



# Law School Survey of Student Engagement

## Accreditation Toolkit

### *Linking LSSSE data to ABA Standards*

*An approved law school must provide an opportunity for its students to study in a diverse educational environment, and [the school] must provide an education program that ensures that its graduates:*

- *understand their ethical responsibilities as representatives of clients, officers of the courts, and public citizens responsible for the quality and availability of justice;*
- *receive basic education through a curriculum that develops*
  - *understanding of the theory, philosophy, role, and ramifications of the law and its institutions*
  - *skills of legal analysis, reasoning, and problem solving; oral and written communication; legal research; and other fundamental skills necessary to participate effectively in the legal profession;*
  - *understanding of the basic principles of public and private law; and*
- *understand the law as a public profession calling for performance of pro bono legal services.*

*-Preamble to the ABA Standards for Accreditation*

### **Introduction and Rationale**

Law schools are beginning to recognize the value of LSSSE as a source of information to be used in accreditation. One of the most time-consuming pieces of the accreditation process is the self-study. Appropriate use of the LSSSE data can greatly facilitate that process.

More and more, the ABA is looking for evidence of the student experience to assess a law school's programs, curriculum and services. As the preamble to the accreditation standards highlights, the ABA wants to be certain that programs at approved law schools ensure student understanding. Although facilities, library holdings and scholarly publications are still taken into account, the ABA's inquiry increasingly focuses on student learning, student skills and student ethics. These types of outcomes can be difficult to measure. A school can easily provide a list of its co-curricular offerings or a description of its academic policies. But how can a school demonstrate that its students graduate with the legal skills and analytic ability required for the practice of law?

LSSSE provides a valuable measure of the kinds of activities associated with student learning and institutional effectiveness. Student engagement results from LSSSE represent what students put into their education and indirectly reflect what students get out of it.

Moreover, the LSSSE results are actionable; that is, they point to aspects of student and institutional performance that law schools can do something about. With LSSSE results in hand, law schools can show how effective their programs are and assess the value of recent or planned innovations in policy, curriculum and campus climate. The ABA asserts that accredited law schools should "continuously seek to exceed" the standards for accreditation in order to "improve the quality of legal education." LSSSE results are evidence of a law school's efforts to improve.

Used over time, LSSSE provides data that help law schools evaluate their progress over a period of years.

## LSSSE and the Self-Study

LSSSE results can be used in all components of the accreditation process, including the self-study, the site evaluation, or requests by the approval committee for evidence of institutional initiatives. Since the self-study requires the most advance work and planning for administrators and faculty, LSSSE data will be especially helpful in that regard. According to the published standards, the self-study must evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the educational program in light of the school's mission. (ABA Standard 202). LSSSE data can serve that purpose.

Individual law schools should determine how often they need to collect student engagement data in order to successfully integrate these results into the accreditation process. Some schools want to collect student engagement information to establish a baseline. Ideally, this would be done three to five years in advance of the self-study. By preparing well in advance, the law school will have time to analyze, interpret and vet the results with appropriate audiences, identify areas for improvement, take action in these areas, and administer the survey in subsequent years to demonstrate whether student and institutional performance are moving in the desired direction.

The appropriate LSSSE participation cycle depends on how you plan to use your data.



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**Used systematically over time**, LSSSE data provide information that helps schools:

- illustrate how they use assessment to determine whether current **programs** meet school goals, as required by ABA Standard 202;
- determine whether current institutional **goals** remain appropriate.

For accreditation purposes, it makes sense to collect information multiple times. This allows for comparative evaluation and may indicate to the ABA that the law school is carefully monitoring student learning to track trends.

After establishing a reliable baseline, some schools may choose to administer LSSSE biennially or every few years to allow time for institutional changes to take effect. Other schools may administer LSSSE annually to gather a fuller picture of student engagement at their institutions.

This toolkit provides suggestions for incorporating LSSSE into the accreditation process. We also show you how to map student engagement results to the ABA standards.

