

Student Legal Services

2023-24 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 **2,043 client consultations in 2023-24** (up 20.5% from 1,699 in 2022-23) to help students resolve legal issues and to foster the student learning outcomes described below.

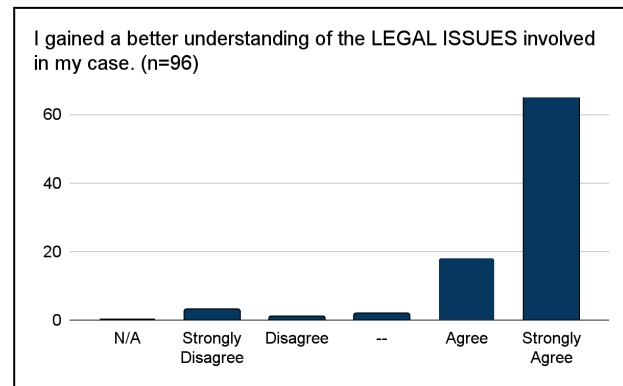
SLS conducted two client surveys (Dec. 2023 and May 2024) to assess four learning outcomes and satisfaction with the service. The survey went to 658 SLS clients with a valid email address on file.¹ The response rate was 14.6%.

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 (**93.8%**) 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:

- SLS saved me from an exploitative landlord situation. I didn’t know any of the Berkeley housing laws, and SLS provided excellent legal advice that enabled me to get out of my lease.
- I learned about the Berkeley Rent Board and the process of filing a petition.
- I realized I have rights! Crazy really.
- I learned about my rights as a tenant in a rent-controlled house.
- I understood the exact civil codes I could cite to help my case.
- I was able to clear up any misunderstanding that I had prior to moving forward with anything regarding my case.
- I understood Berkeley renter's rights and how to break a lease really well.
- I'm an exchange student, so I had no idea what would be the best way forward with my landlord. I received excellent help and couldn't be more grateful. I felt like SLS went above and beyond with its help and advice.
- SLS explained how personal injury cases work in a very easy to understand manner.
- On two occasions, SLS helped me understand the legal landscape, options, and find additional resources for personal injury and rent board questions.
- I had a clearer understanding of my rights. I also felt more capable of writing new letters to my landlords using the language that SLS helped me draft.
- SLS was SO helpful in explaining the legal issues surrounding my case. I learned a lot about renter protections and the process of going to small claims court.

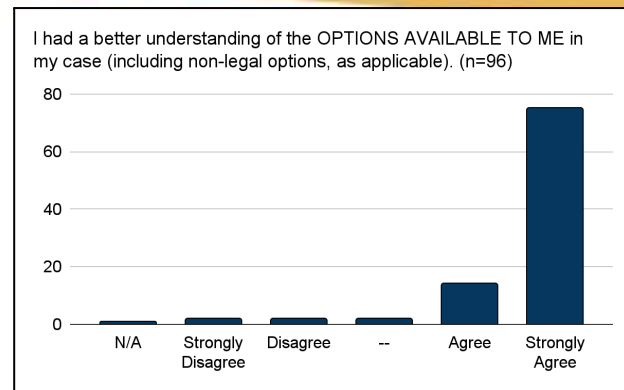


¹ To preserve attorney-client privilege and protect the confidentiality of SLS clients, the survey was administered solely by the Director of SLS, Mark Lucia, through a private account. All survey results are aggregated and presented without link to any identifying information of respondents. Survey 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.

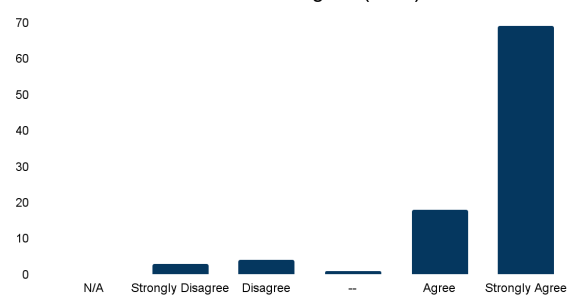
Learning Outcome #2: Students will identify and understand the legal options related to their cases, and the relative merits of those options.

