

■ **Final Report: LSAC Skills Analysis
Law School Task Survey**

**Stephen W. Luebke
Kimberly A. Swygert
Lori D. McLeod
Susan P. Dalessandro
Louis A. Roussos**

■ **Law School Admission Council
Computerized Testing Report 02-02
May 2003**

The Law School Admission Council is a nonprofit corporation that provides services to the legal education community. Its members are 201 law schools in the United States and Canada.

Copyright© 2003 by Law School Admission Council, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any part or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission of the publisher. For information, write: Communications, Law School Admission Council, 661 Penn Street, Box 40, Newtown, PA 18940-0040.

LSAT® and LSAC are registered marks of the Law School Admission Council, Inc.

This study is published and distributed by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). The opinions and conclusions contained in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Law School Admission Council.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Survey Methodology	3
The Sample of Schools Surveyed.	5
Data Acquisition	7
The Student and Faculty Participant Sample.	7
Data Analysis.	8
Survey Results	9
What tasks and categories of tasks are most important for success in law school courses in general?	9
Do faculty and students rate the importance of tasks for law school courses differently?	16
Do men and women rate the importance of tasks for law school courses differently?	20
Is there a difference in the task mean ratings between traditional first-year courses collectively and the upper-level courses collectively?.	24
How do the ratings of importance of tasks differ between the individual courses surveyed?	27
Do the ratings of importance of tasks for success in law school courses differ by race, ethnicity, primary language, or undergraduate major of students?	31
To what extent does the list of tasks surveyed include all the tasks involved in success in the law school course surveyed?	33
Do the tasks involved in success in law school courses vary according to how the courses are taught?	35
Do the judgments of completeness of the list of tasks vary according to the teaching method used in a class?	40
Conclusions	41
References	42
Appendix A (Skills Analysis Survey)	43
Appendix B (Key Abbreviations).	51

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Skills Analysis Survey Outside Review Panel for their careful review of this study and their insightful and helpful comments. We have tried to incorporate many of their comments into this final report and others will serve as the basis for further studies. Members included law school faculty members Okainer Dark, Howard University School of Law; George Dawson, University of Florida Levin College of Law; and Lizabeth Moody, Stetson University College of Law; and consultants Susan Embretson, University of Kansas; and Michael Rosenfeld, formerly of Educational Testing Service.

We also wish to thank the many present and former LSAC staff members who have contributed to this study and this report. It has truly been a collective effort of many different individuals. These include Richard Adams, Jennifer Duffy, Jonathan Elliott, Susan Jenkins, Michele Lawrence, Peter Pashley, Gilbert Plumer, Lynda Reese, Andrea Thornton, James Vaseleck, and Gita Wilder.

The study benefited enormously from the help and advice, at various stages, of many law school faculty members and students, who answered informal survey questions, participated in focus groups, took trial surveys, and participated in discussions. We are grateful for their cooperation and patience.

Finally, we are deeply indebted to the faculty and staff members at the participating law schools who made this study possible by performing the unsung, but absolutely essential, task of distributing and collecting the surveys.

Executive Summary

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Skills Analysis Survey is a major component of the LSAC Skills Analysis Study, which in turn is an integral part of the Computerized LSAT Research Agenda. The goal of this survey is to identify the skills that are important for success in law school and the relationships among those skills. This information provides validity evidence for the current Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and will guide the development of new item types, item formats, and test specifications for future versions of the LSAT, including possible computerized versions.

The key question the survey sets out to answer is “what academic tasks are fundamental to success in law school courses.” The survey also asks a set of related questions about whether the ratings of the importance of tasks to success in courses varies importantly between subgroups of the respondents, and among courses, law school years, and teaching methods. If certain tasks can be identified that are fundamental to all or most law school courses, the skills involved in those tasks can be inferred to be fundamental to success in law school.

The survey instrument asked law school faculty and students to rate the importance of 57 law school tasks in 14 skill-related categories as “highly important” (given the value 4), “moderately important” (3), “somewhat important” (2), or “not important/not applicable” (1) for one of seven traditional first-year courses or one of six upper-division courses. There were 3,525 respondents from 41 law schools, of which 3,048 identified themselves as law students and 457 as faculty members. The samples of respondents and schools are large and are similar, in terms of geographic, gender and ethnic proportions, to the total populations of law students, faculty, and schools.

