

Preparing Law Students to be Successful Lawyers

Chad Christensen

I. Introduction

Lawyers are called upon to ethically uphold the law and to seek justice for those who have been injured or wronged. The importance of this role is sewn into the fabric of our society. Therefore, it is salient that law schools cultivate and develop professional skills that will allow students to be effective and successful lawyers. This is not a novel idea. For decades, scholarship has suggested that legal education should more purposely focus on professional skills development. However, half a decade ago the calls for this change were put into policy through the ABA. In 2014 the ABA Task Force on the Future of Legal Education wrote, “The balance between doctrinal instruction and focused preparation for the delivery of legal services needs to shift still further toward developing the competencies and professionalism required of people who will deliver services to clients.”¹ Soon thereafter, the ABA accreditation standards were changed and law schools were required to develop student learning outcomes that focused on, among other things, “professional skills needed for competent and ethical participation as a member of the legal profession.”² Examples of these professional skills include cultural competence, self-direction/initiative, and teamwork and collaboration.³ These three professional skills have been identified through empirical research as being highly valued by law firms for hiring and promotion.⁴

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1. Am. Bar Ass’n Task Force on The Future of Legal Education, Report and Recommendations 1 (2014) https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/report_and_recommendations_of_aba_task_force.pdf
2. *ABA Standards*, American Bar Association, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2019-2020/2019-2020-aba-standards-chapter3.pdf.
3. *Id.* at Interpretation 302-1.
4. See Neil W. Hamilton, *Changing Markets Create Opportunities: Emphasizing the Competencies Legal Employers Use in Hiring New Lawyers (Including Professional Formation/Professionalism)*, 65 S.C. L. REV. 547, 551-58 (2014) [hereinafter Hamilton, *Changing Markets*]; Neil W. Hamilton, *Fostering and Assessing Law Student Teamwork and Team Leadership Skills*, 48 HOFSTRA L. REV. 619 (2020)

Hamilton refers to these “values, virtues, and habits that can be developed” as *professional formation competencies*.⁵ The Holloran Center at the University of St. Thomas School of Law has been working with law faculty and staff throughout the country to identify salient professional competencies and to create rubrics to help law schools assess and develop important professional skills in their students. The first professional competencies identified were based on the ABA Standards and significant research on what it takes to be a successful lawyer: teamwork/collaboration, cultural competency, and self-directedness. These skills are also highly valued by law firms during hiring and promotion.

This article analyzes data from the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE)⁶ to provide insight into students’ exposure to and development of professional competencies that are vital to excel as a lawyer. Law schools should seek to intentionally develop the professional skills of their students that will be valuable in securing employment, excelling in their career, and meeting “society’s and the profession’s public purposes.”⁷ Specifically, this article will utilize LSSSE survey data to examine student engagement with three previously identified professional competencies: teamwork and collaboration, cultural competency, and self-directedness.

II. Teamwork and Collaboration

The ABA Standards and an extensive body of scholarship on professional competencies in law call for a greater focus on collaborative approaches in legal education.⁸ The motivation for this is evident when looking at data on effective lawyers. As Hamilton notes, “the data on legal employer competency models indicate that initiating and maintaining strong team relationships are the most common competencies that law firms and state attorneys general are assessing with respect to junior attorneys.”⁹ Under the umbrella of teamwork

[hereinafter Hamilton, *Fostering and Assessing*].

5. Neil W. Hamilton, *Empirical Research on the Core Competencies Needed to Practice Law: What Do Clients, New Lawyers, and Legal Employers Tell Us?*, 12 THE BAR EXAMINER 6, 6-16 (2014).
6. The LSSSE survey includes close to 100 questions on student engagement. Student engagement is based on the simple yet powerful observation that the more engrossing the educational experience, the more students will gain from it. The survey asks students about various aspects of their law school experience, such as the time and effort they invest in their studies, their discussions and interactions with faculty members and peers, their participation in law school activities such as moot court or the law journal, and other educationally purposeful activities.
7. Hamilton, *Changing Markets*, *supra* note 4.
8. See Marjorie M. Shultz & Sheldon Zedeck, *Identification, Development and Validation of Predictors for Successful Lawyering* 4 (2008), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1353554; LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – AN EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM, REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON LAW SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSION: NARROWING THE GAP 332 (1992) [hereinafter MACCRATE REPORT]; WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN ET AL., EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW (2007).
9. Hamilton, *Fostering and Assessing*, *supra* note 4, at 1.

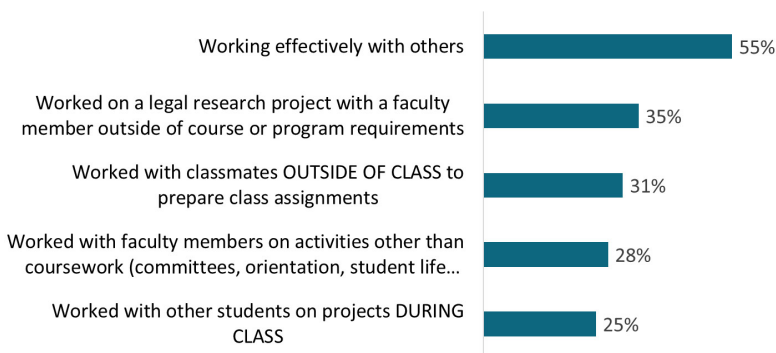
and collaboration are also important professional skills, such as interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, active listening, and meaningful feedback.

The LSSSE survey asks five questions that relate to teamwork and collaboration¹⁰:

- To what extent has your experience contributed to your working effectively with others?
- How often have you worked with other students on projects *during class*?
- How often have you worked with classmates *outside of class* to prepare class assignments?
- How often have you worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)?
- How often have you worked on a legal research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements?

