

Student Legal Services

2021-22 Assessment and Learning Outcomes Report

Overview

Student Legal Services (“SLS”) offers students free and confidential consultations with an attorney for advice, guidance, and coaching related to their legal questions, rights, and obligations. Areas of law include **landlord-tenant, family law, credit issues and collections, auto and health insurance, accidents and personal injury, consumer fraud, traffic and alcohol citations, small claims actions, technology and privacy issues, general contract law, and basic estate planning matters**. SLS provided **1,527 client consultations in 2021-22** (up 9.2% from 1,398 in 2020-21) to help students resolve legal issues and to foster the student learning outcomes described below.

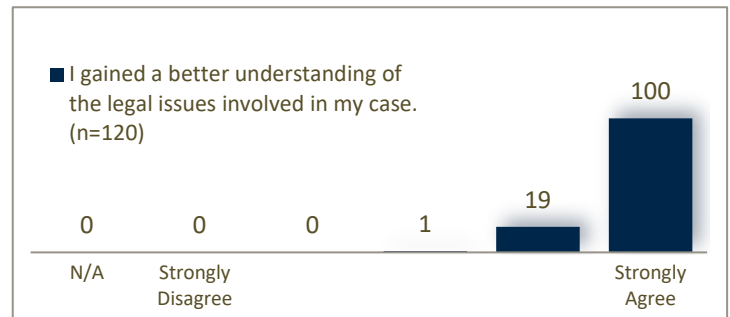
SLS conducted two client surveys (Dec. 2021 and May 2022) to assess four learning outcomes and satisfaction with the service. The survey went to 553 SLS clients with a valid email address on file.¹ The response rate was 21.7%.

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 (**99.2%**) agreed or strongly agreed that consulting with SLS improved their understanding of the legal issues related to their cases. Representative narrative responses included the following:

- After consulting with SLS, I understood many laws around renting that I had not known before, including very important habitability laws.
- The legal info I found online was complicated and confusing, but the consultation with SLS made everything a lot more approachable and easy to understand.
- I gained a much better legal understanding of my situation and the options at hand. Mark did a wonderful job at breaking everything down and explaining what to do next, and I was given additional resources that I could use after my appointment.
- I learned a lot about the different laws and steps related to restraining orders.
- Mark always sends relevant documentation, helpful summaries, and goes above and beyond to make sure I understand how I can exercise my rights while keeping myself safe.
- I was able to better understand the process of a legal name change.
- Speaking to SLS made me way more prepared in dealing with a predatory landlord, keeping all documentation, etc.
- I received amazing advice and was it was very accessible in a timely manner.
- Mark was very attentive and was of great help to all the questions I had! Every single question was answered and I could not be happier with how the consultation went.
- Before and after meeting with SLS was like night and day. It was so helpful.

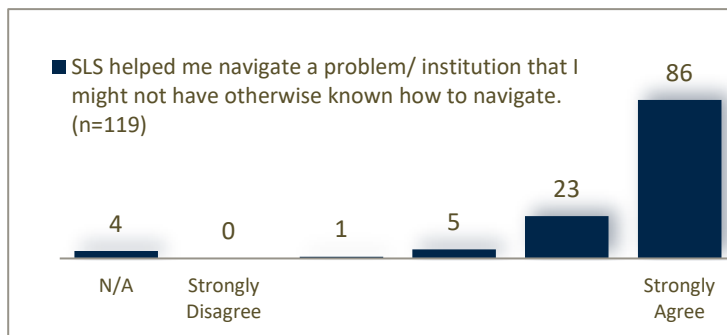
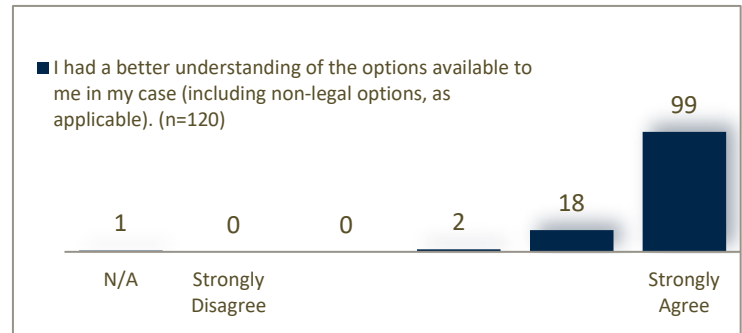


¹ To preserve attorney-client privilege and protect the confidentiality of SLS clients, the survey was administered solely by the Director of SLS, Mark Lucia, through a private account. All survey results are aggregated and presented without link to any identifying information of respondents. Survey 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 represent students, so it's key that they know the next step(s) to address their legal issues. **97.5%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their options after consulting with SLS, and **95.8%** agreed or strongly agreed they knew the first "next step" to take. Illustrative comments included:

- The SLS advice helped me decide the most effective appropriate action to protect the safety of me and my loved ones.
- My consultation was very eye opening, and I was definitely offered many more options than what I thought I had.
- Mark was incredibly knowledgeable. I felt like I had a more "niche" case, and he was able to answer all my questions and provide me with a good framework as how to proceed.
- I was definitely given all the pros and cons of pursuing legal actions, with non-legal methods ultimately being the best option. I was thankful I was able to learn about all these options and compare them, to be able to choose the best option.
- I was able to identify how my landlord was taking advantage of us in the situation, what our options were legally, what we could negotiate, what next steps we could take, and all the ways we were protected by existing laws.
- I was aware of all the possible outcomes and how likely (or unlikely) they were, whereas before I had no idea what were all the possible things that could happen/the likelihood they would happen.
- SLS narrowed things down to 2-3 potential outcomes, and helped me create next steps for each situation.



