

# LAW TEACHING ON TRIAL: THE EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR CANTERBURY LAW STUDENTS

LYNNE TAYLOR, URSULA CHEER, NATALIE BAIRD, JOHN CALDWELL,  
DEBRA WILSON\*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper reports the results of two online surveys focusing on the expectations and experiences of students enrolled in first year law papers offered in 2014 by the School of Law at the University of Canterbury. The results from these surveys make up the first phase in a planned longitudinal study of the participating students. A survey of School of Law teaching staff was also carried out. Students participating in the study shared many common characteristics and, for the most part, reported high levels of engagement in, and satisfaction with, their law school experience. There was a high degree of correlation between the responses of students and academic staff to questions directed at students' teaching and learning experiences. Most students reported overall levels of mental wellness either consistent with or better than the general population over the entirety of their first year of study. There were few significant gendered differences in students' responses. Although the findings of this phase of the project are prima facie positive, further work needs to be done to determine the make-up of the small minority who reported a different and more negative experience.*

\* The team of authors are all members of the Socio-Legal Research Group at the School of Law, University of Canterbury. Ursula Cheer is Professor and Dean of Law, Lynne Taylor and John Caldwell are Associate Professors of Law, and Natalie Baird and Debra Wilson are Senior Lecturers in Law.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the first, baseline, collection of data in a planned longitudinal study of law students at the University of Canterbury.<sup>1</sup> The findings in this paper are a subset of those in a wider study focusing on the experiences and expectations of students at the Universities of Auckland, Canterbury and Waikato.<sup>2</sup>

The expectations and experiences of New Zealand law students have been little studied and we hope that this study may help inform and improve the teaching practices of law teachers and, in turn, enhance law students' learning and law school experiences at the University of Canterbury and elsewhere. It is intended that, over time, a complete University of Canterbury law student profile will be developed which will detail the expectations, views and experiences of law students during each year of their law studies and in their first years in the workforce.

In this first phase of the study, two online surveys of the cohort of first year students enrolled in first year law papers at the University of Canterbury in 2014 were undertaken, the first survey taking place at the beginning of the academic year, the second towards the end. An extensive range of data was collected from core demographic information through to relationships with teaching staff and other students, family background, future intentions and general well-being. Results were analysed across the total survey cohort and by gender. An online survey of Law School academic staff was also undertaken. The methodology employed is detailed in Part II of the paper. Results and accompanying commentary is set out in Part III.

A key, but not unexpected, finding was that the first law students in the total study cohort shared many common characteristics. A further finding, likely influenced by these shared common characteristics, was that there was a high degree of consistency in students' overall responses. For the most part, students generally reported high levels of engagement in, and satisfaction with, their law school experience. There was a high degree of correlation between the responses of students and academic staff to questions directed at students' teaching and learning experience. A further finding, again consistent with the foregoing, was that most students reported overall levels of mental wellness either consistent with or better than the general population over the entirety of their first year of study – a finding that is out of line with overseas trends. A final and unexpected finding was that the analysis of students' responses showed few significant gendered differences. However, whilst the findings of the study are *prima facie* positive, we also conclude that further work needs

2 See Lynne Taylor, Ursula Cheer, Natalie Baird, John Caldwell, Debra Wilson "The Making of Lawyers: Expectations and Experiences of First Year New Zealand Law Students" (2015) Project Outputs, Southern Hub, Ako Aotearoa, Wellington, 2015 <[www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz](http://www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz)>.

to be done to determine the make-up of the minority who reported a different and more negative experience.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study design is mixed method sequential research involving both quantitative and qualitative strategies. Our approach to data collection is based on an “is/ought model” – surveying is carried out to determine what the current situation is, followed by soliciting views about what should subsist, and analysis of all data collected. The project is broken down into a number of substantive stages.

The first phase, which is the subject of this paper, comprised a number of steps carried out in 2014. Initially, a literature review of empirical studies and analytical commentary on student profiles and/or the development of student profiles was carried out. Second (the heart of the study); an online longitudinal survey of the 2014 first year law cohort was developed. Two surveys were carried out in the first phase of the project. An initial survey was administered over March and April 2014 and included demographic questions covering ethnicity, age, gender, disability, prior experiences, and educational and family background. This was followed by questions investigating the reasons why students chose to study law at the University of Canterbury, their future plans and intentions, and their expectations around the law degree and the study of law. A final set of questions dealt with well-being and confidence at the start of the study year. The second survey was administered at the beginning of the final terms in September 2014 and was adapted to remove the demographic questions and to allow comparison of the students’ actual experience with their initial expectations as captured in the first survey. Questions focused on whether students expected, at this later stage of their first year studies, to continue studying law in 2015, on the skills they had gained, the support they had received and the contact they had had with their law teachers and other students. Questions were also directed at the students’ actual study experiences and feelings of general well-being. One final subset of questions was directed at how the students’ first year experience could have been improved.

An attempt was made to hold focus groups of students around the same time as the second survey, but student response rates were too low to be meaningful and are not included in this report.

The surveys were promoted beforehand to first year classes by academic staff, including the Dean of the Law School. Students were then contacted by email and invited to take part in a 15-minute online survey. Students responding to the first survey were assigned a digital identifier which was only used to contact individuals for the following survey. Staff researchers do not have access to any identifying information and cannot identify any student

responses, to ensure there is no possibility that participation might affect student academic progress. However, if student responses showed a student was at risk in terms of well-being, provision was made for that student to be identified by an independent consultant and offered assistance, if necessary.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Students have the right to withdraw at any stage with no penalty, in which case relevant information is removed from the data if requested, provided this is practically achievable. Only members of the research team and their assistants working on the project have access to the raw data, which is dealt with in confidence and securely stored at the Law School at Canterbury University. The data will be destroyed five years after the project has been completed.

Three hundred and twenty-seven students were invited to complete the first online survey and 184 did so (56 per cent). Of this group of 184 students, 135 completed the second online survey. This group of 135 students represents 41 per cent of the 327 students invited to complete the first online survey and 63 per cent of the group of 184 students who completed the first online survey.

Results were analysed across the total cohort and also by gender. However, the results of the analysis by gender are reported only where they differ significantly from the total cohort. Numbers of minority ethnic groups completing the surveys were too small to make a separate analysis of their results statistically meaningful.

In order to provide a crosscheck of students' responses to questions directed at their teaching and learning experience, an anonymous and online survey of Law School academic staff was conducted over October and November 2014. Twenty-three academic staff were invited to participate in the survey and 10 completed the survey.

### III. RESULTS

#### *A. The characteristics of the survey cohort*

This section sets out the core demographic data supplied by the 184 students who responded to the first online survey. In summary, the students responding to the first survey exhibited a high degree of homogeneity. They were, for the most part, young school leavers enrolled in full time study at their local university with no familial connection to the legal profession.











#### **1. Gender**

More female students completed the first survey than did male students. Of the 181 students who completed this question, 64 per cent were female and 36 per cent were male. The greater numbers of female respondents is consistent with the actual enrolment figures for first year students.