Student engagement is a two-way street. The concept embraces two equally important facets: 1. the amount of time and effort that students put into educational activities that matter to student learning and success; and 2. how the law school intentionally creates and organizes the curriculum to get students to participate in these activities. Therefore, some questions on the LSSSE survey focus on the institutional culture (law school emphasizes) while others focus on individual student choices (time/activities). Responses provide salient insight into the frequency with which students are working collaboratively and the opportunities that law schools create for students to develop this set of skills. The first question is addressed independently while the remaining four are grouped together into “peer collaborations” and “student-faculty collaborations.”

Figure 1: Teamwork and Collaboration



10. An example of how law schools use these questions as part of their assessment toolkit is provided in the text.

In 2019, fifty-five percent of students reported that their law school contributed substantially¹¹ to their knowledge, skills, and professional development in “working effectively with others.”¹² A decade earlier, that number was fifty-one percent. Roughly half of all respondents do not believe that their law school experience helped in developing their ability to work in a team, and that needle has not moved for quite some time.

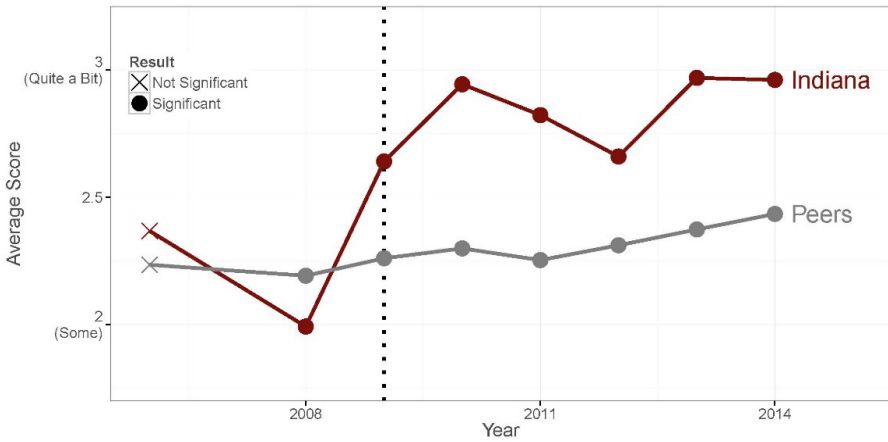
Figure 2: Working Effectively with Others

Working Effectively with Others



In spite of little national progress shown in schools supporting students to work effectively with others, there has been some progress at individual law schools. For example, Indiana University’s Maurer School of Law introduced a legal professions course into the 1L curriculum. This course teaches competencies that go beyond learning the law, placing special emphasis on a goal-oriented, collaborative approach to legal work. To assess whether the curricular change was influential, Figure 3 plots the average scores on this question from 2006 to 2014. The figure compares the scores for 1Ls at IU versus 1Ls at peer schools. In 2008 (the year before the legal professions course was introduced), IU’s 1Ls reported a significantly lower level of effective collaboration than 1Ls at its peer schools. From 2009 forward, however, IU students’ effective collaboration scores increased steadily. It’s but one example of how change can occur through assessment.¹³

11. “Very much” or “quite a bit.”
12. To what extent has your experience at your law school contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?
13. IU Maurer School of Law offered to share this school-specific data for publication, though usually those data are not shared by LSSSE publicly (only national aggregate data).

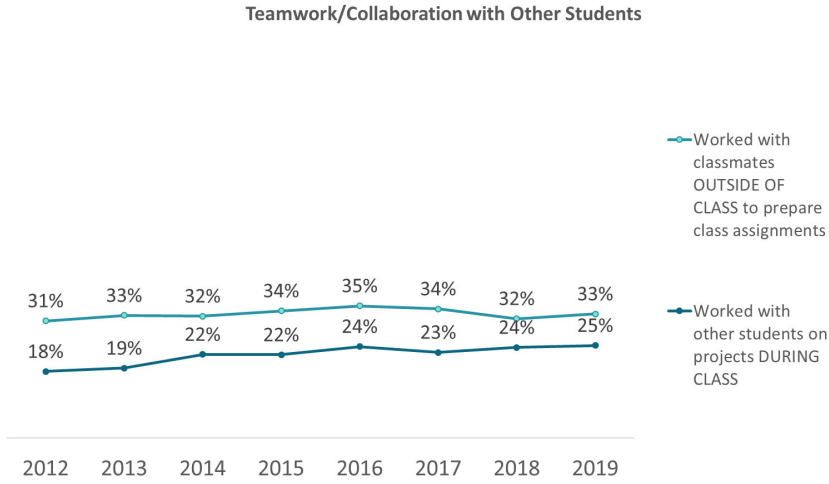
Figure 3: IU Case Study—Working Effectively with Others

A. Teamwork and Collaboration with Other Students

The opportunity to work or collaborate with other students both in and out of class has remained relatively low. In 2019, thirty-three percent of students reported frequently working with classmates outside of class,¹⁴ a number that has remained relatively static since 2012. Twenty-five percent reported frequently working with students on projects during class. Though that is low, it should be noted that in 2012 that number was eighteen percent and has been steadily rising each year. Increased opportunities for students to work collaboratively with peers could better prepare them for a profession in which this will be a daily norm.

14. “Very often” or “often.”

Figure 4: Teamwork and Collaboration with Peers



B. Collaboration with Faculty Members

Informal student-faculty interactions have been shown to have a host of benefits related to learning and learning outcomes.¹⁵ LSSSE data reveal that student-faculty interaction at law school relates significantly to students’ perceptions of their own gains in both academic and personal dimensions; it influences work-related knowledge and skills as well as critical and analytical thinking.

