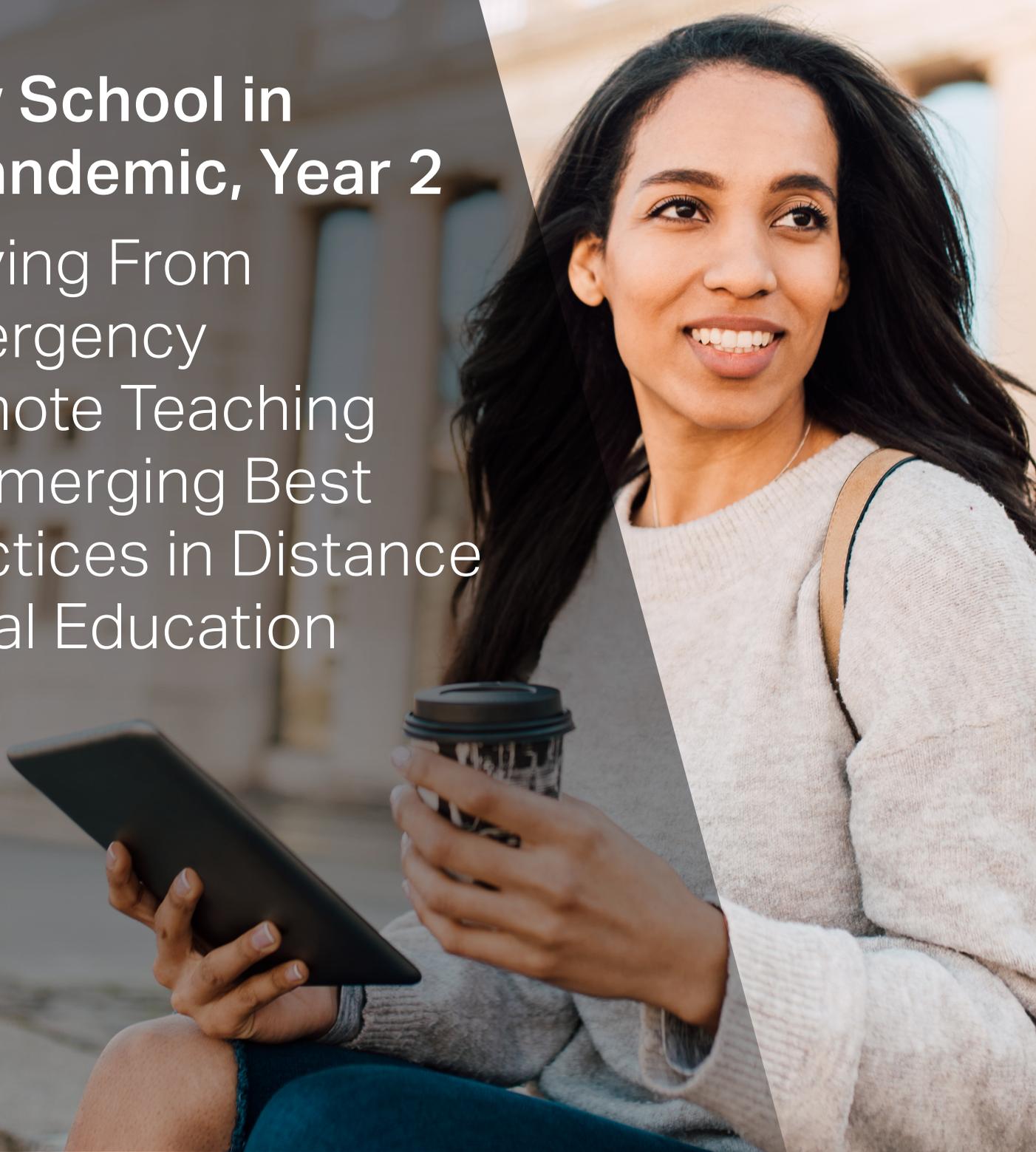


GALLUP®



Law School in a Pandemic, Year 2

Moving From
Emergency
Remote Teaching
to Emerging Best
Practices in Distance
Legal Education



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Foreword

In Fall 2021, most law schools returned to in-person learning after a year of emergency remote teaching at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From what we can tell, the return to campus was welcomed by many law students. Last year, our joint report, *Law School in Pandemic: Perspectives on Distance Learning and Lessons for the Future*, found only a few (9%) would have highly recommended online J.D. courses to family and friends. But we know emergency remote teaching is very different from offering intentional, strategically designed online J.D. courses and programs, despite both yielding distance learning experiences.

With this in mind, we reinterviewed students who responded to last year's survey to determine if their experiences with, and perceptions of, distance learning during the pandemic had changed. For instance, would those who remained online report improved learning experiences as law school professors and professionals refined their approaches to teaching and supporting students remotely? Or, would those who returned to campus more fondly recall online learning due to the flexibility it offered?

The results suggest modest improvement — both in how students perceive distance learning, as well as how they rate the quality of their J.D. programs, whether online or in-person. Among those who completed our survey again this year, 16% would highly recommend online J.D. courses to family and friends. This is higher than last year, compared with both the overall percentage and the 11% of this year's survey sample, most of whom are second- and third-year students. And while only 51% of students who split their time between online and in-person classes rated their J.D. programs as "excellent" or "good" last year, 73% did so this year. Among those who were mostly online last year and remained so this year, the percentage who rated their J.D. programs highly increased from 57% to 72%.

The report also reveals gaps between online and in-person J.D. experiences that still persist. While over half of students taking at least half their courses online agreed their J.D. program is worth the cost, only 36% of those mostly or completely online shared this sentiment. And only 48% of students agreed they are able to fully participate in online classes compared with 84% who said the same about in-person classes.

Despite these gaps, we continue to see evidence that distance learning can serve as a valuable tool for expanding access to legal education for students juggling non-academic responsibilities. Students attending tier-four law schools, which tend to have access-oriented missions, were more likely to report continuing their legal education online this year and having meaningful interactions with their professors and classmates in online courses. Additionally, a majority of all students surveyed agreed that, compared with in-person classes, online courses offered more time to care for family members and work to earn money.

I am encouraged by the collective findings of our *Law School in a Pandemic* reports. Even amid a sweeping global tragedy, law schools managed to produce distance learning experiences that nearly 10% of students surveyed would promote to others in 2021. Further, law students who remained online this year reported improved J.D. program quality, suggesting law schools continued iterating, even as students returned to campus, to provide meaningful and engaging distance learning experiences. Imagine the possibilities if we continue to invest in facilitating and refining learning modalities that expand access to a quality legal education for all students.

Tiffane Cochran

Vice President of Research

AccessLex Institute Center for Legal Education Excellence

Executive Summary

For the 2022 follow-up study on law students' perceptions of online J.D. classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, AccessLex and Gallup reinterviewed 820 students who participated in the initial Spring 2021 study of J.D. students at 147 ABA-accredited law schools. Though most of these students had returned to in-person classes in the Fall 2021 semester, about one in seven were still in hybrid arrangements, split evenly between in-person and online classes in Spring 2022 (6%), or continuing to attend most or all of their classes online (9%). Students in tier-four schools (i.e., lower-ranked law schools according to ratings by *U.S. News and World Report*) were most likely to still be taking at least half of their classes online, at 32%.

1 COVID-19, Year 2: How Have Overall Perceptions of Online J.D. Courses Changed?

- About one in six students reinterviewed in 2022 (16%) rated their likelihood to recommend online J.D. courses at a "9" or "10" on a zero-to-10 scale, the standard commonly used to characterize product or service users as "promoters."
 - This figure was up somewhat from 11% among the same students in 2021. The percentage of promoters rose most among students who were still attending about half their classes online (13% to 24%) or continued to be mostly or completely online (10% to 28%).
- Gaps in program quality ratings by instructional mode narrowed considerably since the 2021 survey.
 - In 2021, 76% of students taking classes mostly or completely in-person rated their J.D. program as "excellent" or "good." Fifty-one percent of those taking half of their classes online and half in-person and 57% of those taking classes mostly or completely online said the same.
 - In 2022, 78% of students who had returned to predominantly in-person classes rated their program as excellent or good — but so did 73% of those who were splitting their time between in-person and online classes, and 72% of those who remained mostly or completely online.
- Students in hybrid in-person/online arrangements were much more likely in 2022 than in 2021 to agree their program was "worth the cost" — 53% vs. 33%, respectively.
- In 2022, students splitting their time equally between online and in-person courses were as likely as those who were taking all or most of their classes in-person (50%) to say their program was worth the cost. However, students who remained mostly or completely online were least likely to feel this way, at 36%.

