

# Student Legal Services

## 2019-20 Assessment and Learning Outcomes Report

### Overview

Student Legal Services (“SLS”) offers students free and confidential consultations with an attorney for advice, guidance, and coaching related to their legal questions, rights, and obligations. Areas of law include **landlord-tenant, criminal, traffic and alcohol citations, small claims actions, credit issues and collections, auto and health insurance, accidents and personal injury, consumer fraud, technology and privacy issues, general contract law, basic estate planning matters, and family law.** SLS provided **1,335 client consultations in 2019-20** (up from 1,161 in 2018-19) to help students resolve legal issues and to foster the student learning outcomes described below.

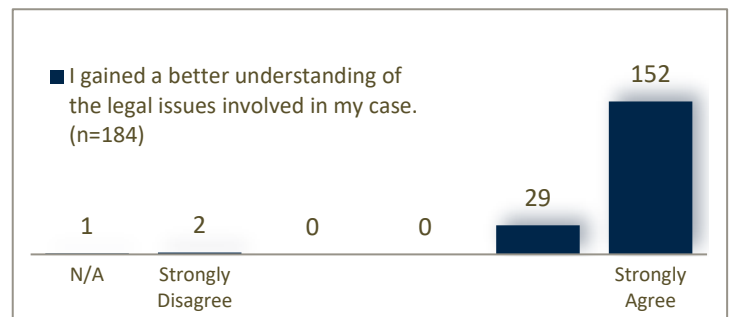
SLS conducted two client surveys (Dec. 2019 and May 2020) to assess four learning outcomes and satisfaction with the service. The survey went to 625 SLS clients with a valid email address on file.<sup>1</sup> The response rate was 29.4%.

### Learning Outcome Assessment Results

#### Learning Outcome #1: After consulting with SLS, students will understand the legal issues involved in their cases.

Almost all student clients (**98.4%**) agreed or strongly agreed that consulting with SLS improved their understanding of the legal issues related to their cases. Representative narrative responses included the following:

- I gained a much better understanding of tenant rights.
- My understanding of legal issues increased by a lot after consulting with SLS. I am grateful for this resource.
- Mark provided clarity about the law related to my issue; as well as free resources to assist me in resolving the problem.
- Through SLS, I understood: 1) the severity of the issue I was facing, 2) the specific safety codes my landlords were violation and 3) the steps I needed to take, as well a timeframe and suggestions on how to proceed.
- I learned a lot more about the law as it applies to tenants. Mark was extremely helpful.
- I had a better understanding of my rights as a California tenant, as well as a better understanding of the legal system and how Small Claims Court works.
- I consulted with Mark before and during my divorce. He helped explain family law to me in a way that was accessible and acknowledged complexity. He shared resources with me that have been so helpful.
- Went from being ignorant and unaware of my rights/protections to feeling confident.
- My discussion with Mark clarified the legal questions (in relation to tenants' rights/housing) I had and helped me plan next steps to take after my appointment.
- I learned the steps I need to take towards legal action, and how to examine whether I have a good case. Mark was very good at explaining a lot of the codes and laws that concern my particular issue.

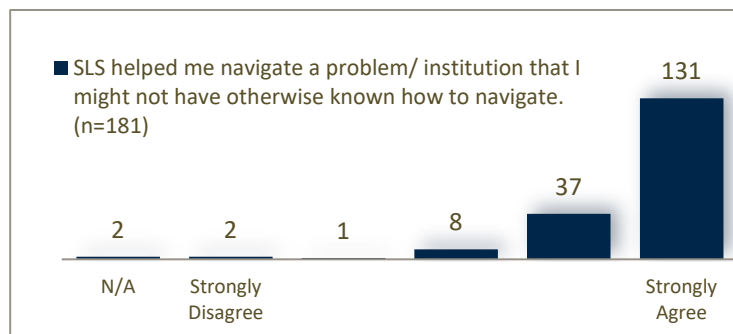
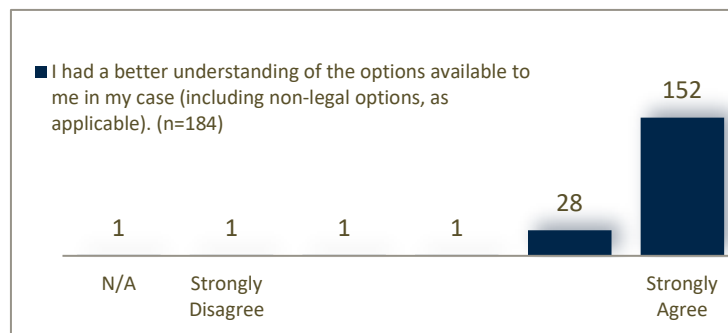


