20 YEARS OF LSSSE

Sharing Trends in Legal Education

LSSSE
UNDERSTANDING LEGAL EDUCATION

Table of Contents

COVER:
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW,
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF LAW,
UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT MERCY SCHOOL OF LAW,
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

2 Table of Contents

3 About Us

4 Foreword

5 Director's Message

6 Introduction

7 Increasing Diversity

10 Stable Career Plans

11 Disturbing Debt Loads

14 Expanded Learning Outcomes

16 Strong Satisfaction

21 Conclusion

SUGGESTED CITATION:

MEERA E. DEO, JACQUELYN PETZOLD, AND CHAD CHRISTENSEN, *LSSSE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT: TWENTY YEARS OF LSSSE: SHARING TRENDS IN LEGAL EDUCATION* (2024).

About Us

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).

QUICK FACTS

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.

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.

PARTICIPATING LAW SCHOOLS

The 2024 LSSSE survey collected responses from over 13,000 law students at 71 law schools in Spring 2024. The law schools participating in LSSSE closely resemble ABA-approved law schools overall in terms of enrollment size and affiliation (public/private).

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.

DATA SOURCES

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

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

LSSSE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Bryant G. Garth, Chair
Distinguished Professor of Law Emeritus
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
Professor of Law
Texas A&M University 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 of Law Emerita, Provost Emerita
Indiana University

Kellye Testy
Executive Director and CEO
Association of American Law Schools

Foreword

Lauren K. Robel

Val Nolan Professor of Law Emerita, Provost Emerita, Indiana University

Now in its twentieth year, the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) has become an indispensable resource for everyone who cares about legal education. Modeled on the National Survey of Student Engagement, which has been asking undergraduates about behavior that empirically correlates with good learning outcomes since 2000, LSSSE has for two decades provided individual schools and those interested in legal education with a wealth of empirical information and important insights about how law students navigate their educations. From a starting point of 42 law school participants, the annual survey over its lifetime has included over 425,000 students at more than 206 discrete institutions in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. LSSSE has accumulated a lot of data in two decades about how law students experience legal education and what schools are doing to help them thrive. Working from that unique and powerful dataset, LSSSE has flowered from a yearly snapshot of student behavior to an exceptional resource for understanding how law schools create and respond to change.

The power of this resource is a function of its unmatched longitudinal and comparative data. **During its twenty years of collecting these data, LSSSE has remained staunchly committed to its founding mission of helping law schools improve learning by keeping the voices of students front and center.** Its focus on how students learn predated the ABA's adoption of learning outcome accreditation standards by ten years, and it has helped law schools demonstrate that they are meeting the requirements of that standard. While providing deep analysis of single-school data, LSSSE also regularly steps back to analyze how schools can think holistically about their data. For individual schools, LSSSE is an invaluable tool for ensuring the quality and efficacy of the school's work—which is why my own school participated every year I was dean.

And LSSSE has done much more. It has responded to important new questions driven by the evolving literature on law schools or experiments that law schools themselves want to explore, allowing constituencies interested in the profession to determine whether innovation is having the hoped-for effects on students' development as professionals. The Annual Reports have also thoughtfully explored the effect of major cultural and social events and trends, like the pandemic and the interest in online courses it triggered, on legal education. They have tackled difficult and intractable issues, such as student debt levels. And under Professor Meera Deo's thoughtful leadership, LSSSE has been especially attentive to exploring how diverse students experience law school.

In addition to its own stellar work with the data, LSSSE has become an important resource for scholars, supporting an impressive and deepening array of research and scholarship (at last count, close to 150 articles, books, and doctoral dissertations). These scholars rely on this data set to formulate and answer questions about legal education, student engagement and success, diverse students' experiences, and comparisons to other professions, enriching what we know about our students' experiences.

What makes LSSSE's work critical, of course, is the importance of the work for which we are preparing our students. Our country endows lawyers with a great deal of power and responsibility, both for their clients' lives and for the health of the rule of law. **The more we know about how students are forming their skills, judgment, and ethics, the better we can perform the crucial task of preparing them for a virtuous practice that supports the highest values of the profession.** For twenty years, LSSSE has guided our efforts to succeed at this task. Congratulations to LSSSE and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research for their important and growing contributions to the success of our students.

Meera E. Deo | *LSSSE Director*

The Honorable Vaino Spencer Professor of Law, Southwestern Law School

Director's Message

Legal education continues to thrive. Twenty years of LSSSE data included in this Annual Report reveal longitudinal results showcasing trends over time. Despite the massive upheavals around us, law schools have endured. Entering students have better academic credentials today than in years past, whether measured by undergraduate grades or test scores. Law schools also are more diverse than ever before—including by race, gender, age, and sexual orientation—highlighting how diversity and excellence go hand-in-hand. Nevertheless, this high level of diversity is threatened due to new anti-affirmative action caselaw as well as intensifying national, regional, and local attacks on efforts to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Student expectations for their future careers have also remained consistent. For the past twenty years, just over half of all law students have expressed a desire to enter private practice. Roughly one-quarter of law students have been interested in government jobs, while a consistent 6% plan to pursue careers in public interest law. Students also are well prepared to enter legal practice. For a decade or longer, a majority of students have noted their school's strong focus on preparing them to solve complex real-world problems (60%), develop a personal code of values and ethics (58%), and set clear career goals (54%). Every year, higher percentages of students also recognize their institution makes efforts to help them engage with people from different racial backgrounds—preparing students for the increasingly diverse practice of law.

While there is much to celebrate, specific challenges remain. Debt levels climbed dramatically for fifteen years before dipping after 2014. However, the debt decline has been uneven, with students of color seeing little relief compared to their White classmates. Debt disparities also accelerated significantly in the past five years. The growing divide between those with the highest debt loads and the lowest constrains future prospects for those graduating with massive debt compared to their classmates who graduate debt-free. LSSSE data also reveal a need to invest in relationships, recognizing the community aspect of law school is critical to academic and professional success. Students rely on one another, with over three-quarters across twenty years consistently reporting positive relationships with classmates. Student-faculty bonds also remain strong, with 73% of students in 2024 viewing them positively; this slight decline from years past (76-79%) signals room for improvement. The main intervention, however, should be improving connections between students and administrative staff; only 59% of students in 2024 reported positive relationships with staff, which is not only down from a high of 68% in 2014 and 2019, but the lowest level ever reported.

Students are still deeply engaged in their legal education, learning more than ever about themselves, their classmates, and how they plan to begin their future careers.