2 Instructional Adaptation: Have Online Teaching Methods Shifted Since the Pandemic Began?

- Among students reinterviewed in 2022, the percentage who agreed their professors were using teaching methods that engage them had risen since the 2021 study, regardless of instructional mode.
 - In 2021, 51% of students whose classes remained mostly or completely in-person agreed with this statement, vs. 45% of those split evenly between in-person and online classes and 48% of those who were mostly or completely online.
 - In 2022, 60% of those whose classes were all or mostly in-person agreed their professors used teaching methods that engaged them, as did 57% of students in hybrid arrangements and 56% of those who remained mostly or completely online.
- Among students who remained mostly or completely online, the mix of teaching methods had shifted somewhat between the early “emergency remote” semesters and more recent AY 2021-22 semesters. Most notably, these students less commonly reported use of the Socratic method in 2022 (33%) than 2021 (57%), while use of more general group discussions had increased from 32% to 44%.

3 Class Participation: Do Students Feel They Behave Differently in Online Classes?

- The 2022 survey included several new questions gauging the extent to which students felt the format itself influenced their participation in class. Students were somewhat less likely to feel they were able to openly and honestly share their opinions in online than in in-person classes, though the differences were relatively small.
- However, there were larger gaps in two other items on differences by instructional mode:
 - Students were more likely to agree they felt “emotionally drained” after online classes (63%) than in-person classes (48%).
 - Students were much less likely to feel they were able to “participate fully” in online classes (48%) than in in-person classes (84%). This finding highlights the importance of strategies for promoting student engagement in distance-learning situations.

4 Predictors of Positivity: What Key Factors Seem to Influence Students' Perceptions of Online Course Quality?

- Several specific attributes predicted positive ratings of students' current J.D. programs, including:
 - **Students' confidence they would graduate with the knowledge and skills to be successful in their careers:** Sixty-nine percent of students in hybrid in-person/online arrangements agreed they were confident in 2022, similar to the 72% among predominantly in-person students. Students taking most or all of their classes online were somewhat less likely to agree, at 64%.
 - **The ease with which students were able to access career advising resources:** Among students whose classes were mostly or completely online, the proportion who said it was easy to access career services fell considerably from 72% in 2021 to 50% in 2022.
 - **The quality of COVID-19-related communications and efforts to ensure students had the technology necessary for pandemic-related changes.**
 - **Use of guest lectures as an instructional method:** The identification of guest lectures as a predictor of quality presents an opportunity to leverage a particular advantage of the distance-learning format, since guests do not have to travel to participate.

Introduction

COVID-19 made 2021 another uncertain year for educational institutions, and law schools were no exception. Vaccines became widely available to Americans in the spring, helping bring new COVID-19 cases to low levels in the spring and summer months, and law students largely returned to in-person classes in the Fall 2021 semester.

The crisis was far from over, however, as the highly transmissible omicron variant tore through the U.S. in late December 2021 through early February 2022, sending cases soaring to their highest peaks¹ and leading many law schools to revert to distance learning for the first few weeks of the Spring 2022 semester.² Omicron subsided in February, permitting a return to in-person classes, but the need for online contingencies against possible future variants remains.

As the pandemic dragged on, 2021 also saw a great deal of learning and adjustment regarding the videoconferencing tools that became essential due to the crisis. Office employees have grown so accustomed to telework that many are now resisting the return to their workplaces.³ Telemedicine has become more prevalent, allowing for greater healthcare access among housebound patients and in rural communities.⁴ And the capacity for distance learning has become the norm, rather than the exception, in U.S. higher education institutions, including law schools.

Online Classes Can Expand Access to Legal Education

For many Americans, expanded distance-learning capabilities unlock new opportunities — including, for some, the possibility of obtaining a law degree. Online J.D. classes have the potential to extend access to a broader range of students by making it more feasible for them to balance their studies with other responsibilities.



In the 2022 study, students said online classes gave them more time to care for family members, work to earn money or take advantage of professional opportunities, and even study for their courses (Page 15).

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>

2 <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/stay-home-get-boosted-law-schools-tell-students-during-new-virus-phase-2021-12-22/>

3 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/people-are-going-out-again-but-not-to-the-office-11644843600>

4 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markkantowitz/2021/01/01/permanent-changes-due-to-the-pandemic/?sh=73df28d926aa>

However, online courses must be designed and implemented in ways that maximize their value to students and minimize the trade-offs with attending classes in-person. The COVID-19 pandemic created a “forced experiment” with online J.D. classes by requiring the vast majority of law faculty, administrators and students to switch to distance learning for the first time — a far-from-ideal environment in which to develop a legal curriculum that had only rarely been implemented in an online classroom. Though fewer students continued their legal education in a distance learning environment during the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 terms, new data suggest these students have had a more positive experience than they did in the emergency remote learning phase of the pandemic.

AccessLex and Gallup Study Law Students’ Experiences With Online Courses

In Spring 2021, AccessLex and Gallup conducted the initial survey of law school students to learn about their experiences with online classes, identify the biggest challenges they experienced, and glean insights that might help educators maximize the value of such classes.

Not surprisingly, most students interviewed in 2021 had a negative overall view of the switch to distance learning; it wasn’t what they signed up for, the sudden loss of in-person contact with their professors and peers was acutely felt, and school administrators and faculty had to adjust to a distance-learning format on the fly. However, that initial study also offered insights about specific factors that predicted greater favorability toward online classes, including easy access to support services and opportunities to engage with faculty and peers.

For the 2022 study, AccessLex and Gallup reinterviewed 820 students who participated in the first survey to see how their recent experiences and opinions of online J.D. classes compared with their experiences and opinions during the first year of the pandemic. The findings in this report are not representative of any group outside the 820 students interviewed for both the 2021 and 2022 studies.

The results, however, do provide insights on how those students’ perceptions shifted as students, teachers and administrators had more time to adapt to the distance learning format. Their recent experiences no longer reflected emergency conditions and online courses were likely to be more strategically executed.

The analysis in this report compares responses from the 820 students interviewed in 2022 with the responses from those same 820 students in 2021. The findings show these students have become somewhat more favorable toward online classes. Ratings of program quality rose among those who continued to attend at least half of their classes online, as did their likelihood to say they would recommend online classes to others. The 2022 study also includes several new questions to gauge if students felt their class participation differed in online vs. in-person environments, providing another angle for improving students’ online learning experiences.

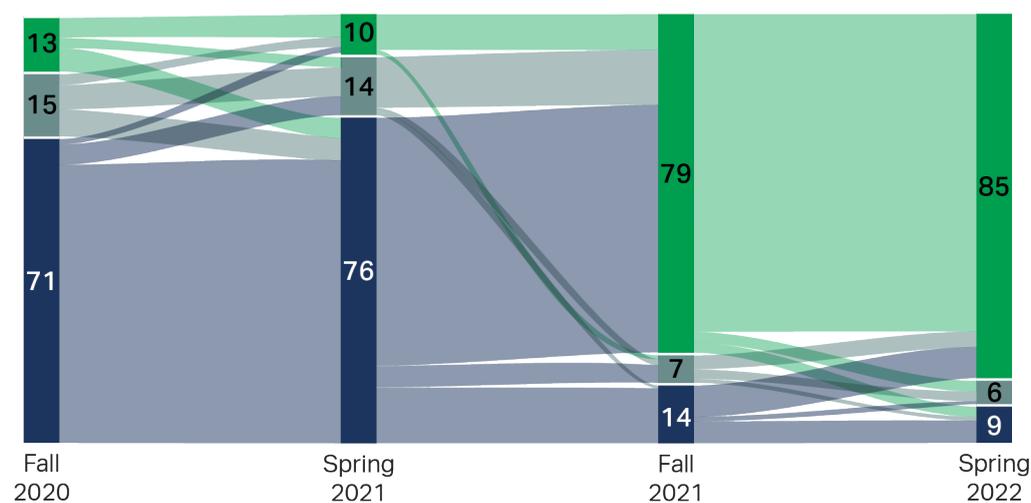
Students Largely Reverted to In-Person Learning in the 2021-2022 Academic Year

Most students reinterviewed in 2022 returned to in-person classes in the Fall 2021 semester. However, about one in seven were still either splitting their class time evenly between in-person and online classes in Spring 2022 (6%) or continuing to attend most or all of their classes online (9%).

CHART 1

Which of the following best describes the classes you [took/are taking] for your J.D. in [semester]?

- % Mostly or completely in-person
- % Equal time online and in-person
- % Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/-1 percentage point.

