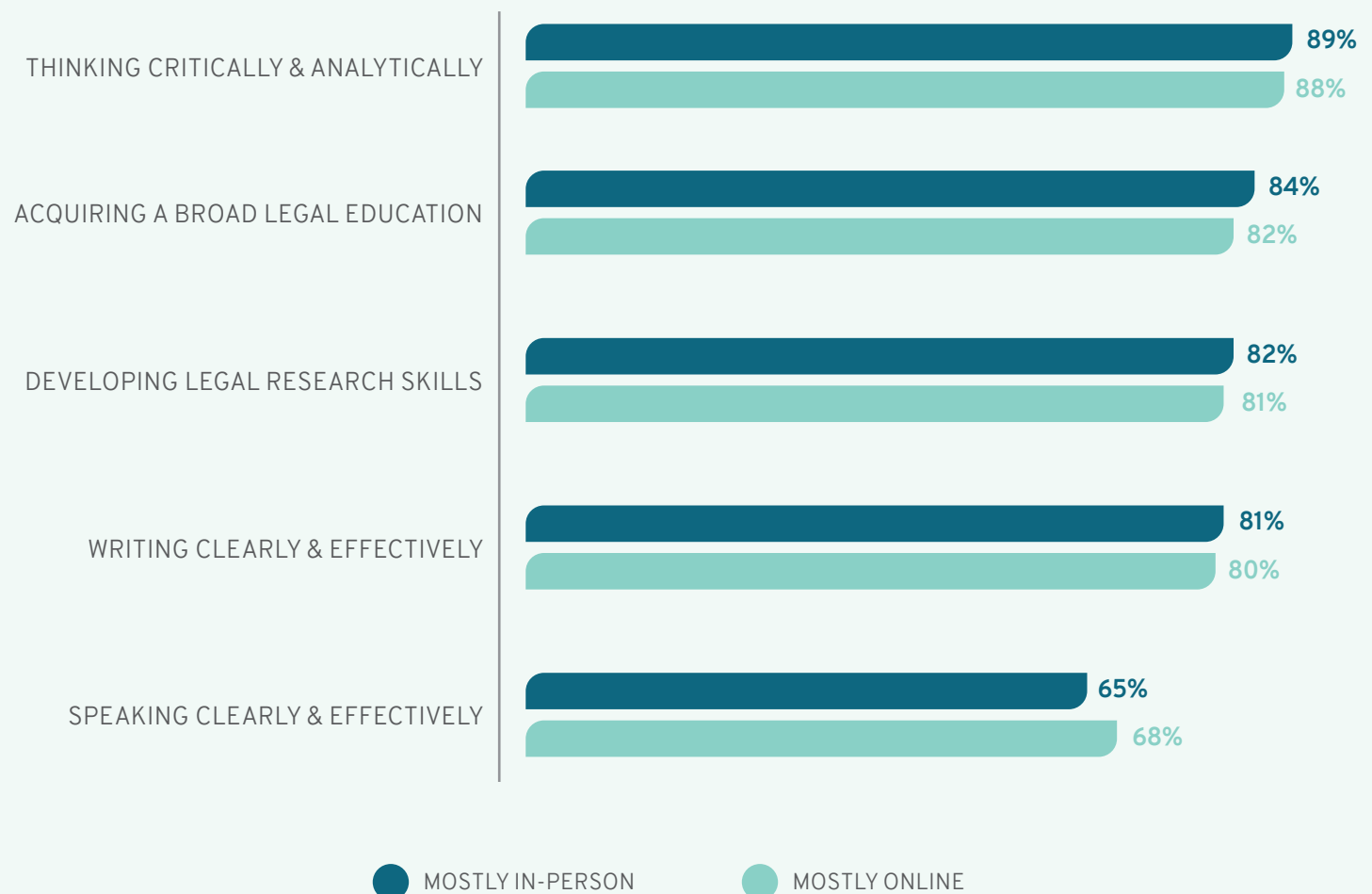


# Online students are learning as much as in-person students

Regardless of how they attend classes, most students are confident that they are developing crucial legal skills. Nearly 90% of online and in-person students are learning to think critically and analytically. More than four out of five online and in-person students say they are acquiring a broad legal education (82% and 84%, respectively) and developing legal research

skills (81% and 82%, respectively). Interestingly, online students are more likely to be developing the ability to speak clearly and effectively, perhaps because (as discussed later) online courses invite more participation from a diverse range of students. Thus, law school classes do not lose their intellectual rigor when they are offered in an online format.

