

Student Legal Services

2014-15 Assessment and Learning Outcomes Report

Overview

Student Legal Services (“SLS”) offers students free and confidential consultations with an attorney for advice and guidance related to their legal questions, rights, and obligations. Areas of law include **landlord-tenant, criminal, traffic and alcohol citations, small claims actions, credit issues and collections, auto and health insurance, accidents and personal injury, consumer fraud, technology and privacy issues, general contract law, basic estate planning matters, and family law.** SLS provided **934 client consultations in 2014-15** (up from 857 in 2013-14) to help students resolve legal issues and to foster the student learning outcomes described below.

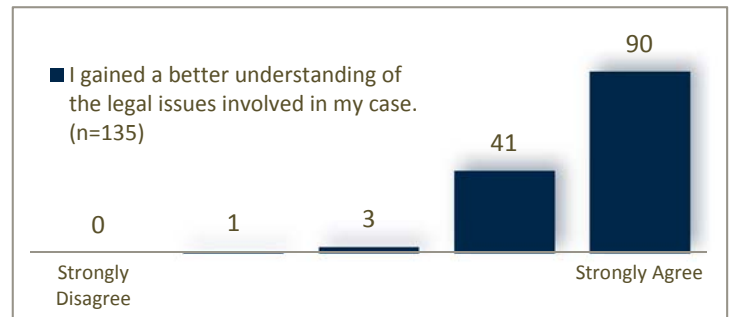
SLS conducted two client surveys (Dec. 2014 and May 2015) to assess four learning outcomes and satisfaction with the service. The survey went to 387 SLS clients with a valid email address on file.¹ The response rate was 34.9%.

Learning Outcome Assessment Results

Learning Outcome #1: After consulting with SLS, students will understand the legal issues involved in their cases.

Almost all student clients (**97.1%**) agreed or strongly agreed that consulting with SLS improved their understanding of the legal issues related to their cases. Representative comments included the following:

- I learned my rights as a tenant and what I could do on my part concerning my legal issue.
- I understood actions I could take to protect myself.
- My understanding of separate vs community property going into a marriage in California was changed.
- I gained an understanding of what situation I was in legally, and specific things I needed to do to address it.
- I was in an extremely stressful situation and Mr. Lucia helped me understand my rights and how to go about the issue with the landlords. I am glad that worked and I could continue staying in the same house
- I was unaware of my legal options before consulting with Mark. I was much more well-informed after our conversations.
- Before my consultation with SLS, I assumed I had no further options. Afterwards, I understood my rights and knew that I actually had multiple options.
- I was provided with good information which allowed me to more clearly understand my position and choices.
- I became more aware of laws in place in Oakland to protect tenants from landlord retaliation.
- Mark explained clearly the statutes/codes associated with my issue. I felt like I better understood the laws governing the thing I was concerned about.

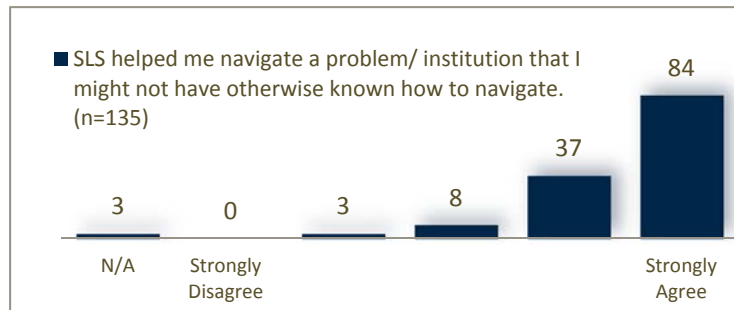
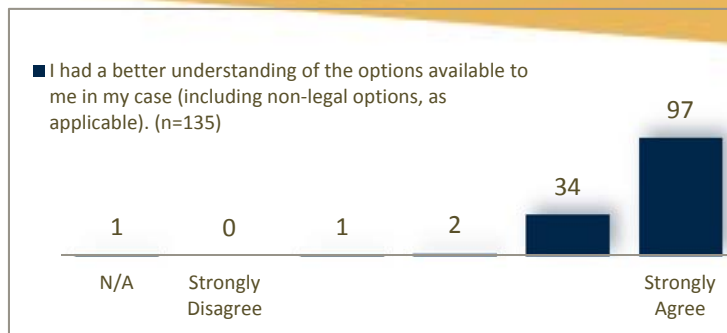


