



Law School Survey of
Student Engagement

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Study finds academically-oriented laptop use during class relates to higher levels of engagement for law students

Findings from a national study released today show that using laptop computers for certain activities during law school classes is linked to higher levels of student engagement and other positive outcomes. Students who frequently used their laptop to take notes, review ideas from past lectures, or read a self-prepared case brief were more likely to come to class prepared, contribute to class discussions, and synthesize material across courses. They were also more likely to work hard to meet faculty expectations.

Perhaps to be expected, students who frequently used their laptops during class to surf the web, email, or instant message were much less engaged overall. Third-year students were more likely than other law students to participate in such distracting activities during class.

The 2008 report from the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) is based on information from more than 29,000 law students at 85 law schools. The LSSSE study, titled *Student Engagement in Law Schools: Preparing 21st Century Lawyers*, gives law schools an idea of how well students are learning, along with what students put into and get out of their law school experience.

According to George Kuh, Indiana University professor and LSSSE director, "Law schools must do more than teach students to 'think like lawyers.' While innovation is essential, effective legal training must be rooted in such timeless fundamentals as helping students acquire the strong conceptual, analytical and writing skills demanded by the profession." "LSSSE has become a valuable resource for legal education precisely because it provides the kind of feedback that law schools need in order to attain their core educational purposes," observed William H. Sullivan, senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The annual survey findings provide information that law schools can use to estimate how well they are contributing to student learning, compare their performance with other schools, and identify policies and practices that may need attention to improve the quality of legal training. Key areas measured by the survey are intellectual experiences, student time usage, student satisfaction, enriching law school experiences, the climate for learning, and selected dimensions of educational, personal and professional development.

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Other key findings from the 2008 report are:

- Half of full-time law students reported that their law school experience substantially contributed to developing a personal code of values and ethics.
- While half of all students frequently reflected on the ethical responsibilities of being a lawyer, 10 percent of third-year students never did so.
- Students pointed to clinics and professional responsibility courses as the most effective settings for learning legal ethics.
- More than a third of all law students wanted more opportunities to do practice-based legal writing during law school.
- Students who entered law school immediately after earning a bachelor's degree spent less time studying and more time socializing than other students.
- Students who reported higher law school grades also spent more time participating in co-curricular activities.
- Third year students devoted less time to their studies, but were more involved than other law students in such co-curricular activities as law journal, internships, pro bono work and research projects.
- Third-year students at smaller law schools and private law schools with religious affiliations were more likely to say that their law school experience contributed substantially to acting with integrity, strengthening their commitment to serving the public good, and to working effectively with future clients.

According to Bryant Garth, dean and president of Southwestern University School of Law, "LSSSE provides a unique opportunity to explore systematically what is achieved, and what can be improved." Kuh added, "Law schools are using their LSSSE results to confirm where they are performing well and to identify areas that may need to change in order to prepare students to perform at the highest levels in a rapidly changing, increasingly complex legal environment."

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The LSSSE 2008 Report is cosponsored by the Association of American Law Schools and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The LSSSE 2008 Report, *Student Engagement in Law Schools: Preparing 21st Century Lawyers*, may be obtained for \$10 at www.lssse.iub.edu.