

STUDENT SECTION COMMITTEE LAW STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

PREPARED BY:
MEGHANN P. GALLOWAY, LAW LIASON

Abstract

In order to collect data on issues surrounding legal education among current AP-LS members, the Student Section Committee developed and distributed a survey asking AP-LS members about their experiences with legal education. Of the 294 individuals who completed the survey, the majority reported never having received formal legal training in a law school setting, although those who did endorse receiving this type of training generally regarded it as helpful. A significant majority of respondents reported primarily focusing on psychology versus law, and a sizable minority reported either currently practicing or planning to practice principally in an academic setting. Many respondents articulated a desire for increased opportunities to network with lawyers and dual-degree professionals, and for AP-LS to facilitate more legal education opportunities. The Student Section Committee hopes the results of this survey will prompt conversation among members of AP-LS about issues related to legal training.

Introduction

AP-LS is by definition a society dedicated to the intersection between law and psychology. It is therefore a unique interdisciplinary division of the APA in the sense that it is populated by a combination of law students and professionals, psychology students and professionals, and members who may consider themselves a little bit of each. For students entering the AP-LS community and embarking on careers in forensic psychology, it is important to have an accurate picture of how to make the most out of incorporating legal education into graduate training. Current professional members of AP-LS may also have a need to know the state of legal training within the organization. It was for these reasons that the Student Section Committee undertook to develop a legal training survey that was distributed to the AP-LS membership.

Method

In order to collect data on this topic, we distributed an online survey to AP-LS members via multiple avenues. The survey was distributed to both the general and student-specific AP-LS electronic mailing lists. Combined, these lists reach approximately 3,000 people. A link to the survey was also posted on the Student Section Committee Facebook page. Survey questions included items inquiring about legal education, satisfaction with the decision to pursue such education, and one's established or intended career trajectory.

Results

Respondents ($N = 294$) included approximately equal numbers of AP-LS student section members ($n = 161$) and non-student members ($n = 133$). Out of these respondents, 72% reported no receipt of legal training in a law school. "Legal training" was defined as both part-time and full-time law school classes. Those participants who did report receiving legal training consisted almost equally of part-time ($n = 39$) and full-time law students ($n = 40$). The types of programs through which students most often received legal training were JD programs ($n = 22$) and PhD programs ($n = 21$).

Generally, individuals who reported receiving legal training provided responses indicative of academic success. For example, a large portion of respondents who attended a JD conferring program (42%) have been on law review at some point. Additionally, participants reported graduating in as high as the top 1% of their law class. Despite the high academic performance often reported by these individuals, there was wide variability in perceptions of how impactful law school grades were on future career goals (see Figure 1). There was more agreement regarding the helpfulness of taking a bar exam, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Generally, respondents were more likely than not to endorse taking the bar as helpful to their careers. Respondents also regarded their legal training to have been helpful overall (see Figure 3).

After graduating law school, 92% of individuals who reported graduating from JD conferring programs had either already taken a bar exam or plan to take it in the future. Among those who had taken a bar exam, most report that it significantly impacted their career. Among all participants, the most commonly reported career setting was academia (42%, $n = 97$), followed by employment in a correctional setting (14%, $n = 32$) and in a government and/or policy setting (11%, $n = 25$). No respondents reported currently working or planning to work in a corporate setting. Taken in light of these reports, it is understandable that 47.4% of all participants ($n = 109$) agree research will be extremely relevant to their future career, and 0% ($n = 0$) said research would be of no relevance to their future.

When asked to approximate the proportion of their work dedicated to law versus psychology, the largest percentage of respondents (24%) reported spending 90% of their time dedicated to psychology (and 10% to law). This was followed by 80% (21%), 100% (21% of respondents), and then 70% (17% of respondents) of work being devoted to psychology. No respondents identified their legal work as taking up 100% of their time, and only 5% reported evenly distributing their time between law and psychology.

Perhaps the most important findings of the survey pertained to respondents' beliefs about desirable future directions for legal training in AP-LS. Several respondents expressed a general concern that AP-LS is lacking in terms of both legal scholarship

and practice, and respondents generally reported a desire for increased exposure to both legal topics and legally trained professionals. Specifically, 43% ($n = 67$) expressed a desire to see more law-specific programming at the annual conference. Another 54% stated they would like to see more networking and mentoring opportunities offered with dual-degree professionals. Other write-in suggestions for ways in which AP-LS could better serve members with legal interests included increasing the profile of AP-LS within the legal community by facilitating more networking events with members of that community; providing seminars about how to better present research findings to legal professionals; and furnishing special training for law students on mental health issues.

Discussion

The primary goal of this survey was to collect data about issues related to legal training among members of the AP-LS community. Results indicated members with formal legal education are in the minority. The strict definition for legal training used in this survey was not meant to imply that legal content is only properly taught or learned in a law school, although it is arguably the setting best suited to such purposes. Many respondents' expressed a desire for an increase in legal training and networking opportunities, which the organization may wish to take into consideration moving forward. Increased recruitment efforts of legal professionals to facilitate increased legal programming offerings at the annual conference may additionally be a worthwhile next step.