Though the LSSSE survey asks numerous questions related to interactions with faculty in the classroom, two questions focus more specifically on opportunities to work and collaborate with faculty more informally outside of the classroom. Analyses of these questions reveal that students engage with faculty at low rates outside of the classroom and that conversations with faculty outside of class occur infrequently. Almost a quarter of students reported *never* having conversations with faculty outside of class. This number has remained relatively static since 2012. These trends persisted across year in school.

15. Patrick T. O’Day & George D. Kuh, *Assessing What Matters in Law School: The Law School Survey of Student Engagement*, 81 IND. L.J. 401, 406 (2006).; ERNEST T. PASCARELLA & PATRICK T. TERENZINI, *HOW COLLEGE AFFECTS STUDENTS: A THIRD DECADE OF RESEARCH* (2005).; Arthur W. Chickering & Zelda F. Gamson, *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, Washington Center News 3 (1987), <https://www.lonestar.edu/multimedia/sevenprinciples.pdf>.

Figure 5: Discussions with Faculty Outside of Class, Year in School (2019)

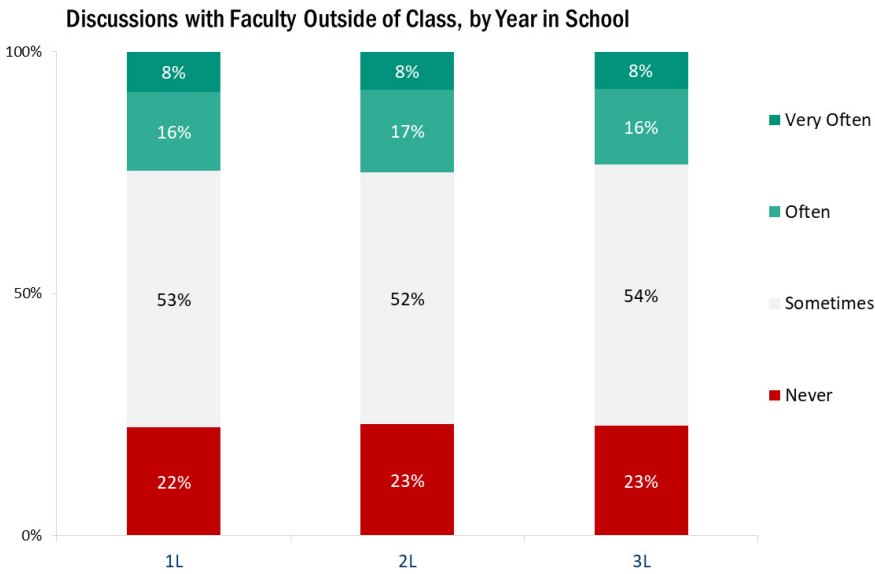
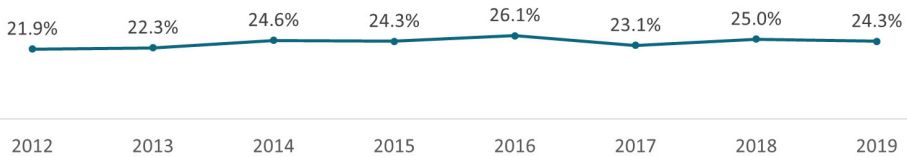


Figure 6: Discussions with Faculty Outside of Class, 2012-2019

Discussions with faculty outside of class
“very often” and “often”



Similarly, law students participated in legal research projects with faculty outside of coursework or program requirements at relatively low rates. In 2019 only about thirty percent of 3L students reported having completed a legal research project with faculty outside of class. Faculty should be encouraged to work with students on research projects even in small ways. Doing so provides law students with a valuable opportunity to develop their legal research skills in a team-oriented setting, similar to the environment they will be working in.

Table 1: Working with faculty outside of course or program requirements

Work on a legal research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements, 2019			
	1L	2L	3L
Undecided	37.8%	22.5%	6.6%
Do not plan to do	19.4%	37.0%	59.2%
Plan to do	40.7%	21.7%	5.5%
Done	2.1%	18.8%	28.7%
Base	5575	4613	4297

The infrequency of discussions outside of class are a missed opportunity for professional development of students on myriad levels. Forming these relationships, interacting with faculty outside of class, and creating opportunities to engage in research activities (even small, informal ones) create multiple opportunities for students to learn from the faculty in significant ways that can develop their professional skill set and help prepare them to practice law. As Wawrose writes, “[D]eveloping personal relationships in a professional setting has the potential to transform students’ experience in law school, the student approach to law practice, and, eventually, the very nature of the legal profession itself.”¹⁶

III. Cultural Competence

Decades of research demonstrates that meaningful interactions among students from diverse backgrounds foster many educational and psychological benefits, such as enhanced development of important leadership skills, improved critical thinking and intellectual growth, reductions in prejudice, appreciation for others’ perspectives, positive perception of the campus environment, and greater civic engagement.¹⁷ For lawyers, cultural competence is paramount. Lawyers play a crucial role in preserving law and protecting the rights of individuals of diverse backgrounds. As Justice Sandra Day O’Connor surmises (2003): “All members of our heterogeneous society must have confidence in the openness and integrity of the educational institutions that provide [legal] training. As we have recognized, law schools cannot be

16. Susan Wawrose, *A More Human Place: Using Core Counseling Skills to Transform Faculty-Student Relationships*, 55 WILLAMETTE L. REV. 133, 133 (2018).
17. See, for example, Nicolas A. Bowman, *Promoting participation in a Diverse Democracy: A Meta-Analysis of College Diversity Experiences and Civic Engagement*, 81 REV. OF EDUC. RES. 29, 29-68 (2011); Thomas F. Nelson Laird, *College Students’ Experiences with Diversity and Their Effects on Academic Self-Confidence, Social Agency, and Disposition toward Critical Thinking*, 46 RES. IN HIGHER EDUC. 365, 365-87 (2005); Eugene T. Parker III, & Ernest T. Pascarella, *Effects of diversity experiences on socially responsible leadership over four years of college*, 6 J. OF DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUC. 219, 219-230 (2013); Ernest T. Pascarella et al., *Effects of diversity experiences on critical thinking skills over 4 years of college*, 55 J. OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT 86, 86-92 (2014).

