



Inside

- Multiple Uses of LSSSE** 1
- Communicating Results** 2
Internally and Externally
- Establishing Standards of Comparison** 3
Benchmarking
Normative/Criterion Approaches
- Examples of Using LSSSE Data** 4-5
Allocating Resources
Regional Accreditation
Teaching and Learning
University Strategic Goals
ABA Self-Study
Multi-Dimensional Action Plan
Institutional Research
- Public Disclosure Policy** 6
- Lessons Learned** 7
- Overcoming Obstacles** 8
- Final Word** 8



Introduction

As we prepare to enter our fourth LSSSE administration cycle, we continue to seek new examples of how student engagement data is being used in different law school settings. The examples in this document represent a snapshot of changes in educational policy and practice informed by LSSSE data, giving schools a broad overview of the possibilities for using their data in meaningful ways.

On the following pages, we discuss some different ways law schools are using their engagement results. We invite you to share your success stories with us so other institutions can learn from your experience.

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:

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

Later we describe how selected law schools are using their 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 effectively convey the concept and import of student engagement.

LSSSE Tip # 1: Linking LSSSE Data with Other Sources

Throughout this guide we offer several “LSSSE tips” that provide ideas for law schools about how to effectively share and utilize their data. Here is our first tip for LSSSE users.

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.



“LSSSE data gave us a nuanced picture of our student body generally and helpful input with respect to specific issues such as diversity.”

Donna L. Pavlick, Assistant Dean at University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law



Communicating Results

Law schools often use several approaches to share their results. It is usually most effective to use a combination of dissemination activities to reach both internal 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 campus 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 law student engagement on campus.

Campus 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 # 2: Using LSSSE PowerPoint Presentation to Increase Awareness and Buy-in

A PowerPoint template into which you can insert school-specific results is included with the *Law School Report* as a tool for introducing 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.

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 63 law schools in LSSSE 2006. 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 of looking 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.

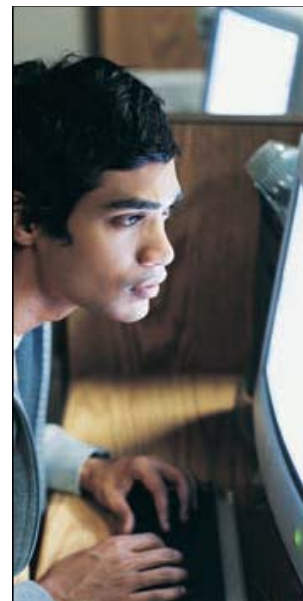
LSSSE Tip # 3: Peer Comparisons

To assist in benchmarking efforts, LSSSE allows schools to select other participating law schools for "post hoc" peer comparison reports with a minimum of six schools in the aggregated request.

Starting with the LSSSE 2006 administration, in addition to the standard comparison groups, schools not already participating as part of a consortium were given the opportunity to select an additional group of peer law schools within the 2006 survey cohort at no additional charge.

LSSSE also conducts specialized analyses on an as-needed basis to assist schools in answering specific questions (e.g., how do our women students specializing in intellectual property compare with other women intellectual property students from across the country?). The fees for special analyses are based upon time required to complete the project.

Please contact LSSSE at lsse@indiana.edu or 812-856-5824 for more details.



“LSSSE provides a unique opportunity to explore systematically what is achieved—and what can be improved—in traditional and non-traditional areas of the curriculum.”

Bryant G. Garth, Dean and Chief Executive Officer at Southwestern University





“LSSSE cannot improve legal education, but thoughtful legal educators, armed with data from the LSSSE, can.”

Gerald F. Hess, Professor,
Gonzaga University
School of Law
Visiting Professor, Phoenix
International School of Law



Examples of Using LSSSE Data

LSSSE was designed to provide information law schools can use to improve the quality of the law school experience. Here we discuss some different ways law schools are using their engagement results.

Allocating Resources to Meet Student Needs

At Touro Law Center, LSSSE results prompted thoughtful discussions about how resources might be better allocated to enhance the learning environment. Associate Dean Nicola Lee found her school’s students were more apt to have longer commutes, more work and family obligations, and less disposable time than law students at similarly sized campuses.