For nearly all groups of respondents and for most of the courses surveyed, the categories of tasks fell into four tiers of importance, based on the mean ratings of the tasks and the percentage of respondents rating the tasks highly or moderately important.

Tier I (mean ratings 3.4 to 4.0)	Analyzing Cases or Legal Problems
Tier II (mean ratings 3.0 to 3.3)	Problem Solving Reasoning Writing Reading Listening Constructing Arguments Managing Time
Tier III (mean ratings 2.5 to 2.9)	Communicating Orally Organizing and Synthesizing Normative Thinking
Tier IV (mean ratings 1 to 2.4)	Conducting Research Working as Part of a Group or Interpersonally Quantitative Reasoning

The survey also asked respondents about how exhaustive the list of 57 tasks was. Over 80% of the respondents indicated that the list either included essentially all of the tasks involved in the course, or included most of them. In general, faculty members considered the list to be more exhaustive than students did.

These results indicate that students and faculty generally judged the most important tasks in most of the law school courses surveyed to involve Reading, Analyzing Cases or Legal Problems, Reasoning, Constructing Arguments, Problem Solving, Time Management, Listening, and Writing. Faculty also judged Normative Thinking tasks to have a similar degree of importance, while students rank them somewhat lower in importance. Organizing and Synthesizing and Communicating Orally tasks were judged less important for law school courses than those above, but were still judged to be of some importance. Conducting Research, Working as Part of a Group or Interpersonally, and Quantitative Reasoning tasks were not judged by the survey respondents as important for success in most law school courses, although they were judged to have importance in some courses.

Introduction

The goal of the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Skills Analysis Study is to identify skills important for success in law school and the relationships among those skills. The LSAC Skills Analysis Survey is a main component of that study. Its aim is to collect and analyze the judgments of a sample of law school students and faculty about what tasks are important in selected law school courses. This information will guide the development of potential new item types, item formats, and test specifications for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), as well as provide validation evidence for the current paper-and-pencil LSAT.

The basic testing question that lies behind the study is "what academic skills should be assessed to determine a student's potential for success in law school." In other words, we are asking, "What skills are fundamental to success in law school?" However, answering this question directly would require law school faculty and students to make theoretical judgments about the relationship of skills to the academic work they have observed in law school. To avoid confounding the survey results with such theoretical judgments, the skills analysis survey instead asked about academic tasks, the identification of which should be more clearly a matter of empirical observation. Legal educators and test specialists can apply their expert judgments in a consistent way to the responses about academic tasks to infer what academic skills are involved in those tasks.

To begin to answer this question the investigators collected judgments about what tasks and skills are important for success in law school from (1) reports from the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) and the American Bar Association (ABA), (2) a telephone survey of selected law school faculty members, (3) focus groups of students and faculty at three law schools, and (4) a report by an LSAC staff law school graduate. This preliminary information was used to construct a comprehensive list of law school tasks that included all those mentioned by these sources. This list was refined and condensed to provide the basis for a practical-length survey, on which law school students and faculty were asked to rate each task as "highly important," "moderately important," "somewhat important," or "not important/not applicable" for success in a particular law school course. Thus, the basic question asked by the survey is "How important is each of these tasks to success in this particular law school course?" These responses provide an indication of what tasks are considered important by law school faculty and students in one of a selected group of law school courses—both first-year and upper-level.

In addition to the basic question of how important certain academic tasks are to success in law school courses, a group of related questions were identified. Discussions with law school students and faculty revealed that they observed different methods of teaching in law school courses and that they thought this made a difference in how success in these courses was achieved. This led to the question: Does the importance of academic tasks to success in a law school course differ according to the methodology used to teach the course?

Focus groups with law school faculty and students also revealed differences in judgments about the importance of certain tasks. This led to the question: Do law school students and faculty differ in their judgments of the importance of tasks to success in law school courses?