SLS does not represent students, so it's key that they know the next step(s) to address their legal issues. **92.7%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their options after consulting with SLS, and **91.7%** agreed or strongly agreed they knew the first "next step" to take. Illustrative comments included:

- I learned that I had more than one way to solve my legal issue, when I wasn't sure whether I would have any.
- I learned about at least three different ways I could take in dealing with the issue, and the expected process and consequences for each. It helped me weigh the costs and decide what I wanted to do.
- SLS clearly laid out my legal opinions, many of which I did not know of beforehand.
- The attorney helped me understand what I was getting into with every choice I was offered.
- SLS was very thorough, informative, clear, and communicative. I learned a lot and got many useful resources.
- I felt more confident about the level of risk for each of my choices.
- I wasn't sure about what options I had regarding my situation, and SLS helped me understand that there were several I hadn't known about which was super helpful. I got a very long email summarizing and detailing these options which was sooooo amazing.
- I understood that I had more legal options around my case than I thought. I relayed these options to the other party involved, and worked with them to a fast resolution.
- SLS gave me multiple options I could pursue that I didn't know even existed, such as filing with the small claims court or the Berkeley rent board. They were super helpful in directing me to resources for each option and the pros and cons of each.
- My awareness of available options was dramatically improved and enabled me to pursue appropriate next steps.



SLS helped me navigate a problem/ institution that I might not have otherwise known how to navigate. (n=95)



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.

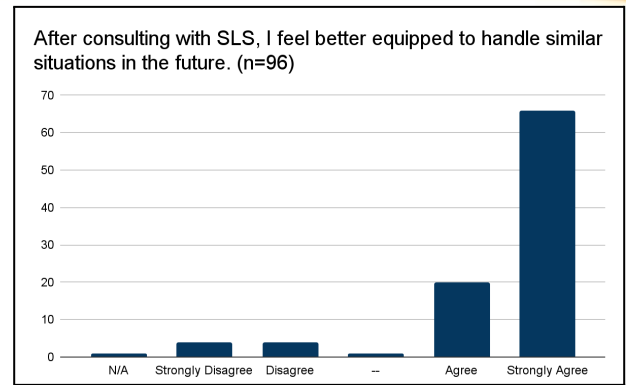
SLS helps students work through unfamiliar issues or bureaucracies. **91.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that SLS helped them navigate an issue or institution they might not have otherwise known how to navigate:

- There was a lot of confusing paperwork and SLS helped me work through it.
- I now know that the Berkeley Rent Board is super helpful and supportive of tenant issues, and in the future, I will be able to either go to the Rent Board for petitioning options or do more investigation online.
- I now know how to gather evidence and make records about my case.
- I knew exactly what next steps to take to get back my security deposit, and it worked!
- I was able to better understand the way legal processes work, as someone who was involved in a legal case for the first time in life. SLS helped me create a plan and eased some anxieties I had for months.
- We were able to be fully prepared for a Rent Board hearing about habitability issues in our apartment, and the Rent Board ruled in our favor.
- I would not have known what to do at all without SLS.
- SLS made an the difference in feeling like I could push back against my landlord. They informed me of my rights and helped me feel empowered to advocate for myself.

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. **89.6%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that their work with SLS helped prepare them for similar future situations:

- I am now more informed on what I can do, and know my rights if this happens in the future.
- I feel confident that I understand the legalities of my case and can handle similar cases in the future.
- I've advised multiple friends to follow similar steps SLS recommended to me. I feel I have a much stronger understanding of my rights as a tenant in California.
- If this happens again, I know my rights now!
- I am thankful for having gone through this experience as I realize how much support and resources there are for students who are in a similar situation as I was. My roommate has actually recommended SLS to one of our friends who is in a similar situation to what we were in the past.
- After consultations, I learned to be as informed as possible and read things carefully.
- I know my rights and how to handle a similar situation. I learned just how important it is to keep records and ask for agreements in writing.



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. **95.8%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that the legal issue they brought to SLS **was causing them stress**, **88.5%** agreed or strongly agreed that it was **distracting them from their studies**, and **24.5%** agreed or strongly agreed that **without legal help they would have considered leaving school**.

Of those students who agreed with the first statement above, **84.9%** 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 **91.7%** of all respondents said that if not for SLS, they would have no access to legal counseling.

In addition, among all SLS clients in 2023-24, **4.2%** were encountering severe financial distress, **9.1%** were dealing with housing insecurity or significant habitability problems, and **1.9%** were at risk of potential violence and/or targets of harm.

Student comments describe the many ways SLS offers this support:

- SLS helped eliminate a huge distraction and worry from my life. I am so appreciative.
- I was less stressed about my home life and the legal ramifications of my situation and was able to devote more energy to my studies.