effective in isolation from the individuals and institutions with which the law interacts.”¹⁸

Despite scholarship, law, and advocacy highlighting the salience of diversity and cultural competence for lawyers, more work is needed in this area. Perhaps now more than ever the importance of culturally competent lawyers is being recognized. In the wake of the tragic killing of George Floyd, second-year Harvard law students of color wrote an article calling for change in legal education. In that article, the students challenge law schools to create a curriculum that puts issues of race at its core and posit that lawyers are “overwhelmingly misguided and underinformed on issues of racism in the law,” though understanding the interaction of race and law is central to effective practice.¹⁹

Vital work in this area is beginning to take shape, as evidenced by the recent creation of the Law Deans Antiracist Clearinghouse Project.²⁰ The focus of the project is explained: “By creating a space for our collective voices as leaders of law schools to engage our institutions in the fight for justice and equality, we strive to focus our teaching, scholarship, service, activism, programming, and initiatives on strategies to eradicate racism.” One component of this project is to audit legal education programs to assess progress toward diversifying law school faculty, staff, and the student body to help diversify the legal profession.²¹

LSSSE asks a number of questions related to the extent to which students are exposed to diverse ideas and people.²² The five questions discussed here provide insight into how diverse experiences in and out of the classroom shape the law school experience.

- How often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?
- How often have you had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values?

18. 539 U.S. 306, 333 (2003).

19. Tyler Ambrose, Zarinah Mustafa & Sherin Nassar, *Law Schools’ Complicity on Racism Must be Challenged*, THE APPEAL (June 24, 2020), <https://theappeal.org/law-schools-racism/>.

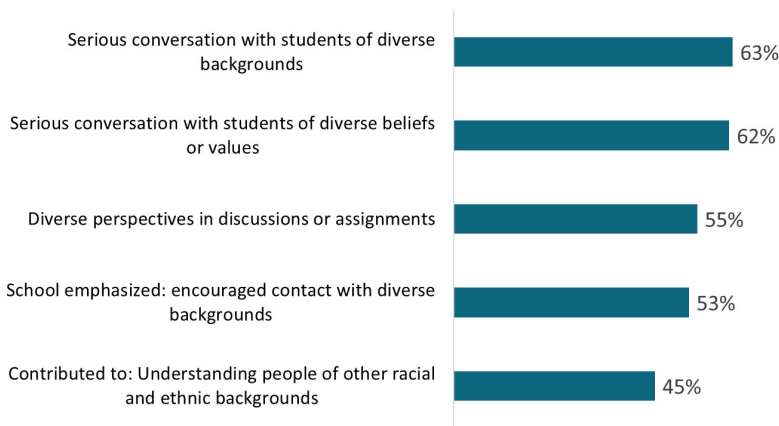
20. *Law Deans Antiracist Clearinghouse*, The Association of American Law Schools, <https://www.aals.org/antiracist-clearinghouse/>.

21. *Id.*

22. Though beyond the scope of this paper, in 2020 LSSSE administered a new Diversity and Inclusiveness module. The module examines environments, processes, and activities that reflect the engagement and validation of cultural diversity and promote greater understanding of societal differences. Questions explore students’ exposure to inclusive teaching practices and intercultural learning; perceptions of institutional values and commitment regarding diversity; and participation in diversity-related programming and coursework. A copy of the question set can be found at *Topical Module: Diversity and Inclusiveness*, Legal School Survey of Student Engagement, <https://lssse.indiana.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LSSSE-Diversity-and-Inclusiveness-Module-FINAL.pdf>.

- How often have you included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments?
- To what extent does your law school emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?
- To what extent has your experience contributed to your understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds?

Figure 7: Students’ exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives
Cultural Competence



The questions revolve around three themes: (1) the nature and frequency of student interactions with peers of different backgrounds; (2) the extent to which students considered and included diverse perspectives in class discussions and assignments; and (3) the extent to which law schools encouraged diverse interactions and understanding among students.

A. Student Interactions with Peers from Different Backgrounds

Exposure to diverse beliefs, values and opinions is critical to cultural competence. As Tavares surmises, “When students engage in cross-cultural dialogue, they are also more likely to educate one another, ‘better preparing all students for professional practice in a multicultural society.’”²³ Two LSSSE questions ask about the frequency with which respondents have serious conversations with students who are from diverse backgrounds and who hold different values and beliefs. Overall, a little more than sixty percent of all law students reported having serious conversations with students from diverse backgrounds. Between 2012 and 2019 there was virtually no change to this number. Disaggregating the data by race/ethnicity highlights important

23. Bonny L. Tavares, *Changing the Construct: Promoting Cross-Cultural Conversations in the Law School Classroom*, 67 J. LEGAL EDUC. 211, 217 (2017).

differences in the frequency that these conversations occur. Seventy-two percent of Latinx students reported frequently having serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity. Black students reported sixty-four percent and white and Asian American students reported about sixty percent.