In the light of current educational literature about the different ways students and faculty of different genders and ethnicities experience law school, the following questions were also asked: Do male and female law school students and faculty differ in their judgments of the importance of tasks to success in law school courses? Is there a difference in judgments about what academic tasks are important for success in law school courses between respondents of different race and ethnicity? Is there a difference in judgments about what academic tasks are important for success in law school courses between respondents whose primary language is English and those whose primary language is other than English?

Traditional first-year law school courses are taught in very similar ways across courses, professors, and schools. In contrast, some upper-level law school courses are taught quite differently from traditional first-year courses and quite differently from each other. This led to the question: Are there differences between courses in what tasks are important for success and, specifically, are there differences between the tasks important for success in traditional first-year courses and those important for success in upper-level courses that differ from first-year courses in subject matter and teaching methods?

Law students come from a wide variety of undergraduate backgrounds, as reflected in their undergraduate majors. As a result the question was posed: Is there a difference in judgments about what academic tasks are important for success in law school courses between students with different undergraduate specializations?

Finally, respondents were asked to judge the extent to which the list of tasks in the survey includes all the tasks necessary for success in a particular law school course. If they thought there were tasks important for the course that were not included in the survey, they were asked to list them.

Survey Methodology

Preliminary Information Gathering

Three legal-education documents played a key role in developing the survey: (1) the 1952 AALS statement on prelegal education; (2) *Preparation for Legal Education* (1996), prepared by the Pre-Law Committee of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar; and (3) *Legal Education and Professional Development—An Educational Continuum* (1992), popularly known as the McCrate Report, which is a report of the “Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap,” for the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. These documents represent considered and consensus judgments of legal education professionals on the skills and tasks involved in legal education and thus provide a solid initial basis for a survey collecting judgments of law school faculty and students.

A second initial source of information for the survey instrument was a small, informal survey of law school faculty members recommended by their peers as having reflected on and studied legal education, and who would reflect the diversity of law schools and law professors involved with LSAC. We contacted 27 people by telephone and gave them the following instructions:

- (1) Make a list of skills important for entering students to have for successful performance in law school. If you wish, you may organize your list in a way that shows their relationships and relative importance.
- (2) Make a list of tasks that law students are required to perform for their classes. If you wish you may organize them to show their relationships and relative importance.

The directives were deliberately left somewhat general and vague so that the responses would help us to develop more focused questions and lists. Of the 27 people contacted, 15 sent lists. The respondents included 9 males and 6 females; 11 whites, 2 African Americans, and one Asian American; and 9 law school faculty and 6 academic support staff members.

From the lists sent by the respondents, together with the ABA and AALS statements, we compiled preliminary comprehensive lists of tasks involved in law school courses and skills necessary for success in law school.

The third preliminary step was to add to, refine, and verify those lists through focus groups held at three law schools in the Philadelphia area. The law schools were selected partly to assure that there would be minority representation among the students and faculty in the focus groups. At each law school we met with separate groups of four or five students and four or five faculty. The focus groups essentially verified the tasks compiled from the selected faculty members and the statements by the ABA and AALS. They also suggested several tasks and types of tasks not found on the preliminary lists, as well as other ideas that were later incorporated into the design of the survey instrument. For example, focus group participants suggested that we not ask about tasks for law school in general, but about tasks for specific courses. They also suggested that we try to distinguish courses by teaching methods, since they thought the tasks involved in courses would vary according to the teaching methods employed by the instructor.

We also used the focus groups to conduct a grouping exercise in which we asked faculty members to arrange the tasks from our list into groups that involved approximately the same underlying skill or skills. The data from this exercise were analyzed with a variety of hierarchical cluster analysis methods. The law school faculty participants exhibited a great deal of agreement about what tasks grouped together based on underlying skills. Moreover, the substantive content of the statistically identified clusters displayed a strong similarity to the categories suggested by the ABA lists and to the conceptual analyses done by LSAC staff. Consequently, we used essentially these categories to group the tasks conveniently for the survey.

Based on this work, an LSAC staff member who is a law school graduate helped develop a detailed list of 108 tasks involved in law school classes.

Development of the Survey Instrument

The list of 108 tasks was used to prepare a draft survey instrument in which law school students and professors would rank the importance of each task for a particular law school course.