- Working with SLS helped me secure my housing so that I could literally continue on in the semester. It was such an incredible help and relief.
- I wouldn't have been able to get out of a poor living situation without SLS, which was extremely helpful and available to me when I had follow up questions. I appreciate what y'all do!
- We realized we could do something about our problem, and getting basic problems fixed at our apartment was critical to us being able to study/read/focus - and also just to feel safe and at home.
- Prior to coming to SLS, all I could think about during class was my housing situation and how after class I would have to return to a house where I was uncomfortable and disgusted.
- It helped free up more of my attention to focus on school.
- I was in an unsafe living situation in a house that had major code violations and a landlord who was threatening me. Trying to determine the best legal path forward took a lot of my time. Talking to SLS made that process wayyy faster and gave me the confidence to get out of my situation so I could focus on my exams.
- I literally was thinking of leaving the Bay Area cause I was so nervous about my living situation.
- I felt safer in my own living arrangement.
- SLS definitely helped. I was at a point where I was so stressed that I didn't manage much else at the time.
- As a chronically ill disabled person, my housing issues were causing me extreme stress and I was considering dropping out of school to avoid further stress. Learning I had a legal way out of my lease allowed me to move and find a more supportive housing situation and lowered my stress tremendously.
- I could focus on classes and not worry about legal issues.
- I did eventually take an Incomplete in a course because the general added stress of a legal case was overwhelming. However, I did successfully complete another course after meeting with SLS, because I was more at ease. Without this service, I may have considered withdrawing or ended up on academic probation.

Student financial support and recovery

SLS also helps students financially: 30.2% 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 \$100 to \$13,300, and averaged \$3,226**.

Student satisfaction with service and sense of connection with the University

Client satisfaction levels with SLS are very high. **95.7%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "SLS is a worthwhile/beneficial service" (with **93.6% strongly agreeing**), and **96.8%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend SLS to other students in need of assistance (with **91.5% strongly agreeing**).

78.2% of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they feel more connected to the University**. Another **79.0%** agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they are more aware of resources available at the University**. Overall, **91.8%** were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (**89.0%** being very satisfied). Comments included:

- SLS was really empathetic, professional and well prepared.
- It was beyond my expectations. Thank you for the service.
- They spoke with words that we understood, and made space for us to ask questions about anything we did not understand.
- Very kind and helpful. Gave me all the information I was seeking and helped me step by step through my issue.
- It was extremely useful to talk to someone about it. Also, since I come from a low income family, it would have been difficult for me to afford legal advice elsewhere.
- I appreciate how direct the SLS was. I was able to quickly determine that I didn't have much legal ground in my case, my main point of contention. My point of contact was empathetic and knowledgeable.
- Getting help from SLS just relieved so much pressure in our lives, it was amazing. We are super grateful!
- Routine and regular availability of SLS staff is incredible.
- Breadth of information and care taken to research for and inform students of options on short notice is remarkable

- I genuinely felt heard and cared for when speaking with both lawyers at SLS.
- SLS was super responsive and gave detailed answers, was super empathetic. Without SLS, we would have never pursued a legal claim and would not have gotten any money back.
- Absolutely amazing, no notes, phenomenal, thank you! I literally wouldn't have known where to start or what to do without you and got a serious paycheck out of a bad situation that I otherwise wouldn't have!
- I was able to schedule an appointment quickly.
- It was so easy to make an appointment and the lawyer was incredibly kind. I had no idea it could be such a helpful resource for my situation, and was so grateful. Thank you!
- It was super easy to make an appointment and talking with SLS was so helpful and supportive. My problem got solved and it relieved a lot of stress for me.
- SLS was incredibly helpful and went above and beyond to explain my options to me and provide me with relevant resources.
- They were very fast to respond and very kind.
- I am really thankful that I was able to receive the help from SLS because my case was causing me personal and academic stress.
- I appreciate this service so much and would recommend it to any student needing legal counsel.
- Once again, IT WAS AMAZING. I have nothing but wonderful things to say about my experience with SLS. THANK YOU!
- SLS is a great service and I have been recommending it to other people to use it!
- Thank you for your help! I am so grateful SLS is here!
- VERY grateful for SLS!!!!

Suggestions and Areas for improvement

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

- Expand SLS to include representation and appearances in court on behalf of students.
- Offer support on a broader set of legal issues, by adding attorneys with specialized expertise.
- Increase publicity and outreach about SLS services.