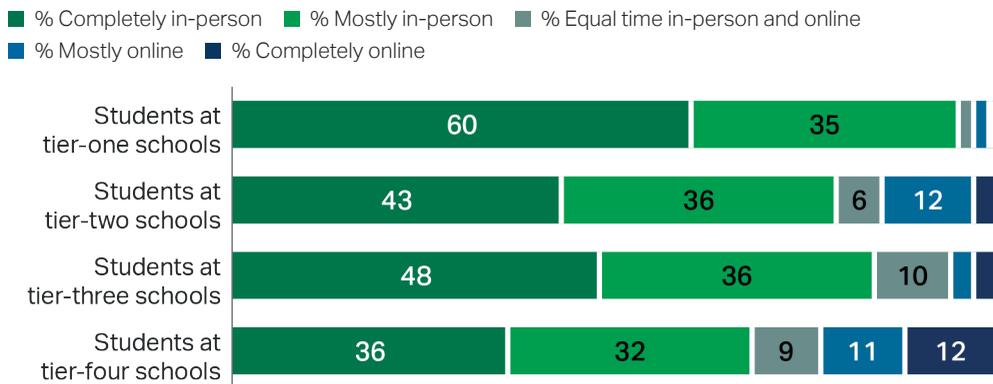
These results differ according to where students' schools are ranked by the influential *U.S. News & World Report*. *U.S. News* publishes rankings annually for ABA-accredited law schools, using indicators of quality assessment, selectivity and job placement success, among others.⁵ The rankings are divided into four similarly sized groups, designated tier one (high) to tier four (low).

5 <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/law-schools-methodology>

About one-third (31%) of students at tier-four schools who were reinterviewed for the 2022 study said they were either still taking all or most of their classes online (23%), or that their classes were split evenly between in-person and online modes (9%). Students at tier-two (21%) and tier-three (15%) schools were less likely to still be taking half or more of their classes online — and just 5% of students in tier-one schools were doing so.

CHART 2

Which of the following best describes the classes you are taking for your J.D. in Spring 2022?



Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/- 1 percentage point; percentages shown when >4%.



PART 1

COVID-19, Year 2: How Have Overall Perceptions of Online J.D. Courses Changed?

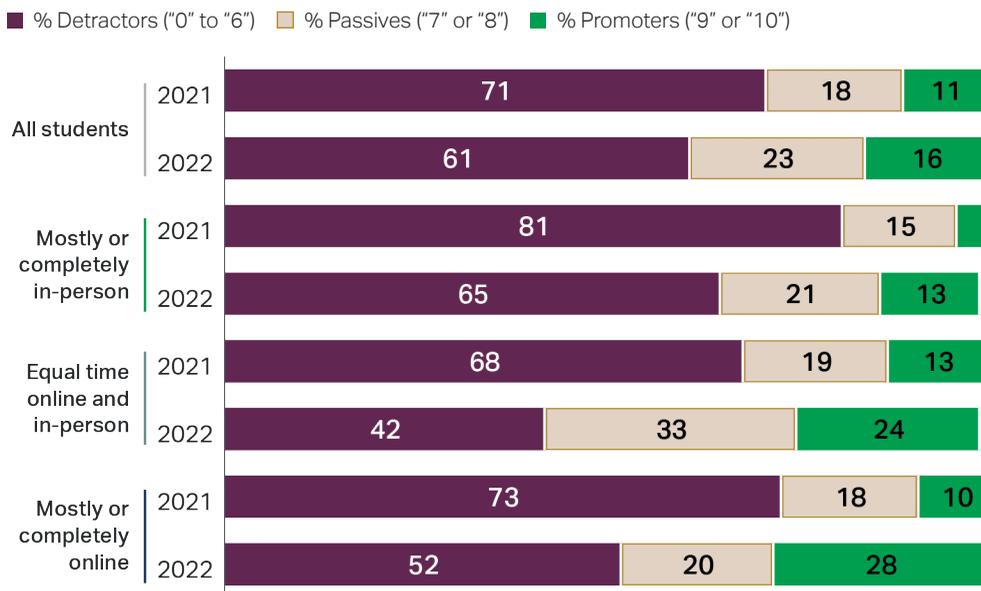
Overall, 16% of students reinterviewed in 2022 rate their likelihood to recommend online J.D. courses at a “9” or “10” on a zero-to-10 scale, the standard commonly used to characterize product or service users as “promoters”; this figure was up somewhat from 11% in 2021. Correspondingly, the proportion considered “detractors” (ratings of zero to six) fell from 71% to 61%.

The percentage of promoters rose most among students who were still attending about half their classes online (13% in 2021 to 24% in 2022) or continued to be mostly or completely online (10% to 28%).

Notably, the percentage of detractors fell from 68% to 42% among students whose classes were equally online and in-person, suggesting a hybrid format that combines advantages of in-person and online attendance is at least acceptable — if not overwhelmingly positive — to most of these students.

CHART 3

On a scale of zero to 10 where “0” means you are not at all likely and “10” means you are extremely likely, how likely is it that you would recommend online J.D. courses to family, friends or colleagues?



Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/- 1 percentage point; percentages shown when >4%.

Students' increased likelihood to recommend their online J.D. courses is reflected in improved perceptions of overall program quality among students who continued to take at least half of their classes online. In the Spring 2021 survey, there were wide gaps in quality ratings by students' mode of instruction that academic year; among those who continued taking most or all of their classes in-person, 76% rated their J.D. program as excellent or good, vs. 51% of those who were about equally in-person and online and 57% of those who took most or all of their classes online.

Among students reinterviewed for the Spring 2022 survey, those gaps had narrowed considerably. Just over three-fourths of students whose schools had returned to mostly or completely in-person classes (78%) rated their program quality as "excellent" or "good." However, this metric was also high among those who were splitting their time evenly between in-person and online classes or remained mostly or completely online (73% and 72% respectively, though fewer in the latter group rated their program "excellent").

CHART 4

How would you rate the quality of your current J.D. program?

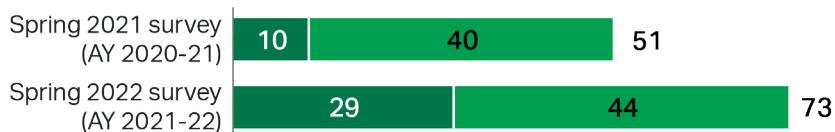
Results by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Excellent ■ % Good

Mostly or completely in-person



Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

Correspondingly, students in hybrid in-person/online or predominantly online formats were more likely in 2022 than they were in 2021 to say the quality of their program had improved since the start of the pandemic (Chart 5).

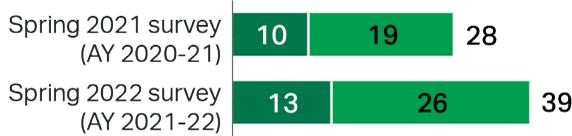
CHART 5

Please rate your level of agreement with the following item: Since the beginning of the pandemic, the quality of my J.D. program has improved.

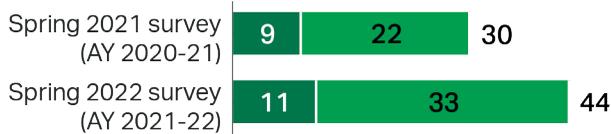
Results by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree

Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

The pattern was somewhat different regarding students' perceptions that their J.D. program was "worth the cost." In both the 2021 and 2022 surveys, about half of students who attended most or all of their classes in-person agreed their program was worth the cost. However, while students who split their time evenly between online and in-person classes were least likely in the 2021 study to say their program was worth the cost at 33%, in the 2022 study, 53% of students felt their hybrid program was worth the cost. Students who remained mostly or completely online, meanwhile, were least likely in the 2022 survey to say their program was worth the cost, at 36%.

Again, these findings are not representative of students beyond those included in these studies. For these students, however, results indicate hybrid in-person/online programs improved the most between the Spring 2021 and Spring 2022 semesters, in terms of perceived value.