## 2. Ethnicity

As Table 1 illustrates, of the 180 students who responded to a question on ethnicity, 66 per cent (118) identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā. Six per cent (11) identified as Pasifika, just under four per cent (seven) as Korean, just under three per cent (five) as Māori and just over two per cent (four) as Chinese. The ethnic groupings of students responding to the first survey is broadly representative of the total first year cohort, but not of the greater Christchurch population. At the time of the 2013 Census, 86 per cent of the population of greater Christchurch identified as European, 10 per cent as Māori, eight per cent as Asian and three per cent as Pacific peoples.<sup>3</sup> This data suggests that Māori students and Asian students are proportionately under-represented in the study and in the total first year cohort.

Table 1. Survey One: What is your ethnicity?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
NZ European/ Pākehā		65.6%	118
Māori		2.8%	5
Pasifika		6.1%	11
Australian		3.3%	6
European		3.9%	7
Indian		3.3%	6
Chinese		2.2%	4
Korean		3.9%	7
Japanese		0.6%	1
Other		8.3%	15
Total Responses			180

## 3. Age

Students were asked how old they were on 28 February 2014 (the first day of the academic year). Seventy-three per cent of students (132) reported that they were in the 18-20 age category. Thirteen per cent (23) were aged 16-17 and six per cent (11) were aged 21-25. Just five per cent of students (9) were aged 26 or above. Although numbers of students aged 21 or over were small, male students made up proportionately greater numbers of the 21-25 and 26-30 age groups. All of the students in the following age groups were female: 31-35; 36-40; 41-45; 46-50 and 51-55.

3 Statistics New Zealand "2013 Quick Stats About Greater Christchurch" (2014) <[www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz)>.

#### 4. Experiences prior to law school

Students were asked what they were doing in 2013 and were given a range of responses to select from. Students could select more than one option. One hundred and eighty students answered this question. As Table 2 shows, most (67 per cent, 121) reported that they were attending high school, but significant numbers also reported that they were in employment (22 per cent, 39) or engaged in other tertiary study (15 per cent, 27).

Table 2. Survey One: What were you doing last year?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
At High School		67.2%	121
Gap year		7.2%	13
In employment		21.7%	39
Caring for dependants		0.6%	1
Other tertiary study		15.0%	27
Voluntary work		2.2%	4
Beneficiary		0.0%	0
Other, please specify...		3.9%	7
Total Responses			180

#### 5. Place of residence in 2013

When asked where they had mostly lived in 2013, the great majority of the 180 students who answered this question reported that they had lived in the Canterbury region (73 per cent, 131). Ten per cent (18) had lived elsewhere in the South Island and 11 per cent (20) had lived in the North Island. Only 11 students (6 per cent) had lived overseas: two in each of Hong Kong, France and the United Kingdom, and one in each of Malaysia, Australia, Papua New Guinea, China and Taiwan.

#### 6. Nationality

One hundred and seventy-nine students completed the question on residency status and most (160, 90 per cent) were New Zealand citizens.

#### 7. Disability status

One hundred and seventy-eight students responded to the question asking whether they had a disability that affected their ability to study and learn in the law degree. Most (94 per cent, 167) did not. Four students (two per cent) indicated that they did have a disability and were receiving support from the University. Seven students (four per cent) responded that they did have a disability but were not receiving support from the University.

## **8. Study status**

An overwhelming majority of students (94 per cent, 165) indicated that they were studying full time.

## **9. Degrees pursued in 2014**

Students were also asked what degrees they were pursuing in 2014. One hundred and seventy-five students answered this question, with a majority reporting that they had enrolled in a double degree programme. The most common double degree programme was a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Laws combination (41 per cent, 71), followed by a Bachelor of Commerce/Bachelor of Laws combination (19 per cent, 33). The third most popular double degree programme was a Bachelor of Science/Bachelor of Laws combination (five per cent, eight), followed by a Bachelor of Criminal Justice/Bachelor of Laws combination (four per cent, seven). Just over a quarter of students (28 per cent, 49) were enrolled only in a Bachelor of Laws degree. The remaining students were enrolled in either a Bachelor of Criminal Justice or a Bachelor of Arts.

## **10. Previous tertiary study**

Students were also asked whether they had already completed one or more degrees. Given that most of the students responding to the first survey were aged 20 or younger, it was to be expected that of the 180 students answering this question, most (94 per cent, 169) had not.

Of the 11 students who had already completed a degree, most (six) had completed a Bachelor of Arts. Two students had completed a Bachelor of Commerce.

## **11. Educational qualifications of parents**

Students were also asked in the first survey to identify the educational qualifications held by their parents. Students were given a range of options to select from and could select more than one option. As Table 3 shows, the most frequently occurring qualification for both mothers and fathers was a Bachelors degree. Interestingly, mothers with Bachelors and post-graduate degrees outnumbered fathers with the same qualifications generally, although more fathers held Doctorates. Analysis by gender showed that male students were proportionately more likely than female students to have a mother and/or a father with a Bachelors degree.

Table 3. Survey One: Educational qualifications held by parents

	Mother	Father	Total Responses
Doctorate	2 (20.0%)	9 (90.0%)	10
Postgraduate qualification (e.g. MA)	21 (63.6%)	21 (63.6%)	33
Degree	60 (75.9%)	46 (58.2%)	79
Other post-school qualification	40 (64.5%)	37 (59.7%)	62
School	49 (76.6%)	41 (64.1%)	64
Not applicable	8 (42.1%)	16 (84.2%)	19
Don't know	18 (64.3%)	24 (85.7%)	28

**12. Family connections to the law**

Students were asked whether anyone in their family had a law degree. Students were given a range of options to select from. Students who had more than one family member with a law degree could select more than one option. One hundred and eighty-one students responded to this question. As Table 4 shows, the result most commonly selected by students was that they had no family member or other significant person with a law degree. Of those who did report they had a family connection to the law, most commonly this was not an immediate family member, but an uncle, aunt or cousin. However, as is noted below, having a family connection to the legal profession was not a common reason given by students for choosing to enrol in a law degree.

Table 4. Survey One: Family connections to the law

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Parent I lived with while growing up		6.6%	12
Uncle, aunt or cousin		24.3%	44
Sister or brother		2.2%	4
Other relative or significant person who influenced you		12.2%	22
No one		66.9%	121
Total Responses			181



#### IV. WHY STUDENTS ENROLLED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Students were also asked for the reason(s) why they enrolled in a law paper or papers at the University of Canterbury. One hundred and seventy-six students answered this question. Students were given a range of options to choose from and were also given the option to add other reasons. Of the given options, the most frequently selected was that it was the local university (62 per cent, 109), followed by having family living in Christchurch (50 per cent, 88) and hearing good things about it (48 per cent, 85). Although the University of Canterbury has offered a wide range of scholarships at first year in the period since the 2011 earthquake, the availability of good scholarships was selected by only 23 students (13 per cent). The most common “other” reason given by four students was that they liked living in Christchurch, with the only “other” reason to feature twice being a liking of the University.

