

Student Legal Services

2022-23 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, 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 **1,699 client consultations in 2022-23** (up 11.3% from 1,527 in 2021-22) to help students resolve legal issues and to foster the student learning outcomes described below.

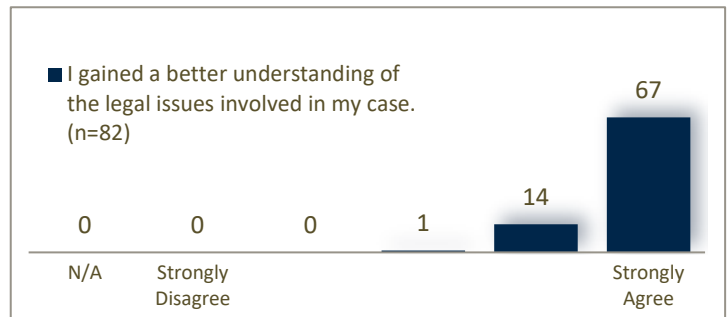
SLS conducted two client surveys (Dec. 2022 and May 2023) to assess four learning outcomes and satisfaction with the service. The survey went to 501 SLS clients with a valid email address on file.¹ The response rate was 16.4%.

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 (**98.8%**) 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:

- I didn't know how to proceed with the court system. SLS listened to my case, gave me immediate options for moving forward, and also sent more detailed information and a recap of everything we talked about.
- I understand the responsibilities of the renter and of the landlord better now.
- We fully learned about all the laws that our landlord had broken, which was extremely helpful for the next steps.
- I knew my legal rights afterward, and was able to negotiate with the landlord.
- I gained a better understanding of the family court system, and received a lot of resources to help me navigate my legal issue.
- SLS made everything a lot clearer and easier to understand.
- I learned that I could make a demand on the other party. I didn't know I had agency in the situation.
- When I talked to SLS, I learned so much about what tenant rights I had, which I had no clue about and this helped me significantly to deal with the issue.
- Working with SLS was a fast and easy option for understanding our situation and options.
- I went in to the case knowing the basic legal framework and how to write a demand letter, but had a lot more confidence with SLS's advice and confirmation about steps to take.

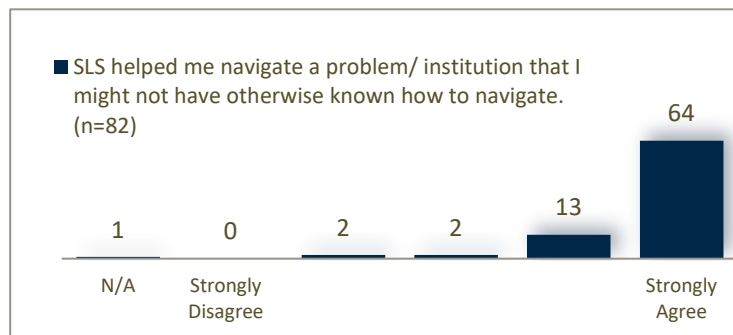
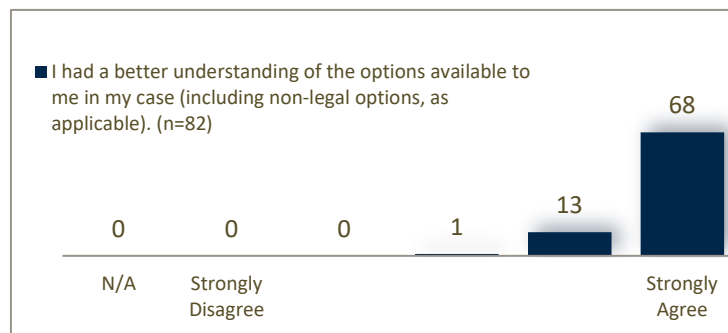


¹ To preserve attorney-client privilege and protect the confidentiality of SLS clients, the survey was administered solely by the Director of SLS, Mark Lucia, through a private account. All survey results are aggregated and presented without link to any identifying information of respondents. Survey 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. 98.8% of clients agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their options after consulting with SLS, and 95.1% agreed or strongly agreed they knew the first "next step" to take. Illustrative comments included:

- SLS was incredibly clear and concise in laying out potential options and a plan for next steps. This was the most helpful part!!
- SLS was extremely kind and described a number of potential solutions to my problem in ways that were easy for people not familiar with the law to understand.
- I had a better understanding of my options, what each would actually entail, as well as potential outcomes.
- I wasn't sure I had any options, but after consulting with SLS I learned that I actually had a couple of ways to resolve my problem. They went over both options in detail, so I knew what to do next (and which approach to try first). It was so helpful.
- Our SLS advisor explained tenant rights and processes related to our case in VERY CLEAR detail and made sure we understood our best course of action. We are very grateful!!
- I was able to understand how to better negotiate financial deals from an auto accident, the possible legal repercussions, and how to leverage my options.
- I knew that I did not have to accept the decision by my landlord because it wasn't legal, and that I could negotiate for what I needed.



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.

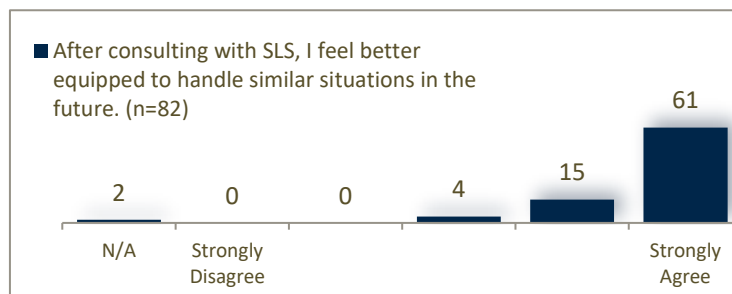
SLS helps students work through unfamiliar issues or bureaucracies. 93.9% agreed or strongly agreed that SLS helped them navigate an issue or institution they might not have otherwise known how to navigate:

- It was easy to get an appointment, and SLS was knowledgeable of the issue and gave good advice and made me feel equipped to handle my issue.
- Through my guided correspondence I obtained the return of my deposit and back-owed rent.
- I felt informed of my rights in a way that I didn't before; while I had been researching on my own, SLS still provided much more than what I previously knew.
- With SLS guidance, we could organize the other house tenants and together drafted a letter for our landlord.
- I appreciate the number of resources provided by SLS that I will use a number of times throughout my case.
- I gained confidence in the process for personal injury and property insurance settlements.
- Renters have more power than I thought against the landlord.
- I gained a thorough understanding of how my marital status was or was not relevant to my legal relationship to my child and partner, and what to consider to protect our family in the case of unforeseen circumstances.
- I was able to negotiate with my landlord, knowing what my rights were and that what the landlord had told me before was incorrect/illegal.
- I didn't know what to do, and after working with SLS I successfully won my full demand after getting hit by a car.

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. **92.7%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that their work with SLS helped prepare them for similar future situations:

- I feel I know where to look for solutions and how to be more detailed oriented when dealing with rent leases.
- I now know that I can advocate for myself against a landlord when I was hesitant to before out of fear of negative consequences. I also know what those consequences might be and how to tell if a landlord is making empty threats.
- If it happened again, I'd know what to say to my landlord, and I think I would even know just how to say it. :-)
- I am much better equipped to handle disputes with landlords in the future.
- I'm now aware of relevant City of Berkeley resources and policies.
- I know what steps to take in the case that I have any issue with the habitability standards of a rental apartment.
- I have literally handled the same situation twice after the initial case.
- I now confront my landlord where they're abusing their power.



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. **98.8%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that the legal issue they brought to SLS **was causing them stress**, **89.0%** agreed or strongly agreed that it was **distracting them from their studies**, and **19.5%** agreed or strongly agreed that **without legal help they would have considered leaving school**.

Of those students who agreed with the first statement above, **96.9%** 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 **87.3%** of all respondents said that if not for SLS, they would have no access to legal counseling.

In addition, among all SLS clients in 2022-23, **3.8%** were encountering severe financial distress, **9.2%** were dealing with housing insecurity or significant habitability problems, and **3.5%** were at risk of potential violence and/or targets of harm.

Student comments describe the many ways SLS offers this support:

- I had been preoccupied with dealing with my landlord situation and was even considering leaving my apartment which would have made it very difficult to stay up to date with classes while I was houseless.
- The issue took up a large part of my life, and it definitely affected my education, so once I got more assistance, I felt that I could handle the situation much better.