Table 2: Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own (2019)

	2019
Top 2	63.0%
Never	7.6%
Sometimes	29.4%
Often	31.2%
Very Often	31.8%
Base	15,405

Table 3: Had serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own, Race/Ethnicity

	2019						
	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Latinx	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial
Top 2	58.3%	59.7%	64.3%	72.1%	62.5%	60.7%	69.7%
Never	5.6%	11.2%	10.0%	7.4%	12.5%	7.1%	6.1%
Sometimes	36.1%	29.1%	25.7%	20.5%	25.0%	32.2%	24.2%
Often	19.4%	28.4%	25.8%	31.3%	25.0%	32.6%	28.0%
Very Often	38.9%	31.3%	38.6%	40.8%	37.5%	28.1%	41.6%
Base	36	670	1001	888	16	8544	1052

Table 4: Had serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own, By Year

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 2	62%	64%	65%	65%	64%	65%	63%	63%
Never	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%	6%	7%	8%
Sometimes	29%	29%	28%	27%	28%	29%	30%	29%
Often	31%	31%	31%	30%	29%	32%	31%	31%
Very Often	31%	33%	33%	35%	34%	33%	32%	32%
Base	25,073	27,025	20,381	20,554	16,761	19,734	17,568	15,405

Additionally, sixty-two percent of students reported having serious conversations with students with very different religious beliefs, political opinions or values. This number is slightly down from 2012 (sixty-five percent). Across racial/ethnic groups, in 2019, sixty-four percent of Latinx and white students reported frequently having serious conversations with peers who held very different religious belief, political opinion or values. Fifty-seven percent of Black students and forty-eight percent of Asian American students frequently had these conversations.

The importance of listening and learning from peers from diverse backgrounds cannot be understated. It is a professional competency that is critical to the legal profession’s moving forward. To have deep, meaningful conversations with other students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives creates an opportunity to challenge a student’s beliefs and to learn from others who hold beliefs and values that are different from one’s own. This is a critical component of cultural competency, and it is vital skill for lawyers to possess to effectively defend and protect those with marginalized voices and to meet with clients who may have different backgrounds, views, and experiences. Law schools should place greater emphasis on this important skill by creating ways for these conversations to occur both in and out of the classroom.

Table 5: Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values (2019)

Top 2	62.2%
Never	6.7%
Sometimes	31.1%
Often	32.9%
Very Often	29.3%
Base	15,405

Table 6: Serious conversation with students of diverse beliefs or values, Race/Ethnicity, (2019)

	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Latinx	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial
Top 2	58.3%	47.9%	56.8%	63.7%	62.5%	63.6%	64.7%
Never	8.3%	13.7%	11.3%	8.1%	12.5%	5.1%	6.0%
Sometimes	33.3%	38.4%	31.9%	28.1%	25.0%	31.3%	29.3%
Often	25.0%	27.8%	27.3%	32.3%	25.0%	34.5%	31.0%
Very Often	33.3%	20.1%	29.6%	31.4%	37.5%	29.1%	33.6%
Base	36	670	1001	885	16	8547	1050

Table 7: Serious conversation with students of diverse beliefs or values, By Year

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 2	65%	66%	65%	64%	64%	62%	61%	62%
Never	7%	6%	7%	7%	7%	6%	7%	7%
Sometimes	29%	28%	29%	29%	29%	31%	32%	31%
Often	32%	33%	32%	31%	30%	33%	31%	33%
Very Often	33%	33%	33%	33%	34%	29%	29%	29%
Base	25,107	27,055	20,409	20,567	16,773	19,749	17,580	15,405

B. Diverse Perspectives in Class Discussions and Assignments

A critical component to developing cultural competence in law school is to create intentional opportunities for students to engage in legal analysis from diverse perspectives. As Tavares posits, “Substantively, engaging in the analysis of legal issues from diverse perspectives challenges the viewpoint that ‘legal analysis involves assessing an objective reality.’ Instead, cross-cultural discussions help students to see that ‘all legal actors . . . engage in their decision making within a situated perspective.’”²⁴ Law students were asked the extent to which diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) were included in class discussions or writing assignments.²⁵ Only fifty-five percent of law students reported *frequently*²⁶ including diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments. This number is slightly up from fifty-two percent in 2012. In 2019, close to ten percent reported *never* including diverse perspectives in class discussion or assignments, a number that has remained static since 2012. Disaggregating the data by year in school shows that diverse perspectives are included in the classroom with less frequency for 1Ls. In 2019, fifty-one percent of 1L students reported frequently including diverse perspectives in the classroom, compared with fifty-eight percent of 2Ls and fifty-seven percent of 3Ls. If only half of 1L students frequently engage with diverse perspectives in class discussions and assignments, what implications does that have on the perceived importance of this perspective? Scholars²⁷ and current law students agree that minimizing

24. *Id.* at 213.

25. How often have you included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments?

26. “Very often” or “often.”

27. See Meera Deo, *Paint by Number? How the Race and Gender of Law School Faculty Affect the First-Year Curriculum*, 29 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 1, 10 (2010); Tavares, *supra* note 24; Pham, H. *Forthcoming*: The Critical Case Brief: A Practical Approach to Integrating Critical Perspectives in the 1L Curriculum; Symposium at Boston College: Racial Bias, Disparities and Oppression in the 1L Curriculum <http://www.bu.edu/law/2019/12/12/racial-bias-disparities-and-oppression-in-the-1l-curriculum/>, noting that “the legal system is presented in the first-year classroom as neutral and equal rather than as a way in which American society polices and enforces disparities and subordination.”

diverse perspectives in the 1L curriculum sends a message that these perspectives are not important: “The curriculum choices that professors make communicate to future lawyers what knowledge is necessary and valuable in the practice of law. Relegating comprehensive discussions of racism in the law to elective courses indicates that understanding racism in the law is elective. It is not.”²⁸ The first year of law school is a critical entry point into these conversations that can create a lens through which to view the legal system. It is also when all students are required to engage in a core curriculum and “required to take classes together.”²⁹

Table 8: Diverse perspectives in discussions or assignments, All Respondents

Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	
Top 2	55%
Never	9%
Sometimes	36%
Often	33%
Very Often	22%
Base	15,803

Table 9: Diverse perspectives in discussions or assignments, Year in School

Diverse perspectives in discussions or assignments			
	1L	2L	3L
Top 2	51%	58%	57%
Never	11%	7%	8%
Sometimes	38%	35%	35%
Often	31%	34%	34%
Very Often	20%	23%	23%
Base	6006	4926	4590

28. THE APPEAL, *supra* note 19.

29. *The Critical Case Brief*, *supra* note 27, at 2.