As a trial, the survey was administered to the LSAC Test Development and Research Committee and to a small sample of students at several schools. In addition, it was discussed with admission professionals and law school faculty at the 1998 LSAC Annual Meeting and Educational Conference. On the basis of the trials and discussions, the list of tasks was shortened to 57 tasks in order to make survey completion easier and to make it more likely that recipients of the survey would take the time to complete it. Thus, the number of

tasks on the final survey represents an attempt to balance a concern for completeness with a desire for a reasonable response rate. An example of the final version of the survey used in data collection is found in Appendix A.

The Questions on the Survey

The main body of the survey (Question 4) contains a list of 57 tasks associated with work in law school, divided into 14 categories. The tasks fall into two basic types. Some are very concrete tasks, like answering exam questions and reading assignments. Others are more abstract, conceptually described tasks, like writing concisely or identifying the legal basis for a decision. Both kinds of tasks were included because both seemed to be informative about skills.

The 14 skill-related categories into which the tasks were grouped were derived from the skill-related groupings found in the AALS and ABA documents, the grouping exercises based on similarities of skills done in the faculty focus groups, and the natural and logical skill-related categories developed by the LSAC staff. The groupings from all three sources corresponded very highly. A hierarchical cluster analysis later performed on the survey results produced basically the same 14 categories plus the groupings into concrete and abstract tasks.

For the complete list of the tasks and the categories into which they are grouped, refer to Question 4 on the survey at Appendix A. The sample survey contains the complete descriptions of the tasks seen by the respondents. *The lists of tasks in the Figures and Tables contain only abbreviated names for the tasks that are closely related to but do not match exactly the descriptions in the survey.*

Question 4 of the survey uses a version of a Likert-Scale to ask law school students and faculty to rate, for a particular course, each of the 57 tasks. The ratings are "highly important," "moderately important," "somewhat important," or "not important/not applicable"; four boxes corresponding to the ratings follow each task and the respondent is asked to check the appropriate box. The other questions on the survey ask the respondent either to check a box corresponding to an answer or to write in a response.

To minimize the effect of the ordering of the tasks on the ratings of their importance, two versions of the survey were developed with the categories of tasks arranged in opposite orders. These two versions of the survey were spiraled when distributed so that half the respondents randomly saw the tasks in one order and the other half saw them in the opposite order.

To effectively evaluate what tasks were most important to success in law school, we felt that it was important to survey both faculty and students and compare their responses. Question 1 on the survey asks the respondent to indicate whether she or he is a faculty member or a student.

To determine whether the rating of the importance of tasks to success in law school courses might depend on how the class was taught and to collect information about how law school courses are taught, Question 2 on the survey asks the respondent to check a response identifying the format and teaching method in the course.

Since the list of 57 tasks might not fully cover the tasks necessary for success in any particular course, Question 5 asked the respondents whether the 57 tasks listed "include essentially all the tasks involved in success in the course," "include most of the tasks ... but do not include some others ...," "include some of the tasks ... but not many others ...," or "include few, if any ..."

There were also several open-ended questions on the survey, in response to which respondents could give detailed specific information. Regarding the format and method of teaching of the course, Question 3 asked the respondents to briefly describe any teaching techniques or methods used in the course other than lecture, Socratic method, and case study. After the question about the comprehensiveness of the list of tasks, Question 6 invited respondents to list any additional tasks involved in success in that particular course and to rate the importance of those tasks. Question 7 asked for any further comments respondents might have regarding the tasks required for success in the course.

Finally, the survey contained a page asking for demographic information, including gender, race or ethnic group, age, and primary language. We placed this page last on the survey to minimize any possible effect it might have on the answers to the other questions on the survey. We asked students what other courses they had taken in their first year of law school, giving them ten choices as well as offering them the opportunity to write in the names of other courses. We also asked students to estimate their first-year law school GPA and to give their undergraduate major. Faculty members were asked to list any other courses they had taught in the last two years and the school from which they had received their law degree.

