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JD NEXT

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT

From Aspen Publishing

1L Reality Check:

1,408 1L Law Students Share Their Insights

Lessons Learned. Unexpected Surprises. And Suggestions
for Excelling During the First Year of Law School



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first year of law school is unlike anything that came before it. In June 2026, JD-Next®, LexisNexis®, and Themis Bar Review® surveyed 1,408 students who had just completed their full 1L year to capture a complete picture of the experience, from the fall semester's initial shock through the spring semester's recalibration. What emerged is a comprehensive, data-informed portrait of the 1L year.

The findings confirm some things educators already suspect: Law school can be harder, more isolating, and more surprising than most students entering law expect. But they also reveal genuinely novel findings, ones that can change how pre-law advisors prepare their students and what law schools communicate with their incoming classes.

7 Findings Worth Forwarding

- ✓ **The Expectation Gap Is Durable:** Most students found that the 1L year differed significantly from their pre-law school expectations. This finding was true even among students with prior legal work experience.
- ✓ **Older Students Report Being Cold-Called Less Often:** Younger students fresh out of college reported more frequent cold-calling during 1L, while a meaningful share of older students reported being called on less often or not at all. This participation pattern warrants closer review.
- ✓ **Older Students Study More, Get Called on Less, and Finish the Year Most Motivated:** Students over 40 work harder, are more socially isolated, and are more likely to be disappointed by their grades; however, they finish 1L more motivated than their younger peers by a significant margin.
- ✓ **Exercise Is Associated with Grade Outcomes:** Students who reported no exercise were more likely to report worse-than-expected grades. The findings suggest that maintaining exercise habits may be one of several supportive 1L routines worth protecting.
- ✓ **Earlier Job Search Pressure Is Associated with Worse Grade Outcomes:** Students who reported recruiting pressure before fall classes began also reported weaker grade outcomes than other groups.
- ✓ **Taking a Real Spring Break Beats Grinding Through It:** Counterintuitively, students who took a genuine vacation during Spring Break reported better grades than students who stayed at school and worked the whole time. Rest as a performance enhancer is a clear academic strategy.
- ✓ **First-Generation Students May Encounter Multiple, Reinforcing Support Gaps:** First-gen students enter with a larger expectation gap, are more likely to be disappointed by grades, exercise less, and, despite reaching out for help at higher rates after grades arrive, feel they receive less proactive institutional support before the crisis happens.



Note to Pre-Law Advisors, Admissions Consultants, and Law School Admissions Officers:

We encourage you to share this white paper with your admitted students before they arrive on campus. The findings are specific enough to be actionable, novel enough to be worth forwarding, and grounded in a statistically robust sample of more than 1,400 students.

INTRODUCTION

The first year of law school is simultaneously the most demanding and the most formative year in a lawyer's education. Students arrive with ambitions and assumptions forged from mentors, movies, and internet searches. The reality they encounter, as measured by pages read per night, cold calls survived, outlines built from scratch, and a parallel summer job search running at full speed before they've found their academic footing, rarely matches what they imagined.

JD-Next®, in partnership with LexisNexis® and Themis Bar Review®, surveyed 1,408 1L students nationwide in June 2026, following the completion of their full first year. This is a follow-up to our December 2025 survey conducted at the end of the fall semester. Together, the data from these two surveys trace the full arc of the 1L experience, from the initial adjustment through the spring semester sprint, the law review write-on competition, and the summer job search.

This white paper goes beyond aggregate data to tell the story of specific groups: how older students navigate an environment whose structures and norms may align more closely with the experiences of younger full-time students, first-generation students without a roadmap, and students whose wellness habits either protected or undercut their academic performance. The goal is a report that lets the data instruct entering 1Ls about what to expect and, more important, what is expected of them during the all-important 1L year.



ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The survey was distributed voluntarily June 5, 2026, to every matriculating first-year student enrolled at an American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law school, a total addressable population of 42,812 students. The survey remained open for 10 days, closing June 15. To encourage participation, respondents who completed the survey were eligible to be entered into a drawing for a \$500 gift card redeemable for casebooks and study aids at **AspenPublishing.com**. Because the survey was voluntary and based on self-reported responses, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive of this respondent group rather than as definitive causal conclusions about all 1L students.

A total of 1,408 1L students completed the survey, representing a response rate of 3.3% of the total population. From a statistical standpoint, 1,408 completed responses from a population of 42,812 yielded a margin of error of ± 2.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, well within the ± 5 percentage point threshold required for survey research to be considered statistically robust. The final sample exceeds the minimum required for that threshold by a factor of approximately 3.7. As with all voluntary surveys, respondents are self-selected and may not perfectly mirror the full population with respect to unmeasured characteristics.

ABOUT JD-NEXT®

JD-Next® is a valid and reliable law school admissions assessment designed to help applicants demonstrate readiness for legal education. The program combines an 8-week online course with a rigorous assessment grounded in the skills and concepts students encounter in law school, including case law analysis, legal reasoning, and analytical writing. As part of Aspen Publishing's legal education portfolio, JD-Next® offers applicants a meaningful way to build and demonstrate foundational skills while providing law schools with a research-informed tool for evaluating readiness and potential. **Learn more at www.jdnext.org.**

ABOUT LEXISNEXIS®

LexisNexis® Legal & Professional is a leading global provider of legal, regulatory, and business information, as well as analytics that help professionals make more informed decisions, increase productivity, and advance the rule of law. For law students and legal educators, LexisNexis® delivers trusted research, practical guidance, and AI-powered tools designed to build confidence, strengthen legal skills, and support success from law school into practice.



ABOUT THEMIS BAR REVIEW®

Themis Bar Review®, a UWorld company, combines research-backed instructional design with decades of bar exam expertise to help students prepare for the bar exam with confidence. Built for today's learners, Themis pairs innovative technology with personalized support from leading attorney advisers, expert essay graders, and experienced faculty. As the only national bar review provider that publishes pass rates, Themis is committed to transparency and results.

Every enrollment includes access to the UWorld Legal QBank and an adaptive study plan designed to fit each student's unique schedule, providing a proven path to bar exam success. With modern methodology at its core, Themis is the best way to prepare for the bar exam for today's students.



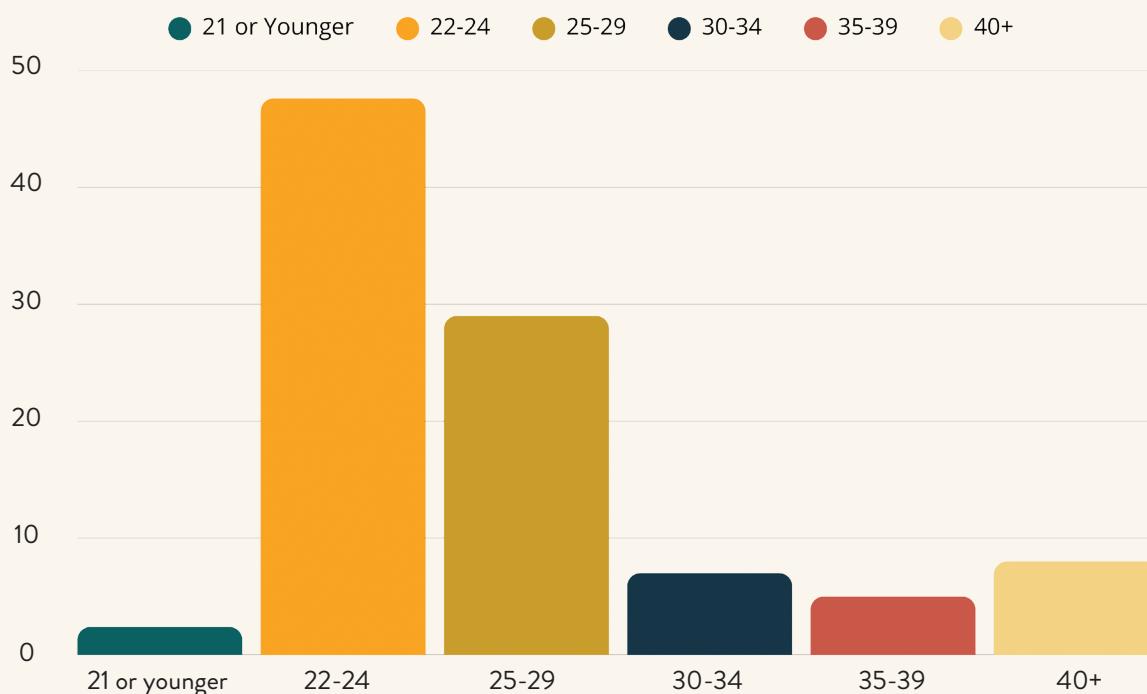
SECTION 1. WHO ARE TODAY'S 1LS?