Through it all, satisfaction remains high. Over twenty years, the vast majority of law students (80-84%) have consistently reported that their overall law school experience has been "good" or "excellent." Students are still deeply engaged in their legal education, learning more than ever about themselves, their classmates, and how they plan to begin their future careers. They need greater institutional investment in faculty and staff relationships as well as creative solutions to resolve lingering financial disparities. With our support, students are poised to realize their future goals.

T. MOSIER/A. HANSEN/ASU LAW

Introduction

For twenty years, LSSSE has been sharing trends in legal education by collecting and reporting on a range of survey data from law students. Over the course of two decades, we have witnessed significant transformations in legal education, both institutional and individual. Some changes have been steady over time, while others are more dramatic or even divergent from established patterns. The longitudinal analyses shared in this Annual Report reveal dependably high levels of diversity, improvements in learning outcomes, strong overall satisfaction, and consistent job expectations. Troublingly, debt levels also remain high, especially for students of color, and relationships between students and staff deserve greater attention. Taken together, the findings reveal not only patterns from the past and present, but the very challenges and opportunities that could define the future of legal education.

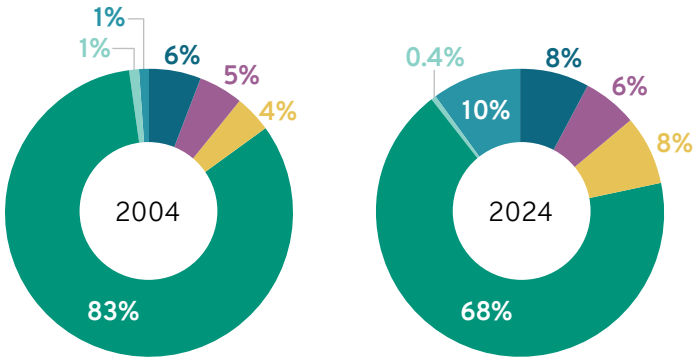
WILLIAM AND MARY LAW SCHOOL

Increasing Diversity

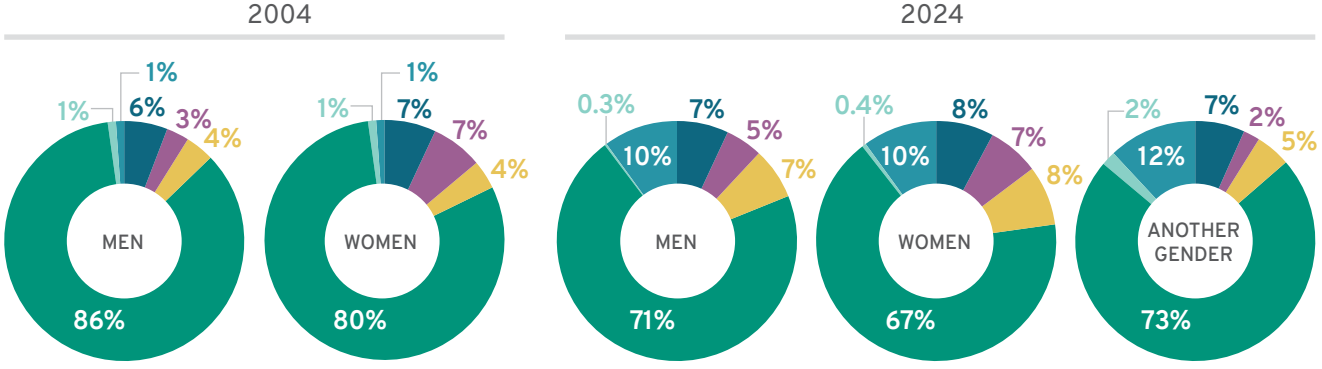
Law students are becoming an ever-more diverse bunch—though that progress may yet be stymied by the end of affirmative action as we know it.[1] Over the past two decades, we have seen increases in diversity as measured by race, gender, age, and sexual orientation. Students of color, including those who identify as Black, Latinx, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial, accounted for just 17% of all LSSSE respondents in 2004; by 2024 their representation had grown to one-third (32%). In particular, the multiracial population has grown substantially (from 1% in 2004 to 10% in 2024, with roughly equal representation between multiracial men and women) as has the percentage of Latinx students (growing from 4% to 8% of law students in twenty years). Alarmingly, the Native American population has remained at or below 1% throughout the twenty years of LSSSE data collection, with a slight decline in recent years.

1 Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard Coll., 600 U.S. 181 (2023).

Race, by Year



raceXgender, by Year

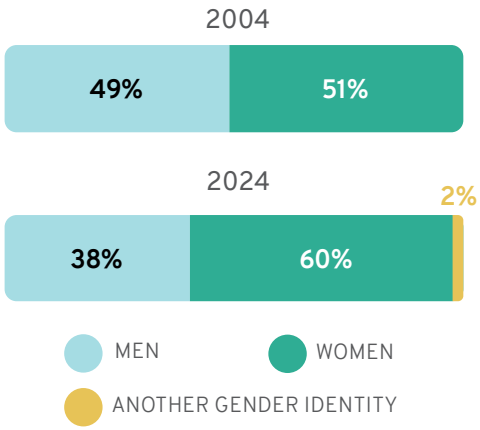


* LSSSE began collecting data on those who identify as neither male nor female but "another gender identity" in 2016.

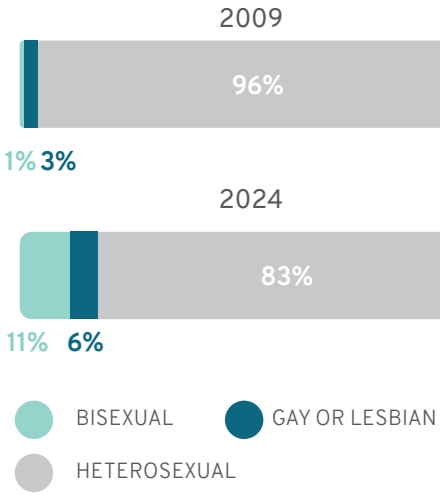
ASIAN AMERICAN · BLACK · LATINX · WHITE · NATIVE AMERICAN · MULTIRACIAL

The percentage of women in legal education has continued to increase in the past decade, from 51-52% between 2004 and 2014 to now 60%. Law students are also trending younger, with a full 11% of current students reporting their age as under 23 years (compared to only 1% in 2004, up from 9% in 2019). There are also higher percentages of students identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; currently, the LGBTQ+ population together represents 17% of all law students, up from just 4% in 2009 (as LSSSE first began collecting these data in 2005) and 9% in 2019. By any measure, legal education is more diverse now than at any point previously documented.