Courses Included in the Survey

From the focus groups it was determined that the tasks required of law students could potentially vary significantly from course to course. For that reason the survey asks students and faculty to rate tasks in

particular courses, rather than for law school in general. This allowed us to compare the responses for different courses and groups of courses. The LSAT has historically been validated against first-year grades, so the list of courses to be surveyed includes those traditionally considered first-year courses at a significant number of law schools: Contracts, Torts, Criminal Law, Constitutional Law, Property, Civil Procedure, and Legal Research and Reasoning. To gain a broader picture of the importance of various tasks to the study of law, we surveyed students and faculty regarding some upper-level courses that were likely to be taught differently from the traditional core or first-year courses: Professional Responsibility, Alternative Dispute Resolution, any Clinical Course, an Appellate Course, Tax, and any Seminar. These courses are not intended to be representative of the upper-level curriculum in law school, but to include courses that would more fully capture the range of how law school courses are taught.

How the Surveys Were Distributed

Because first-year law students would not have received their grades in the courses they were currently taking and, thus, would not really know what was involved in succeeding in the course, we decided to survey second-year law students about their first-year courses. We asked the law schools to find a course or courses likely to be taken by all second-year students and to distribute the surveys about first-year courses to students in that course or those courses. We asked each law school to identify the first-year courses at that law school and labeled equal numbers of surveys with the name of each course. These were then randomly distributed to second-year students. Thus, each second-year student received a survey asking her or him to rate the importance of tasks for success in one of the first-year courses he or she had taken the preceding year. The surveys for the individual first-year courses were randomly distributed among second-year students and they could not choose the course they were commenting on. In the unlikely case that the course listed at the top of the survey was one he or she had not taken, the second-year student was asked to substitute a first-year course she or he had actually taken. Using this method meant that there was a time lapse between when the student took the course being asked about and when the survey information was collected. While this might result in some students forgetting some of what was involved in the course or being influenced by intervening factors, we believe that this was outweighed by the advantage of students having completed the entire course, having received a grade, and having had time to think about the experience in the course.

The method described above was not available for collecting data about upper-level courses. Some of the upper-level courses were offered in the third year, leaving no easy way to collect data from the students after they had completed the course, since they would have graduated. And students surveyed about courses offered in the second year would be scattered in a wide variety of courses in their third year, making it difficult to survey them at that time. For these reasons the surveys for upper-level courses were distributed to students while they were taking the course, but preferably towards the end of the course. While the students would not yet have completed the course and, thus, would not know their grade, they would already have completed at least a year of law school and would have some perspective on how to rate the tasks involved in a course currently being taken. In only a few instances third-year law students were asked to complete a survey about a second-year course that they had taken. In those cases the students were allowed to select the course for which to complete the survey. Thus, the course for which a student completed the survey depended upon either which survey she or he randomly received for first-year courses or which course he or she was enrolled in for upper-level courses. In neither case could students select a course, except for the small number of cases mentioned above.

Faculty members were given surveys and asked to indicate a course they were currently teaching or commonly taught. Thus, faculty members did have some leeway in choosing the course for which they would fill out the survey. However, their choices were limited by the courses they were teaching or had taught, and the distribution of responses for each school was constrained by the distribution of courses among faculty members.

The Sample of Schools Surveyed

All LSAC-member schools were invited to participate in the Skills Analysis Survey. All of those who agreed to participate were included in the study sample. In addition, several schools were recruited to participate to provide balance in the sample of schools and increase minority participation. Forty-one member schools agreed to distribute surveys to faculty, students, or both. The list of participating schools is found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Number and type of surveys sent and returned, survey method used, and response rate for the schools included in the final report