Touro Law’s clinic began exploring expanded options to meet all student needs, such as offering a reduced credit course that took less time each week to complete. In addition, campus organizations sought ways to change event schedules in order to better accommodate busy students.

Incorporating LSSSE Results into Regional Accreditation Reviews

One way law schools are using LSSSE results is by incorporating them into their institutional accreditation reviews. Franklin Pierce Law Center included student engagement data in its site inspection report for the school’s regional accreditation group, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

The law school found its survey results to be helpful in describing the student experience, identifying program strengths and areas that need attention, and in creating a plan for future action. According to Sophie Sparrow, professor and director of legal skills and co-chair of the law school’s accreditation committee, NEASC found the outcomes-oriented nature of LSSSE data to be very informative in describing the student experience at Franklin Pierce.

Improving Teaching and Learning

University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law distributed copies of the school’s LSSSE report to all faculty members. The deans also presented findings to the faculty at the start of the school year and engaged them in an interactive discussion about the nature of the school’s learning environment.

The following spring the school revisited their student engagement data at a faculty meeting to highlight the similarities and differences of the experiences of their part-time and full-time students. Faculty members gained new insights about the level of student involvement and began to reflect upon how these experiences effect their areas of the academic or student life program.

Other law schools, including Washington and Lee University School of Law, have shared LSSSE results at faculty development sessions and committee meetings to seek ways to translate findings into improving the learning experience at the law school.

Aligning the Law School with University Strategic Goals

Ohio Northern University, Pettit College of Law is interpreting its results within the context of the larger university assessment plan. The law school is matching student engagement data with measures of how students are attaining each of the nine university learning goals. Toward this end, the school is collecting several years worth of data to track its LSSSE results over time and to document improvements in the law student experience in response to interventions the school is planning.

Using LSSSE as an Assessment Tool for ABA Self-Study

Several schools have utilized their LSSSE data in ABA and AALS self-study reviews. Indiana University School of Law – Bloomington administered both LSSSE and a local student survey in preparation for its sabbatical ABA site visit. While the local survey asked several questions specific to the Indiana University Law experience, LSSSE results provided comparative information that highlighted several areas of relative strength and weakness.

After finding student debt levels to be higher than other public law schools, Indiana Law instituted a new loan repayment assistance program. In addition to the student section of the self-study report, the law school incorporated LSSSE data into discussions of the curriculum, career services, and administration. 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.

Developing a Multi-Dimensional Action Plan

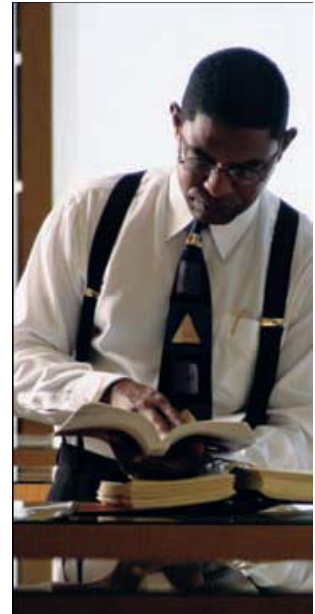
Brigham Young University Clark Law School collaborated with the university's institutional research office to better understand the LSSSE data and to create a plan to improve the quality of the educational experience. Among its initiatives, the law school integrated what it learned from its LSSSE results into its student orientation program to set high standards.

BYU Law also reallocated resources to better meet student needs and to help remove potential barriers to student involvement. A faculty committee examined how to modify curricular requirements and expectations to enhance learning. The school also shared its survey results with its Student Bar Association, which sponsored several student-led initiatives designed to create a more supportive environment for all students.

Collaborating with Institutional Research

Many law schools have enlisted the help of their university institutional research office in analyzing their LSSSE results. St. John's University School of Law worked with its research office to break down the data into a format that facilitated sharing the results with different offices. When the new dean arrived on campus, she had a quick snapshot of student life. The law school shared the results both with administrators and student leaders to create an action plan for addressing areas of student concern.

Other law schools, such as New York Law School and South Texas College of Law, have used the expertise of institutional researchers housed in their law schools to analyze sub-populations of interest using the LSSSE data file.



“Participating in the LSSSE project provided motivation for us to develop a comprehensive alumni survey designed to capture similar data.”

