



Law School Survey of Student Engagement

Using LSSSE Data

Since 2004, 148 different law schools have administered LSSSE. In this guide we provide a look at how select law schools are using their LSSSE data to inform policy changes, curricular reform, and strategic planning.

Multiple Uses of LSSSE

Because LSSSE focuses on student behavior and effective educational practice, law schools have found many different, productive ways to use survey results. In most instances, a communication strategy is needed in order to get people to attend to and take interest in the findings. An important first step is to clearly convey the import of the student engagement concept. Survey results can be used for:

- Assessment and improvement
- Accreditation
- Benchmarking
- Self-studies
- Curricular reform
- Grant proposals
- Accountability
- Institutional research
- Strategic planning
- Student retention and satisfaction
- Faculty and staff development
- Scholarship of teaching and learning
- Recruitment
- Alumni outreach

Maximizing the Use and Impact of LSSSE Data

LSSSE was designed to provide useful, actionable information for law schools. Taking certain steps before, during, and after the survey administration can increase the odds that your results will be used effectively.

Using the LSSSE Data 1

Consider the following to maximize return on your investment:

Before survey administration begins

- Encourage interest in the survey and the data among students and faculty. Generating enthusiasm in advance of survey administration may boost your response rates, which may in turn lead to more representative results. One effective method of promoting the survey is to share with students the reasons you are administering LSSSE and your plans to interpret and act on the results.

During the survey administration period

- Identify peer law schools or aspirant law schools for comparisons purposes. Your self-selected comparison group will help you better understand the results by lending context to your mean scores. Base your selections on criteria appropriate to your research goals. Consult LSSSE staff for assistance finalizing your selections.

After you receive your results

- Identify sub-populations of interest such as part-time evening students or female joint-degree students. Using the SPSS data file, you can disaggregate the data to further investigate the experiences of certain groups of students.
- Develop a communications strategy to share the results. Determine which groups at your law school will receive results (administrators, students, alumni, governing boards), and the best method for sharing these results. When planning presentations, think about ways to encourage interest in the data among audience members.
- Validate findings by linking LSSSE to other data sources. Corroborating student engagement results with other data sources like outcomes measures or internal surveys increases confidence in making policy decisions.
- Translate the data to action.

(Throughout this guide we offer several “LSSSE tips” that provide ideas for law schools about how to effectively share and utilize their data.)

LSSSE Tip # 1: Linking LSSSE Data with Other Sources

LSSSE results can and should be linked to other data sources on campus to determine whether improvement efforts are having the desired effect.

Some schools want multiple years of data before taking action. Other law schools corroborate LSSSE results with existing evidence and are confident in moving ahead to address areas of concern, such as student use of technology, the amount of reading and legal writing, and quality of academic advising.

Lessons Learned about Using LSSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of schools using student engagement data, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating the data into law school improvement efforts:

1. **Make sure faculty understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.** Without a clear understanding of the research foundation and the empirical evidence of the benefits of student engagement, faculty may not appreciate the value and import of these data. Refer to the *Sample PowerPoint* for help in communicating the concept and the validity and reliability of self-reported data.
2. **Understand what student engagement data represent and how the results can be used productively.** It takes time, perspective, and experience to understand and make the best use of the LSSSE results. If you’d like assistance better understanding and using your results, feel free to contact our office to investigate future workshops or to discuss consultations.
3. **Don’t allow the numbers to speak for themselves.** Every number and comparison report should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results.

4. **Examine the results from multiple perspectives.** Use peer comparisons (normative approach) to confirm or challenge assumptions about your law school’s performance. You should also place the results in the context of your own law school’s objectives and mission using the criterion referenced approach. Both are described below in the benchmarking section of this *Guide*.
5. **Don’t go it alone.** Coordinate with colleagues at your peer law schools to develop a survey participation schedule to maximize the utility of your comparative data. Think about forming a consortium if you would like to develop supplemental questions and receive comparative data on those topics.

Establishing Standards of Comparison

LSSSE data serve a diagnostic function by identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses in terms of effective educational practices. Comparisons with peer law schools and the national averages help reveal aspects of law school and JD/LLB student performance not readily available from other sources.