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.

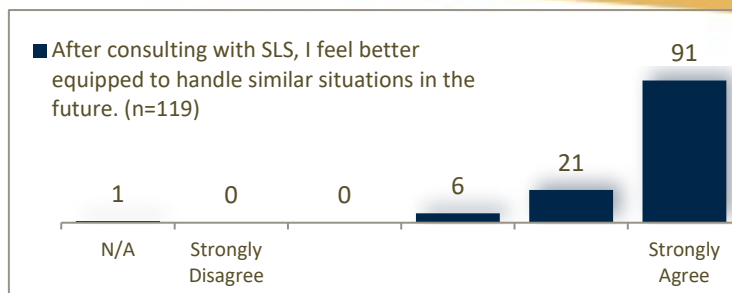
SLS helps students work through unfamiliar issues or bureaucracies. **91.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that SLS helped them navigate an issue or institution they might not have otherwise known how to navigate:

- Mark thoroughly explained the legal options available, but also gave his input on this situation as a whole, owing to all his experience with Berkeley landlords and renting. It was very useful and so we understood what we could expect if we didn't pursue a legal avenue.
- After talking to SLS we knew what to do, how to understand our rights, everything changed. It was so helpful.
- Basically SLS is the only reason I was able to competently navigate a security deposit claim against my landlord through the city of Berkeley Rent Board. I am now well versed in the rights and responsibilities of renters.
- I confidently knew how to proceed with my housing situation after my meeting with SLS. Being aware of my rights made the subsequent conversations with my landlord a lot easier.
- Thanks to the help of SLS, we were able to move out of a rat and bug infested house and pursue a claim against the landlord. SLS told us how to do it, and now we are doing it.
- SLS gave me many resources to read to better equip myself with the necessary knowledge I need to understand the whole rental process and rights/protections I have as a renter. In addition, I was made aware of how contracts work and what legal actions I can take in the future should issues arise regarding breaches of contract.

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. **94.1%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that their work with SLS helped prepare them for similar future situations:

- I learned how important it is to carefully read contracts.
- I feel a lot more confident with the similar situations in the future, I would know what are my rights and what should I do to avoid a bunch of troubles.
- I understand that I have many rights as a tenant, and there are a lot of places to go in case I need to advocate and exercise them.
- Receiving reassurance and support from SLS was amazing. I have recommended SLS to friends who share concerns or their legal situations with me, and have also shared what I learned from SLS with others in my situation.
- The first time with SLS prepared me to be even better at asking for help again. I've pointed other students to SLS facing a range of legal issues, and shared CA housing rights documents to help students facing similar situations.
- I now know not to panic and get overwhelmed, and I know the steps I can take to solve a similar issue, or even not have the issue come up again in the first place.
- I know how to look up my rights, and have also been able to help and guide others who were in similar situations.



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 success by helping students focus on school priorities, and limiting the potential distraction created by legal matters. **95.7%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that the legal issue they brought to SLS **was causing them stress**, **82.4%** agreed or strongly agreed that it was **distracting them from their studies**, and **12.5%** agreed or strongly agreed that **without legal help they would have considered leaving school**.

Of those students who agreed with the first statement above, **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 important, since students from underrepresented ethnic minority groups and lower-income families consult with SLS in **much higher numbers** than their representation in the overall student population, and **88.2%** of all respondents said that if not for SLS, they would have no access to legal counseling.

In addition, among all SLS clients in 2021-22, **4.4%** were in severe financial distress, **5.4%** were dealing with housing insecurity or significant habitability problems, and **3.0%** were at risk of potential violence and/or targets of harm.

Student comments describe the many ways SLS offers this support:

- I was under tremendous stress and unable to complete my school work due to anxiety. Talking with SLS and knowing what I could do gave me so much relief that I could resume normal life and focus on my work again.
- Talking with Mark really helped to ease the panic I was feeling when I faced eviction. I was unaware of my legal rights but Mark gave me the confidence to not only better understand them, but to exercise them as well.