<sup>1</sup> To preserve attorney-client privilege and protect the confidentiality of SLS clients, the survey was administered solely by the Director of SLS, Mark Lucia, through a private account. All survey results are aggregated and presented without link to any identifying information of respondents. Survey recipients were advised that (i) responding was completely optional and (ii) short-answer responses should be generalized enough to protect any personal or confidential information that the clients did not want disclosed (even if not attached to any other identifying information). Not all SLS clients provide an email address (it is not mandatory to do so), hence the number of survey recipients is typically lower than the total number of SLS clients.

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

SLS does not represent students, so it's key that they know the next step(s) to address their legal issues. **97.8%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their options after consulting with SLS, and **94.7%** agreed or strongly agreed they knew the first "next step" to take. Illustrative comments included:

- I was able to understand what my options were as an employee and how I could fight back against my employers discriminatory and retaliatory practices. It also helped me to be able to ask the right questions and give guidance when I eventually hired a lawyer.
- Mark always gives very well thought-out advice and lays out the options. Specifically for tenant/landlord issues, he is extremely proficient, teaching us what landlords can or cannot do to us.
- SLS helped me understand the issue deeply and consider all of my options. It was a really good consultation.
- I had no idea about anything. After, I knew what the process, time frame, logistics, likelihood, challenges, and advantages of different options were.
- My awareness of available options broadened greatly after meeting with Mark. He clearly presented the potential options I have in regards to the case and guided me through the process.
- We had meetings with Mark every few weeks, and every time we were to go away with tasks to accomplish to get us closer to our goals.
- SLS gave me a specific, actionable plan to resolve my issue, and it was successful.



## Learning Outcome #3: After consulting with SLS, students will know how to navigate a problem/institution that they might not have otherwise known how to navigate.

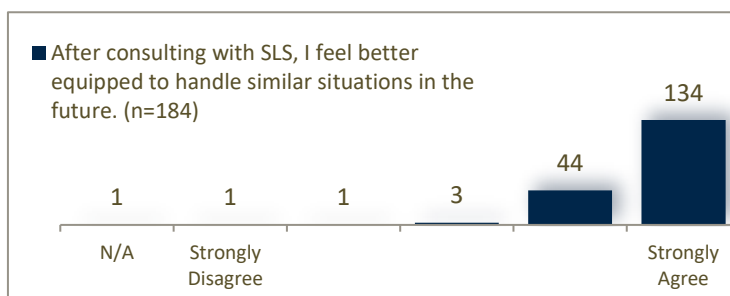
SLS helps students work through unfamiliar issues or bureaucracies. **92.8%** agreed or strongly agreed that SLS helped them navigate an issue or institution they might not have otherwise known how to navigate:

- I learned the mechanics of suing a landlord in small claims court and strategies for reaching settlements with aggressive landlords.
- Mr. Lucia helped me understand that my rights gave me far more ground to stand on than I had realized from my own research. I had misunderstood some essential concepts, and he pointed me to relevant CA codes.
- Though I Googled on my own before the appointment, talking with Mark gave me the reassurance that I was getting trusted and verified information. There's no DIY substitute for professional experience!
- I had no idea that the Small Claims Court existed, and now we are currently in the process of seeing one through.
- I learned about preparing my own paperwork and the various ways that folks come to an agreement in divorce. Mark also gave me information and recommendations based on my situation that have been so helpful.
- With SLS, I was able to keep responding back to the property management company, stating my rights and their obligations, and fortunately I was able to resolve the issue.
- I know I am empowered to have an Emotional Support Animal and how to make sure that landlords provide reasonable accommodations. I just recently helped a friend who had similar questions to mine about ESAs.