Benchmarking

There are two basic approaches to benchmarking that LSSSE schools are using. One or both may be appropriate, depending on your law school’s situation.

Normative Approach

The normative approach compares your students’ responses to those of students at the other 84 law schools in LSSSE 2008. This information is readily available from the *Means Comparison Report*. Breaking down the information into subgroups or engagement topics may be a way of stimulating faculty interest and discussion in the findings.

Criterion Approach

A second way to look at your results is a criterion-referenced approach whereby you compare your law school’s performance against a predetermined value or level that you and your colleagues deem appropriate for your students, given your school mission, size, curricular offerings, selectivity, demographics, and so forth.

LSSSE Tip # 2: Peer Comparisons

As part of your report, you were asked to select a group of “peer” schools to comprise a comparison group. You likely selected these schools based on similarities with your own law school, such as admissions criteria, educational mission, or region.

You can increase the power of benchmarking by forming more than one comparison group. For example, you may want to situate your school’s performance in the context of peer schools and a separate group of aspirant schools. Knowing how your school stacks up against schools in your metro region *and* schools with similar demographics may be helpful to understand your results in context.

LSSSE makes it possible to create more than one comparison group through a special analysis request. After you receive your report in June, contact the LSSSE office for more details. Fees for special analysis are based upon the time required to complete the project.

Communicating Results

It is usually most effective to use a combination of dissemination activities to reach both audiences within the law school community and external audiences.

Communicating Internally

Selected Audiences

Targeting specific audiences that may have expressed an interest in, or that should be aware of, one or more aspects of the results can facilitate focused dialogue about implications of the findings for policy and practice.

When preparing LSSSE reports and presentations for various constituencies, highlight results that link to ongoing activities of the target audience. Reports that indicate areas of relative strength and weakness can help to distill myths or raise awareness about student engagement at your law school.

School Wide

To distribute LSSSE results broadly, many schools post summaries of important findings and invite colleagues to review the full report online or by request through the appropriate office. Another way to share results is to post them to internal or public web sites or create displays in public areas such as the law school library.

Communicating Externally

The most common external audiences for LSSSE results are accreditors. Many LSSSE schools report they are using their results, or expect to refer to them, in self-studies and accreditation reports. Governing boards, regional university accreditors and university system offices also see value in student engagement data.

Some law schools provide information via news releases and special feature articles for student, local and regional newspapers. Although some schools choose not to share their data with external audiences and use it solely for institutional improvement, others delay public data sharing until triangulation with other law school data can provide greater context.

LSSSE Tip # 3: Use the LSSSE PowerPoint Presentation to Increase Awareness and Interest

A PowerPoint template into which you can insert school-specific results is included with this *Law School Report*. Use this sample presentation as a tool to introduce the student engagement construct and how LSSSE measures it.

Schools can use these materials as part of faculty workshop sessions or presentations to student bar associations or trustees to give an overview of what LSSSE entails.

Examples of Using LSSSE Data

LSSSE was designed to provide information law schools can use to improve the quality of the law school experience. Law schools are using their results in the following ways:

Making Improvement a School-Wide Goal

A first step in using the LSSSE data is to understand what the findings mean and generate interest in the results. Sharing data on the student experience with those who are in a position to directly influence students is a highly effective method of achieving positive change.

Santa Clara University School of Law is generating interest in their data by sharing the results widely. Students can download copies of the results from the school's intranet site. In addition, the administration invited LSSSE staff to visit and present a brown bag talk about Santa Clara's results to students. Taking this step helped Santa Clara students realize that their school values their input and is committing real time and effort toward improvement.

Santa Clara also brought faculty into the conversation for a multi-year analysis of LSSSE results. Reviewing three years worth of data, faculty discussed improvement and change over time. This type of trend analysis lent new insight to institutional assessment efforts. Data points that may not stand out as notable during a particular administration year were more informative when viewed over several years.

Drawing on Other Measures

LSSSE data can be enhanced by connecting them with other measures. While LSSSE results give you a good idea of what students put into their education, it is useful to know how these process measures relate to other data on student performance and the law school experience.