#### V. STUDENTS’ FUTURE CAREER PLANS

Students were asked a range of questions in the first survey directed at why they had chosen to study law and whether they intended to have a legal career. Responses across a range of questions were consistent in indicating that most students had enrolled in first year law papers intending to complete a law degree and to then embark on a legal career. However, perhaps consistent with the fact that the majority of students responding to the study were young and with no familial connections to the legal profession, the future career plans of some students, as is explained further below, were not entirely realistic.

Students were asked why they chose to study law in 2014. One hundred and seventy-six students answered this question. Students were given a range of options to select from and were also given the option to specify other reasons. The most commonly selected reason was wanting to be a lawyer (60 per cent, 106), followed by keeping the option open to do law (58 per cent, 93) and that law is a useful or interesting paper (41 per cent, 72). Very few students indicated they had chosen to study law because it fitted in with their proposed major (11 per cent, 19). Only one student indicated they had chosen to study law because it fitted in with their timetable. The most common “other reason” given by students was that studying law would provide assistance in the development of other careers.

Analysis by gender showed that female students were slightly more likely to have enrolled in a law degree because they wanted to be a lawyer (female students made up 70 per cent of the total responses to this option). On the other hand, male students were, on a proportionate basis, more likely to have enrolled in a law degree to keep their options open to do law (male responses made up 43 per cent of the total responses selecting this option) or because

it fitted well with their proposed major (male responses selecting this option totalled 58 per cent).

Students were then asked if they intended to complete a law degree and, if so, their reasons for doing so. Students were given a range of options to select from and were also given the option to add additional reasons. One hundred and seventy-six students answered this question. The most popular of the given options was “I am passionate about law and justice” (63 per cent, 100), followed by “I want to make a difference” (61 per cent, 107), “It is a respected profession” (51 per cent, 89), “I want to help people” (48 per cent, 84) and “It is a good, steady profession” (46 per cent, 81). The given option that law is a well-paid career was selected by 70 students (40 per cent). The least popular options were a familial connection to the legal profession (seven per cent, 13) or that the study of law had been suggested to them by someone else (17 per cent, 30). The most commonly occurring “other reason” given by students was providing assistance with other career paths.

Students were also asked in the first survey to indicate their interest in pursuing a legal career on a five-point scale, with 1 representing no interest and 5 representing extreme interest. One hundred and seventy-five students answered this question. As Table 5 shows, consistent with students’ responses to the questions asking why they had chosen to study law and whether they intended to complete a law degree, the most frequently selected option was that of extreme interest (41 per cent, 71), followed by very interested (41 per cent, 72).

Table 5. Survey One: How interested are you at the moment in pursuing a legal career?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1		0.6%	1
2		1.1%	2
3		16.6%	29
4		41.1%	72
5		40.6%	71
Total Responses			175






Analysis by gender revealed that female students were proportionately more likely to select point five on the scale (extreme interest). Female responses made up 76 per cent of the total responses selecting this option. On the other hand, male students were proportionately more likely to select points three and four on the scale. Male responses made up 48 per cent of those selecting point three and 42 per cent of those selecting point four.

Students were then asked if they were interested in pursuing a legal career and, if so, what type of career. Students were given a range of options to select

from and also had the option to add other options. A total of 173 students answered this question.

As Table 6 shows, the most popular of the given options was private practice (122, 71 per cent), followed by a government position (50 per cent, 86). A desire for a position as an in-house lawyer also attracted reasonably high responses (23 per cent, 39). Although idealistic reasons such as wanting to help others and to make a difference were popular reasons given for intending to complete a law degree, a career working for a non-governmental or community organisation was the least popular option career option attracting only 20 per cent of responses (35). A range of “other” career options were given by students, including becoming a barrister, joining the police force, working for a trade union or becoming an independent consultant.















Table 6. Survey One: If you are interested in pursuing a legal career, what type of career appeals to you at the present time?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Private practice (working in a law firm)		70.5%	122
Government position		49.7%	86
In house lawyer for employer that is not a law firm		22.5%	39
Non-governmental or community organisation		20.2%	35
Other, please specify...		8.1%	14
Total Responses			173

Analysis by gender showed that a career in private practice appealed to proportionately equal numbers of male and female students. However, consistent with their responses to other career related questions, male students were proportionately more likely to indicate that a range of other career options also appealed to them. Male students made up 42 per cent of responses selecting the option of a government position, 46 per cent of responses selecting in-house lawyer and 43 per cent of responses selecting a non-governmental or community based organisation.

In the final question in this set of questions in the first survey, students were asked about the area(s) of law in which they had an interest. Students were given a range of responses to choose from and could also add other options. A total of 175 students answered this question. The most popular of the given options was criminal justice (62 per cent, 109), followed by international law (54 per cent, 94) and company and commercial law (47 per cent, 82).

Table 7. Survey One: Areas of law in which you have an interest?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Commercial and company		46.9%	82
Community		24.0%	42
Criminal Justice		62.3%	109
Estates and Wills		17.7%	31
Information and Technology		12.0%	21
Media		32.0%	56
International		53.7%	94
Maori Land and Resource Law		7.4%	13
Property law and land transfer		21.7%	38
Public		30.3%	53
Family		37.7%	66
Law and Sport		20.0%	35
Law and Medicine		22.3%	39
Other, please specify...		5.1%	9
None		0.6%	1
Total Responses			175

The answers to this question are somewhat inconsistent with the most popular intended legal career – private practice as a lawyer. Neither of the two most popular areas of law, criminal justice and international law, are likely to feature frequently in this particular career path. The popularity of these areas of law is, however, more consistent with the idealistic reasons given by many students for wanting to complete a law degree.

Analysis by gender revealed that, although both criminal justice and international law were selected by large numbers of male and female students, overall, male students were proportionately more likely to select areas of law commonly featuring in private practice in New Zealand. Proportionately, greater numbers of male students selected the following categories: commercial and company (40 per cent of total responses); estates and wills (42 per cent); property law and land transfer (47 per cent); family law (45 per cent). Again on a proportionate basis, slightly greater numbers of female students selected the options of criminal justice (68 per cent) and medical law (67 per cent).

A follow up question in the second survey asked students whether, as a result of their study in 2014, they wanted to practice as a lawyer, use their law degree in some other career or not complete or use a law degree in any profession. A total of 134 students answered this question. Strikingly, after only two more terms of studying law, the proportion of students who indicated they wanted to practice as a lawyer decreased from 71 per cent to 54 per cent. A greater proportion of students thought they would use their

law degree in some other profession (43 per cent), but only three per cent did not intend to complete or use a law degree at all. Because the follow up question in the second survey was asked in quantitative form, the reasons for the students' change in intended career are not known. Analysis by gender revealed that female students were slightly more likely at this stage to intend to practice as a lawyer (female students made up 69 per cent of responses in this category). Male students were still more likely to intend to use their law degree in some other career (male responses made up 44 per cent of responses in this category).