Before examining what happens to 1L students, it helps to understand who they are. The students in this survey reflect the full breadth of the modern law school class. They represent a group more diverse in age, background, and prior experience than popular culture suggests.

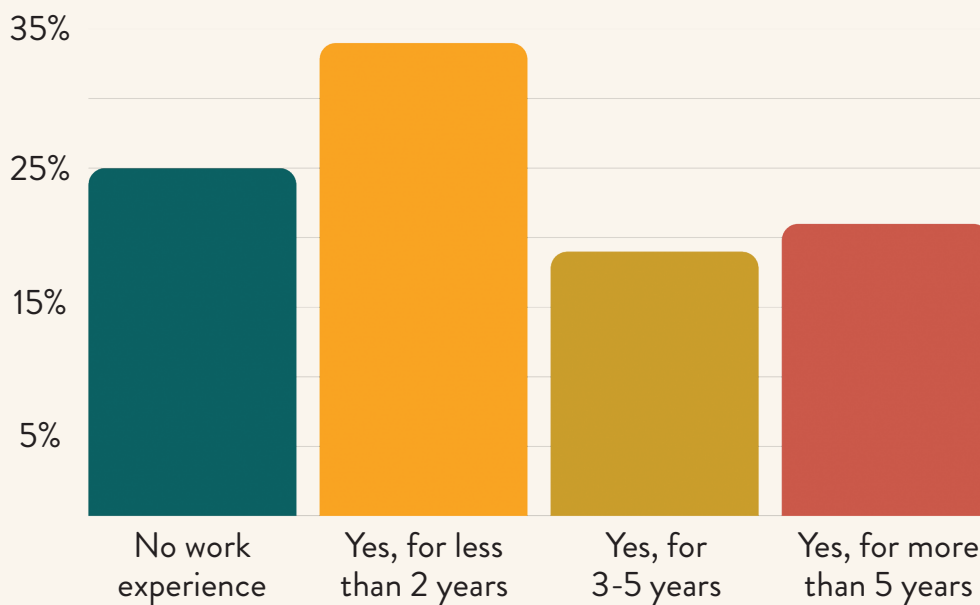
Nearly half are between 22 and 24 years old, arriving directly or nearly directly from college. A significant number of students are 30 or older, many of them career-changers or returning students who have spent years in another field before deciding to pursue a legal career. These older students may bring professional context and clarity of purpose that their younger peers often lack, but they may also face institutional routines and norms that may fit some students more naturally than others.

Most entering 1Ls worked before starting law school, many with experience in law, legal services, or government. Prior exposure to the law should provide these students with a sense of what legal culture looks, sounds, and feels like, though our findings later in this paper demonstrate that this is not always the case. Almost a third of respondents identified as first-generation college students. This group faces a distinct set of challenges, as will be demonstrated throughout this report.

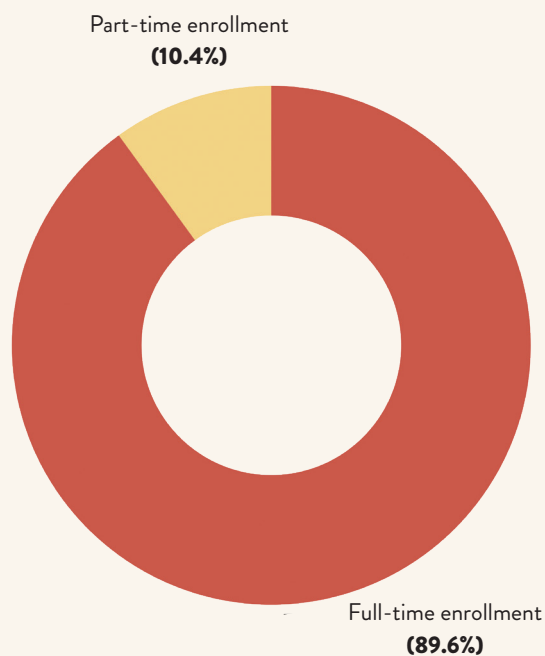
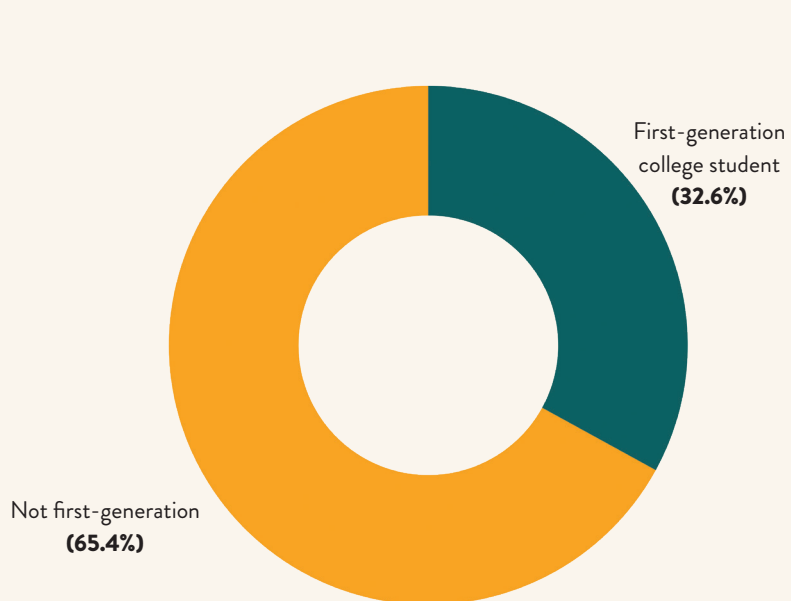
Age Distribution:



Prior Work Experience:



First-generation / Program Type Identification:



SECTION 2. THE EXPECTATION GAP: CONFIDENT GOING IN, SURPRISED COMING OUT

The expectation gap in 1L is not subtle. Most students arrive with at least some confidence that they understand what they're walking into. For many of them, they find that confidence is misplaced.

Before starting law school, over half of the respondents described themselves as “somewhat” or “very confident” that their expectations about the 1L experience were accurate. Only around 25% of respondents admitted that they were genuinely unsure of the challenges they would face during 1L. By the end of the full year, over 60% found the experience “somewhat different” or “very different” from what they had imagined.

62.5%

found 1L “somewhat” or
“very different”
from expectations

3.0%

said the year exactly
matched what
they anticipated

The expectation gap has a specific texture. It is not primarily about the intellectual difficulty of law school that most students anticipate, but the cumulative compression of simultaneous demands: dense nightly reading, briefing every case, preparing for an unpredictable cold call in each class, building exam outlines months in advance, and navigating a summer job search that runs in parallel with all of it. Together, these demands form something most students have never experienced: a high-stakes, open-ended cognitive load that relentlessly spreads throughout the entire academic year.

What is also notable is what does **not** close the expectation gap. Prior work experience, even legal work experience, barely moves these numbers. The expectation gap is not primarily a knowledge problem. It is an experience problem, indicating that no amount of research, reading, or resume-building fully prepares someone for the totality of the 1L experience.



What Took Longer Than Expected

TASK	% of Respondents
Reading and briefing cases	61.7%
Legal writing assignments	49.7%
Outlining	39.1%
Studying for exams	37.4%
Preparing job application materials	33.3%
Managing school, work, or personal responsibilities	32.7%
Legal research	30.9%
Understanding difficult legal concepts	18.4%
Preparing for cold calls	11.7%



WHEN STUDENTS NEED THE MOST SUPPORT

The timing of need is instructive for law schools designing orientation programs and first-year support structures. Not surprisingly, the biggest crunch comes at finals; however, the second and third peaks occur during the first few weeks of class and during the first legal writing assignment. By the time most students ask for help, the semester is already deep into its second act.