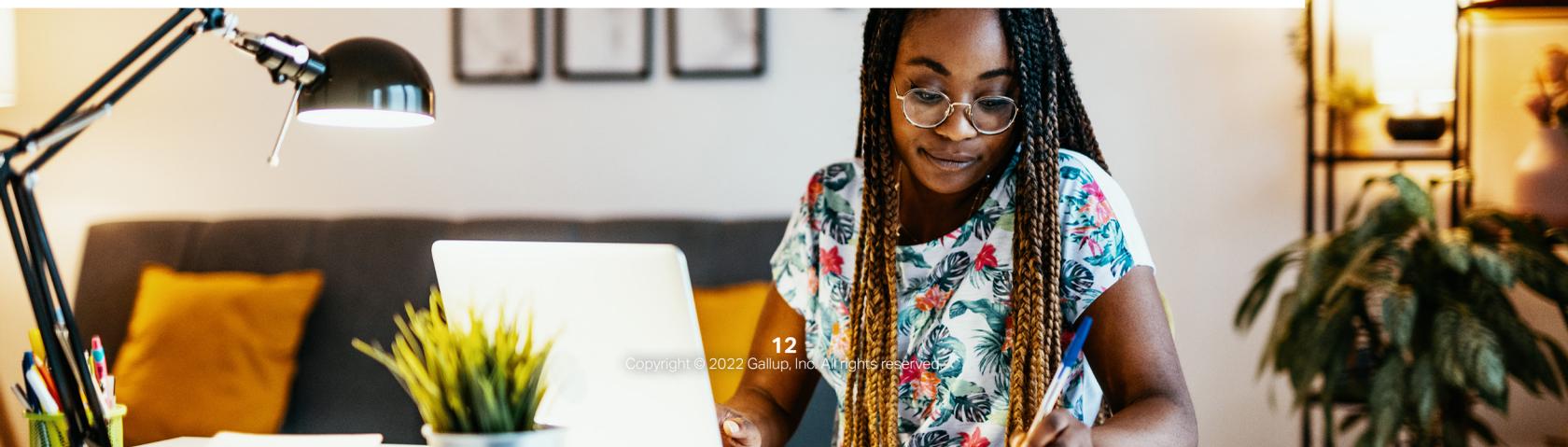


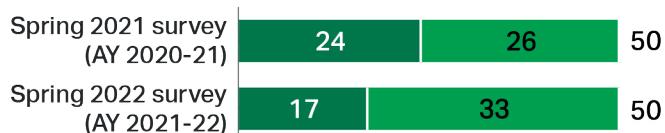
CHART 6

Please rate your level of agreement with the following item: *The education I am currently receiving in my J.D. program is worth the cost.*

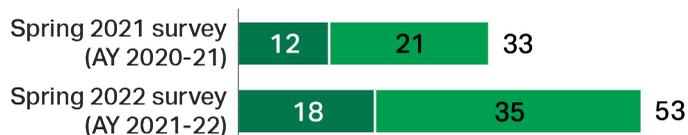
Results by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree

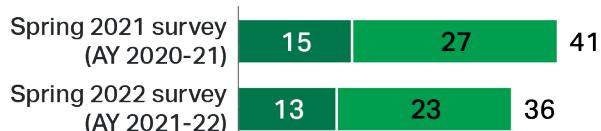
Mostly or completely in-person



Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/- 1 percentage point.

The year-to-year comparisons by instructional mode in Charts 4 through 6 should be evaluated in light of the considerable change in the student composition of those groups over the comparison period. In the Spring 2021 survey, the online group included the vast majority of students, but by the Spring 2022 survey, most fell into the in-person category.

However, it is also worth noting that program quality and value ratings improved about as much among students who remained online for half or more of their classes in both the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years as they did among students who returned from hybrid or predominantly online arrangements in AY 2020-21 to mostly or completely in-person classes in AY 2021-22.

In other words, an additional year of refining and adapting to online programs appears to have had a commensurate impact on perceived program quality and value as a return to in-person courses.

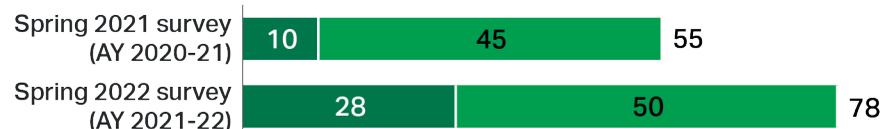
CHART 7

How would you rate the quality of your current J.D. program? Percentage “Excellent” or “Good” among students who remained online for at least half of classes in both years, vs. those who returned from online to in-person classes in AY2021-22

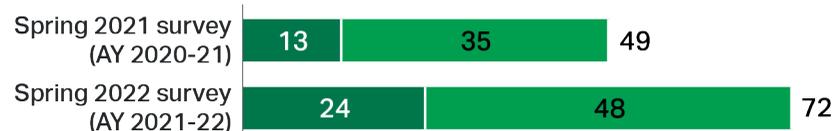
Results by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Excellent ■ % Good

Online for half or more classes in AY 2020-21, mostly/completely in-person in AY 2021-22



Online for half or more classes in both academic years



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

Hybrid J.D. Programs Seek to Maintain Quality While Improving Access

The increase in the perceived cost effectiveness of hybrid programs among the students surveyed bodes well for law schools aiming to improve the value of increasingly common hybrid programs. Prior to the pandemic, fewer than 10 law schools — including Mitchell Hamline School of Law and the University of Dayton School of Law — had received variances from the ABA allowing them to offer hybrid J.D. programs with more than one-third of credits earned online.

Since COVID-19 forced all schools to adopt distance learning capabilities, hybrid in-person/online programs are expected to become increasingly available as a permanent option. In 2020, the ABA adopted new resolutions to allow law schools to temporarily offer J.D. programs online without fear of violating accreditation standards related to distance education. Normally, the ABA only allows accredited law schools to grant up to one-third of credits required for graduation for online courses.⁶

Some law schools are already offering hybrid programs on a permanent basis, with several only requiring students to visit their campuses a few times a year, thereby extending access to more students who do not live within driving distance of campus.⁷ But no matter how hybrid programs are implemented, less time spent commuting to and from campus makes it easier for students to balance other responsibilities, such as family and work, as the 2022 study shows.

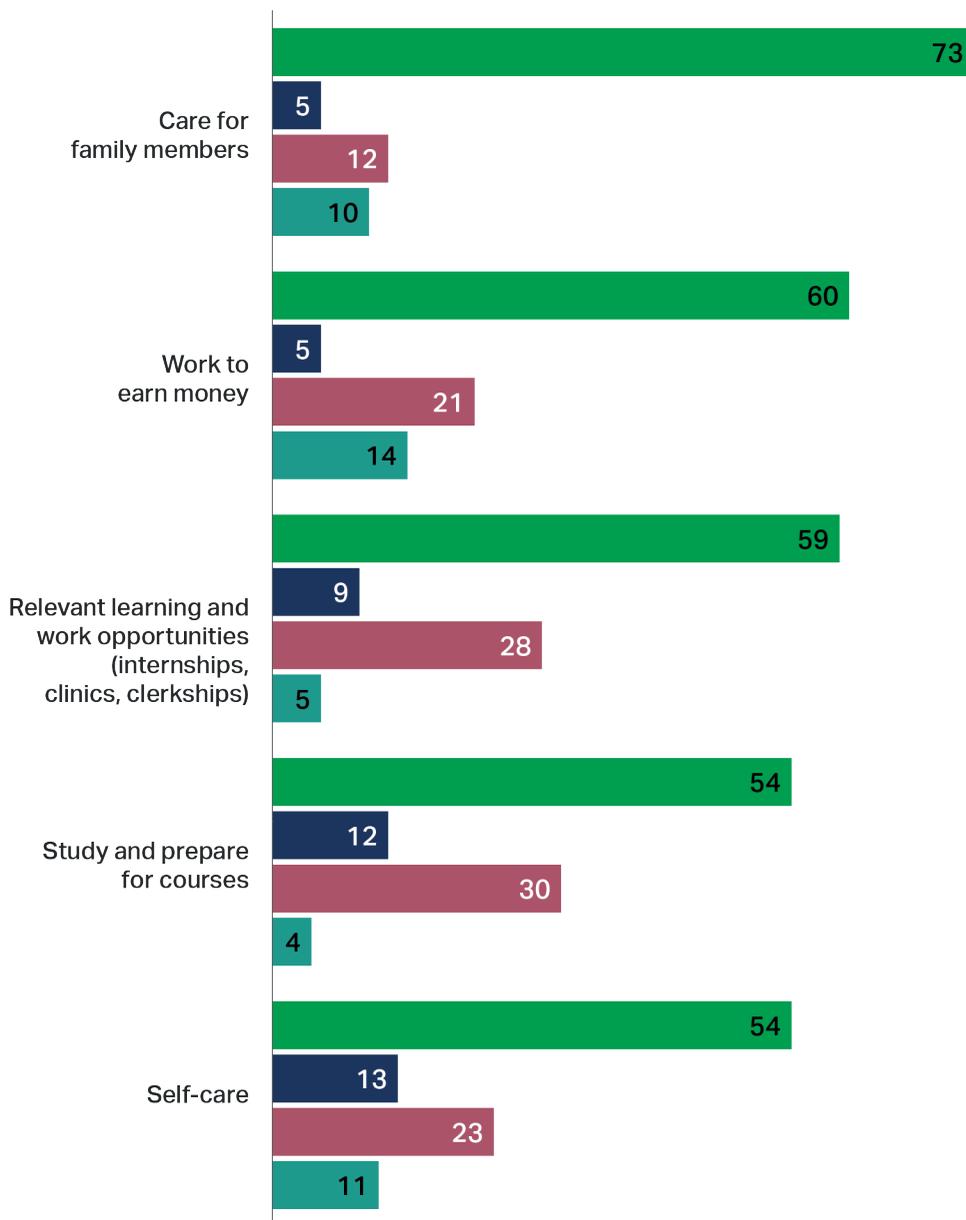
6 <https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/various-legal-ed-proposals-approved-by-aba-house-of-delegates>

7 <https://www.onlinejdddegree.com/choosing/aba-approved-hybrid-law-schools/>

CHART 8

Which mode of classroom instruction leaves more time for you to do the following?