Gina D. Rowsam, Assistant Dean of Professional and Career Development Center at Oklahoma City University





“LSSSE assists our faculty and administrators in assessing the College’s performance, as well as provides a tangible framework for focusing on our strategic initiatives.”

James J. Alfini, President and Dean of South Texas College of Law



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: Faculty Development Activity

Before reviewing any LSSSE data with law school faculty, start the dialogue by using institutional written materials (law school mission statements, course descriptions, etc.) to bring the focus on shared learning objectives. Then these objectives can be linked to LSSSE findings that indicate the degree of success in specific areas.

Once these linkages have been made, provide an opportunity for small groups of faculty to discuss specific programs or teaching practices that could improve student learning along desired dimensions. Use these ideas as a guide for active shaping of educational policy and practice.

(Adapted for the law school environment from a successful program at Drew University using undergraduate survey results from NSSE — National Survey of Student Engagement.)

Lessons Learned About Using LSSSE Data

Based on the collective experience of LSSSE users, we offer the following suggestions for incorporating LSSSE data in law school improvement efforts.

1. Make sure faculty and staff understand and endorse the concept of student engagement.

The value of student engagement results to improving teaching and learning needs to be convincingly explained to those faculty less familiar with assessment in general and the engagement concept in particular.

2. Understand what student engagement data represent and use the results wisely.

It takes time, perspective and experience to understand and make the best use of LSSSE results.

3. Report student engagement results in a responsible way.

LSSSE encourages schools to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of law school quality and promote institutional improvement efforts.

4. Don't allow the numbers to speak for themselves.

Every number and comparison reported should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results. Unclear results can provide opportunities for dialogue that can provide greater clarity.

5. Examine the results from multiple perspectives.

Use peer comparisons to confirm or challenge assumptions about performance quality, but also consider a criterion-referenced view of student engagement in the context of the school's mission. It is also wise to compare the engagement levels of specific student groups, such as 1L women students or 3Ls pursuing various legal specialties.

6. Link the results to other information about the student experience and complementary initiatives.

The positive impact of student engagement results will be multiplied if the data can be made relevant to groups of faculty and staff working on different reform efforts around the law school.

7. Don't go it alone.

Experts argue that the chances of successful innovation improve when campus teams are formed and law schools work together in consortial arrangements on topics of mutual interest. Greater success may be achieved when law schools develop these partnerships at the start of a LSSSE administration cycle to make early decisions about strategic use of the data.



“We received extraordinarily valuable feedback about our students, our teaching and our services from participating in LSSSE. It gave us a way to measure and hold ourselves accountable for improving student learning.”

Sophie M. Sparrow, Professor of Law at Franklin Pierce Law





“The LSSSE project provides a wonderful opportunity for a reexamination of some chronic questions in legal education using reliable national data.”

Alison Grey Anderson,
Professor of Law Emerita,
University of California, Los
Angeles School of Law



Overcoming Potential Obstacles to Using LSSSE Data Effectively

Converting assessment information into action is a challenge for all law schools. Below we provide ways to address some of the more common obstacles.

Obstacle	Approach
<i>Small number of respondents</i>	Check to see how representative the sample is compared to the respective populations.
<i>Inappropriate comparison group</i>	Contact LSSSE for another peer comparison or special analyses to capture a better fit.
<i>Limited capacity to analyze and report results</i>	The reports that LSSSE sends law schools can be quickly packaged and sent to faculty and staff with little work.
<i>“Average” results across the board</i>	Try using a different comparison group or consider a criterion-based approach to determine to what degree of student performance is inconsistent with your law school’s expectations.

LSSSE Tip # 5: LSSSE on the Web

Some law schools have disclosed all or part of their results on the Web. Publishing LSSSE results online is not only a way to highlight institutional strengths, but can also demonstrate your law school’s commitment to quality improvement. Your school could display your entire means and frequency reports, post selected results, or highlight particular strengths in news releases to the community.

Final Word

Collecting and documenting how LSSSE schools are using their results is an ongoing process. We would very much like to hear about how you are using your LSSSE data.

Please send us specific examples of internal reports or brochures highlighting LSSSE data, usage strategies, and special activities. These examples will form a shared resource for law schools and assist in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of the law student experience.