Future surveys will continue to monitor students' intentions with respect to their future legal careers with a view to determining whether there is any correlation between changing intentions and students' feelings of well-being. As is discussed further below in the section on students' feelings of confidence and well-being, Australian and American studies consistently show that both law students and lawyers are affected to a greater degree by depression and other forms of psychological distress than the general population.<sup>4</sup> Although most studies conclude that it is the legal education process that produces the reported detrimental effects on mental health,<sup>5</sup> one American study suggests that a contributing factor is a shift in students' values from community service values (as exemplified in this study by the strong showing of idealistic and altruistic reasons for intending to complete a law degree) to values associated with self-image and appearance.<sup>6</sup> Most students in this survey, as is discussed in the section on students' feelings of confidence and well-being below, remained committed to their legal studies at the end of their first year of legal studies and also reported unchanging levels of well-being over this period that were higher than we anticipated. As the results to the set of questions described above show, this was at a time when their views about their future careers were still changing. It was also at a time when the views of some students, particularly female students, were not always entirely realistic. Overall, however, for large numbers of students, it seems that the "lustre" associated with their present and intended future connection to the law has yet to fade. We are interested in determining whether there is any reported drop in feelings of well-being at or around the time that students' future career intentions become fixed.

4 Norm Kelk, Georgina Luscombe, Sharon Medlow and Ian Hickie "Courting the Blues: Attitudes to Depression in Australian Law Students and Lawyers" (2009) Brain and Mind Research Institute, Camperdown, NSW; Kennon Sheldon and Lawrence Krieger "Does legal education have undermining effects on law students? Evaluating changes in motivation, values, and well-being" (2004) 22 Behavioral Sciences and the Law 261 at 271.

5 See, for example, Katherine Fethers and Wendy Larcombe "Schooling the blues? An investigation of factors associated with psychological distress among law students" (2013) 36 UNSW Law Jnl 390 at 393.

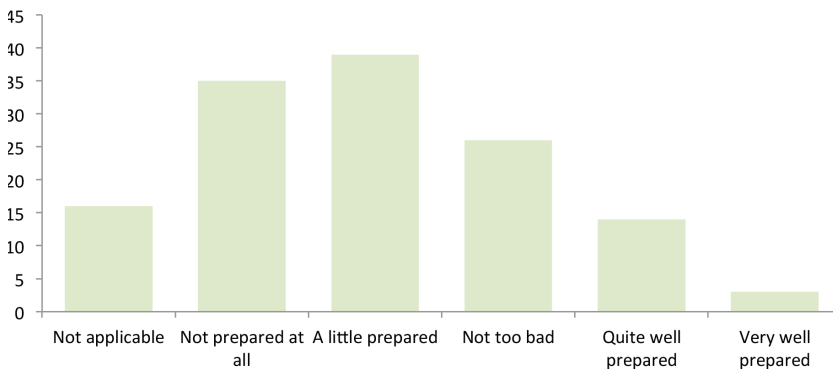
6 Kennon Sheldon and Lawrence Krieger, above n 4, at 281.

## VI. WINDOWS INTO STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES

A number of questions in the first survey sought information about students' expectations about the study of law. The second online survey, to a large degree, sought information about students' actual experiences.

The responses to one question asked in the second survey assists in putting the students' answers to the questions in this category in context. The question asked students how well prepared they were by their high school experience for starting their law studies. As Table 8 shows, of the 133 students who answered this question, only two per cent (3) of students considered themselves very well prepared, with 11 per cent (14) indicating they were quite well prepared. Twenty per cent (26) considered themselves not too badly prepared, but 29 per cent (39) indicated they were a little prepared and 26 per cent (35) rated themselves not prepared at all. Twelve per cent (16) indicated this question was not applicable to them.

Table 8. Survey Two: How prepared were you by your high school experience for starting your law studies?



Analysis by gender revealed that more female students felt not prepared at all for their law studies (female responses were 82 per cent of the responses in this category). On the other hand, male students were proportionately over-represented in those who felt not too badly prepared (male responses totalled 64 per cent of responses in this category) or quite well prepared (male responses totalled 47 per cent of total responses in this category). Male students and female students selecting the response that they were a little prepared were approximately proportionate.

Exactly why so many students, especially female students, felt unprepared can only be determined by asking further qualitative questions and this may be explored further in focus groups to be held in 2015. Nevertheless, despite many students feeling unprepared, students' responses to questions in this

category indicated that, for the most part, they were engaged in their studies and generally satisfied with their law school experience.

### *A. Skills expected to be gained and actually gained*

In the first survey, students were asked a qualitative question: what skills do you expect to have after completing your law studies in 2014? One hundred and fifty-seven students answered this question. Despite being asked this question after only a few weeks of their studies, most students were clear about the skills they expected to have. Typically, students identified and then proceeded to list a variety of expected skills. For example one student replied in this way: “[t]horough and excellent analysis skills, research and writing skills, be able to develop strong and informed arguments, and a whole lot more I can’t wait to learn!”

The skills most emphasised by students, by quite a wide margin, were literacy skills. “I expect to be able to write eloquently” wrote one student. Next, were analytical and critical thinking skills or, as one student put it, “Critical analysis, reading between the lines, being able to understand the implications”. Legal Method skills (i.e. skills in statutory interpretation and case analysis etc.) emerged as the third highest response, with acquisition of knowledge of legal structures coming fourth. Some basic knowledge of substantive legal concepts also emerged as an anticipated skill, as did oral communication skills such as public speaking, mooting and debating. Allied with the latter was the anticipated skill in argument and/or persuasion. Research skills and skills for future law study at University also featured. One student expressed a wish for “A complete skill set for the next year of study”. Personal growth skills, such as increased confidence, were listed by only a small number of students (less than five per cent), as were time management skills and skills in helping people.

In the second survey, students were asked a quantitative question: what skills have you gained from your law courses in 2014. Students were given a range of responses to choose from which mirrored the skills they indicated they expected to gain in the first survey. Students were able to select more than one response. For the most part, there was a high degree of correlation between the skills most expected to acquire and the skills most reported as having acquired.

Of the 135 students who responded to this question, 90 (121) per cent felt they had gained the fundamental skill competencies of understanding New Zealand’s legal system and some knowledge of basic legal principles. Eighty-one per cent (108) reported they had acquired legal method skills and 79 per cent (105) reported they had acquired critical thinking and analytical skills. Seventy per cent of students agreed that they had acquired skills in developing a theoretical understanding of the Law and the legal system, with 66 per cent (89) reporting they had gained baseline law study skills. Sixty

per cent of students (81) believed they had gained research skills, and 46 per cent (62) perceived an improvement in their literacy skills. Thirty-four per cent (46) reported they had gained skills in argument/persuasion. Skills for career or legal practice were seen to have been enhanced by 25 per cent (34) of students, but only 10 (13) per cent reported a gain in oral communication skills.

Academic staff in the law school were asked the same question in an online survey conducted in October and November 2014. Staff were given the same list of responses supplied to students in the second survey from which to select. It became apparent that, for the most part, staff and students agreed on the skills that students should acquire as a result of their first year studies. All staff expected students to acquire legal method skills. Ninety per cent expected that students would also acquire literacy skills, understanding and knowledge of the legal system and structure and basic knowledge of the law and some legal concepts. Other skills receiving 70 per cent or more responses were critical thinking and analytical skills, argument/persuasion skills and research skills. Fifty per cent of staff expected students to acquire skills in theoretical understandings of law and society. Consistent with student responses, only one staff member expected students to acquire oral communication skills. One staff member expected students to acquire skills for their career or legal practice. Aside from the given responses, four additional responses also specified that they expected students to acquire “basic grammar and punctuation skills”, “bi and multicultural and gender sensitivity skills”, an “understanding of how uni study differs from high school” and “a basic ability to extract information from relevant sources and summarise it and shape an account of it.”