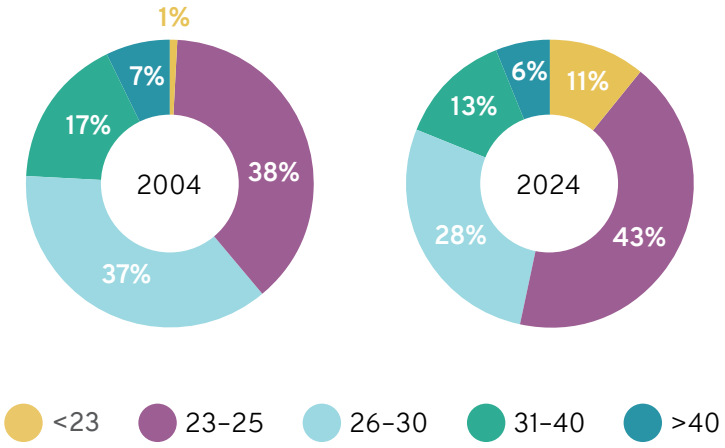
Gender, by Year



Sexual Orientation, by Year



Age, by Year

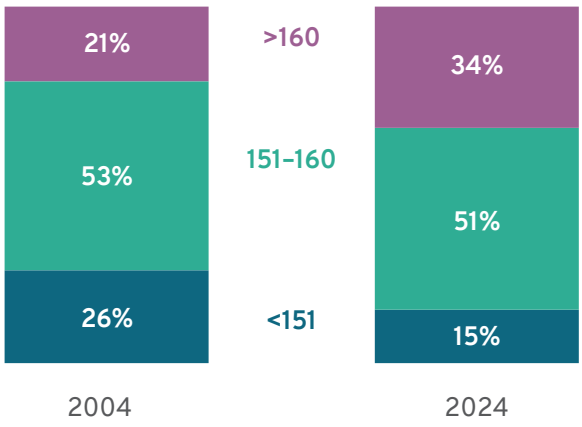


UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI COLLEGE OF LAW

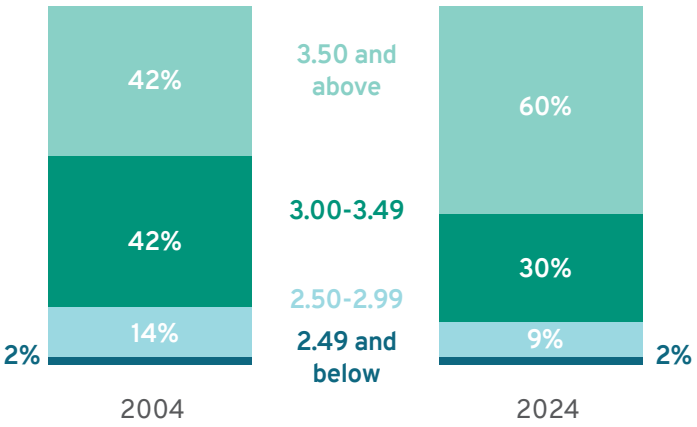
NORTHWESTERN PRITZKER LAW

There are also interesting patterns in academic achievement for entering law students. The most recent half-decade (2019-2024) reveals students with higher undergraduate grade point averages (UGPAs) and LSAT scores than in years past. In 2004, roughly one-quarter of LSSSE respondents (26%) had LSAT scores at 150 or below, whereas only 14% do so now. On the high end of the spectrum, only 6% of all LSSSE respondents scored over 165 on the LSAT in 2004, compared to 17% performing at that level in 2024. UGPA data reveal a trend consistent with LSAT performance of students entering law school with higher academic metrics: a full 60% report UGPAs of 3.50 or higher in 2024, compared to 42% of students in 2004. This increase in metrics suggests entering students are better prepared than ever to tackle the challenges of law school.

LSAT Score, by Year



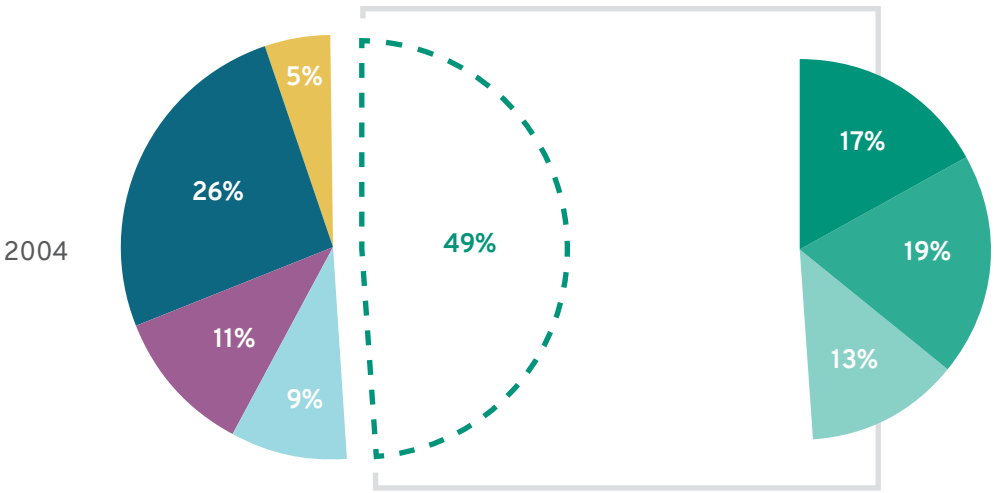
Undergraduate Grade Point Average, by Year

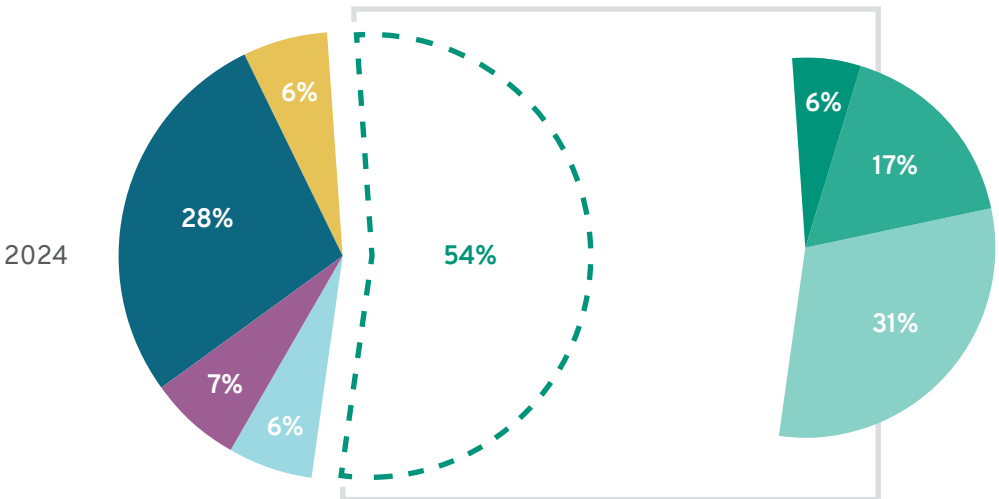


Stable Career Plans

Every year, LSSSE respondents report on their expectations for employment after graduation. The results over two decades remain relatively consistent. As in years past, roughly half (53%) of all law students in 2024 expect to enter private practice upon graduation, ranging from solo to large firms. Disaggregating the category of large firms with the 2024 data reveals that 17% of students expect to join firms of 51-500 attorneys while 13% expect to join even larger firms of more than 500 lawyers. Current expectations to join the government (including judicial clerkships, legislative offices, military positions, prosecutor's offices, or public defender's offices) also have remained consistent over twenty years, ranging from 25-29% of students. There has been a slight decline in students pursuing careers in business and industry, with only 7% following that route now compared to 9-12% in years past. As over the previous two decades, roughly 6% of students expect to work in public interest law.