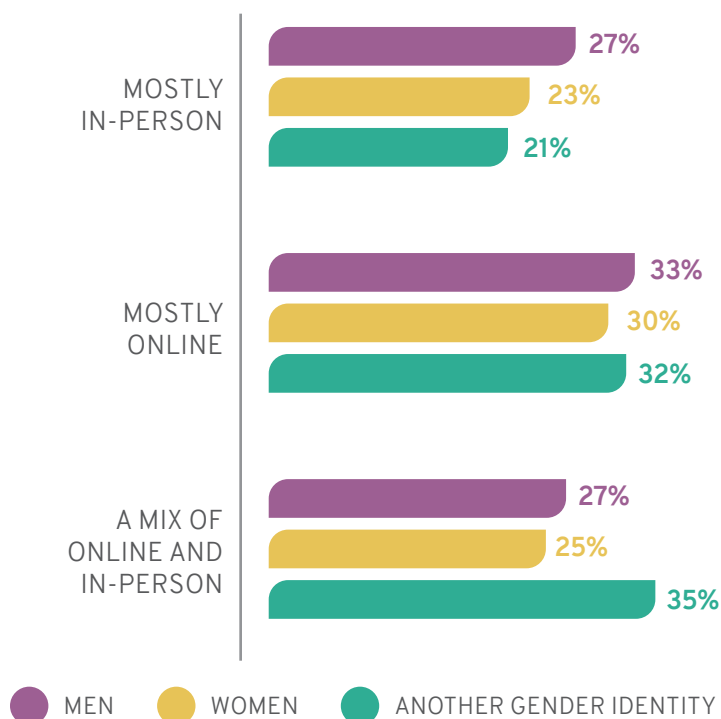
## Law school contributes significantly to...



# Online discussions feature diverse voices

Online classes excel at inviting participation from a broader range of students than in-person classes. Men are equally likely to participate in class discussion and ask questions “often” or “very often” whether participating in person (60%) or online (61%). However, women taking mostly online courses are more likely to engage in class “often” or “very often” (58%) compared to women taking mostly in-person courses (53%). In fact, online courses appear to encourage all students to engage more intensely with class discussion. One quarter of students (25%) who take primarily in-person classes participate “very often” compared to 31% of students taking mostly online classes. There is a marked gender difference, with 23% of women participating “very often” in person but a full 30% participating “very often” online, and only 21% of those with another gender identity participating “very often” in person while 32% do so online.<sup>1</sup> The online environment—perhaps because of the mechanisms for turn-taking or because it is more comfortable for students to volunteer—invites more voices to engage in the conversation.

## Participate very often in class



# Online students need tailored career services

While satisfaction and engagement are high among online students, there is room for law schools to enhance career service offerings for students who are not routinely on campus. Online and in-person students are equally confident that they are acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills (64% of online students and 63% of in-person students). However, online students are less likely to feel that the school provides the support they need to succeed in their employment search (46%

compared to 53% of in-person students). Additionally, 52% of in-person students believe that law school helps them develop clearer career goals, compared to 48% of online students. These modest but consistent differences show that online students are even more isolated from the advice and guidance that some of their in-person counterparts receive and feel less confident about finding satisfying employment post-graduation.

<sup>1</sup> “Another gender identity” is a significantly smaller population than “men” or “women.” In 2022, 145 students with another gender identity responded to this question.



# Online learning maintains strong relationships

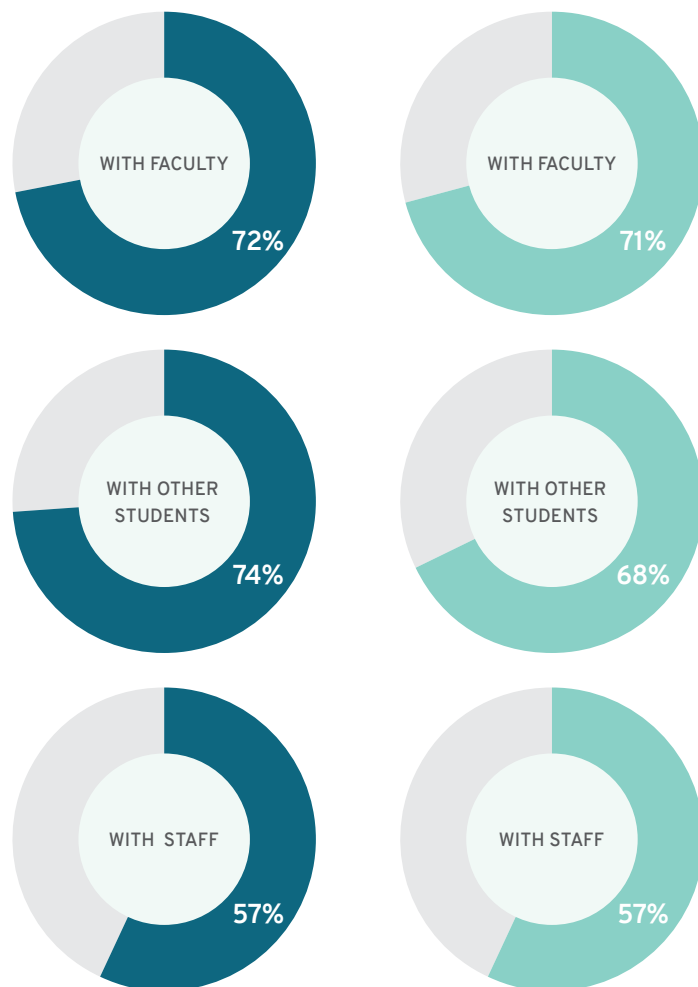
LSSSE data confirm other research showing how law school faculty have invested an enormous amount of energy and effort to connect with students, regardless of instructional modality. A full 72% of students taking mostly in-person classes have strong relationships with faculty (5 or higher on a 7-point scale), and 71% of mostly online students feel the same way. Students remain highly engaged with faculty in an online environment.