■ % Online ■ % In-person ■ % Both leave same amount of time ■ % Neither leaves the time



The spread of hybrid J.D. formats will likely depend, in part, on law schools' ability to demonstrate such programs are as rigorous and likely to lead to positive outcomes as predominantly in-person formats. In particular, law schools will need to develop strategies for minimizing the dampening effect of the online modality on students' class participation and the quality of their interactions with faculty and peers.

Meaningful Interactions With Professors and Classmates

Among students whose classes were, and continue to be, mostly or completely online, there was an increased percentage who said they had meaningful interactions with their professors during online courses — 39% in 2021 vs. 53% in 2022. Similarly, students whose classes were mostly or completely online were more likely in 2022 than they were in 2021 to say they had meaningful interactions with their classmates in online courses — 24% vs. 36%.

However, most of these increases can be attributed to the greater likelihood of students who took all or most of their classes online in AY 2021-22 to be at tier-four schools (Chart 2). Regardless of instructional mode, students at tier-four schools were more likely than those in higher-ranked schools to say they had meaningful interactions with both professors and classmates (Table 1).

TABLE 1:

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements: I have _____ in my online J.D. courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Percentage “Strongly agree” and “Agree,” Spring 2022

	Students at:			
	Tier-one schools	Tier-two schools	Tier-three schools	Tier-four schools
Had meaningful interactions with professors in online courses	32%	35%	36%	48%
Had meaningful interactions with classmates in online courses	23%	25%	21%	40%

The finding that students at tier-four schools rate the quality of their interactions more highly itself has important implications, as the accessibility mission and lower selectivity of tier-four schools makes them more likely to innovate with distance-learning techniques to meet a broader range of student needs. To the extent those schools are also more focused on making faculty accessible and promoting supportive peer interactions, they have a distinct advantage in making online classes work for students.

PART 2:

Instructional Adaptation: Have Online Teaching Methods Shifted Since the Pandemic Began?

In the 2021 study, students' likelihood to agree their professors used teaching methods that engaged them in the course material was strongly related to their likelihood to recommend online J.D. classes.

Among students reinterviewed in 2022, the percentage who said their professors used teaching methods that engaged them rose, with high agreement, regardless of whether their classes were mostly in-person or online, or split between the two.

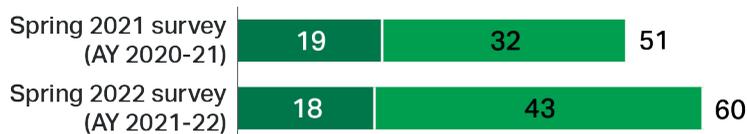
CHART 9

Please rate your level of agreement with the following item: My professors are using teaching methods that engage me in learning the course material during the COVID-19 pandemic.

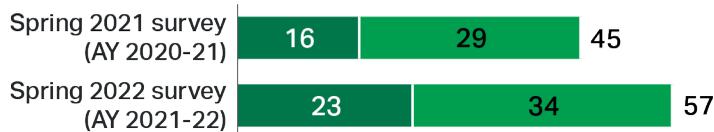
Results by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Strongly Agree ■ % Agree

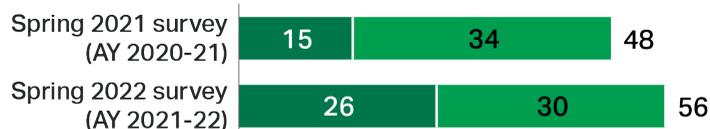
Mostly or completely in-person



Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

Among students taking a substantial proportion of their courses online, some of this rise is likely attributable to changes in the mix of teaching methods after faculty members had more time to adapt to the online format. Those changes include the following:

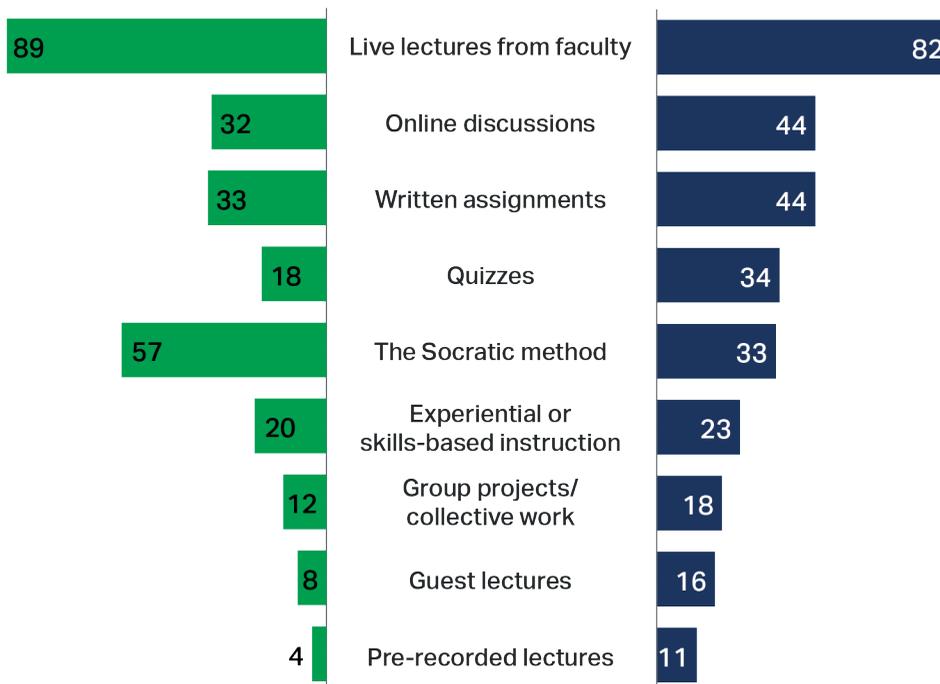
- Students who were taking all or most of their classes online were much less likely in the 2022 survey (33%) than in 2021 (57%) to say the Socratic method — which involves engaging students in dialogue to help them think critically about legal arguments and court decisions — was used in their classes.
- In the 2021 study, online students had been less likely than those who continued to take most classes in-person to say the Socratic method was used in their classes. Movement away from the technique among online students in 2022 suggests it may not be as effective in a distance-learning format.
- Online discussions, another means of engaging students through interactivity, was more commonly used among students taking all or most classes online in 2022 (44%), compared with 2021 (32%). In the 2021 study, online discussion was the teaching method that best differentiated online students who rated the quality of their program as “excellent” from those who gave lower quality ratings.
- Predominantly online students were also more likely in 2022 than they were in 2021 to say two evaluative methods — written assignments and quizzes — were used in their classes.

CHART 10

Please indicate how many of your law school courses have used each of the following during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Percentage who said “All” or “Most” courses used each method, among students who were mostly or completely online in each academic year

■ % Spring 2021 survey ■ % Spring 2022 survey



Though group projects, guest lectures and prerecorded lectures remained relatively rare, online students were more likely to say they were used in their classes in 2022 than they were in 2021. The increase may suggest that, over time, faculty members may experiment with a variety of teaching methods to help boost students' engagement and participation. Guest lectures, in particular, are associated with higher quality ratings and lend themselves well to the online format (see [Page 29](#)).

Extracurricular Participation

In addition to adjusting classroom environments to better accommodate online learning, law schools were also forced to adapt their extracurricular activities — such as research opportunities with faculty, law review and moot court. In Spring 2021, schools seemed to have done an admirable job of making these adjustments; students participated in extracurricular activities at equal or higher rates as they did before the pandemic, and students completing at least half of their courses online were participating at similar rates as their in-person peers.

In Spring 2022, this trend appears to have continued. Overall, students completing half or more of their coursework online showed notable increases in their participation across a number of these extracurricular activities.

TABLE 2:

Which of the following have you participated in [since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Spring 2021)/during the 2021-2022 academic year (Spring 2022)]?