Expected Future Work Environments, by Year





PUBLIC INTEREST GROUP
GOVERNMENT AGENCY
BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY
OTHER
PRIVATE FIRM

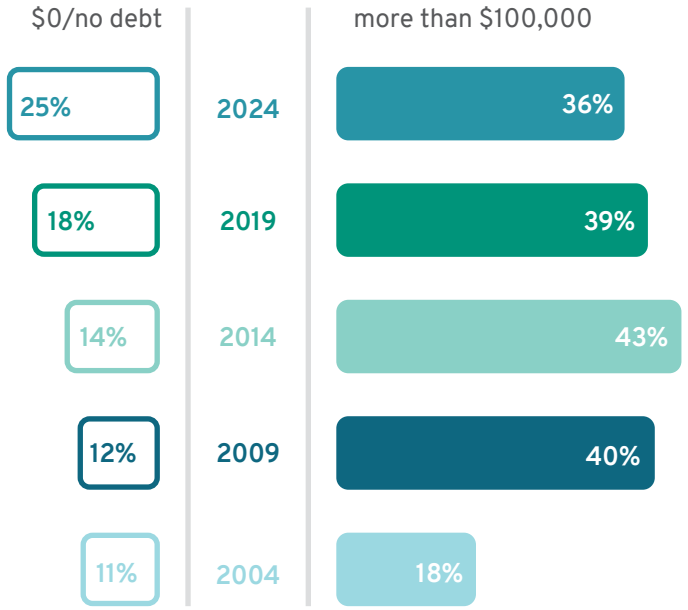
Private Firm Size

<10 ATTORNEYS
10–50 ATTORNEYS
>50 ATTORNEYS

Disturbing Debt Loads

Debt continues to be a struggle for many law students, continuing past trends. While only 18% of students in 2004 owed over $100,000 in educational loans upon law school graduation, that percentage jumped to 40% by 2009 and has remained at similarly high levels. Disparities in debt also are accelerating, particularly when we consider those at the other end of the spectrum: students who graduate with no educational loans. Only 11% of law students in 2004 and 18% in 2019 graduated from law school without taking on any debt; by 2024, a full one-quarter (25%) of law students nationwide graduated debt-free. Thus, the percentage of students graduating without educational loans accelerated at the same time as that of students accruing the highest levels of debt. Comparing the 25% of students with no debt to the 36% of their classmates beginning legal practice owing over $100,000, there are significant financial limitations in opportunities and priorities for certain law school graduates that could shape their professional futures.

Expected Law School Debt, by Year

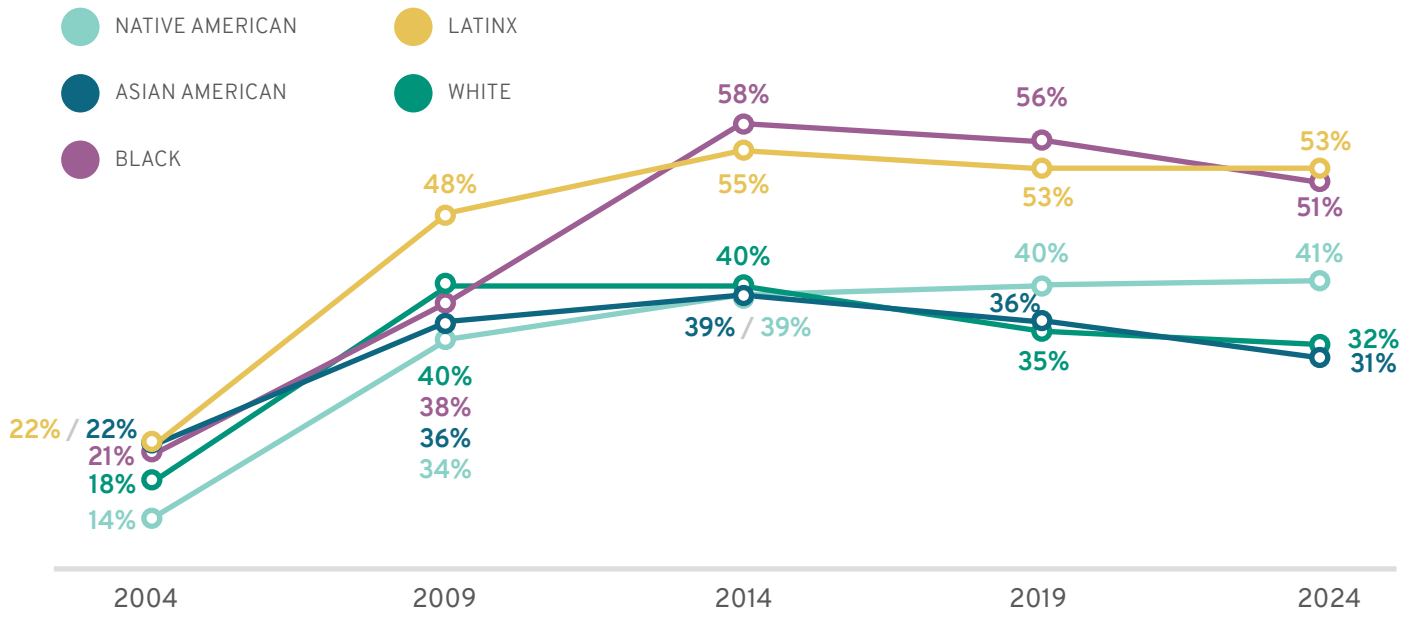


For those accruing debt, the average load is significantly higher today than it was twenty years ago, across racial backgrounds. In 2004 18% of White students graduated with over $100,000 in loans, compared to 32% in 2024. The increases are even more disturbing for Black and Latinx students. In 2004, less than one-quarter of Black (21%) and Latinx (22%) students had loans of over $100,000 (which was roughly equivalent to their White peers); by 2024, however, over half of all Black (51%) and Latinx (53%) students were taking on that highest level of debt, compared to only one-third (32%) of their White classmates.