### *B. Support expected and received*

In the first survey, students' views were sought in relation to the contact they expected to have with their lecturers and the types of support they expected the lecturers to provide. Students' expectations were later compared with those of academic staff. Questions in the second survey sought to measure the extent to which students' expectations had been met.

The first survey asked students a qualitative question: what forms of support/contact do you expect to receive from your law teachers this year? One hundred and forty-nine students answered this question. Most identified more than one type of support or contact that they expected to receive. Six per cent (14) indicated they expected to receive no individual support or contact. Of the majority who did expect assistance or support, the categories mentioned most frequently were an expectation that teachers would provide extra assistance as and when it was needed by students (29 per cent, 71) and an expectation that teachers would be available and approachable via a variety of mediums – including email, one-to-one meetings during office hours or



after class and online learning systems (12 per cent, 28). Other commonly occurring categories included support associated with effective teaching, assistance and/or guidance in completing assessment tasks, receiving appropriate feedback on completed assessments and general encouragement.

In the second survey, students were asked the ways in which they had contact with their law lecturers in 2014. Students were given a range of options to select from and could select more than one option. Students were also able to add their own response. One hundred and thirty-three students answered this question. The most common form of contact was in lectures (33 per cent), but only a small percentage (nine per cent) reported contact in lectures as being their only contact with their lecturers. Email contact was the next most frequently selected form of contact (23 per cent), followed by contact via the University's online learning platform (LEARN) (15 per cent). Attendance at office hours attracted only five per cent of responses and telephone contact accounted for less than one per cent of the total responses to this question.

Academic staff were asked the same question and given the same list of responses from which to select. Ten staff responded to the question. Aside from lectures, the most common contact was email (90 per cent), followed by office hours (eight per cent), information on LEARN (seven per cent), recorded lectures (six per cent), social occasions (six per cent) and telephone contact (five per cent). The reported differences between staff and students on the subject of telephone and office hours contact may be explained by the fact that staff were not asked to report on the contact they had with first year students. It may be that students become more willing to engage in more direct and personal forms of communication with staff as they progress through their law studies.

Students were also asked a qualitative question in the second survey: what could have been done to improve contact with your law lecturers? Fifty-six students answered this question and many made more than one suggestion for improvement. By far the most common response (41 per cent, 23) was that students were satisfied with the level of contact available. As one student put it, "I felt contact with them was made easily achievable via email, lectures, etc." The next most common response was the desirability of regular contact in a small group setting. Comments in this category included a desire for individual "check-in" type sessions with lecturers (13 per cent, seven), or lecturers attending or taking tutorials or teaching in smaller classes (seven per cent, four). Another common response was that contact through use of technology, generally through the University's online learning platform (LEARN), would be useful (14 per cent, eight). One reason given for this suggestion was anonymity in asking questions. One other interesting set of comments (13 per cent, seven) answered the question by recognising that students needed to initiate contact, and approach lecturers for help. As one student stated, "UC provides students with multiple ways of getting in touch. It is up to the student to take full advantage of this."

When academic staff were asked the same question, a different set of responses were given. Half the responses focused on the physical environment, probably due to recent post-earthquake changes that have significantly affected the built environment of the Law School. It is likely that the first year cohort responding to the survey were largely unaware of these changes. In 2013, the building in which the School of Law is housed was remediated for earthquake damage and significantly renovated in order to accommodate the School of Business and Economics in the building. A major consequence of this was the closure of the dedicated Law Library and relocation of remaining staff and books away from the Law Building. Four staff members commented that this change had resulted in reduced contact with students outside of class time.

Aside from the built environment, there were some parallels with student suggestions for improving contact between law lecturers and students. Staff suggestions included smaller classes (two responses), lower staff/student ratios, and more workshops and tutorials. Increasing already running social functions were also identified as a means of improving contact. Two other suggestions were for minimum standards for lecturers such as a common approach to structuring a LEARN site, and functioning first year “pastoral care” groups. Indicating the diversity of staff views, one respondent thought that contact between lecturers and students was “good as it is.”

Students were also asked in the second survey what forms of support or feedback they had received from their law lecturers in 2014. Students were given a range of responses from which to select. They were able to select more than one option and could also add their own response. One hundred and thirty-three students answered this question. The most frequently selected option (40 per cent) was receiving feedback on assessment tasks, followed by general encouragement to succeed (27 per cent), assistance with assessment tasks (14 per cent) and career guidance (nine per cent). Although a commonly reported expectation at the time of the first survey was receiving extra assistance if it was needed, only eight per cent of responses selected this option in the second survey.

Again, student responses largely mirrored those of academic staff. When staff were asked to indicate the type(s) of additional support or feedback they regularly supplied to students, all respondents indicated they provided extra assistance to individual students when approached. Most staff also indicated that they provided general encouragement, career guidance, feedback on assessments and pastoral care. Thirty per cent of staff provided individual assistance with assessment tasks.

A useful cross-check on the support received by students in terms of formative and summative feedback on their academic performance are the responses to a quantitative question in the second survey asking students to what extent, on average, the assessment results they had received in their law courses reflected their expectations. One hundred and thirty-three students answered this question. Students were given a range of options from which to

select. The most frequently selected option was that results were “about what I expected” (68, 51 per cent). Forty-six per cent (47) of students had received results that were lower or much lower than expected and 19 students (14 per cent) had received results that were higher or much higher than expected.

In the second survey, students were asked how satisfied they were with the support they had received from their law lecturers in 2014. Students were asked to select from a five-point scale, with one representing very dissatisfied and five representing very satisfied. A total of 135 students answered this question. Sixteen per cent (22) indicated they were very satisfied by selecting point five on the scale. Forty-seven per cent (64) selected point four, with 30 per cent (40) selecting the mid-point or neutral point three. Only five per cent (seven) selected point two on the scale and one per cent (two) selected point one. Overall, nearly two-thirds of students were satisfied or very satisfied with the support received.

One final and general question in the second survey asked students how satisfied they were with their experience at law school in 2014. Consistent with the responses to other questions in this category, most students were satisfied with their experience. Students were given a five-point scale to select from, with point one representing very dissatisfied and point five representing very satisfied. Of the 133 students who answered this question, 57 per cent (76) reported themselves satisfied (point four on the scale) and 17 per cent (23) reported they were very satisfied. Twenty-three per cent (31) selected the neutral point three. Only two per cent (three) reported that they were dissatisfied (point two) and no students reported that they were very dissatisfied (point one). Nearly three-quarters of students were either satisfied or very satisfied overall.

### *C. Positive and negative factors impacting on students' studies*

The first survey asked students what things might negatively impact on their studies in 2014. One hundred and sixty-five students answered this question. Students were given a range of responses to choose from and could also add their own “other” response.