Percentage of students who have participated in each

	Equal time online and in-person			Mostly or completely online		
	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Pct. Pt. Change	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Pct. Pt. Change
Internship or externship	43%	61%	+18	38%	66%	+28
Faculty research assistant position	13%	26%	+13	15%	31%	+16
Pro bono or volunteer legal work	33%	58%	+25	37%	36%	-1
Nonlegal volunteer work	16%	31%	+15	14%	28%	+14
Paid or unpaid law-related employment	29%	60%	+31	33%	61%	+28
Paid nonlegal employment	15%	36%	+21	16%	30%	+14
Law review/journal	26%	45%	+19	29%	44%	+15
Moot court or mock trial	14%	22%	+8	19%	20%	+1
Legal clinic or practicum	17%	44%	+27	18%	44%	+26

While some of these increases are likely due to improved facilitation of these programs by law schools, a portion of the increase likely stems from students' progression through their program of study, where participation in activities such as law review are more likely to occur in students' 2L or 3L years. At a minimum, though, online students seem unimpeded by the modality of their courses when it comes to extracurricular engagement.



With the exceptions of law review participation and volunteer legal work, students completing at least half their courses online remained about as likely as students completing most of their coursework in-person to have participated in nine extracurricular or professional development activities during the 2021-2022 academic year.

TABLE 3:

Which of the following have you participated in during the 2021-2022 academic year?

Percentage of students who participated, Spring 2022

	Mostly or completely in-person	Equal time online and in-person	Mostly or completely online
Internship or externship	66%	61%	66%
Faculty research assistant position	27%	26%	31%
Pro bono or volunteer legal work	54%	58%	36%
Nonlegal volunteer work	26%	31%	28%
Paid or unpaid law-related employment	66%	60%	61%
Paid nonlegal employment	26%	36%	30%
Law review/journal	54%	45%	44%
Moot court or mock trial	24%	22%	20%
Legal clinic or practicum	46%	44%	44%

A portion of the discrepancy in law review participation is likely due to the high incidence of participation among students enrolled at predominantly in-person, tier-one schools — 69% of surveyed tier-one students participated in their school's law review, compared with 33% of tier-three and 29% of tier-four students. Additionally, while predominantly online students were less likely to participate in volunteer legal work, students who spent equal time online and in-person were as likely as predominantly in-person students to conduct volunteer legal work.

PART 3

Class Participation: Do Students Feel They Behave Differently in Online Classes?

Students Were Less Likely to Feel They Can “Participate Fully” in Online Classes

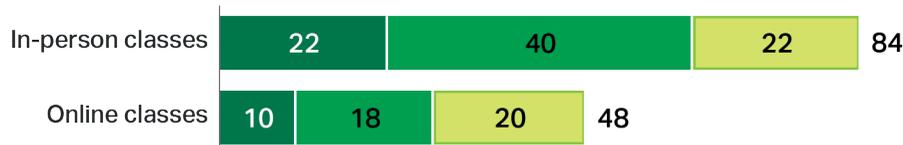
While most students — 84% — agreed they participated fully in in-person classes, just 48% said the same about online classes. This gap reflects the most fundamental challenge facing online educators at all levels — but particularly those in law school, where in-class dialogues (such as those using the Socratic method) are commonly used to help students think through and synthesize the course material.

This is particularly notable in light of the above findings concerning the importance of meaningful engagement with faculty and peers to students’ assessment of their programs’ overall quality.

CHART 11

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement: I am able to participate fully attending _____.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree ■ % Somewhat agree



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.



Strategies for increasing student engagement online can leverage advantages offered by videoconferencing platforms, such as the ease of using breakout rooms to incorporate small group discussions into seminar classes.

Others have called for changes in course design to boost engagement, such as more “student-centered” approaches, which may include dividing the course into shorter segments and clearly articulating the learning goals for each.⁸

As the 2021 study indicated, student engagement may also benefit from multifaceted teaching methods that mix active learning activities with evaluative components, such as written assignments and quizzes.⁹

To provide additional insight on student experiences by instructional mode, the 2022 survey included several new questions to gauge the extent to which students felt they behaved differently in online vs. in-person classes. Specifically, the goal was to determine whether students felt the format itself influenced the extent and quality of their participation in class.

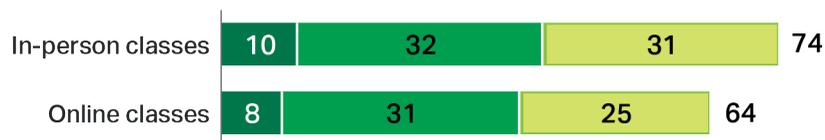
The first few questions addressed students’ perceived tendency to be open and honest in class discussions. Overall, they were somewhat less likely to agree they can express their honest opinions online than in-person (64% vs. 74%, respectively), and somewhat more likely to say they resist sharing their opinions in online classes (50% vs. 43%).

CHART 12

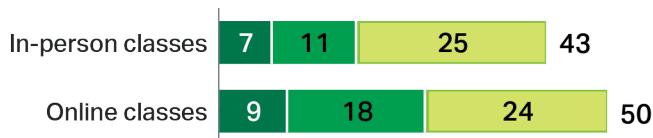
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree ■ % Somewhat agree

I am able to express my honest opinion in _____.



I resist expressing my opinion in _____.



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

8 <https://bestpracticeslegaled.com/2020/07/17/top-5-tips-for-teaching-law-online/>

9 <https://www.accesslex.org/law-school-in-a-pandemic>

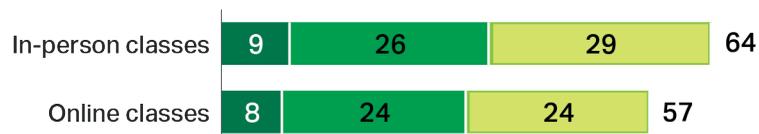
Similarly, students were somewhat more likely to agree they were comfortable sharing their true feelings in online classes than in in-person classes (57% vs. 64%), and somewhat more likely to say they avoided doing so in online classes (52% vs. 47%).

CHART 13

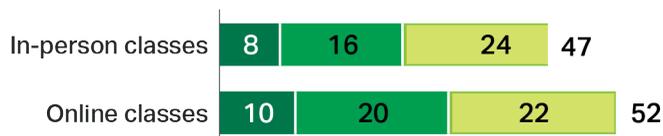
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree ■ % Somewhat agree

I am comfortable sharing my true feelings in _____.



I don't often share my true feelings in _____.



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/- 1 percentage point.

Students were also asked about the honesty of their interactions with peers and faculty members in online vs. in-person classes. Here also, they were somewhat more likely to feel they were circumspect about their true feelings in online classes than in in-person classes, particularly when it came to interacting with faculty members.

CHART 14

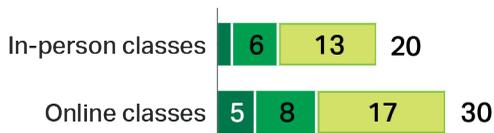
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree ■ % Somewhat agree

When I work with peers in _____, the way I act and speak often doesn't match what I really feel.



When I interact with faculty _____, the way I act and speak often doesn't match what I really feel.



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/- 1 percentage point; percentages shown when >4%.

The above questions suggest that, though there are some differences in how students perceive the authenticity of their interactions in in-person vs. online classes, those differences aren't dramatic. All gaps were relatively small (10 percentage points or less) and may reflect the relative novelty of online J.D. classes. Further studies may find that, as students grow more accustomed to the format and uncertainty regarding protocols for online participation fades, students' comfort levels rise. Future research might also address how the chat function in online J.D. classes can be best used to enhance student participation, as educators in other fields of study have claimed it can.¹⁰

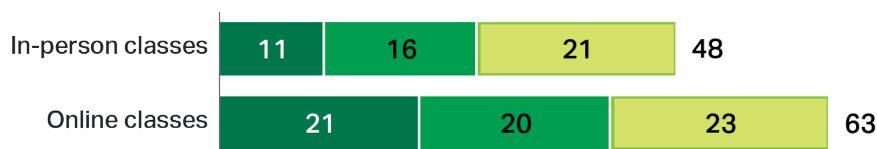
Students Are More Likely to Feel Emotionally Drained After Online Classes

Another difference by instructional mode may require more concerted efforts to address. Almost two-thirds of students in the 2022 study (63%) agreed they felt emotionally drained after attending online classes, compared with 48% who said the same about in-person classes.

CHART 15

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement: I feel emotionally drained after attending _____.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree ■ % Somewhat agree



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

This effect is not unique to online law classes; students at all education levels have reported feeling more tired after online classes, leading to research on how videoconferencing platforms tax the brain differently from in-person interactions.¹¹

Researchers have recommended various tactics for reducing the cognitive burden of online classes, such as encouraging students to minimize distractions in their external environment and using the "hide self-view" function to remove the distraction of seeing oneself on the screen.¹² In hybrid J.D. programs, it may also be helpful to use online formats more commonly with courses that have shorter class periods.