Although LSSSE data reveal 2014 as the height of the debt crisis, racial groups have seen improvements at differing rates, with some still staggering under the load. White students borrowing at the highest levels declined from 40% in 2014 to 32% by 2024. However, the debt load for Latinx students borrowing $100,000 or more has remained constant at 53% from 2019-2024, only slightly down from 58% in 2014. Similarly, Black students with significant educational debt dropped only minimally between 2014 and 2019 (from 58% to 56%) and continues a modest decline, reaching 51% in 2024. These data also confirm past LSSSE research revealing raceXgender debt disparities, with women in every racial group borrowing more for law school than men from the same background.[2] The raceXgender groups with the highest debt loads continue to be Latinas (54%), Latino men (53%), and Black women (52%).

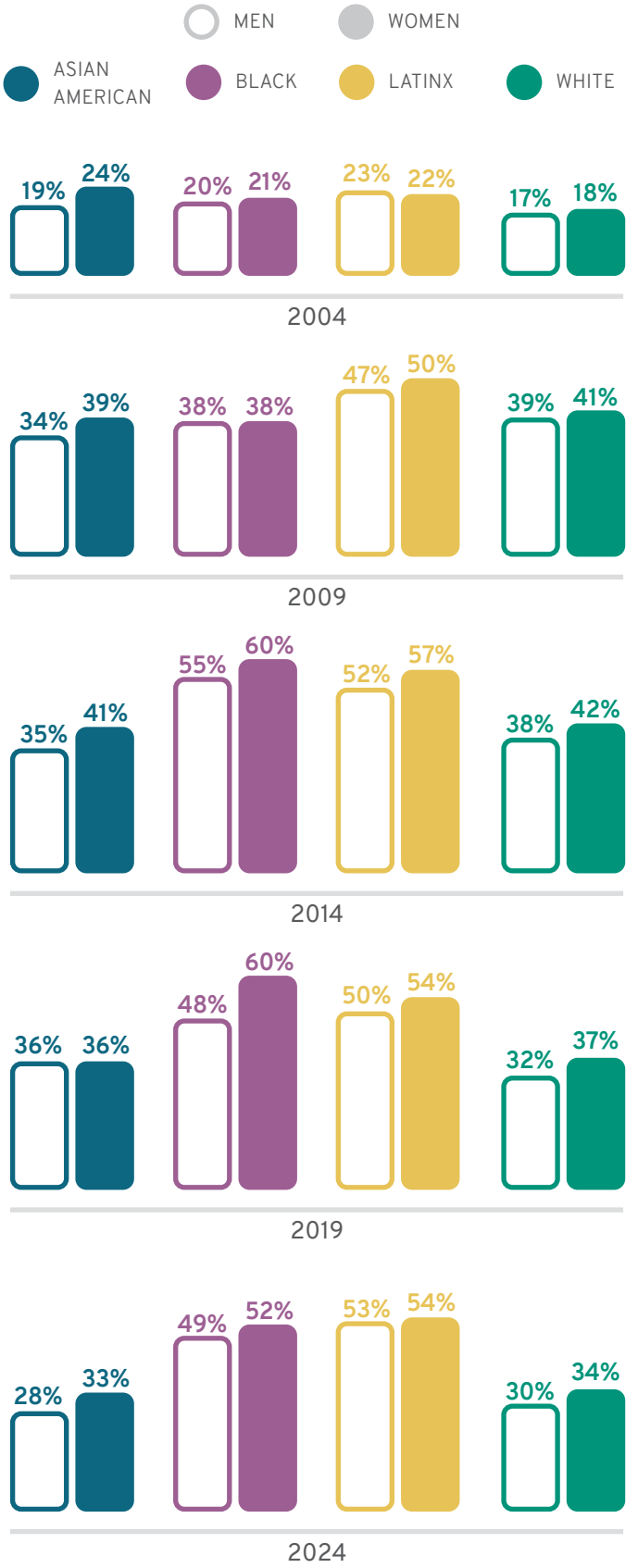
2 Meera E. Deo and Chad Christensen, *LSSSE 2019 Annual Report: The Cost of Women's Success* (2019).

Students Expecting to Owe $100,000 or More, by Year and Race



THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS
CECIL C. HUMPHREYS SCHOOL OF LAW

Students Expecting to Owe More Than $100,000, by Year and raceXgender



Expanded Learning Outcomes

Over the past twenty years, law schools have emphasized various learning outcomes to help students develop into competent and effective practitioners. Major improvements are particularly evident along all relevant metrics between 2004 and 2014, signaling a transformation as schools may have recognized the need to promote professionalism and emphasize skills-based learning. This shift also coincided with the implementation of ABA Learning Outcomes Standard 302.[3] Today, schools also are working to satisfy ABA Standards 303(b) and 303(c), which focus on clinical opportunities, professional identity formation, and cross-cultural competency.[4]

One learning outcome that is particularly relevant to each of these new ABA Standards and to the effective practice of law is the ability to work well with diverse groups of people. In 2004, fewer than one-quarter (23%) of law students believed their schools did "quite a bit" or "very much" to help them understand people of different racial backgrounds; twenty years later, almost half (47%) of students believe their schools help in this way, contributing to their ability to work proficiently with diverse populations. Given the diversity of clients and colleagues today's law graduates will encounter in legal practice, greater institutional focus on students' cultural competency is especially welcome.

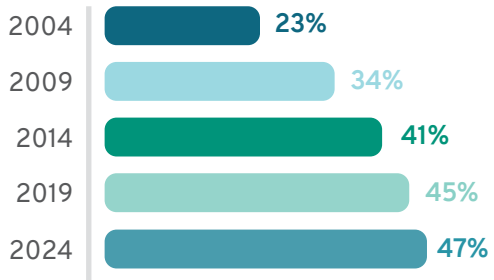
While many core aspects of legal education may require students to problem-solve, this metric of practice-ready graduates has also grown over time. In 2004, almost half (45%) of law students saw their schools as contributing "quite a bit" or "very much" to their ability to solve complex real-world problems; by 2014 and through 2024, a full 60% believed so.

3 ABA Standard 302 requires schools to "established learning outcomes" that include "competency" in legal knowledge; legal analysis, reasoning, problem-solving, and communication; professional ethics; and other "professional skills."