¹ To preserve attorney-client privilege and protect the confidentiality of SLS clients, the survey was administered solely by the Director of SLS, Mark Lucia, through a private account. All survey results are aggregated and presented without link to any identifying information of respondents. Survey recipients were advised that (i) responding was completely optional and (ii) short-answer responses should be generalized enough to protect any personal or confidential information that the clients did not want disclosed (even if not attached to any other identifying information). Not all SLS clients provide an email address (it is not mandatory to do so), hence the number of survey recipients is typically lower than the total number of SLS clients.

Learning Outcome #2: Students will identify and understand the legal options related to their cases, and the relative merits of those options.

SLS does not directly represent students, so it's crucial that they understand the next step(s) to address their legal issues. Clients (**97.0%**) widely agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their options after consulting with SLS, and **91.9%** agreed or strongly agreed they knew the first "next step" to take in their case. Illustrative responses included:

- I understood the case overall, the next steps or possible solutions, and what to consider in making decisions.
- I understood my options on how to take care of my case, and how "realistic" it was to follow through.
- Mark helped me understand what exactly the other person involved was threatening to do, what the actual likeliness was of them to do that, what my options were, and how I could follow through on those options. He provided several resources and was really helpful
- There were available options that I had never considered before consulting with SLS.
- The attorney offered me several possibilities and kindly wrote a letter to get the issue fixed.
- Before, I only knew of the non-legal methods in handling my situation, but Mark provided information about legal points that could help me, as well as examples of previous similar cases in which it actually worked.
- After consulting with SLS, I realized I was undervaluing "non-legal" options, which ultimately resolved my issue.
- Mark did a great job of contextualizing our situation and presenting us with a plan of action.
- Mark basically walked me through everything, outlining what I could do but also what would be most beneficial/feasible, given my preferences.



Learning Outcome #3: After consulting with SLS, students will know how to navigate a problem/institution that they might not have otherwise known how to navigate.

Students are often unfamiliar with legal matters, so SLS helps them work through a new form of problem or bureaucracy. **89.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that

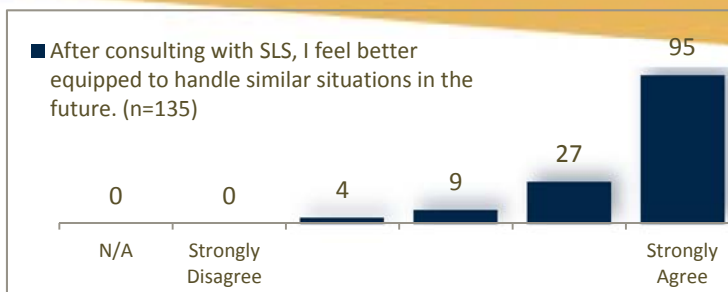
SLS helped them navigate an issue or institution they might not have known how to navigate:

- I knew exactly how to follow up on my auto insurance claim, and learned that I had a much larger potential legal claim than the insurance company was indicating to me.
- I was able to take action in writing a termination letter to get my deposit back
- I felt empowered as a citizen and as a student.
- I knew how to file a petition with the Rent Stabilization Board at Berkeley.
- I have a better understanding of how my case will be viewed by a judge.
- This situation has made me think more about what to look for in terms of housing situations and feel more confident dealing with scary landlords who write angry emails
- I drafted and implemented a premarital agreement.
- I successfully solved the problem of subletting.
- Without consulting SLS, I would have ended up owing about \$17,000 in property damage to my landowner, whose claim to my role in the situation had very little credibility. I am incredibly grateful for the advice Mark offered, because I would've had no choice but to bow to the whims of my extortionate landlord without it.