The self-study requires a school to conduct a candid and rigorous evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of its educational programs.

-ABA Standard 202

## **LSSSE and the Site-Evaluation**

The site-evaluation team is charged with assessing various aspects of your law school. By necessity, many of the team's assessments will be limited to observation of inputs — that is, the resources and emphasis devoted to certain aspects of the school. Outputs will be difficult for the team to measure. For example, to assess the school's academic rigor, the team may consider how many hours students are in class and what courses are offered. But the evaluation team has no meaningful way of measuring what students are getting *out* of those hours spent in the lecture hall.

LSSSE results can give the site-evaluation team a fuller picture of your school, leading to a more accurate report to the ABA. The results describe the school climate from the student perspective. After all, the students are the ones who know whether or not the school effectively emphasizes academic rigor and the ethical practice of law.

Teaching effectiveness, efforts to improve pedagogy, and instructional innovation are also considered by the site-evaluation team. In its report to the ABA, the team will describe the efforts made by the school to improve the teaching of its faculty. With student engagement data in hand, schools can show the team what efforts — and what strides — have been made toward greater educational effectiveness.

## **Mapping LSSSE to ABA Standards**

To make the LSSSE data easily adaptable to a self-study, we have developed a template to map the LSSSE survey items to the ABA accreditation standards.

Results from individual LSSSE questions can be used as evidence that your school is living up to specific standards set by the ABA. In the aggregate, LSSSE findings can be used to support and document institutional improvement efforts.

Use the data to help identify particular areas of strength and weakness, as required by the self-study. If your school has several years of LSSSE data, chart the success of steps taken to increase student engagement levels.

- Use our map to **link the LSSSE survey items directly to ABA curricular and co-curricular standards.**
- Use cumulative LSSSE results to **track the success** of institutional improvement efforts.

Keep in mind that LSSSE results will be most meaningful when used in concert with other measures of student learning outcomes from your law school.

## **Accreditation Timelines**

### **LSSSE Administration over a 7-year cycle**

To use LSSSE results in the accreditation process, some schools will not find it necessary to administer the survey every year. However, administrators should develop a strategy for self-evaluation and institutional reflection. A sample administration cycle based on the 7-year accreditation evaluation follows. Your school should adapt this sample cycle to suit its needs, taking into account other assessment or evaluation measure already in place.

**ABA Accreditation Standard 401 mandates that faculty possess a high degree of teaching effectiveness.**

**The site-evaluation team will evaluate a school's efforts to improve the effectiveness of its teaching and learning.**

## Sample Administration —7 Year Cycle

Your school's LSSSE participation cycle should be based on assessment and improvement goals. The schedule presented here may be appropriate for your law school, but depending on your school's objectives, you may need to administer the survey more or less frequently. Please contact LSSSE with questions about the participation cycle that will best suit your research agenda.

### Years 1&2      **Establishing a Baseline**

*Administer LSSSE both years.*

### Year 3      **Self-Evaluation and Improvement**

*Analyze the LSSSE results. Consider inviting LSSSE staff to conduct an on-site workshop with your faculty. Invite stakeholders to review and comment. Take appropriate and well-informed steps to improve programs and practices.*

### Years 4&5      **Review and Further Analysis**

*Administer LSSSE and analyze results. Use LSSSE data to assess whether student and institutional performance are increasing.*

### Year 6      **Preparing the Self-Study**

*Use your past LSSSE results to **chart institutional improvement over time**, to document student reported gains in learning, professional skills, and development of legal ethics. Map the data to ABA accreditation standards.*

### Year 7      **Site Evaluation**

*Using the data from LSSSE, demonstrate to the site evaluation team that your law school has taken intentional steps to assess and improve student learning.*

## What if Accreditation is Around the Corner?

For some law schools, a self-study or site evaluation may be just a year away. In such cases, LSSSE can still provide some valuable information. Keep in mind that the survey is administered during the spring semester, and schools receive results in July. Using the data from a single survey administration, schools can begin to establish a baseline and to demonstrate educational strengths and weaknesses. It may be particularly appropriate to compare the LSSSE results with internal efforts at self-evaluation.