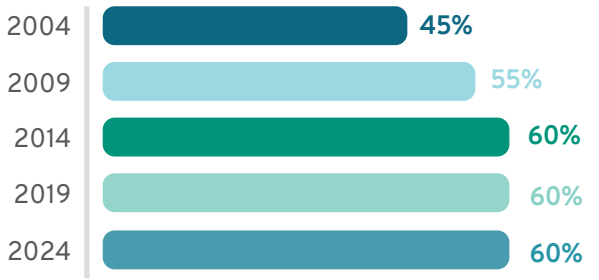
4 ABA Standard 303(b) requires schools to provide "substantial opportunities" for students to participate in clinics, contribute to pro bono work, and develop a professional identity. ABA Standard 303(c) requires schools to "provide education to law students on bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism" at least twice during law school.

School Contributed to...

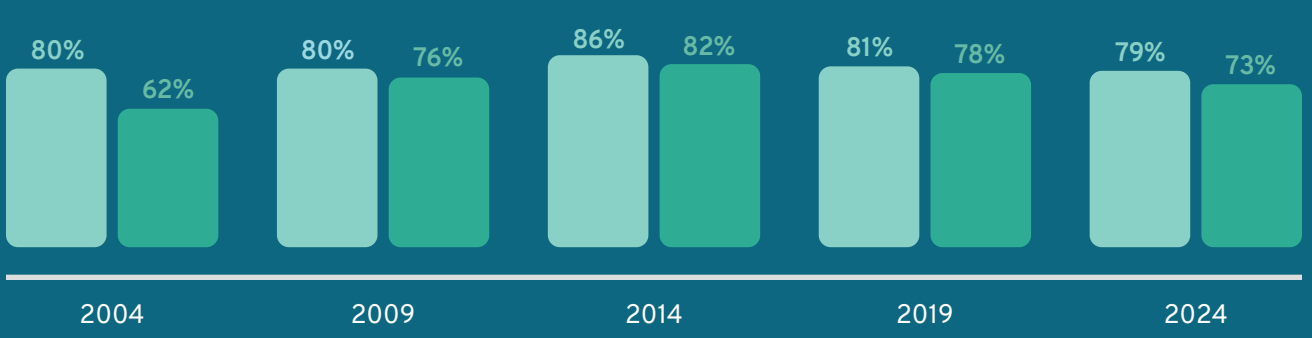
Student Understanding of People of Other Racial Backgrounds, by Year



Student Solving Complex Real-World Problems, by Year



Students Participating in Clinics and Pro Bono Work, by Year



Law students have been regular participants in clinical and pro bono work for the past twenty years. Even in 2004, a full 80% of students participated in clinics or field placements, with little variation (79-86%) in the intervening years. Student pro bono service has increased over time. Like clinical engagement, the height of participation in pro bono work occurred in 2014, with 82% of students saying they had already or planned to engage in pro bono. Public service engagement also increased steadily from 2004 to 2014, although the decline documented by 2019 (78%) continues today (73%). Despite some declines from the high point of participation, these findings signal that a majority of students are eager to involve themselves in experiential education, taking advantage of the skills-based learning that clinics and pro bono opportunities provide so they are practice-ready upon graduation.

Law schools also have been working to help students navigate the process of professional socialization. Developing a professional identity is key to students transforming into attorneys.[5] Law schools have improved at helping their students develop a personal code of values or ethics. While 43% saw their schools contributing "quite a bit" or "very much" to this effort in 2004, that percentage increased to 55% in 2014 and to 58% by 2019, where it remains today. Starting in 2024, LSSSE began asking students specifically about professional identity formation. More than half (56%) of students in 2024 report their schools contribute either "quite a bit" or "very much" to their developing a professional identity.

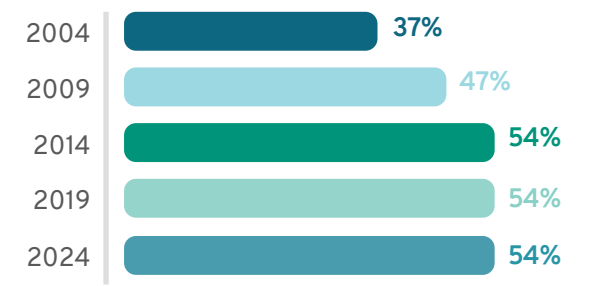
Law schools also have improved significantly over the past twenty years in helping students outline their professional aspirations. While just over one-third (37%) of students saw their schools doing "quite a bit" or "very much" to help them on this path two decades ago, more half of law students (54%) since 2014 believe their schools contribute significantly to them developing clearer career goals.

5 Jacquelyn M. Petzold and Meera E. Deo, *Increasing Law Student Belonging: Student Services Professionals as Cultural Navigators*, Am. Behavioral Scientist (forthcoming 2025).

School Contributed to...

Student Developing a Personal Code of Values and Ethics, by Year

Student Developing Clearer Career Goals, by Year



BINGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY, J. REUBEN CLARK LAW SCHOOL

Strong Satisfaction

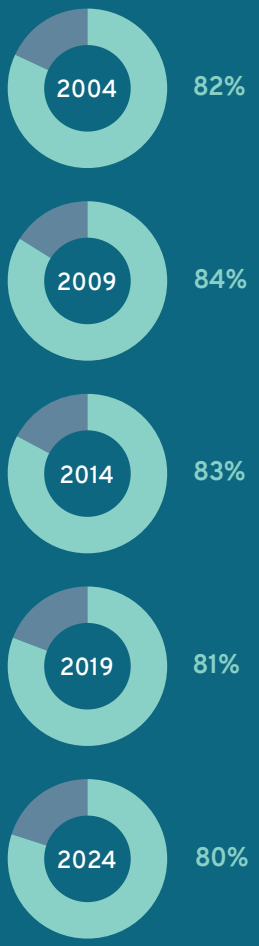
For the entire two decades of the LSSSE survey administration, students have reported high levels of satisfaction with their overall law school experience. However, looking more carefully reveals some racial disparities as well as troubling recent declines in student relationships with staff, including with academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, and job search assistance. Likely, these satisfaction levels dropped due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which LSSSE documented as wreaking considerable havoc on the law student experience, though it is disquieting that they remain depressed.[6]

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

Overall satisfaction is a true success story. When asked to evaluate their "entire educational experience" during law school, the twenty years of the LSSSE survey reveal similarly high levels of satisfaction. Between 2004 and 2024, roughly 80% of all law students consistently have rated their overall experience as "good" or "excellent." Roughly one-third (33-35%) of law students for the past twenty years have rated their law school experience as "excellent."