## Learning Outcome #4: After consulting with SLS, students will feel better equipped to handle similar situations in the future.

Working through a legal question or problem with SLS may foster transferable skills that apply to future student experiences, legal or otherwise. **96.7%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that their work with SLS helped prepare them for similar future situations:

- I have been telling everyone I know about how strong tenant rights are in the Bay Area and encouraging them to exert these rights in similar situations.
- Along the process, I also became empowered as I noticed that my initial emails where being ignored but once I started sending the emails Mark helped me draft, the landlords "suddenly" became more attentive.
- I think I will be able to better advocate my rights and obligations and not just do what the landlord says to me.
- I thought I was much more restricted than I actually was, but SLS helped me realize I had more freedom.
- If this happened again, I feel confident that I could get it resolved by following the advice I learned from SLS.
- I know my rights when it comes to dealing with my landlord and know to better document any potential wrongdoings in the future.
- I'm far more familiar with my rights and feel very comfortable naming them to any new landlord should serious violations of those rights arise again in a new tenancy, and I am aware of how I could mediate conflict like this via the Rent Board / the city in the future should the need arise.



## General Assessment/Survey Results and Observations

### Student success and retention

In addition to four specific learning outcomes, the SLS mission emphasizes a broader learning goal:

**SLS will support student retention by improving students' ability to stay in school via high-quality counseling and assistance with their legal issues.**

SLS fosters success by helping students focus on school priorities, and limiting the potential distraction created by legal matters. **99.4%** of clients agreed or strongly agreed that the legal issue they brought to SLS **was causing them stress**, **88.6%** agreed or strongly agreed that it was **distracting them from their studies**, and **14.5%** agreed or strongly agreed that **without legal help they would have considered leaving school**.

Of those students who agreed with the first statement above, **93.7%** said "Yes" when asked whether the assistance they received from SLS **improved their ability to stay in school and/or to focus on their studies**. This is important, since students from underrepresented ethnic minority groups and lower-income families consult with SLS in **much higher numbers** than their representation in the overall student population, and **87.1%** of all respondents said that if not for SLS, they would have no access to legal counseling.

In addition, among all SLS clients in 2019-20, **6.1% were encountering severe financial distress**, **5.8% were dealing with housing insecurity or significant habitability problems**, and **3.8% were at risk of potential violence and/or targets of harm**.

Student comments describe the many ways SLS offers this support:

- I was able to be more relaxed knowing things would be okay.
- Most importantly, Mark taught me that there's always room to fight back against injustice.
- I felt comfortable speaking to Mark as he helped relieve my stress by guiding me towards the next steps.
- It helped me to understand I have rights that have to be respected and should not allow myself to think I was powerless.
- The issue I was facing caused me financial instability and housing insecurity. Without Mark's help I wouldn't have made much progress by myself.
- I was able to get money that was essential for rent/groceries and resolve a situation where I felt treated unfairly.
- Being able to ease some of the overwhelming helplessness that I was feeling greatly helped my ability to stay focused.
- We didn't have to stress about our living situation since we knew we were in the right and that we were taken care of.
- Thank you so much for your help. It was causing me so much distress and I felt like I wasn't alone in it.
- The times were very uncertain and due to the shelter in place order I was not able to get a hold of any other free legal service besides what was available at school. I am so glad Berkeley offers this.
- I was less stressed about my living situation. I felt like I had hope and an advocate I could turn towards for help.
- Determining where we are going to live is stressful and who cares about my GPA if I'm homeless or can't pay rent or severely depressed. Talking with SLS gave me the strength of knowledge required to deal with the savage Berkeley housing market.
- It helped me resolve a housing problem that was not only causing me a heap of stress and distraction, but also was threatening my ability to stay in Berkeley - so getting help from SLS was critical.

