



Law School Survey of Student Engagement

Working with LSSSE Data: A Facilitator's Guide

A manual for law school administrators and faculty members looking to translate the LSSSE results to a wider audience

About this Guide

For the LSSSE results to be used to good effect at your law school, they must be understood, contextualized, shared, discussed, and put to action. This *Report* contains a great deal of information. Here, we give you some ideas for translating this information to a wider audience to stimulate instructive conversations about improving the quality of legal education.

Many law schools may find that sharing the LSSSE results at faculty workshops, administrative retreats, and strategic planning meetings is a productive way to stimulate action. This guide is designed to help you facilitate presentations and discussions about your school's results.

The guide includes:

- A LSSSE primer—what is student engagement, and what does the survey measure?
- Digests of the *Law School Report* results topics
- Suggestions for facilitating LSSSE discussions and presentations at your school

Step 1: Getting Acquainted with the LSSSE Survey and What it Measures

The first step in getting your colleagues to take your data seriously is to ensure that the concepts of student engagement and effective educational practice are understood. LSSSE provides information on the time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities and students' perceptions of the quality of other aspects of the law school experience. The sample PowerPoint presentation includes more detailed information about the research foundation upon which LSSSE was created.

One approach to stimulating faculty members'

interest is to invite them to identify which survey items they believe are the most important to student learning. Similarly, asking faculty members to predict survey results at your school can lead to interesting discussion. The gap between student responses and faculty predictions can be a starting point for discussions of educational practice and institutional improvement.

Program Suggestion:

Use Worksheet 1 during your session to encourage participants to predict the LSSSE results.

Step 2: Digesting the *Law School Report*

As the facilitator of a LSSSE presentation or discussion, you will likely want to become very familiar with the *Law School Report*. Use this guide to better understand the *Report's* three main sections:

- Respondent Characteristics
- Frequency Distributions
- Means Comparisons

Program Suggestion:

In advance of the session, distribute copies of the relevant portions of the *Law School Report* to participants.

Topic One: Respondent Characteristics

This section of the *Report* includes important information on the demographic and statistical data of your respondents, and information about your law school's selected comparison group, law schools of similar size and affiliation, and the entire LSSSE cohort.

It's wise to review this section of the *Report* to better understand (1) how the survey respondents at your school compare to your school's student population, and (2) how to use comparative data.

Response Rate

% response rate = number of respondents / total student population (non-deliverable email addresses are not included in this equation)

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do the LSSSE respondents reflect your student body profile? If not, what cautions might be exercised in interpreting the data?
2. How does your school compare to other law schools in terms of demographic features of students?
3. What generalizations are (or are not) possible based on these data?
4. How does your law school's response rate stack up against those of other schools?

Topic Two: Means Comparisons

In this section of the *Report*, you will find mean scores for each survey item.

Mean

Mean = sum of scores / number of responses

First, become familiar with what effect size represents. Then, look carefully at items with large effect sizes.

Effect size

Effect size = mean difference / standard deviation of the comparison group

Standard deviation = avg. deviation from the mean

Effect size indicates the "practical significance" of mean differences. An effect size of .2 is considered small, .5 is moderate, and .8 is large. A positive value indicates that the law school's mean was greater or showed a more affirmative result than the comparison group. A negative effect size indicates that the school lags behind the comparison group.

A large effect size indicates that your students' responses differ at a statistically significant level

from students in schools in your comparison groups. More asterisks for a particular survey item indicate that there is a smaller probability that the difference is due to chance. *Take note*, however: statistical significance does not guarantee that the result is important. Effect size should also be taken into account. LSSSE reports the Cohen's *d* effect size for comparisons that are statistically significant.

Statistical significance

Mean differences that are larger than would be expected by chance alone are noted with one, two, or three asterisks, referring to three significance levels (* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$). The smaller the significance level, the more confidence one can have in the result and the less likely the result is due to chance.

The effect size represents the magnitude of the difference in the student or institutional behavior represented by the item. When the effect size is large, or a pattern of moderate effect sizes exists, it is likely that the quality of the student experience is appreciably different.

Large effect sizes are uncommon in most areas of social science research, including LSSSE. If your results include some medium or large effects, something may be going on at your school that warrants immediate attention, especially if other empirical or anecdotal information corroborates the LSSSE data.

Topic Three: Identifying Patterns

In addition to focusing on items with medium to large effect sizes, you should also look for patterns in student responses. Do not rely exclusively on significance tests to identify areas that warrant attention. A consistent pattern of scoring above the mean may indicate that your law school is using good educational practices more frequently than those in the comparison group. These sorts of patterns can be instructive even when individual survey items do not reach statistical significance. For example, some schools may set very high expectations for student engagement and thus may find that their results fall short of their aspirations even though comparisons with other law schools are favorable.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do your students consistently score above or below the mean of comparison groups in certain areas of student engagement?
2. Are such differences explainable? For example, has the law school targeted specific programmatic areas for improvement? Could the differences be based on certain student characteristics unique to your law school?
3. What are areas of strength? What areas could be targeted for improvement?