SUPPORT NEEDS	% of Respondents
While preparing for midterms or finals	42.3%
During the first few weeks of class	17.3%
During my first legal writing assignment	16.4%
During the summer job search	14.2%
While outlining	5.4%
Before classes started	3.1%
Before my first cold call	1.4%

“*The substance is **not impossible** to learn. Law school just requires a lot of hard work. What I didn’t expect was how relentless ‘a lot of hard work’ actually means in practice.*”



Practical Advice: Mitigating the Expectation Gap

- ✓ **Prepare for the Totality, Not Just the Content:** Prior legal knowledge helps at the margins. The expectation gap is not closed by knowing what a tort is or what a contracts course covers. The expectation gap is closed by understanding what it feels like to do all of law school while simultaneously balancing competing demands.
- ✓ **Build Routines Before You Need Them:** Students who had study routines, sleep habits, and self-care practices in place before law school reported fewer surprises. The system matters as much as the material.
- ✓ **The First Few Weeks Set the Tone:** Most students underestimate how important it is to establish good habits during orientation and the beginning of the semester. Catching up is harder than starting well.
- ✓ **Experience Gives Conviction, Not Immunity:** Students with 5+ years of work experience finished 1L more motivated than those without it. But they faced the same expectation gap on day one. Prior experience shapes how you interpret the difficulty; it doesn't appear to eliminate it.



SECTION 3. THE ACADEMIC GRIND: WORKLOAD, COLD CALLS & THE CLASSROOM

The 1L curriculum is a sustained endurance test. Not because any single day is impossible, but because the material is cumulative, every day is demanding, and there are no easy weeks. In fact, they only seem to get harder as the semester goes on. Students must stay current with dense nightly reading, prepare to be put on the spot in each class, begin outlining before they feel ready, and produce polished legal writing under tight deadlines. The data surrounding workload put the grind in perspective.

The Daily Load

WORKLOAD	% of Respondents
Daily weekday prep: 3–4 hours outside class	24.0%
Daily weekday prep: 4–5 hours outside class	20.7%
Daily weekday prep: more than 5 hours	25.1%
Weekend study combined: 6–10 hours	37.0%
Weekend study combined: 11–15 hours	28.4%
Weekend study combined: 16–20 hours	13.3%
Pages read per night: 51–75 pages	36.6%
Pages read per night: 76–100 pages	20.1%
Pages read per night: more than 100 pages	10.8%

Put plainly: The median 1L student reads 51–75 pages per night across all classes and spends between 3 and 5 hours on coursework every weekday, excluding weekend work. The reading volume alone would constitute a substantial workday in most professional contexts. In 1L, it represents the normal baseline.



COLD CALLS: THE SOCRATIC METHOD AND WHO IT REACHES

Cold calling is the signature pedagogical tool of the year. It forces novice law students to articulate legal reasoning in real time, under pressure, in front of their peers. It is also, according to the data, applied in highly uneven ways, with significant consequences for those who develop the skill and those who do not.

Among the full survey population, 97% of students were cold-called at least once during the year. More than half (50.9%) were called on 7 or more times. But those aggregate numbers mask a pattern that pre-law advisors and law school faculty may find striking.

Finding: An Inverse Relationship Between Age and Cold-Call Frequency.

The pattern warrants attention. Among students aged 22–24, well over half were cold-called at least 7 times, while among students aged 40 or older, that percentage falls to a little more than one-third. Across the full spectrum, the trend is consistent: As age increases, cold-call frequency falls.

Cold-Call Frequency	Age 22-24	Age 40+
Never cold-called	0.8%	12.4%
Cold-called 1–3 times	13.9%	23.8%
Cold-called 4–6 times	26.6%	29.5%
Cold-called 7–10 times	26.4%	15.2%
Cold-called more than 10 times	32.3%	19.0%
High frequency (7+ times combined)	58.7%	34.3%

1 in 8 students over 40 were never cold-called during their entire first year of law school.



COLD CALLS: THE SOCRATIC METHOD AND WHO IT REACHES (CONT.)

Cold calling, of course, is a critical teaching tool. Students who are regularly cold-called are forced to develop their ability to reason aloud, synthesize facts and doctrine under pressure, and receive immediate corrective feedback. Students who are routinely passed over miss that developmental experience. They may be learning the same material, but they may not be receiving the same opportunities for live verbal engagement in class. The result may be a materially different classroom experience for some students than the method aims to provide. The skills practiced and developed during a Socratic dialogue — a quick recall and summary of the relevant law and its application to novel hypothetical scenarios under pressure — are precisely the skills professors test on their final exams.

PART-TIME STUDENTS AND THE SOCRATIC DIVIDE

Part-time students face a similar dynamic at scale. While more than half of full-time students were cold-called 7 or more times, only around one-quarter of part-time students experienced that level of engagement. And 16.3% of part-time students were never cold-called, as compared to just 1.3% of full-time students. Part-time students enjoyed slightly better grade outcomes and meaningfully less stress during the job search, likely because they were on a different employment track, but nonetheless, the data suggest that they may be receiving a substantially different pedagogical experience in the classroom.

What Would Have Helped Before the First Cold Call

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Help identifying the most important parts of a case	44.7%
Clearer professor expectations	43.6%
More practice explaining rules and facts out loud	37.9%
Earlier training on how to read cases	32.4%
Better case summaries	24.4%
More examples of strong case briefs	19.7%
More time to prepare	18.2%
Advice from upper-level students	15.0%



THE HARDEST CORE 1L COURSE

Civil Procedure led the field as the course students found most difficult, a shift from the December 2025 survey, in which Torts ranked first. Civil Procedure's complexity lies not in abstract doctrine but in the competing demands between maintaining operational efficiency of the courts while preserving an individual's right to justice. The procedural rules are numerous, interconnected, and often counterintuitive in ways that may not map onto students' prior experience of "how the world works."

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Civil Procedure	24.3%
Contracts	20.7%
Property	18.4%
Legal Research & Writing	12.3%
Torts	10.0%
Criminal Law	7.4%
Legislation / Statutory Interpretation	2.9%
Other	4.0%

“What it takes **to prepare for class and cold calls is very different** from what it takes to successfully prepare for an exam.”



Practical Advice: Managing the Academic Grind

- ✓ **Practice Speaking the Law Out Loud Before Day One:** The most common need before a first cold call was help identifying the key parts of a case and clearer understanding of professor expectations. The best preparation is practice: summarizing holdings, stating rules, and applying facts before being asked to do it in a room full of peers.
- ✓ **Give Civil Procedure Disproportionate Attention:** This is the course most students found hardest, and it is also the one whose procedural rules take the longest to internalize. Begin familiarizing yourself with the basic framework of civil litigation before classes start.
- ✓ **Older Students May Benefit from Seeking Additional Classroom Engagement Opportunities:** The data suggest that older students receive fewer cold calls. If you are not being called on, you may benefit from finding additional ways to engage through class discussion and office hours. Participate in class voluntarily. Don't let the pattern of being passed over become the pattern of being uninvolved.



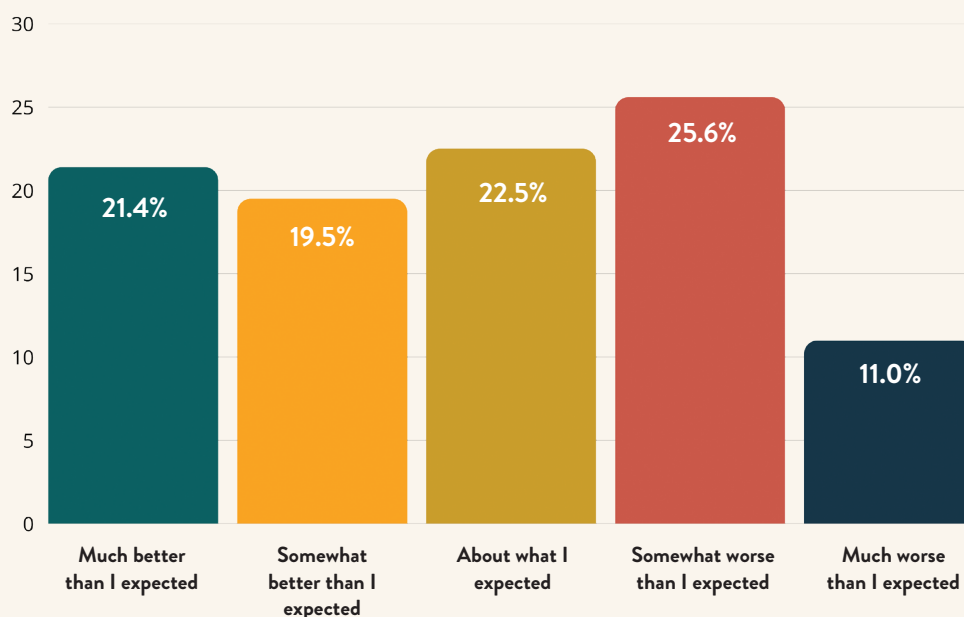
SECTION 4. GRADES, ADAPTATION & THE SPRING SEMESTER PIVOT

Fall grades are the first hard data 1L students receive about how well their study habits are actually working. For many, the verdict is humbling. For most, it becomes the catalyst for a deliberate recalibration in the spring.