## Student financial support and recovery

**SLS also helps students financially:** 28.3% of respondents recovered money that they would not have otherwise collected without help from SLS. Of the students who specified funds actually recovered or saved with SLS assistance (several matters were still pending), **the amounts ranged from \$180 to \$6,000, and averaged \$1,787.**

## Student satisfaction with service and sense of connection with the University

Client satisfaction levels with SLS are very high. **98.8%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "SLS is a worthwhile/beneficial service" (with **95.4% strongly agreeing**), and **99.4%** agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend SLS to other students in need of assistance (with **94.8% strongly agreeing**).

**75.7%** of SLS clients agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they feel more connected to the University**. Another **86.7%** agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experience with SLS, **they are more aware of resources available at the University**. Overall, **98.3%** were satisfied or very satisfied with SLS (90.2% being very satisfied). Comments included:

- I truly appreciated Mark's input and understanding in my situation. After our appointment I felt seen and heard, and my frustrations were validated, and that alone made a tremendous difference.
- SLS was really approachable, helpful, and directed me to additional resources that I have been able to use after my consultation.
- It was incredibly useful to have Mark's guidance, since everything played out pretty much exactly as he said it would - and we were able to get our deposit money back.
- Honestly, I started this process feeling very overwhelmed. Mark has helped me navigate the situation by sharing his knowledge with me. I feel empowered to handle my own divorce; Mark has been willing to meet with me multiple times and his calm, nonjudgmental approach has been really meaningful to me.
- I am able to speak up for what is within my legal rights without hesitation or questioning of my rights.
- I learned of the importance of being an advocate for myself, and have become comfortable with doing so.

- SLS did a great job of explaining things to me and giving me good resources to refer to. I have recommended SLS to all of my grad student friends!
- Mark was an incredible resource and really helped guide me understanding my situation and who to contact and how to choose who to work with regarding advisors. I'm very grateful for his help!
- Without Mark's help, I would have had to do research on my own, or pay for legal help. I am so glad the university provides this service so that I was able to access legal expertise for free in a timely manner.
- I was able to get out of a stressful living environment and found a wonderful new home.
- I felt as though my situation was taken seriously and that I was listened to very well. I felt as though I had an advocate for my situation through SLS.
- The SLS lawyer was very friendly and helpful, which gave me a sense of belonging.
- SLS provided attentive services, clear advice, prompt communication, and excellent document drafting.
- I really appreciated the attention detail and respectful manner in which my sensitive matter was attended to. I really felt comfortable sharing in detail everything knowing that I would receive honest advice!
- I appreciated the empathy to understand the feelings, concerns, stress of each student
- The help from SLS really made a big difference in my life. I'm so grateful that we have this service. Thank you very much!!
- Mark is friendly, warm, and caring. He's a good listener and made me feel like my issues were important to him.
- The attorney was courteous and professional. This was important to me at the time when I felt like no one else understood why I was frustrated.
- Mark validated and normalized what I was going through. His nonjudgmental approach helped with the stigma I was feeling about getting divorced.
- Mark was very reassuring, specific, and helpful.
- Mark was an amazing help and even made himself available for follow up questions. He obviously cared, and knew what he was talking about. Though he sugar coated nothing, he also made me feel like I had someone in my corner legally. That made all the difference.
- As a low-income, first-college generation and transfer student at Cal, I felt really limited when it came to addressing an issue I was having with my housing. I couldn't rely on my non-English speaking parents and the support I was receiving from advisors was not concrete. Students' services such as SLS really help students like me when facing intimidating situations.
- Just a big thank you to Mark for being so caring and responsive!
- SLS and Mark do incredible work. It exemplifies the values that UC Berkeley stands for.
- Without having met with Mr. Lucia and without his help, I think I would continue to be in a physically unhealthy living situation; I've been thinking about this fact a lot given the pandemic. Mr. Lucia's help had an unquantifiable effect on the improvement of my quality of life in Berkeley as a human being and student. Rarely have I experienced a service so competent at Berkeley as the SLS.

### Areas for improvement

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

- Expand SLS services, including representation and appearances in court on behalf of students and the addition of attorneys with specialized expertise.
- Increase publicity about SLS services.
- Offer longer appointment times.