- I took the advice from the SLS in my case, and things are turning out great; my life is gradually going to the positive side.
- I was dedicating a significant amount of time and energy trying to figure out if I could be kicked out of my home. Knowing that I legally had the right to remain allowed me to stress less and focus on my studies.
- I was so stressed out with this apartment situation, that I did almost no work for the first week of school. Meeting with SLS not only reduced the stress, but helped navigate us towards a solution quickly.
- Yes, oh my goodness. I had the most disruptive summer because of a landlord who refused to fix our persistently clogged shower and extremely ancient plumbing. My housemates were afraid of losing the security deposit, but with Mark, I was able to re-focus my attention to my summer internship.
- I felt like I was getting buried in paperwork and I was spending more time on sorting out my legal case than on school. I felt incredibly behind but with clear steps outlined for me, I was able to sort out how to proceed in a more efficient manner.
- Once the housing issue was behind me (after Mark had told me about my rights), I could go back and pursue my studies in peace without having to worry about living for the next year with a terrible landlord.
- Just knowing that I had done the right things, and that I was protected and that I could pursue legal action took HEAPS of stress off my plate. If I had not been able to resolve it, I was planning to defer for a semester.
- Before talking to the SLS, I had the worst days and had been crying and drinking for days. I did not attend school for a week and missed all my assignments. Then I talked with my therapist and then the SLS, the situation was a lot better. I made up all of my assignments and presentations.
- Before the SLS consultation, I was very overwhelmed and unable to focus with the uncertainty of the future, but afterwards I felt more confident in the next steps I had to take which cleared my head.
- Mark provided us with great information and advice, which was not only important to the issue, but really, really, reduced the stress we were facing. It helped us focus back on school.

Student financial support and recovery

SLS also helps students financially: 33.9% of respondents recovered money that they would not have otherwise collected without help from SLS. Of the students who specified funds actually recovered or saved with SLS assistance (several matters were still pending), **the amounts ranged from \$250 to \$14,000, and averaged \$3,310.**

Student satisfaction with service and sense of connection with the University

Client satisfaction levels with SLS are very high. **100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “SLS is a worthwhile/beneficial service” (with **97.3% strongly agreeing**), and **100%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend SLS to other students in need of assistance (with **98.2% strongly agreeing**).

75.7% of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they feel more connected to the University.** Another **93.7%** agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they are more aware of resources available at the University.** Overall, **100%** were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (90.9% being very satisfied). Comments included:

- Mark Lucia is incredibly competent. He has a comprehensive understanding of how legal and non-legal systems work in tandem and is a quick brilliant thinker. I've consulted with him on multiple issues across a range of topics, and I've greatly appreciated his help.
- Honestly, having someone actually on my side was as helpful as any of the legal advice.
- Every aspect of my interactions with SLS were defined by professionalism, respect, courtesy, and caring. I honestly can't sing Mark's praises enough.
- SLS was helpful, thoughtful, considerate, and I could feel his commitment to help me and devote time to my call.
- Mark is warm, helpful, fast, efficient, and made me feel not alone in my struggles.
- SLS was just really helpful, responsive, kind, and knowledgeable all around. I also really appreciated that Mark had been with SLS for 15+ years, so he really understood the students and the environment.
- Mark was fantastic. He was incredibly knowledgeable during our meeting, listened intently to my story and concerns, and spent extra time on the phone with me past the appointment to answer all my questions.

- The consultation was very professional and reassuring, and made me feel very safe and comfortable with the options.
- Mark was a great consultant and overall great representative of the SLS. No question went unanswered and it was better than expected.
- Mark is a good lawyer for students. He listens patiently and offers good counsel.
- SLS was SO good. He listened, but also directed the conversation to get the information to be able to help without interrupting or being rude. He was super friendly, never felt like I was a bother, he seemed as though he really cared and wanted to help.
- Mark = Good
- Very helpful and supportive – SLS understood that this was a particularly emotionally challenging case and helped.
- I did not feel judged. It was quite the opposite, I did not feel as isolated from the university due to my record. The SLS provided me with the reassurance and support I needed at the time. There was also great and timely follow up.
- Responsive, provided detail about my situation, helped us know facts to think through options and turn a situation with a lot of uncertainty into a series of steps, rather than an overwhelming mess.
- I felt very comfortable asking all of my questions, since Mr. Lucia was very patient in thoroughly answering all of them. He goes above and beyond to think of additional resources that may be pertinent to your situation as well!
- SLS were very kind and informative. There was a lot of gray area in my case, but SLS helped me figure out the next best move.
- I would like to thank SLS for the support, resources, information, knowledge, and reassurance that was offered during our appointment. I felt and still am extremely grateful, as it left me feeling like everything would work out and be okay since I had a clear sense of direction on what the next steps I needed to take.

Areas for improvement

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

- SLS representation and appearances in court on behalf of students.
- More appointment times, and potentially longer appointments.
- Multiple attorneys with specialized areas of expertise.

To help support some of these areas of suggested improvement, SLS received a grant from the Chancellor's Committee on Student Services and Fees in 2021-22, which has funded a 2nd attorney in the office at 0.80 FTE from March 2022 through August 2023. We hope to secure permanent funding for the 2nd attorney at 1.00 FTE after that.