The University of Akron School of Law plans to link its LSSSE data to outcomes measures like bar passage statistics. The results will allow Akron to draw important connections between engagement activities (*e.g.* preparing for class, discussing ideas with professors, and effort) and success on the bar.

LSSSE Tip #4: Special Analysis

LSSSE conducts specialized analyses on an as-needed basis to assist schools in answering specific questions. For example, if you are interested in knowing how the experiences of your minority female 1L students compare against those of other similar students across the country, you may consider requesting a special analysis.

The fees for special analyses are based upon time required to complete the project. Please contact LSSSE at lssse@indiana.edu or 812-856-5824 for more details.

Incorporating LSSSE Results into ABA Accreditation

Preparing the self-study report and prepping for the ABA site evaluation can be a challenging process. The LSSSE data help schools document improvement and provides a source of information about the student experience.

Several schools have utilized their LSSSE data in ABA self-study reviews. Drake University Law School, University of Missouri – Columbia School of Law and Oklahoma City University School of Law are among other LSSSE schools using their data in the ABA self-study process. The *Accreditation Toolkit* maps the LSSSE survey items directly to ABA accreditation standards. Also refer to the *Toolkit* for several survey administration suggestions depending on your accreditation timeline.

Benchmarking Performance

Faculty at the Indiana University School of Law, Bloomington are discussing the school's performance over time. As part of a lunchtime series on law school improvement, faculty members reviewed five years' worth of data, comparing mean scores for individual survey items to mean scores at other law schools to gauge performance. Indiana Law mean scores were presented alongside scores for other public law schools, mid-sized schools and the selected peer group. In addition, faculty discussed internal trends as observed over the five year period.

Beginning with data points that faculty could easily digest, such as commute times for IU Law students compared to commute times at other law schools, the group was able to validate the results within the context of the law school. From there, the discussion progressed to the more surprising or potentially ambiguous findings. Viewing the results within the context of both comparative and multi-year data helped the group interpret the meaning of the engagement data.

Identifying Peer Law Schools and Setting Goals

Southwestern University Law School is using comparative data to obtain a clearer picture of its students' level of engagement compared to students at other law schools. The dean was interested in triangulating Southwestern's results to achieve the most accurate picture available. To that end, Southwestern requested data from a second comparison group to complement the Selected Peers data included in their report. The first group included self-identified peer schools, while the second included several aspirational peers. By charting their results against both groups, administrators at Southwestern will be able to better understand the import of their results.

Other schools have recognized the value of peer comparisons in lending perspective to the results. The consortium option allows schools to examine topics in further detail. For example, schools with sizeable part-time populations can use the consortium option to examine issues pertinent to their students. Past consortium participants include Charleston School of Law, Florida Coastal School of Law, Atlanta's John Marshall School of Law, Marquette University Law School, New York Law School, Nova Southeastern Law Center, Southwestern University Law School, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, University of Denver Sturm College of Law, and University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law, among others.

Collaborating with Institutional Research

Many law schools have found it useful to partner with institutional researchers on their campus to analyze their results in greater detail. Institutional research offices, whether housed within the law

school or in the university at large, serve as valuable resources for schools looking to identify sub-populations or perform extensive statistical analyses. St. John's University School of Law worked with its research office to break down the data into a format that enabled them to better share the results with different offices. When the new dean arrived on campus, she had a quick snapshot of student life.

Stetson University and New York Law School both employ the services of in-house institutional researchers. These researchers have responded to questions and analysis requests from the administration, but they have also had time to work with the data in depth to determine whether interesting patterns emerge. Meanwhile, Pepperdine University Law School worked closely with researchers housed in the larger university who were familiar with student engagement data.

Getting More out of your Data File

Although the *Report* contains a wealth of information, to answer the questions that are important at your school, you may need to dig deeper into the data file.