¹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2022/02/10/online-college-classes-can-be-better-than-in-person-ones-the-implications-for-higher-ed-are-profound/>

¹¹ <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-09-15-is-learning-on-zoom-the-same-as-in-person-not-to-your-brain>; <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>

¹² <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>; <https://petri.com/microsoft-teams-meeting-fatigue-hide-your-own-video/>

PART 4

Predictors of Positivity: What Key Factors Seem to Influence Students' Perceptions of Online Course Quality?

Statistical analysis of the 2022 results highlights the specific attributes asked about in the survey that are most closely associated with online students' likelihood to rate the quality of their current J.D. program positively. Items that emerged as the strongest predictors included:

- students' confidence they would graduate with the knowledge and skills to be successful
- the ease with which students were able to access career advising resources
- students' ratings of how well the program communicated COVID-19-related changes
- students' agreement that the program ensured they had the technology necessary for COVID-19-related changes
- the use of guest lectures in online classes

Programs that sustained students' confidence that their J.D. program provides them with the knowledge and skills to be successful in their legal careers were most likely to be rated positively. This percentage changed little among students in hybrid online/in-person arrangements between 2021 and 2022, and students' likelihood to agree they were confident was similar to mostly in-person students' feelings (69% vs. 72%). Students taking most or all of their classes online, however, were somewhat less likely to agree in 2022, at 64%.

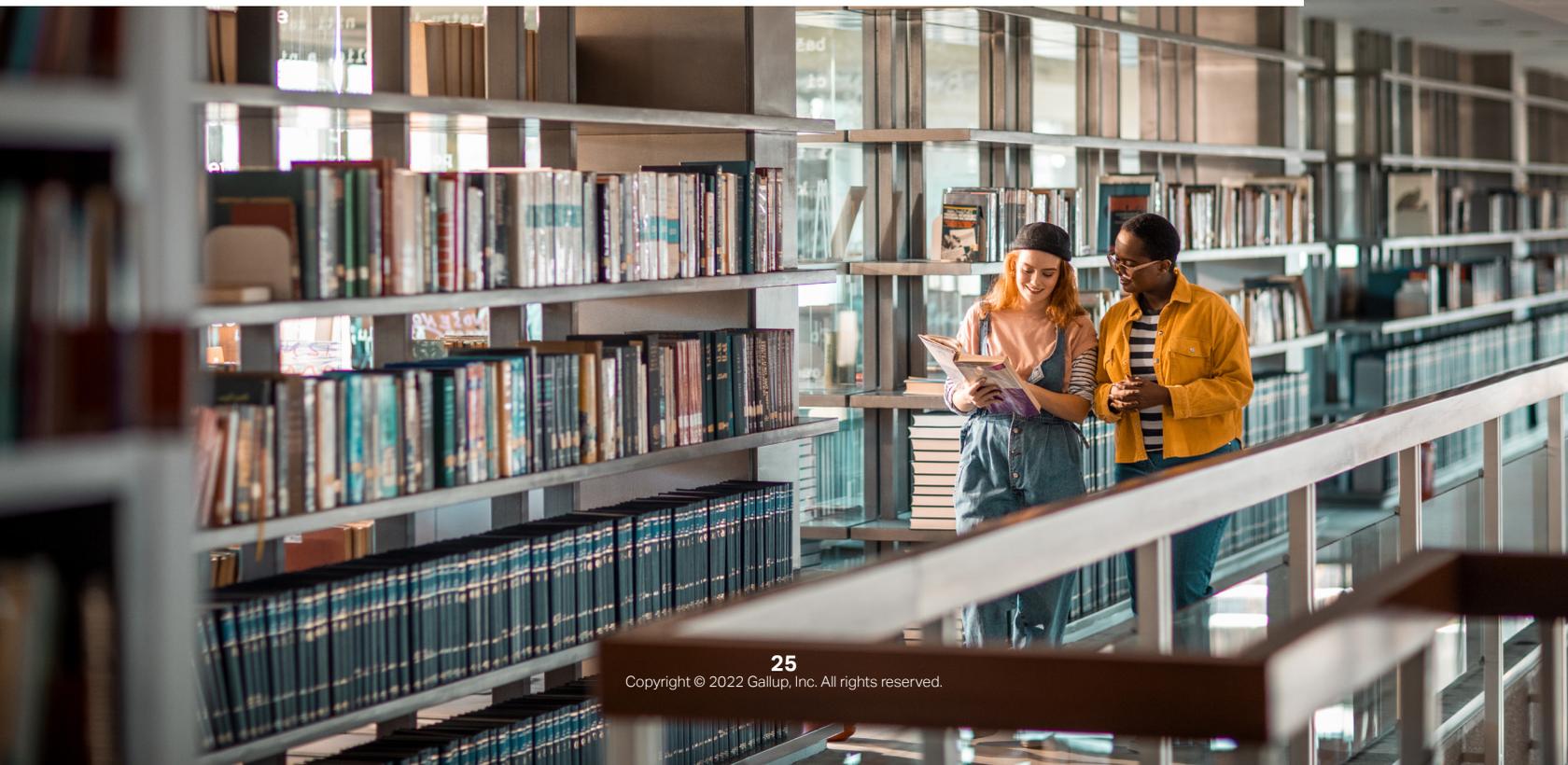


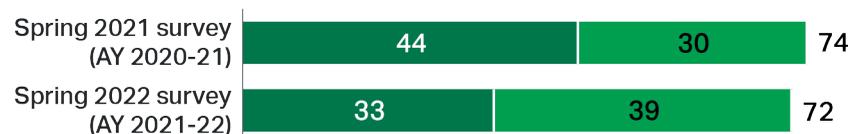
CHART 16

Please rate your level of agreement with the following item: *I am confident that I will graduate from my J.D. program with the knowledge and skills I need to be successful in my chosen career path.*

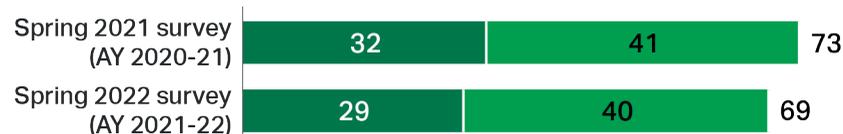
Percentage “Strongly agree” or “Agree,” by mode of instruction during each academic year

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Agree

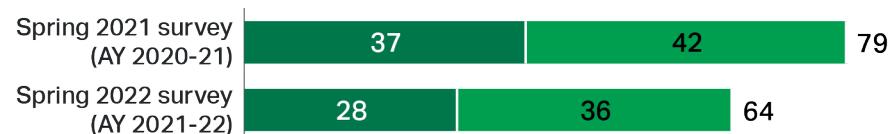
Mostly or completely in-person



Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, segment percentages may sum to shown totals, +/-1 percentage point.

Career Advising Resources

Access to career advising services was another key predictor of quality ratings among online students, demonstrating the importance of helping such students feel just as connected to resources geared to help them succeed as students who are on campus more frequently.

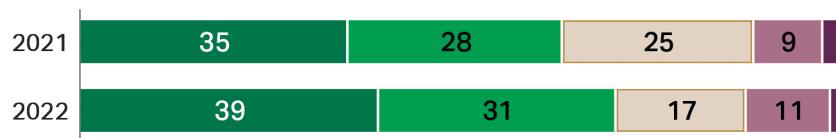
Among students who were split evenly between in-person and online classes, 69% indicated it was very easy or easy for them to access career advising resources in the 2022 survey, slightly higher than the 63% who responded this way in 2021. Among students who remained mostly or completely online, however, the proportion who said it was easy fell considerably, from 72% in 2021 to 50% in 2022.

CHART 17

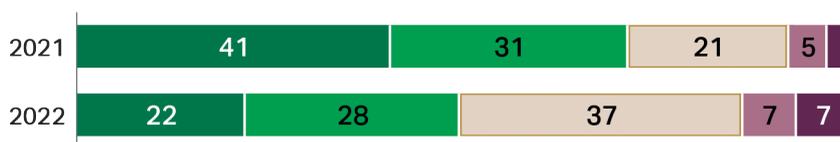
Currently, how easy or difficult is it for you to access career advising resources?

■ % 5, Very easy ■ % 4 ■ % 3 ■ % 2 ■ % 1, Very difficult

Equal time online and in-person



Mostly or completely online



Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/- 1 percentage point; percentages shown when >4%.

The decline is not a result of online students' greater likelihood to be in lower-tier schools in the latter survey — overall, students in tier-three (70%) and tier-four (71%) schools are almost as likely as those in tier-one schools (75%) to say it is easy to access career advising resources. One possibility is, as most students returned to in-person classes, administrators tended to place less emphasis on ensuring those who remained online retained easy access to such services.