HOW FALL GRADES COMPARED TO EXPECTATIONS

More than 1 in 3 students (36.6%) received worse grades than they expected during their first semester. This is a significant number, particularly in a population that, by definition, succeeded academically enough to gain admission to law school. For students accustomed to being at the top of their undergraduate class, a disappointing law school grade is often the first academic setback of their lives.

Fall Grades Compared to Expectations:



What students do next is what separates the 1L year from most academic experiences. The vast majority of students who were disappointed did not wait for the situation to resolve itself. They sought feedback, changed their approach, and arrived at the spring semester with a clearer strategy.



What Students Did After Fall Grades:

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Met with a professor during office hours	58.1%
Sought advice from upper-level students	56.4%
Met with an academic support advisor	46.4%
Joined or changed a study group	38.2%
Did nothing — waited to see how spring played out	14.5%

One finding here deserves particular attention: 58.7% of students who changed their academic approach mid-year said the driver of that change was their own analysis of what went wrong, rather than advice from a professor, advisor, or peer. This self-directed insight is genuinely encouraging, but it also reveals an untapped opportunity. If most of the adaptation is self-driven, students who struggle to diagnose their own shortcomings have no fallback. The students who met with professors and advisors had access to more precise feedback to guide their approach. The ones who did not were simply guessing about what might be most effective.

THE SPRING SEMESTER STUDY HABIT SHIFT

The spring semester is a course correction at scale. Among students who made changes, the most consistent pattern was structural: earlier outlining, taking more practice exams, and a change in their approach to briefing cases. These are not surface-level adjustments; rather, they reflect a fundamental revision of how students managed the relationship between daily class prep and exam-focused synthesis. Incoming students should read these shifts as a roadmap. After first-semester grades arrived, their predecessors adopted these habits mid-year: earlier outlining, more practice exams, and consistent use of study aids. Entering 1L students should build these strategies into their routines from the start of the fall instead of waiting until spring to course-correct.



SHIFT IN ACADEMIC STRATEGIES	% of Respondents
Started outlining earlier	61.1%
Spent more time on practice exams	59.3%
Used different study aids or resources	52.7%
Changed how they briefed cases	49.7%
Used AI tools more deliberately	35.5%
Attended more office hours	33.1%
Reduced outside commitments to focus on academics	28.2%
Joined a study group	20.9%
Stopped briefing cases	20.2%
Changed how they prepared for cold calls	15.0%
Nothing — kept same approach	1.5%

Notably, 72.6% of students who were satisfied with their fall performance still made changes for the spring, either refining their approach or pursuing further improvement. The spring semester is not just a recovery plan for students who struggled. It is a universal opportunity for recalibration. Only 1.5% of all respondents kept exactly the same approach.

“

Learn from your fall exams, but do not harp on them.

Significant progress is possible.

I changed 3 things, and my spring results were completely different.

”



THE SPRING BREAK COUNTERINTUITIVE FINDING

Here is a finding worth putting directly in front of rising 1Ls: Taking a real vacation over Spring Break is associated with better grade outcomes than grinding through the break entirely.

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Went on vacation, also worked on outlines/exams	45.8% better-than-expected grades
Went on full vacation, left books behind	42.0% better-than-expected grades
Traveled home, worked on outlines/exams	39.0% better-than-expected grades
Stayed at school, worked the whole break	38.0% better-than-expected grades

Students who stayed at school and worked the entire break had the lowest rate of better-than-expected grades and the highest rate of worse-than-expected grades among any Spring Break group. Students who took a genuine vacation, or at least a partial one, performed better. The most likely explanation is that Spring Break arrives at the precise moment when cognitive fatigue is highest. A rested student who studies less may be significantly more effective than a burned-out student who grinds through the break.

There is, however, a confounding variable worth acknowledging. Students who stayed behind to grind through the break were likely not a random sample of the class. They perhaps included students already struggling, already worried about their grades, and already under the most cognitive strain entering the break. The decision to skip vacation may not have been a cause of poor performance so much as a symptom of it. A student convinced they cannot afford to take a break from their studies is, very likely, the type of student who needed rest more than anyone. In that light, forgoing Spring Break may be less a strategy and more a warning sign: For some students, not taking a break may reflect existing academic or personal pressure rather than a simple preference to keep working. Law school administrators and academic success professionals may want to identify these students before Spring Break begins, not after grades are posted.



Practical Advice: The Spring Semester Reset

- ✓ **Start Outlining Earlier in the Semester:** The single most common change among adapting students was starting outlines earlier. Treat outlining as a weekly maintenance and self-quizzing task, not an end-of-the-semester emergency.
- ✓ **Make Practice Exams a Priority:** Nearly 60% of students who adapted added more practice exams. You cannot understand what your professor is testing simply by reading cases or reviewing your notes. You understand it by testing yourself, preferably under exam-like conditions.
- ✓ **Pair Self-Reflection with Professor Feedback:** 58.7% of students who changed their approach did so based on their own analysis. Self-analysis is useful, but professor feedback can make it more precise. Use post-exam office hours to understand where you lost points and carry that insight into the spring semester.



SECTION 5. DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT EXPERIENCE: AGE, BACKGROUND & THE SELF-CARE DIVIDE

Aggregate data tells you what is typical. Subgroup data can help identify which students may be encountering additional friction and which appear to be navigating the year differently. This section examines 4 patterns that the headline numbers alone obscure.

5A. THE MOTIVATION PARADOX OF OLDER STUDENTS

If you built a profile of the 1L student most likely to emerge exhausted and disillusioned, it might look like this: socially isolated, exercising less than anyone else in the class, studying more hours than their younger peers, cold-called less often, more likely to be disappointed by fall grades, and far less likely to compete for a law review position. That pattern appears more often among respondents over 40 than among younger respondents in this survey.

And yet: When the year ended, 47.3% of students over 40 said they finished more motivated than when they started. Among 22- to 24-year-olds, that number was 36.0%. Older students finish the hardest, most isolating version of 1L and come out more committed to why they came. That is the motivation paradox.



METRIC	Age 22-24	Age 40+
Social: rarely or never goes out	19.9%	53.6%
Social: goes out multiple times/week	9.0%	1.8%
Exercise: rarely or never	29.2%	40.9%
Weekend study: 11+ hours	42.0%	64.5%
Weekend study: 16+ hours	15.6%	36.4%
Weekday prep: 4+ hours	45.3%	60.0%
Grades worse than expected	29.4%	36.4%
Never cold-called	0.7%	11.8%
Cold-called 10+ times	29.4%	18.2%
Participated in law review write-on	37.0%	11.8%
Used AI regularly	16.5%	26.4%
Job search very/extremely stressful	48.0%	20.9%
Finished MORE motivated than started	36.0%	47.3%
Began law school with a significant other and still together	35.1%	63.6%

This pattern is notable for several reasons. Of course, with age comes maturity, but beyond that older students have different social contexts that could help them. For example, older students are almost twice as likely to have a partner than younger students.

Older students are typically less stressed about the summer job search, which may reflect differences in prior work experience, career goals, or employer targets. They study more hours and know why they are there in a way that many 22-year-olds may still be figuring out.