The most frequently selected of the given options was a part time job (79, 48 per cent), followed by finding studying hard (65, 40 per cent), social life (61, 37 per cent), non-law study requirements (59, 36 per cent) and law being hard (58, 35 per cent). As Table 9 illustrates, the least frequently selected of the given options were having a full time job (four, two per cent) and voluntary work (15, nine per cent).

Table 9. Survey One: What are the things that might impact on your study this year?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Family obligations		33.3%	55
Full time job		2.4%	4
Part time job		47.9%	79
My health		27.3%	45
Health of others		7.9%	13
Close relationships		23.6%	39
Law is hard		35.2%	58
Find studying hard		39.4%	65
Non-law study requirements		35.8%	59
Hobby or sport		26.7%	44
Social life		37.0%	61
Voluntary work		9.1%	15
Other, please specify...		4.8%	8
Total Responses			165

Analysis by gender revealed that whilst male and female students expected that their studies would be impacted by part-time work in approximately equal proportions, a greater proportion of male students selected the options relating to hobby or sport, social life and the health of others. Proportionately, more female students expected their own health to have an impact on their studies.

A follow up question in the second survey asked students what sorts of things had impacted on their law studies in 2014. One hundred and thirty-three students answered this question. Again, students were given a range of options to select from and could also add their own “other” response. Of the given options, the factors that most frequently had a negative impact on students were personal issues (selected by 49 per cent of students), followed by things to do with studying at university (47 per cent) and home/family issues (47 per cent). Work and employment issues affected 34 per cent of students and financial issues 25 per cent of students. Health issues affected 27 per cent of students, relationship issues affected 23 per cent and accommodation issues affected 14 per cent.

The fact that financial issues affected a quarter of students may be connected to the finding that of the 133 students completing the survey, 81 per cent (107) had incurred at least some student debt by the time of the second survey. Fourteen per cent of students (19) reported debt levels of up to \$5,000, with 49 per cent (65) reporting debt levels of \$5,001 to \$10,000 and 14 per cent (19) reporting debt levels of \$10,001 to \$20,000. Four per cent (five) reported a debt level of more than \$20,000. Although first

year university fees may vary, a full time first year student can expect to pay approximately \$5,900 in fees.

In the second survey, students were asked a qualitative question: what factors helped you to settle in to law school in 2014? Eighty-six students answered this question. The most common response (33 per cent) was having a support network, either an existing family network or creating a new network through the making of friends or forming study groups. Nine per cent of students emphasised the importance of personal attitude, either in motivating themselves or developing good study habits. The importance of enjoying classes was seen as relevant by 19 per cent of students and having approachable lecturers was noted by 26 per cent.

*D. Students' study habits*

One of the most interesting set of student answers related to questions focusing on their study habits.

Students were asked in the first survey how many hours of study per week outside lecture and tutorial times they expected to do in law in 2014. Students were given a range of responses from which to choose. A total of 169 students answered this question, with the most frequently selected response being six to eight hours each week (56, 33 per cent).

Table 10. Survey One: How many hours of study per week outside lectures and tutorial times do you expect to do in law this year?

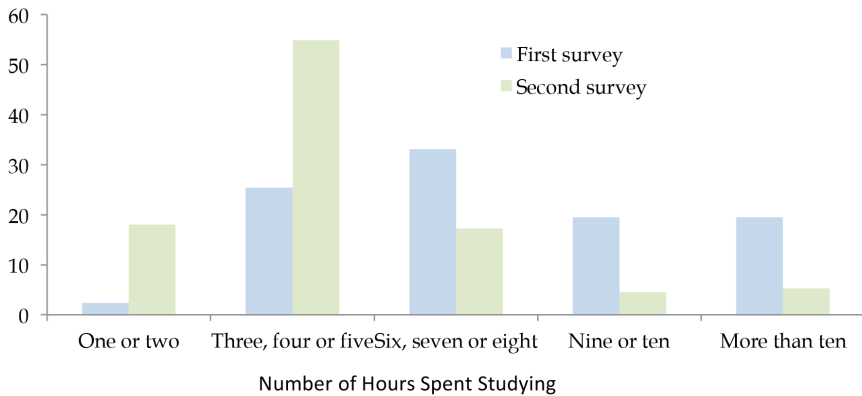
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
None		0.0%	0
One or two hours		2.4%	4
Three, four or five hours		25.4%	43
Six, seven or eight hours		33.1%	56
Nine or ten hours		19.5%	33
More than ten hours per week		19.5%	33
Total Responses			169

Analysis by gender showed that more male students expected to spend three to five hours on their studies (male responses made up 49 per cent of those in this category) or six to eight hours on their studies (41 per cent of responses). More female students expected to spend nine to 10 hours on their studies (female students made up 79 per cent of responses in this category) or more than 10 hours (70 per cent of responses).

A follow up question in the second survey asked students how many hours per week on average they had spent on their law courses in 2014. A total of 133 students answered this question. The most frequently chosen option by

students in the second survey was three to five hours of study (55 per cent), down from six to eight hours (33 per cent) in the first survey. Table 11 below compares the hours intended to be spent by students on their studies with the time actually spent. The results are expressed in percentages to enable a direct comparison. We intend to explore the reasons behind why students reported spending fewer hours than they anticipated on their law studies in student focus groups planned for 2015.

Table 11. Hours intended to be spent on law studies compared with hours actually spent expressed in percentages.



Analysis by gender showed that female students were over-represented in those students spending six to eight hours, nine to 10 hours or more than 10 hours each week on their law studies. Male students, on the other hand, were over-represented in those spending only one to two hours each week on their law studies.

Responses to a number of other questions shed some light on how students spend their time during periods of self-directed study. The first of these questions relates to use of study groups, which proved to be popular and frequently used by many students. Students were asked in the second survey whether they had studied with other students. Of the 133 students who asked this question, 100 (75 per cent) had done so. The students who reported studying with other students were then asked how often they did so. One hundred students answered this question. Students were given a range of options from which to select. Fifty-three per cent of students reported studying with other law students at least once a week, with 20 per cent reporting that they did so only for tests and exams. Eighteen per cent of students reported studying with others every few weeks or so, eight per cent once a month and only one per cent less than once a month.

Another question in the second survey asked how often students physically visited the law library. A total of 130 students answered this question.

Students were given a range of responses from which to select. Seventeen per cent (23) had never visited the law library and 47 per cent (62) had visited it only occasionally. Twenty-three per cent of students (30) reported visiting the library on a monthly basis, nine per cent (12) on a fortnightly basis and just five per cent (six) weekly or more frequently. Physically visiting the law library is not necessarily an accurate indicator of use of legal resources as many are now available online through the University Library. Students did report higher rates of use of these online resources. One hundred and thirty students answered a question in the second survey asking them how frequently they used the online legal resources available through the University Library. Students were given a range of options from which to select. Two per cent of students (two) reported never using these resources and 45 per cent (59) had used them only occasionally. Twenty-six per cent (34) had used them monthly, 20 per cent (26) fortnightly and seven per cent (nine) weekly or more frequently.