However, career advising resources are important to many students faced with the uncertainty of securing a position in their chosen legal field. A 2017 study by AccessLex and Gallup found law graduates were much more likely to report their degree was worth the cost if their law school helped them find a job.

COVID-19-Related Communications

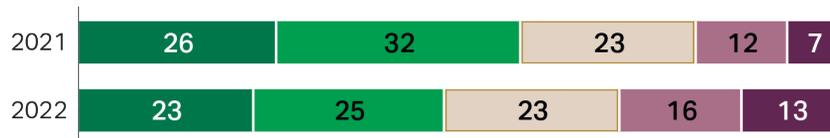
As noted on [Page 6](#), the 2021-22 academic year was characterized by uncertainty about COVID-19, as cases subsided in the fall, but rose sharply and spurred renewed precautions with the spread of the omicron variant in late 2021 and early 2022. Students reinterviewed in 2022 are somewhat less positive about their school’s communications about pandemic-related changes than they were in 2021; for example, 48% agreed in 2022 that COVID-19-related communications have been clear, down from 58% in 2021.

CHART 18

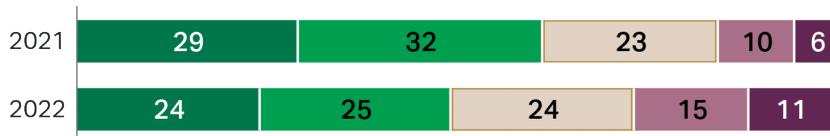
On a five-point scale, where “5” means “strongly agree” and “1” means “strongly disagree,” please rate your level of agreement with the following items.

■ % 5, Strongly agree ■ % 4 ■ % 3 ■ % 2 ■ % 1, Strongly disagree

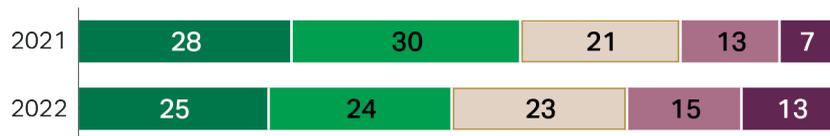
[School name] communications regarding COVID-19-related changes have been clear.



[School name] communications regarding COVID-19-related changes have been informative.



[School name] communications regarding COVID-19-related changes have been timely.



Due to rounding, totals may sum to 100%, +/-1 percentage point.

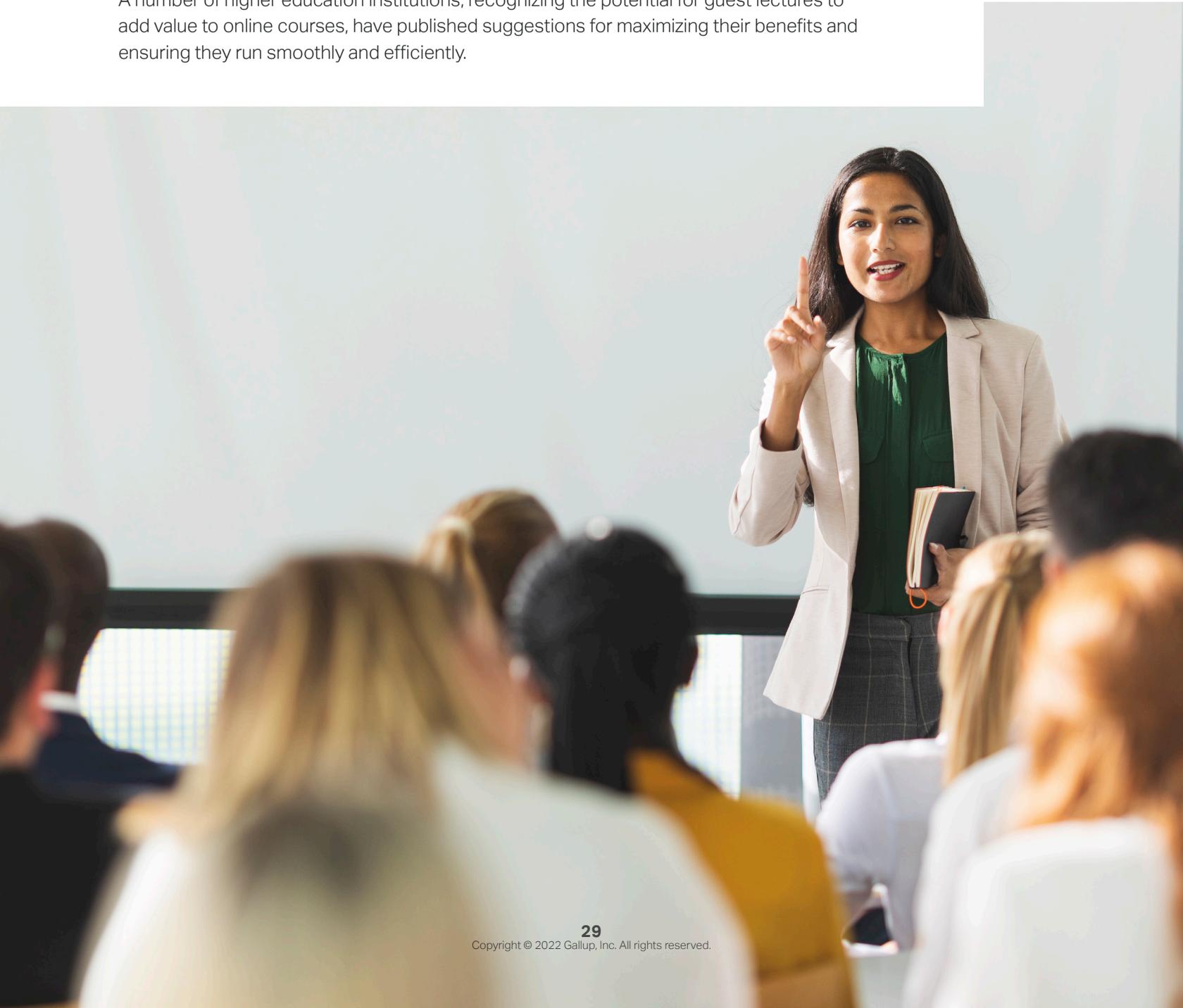
In some cases, schools may have been less focused on pandemic-related communications in the 2021-22 academic year after most students had returned to in-person classes. However, the regression results suggest schools that more effectively maintained clear and timely communications — and continued to ensure students’ technological needs for distance learning were met — helped those who remained online feel better about their programs.

Guest Lectures

Sixteen percent of students in the 2022 survey who attended classes mostly or completely online said all or most of their courses use guest lectures, up from 8% of such students in the 2021 survey.

The opportunity for a broader range of guest lecturers is a particular advantage of the distance-learning format, since lecturers do not have to travel to participate. Experts in particular legal fields or on specific cases covered in the class can provide perspectives, opinions and personal experiences that supplement or reinforce course material.

A number of higher education institutions, recognizing the potential for guest lectures to add value to online courses, have published suggestions for maximizing their benefits and ensuring they run smoothly and efficiently.



Implications

While most law school students have returned to in-person classes, the “online experiment” forced by the pandemic has been a learning opportunity for law schools seeking to make online classes a permanent option for students who need the convenience they provide. The results from this 2022 follow-up study of students interviewed for the 2021 AccessLex-Gallup survey show an increase in favorability toward online classes among students still taking them, suggesting some schools were able to make improvements over time.

The 2022 study also suggests a hybrid in-person/online format may offer the greatest value for some J.D. students. Fifty-three percent of students who split their time evenly between in-person and online classes agreed their J.D. program was worth the cost, similar to the percentage among students attending all or most classes in-person.

Results from the 2022 study also offer insights on specific issues facing online law students and areas of focus that may be likely to improve their experience. Analysis of the 2022 results supports the 2021 finding that online students need to feel they are fully supported by their universities through effective communications and easy access to key services like career advising. Perhaps most importantly, students’ lower likelihood to feel they can “participate fully” in online than in in-person classes suggests maintaining student engagement should be a key area of focus as more law schools seek to provide distance-learning options.

Methodology

Results from the AccessLex-Gallup 2022 Current Law Student Survey are based on 820 completed web surveys with currently enrolled J.D. students across 137 law schools. Gallup conducted surveys Feb. 16-March 16, 2022, via the web, in English only.

The sampling population was J.D. students currently registered in AccessLex’s MAX database, who had also completed the 2021 AccessLex-Gallup Current Law Student survey in 2021. The analysis in this report compared responses from the 820 students interviewed in 2022 with results from the same set of students who took the survey in 2021. Unlike results in the 2021 report, data presented in this report have not been weighted to match national law school student demographics of gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, region and law school tier; all trends and findings are limited to the observed student population.