- **Amazing** help, really felt like I had an advocate and someone I could go to. Understood resources available to me both at Berkeley and in my city.
- Before the consulting, I couldn't focus on my studies, and I spent most of the time looking for legal documents and it was really stressful.
- I was able to obtain and retain secure housing which I was at risk of losing which would have made studies extremely difficult.
- This relieved significant stress by giving me clear next steps and saving me many hours of work that would have been taken away from my studies.
- Taking the steps SLS advised help me deal with the issue and resulted in my financial stresses being alleviated.
- Hearing SLS expertise on resources and similar situations reassured me that I would be ok.
- SLS gave me clear direction and gave me security in my spinning mind on the events (a rent hike and a battery case) that I was wronged by someone and what my options are. Having a clear plan let me take action and stop thinking about it.
- Easy and quick to make an appointment – I really appreciated that because of my stress level.

Student financial support and recovery

SLS also helps students financially: 27.2% 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 \$775 to \$20,000, and averaged \$3,107.**

Student satisfaction with service and sense of connection with the University

Client satisfaction levels with SLS are very high. **98.7%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “SLS is a worthwhile/beneficial service” (with **92.5% strongly agreeing**), and **98.7%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend SLS to other students in need of assistance (with **95.0% strongly agreeing**).

88.0% of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they feel more connected to the University**. Another **95.1%** agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they are more aware of resources available at the University**. Overall, **95.0%** were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (**91.3%** being very satisfied). Comments included:

- SLS is an incredible resource that I am grateful to have access to.
- SLS was very quick to respond and eager to help - very thorough in their advice and details, and made the situation clear.
- I felt very validated in my struggles and like someone was on my side, especially since my landlord was trying to isolate me and my issue and make it seem like my household was being unreasonable.
- I was worried about the case and I felt like I was being hardballed into hiring a (very expensive) hardcore lawyer that SLS reassured me I didn't need- they were right! I really value SLS's experience with students and the local laws and procedures in Alameda County :-)
- My whole experience on the personal and professional level with SLS was everything I could have hoped for.
- It was just an incredibly supportive and helpful experience. I learned so much and felt so empowered!
- It was really reassuring that we had someone to help us with understanding what we had to do.
- SLS provided me with exactly the information I needed in a friendly, understandable manner. I also appreciate that I did not have to wait long for an appointment.
- Extremely informative, passionate, caring and respectful. Absolutely amazing, one of the best resources for students.
- SLS was very responsive and we were able to communicate in a timely manner. He handled the matter professionally and encouraged us to advocate for ourselves and educated us about our rights as renters.

- I really appreciated how SLS was very respectful and gave me space to explain my situation. It made me feel comfortable and safe to tell my story without facing any judgment, especially since I was already in significant emotional distress. After patiently listening to me speak, they repeated my comments to ensure that they understood me correctly, acknowledged how the situation was very stressful for me, and offered the advice on how to move forward with various campus resources.
- Honestly, my experience with SLS was so effortless and seamless that I have no suggestions: my issue was handled promptly over email, without the need for a meeting, and the interaction/advice I received was very sensitive and professional. I am so glad that, unlike many other offices in the university, SLS operates this way.
- Students (especially student employees) are sometimes seen as "easy targets" since we are viewed as naive, unlikely to pursue a legal case, and unaware of our rights. SLS does a fantastic job overcoming this.
- They were frank, clear, intelligent, to the point, knowledgeable, and even shared their guesses & feelings about my odds of getting an appeal. It was so, so helpful to be able to get this from an expert.
- They felt in my corner.
- SLS is really an amazing service - given how little we earn and the cost of living in the bay I would never have had access to legal services otherwise and as an international student have very limited understanding of how the laws work here. The appointments are easy to get and the process and conversation very streamlined. It's very user friendly. Knowing that I have this available to me in the future is truly very comforting and significant.
- Amazing service, super grateful to have it.
- Thank you so much, I can't say enough how much this helped me and relieved stress last semester.
- SLS is a huge asset to the university and the reputation of the university to its students.

Areas for improvement

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

- Greater outreach to build awareness of SLS services.
- Consider the expansion of SLS services, such as representation and appearances in court on behalf of students and adding attorneys with specialized 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 June 2023. **A second grant has enabled us to extend this 2nd attorney to July 2024, at 1.00 FTE.**