## Planning your Strategy for Accreditation

A successful strategy for approaching accreditation is authentic to each law school. However, an important step in developing your strategy is determining what self-evaluation practices are currently in place. What evidence of self-evaluation and student learning does your law school have on hand? Is your school interested in comparing its results with peer schools, or benchmarking results over time? The answers to these questions may help determine your LSSSE participation cycle, and the role LSSSE will play in your larger efforts at institutional improvement.

**LSSSE 2008 Survey Items**

**ABA Standards**

<b>1 Academic and Intellectual Experiences</b>		
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	302(a)(3). See Intrap. 302-1
c.	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	302(a)(3)
d.	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, sexual orientations, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	212(a)
e.	Come to class <i>without</i> completing readings or assignments	
f.	Worked with other students on projects <i>during class</i>	302(b)(3)
g.	Worked with classmates <i>outside of class</i> to prepare class assignments	302(b)(3)
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	302(b)(1)
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	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
l.	Discussed assignments with a faculty member	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
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	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
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	303(a)
q.	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
r.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)	
s.	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	212(a)
t.	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	
<b>2 Exam Challenge</b>		
	Extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work	303(a). See Intrap. 303-1

**ABA**

*202...The self-study shall describe the program of legal education, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program.*

*301...All students [shall] have reasonably comparable opportunities to take advantage of the school's educational program, co-curricular programs, and other educational benefits.*

*302...A law school shall require that each student receive substantial instruction in: legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem solving, and oral communication*

Mapping LSSSE to ABA Standards

<b>3</b>	<b>Mental Activities</b>		
	a.	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	
	b.	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	302(a)(2)
	c.	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	302(a)(2), (4)
	d.	Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	302(a)(4)
	e.	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	301. See Intrap. 301-1
<b>4</b>	<b>Reading and Writing</b>		
	a.	Number of written papers of 20 pages or more	302(a)(3)
	b.	Number of written papers between 5 and 19 pages	302(a)(3)
	c.	Number of written papers of fewer than 5 pages	302(a)(3)
<b>5</b>	<b>Participation in Co-Curricular Activities</b>		
	a.	Clinical internship or field experience	302(b)(1)
	b.	Volunteer or pro bono work	302(b)(2)
	c.	Student-faculty committee	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
	d.	Work on a legal research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	301(b). See Intrap. 301-4
	e.	Study abroad	307
	f.	Law journal member	301(b)
	g.	Moot court team	301(b)
	h.	Law student organization member	301(b)
	i.	Law student organization leader	301(b)
<b>6</b>	<b>Satisfaction with Non-Academic Support</b>		
	a.	Academic advising and planning	511
	b.	Career counseling	511
	c.	Personal counseling	
	d.	Job search help	511
	e.	Financial aid advising	511
	f.	Library assistance	601
	g.	Computing technology	704

*301-4...Among the factors to consider for assessing compliance.. are whether students have reasonably comparable opportunities to benefit from regular interaction with full-time faculty and other students.*

*302-1...Factors to be considered ... include: the number and nature of writing projects assigned to students; the opportunities a student has to meet with a writing instructor ...; the number of drafts that a student must produce of any writing project.*

*403-2: Efforts to ensure teaching effectiveness may include: a faculty committee on effective teaching ...institutional review of student evaluation of teaching, colloquia on effective teaching.*