Table 10: Diverse perspectives in discussions or assignments, Race/Ethnicity (2019)

	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Latinx	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial
Top 2	65.7%	50.4%	53.1%	54.7%	50.0%	56.0%	54.2%
Never	22.9%	12.2%	11.7%	11.0%	6.3%	7.5%	8.5%
Sometimes	11.4%	37.4%	35.2%	34.3%	43.8%	36.4%	37.3%
Often	22.9%	33.2%	26.6%	29.1%	25.0%	34.2%	31.1%
Very Often	42.9%	17.1%	26.6%	25.6%	25.0%	21.8%	23.1%
Base	35	665	1001	890	16	8526	1048

Table 11: Diverse perspectives in discussions or assignments, By Year

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 2	52%	53%	55%	53%	55%	55%	56%	55%
Never	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%	9%	9%
Sometimes	38%	36%	35%	37%	35%	36%	36%	36%
Often	32%	33%	32%	32%	32%	34%	33%	33%
Very Often	20%	21%	22%	21%	22%	22%	22%	22%
Base	25,604	27,581	20,892	21,063	17,166	20,156	17,987	15,803

C. School Emphasis and Perceived Gains

It is of utmost importance that law schools support and create opportunities to expose students to diverse perspectives both in and out of the classroom. Two questions on the LSSSE survey provide insight into how students perceive that their law school has purposefully developed a curriculum related to the understanding of diverse perspectives. The first question asks: *To what extent does your law school emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?* Overall, fifty-three percent of law students reported that their law school *substantially*³⁰ encouraged contact among students from diverse backgrounds. The longitudinal data show this percentage had risen by five points from forty-seven percent in 2012. Trends varied among racial and ethnic groups. Sixty-one percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives reported substantial emphasis. White, Latinx, and Asian American students accounted for the next-highest proportion, at around fifty-three percent, followed by forty-seven percent of Black students.

On the other side of the scale, sixteen percent of all students reported that their law schools encouraged “very little” contact with student from diverse backgrounds. Twenty-four percent of Black students reported that their law

30. “Very much” and “quite a bit.”

schools encouraged contact “very little,” the highest number among all racial/ethnic groups.

Table 12: School emphasized: Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds, Race/Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Latinx	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial
Top 2	61.1%	52.2%	46.8%	53.5%	71.4%	54.6%	51.0%
Very little	19.4%	16.6%	23.6%	19.8%	7.1%	13.8%	19.8%
Some	19.4%	31.2%	29.7%	26.7%	21.4%	31.6%	29.2%
Quite a bit	38.9%	29.9%	23.0%	22.2%	35.7%	30.5%	27.4%
Very much	22.2%	22.3%	23.8%	31.4%	35.7%	24.0%	23.6%
Base	36	663	988	889	14	8543	1048

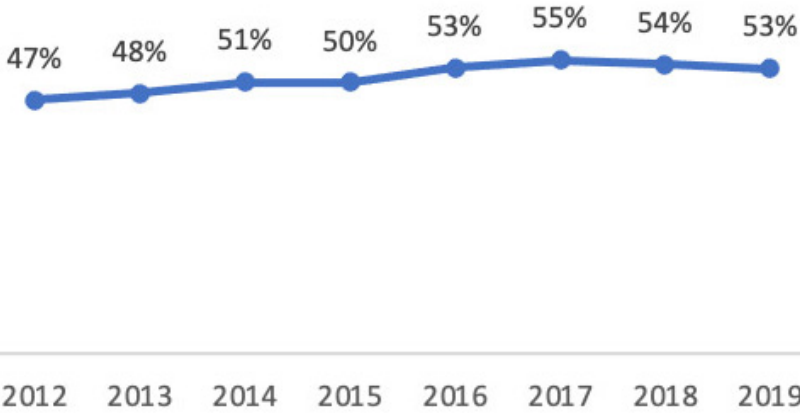
Table 13: School emphasized: Encouraging contact among diverse backgrounds, 2019

	2019
Top 2	53.1%
Very little	16.1%
Some	30.8%
Quite a bit	29.0%
Very much	24.1%
Base	14,331

Table 14: School emphasized: Encouraged contact with diverse backgrounds, By Year

	Administration Year							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 2	47.2%	48.4%	50.6%	50.5%	53.2%	54.7%	53.9%	53.1%
Very little	17.7%	17.3%	15.5%	17.3%	16.6%	15.4%	15.7%	16.1%
Some	35.2%	34.3%	33.9%	32.2%	30.1%	29.9%	30.4%	30.8%
Quite a bit	27.6%	27.7%	28.1%	27.3%	28.4%	30.8%	29.6%	29.0%
Very much	19.6%	20.7%	22.5%	23.2%	24.8%	23.9%	24.3%	24.1%
Base	23,719	25,603	19,278	19,229	15,620	18,571	16,337	14,331

Figure 8: School emphasized: Encouraged contact with diverse backgrounds, By Year



Analyses of the second question are perhaps even more revealing. It asks: *To what extent has your experience contributed to your understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds?* In 2019, less than half of all students (forty-five percent) reported that their law school experience contributed to their understanding people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. In spite of this abysmal finding, longitudinal data indicate that there has been significant improvement in this area over time. In 2012, only thirty-six percent of all law students reported that their law school experiences contributed substantially to their understanding people of diverse backgrounds. Though the trends are positive, there is clearly still room for improvement. One-fifth (twenty percent) reported in 2019 that the law school experience contributed “very little” to this important competency. Forty-six percent of white students reported that their law school experience substantially contributed to their understanding, compared with thirty-eight percent of Black students.