Figure 1

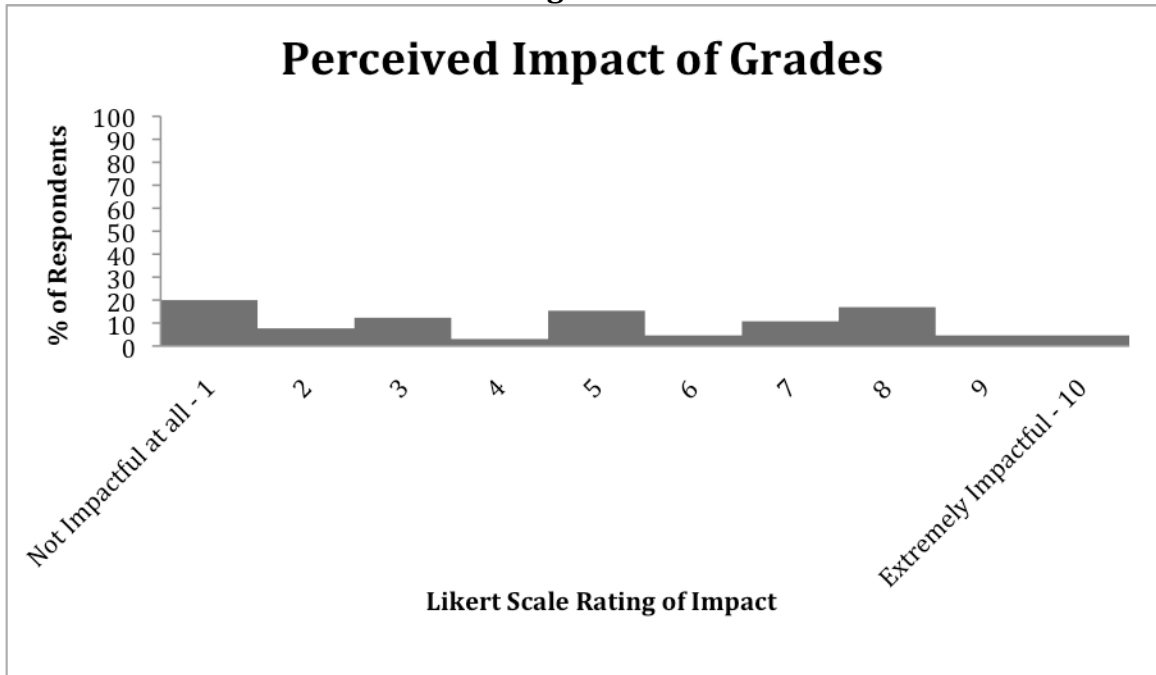


Figure 2

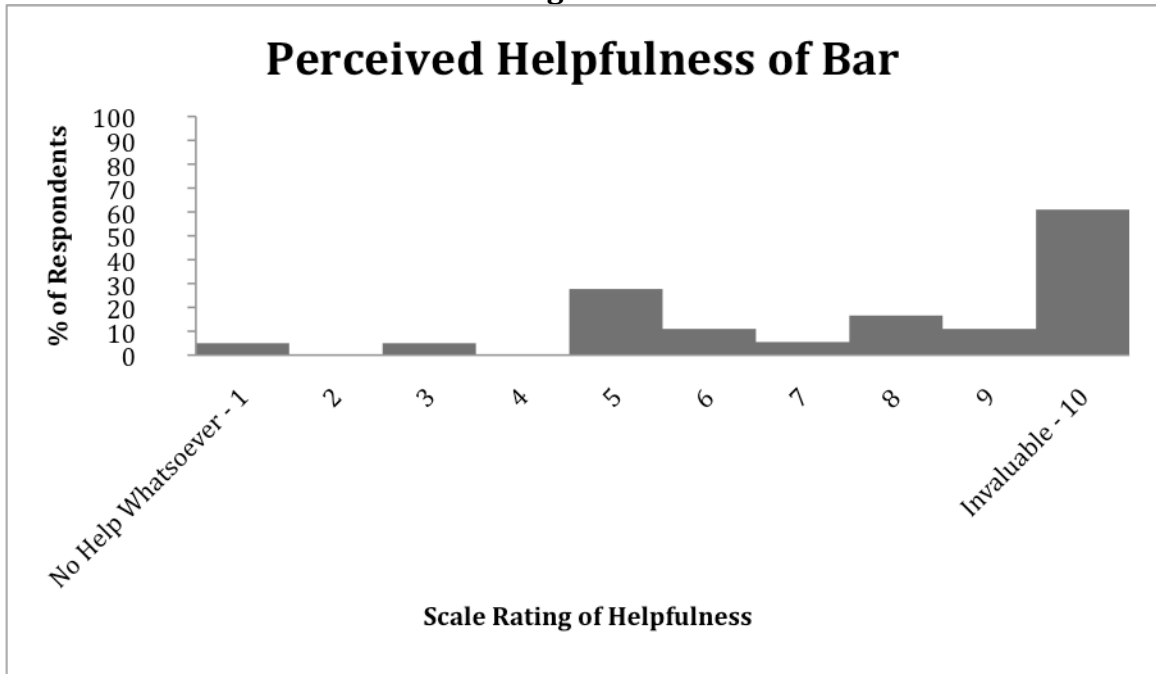


Figure 3