Schools	Number Sent		Number Returned		Total Number Returned	Number Returned		Number Returned Faculty	Number Returned Unidentified	Method of Collection	Response Rate
	First-Year	Second-/Third-Year	Faculty	Students		Faculty	Students				
1 Campbell Univ. School of Law	100	220	20	240	259	14	5	P	76.2%		
2 Univ. of Maryland School of Law	200	115	15	197	211	13	1	P	63.9%		
3 Albany Law School of Union Univ.	215	300	35	165	186	19	2	I	33.8%		
4 Univ. of Florida College of Law	200	20	50	176	187	9	2	C	69.3%		
5 Inter American Univ. School of Law	205	15	45	168	171	2	1	P	64.5%		
6 Capital Univ. Law School	270	620	55	122	139	16	1	I	14.7%		
7 New York Univ. School of Law	450	0	0	134	135	0	1	I	30.0%		
8 Southern Illinois Univ. School of Law	115	200	35	112	132	20	0	P	37.7%		
9 Univ. of Calif. at Berkeley (Boalt Hall)	286	145	25	112	120	8	0	P	26.3%		
10 Marquette Univ. Law School	140	205	40	89	114	25	0	P	29.6%		
11 Univ. of Pittsburgh School of Law	200	0	0	101	101	12	0	I	50.5%		
12 Univ. of San Diego School of Law	310	0	46	71	99	28	0	P	27.8%		
13 North Carolina Central Univ. School of Law	120	155	20	81	95	13	1	C	32.2%		
14 Yale Law School	150	150	50	77	92	15	0	P	26.3%		
15 Louis D. Brandeis School of Law— Univ. of Louisville	125	0	0	89	89	0	0	P	71.2%		
16 Syracuse Univ. College of Law	120	115	30	68	89	21	0	P	33.6%		
17 William Mitchell College of Law	320	640	36	71	83	12	0	I	8.3%		
18 Oklahoma City Univ. School of Law	170	0	40	64	82	18	0	P	39.0%		
19 Univ. of Akron School of Law	165	400	55	60	81	21	0	I	13.1%		
20 Duke Univ. School of Law	201	273	30	74	81	7	0	P	16.1%		
21 Temple Univ. School of Law	350	0	65	61	80	18	1	I	19.3%		
22 Univ. of Washington School of Law	165	360	30	78	80	1	1	P	14.4%		
23 Univ. of Windsor Faculty of Law	60	130	18	70	79	8	1	I	38.0%		
24 Univ. of Tulsa College of Law	150	550	18	64	78	14	0	I	10.4%		
25 Washington Univ. School of Law	203	200	15	54	66	12	0	I	15.8%		
26 Willamette Univ. College of Law	150	225	45	51	63	12	0	I	15.0%		
27 Santa Clara Univ. School of Law	240	0	50	42	60	16	2	P	20.7%		
28 Valparaiso Univ. School of Law	120	0	0	58	59	0	1	P	49.2%		
29 Hamline Univ. School of Law	100	200	32	33	57	24	0	P	17.2%		
30 Univ. of New Mexico School of Law	120	120	20	36	50	14	0	C	19.2%		
31 Univ. of Connecticut School of Law	50	0	0	44	44	0	0	I	88.0%		
32 Vanderbilt Univ. School of Law	175	0	20	36	43	7	0	I	22.1%		
33 Univ. of California, Davis School of Law	0	270	0	41	41	0	0	I	15.2%		
34 Univ. of Puerto Rico School of Law	125	0	0	39	39	0	0	I	31.2%		
35 South Texas College of Law	195	0	31	25	25	0	0	I	11.1%		
36 Univ. of Nebraska College of Law	120	0	0	24	24	0	0	I	20.0%		
37 Univ. of North Carolina School of Law	0	0	40	0	22	22	0	P	55.0%		
38 Dalhousie Law School	150	290	20	21	21	0	0	I	4.6%		
39 Boston College Law School	0	0	47	0	15	15	0	I	31.9%		
40 Stetson Univ. College of Law	0	0	20	0	13	13	0	P	65.0%		
41 Univ. of Houston Law Center	0	0	35	0	8	8	0	I	22.9%		
Miscellaneous Schools				12	12	0	0				
Totals	6,535	5,918	1,165	3,048	3,525	457	20		25.9%		

Key: Method of Collection: I = Individually Mailed to LSAC, P = Professor Collected, C = Combination of I and P

Despite being mostly self-selected, the total sample of law schools was found to be highly similar to the total population of LSAC law schools in terms of geographic distribution, size, school average LSAT score, school undergraduate GPA, and percentage of minority students in the school. The comparison was based on data gathered about matriculants during the 1996–97 application year.

Because it was important that the survey data include the judgments of minority law students and faculty, we included in the sample law schools with relatively high percentages of minority students. The distribution of the percentages of minority students in schools in the school sample is similar to the distribution of the percentages of minority students in the total distribution of all LSAC member schools, with the sample schools having a slightly higher mean percentage than the total of LSAC member schools.

