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Third-year law students slack off, national survey says

Diversity experiences linked to positive outcomes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 3, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Findings from a national survey released today by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research show that the first two years of law school are more demanding compared with the final year.



Law School Survey of Student Engagement

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According to the survey, third-year students do not work as hard as their counterparts to meet faculty members' expectations, nor do they discuss legal issues and ideas outside of class as often as other law students. As many as one-quarter of third-year students frequently come to class unprepared. When estimating how much they have gained from law school, third-year students look similar to first- and second-year students in areas such as critical thinking, effective writing and work-related knowledge or skills.

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"These results tend to confirm the criticism that the third year of law school is not used effectively to build on students' existing skills and provide a sophisticated transition to the practice of law," said Alison Anderson, professor of law emerita at University of California at Los Angeles School of Law. "In a well-structured professional education, third-year law students should feel they have learned more about solving complex real world problems, developing ethics and developing clearer career goals than first-year students."

The 2005 report from the Law School Survey of Student Engagement is based on information from about 28,000 law students at 73 law schools. The LSSSE study, *The Law School Years: Probing Questions, Actionable Data*, gives schools an idea of how well students are learning and what they put into and get out of their law school experience.



IU Bloomington Chancellor's Professor George Kuh directs the Law School Survey of Student Engagement, which is helping law schools determine how effectively they are contributing to student learning.

"Engagement in learning is important because the more time and energy students devote to desired activities, the more likely they are to gain the skills and

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competencies essential for the practice of law," said George Kuh, LSSSE director and Indiana University Bloomington Chancellor's Professor of higher education. "Law schools that intentionally craft policies and practices so that students expend more effort on productive activities arguably are preparing their students well for what they will encounter after the J.D."

The survey results provide comparative data for determining how effectively law schools are contributing to learning. Key areas measured by the survey are intellectual experiences, student satisfaction, student time usage, enriching educational experiences, the law school learning environment and educational and personal growth.

Other key findings from the 2005 report are:

- Students who had more experiences with diversity in law school were more likely to report they benefited from law school and were more satisfied with their overall law school experience.
- Although students who frequently received prompt oral or written feedback from faculty were more positive about their overall law school experience, about one in six "never" received such feedback.
- Students who were satisfied with career counseling and job search assistance gained more in acquiring work-related knowledge and were more likely to attend the same law school if they could start over again.
- More than 80 percent of law students reported that their classes emphasized, to a substantial degree, applying theories or concepts to practical problems.

- About two-fifths of law students spent no time on cocurricular activities.
- Part-time and full-time law students were similar in terms of how they perceived the degree to which the law school environment supports their academic and social needs.
- The nine out of 10 J.D. students who incur debt to attend law school indicated they will owe more than \$77,000 when they graduate.

"The LSSSE data could be used effectively to inform the efforts of institutions and individual teachers to enhance the quality of their pedagogy," said Gerald Hess, professor at Gonzaga University School of Law. Sophie Sparrow, professor at Franklin Pierce Law Center, said, "We received extraordinarily valuable feedback about our students, our teaching and our services from participating in LSSSE. It gives us a way to measure and hold ourselves accountable for improving student learning."

Kuh said, "Law schools can do more to help students succeed by clearly marking paths that students should take to get involved in activities that matter to them and their learning."

The LSSSE 2005 Report is co-sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The LSSSE 2005 Report, *The Law School Years: Probing Questions, Actionable Data*, is available in PDF format at <http://nsse.iub.edu/lssse> or may be obtained by mailing \$10 to the Law School Survey of Student Engagement, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, School of Education, 1900 E. 10th Street,

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