5A. THE MOTIVATION PARADOX OF OLDER STUDENTS (CONT.)

The takeaway for advisors: Older students are not failing to thrive. They are thriving differently and with more conviction, despite greater isolation, more work, and less institutional recognition. The cold-call gap described in Section 3 is particularly consequential for this group. For law schools to better serve older students, the place to start is to make sure they are receiving the same Socratic engagement as their younger peers.

“*Nobody prepared me for how different the experience would be from students who came here at 22.*”

5B. FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AND REINFORCING SUPPORT GAPS

First-generation college students (32.6% of this survey’s respondents) face multiple, reinforcing support gaps in 1L that the data make visible and, fortunately, that law schools have the tools to address.

METRIC	Non-First-Gen	First-Gen
Expectation gap (experience differed from expectations)	58.9%	68.4%
Grades worse than expected	30.5%	39.7%
Exercise multiple times per week	25.4%	18.4%
Exercise rarely or never	27.9%	35.3%
High cold-call frequency (7+ times)	54.4%	44.2%
Met with professor after grades	17.7%	22.4%
Met with academic support advisor after grades	13.5%	19.1%
Sought advice from upper-level students after grades	17.0%	22.1%



The expectation gap for first-generation students is nearly 10 percentage points higher than for their non-first-gen peers. They are more likely to receive grades worse than expected, less likely to exercise, and, like older students, less likely to be cold called frequently. But the most important findings in this table are in the last 3 rows.

First-generation students reach out for help at higher rates after fall grades arrive. They are more likely to meet with professors, academic support advisors, and upper-level students than their non-first-gen counterparts. They are not avoiding support. They are seeking it reactively, after the damage is done. The gap doesn't appear to be in their willingness to ask for help. It is in the timing: They arrive at law school without the same familiarity with informal norms and support pathways to seek that support proactively, before the first exam, when it would matter most to their full-year GPA.

For law school admissions deans and orientation directors: The data argue for targeting first-generation students with proactive outreach early in the fall semester before grades arrive, before a crisis, when a conversation about what to expect might change what happens.

5C. EXERCISE AND REPORTED ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

This may be the most actionable finding in the report, and one of the most surprising. Students who exercised regularly reported meaningfully better grades than students who did not. The relationship is not subtle: There is a nearly 14-percentage-point swing in “worse than expected” outcomes between the most and least active students.

METRIC	Exercise: Multiple/Week	Exercise: Never
Grades worse than expected	31.5%	45.4%
Grades better than expected	42.4%	37.5%
Finished more motivated than started	46.1%	40.8%



5C. EXERCISE AND REPORTED ACADEMIC OUTCOMES (CONT.)

The direction of causation is worth noting carefully. It is possible that students who were struggling academically had less time and energy to exercise, resulting in the correlation running in reverse. The data cannot definitively distinguish cause from effect. What can be said is: Among 1,408 law students, there is a consistent, directional relationship between physical activity and grade outcomes. Students who reported maintaining an exercise habit also reported stronger grade outcomes. Students who abandoned it were more likely to be disappointed by their grades.

The practical implication is the same regardless of causal direction: Exercise should be built into the 1L schedule as a non-negotiable commitment, not treated as a luxury that gets eliminated when the workload increases, because the workload always increases. The students who protected their exercise habits protected their performance along with it.

Students who never exercised during 1L were 44% more likely to receive grades worse than expected than students who exercised multiple times per week.

5D. THE SELF-CARE DIVIDE: CONTINUING THE WINTER REPORT'S SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

The December 2025 survey identified a group of 1L students (~12% of the population) who were not exercising, not socializing, and not in a significant relationship. That “no self-care” group showed higher workloads and greater academic risk. The full-year data extend and complicate that picture.

Older students (40+) are less likely to engage in social activities compared to younger students. More than half rarely or never go out socially, compared to around 20% of 22- to 24-year-olds. But they are not meaningfully more isolated on exercise grounds, as both groups have roughly a quarter of members exercising multiple times per week. The social isolation of older students is likely a structural feature of their situation (competing careers, family obligations, different social contexts) rather than evidence of wellness neglect.



5D. THE SELF-CARE DIVIDE: CONTINUING THE WINTER REPORT'S SUBGROUP ANALYSIS (CONT.)

First-generation students show a distinct self-care profile: They exercise less than their peers (18.4% multiple times per week vs. 25.4%), which correlates with their lower grade outcomes. They are also less likely to report strong social networks within law school.

The through-line across all subgroups: Students who maintained at least one active self-care practice, whether exercise, social connection, or a stable relationship outside law school, reported better academic and wellness outcomes than those who had none. The specific practice matters less than the consistency of having one.

Practical Advice: Using the Subgroup Data

- ✓ **Older Students, Stay Connected and Engaged:** The data suggest that older students may experience greater social isolation during 1L. Build social connection deliberately, and stay engaged in the classroom through voluntary participation and direct communication with professors.
- ✓ **First-Generation Students, Be Proactive:** The data suggest that first-generation students may face a larger expectation gap and seek support after grades arrive. Try to reverse that timing by seeking academic support before the first exam, not only after fall semester grades are released.
- ✓ **Pre-Law Advisors, Close the Expectation Gap:** The students most at risk in 1L are not the ones with the lowest credentials. They are the ones with the largest gaps between expectations and institutional knowledge, often first-gen students and career changers who lack an internal model of how law schools actually operate. Give these students the most specific, most honest preparation you can.
- ✓ **Law School Leaders, Build Awareness of Simple Fixes:** Differences in cold-call patterns may warrant faculty reflection. The first-gen data point to a gap in orientation design. The correlation between exercise and grades is information worth sharing with students early and often. None of these findings require a curriculum overhaul.

“*I wish someone would have told me how important it was to not give the entirety of myself to it. Law school can be all-consuming and if you let it, it will consume every crevice of your life and you'll just be miserable. So it's worth it to go have fun once in a while and to take the break to exercise and **take care of yourself** because then you can come back feeling refreshed. It doesn't make you a bad student for taking care of yourself, too.*”



SECTION 6. THE LAW REVIEW WRITE-ON COMPETITION

Immediately after the spring finals period, when most students are exhausted and desperate for a break, nearly half of all 1L students at schools with law review competitions choose to spend days on a high-stakes writing competition. Understanding what that commitment requires is something most pre-law students are unprepared for.

More than a third of participants devoted over 20 hours to the write-on competition, representing an enormous commitment by any measure, and one that often follows immediately on the heels of a full week of spring finals. For students who are also managing a summer job search, the end of the spring semester represents a compression of demands that most did not see coming.

Notably, older students are far less likely to participate: Only 11.8% of students over 40 competed in the write-on, compared to 37.0% of 22- to 24-year-olds. This likely reflects a realistic assessment of career goals, because law review participation matters most for certain practice areas and employers, and older career changers may have career paths that don't require it. It is worth ensuring that the decision not to compete is intentional and informed, not simply an avoidance of an unfamiliar process.

84.7% attended a school with a law review write-on competition

43.6% of eligible students chose to participate

33.6% spent more than 20 hours on the competition

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Less than 5 hours	5.8%
6–10 hours	15.7%
11–15 hours	20.4%
16–20 hours	24.5%
More than 20 hours	33.6%



Practical Advice: The Write-On Competition

- ✓ **Know What You're Signing Up For:** Most 1Ls who participated in the write-on competition spent 15–20 hours drafting their submission.
- ✓ **Decide with Intention:** Law review is one path to a successful legal career. It is not the only path. If you are a career changer or have a clear employer target that doesn't require law review membership, be intentional about whether the time investment is right for you.
- ✓ **Rest Before You Write:** The write-on requires precise, polished legal writing. Taking even a short break between Spring finals and beginning the writing competition may lead to better work.