While the geographic distribution of schools in the sample is not exactly the same as the geographic distribution of LSAC schools, the sample contains some schools from every official LSAC geographic region, including Puerto Rico and Canada, and most regions are well represented.

Data Acquisition

To encourage school participation, schools were offered several different options for distributing and collecting the surveys. Schools could choose to distribute surveys about randomly selected first-year courses to second-year students; surveys about upper-level courses they were currently taking to upper-level students; surveys about first-year and upper-level courses they were teaching or had taught to faculty members; or any combination of these. In addition, schools could choose (1) to both distribute and collect the surveys, (2) to distribute the surveys along with postage-paid envelopes, or (3) a combination of these. Students and faculty given surveys along with postage-paid envelopes mailed their surveys directly to LSAC. For each school in the sample, Table 1 contains the number of surveys sent, the number of surveys returned, the method of collection used, and the resulting response rate.

Of the 41 schools, 7 only distributed surveys about first-year courses to second-year students; one only distributed surveys about upper-level courses to upper-level students; 4 only distributed surveys about first-year or upper-level courses to faculty; and 6 only distributed surveys about first-year courses to second-year students and to faculty. The remaining 23 schools distributed surveys to all three groups.

Of the 13,618 surveys distributed to the schools, 3,525 were returned, which is a response rate of 26%. Of these, 3,048 were returned by students and 457 were returned by faculty (20 did not give their faculty or student status). School response rates ranged from 4.6% (21 out of 460 surveys mailed to the school were returned) to 88% (44 out of 50 surveys mailed to the school were returned). The largest number of surveys returned by any one school was 259.

While giving schools many different options for distributing and collecting the surveys helped encourage school participation, it did result in the sample of respondents not being as representative as the sample of schools was.

The Student and Faculty Participant Sample

While some law schools both distributed and collected the surveys, other schools distributed the surveys with return envelopes, and students and faculty could choose whether to fill out and return the survey. Moreover, the students in classes surveyed at a particular school might not be representative of the student body at that school. So self-selection and convenience played a role in determining the sample of students and faculty. Table 2 compares the students in the survey sample with 1998–99 LSAT takers. Table 3 compares the faculty in the survey sample with the law faculty listed in the 1997–98 AALS Directory of Law Teachers. It should be noted that the demographic information from the survey and from LSAT takers is self-reported. We do not know how the information in the AALS Directory was acquired.

The reported distribution of students in our sample was very similar to that of 1998–99 LSAT takers (Table 2). However, the percentage of reported Black/African American participants in the survey sample is somewhat lower than that in the test taker population, despite the fact that the sample contains responses from one historically black law school and that law schools with high percentages of minority students are slightly overrepresented in the sample. Because the survey sample is composed of second-year or higher law students, who are on average older than LSAT takers, as expected, the sample of survey respondents is slightly older than 1998–99 test takers. The gender and ethnic distributions of the faculty survey sample are comparable to the gender and ethnic distributions of the faculty list on the AALS 1997–98 Directory of Law Teachers (Table 3).

TABLE 2

Comparison of skills analysis final sample and 1998–99 LSAT taker student distribution

	Female		Male		No Response
Skills Final Sample	50.6		45.7		3.8
1998–99 LSAT Takers	50.6		49.0		0.4
Ethnicity	Skills Final Sample		1998–99 LSAT Takers		
Aboriginal Indian/American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.8		0.8		
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	5.6		7.5		
Black/African American	5.1		10.7		
Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Puerto Rican/or other Hispanic	9.1		7.9		
White/Caucasian	71.0		66.8		
Other	2.4		4.2		
No Response	6.1		1.9		
Age:	<21	21–24	25–39	>39	No Response
Skills Final Sample	.03	22.5	66.3	5.5	5.7
1998–99 LSAT Takers	6.4	53.1	34.4	6.1	.02

TABLE 3

Comparison of skills analysis final faculty sample and 1997–98 Directory of Law Teachers. (The directory does not provide information about nonresponse for gender or ethnicity.)