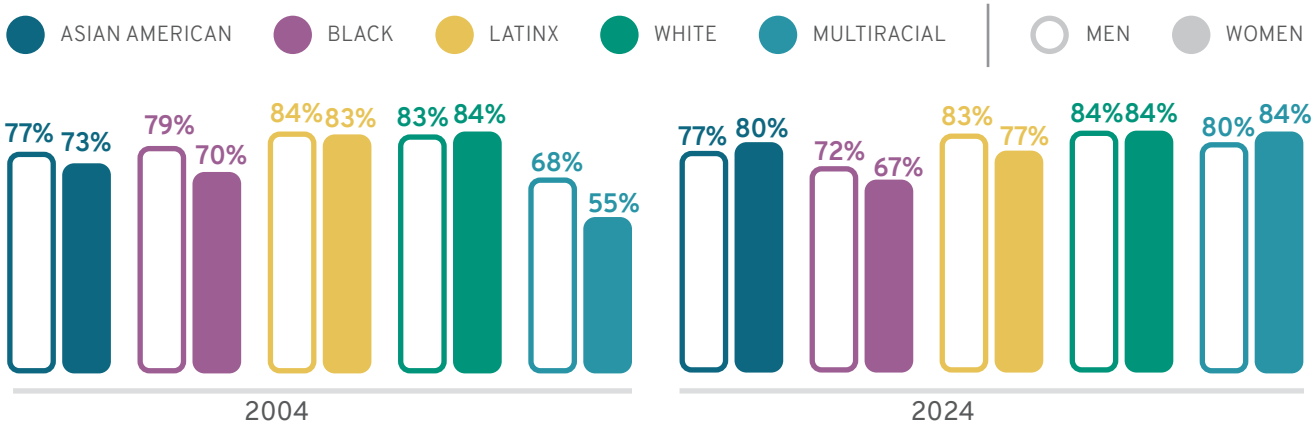
Despite high levels of overall satisfaction, disaggregating by race, gender, and raceXgender reveals interesting longitudinal differences. In 2004, every racial group except for Whites reported higher levels of law school satisfaction for men than for women, though these gender disparities were not constant between 2014 and 2024. White students consistently report the highest levels of satisfaction of any racial group (a full 84% in 2024), while Black students are among the least satisfied with their overall law school experience, including 28% of Black men and 33% of Black women who reported their experience as only "fair" or even "poor" in 2024.

Satisfaction with Law School, by Year



Percentage rating their overall experience as "Excellent or "Good"

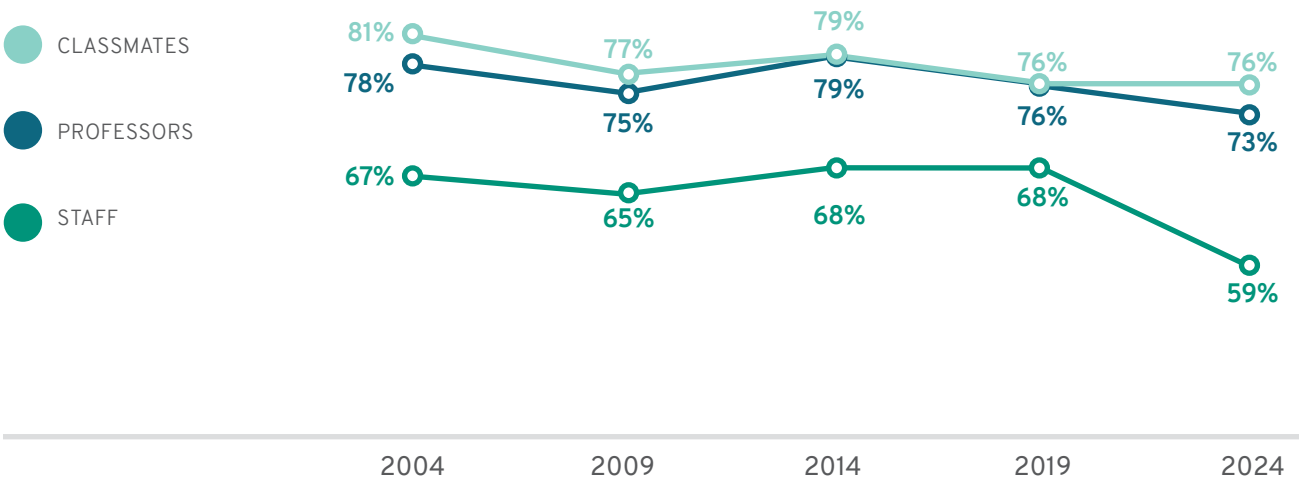
Satisfaction with Law School, by Year and raceXgender



Percentage rating their overall experience as "Excellent or "Good"

A large part of overall student satisfaction with law school is likely due to strong bonds with others on campus. Student relationships with faculty and classmates have been compellingly positive over the past twenty years. Throughout the past two decades, over three-quarters (76-81%) of law students have consistently rated their relationships with classmates as five or higher on a seven-point scale. Peer relationships are the only ones to have remained in 2024 at the high levels of 2019, showing these bonds quickly recovered from any potential pandemic-related decline. Students also report strong bonds with professors. Roughly three-quarters (73-78%) of LSSSE respondents from 2004 to 2024 have rated relationships with faculty as positive, measured as five or higher on a seven-point scale. Though the current 73% of students reporting strong relationships with their professors is slightly down from 2019 levels (76%), it nevertheless remains high. Relationships between students and staff, on the other hand, are more concerning. From 2004 to 2019, roughly two-thirds (65-68%) of law students reported positive relationships with staff; in 2024, this figure dropped to 59%. While student-staff connections have never been as strong as those between students and faculty or students with peers, those reported in 2024 are the lowest ever recorded, revealing room for significant improvement in these relations post-pandemic.

Positive Relationships with...



UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL OF LAW

Because staff have many opportunities to interact with students in response to various issues, each contact provides an opportunity to strengthen bonds between them. Between 2004 (61%) and 2019 (71%), there were steady increases in satisfaction with academic advising; however, the percentage of law students reporting they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" dropped to 64% in 2024. Whether due to COVID-19 or other reasons, student satisfaction with academic advising declined over the past five years, instead of continuing the steady progress it enjoyed through 2019. Because the percentage of students using academic advising remains particularly high (90-94% in the past decade), positive interactions with academic advising staff could be instrumental in improving student-staff relationships overall.

Most students also partake in advising opportunities with career services staff, including 87-92% of all students over the past twenty years. Though only half (51%) of students were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with career counseling in 2004, that percentage also steadily increased over time for fifteen years through 2019. However, as with other staff services, the upward trend has stopped, with current student satisfaction with career counseling (64%) matching 2014 levels, down from 69% five years ago.