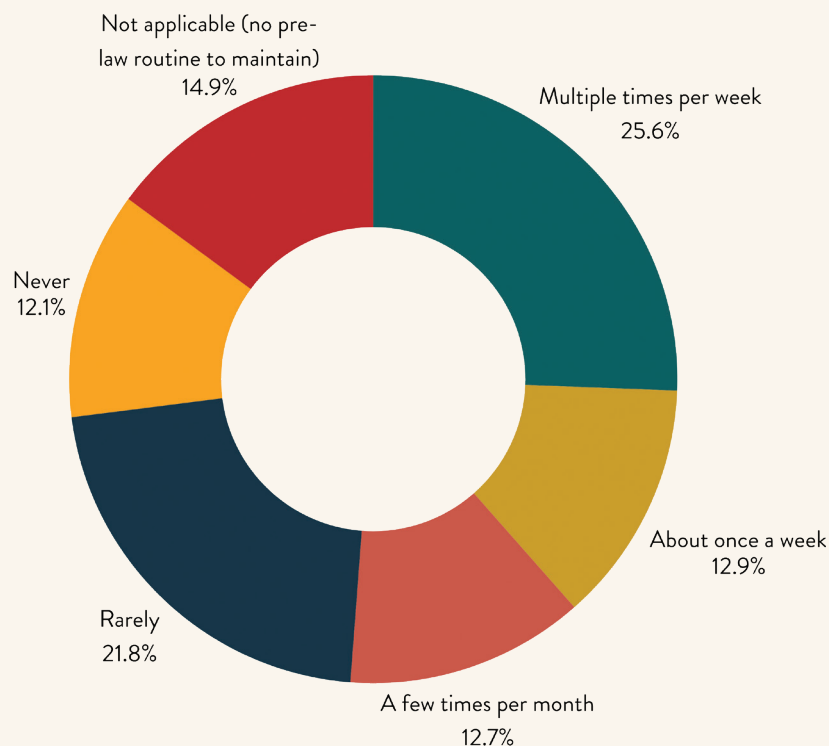
SECTION 7. WELLNESS, RELATIONSHIPS & LIFE OUTSIDE CLASS

The 1L year is not just an academic experience. It can reshape social lives, strain relationships, and put the habits that kept students healthy and grounded under sustained pressure. The wellness picture that emerges from this data is not merely a story of sacrifice for academic achievement; it is also a story of how routines and relationships outside class may interact with students' academic experience.

EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL WELLNESS

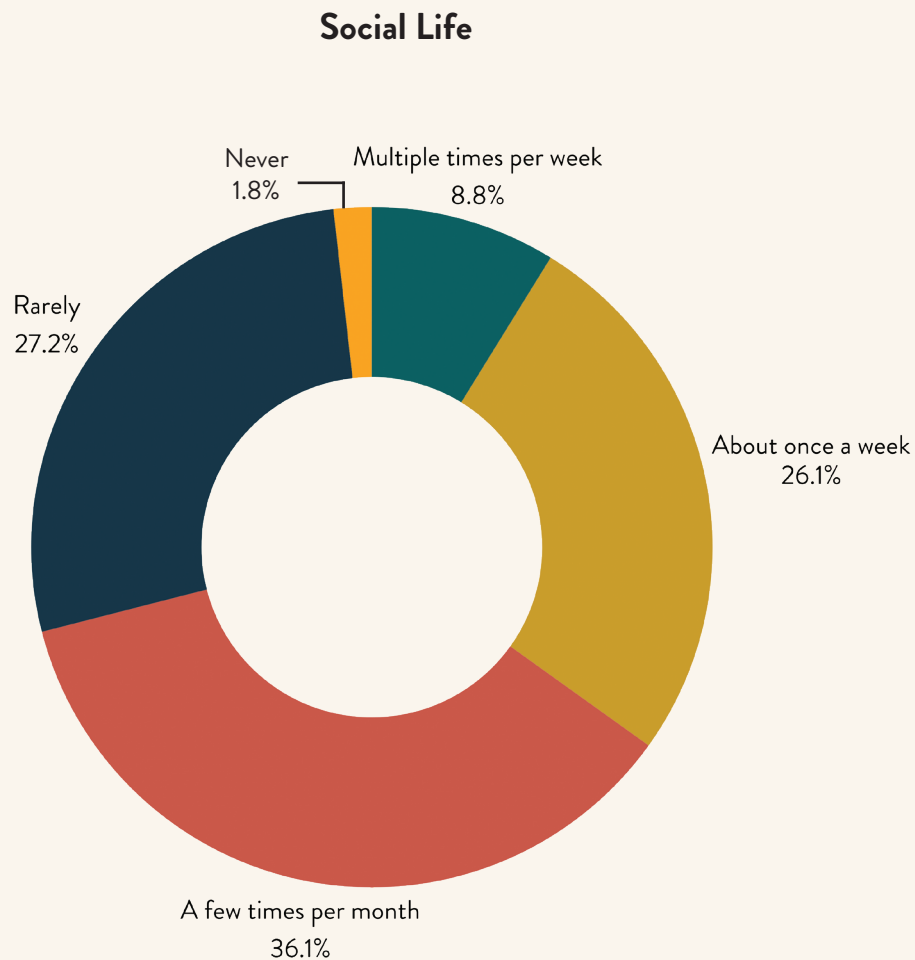
Before law school, most students had some form of physical activity in their lives. After a full year of 1L, the picture changed substantially. Only 25.6% maintained a multiple-times-per-week exercise habit, and 33.9% exercised rarely or never. As documented in Section 5, this decline in physical activity is associated with worse grade outcomes, making it not just a wellness issue but an academic one.

Exercise and Physical Wellness



SOCIAL LIFE

Social connection is one of the most reliable buffers against academic stress and one of the first things to disappear in 1L. Nearly two-thirds of respondents socialized only a few times per month or less. Among students over 40, social isolation is even more pronounced: 53.6% rarely or never went out socially during the year.



Primary Stress-Relief Activities

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Socializing with friends	21.4%
Exercise	20.9%
Sleep	19.1%
TV / streaming	17.6%
Gaming	7.4%
Reading	4.1%
Cooking	3.3%
Other	6.3%

WORKING OUTSIDE LAW SCHOOL DURING 1L

Responses to this question were among the clearest in the survey. When asked whether they would recommend that full-time law students work outside of school during the 1L year, respondents were unequivocal: 83% said no.

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Absolutely not	41.6%
Only if financially necessary	41.4%
Yes, but only limited hours	10.0%
Yes, definitely	2.1%
Unsure / depends	4.9%



“ *I wish someone had told me **how important it is to intentionally make time** for things unrelated to law school. If you wait until you ‘have time,’ they won’t happen.* ”

Practical Advice: Protect Your Well-Being During 1L

- ✓ **Schedule Self-Care Like a Class:** Exercise, sleep, and social time don’t survive 1L by accident. Block them on your calendar and protect them as you would a class.
- ✓ **Exercise Is Not Extra:** Students who maintained a regular exercise habit were nearly 14 percentage points less likely to receive grades lower than expected. The data suggest exercise may be one of the habits worth protecting during 1L.
- ✓ **Communicate Before Things Get Hard:** Have honest conversations with family, partners, and close friends about what’s coming before law school starts. Revisit those conversations at the midpoint of fall semester, not after the strain is already showing.
- ✓ **Be Realistic About Working During 1L:** 83% of full-time 1L students discourage working outside school. If a job is financially necessary, cap your hours when possible and be deliberate about protecting study time.



FALLING IN (AND OUT OF) LOVE DURING 1L

Survey responses suggest that relationship status varies across 1L students, but most do not experience significant change over the course of the year. The data below describe observed patterns in relationship stability and change, along with differences in reported outcomes. These findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as predictive of academic or personal outcomes.

WHERE STUDENTS STARTED — AND WHERE THEY ENDED UP

Among 1,253 respondents who reported relationship status, most entered law school either in an existing relationship or remained single throughout the year.

55% entered 1L with a partner, and 86% of those relationships remained intact throughout the year.

RELATIONSHIP STABILITY AND GRADE OUTCOMES

Differences were observed in grade outcomes across relationship categories. Students in stable relationship conditions showed different grade distributions than students experiencing relationship changes.

Respondents reporting stable relationship circumstances also reported different grade distributions than respondents reporting relationship changes during 1L.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS	WORSE Grades	BETTER Grades
Stable (partnered and together OR single all year)	33.9%	43.0%
Relationship ended during 1L (any reason)	48.6%	33.6%
Started new relationship in law school (still together)	46.6%	33.0%
Started new relationship in law school, then broke up	58.1%	32.6%
Broke up — law school was a factor	47.4%	31.6%
Broke up — law school was NOT a factor	40.0%	37.5%



AGE AND RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

Relationship patterns vary by age, with older students more likely to remain in stable relationships and younger students more likely to experience relationship change during 1L.