The comparatively low and infrequent use of online library resources is a little surprising, but it may be the case that students who report no or infrequent use of online resources may still be engaging with the primary and secondary legal materials made available to students via other methods such as the University's online learning platform (LEARN), or may be accessing online resources outside the library system. Many of the topics taught in the second half of the year are skills based and it might also be the case that students are not required to access materials other than those provided on LEARN.

Although not strictly related to study habits, a range of questions directed at students' social experiences confirmed that many students were interacting with their peers in social situations as well as in study groups, a further indicator of relatively high levels of student engagement in the total law school experience. The first question of this nature asked in the second survey was whether students were members of a Law Students' Association. There are two law students' associations: Lawsoc and Te Putairiki (the Māori Law Students' Association). One hundred and thirty-three students answered this question and 92 (69 per cent) belonged to one or both of these associations.<sup>7</sup> Students were also asked in the second survey whether they had used social media to communicate with other students. Of the 100 students responding to this question, 96 per cent had done so.

## VII. FEELINGS OF CONFIDENCE AND WELL BEING

A final set of questions were directed at students' levels of confidence and well-being over the course of their first year of study.

<sup>7</sup> Note: membership of Te Putairiki is not limited to Māori students.

Consistent with their responses to whether they intended to complete a law degree, when students were asked in the first survey how important passing their law courses was to them, an overwhelming majority indicated that this was extremely important. Students were given a five-point scale to select from, with point five representing extreme importance and point one representing not important. Of the 168 students answering this question, 92 per cent (155) selected point five.

Students were asked in the first survey how confident they were at this early stage of being admitted to second year law. To gain entry to second year law, students must not only pass their first year law courses, but also pass sufficiently well in relation to their peers to be ranked above the cut-off mark and grade for acceptance. Students were given a scale of 1 to 5 to select from, with point one representing no confidence and point 5 representing extreme confidence. Because it may be possible for a student to enrol concurrently in both first and second stage law courses, this was given as a further option. A final option, of not intending to study second year law papers, was also given. One hundred and seventy-five students answered this question. The most frequently selected option at the time of the first survey was point three on the scale (45 per cent, 79). As Table 12 illustrates, 42 per cent of students (74) were either confident or extremely confident of being admitted (points four and five on the scale). Only 11 per cent of students (19) selected points one or two on the scale.

Table 12. Survey One: How confident are you of being admitted to second year law?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
1		2.3%	4
2		8.5%	15
3		44.9%	79
4		36.4%	64
5		5.7%	10
I am already taking second year law papers		2.3%	4
I do not intend to study second year law papers		0.0%	0
Total Responses			176

Analysis by gender revealed that proportionally more female students were likely to select the mid-point (point three on the scale.) Female responses made up 73 per cent of those in this category. Male students, on the other hand, were proportionately more likely to select point four (44 per cent) and point five (80 per cent).










A follow up question was asked in the second survey and was answered by a total of 135 students. Students were given a range of options from which to select. By the time of the second survey, a greater proportion of students selected responses indicating a lack of confidence that they would be admitted to second year law. Twenty per cent (27) admitted they did not know if they would do well enough to be admitted, with 16 per cent (22) being very worried that their grade would not be good enough. A further 12 per cent (16) noted that all they had to do was pass their course, but were worried about this. Forty-four per cent of students (60) were reasonably confident of being admitted, with only four per cent (five) indicating that they would definitely be admitted. A further four per cent of students (five) indicated they did not intend to study law in the following year. Interestingly, at this later stage of the year, analysis by gender revealed that, with one exception, male and female students selected the available responses on a proportionate basis. The exception was the response of being very worried that their grade would not be good enough. Of the 22 students who selected this response, 73 per cent (16) were female.

Students were also asked in the second survey if, no matter what the outcome of the selection process for second year law, they intended to continue studying law in 2015. Students were given a range of responses from which to select. Of the 135 students answering this question, 64 per cent (86) indicated that they would. Twenty-two per cent (29) indicated it was likely they would do so, with 12 per cent (16) being unsure. Two per cent (three) indicated they probably would not continue their studies and less than one per cent (one) would definitely not continue their studies. Analysis by gender revealed that male and female students indicated that they would continue their studies on a proportionate basis.

Although a clear majority of students indicated they wished to continue studying law, for some this was accompanied by a drop in confidence in their ability to gain admittance into second year law. Nevertheless, the additional pressure faced by at least some of the cohort did not translate directly into decreased levels of reported feelings of wellness.

The question directed at wellness in the first survey asked students how they felt about studying law. Students were given a range of responses to choose from and also had the option of adding their own response. One hundred and sixty-nine students answered this question. Students felt a wide range of feelings about their law studies. As Table 13 shows, the most frequently selected of the given responses was feeling a bit stressed (52 per cent, 87), but this was balanced for many by the positive feeling of being excited (75 per cent, 127). Only 16 per cent (27) felt confident. Sixty-five per cent (110) reported feeling nervous and 12 per cent (20) reported feeling very stressed.

Table 13. Survey One: How do you feel about doing law this year?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Nervous		65.1%	110
Excited		75.1%	127
Confident		16.0%	27
OK		14.8%	25
A bit stressed		51.5%	87
Very stressed		11.8%	20
Other, please describe...		1.2%	2
Total Responses			169

Analysis by gender showed that, on a proportionate basis, there was little difference in numbers of male and female students feeling nervous, excited, okay or a little bit stressed. More male students were feeling confident (male students made up 56 per cent of the total responses in this category). More female students were feeling very stressed (female responses made up 80 per cent of the responses in this category).

This question was repeated in qualitative form in the second survey and overall responses were generally in line with those given in the first survey. One hundred and four students answered this question. The most common responses indicated a positive view (74 per cent, (77) Comments relating to being stressed and nervous were the next most common response (21 per cent, 22). Consistent with responses to the questions related to the importance of passing law courses and confidence about being admitted to second year law, students indicating they felt stressed or nervous tended to focus on concerns over grades and whether they would get a good enough grade to be admitted into second year. A number of students combined their answers, reporting feeling both stressed and positive. For example, one student wrote, “It has been tough but very interesting and rewarding.”

One interesting type of response was that a small number of students (five per cent, five) reported feeling less stressed at the end of the year than they did at the time of the first survey. One student noted, “I found the first term confusing, as I didn’t fully understand the Law School’s expectations. Over time, however, I have become more confident and am enjoying a sense of achievement.”

The second survey also asked students to rate their feelings of general well-being. A total of 132 students answered this question. Students were given a range of options to select from, with the most frequently selected option being feeling okay (47 per cent, 62), followed by feeling good (28 per cent, 37). Eight per cent of students (11) reported feeling great. Seventeen per cent of students reported negative feelings, with 12 per cent (16) not feeling too good and five per cent (six) reported feeling terrible. Analysis by gender revealed that male and female responses indicating that they were

feeling okay or good were approximately proportionate. Of the 11 students who indicated that they felt great, 45 per cent (five) were male. Of the 18 students who reported not feeling too good, 50 per cent (eight) were male. Of the five students who reported feeling terrible, 80 per cent (four) were female.