Table 15: Contributed to: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds

	2019
Top 2	45%
Very little	20%
Some	35%
Quite a bit	28%
Very much	18%
Base	14,094

Table 16: Contributed to: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, Year in School

	1L	2L	3L
Top 2	45%	45%	47%
Very little	21%	20%	18%
Some	35%	35%	35%
Quite a bit	27%	28%	28%
Very much	17%	17%	19%
Base	5282	4434	4123

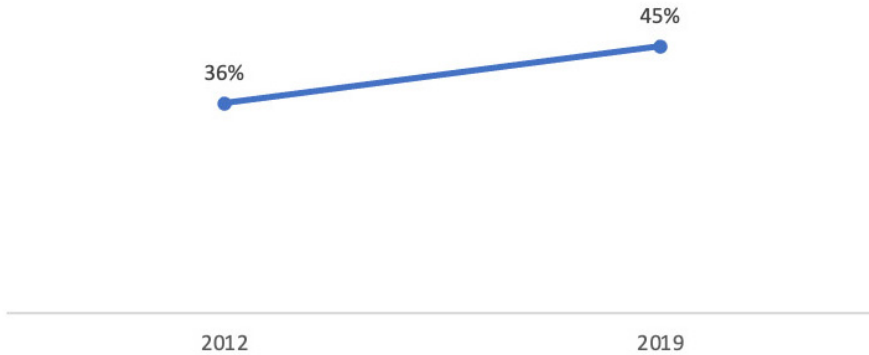
Table 17: Contributed to: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, Race/Ethnicity

	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Latinx	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Multiracial
Top 2	60%	51%	38%	48%	50%	46%	43%
Very little	23%	18%	28%	23%	0%	18%	23%
Some	17%	31%	34%	30%	50%	37%	35%
Quite a bit	31%	30%	20%	22%	29%	29%	26%
Very much	29%	22%	19%	25%	21%	17%	16%
Base	35	665	992	884	14	8521	1051

Table 18: Contributed to: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, By Year

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 2	36%	37%	41%	44%	46%	46%	46%	45%
Very little	26%	25%	22%	22%	20%	18%	19%	20%
Some	39%	38%	37%	35%	34%	36%	35%	35%
Quite a bit	23%	23%	25%	25%	26%	29%	28%	28%
Very much	13%	14%	16%	19%	20%	18%	18%	18%
Base	23,051	24,808	18,712	18,932	15,347	18,281	16,090	14,094

Figure 9: Contributed to: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, 2012, 2019



Having culturally competent lawyers is critical for the success of the legal profession. As Tavares asserts, “Cross-cultural awareness is essential to our students as they prepare to practice in an increasingly diverse domestic and international legal marketplace with competence and confidence.”³¹ Creating cross-cultural awareness and understanding should be a key focus of all law schools. The development of this vital professional skill is not only important in the practice of law, it is of utmost import to society as a whole.

IV. Self-directedness

Effective lawyers require an important attribute to be successful: self-directedness. Self-directedness encompasses taking initiative, engaging in goal-oriented behavior, being forward thinking, and possessing the ability to assess one’s strengths and weaknesses for self-betterment. In numerous studies, self-directedness/initiative is identified as a key quality of a successful lawyer.³² Hamilton elucidates why this professional competency is particularly germane: “[T]he empirical data available indicate that legal employers greatly value a new lawyer’s commitment to continuous professional development, which legal employers often describe as “initiative” or “ownership.”³³

A number of LSSSE survey questions center on self-directedness and initiative. A cluster of questions highlight how (and with what frequency) students activate and nurture this skill in law school, such as:

31. Tavares, *supra* note 24, at 211.
32. MACCRATE REPORT *supra* note 8; WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN ET AL., *supra* note 8; Hamilton, *Changing Markets Create Opportunities*, *supra* note 4, at 551-58; Shultz & Zedeck, *supra* note 8.
33. Neil Hamilton & Jerome M. Organ, *Each Law Student Must Take Increasing Ownership Over Professional Development During Law School*, PD QUARTERLY 27 (Sept. 10, 2018), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3246164>.

*In your experience at your law school during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?*³⁴

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Worked harder than you thought you could to meet faculty members' standards or expectations
- Talked about career plans or job search activities with faculty member or advisor

Nearly two-thirds (sixty-eight percent) of all students in 2019 reported frequently asking questions in class and contributing to class discussion, up from sixty-two percent in 2012. Fifty-nine percent of law students reported frequently working harder than they thought they could to meet faculty standards or expectations. In 2012, only fifty-two percent of students reported working this hard. These data highlight an important and positive trend: Students are working harder to meet expectations than ever before. Both questions demonstrate self-directiveness/initiative in law students—a professional competency that is highly valued by law firms.³⁵ More students are also taking the initiative to speak with faculty about career plans and job search activities. In 2012 only thirty-three percent of students had talked with faculty about career plans and job search activities. By 2019 that number had increased to forty-two percent.

Seeking leadership positions at law schools is another strong indicator of initiative and self-directed behavior. LSSSE data show that more students are serving in leadership positions in law school. In 2019, fifty percent of all students were student organization leaders or planned to take on a leadership role in a student organization, compared with forty-four percent of students in 2009. This increase signals that future lawyers may be better equipped to handle leadership responsibilities in practice and civic life as well.