Online students and in-person students are equally likely to have positive relationships with administrative staff. A little over half (57%) of each group rate their relationships with their law school's administrators a 5 or higher on a 7-point scale. Career services-oriented staff could consider using these relationships to bring more targeted career guidance to online students to narrow the gap in career preparedness between online students and in-person students. However, the relatively low percentage of both in-person and online students who have strong relationships with staff is a point of concern that should be addressed to better support law student development.

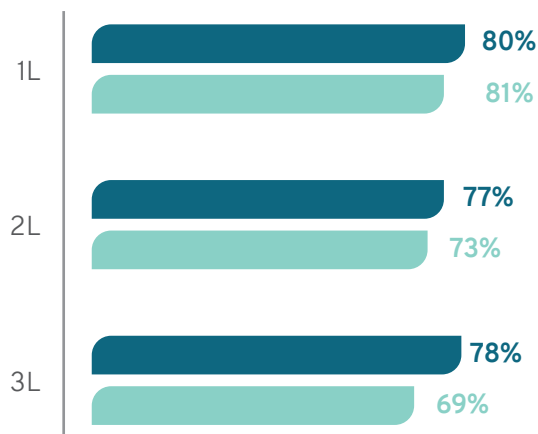
Despite similarly positive relationships with professors, students in mostly online classes are less likely than others to have strong relationships with each other. Only 68% of online students rate their relationships with their classmates positively, compared to nearly three-quarters (74%) of in-person students. There is again a disparity across class years, with 1Ls having similarly positive peer relationships regardless of mode of attendance and online 3Ls being much less likely to enjoy strong relationships with their peers than 3Ls attending in person. There may be a loss of social connections among online students because of a lack of the sort of incidental contact that builds relationships over time.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Chad Christensen and Meera E. Deo, LSSSE 2018 Annual Report: Relationships Matter (2019).

## Positive relationships



## Positive relationships with other students



● MOSTLY IN-PERSON ● MOSTLY ONLINE



## Conclusion

Online law school classes can be highly successful and well-received by students. Many students who take most of their classes online are as satisfied—and sometimes more satisfied—than their peers who attend classes primarily in person. Furthermore, law students who attend classes via either modality are equally likely to feel confident that they are learning important skills that will help them succeed as legal professionals.

As predicted in the 2021 LSSSE Annual Report, some important intangibles are less accessible to online students, including academic and career support services.<sup>3</sup> It will

be crucial for law schools that plan to extend or enhance future online offerings to increase the visibility and accessibility of such services. This will ensure that students attending primarily online will be on equal footing with their in-person peers to apply their knowledge and training as future lawyers.

For full-time students, in person learning is important to fulfill the need for social connections in a way that online learning—at least in its current form—cannot. Yet part-time students, who are likely to have comparatively more intense work and family responsibilities, thrive with the flexibility that online

learning affords. **Although the law school experience is unlikely to be primarily online again, the accelerated transition to offering online courses that occurred due to COVID-19 shows that the online law school experience can be as successful, enriching, and satisfying as the traditional curriculum.** Law schools are likely to continue to offer some form of online education in the future. To maximize outcomes, law schools must learn from the findings presented here to tailor their course offerings to the specific needs and preferences of their various student populations.

3 Meera E. Deo, Jacquelyn Petzold, and Chad Christensen, LSSSE 2021 Annual Report: The COVID Crisis in Legal Education (2021).





## Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research

201 N. ROSE AVE  
BLOOMINGTON, IN 47405-1006  
PHONE: 812-856-5823  
E-MAIL: [LSSSE@INDIANA.EDU](mailto:LSSSE@INDIANA.EDU)  
WEB: [LSSSE.INDIANA.EDU](http://LSSSE.INDIANA.EDU)