<b>7</b>	<b>Time Use</b>		
	a.	Reading assigned textbooks, online class reading, and other course materials	303
	b.	Preparing for class and clinical courses <i>other than reading</i> (studying, writing, doing homework, trial preparation, and other academic activities)	303
	c.	Reading on your own (not assigned) for personal or academic enrichment	
	d.	Legal pro bono work <i>not required</i> for a class or clinical course	302(b)(2)
	e.	Working for pay in a <i>law-related</i> job	304(f)
	f.	Working for pay in a <i>nonlegal</i> job	304(f)
	g.	Participating in law school-sponsored activities (organizations, journal, moot court, student bar association, etc.)	301(b)
	h.	Exercising or participating in fitness activities	
	i.	Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)	
	j.	Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	
	k.	Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.)	
	l.	Participating in community organizations (politics, religious groups, etc.)	
<b>8</b>	<b>Institutional Environment, Emphasis</b>		
	a.	Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	See 301, Intrap. 301-3
	b.	Encouraging the ethical practice of law	302(a)(5)
	c.	Providing the support you need to succeed academically	511
	d.	Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	212
	e.	Providing the support you need to succeed in your employment search	511
	f.	Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	
	g.	Providing the support you need to thrive socially	
	h.	Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural events, symposia, etc.)	
	i.	Providing the financial counseling you need to afford your education	511
	j.	Using computers in academic work	704

*104-1... [a law school] should continuously seek to exceed these minimum requirements in order to improve the quality of legal education and to promote high standards of professional competence, responsibility and conduct.*

*511... A law school shall provide all its students with basic student services..., including maintenance of accurate student records, academic advising and counseling, financial aid counseling, and an active career counseling service to assist students in making sound career choices and obtaining employment.*

<b>8</b>	<b>Institutional Environment, Emphasis (continued)</b>			<i>301-1...A law school shall maintain an educational program that prepares its students to address current and anticipated legal problems.</i>	
	k.	Quality of relationships with people at your law school			
		i. Other students			
		ii. Faculty members			
		iii. Administrative staff and offices			
<b>9</b>	<b>Educational and Personal Growth</b>			<i>302(a)(5)...A law school shall require that each student receive substantial instruction in...the history, goals, structure, values, rules, and responsibilities of the legal profession and its members.</i>	
	a.	Acquiring a broad legal education	302(a)(1), (4), (5)		
	b.	Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	302(a)(1), (4)		
	c.	Writing clearly and effectively	302(a)(3)		
	d.	Speaking clearly and effectively	302(a)(2)		
	e.	Thinking critically and analytically	302(a)(2)		
	f.	Using computing and information technology			
	g.	Developing legal research skills	302(a)(2)		
	h.	Working effectively with others	302(a)(4), 302(b)(3)		
	i.	Learning effectively on your own			
	j.	Understanding yourself			
	k.	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds			
	l.	Solving complex real-world problems	301. See Intrap. 301-1		
	m.	Developing clearer career goals			
	n.	Developing a personal code of values and ethics			
	o.	Contributing to the welfare of your community			
	p.	Developing a deepened sense of spirituality			
<b>10</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>				<i>302-2...Each law school is encouraged to be creative in developing programs of instruction in professional skills related to the various responsibilities which lawyers are called upon to meet, using the strengths and resources available to the school.</i>
	How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?				
	If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?				

## **LSSSE as a Tool for Improving Student Learning**

Student engagement information can respond to accreditation goals. To evaluate the analytic and legal reasoning skills your students gain during law school, or to assess the competency of your students in areas of legal research, or written and oral advocacy, consider the results delivered from LSSSE.

- Law schools can track their progress in certain curricular or program areas.
- LSSSE results can help pinpoint areas of comparative strength or weakness.
- With several years of results in hand, schools can chart the success of their curricular innovations and improvement efforts.
- Student engagement information shows how much time students are devoting to activities and practices that will help them learn effectively.
- School environment — *e.g.* emphasis on student/faculty interaction, collaborative learning, encouraging diversity — can be assessed from the student perspective using data from LSSSE.

Want more information?  
Visit us at [www.lssse.iub.edu](http://www.lssse.iub.edu)

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