Another cluster of questions focus on student perceptions of how the law school contributes to the development of self-directed behavior:

*To what extent has your experience at your law school contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?*³⁶

- Learning effectively on your own
- Acquiring job or work-related knowledge of skills

34. Response options: Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never.

35. See Hamilton, *Changing Markets*, *supra* note 4, at 551–58; Hamilton, *Fostering and Assessing*, *supra* note 4.

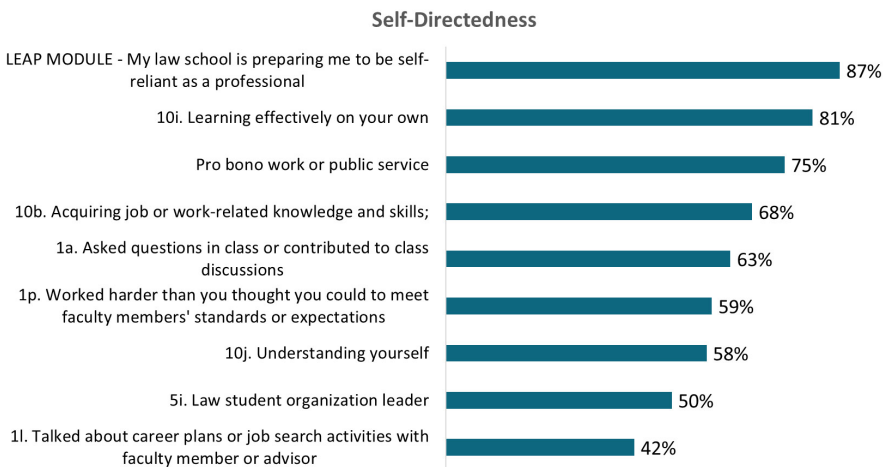
36. Response options: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little.

Based on your experience at your law school during the current school year, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?³⁷

- My law school is preparing me to be self-reliant as a professional.

The 2019 data highlight that law schools are doing well in this area. Eighty-seven percent of students reported that they “strongly agree” or “agree” that law school is preparing them to be self-reliant as a professional, perhaps the greatest signal that they have developed the professional skill of self-directedness. Furthermore, eighty-one percent of law students reported that their law school contributed substantially to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in learning effectively on their own. Both questions are strong indicators that law schools are purposefully creating and supporting ways to develop law students into self-directed lawyers. Focusing on the development of this professional competency is vital to their success in practice. In fact, studies have shown that self-directed behavior—taking initiative and having the ability to learn and adapt—is the most important factor for success in law firms.³⁸

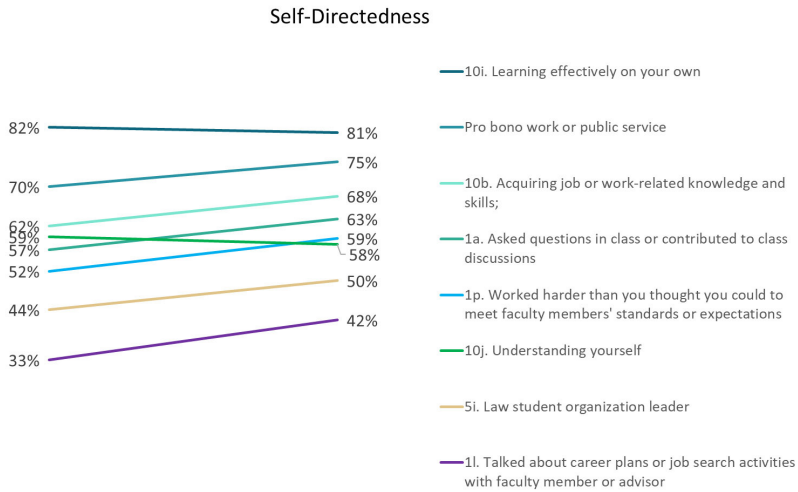
Figure 10: Self-Directedness Questions, 2019



37. Response options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree.

38. Hamilton & Organ, *supra* note 33, at 27.

Figure 11: Self-directedness questions, 2012, 2019



V. Conclusion

Law schools can work to prepare students to be successful in their employment search and in their career by purposefully creating opportunities to engage, challenge and develop their professional skills. In 2014 law school graduates believed their professional skills and competencies had not been adequately developed to prepare them to be effective lawyers.³⁹ In the five years since the ABA Standards were revised to include a greater emphasis on professional skills development, the question remains: How are law schools doing? This article endeavored to provide insight into that question. The three professional skills this article focused on have been identified by scholars, law students, and law firms as vital to a lawyer’s success.⁴⁰ The findings suggest that in some areas law schools are doing quite well. In others, there is significant room for improvement.

Self-directedness is a vital professional skill for a student’s academic and professional success.⁴¹ Law schools are doing well here. On almost every question related to self-directedness there has been a gradual and significant increase in percentage points since 2012. This highlights the meaningful work that has been accomplished in this area since the ABA Standards were revised in 2014. Other skills, such as teamwork/collaboration and cultural competency, have room for improvement. Findings suggest that for questions related to teamwork/collaboration, little has changed at the national level since 2012. However, as the IU Maurer School of Law example demonstrates,

39. ABA Task Force, *supra* note 1, at 24.
 40. See Hamilton, *Changing Markets*, *supra* note 4, at 551-58 (2014); Hamilton, *Fostering and Assessing*, *supra* note 4.
 41. See Hamilton, *Changing Markets*, *supra* note 4, at 551-58; Hamilton & Organ, *supra* note 33, at 27.

meaningful change can occur when law schools are intentional about making curricular changes and using data to support and gauge the success of their efforts. In developing students' cultural competency there is much room for improvement. This professional skill is imperative not just to be a successful lawyer but for society as a whole. Egregious injustices and violence continue against people of color. As extant scholarship demonstrates, developing a curriculum with a purposeful and meaningful focus on diverse perspectives is critical. Moving forward, how do we determine how law schools are doing in developing law students' professional skills? Through a continued commitment to sound empirical research and continual assessment of our programs and initiatives.