**Older students were more likely to remain in stable relationships;
younger students experienced more relationship change.**

AGE GROUP	Partnered, Still Together	Broke Up (LS Factor)	Single All Year	Started New Rel.
22–24 (n=582)	40.2%	4.8%	33.0%	13.4%
25–29 (n=374)	47.9%	4.8%	24.9%	13.6%
30–34 (n=94)	58.5%	4.3%	25.5%	6.4%
35–39 (n=62)	66.1%	0.0%	16.1%	8.1%
40+ (n=102)	68.6%	4.9%	12.7%	3.9%

A Note on These Data: This analysis is drawn from the June 2026 survey of 1,408 first-year law students. Relationship status was self-reported. Observed differences reflect correlation and do not establish causation. Students experiencing relationship changes may also have been managing other factors influencing both relationships and academic performance.



SECTION 8. THE JOB SEARCH TAX ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The modern 1L experience cannot be understood without accounting for the summer job search. Formerly a tightly regulated process that provided limited access for entering 1Ls, law student recruiting has become a process marked by diminishing guardrails and inconsistent oversight, now beginning before most students find their academic footing, and whose timing appears to have a direct, measurable impact on how well they perform in their coursework.¹

When Students Felt the Pressure

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Before fall semester classes even began	10.2%
By middle of the fall semester	39.8%
By end of the fall semester	22.6%
By beginning of the spring semester	11.6%
Did not feel pressured	12.1%

Fifty percent of students felt recruiting pressure before the fall semester was over. This is not a minor distraction running parallel to coursework. It is a second set of high-stakes demands that includes researching employers, writing application materials, attending recruiting events, and managing interviews. Each of these tasks competes directly for the time and cognitive focus required by 1L coursework.

¹Prior to December 2018, the National Association for Law Placement's (NALP) Principles and Standards included specific timing guidelines that governed 1L recruiting: Law schools were prohibited from providing individual career counseling to 1Ls before Oct. 15, and employers could not formally interview or extend offers to 1L students before Dec. 1. In December 2018, NALP eliminated these guidelines in favor of broader principles emphasizing reasonableness and good faith, citing both antitrust constraints and a desire to encourage innovation in the recruiting process. The practical effect was immediate: Without enforceable timing floors, market competition drove recruiting progressively earlier. By the 2025 recruiting cycle, NALP's own data showed that 56% of summer associate offers for 2L positions were made before June of students' 1L year, and 85% were extended before July, representing a dramatic acceleration compared to just 34% made before July in the prior cycle. In April 2026, NALP issued a formal statement expressing concern that current recruiting practices "may place undue pressure on students in ways that both affect their well-being and their ability to fully engage in their legal education." The recruiting pressure documented in this survey is a direct downstream consequence of that 2018 structural shift.



FINDING: THE EARLIER THE JOB SEARCH PRESSURE ARRIVES, THE WORSE THE GRADE OUTCOMES.

Students who felt recruiting pressure before fall classes even began had the worst grade outcomes in the survey: 42.1% received grades worse than expected, and only 34.9% did better. Students who didn't feel pressured until the end of the fall semester experienced the opposite outcome: 33.7% worse, 44.8% better. Students who felt no pressure at all: 28.9% worse, 43.0% better.

GRADE OUTCOME	Felt Recruiting Pressure Before Classes Began	Felt No Recruiting Pressure
Grades WORSE than expected	42.1%	28.9%
Grades BETTER than expected	34.9%	43.0%

This correlation should not be ignored. The timing of recruiting pressure appears to function as an academic tax that falls disproportionately on students who feel the most urgency to secure a summer position before they've established their academic footing. The students who are most anxious about the job search are often the ones who can least afford to divide their attention.

Even the raw time investment, modest on paper, is consequential at this stage. Most students (67%) devoted 1–5 hours per week to job-related tasks during the fall semester, and 15% spent 6–8 hours or more. Especially during the fall semester, when students are managing reading loads, class preparation, and developing foundational study habits, these hours represent meaningful opportunity costs, often displacing rest, wellness routines, or focused academic study.

51%

rated the job search "very" or "extremely stressful"

13.2%

said the process was not stressful at all

“*That the job search is such a focal part of 1L – I wasn't prepared for that at all.*”



FINDING: THE EARLIER THE JOB SEARCH PRESSURE ARRIVES, THE WORSE THE GRADE OUTCOMES. (CONT.)

The sources of stress are multifaceted and cumulative. The most common challenge was finding time to research job opportunities while keeping up with coursework (68.8%), a practical issue that lasts throughout both semesters. Students also reported that recruiting distracted them from outlining and exam preparation (52.0%), a tradeoff with direct implications for grades. Social comparison amplified pressure: 64.7% felt behind their classmates, while tasks such as preparing application materials (60.2%) and managing interviews (45.2%) added an additional administrative burden.

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Finding time for employer research while keeping up with coursework	68.8%
Feeling behind classmates' job search progress	64.7%
Preparing application materials while taking classes	60.2%
Job opportunities distracting from outlining and exam prep	52.0%
Applying, scheduling, and managing interviews	45.2%
Lacking guidance or structure around the process	44.1%
Feeling pressured to attend recruiting events	41.3%
Competing journal, club, or personal commitments	22.7%



Practical Advice: Protecting Your GPA During Recruiting

- ✓ **Prepare Basic Job Search Materials Before School Starts:** Polish your résumé and draft basic cover letter templates during the summer before 1L. Every hour you spend on this before classes begin is an hour you won't have to spend on it in October.
- ✓ **Know That Timing Affects Grades:** The data show that students who felt recruiting pressure earliest got the lowest grades. If you can delay your active search until you have your fall semester footing, your academic performance will likely benefit.
- ✓ **Run Your Own Recruiting Race:** Social comparison around recruiting is one of the top two sources of job search stress. Every student's situation, career goals, and employer targets are different. Manage your own process.
- ✓ **Engage Career Services Early:** 44% of students reported lacking adequate guidance on the job search. Career services offices exist precisely to fill that gap. Use them before the pressure peaks, not after it's already affecting your studies.



SECTION 9. AI IN THE 1L TOOLKIT: ADOPTION, USE & TRUST

Artificial intelligence has arrived in law school. The majority of 1L students used AI tools at some point during the year, and the data reveal a pragmatic, skeptical, and increasingly sophisticated relationship with this technology. The question is no longer whether students will use AI. It is how they use it, what they trust, and what stands in the way of intentional and confident adoption.

AI Adoption Rates

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Yes, regularly	21.3%
Yes, occasionally	38.0%
Yes, once or twice	19.5%
No, but I considered it	4.2%
No, and I do not plan to	15.1%
Not sure what counts as AI use	1.8%

Nearly 80% of 1L students used AI at least once during the academic year. Regular users represent 21%, a share that will almost certainly grow as AI tools become more integrated into legal practice and law school curricula. The 15.1% who actively chose not to use AI at all and do not plan to use it represent a group that may face a meaningful professional disadvantage as the legal industry continues to incorporate these tools.

One counterintuitive finding from our data: Among AI regular users, 39.9% received grades worse than expected, compared to 28.4% among students who never used AI. This could certainly reflect reverse causation: Students who were struggling were more likely to turn to AI tools for help. But it underscores that AI use does not automatically translate to academic improvement. The value of AI in 1L depends entirely on how it is used.



HOW STUDENTS USED AI

The leading AI use cases reveal something important about how law students are integrating this technology: They are using it as a comprehension accelerator rather than a content generator. Summarizing cases and understanding difficult concepts together account for the top two uses. The pattern suggests students are using AI to move faster through material they still need to engage directly, not to avoid engaging with it.