Program Suggestion:

Map some of these trends in advance of the session. Pay attention to trends that will be of interest to your participants. For example, if you are meeting with faculty members, do trends appear in the academic engagement of students? If you are meeting with student service professionals, are trends apparent in the quality of student support?

Topic Four: Frequency Distributions

This section of the *Report* includes information on the frequency with which your students responded to the survey items. It may not be productive to examine each of these items in detail. Rather, you should identify the survey items that are of particular interest to your school (e.g. areas targeted for improvement efforts, areas of programmatic change, areas relating to your school's mission), and explore the frequency distribution in those areas.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do our students' responses correlate with what our law school expected?
2. What results are acceptable? Need attention?
3. Are there important differences recognizable in our student responses according to class (1L, 2L, etc.), full-time versus part-time enrollment, day versus evening programs?

You may consider identifying percentages of students responding "never" to certain survey items. Is it acceptable to your school that this percentage of students *never* engages in a particular activity? Do schools in your comparison group report similar results?

Program Suggestion:

In advance of the session, chart items with large effect sizes. Particularly note multiple large effects that occur within a single area. These may be areas that warrant further discussion.

Step 3: Exploring the Next Steps

We hope this guide has helped you initiate a discussion at your school about the LSSSE results. Your *Law School Report* includes a rich data set that administrators and faculty members at your law school should continue to draw upon as they dialogue about institutional improvement.

As you prepare to dig further into your data, we encourage you to take advantage of these resources:

- **Sample Presentation** — A customizable PowerPoint template with a sample presentation of the LSSSE data is appended to this guide and available on the CD and the LSSSE interface.
- **Consulting** — Arrange for a LSSSE staff member to visit your school. We can assist with presentations, and help facilitate workshops or retreats.
- **Users' Sessions** — The LSSSE staff facilitates workshops to help schools make the most of their results by understanding the data and how to use statistical software. Check the LSSSE website for information on upcoming sessions.
- **Accreditation Toolkit** — If your school is planning to use its LSSSE results in the accreditation process, use the *Toolkit* to map the survey items to the ABA standards.
- **Presentations and Conferences** — Consider sharing your LSSSE experiences, and learn more about how other schools use the data.

Predict Your Results

What do you know about your students? How *do* they spend their time, and what aspects of their legal education are most important to them? Your beliefs and assumptions about law students can shape the role you play in their legal development. These assumptions can also influence the types of

support and services you offer. Accordingly, it is important to measure your beliefs about students against their responses. Use this worksheet to record your predictions and preferences. The gaps between your predictions and the actual student responses may be a catalyst for important group discussions.

Survey Items		% of “Often” or “Very Often”		
		Predicted	Preferred	Actual
a.	Satisfaction with academic advising and planning			
b.	Satisfaction with career counseling			
c.	Satisfaction with personal counseling			
d.	Satisfaction with job search help			
e.	Satisfaction with financial aid advising			
f.	Satisfaction with library assistance			
g.	Satisfaction with computing technology			
h.	To what degree did your law school encourage spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work			
i.	To what degree did your law school encourage the ethical practice of law			
j.	To what degree did your law school provide the support you need to succeed academically			
k.	To what degree did your law school encourage contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds			
l.	To what degree did your law school provide the support you need to succeed in your employment search			
m.	To what degree did your law school help you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)			
n.	To what degree did your law school provide the support you need to thrive socially			
o.	To what degree did your law school encourage attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural events, symposia, etc.)			
p.	To what degree did your law school provide the financial counseling you need to afford your education			
q.	To what degree did your law school encourage using computers in academic work			
k.	How would you evaluate the quality of relationships with people at your law school			
	i. Other students			
	ii. Faculty members			
	iii. Administrative staff and offices			

Predict Your Results

What do you know about your students? How *do* they spend their time, and what aspects of their legal education are most important to them? Your beliefs and assumptions about law students can influence the expectations you set for them in class. These assumptions can also shape the role you play in

their legal development. Accordingly, it is important to measure your beliefs about students against their responses. Use this worksheet to record your predictions and preferences. The gaps between your predictions and the actual student responses may be a catalyst for important group discussions.

Survey Items	% of “Often” or “Very Often”		
	Predicted	Preferred	Actual
a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions			
b. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in			
c. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources			
d. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, sexual orientations, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments			
e. Come to class <i>without</i> completing readings or assignments			
f. Worked with other students on projects <i>during class</i>			
g. Worked with classmates <i>outside of class</i> to prepare class assignments			
h. Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions			
i. Participated in a clinical or pro-bono project as part of a course or for academic credit			
j. Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment			
k. Used e-mail to communicate with a faculty member			
l. Discussed assignments with a faculty member			
m. Talked about career plans or job search activities with a faculty member or advisor			
n. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class			
o. Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from faculty on your academic performance			
p. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet faculty members’ standards or expectations			
q. Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)			
r. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)			
s. Extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work			