Across the two surveys, the numbers of students reporting negative feelings (high levels of stress in the first survey and feeling “terrible” or “not too good” in the second survey) were generally consistent. Putting these findings in a wider context, the students participating in this study did not reveal levels of well-being significantly different from the general population. A 2011 New Zealand Mental Health report by the Ministry of Youth Development showed that 28.6 per cent of young people aged 16-24 reported experiencing a mental health disorder in the previous 12 months with anxiety (17.7 per cent) and mood disorders (12.7 per cent) being the most frequently reported.<sup>8</sup>

What is particularly interesting is that students’ reported levels of mental wellness appear to be out of line with a number of Australian and American studies, although admittedly these studies, unlike this one, measured wellness using a range of recognised psychometric tests.<sup>9</sup> For example, in a recent study focusing solely on first year law students at Australian National University, 85 per cent of students surveyed in the first two weeks of their first semester of study reported normal or mild rates of depression,<sup>10</sup> yet by the end of the first year of study, one third of students reported rates of depression at moderate, severe or extremely severe levels.<sup>11</sup> Similar results occurred when levels of stress were investigated. Reported levels of well-being at the beginning of the year also dropped significantly by the end of the year. One American study reports that prior to entering law school, rates of psychological well-being of students are consistent with the general population,<sup>12</sup> and another reports that law students have higher than average levels of subjective well-being prior to beginning law school.<sup>13</sup> Both of the American studies report a rapid decline in the mental health of law students once they begin law school.<sup>14</sup>

8 Mental Health Commission *Child and youth mental health and addiction* (2011, Mental Health Commission, Wellington). Almost identical statistics were reported in the 2006 New Zealand mental health survey: see Mark Oakley, Elisabeth Wells & Kate Scott *Te Rau Hirenaro: The New Zealand Mental Health Survey* (2006, Ministry of Health, Wellington).

9 A widely recognised measure of likely psychological distress, the Kessler 6 scale, has been incorporated in surveys of students in subsequent phases of this project.

10 Molly Townes O’Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall “Changing Our Thinking: Empirical Research on Student Well-being, Thinking Styles and the Law Curriculum” (2011) 21 *Legal Educ Rev* 149 at 159. Similar results were obtained in surveys of first year law students at Monash University: Anthony Lester, Lloyd England and Natalia Antolak-Saper “Health and Well-being in the First Year: The Law School Experience” (2011) 36 *Alternative Law Journal* 47.

11 Molly Townes O’Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall, at 159.

12 Andrew Benjamin, Alfred Kaszniak, Bruce Sales and Stephen Shanfield “The Role of Legal Education in Producing Psychological Distress Among Law Students and Lawyers” (1986) 11 *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 225 at 241.

13 Kennon Sheldon and Lawrence Krieger, above n 4, at 271.

14 At 275; Andrew Benjamin, Alfred Kaszniak, Bruce Sales and Stephen Shanfield “The Role of Legal Education in Producing Psychological Distress Among Law Students and Lawyers” (1986) 11 *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 225 at 241.

The results from this study are all the more notable given that the findings described above involve studies of different student cohorts (law is a graduate degree in the USA) and differences in law schools ethos and teaching methods. One of the American studies referred to above focused on law students taught mainly by the case method accompanied by a Socratic dialogue.<sup>15</sup> The study focussing on ANU students was in a setting where students were taught primarily in large lectures with supporting small group tutorials in a law school with a self-reported mentoring programme, readily available counselling and staff “sensitive to issues of psychological distress”.<sup>16</sup>

A final point of note is that one Australian study reports that law students report greater levels of mental distress than do students enrolled in other kinds of professional degrees such as medicine, mechanical engineering and psychology.<sup>17</sup>

What is also interesting about this study is that reported differences in confidence between male and female students were generally fewer by the time of the second survey. Female students were proportionately under-represented in those who reported feeling confident in the first survey. They were also slightly less confident at the time of the first survey about their chances of being admitted into second year law. In the second survey, female students were proportionately over-represented in those who reported feeling unprepared by their high school experience for studying law. However, in the second survey their confidence levels about being admitted to second year law were, for the most part, proportionate with their male counterparts.

For the most part, male and female responses to well-being questions were proportionate over both surveys. Where there was a difference in male and female responses, it tended to be in the small minorities who gave extreme responses. For example, female students were the majority of the 20 students feeling very stressed at the time of the first survey and of the five students feeling terrible at the time of the second survey.

A possible explanation for the similarity of male and female responses in terms of confidence and well-being by the time of the second survey is that there were very few reported differences in their learning experience and their feelings of satisfaction about that experience.

Future surveys will continue to monitor students’ reported levels of well-being and confidence overall and by gender to determine whether they continue to be more positive than those reported in other New Zealand and overseas studies. We hope that this proves to be the case.

15 At 271.

16 Molly Townes O’Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall, above n 11, at 150.

17 Catherine Leahy, Ray Peterson, Ian Wilson, Jonathan Newbury, Anne Tonkin, Deborah Turnbull “Distress levels and self-reported treatment rates for medicine, law, psychology and mechanical engineering tertiary students: cross-sectional study” (2010) 44 *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 608 at 611.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

As we noted at the beginning of this paper, the findings presented above show a high degree of consistency in students' overall responses and this is likely influenced by the many shared common characteristics of the cohort. Students generally reported high levels of engagement in, and satisfaction with, their law school experience. There was a high degree of correlation between the responses of students and academic staff to questions directed at students' teaching and learning experience. Most students reported overall levels of mental wellness either consistent with or better than the general population over the entirety of their first year of study, but at the same time, were not yet settled on their future career directions. There were few significant differences when students' responses were analysed by gender.

One possible explanation for the generally positive responses is the nature and novelty of the first year university experience. Many students may be experiencing freedoms that they have not had before, and new social experiences and relationships. At the times that the students were surveyed, they were yet to be advised whether they had been accepted into second year law. For those that make it through, they will then face a much tougher second year of study. It will be very interesting to see whether the overall positivity of the first year cohort continues into their second year of study.

It is, however, important to emphasise that the trend of overall positivity does not reflect the expectations and experiences of the total cohort. A minority of students did not have this experience and presently we do not know the characteristics of this minority cohort. Because numbers of minority ethnic groups completing the surveys in this study were so small, separate analysis of their results would not have been statistically meaningful and so was not undertaken. In the wider study involving students across three universities, this analysis was possible and showed that one ethnic group (Māori) reported an experience that was at least as positive as the dominant New Zealand European/Pākehā group.<sup>18</sup> Other ethnicities (Pasifika and Chinese) reported an experience that was more negative than the norm. In any case, whatever their experience, Māori students and Asian students are under-represented in this study and the overall 2014 cohort.

Even within the largest New Zealand European/Pākehā group, there may be some groups whose experience is different from the norm. Because numbers of older students were so small, their responses were not separately analysed.

A number of future challenges exist. Achieving a student body that is more representative of the overall greater Christchurch community is one challenge. So too is determining whether the law school experience that so clearly suits the dominant group by age and ethnicity works equally well for other minority groups. To the extent that it does not, a further challenge will

18 Lynne Taylor et al, above n 2.

be to design and implement any necessary and potentially targeted changes that will appropriately support the affected minority groups.