Learning Outcome #4: After consulting with SLS, students will feel better equipped to handle similar situations in the future.

Working through a legal question or problem with SLS may foster transferable skills that apply to future student experiences, legal or otherwise. **90.4%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that their work with SLS helped prepare them for similar future situations:

- I now know the evidence I need to collect.
- I have advised others in situations involving owner move-ins and rent control from my experience after being advised by SLS.
- I now know that the first step is to make a demand letter and that keeping evidence about the case is also crucial.
- I know now to better negotiate contracts before signing - making sure to get everything in writing instead of just verbally.
- I feel well versed in small claims lawsuits as a result of my experience and my conversations with Mr. Lucia. I would feel quite confident tackling a similar situation in the future.
- I am more aware of my rights as a tenant and I am better equipped now to defend myself of any other landlord overstepping their authority and power.
- I know where to look for help.
- I organized and documented information about my car accident, and the related claim. Mark helped me do this.
- I am definitely more aware and ready in case a similar event was to occur again
- I could go through the insurance claims process again if I needed to, and would feel much more knowledgeable and prepared.



General Assessment/Survey Results and Observations

Student success and retention

In addition to four specific learning outcomes, the SLS mission emphasizes a broader learning goal:

SLS will support student retention by improving students' ability to stay in school via high-quality counseling and assistance with their legal issues.

SLS fosters student success at Cal by providing counseling and assistance that enable students to focus on school priorities and limit the potential distraction created by legal matters. **97.8%** agreed or strongly agreed that the legal issue they brought to SLS **was causing them stress**, **75.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that it was **distracting them from their studies**, and **20.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that **without legal help they would have considered leaving school**. Of those students who agreed with the latter two statements, **89.9%** said "Yes" when asked whether the assistance they received from SLS **improved their ability to stay in school and/or to focus on their studies**. This is particularly important given that students from underrepresented ethnic minority (UREM) groups and lower-income families consult with SLS in **much higher numbers** than their representation in the overall student population, and that **83.0%** of respondents said that if not for SLS, they would have no other access to legal counseling. Student comments describe the variety of ways that SLS offers this support:

- With help from Mr. Lucia I had the legal knowledge needed to confront the situation and resolve/minimize it in a way that allowed me to lend more time and energy to studying.
- I was very stressed before I received legal help from Mark, and he was able to make me feel much better about my situation so that I could focus on other things.
- Mark put me at ease, both financial and emotional.
- I was able to seek a move away request that would allow me to continue at UC Berkeley and allow me to continue to have all my family together.
- SLS took a lot of stress out of the entire situation and removed a lot of question marks that were just constantly floating around in my head.

- It took my focus off my legal matter because his advice helped me understand that the problem was not as serious as it originally seemed.
- As a mother and a student, the unforeseen issues were difficult to handle. Mark's help and his valuable advice helped me to stay focused because I realized that my problems can actually be resolved.

Student financial support and recovery

SLS also helps students financially: 32.8% of respondents recovered money that they would not have otherwise collected without help from SLS. Twenty-four students specified amounts they actually recovered or saved with SLS assistance (several matters were still pending); **these amounts ranged from \$200 to \$17,000, and averaged \$1,551.**

Student satisfaction with service and sense of connection with the University

Client satisfaction levels with SLS are very high. **99.3%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "SLS is a worthwhile/beneficial service" (with **91.1% strongly agreeing**), and **99.3%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend SLS to other students in need of assistance (with **91.1% strongly agreeing**).