To know whether students who participate in an activity such as a pilot program, a particular section, or a summer start initiative have different engagement patterns than their classmates, schools may elect to include an extra field in their population file to flag these students while preserving the anonymity of responses. The University of Ottawa used this technique to know whether students follow an English or French language curriculum. When Ottawa received its data file, researchers were able to determine the differences in engagement between these two groups of students.

Alternatively, schools can make these connections after receiving the results. New York Law School wanted to better understand their students' participation in a number of activities, including clinical internships and field experiences, externships, clerkships, and public interest work. Administrators at NYLS are designing a data-analysis approach that will help them to determine whether students who participate in these activities are more engaged in their legal education. For more information on how to conduct such studies, please contact LSSSE.

LSSSE Public Disclosure Policy

LSSSE encourages public disclosure of student engagement results in ways that serve to increase understanding of law school quality and that support efforts to improve law school teaching and student learning.

Disclosing law school results from the LSSSE survey provides an opportunity to help educate the public about the value of student engagement as a new metric for defining and examining law school quality. LSSSE especially supports public reporting of student engagement results in ways that enable thoughtful, responsible comparisons while encouraging institutional diversity.

Whether a participating law school makes public its student engagement results is up to the institution.

Consistent with the LSSSE participation agreement, LSSSE does not make institutional results available to third parties. Law schools may do so as stated in the LSSSE Participant Agreement. While organizations and individuals are entitled to request LSSSE data from participating law schools, LSSSE is neutral as to whether institutions supply their results. Premature disclosure of an individual school's results could inadvertently divert the focus away from improvement if the data are used in inappropriate or irresponsible ways.

LSSSE does not support the use of publicly disclosing student engagement results for the purpose of rankings.

The LSSSE Advisory Board and LSSSE cosponsors—Association of American Law Schools and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching—believe reducing student engagement to a single indicator obscures complex dimensions of law school performance. Rankings are inherently flawed as a tool for accountability and improvement, regardless of the information on which they are based. Such comparisons become even more problematic in the case of law schools that differ in terms of mission, resources and profile of students.

LSSSE Tip # 4: Consider Attending a LSSSE Users Session

We have done our best in this *Law School Report* to provide useful examples and clear explanations of the results. Even so, many questions will remain unanswered. Accordingly, we offer Users' Sessions aimed at increasing familiarity with the data and bringing together LSSSE participating schools.

LSSSE research analysts are on hand at these sessions to answer questions about your data. With some basic tools in hand, you will be prepared to open up your data disc and dig into the results. For more experienced users, these sessions offer a unique opportunity to learn about what other schools are doing and whether their approaches might be useful at your law school.

Fall LSSSE workshops will be announced shortly. Please visit the LSSSE website for information about upcoming sessions.

Overcoming Potential Obstacles to Using LSSSE Data Effectively

Translating assessment information into action is a challenge for all law schools. Here are some ways to address some of the more common obstacles:

Obstacle	Approach
<i>Small number of respondents</i>	Determine whether respondents are similar to the groups of interest.
<i>Inappropriate comparison group</i>	Request another peer comparison or special analysis from LSSSE.
<i>Limited capacity to analyze and report results</i>	Contact LSSSE to request a school-consultation or to discuss research strategies.
<i>"Average" results across the board</i>	Use a different comparison group or a criterion-based approach to determine the degree that student performance is inconsistent with your school's expectations.

LSSSE Tip # 5: Strategize to Increase the Usefulness of Your Results

You can increase the value of your LSSSE results by adopting a strategy for assessment and data analysis. An assessment strategy can help you determine how often your law school should administer LSSSE and how you should go about interpreting the results. For example, will a longitudinal analysis help you clarify and better understand your students' experiences? Will establishing a baseline help you chart improvement over time? Contact the LSSSE staff to discuss an appropriate strategy for your school.

Final Word

We know LSSSE results are being used widely to improve the quality of legal education students receive. So that other law schools can learn from your experiences, we encourage you to share with us examples from your own law school. We especially invite administrators and faculty to participate in regional LSSSE users' workshops where users exchange ideas and stories about using LSSSE data and other efforts to improve legal education. Please visit the LSSSE homepage to view upcoming events.

Want more information?

Visit us at www.lssse.iub.edu

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