DEANE SUTIC COURTESY OF DALE E. FOWLER SCHOOL OF LAW

Satisfaction with Academic Advising, by Year

Satisfaction with Career Counseling, by Year

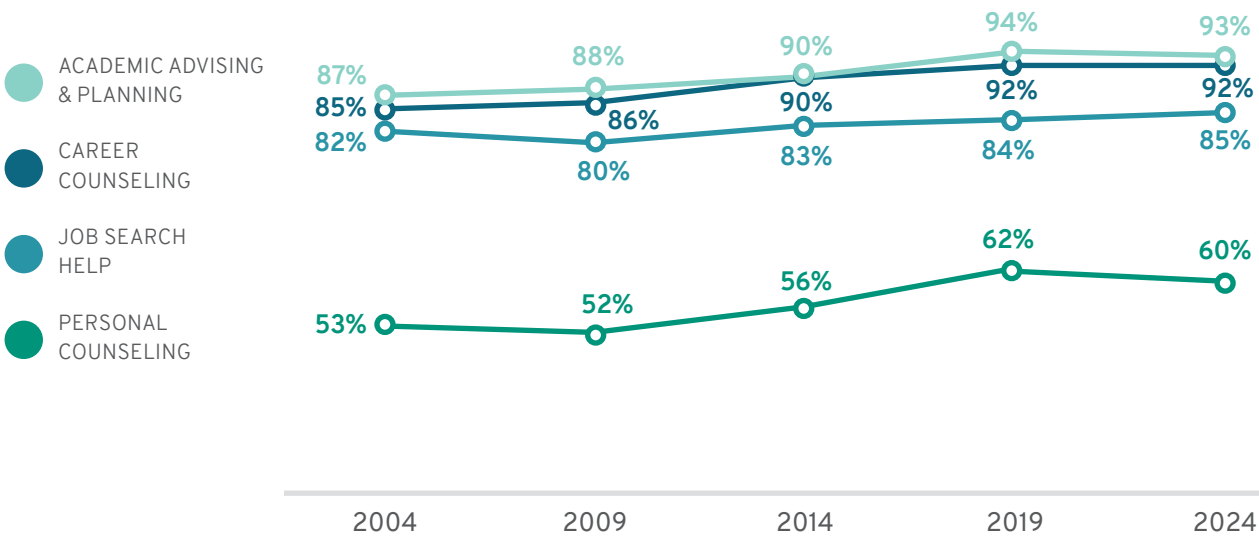
Satisfaction with Personal Counseling, by Year

Satisfaction with Job Search Help, by Year

Satisfaction with personal counseling sessions also enjoyed incremental increases over time for fifteen years, from a low of 57% in 2004 to 65-67% in 2009 and 2014, to a high of 68% in 2019. Troublingly, satisfaction has dropped significantly in the past five years, down to only 60% of students who are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the personal counseling they receive. Although the myriad challenges of the pandemic and other upheavals in legal education and society writ large may suggest personal counseling is all the more necessary for law students today, only 60% used these services in 2024 (another drop from 68% who sought personal counseling in 2019).

Students also reported lower levels of satisfaction with job search help in 2024 than they did in 2019, with only 61% reporting they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with these services. Again, this reveals a break in the trend of increasing satisfaction with job search help from 2004 (49%) through 2019 (66%). The good news is that roughly the same percentage of students (83-85%) over the past decade have sought assistance with their job search; thus, opportunities remain to improve these interactions over time.

Use of Various Student Services, by Year



Conclusion

Legal education has transformed in myriad ways since LSSSE first began collecting student data in 2004. There has been an expansion of legal education opportunities and access for diverse populations, as measured by a variety of metrics, that have enrolled in increasing numbers over the past twenty years. There is more racial diversity today than at any point over the past twenty years as well as more women law students. Queer students, who comprised only 4% of students in 2004, now account for a full 17% of the total law student population. Some of these demographic shifts reflect changes in how students identify themselves, with greater percentages of the national population identifying as multiracial as well as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. However, these steady increases in diversity are not guaranteed going forward; particularly given recent and ongoing attacks on affirmative action and diversity, equity, and inclusion, schools must increase efforts to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds if we expect them to enroll in meaningful numbers and perform at their best during law school.[7]

Law students today are beginning their legal education with the confidence of LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs that are higher than ever previously documented. As in years past, roughly half plan to enter private practice (including 13% at the largest law firms of over 500 attorneys), a stable 6% expect to work in public interest, and about one-quarter will pursue government service.

Learning outcomes also remain strong and are clearly driven at least in part by ABA Standards. Although we might have expected a dip between 2019 and 2024, given pandemic-related challenges, any recovery (if needed at all) seems to have already occurred. Students report being well prepared for practice in terms of developing a professional identity, code of values, and career goals. They participate in clinical opportunities and provide pro bono services at high rates. And most law students believe their schools emphasize the importance of understanding people from different backgrounds—a critical skill for legal professionals in our increasingly globalized workforce.

Satisfaction rates also remain high, with 80% of current law students noting they see their overall law school experience as "good" or "excellent." Nevertheless, over twenty years, White students consistently have reported the highest levels of satisfaction with their legal education, while Black students are less satisfied. Law schools must also work to improve student-staff relationships. Though high percentages of students continue to report strong positive relationships with faculty (73%) and classmates (76%), much smaller percentages have strong bonds with staff (59%)—and that percentage is declining. Whether we consider academic advising, career counseling, personal counseling, or job search assistance, fewer students are satisfied with these services in 2024 than they were in 2019, despite steady increases between 2004 and 2019. Because many students use these services, there are opportunities to improve these relationships.

High levels of student debt also remain troubling, especially when we consider disparities based on race, gender, and raceXgender. Although overall debt loads have decreased from their height in 2014, certain groups—including Black and Latinx students—have seen only modest improvement compared to their peers. Disparities have also increased between those borrowing at the highest levels and those accruing no debt at all.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from these findings is that legal education remains strong, despite recent dramatic upheavals around us. The question is whether we are prepared to weather the storms ahead: managing student use of Artificial Intelligence, recruiting and retaining a diverse student body, helping to ameliorate the access to justice crisis, and other concerns. As they move closer to becoming lawyers, students are increasingly practice-ready, developing a variety of skills they will need as attorneys, and setting clear professional expectations and career goals. LSSSE data suggest that with the support of their peers, professors, and staff, these students will be ready to tackle whatever challenges the future may have in store.

7 Meera E. Deo, *Building Belonging*, 102 Denver L. Rev. – (2025).

LSSSE

UNDERSTANDING LEGAL EDUCATION

Indiana University
Center for Postsecondary Research

201 N. ROSE AVE
BLOOMINGTON, IN 47405-1006
PHONE: 812-856-5823
E-MAIL: LSSSE@INDIANA.EDU
WEB: LSSSE.INDIANA.EDU