72.2% of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they feel more connected to the University.** Another **93.2%** agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they are more aware of resources available at the University.** Overall, **97.8%** were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (85.9% being very satisfied). Comments included:

- Mark was wonderfully helpful, super responsive, and gave us plenty of ammunition to pursue our grievance. Couldn't be more pleased. Thank you!
- Well, my problem was fixed by Mark. His one page letter saved me \$2,000. I am extremely grateful to him.
- Mark was very clear and concise. SLS is truly the most effective service on campus.
- I felt well prepared for everything that happened because of my conversations with Mr. Lucia.
- SLS is a DIRE necessity on campus as students often feel trapped.
- I'm very thankful for his service at Cal and its reassuring to know that I have free legal advice if needed.
- Mark was helpful, kind, nonjudgmental, and understanding. He ended up saving me money, calming me down, and saving my record. I am thoroughly satisfied with my experience.
- It was encompassing and caring.
- The attorney was very kind, the service was fast and direct and the information was extremely useful.
- The replies I got were prompt, detailed, and addressed my situation accurately. I got answers to all my questions.
- I was seen quickly, taken seriously (which as a woman and a student happens very rarely), listened to with great attention to detail, and given options that I was not aware were available.
- Mark was very friendly and having the opportunity to meet with someone and share the issue that is causing you so much stress is incredibly helpful.
- Mark was very kind and patient in listening and explaining throughout the entire session. In our follow-up appointment, he expressed the same amount of generosity. I walked in wanting clear, concise directions in dealing with my situation, but he gave me way more than that.
- Very, very responsive to follow-up emails after the in-person consultation. So impressed by how helpful SLS was.
- Mark was very clear, kind, and helpful. Great in-person skills with college students in addition to legal knowledge.
- The attorney was very approachable and realistic. He helped me understand my situation, how others would react in similar situations, my options, and advice on how or if I should proceed.
- My experience was near perfect and extremely informative and calming.
- Mark helped me be prepared for an otherwise scary experience. I feel confident referring other transgender students to your office.
- Mark was very very helpful, attentive and patient with my woes. He devoted so much time to hear me out and offer practical assistance. I felt a lot of relief after this meeting.
- Very informative, approachable, understanding, and friendly!

- I am so grateful to SLS. Without it, I would not have been able to seek legal advice without going into debt.
- I appreciated this service more than I can describe, and have already recommended several other people to go to Student Legal Services. You are the best, most helpful service on campus!
- Mark is the best. He really is on the students' side to ensure we are aware of our legal rights and devotes himself to helping others. The work SLS does is absolutely incredible -- would HIGHLY recommend to students.
- Mark is the nicest and most intelligent man I have ever met. He was courteous, logical, and overall amazing!
- I honestly got EXACTLY what I was hoping I would. Mark listened, made me not feel crazy, outlined my options, worked with me to decide on an option, helped me think about how to send an email, and reviewed the email pretty immediately. There's really nothing he didn't do that he should of or anything he did that wasn't helpful.
- The most positive aspect of my experience with SLS was Mark Lucia. He has an ability to relate, in addition to being quite knowledgeable.
- Mark was not only professional, but also really welcoming and sympathetic. I felt comfortable enough to talk to him because he showed compassion and most importantly, he did not rush me during our consultation.
- SLS is one of the best managed and run student services and extremely valuable to my time at Berkeley.
- Having no-cost legal help makes a world of difference for maintaining emotional well-being during grad school.
- THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU. SLS literally saved my future.
- Mr. Lucia is a fantastic resource for students here at Berkeley. I sincerely appreciate all his help.
- SLS is fantastic and a very important resource to have on campus to support students who run into issues (especially landlord-tenant disputes).
- The beginning of my semester was really difficult and full of stress because of my problem. I was able to recover little by little only because of Mr. Lucia's advice.

Areas for improvement

Students identified three general areas where they would like to see potential enhancements of SLS:

- More publicity/advertising of SLS.
- Shorter wait times for appointments (certain times of year – typically August-October and March-April – are impacted at SLS, and appointments can be delayed up to a week).
- Attorney representation and appearances in court on behalf of students (or a student legal defense fund for such outside representation), and additional local referrals.