AI USE CASE	% of Respondents
Summarizing cases	50.2%
Understanding difficult legal concepts	45.8%
Creating study questions or practice hypotheticals	40.7%
Conducting legal research	32.7%
Preparing résumés, cover letters, or interview materials	28.7%
Creating or reviewing outlines	28.2%
Preparing for cold calls	19.4%
Drafting or revising legal writing assignments	15.8%
Managing time or organizing tasks	12.9%



What Students Are Concerned About

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
The answer may be inaccurate	57.6%
It may miss important legal nuance	40.8%
I will rely on it too much	31.0%
Privacy concerns about uploading information	21.6%
Not sure whether I am allowed to use it	18.3%
Professors or classmates will judge my use	13.2%
No concerns about using AI	5.4%
Do not use AI	15.3%



WHAT WOULD BUILD TRUST

The single biggest barrier to broader AI adoption in law school is not skepticism about the technology itself. It is the absence of verifiable sourcing. Law students are trained, from day one, to follow the chain of legal authority to serve as the foundation for any legal argument. They need to know where an answer comes from. An AI tool that cannot reliably show its work does not earn a law student's trust.

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Links to the cases, statutes, or sources it relied on	61.6%
Clear citations to legal authority	52.2%
An explanation of how the answer was reached	46.4%
The ability to check whether cited law is still valid	42.4%
A warning when the answer may be incomplete or uncertain	34.0%
A tool designed specifically for legal work	28.3%
Guidance from a professor that the tool is acceptable	23.9%
Training on how to verify AI responses	23.1%

37.1% of students said they would use AI more if they knew the answers were based on trusted legal sources. That is the number one unlock for broader 1L AI adoption: citability. A legal AI tool that can show exactly what cases and statutes it relied on is a fundamentally different product from one that cannot. For students trained to “never trust unverified authority,” it represents the difference between a useful research partner and an unreliable shortcut.



Practical Advice: Using AI Thoughtfully in Law School

- ✓ **Use AI to Learn, Not to Skip:** The most effective uses, like summarizing cases, explaining concepts, and generating practice hypotheticals, are the ones that accelerate understanding of material 1Ls still need to engage with directly. AI as a cram sheet is not the same as AI as a study partner.
- ✓ **Verify Before You Rely:** Students' top concern about AI is inaccuracy. Any AI-generated summary or research result should be checked against primary sources before it's used for anything consequential.
- ✓ **Know Your School's Policy:** Nearly 1 in 5 students said they were unsure whether they were allowed to use AI. Find out the specific policy for each course before the semester begins, not during exam prep.
- ✓ **Insist on Citability:** Legal AI tools that link to their sources are meaningfully more trustworthy than those that do not. Choose tools built for legal work when the stakes are high.



SECTION 10. MOTIVATION AND CAREER OUTLOOK AFTER THE FULL YEAR

Perhaps the most important question about the 1L year is not how hard it was, but rather whether students came out the other side still believing in what brought them to law school in the first place. The data offer a genuinely encouraging answer, with one important nuance.

WHY STUDENTS CHOSE LAW SCHOOL

Students entered law school with a blend of idealism and practicality. Career stability and social justice ranked nearly equally as the top motivators, alongside earning potential and intellectual challenge. This mix of purpose and pragmatism is not contradictory; instead, it reflects the actual complexity of why people pursue a demanding 3-year professional degree.

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Career stability	56.0%
Interest in social justice or advocacy	55.4%
Earning potential	50.7%
Intellectual challenge	48.8%
Commitment to helping underserved communities	37.0%
Interest in constitutional principles or rule-of-law issues	29.1%
Encouragement from mentors or family	28.2%
Unsure / figuring it out	3.1%



ARE STUDENTS STILL MOTIVATED AFTER THE FULL YEAR?

76.9%

remain motivated or more
motivated than when
they started

44.3%

are now **MORE**
motivated than when
they enrolled

“ I came in for social justice, but now I’m also
genuinely interested in corporate governance.
1L taught me that the **law is bigger**
than any one reason
I had for coming here. ”

RESPONSE	% of Respondents
Yes, more motivated	44.3%
About the same	32.6%
Motivations have shifted somewhat	16.7%
Motivations have shifted significantly	3.4%
Unsure / reevaluating	3.0%

That 44.3% of students emerge from 1L more motivated than when they started, despite all the data surrounding workload, social sacrifice, grade shocks, and life disruptions during the year, is one of the most compelling findings in this report. The 1L year is genuinely hard, but for most people who go through it, it also delivers something the pre-law phase cannot: the direct experience of thinking and working like a lawyer and the discovery that they can do it.

The nuance: Students with more than 5 years of work experience before law school are 44.7% more motivated after 1L, representing nearly 10 percentage points higher than students with no prior work experience (35.0%). Older students (40+) show the highest motivation lift of any age group at 47.3%. The pattern is consistent: Students who entered law school with a clear sense of professional context finish with stronger conviction. Purpose is a renewable resource in 1L. Uncertainty is not.



Practical Advice: Staying Connected to Your Motivation

- ✓ **Clarify Your “Why” Before Day One:** Students with a clear sense of purpose have an anchor when the year gets hard. Spend time before law school articulating why you’re there and, specifically, how you want to use your law degree later in practice.
- ✓ **Let Your Motivations Evolve:** Nearly 1 in 5 students found their motivations shifting as they encountered new areas of law. This is normal and healthy.
- ✓ **Experience Builds Conviction:** The data show that work experience, especially 5+ years, correlates strongly with post-law school motivation. If you’re coming straight from college, look for every opportunity to connect your coursework to real-world legal practice, however small.
- ✓ **Don’t Mistake Doubt for Disqualification:** Many students question whether law school is right for them during 1L, especially in October and November. Most of those students are among the 76.9% who finish motivated. Doubt in the middle of something hard is not the same as being wrong to have started.



CONCLUSION

The 1L year is hard in ways that most people do not anticipate and in ways that no amount of warning fully prepares them for. The data in this report make that clear. But they also make something else clear: The vast majority of students who go through it come out the other side more capable, more motivated, and with a far more precise understanding of what it means to think and work like a lawyer.

The data argue for not lowering students' ambitions before they start, but for raising the quality of the preparation they receive. The students who struggled most were not the least talented. They were the most surprised. They were the ones without a roadmap for the specific texture of 1L's demands: The cumulative reading load, the cold call preparation, the early recruiting pressure, the self-care habits that support strong academic performance, and the institutional dynamics that affect some students far more than others.

The cold-call age gap may present an opportunity for faculty reflection on classroom participation practices. The first-generation expectation gap suggests an opportunity for earlier and more targeted orientation and support. The exercise-grade pattern is notable and may be worth discussing as part of broader student wellness planning. The job-search-timing effect on grades is not inevitable. It is a policy conversation about when recruiting pressure appropriately begins.

Many findings in this report suggest practical actions for advisors, administrators, and students. That is what makes a survey worth sharing.

FOR LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS DEANS AND ORIENTATION DIRECTORS

The students sitting in your incoming class this fall are already forming expectations about what law school will be like. Most of those expectations are wrong in specific, predictable ways. This report gives you the data to correct them before the year begins: before their first cold call, before their first legal research assignment, before the first recruiting email arrives at the wrong moment. The most effective orientation is not just a welcome speech. It is an honest preview, backed by numbers, of what your admitted students are about to experience.



FOR PRE-LAW ADVISORS

You are often the last person a student talks to before they walk into law school. The findings in this report, particularly the expectation gap data, the cold-call age disparity, the exercise-grades link, and the first-gen disadvantage, give you a specific, evidence-based foundation for the most important conversation you can have: an honest, detailed preview of what is actually coming, not just what law school is reputed to be.

FOR PROSPECTIVE AND INCOMING LAW STUDENTS

You will be surprised by law school. Most people are. The question is not whether the surprises will come but whether you are equipped to respond to them effectively. The data in this report are your roadmap. Read it before you need it.

“ ***It’s a marathon, not a sprint.***

Prep for small victories, protect your routine, and remember that the hardest weeks are the ones that teach you the most about what kind of lawyer you’re becoming.

”

Next Steps

- ✓ Share this white paper with pre-law students, advisees, and admissions networks.
- ✓ Use the data to spark conversations in advising sessions, workshops, and orientation programs.
- ✓ Encourage incoming students to build their routines, networks, and self-awareness before day one.
- ✓ Visit www.JDNext.org for additional law-related tools, research, and admissions resources.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting the next generation of legal professionals.