	Female		Male		No Response
Faculty in Skills Final Sample	35.4		57.1		7.4
1997–98 Directory of Law Teachers	30.2		69.8		
Ethnicity	Skills Final Sample		1997–98 Directory of Law Teachers		
Aboriginal Indian/American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.0		0.4		
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.8		1.8		
Black/African American	3.9		7.1		
Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Puerto Rican/or other Hispanic	1.8		3.1		
White/Caucasian	80.7		86.8		
Other	1.8		0.0		
No Response	10.1				

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The survey data are in the form of demographic information, task ratings, and survey responses to categorical questions. The demographic information has been summarized above. For the task ratings, means and frequencies were calculated for the overall set of respondents. The means were also calculated for the respondents grouped by sex, by student or teacher status, by law school course, and by the demographic variables of ethnic group and primary language. Percentages were calculated for the survey questions concerning courses, whether the list includes all necessary tasks, and method of teaching. These results are displayed in figures and tables and provide a graphical way to assess the cohesiveness of the data and how similar or different task mean ratings are for different groups within the data.

Inferential Statistics

Two sets of significance tests were performed on the three group comparisons of primary interest—students vs. faculty, male respondents vs. female respondents, and first-year course respondents vs. upper-level course respondents. The first set of tests consists of analysis of variance tests to examine the group differences in the data—whether or not the mean rating values for different task groups differ for various respondent groupings. The second set consists of chi-square (χ^2) loglinear tests to see if the respondent groups rated tasks similarly within tasks and within respondent groups. Taken together, these two sets of analyses provide an inferential measure of how consistently our respondent groups rated the 57 tasks, both across tasks and within tasks.

Analysis of variance: The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is appropriate for assessing the group differences in these data. The MANOVA uses demographic and group variables, such as gender, student or teacher status, and course level, to predict responses on the different tasks for each of the 14 categories of tasks.

Separate MANOVAs could be performed for each of the three respondent groupings, but a better way is to use a model in which all the group values are used to simultaneously predict task category means. This allows us to interpret the predictive value for each respondent group while controlling for the effects of the other groups.

The inferential statistic of interest for the MANOVAs is the Wilk's Λ statistic. This statistic measures the disparity between group means on the tasks—the larger the disparity, the smaller the Λ value, and the smaller the p -value associated with it. The p -value that is associated with Λ can be compared to a predetermined value to see if the differences within task categories are significant. However, differences that are significant can be of little practical use, especially when sample sizes are as large as they are here, and so we use a multivariate measure of practical significance, η , that is equal to $1-\Lambda$. The square root of η is analogous to a correlation coefficient—the larger the value, the stronger the relationship between group membership and task rating. A correlation of .3 is usually the smallest that is considered to be of practical predictive value in social science research, so an η value that is larger than .09, the square of .3, may be a useful standard of practicality for these data.

What should the predetermined p -value be for the significance tests? The norm is to use $p = .05$. However, as there are 14 tests—one for each task category—being performed for each respondent grouping, the p -value should be corrected so that Type I (false positive) errors can be minimized. The Bonferroni correction is appropriate and simple to use, because it consists of dividing .05 by the number of tests that will be performed. Dividing the .05 value by 14 produces .0036, and so only p -values less than this will indicate significance. Finally, post hoc tests can be performed on the means within each task category if necessary. A Tukey Least Significant Difference (LSD) test can be performed for those task groups that have significant p -values and large effect sizes, and the results of these tests aid in the interpretation of the η value.

Chi-square tests: Another way to view the data is to look within tasks and examine the ratings to see whether these respondent groups rate the same tasks in the same way. Such a process clarifies the within-task ratings in a way that analysis of variance, with its overall mean values, does not. A suitable method for this is to use a form of categorical modeling, known as log-linear modeling, in which chi-square significance tests are used to show if the different variables—respondent group, task, and rating—are independent of one another. If the chi-square statistic χ^2 associated with the log-linear model has a p -value less than some predetermined value, then the different variables can be considered not independent.

The calculation of the p -values here uses the same Bonferroni method as was used with the multiple MANOVA tests. An appropriate set of models for these data use each of the three data groupings—male/female, faculty/students, first-year/upper-level—separately to predict ratings within each task category to start with. This means there are 3×14 , or 42 initial significance tests; The standard p -value, 0.05, divided by 42 yields a p -value of 0.0012. For each task set, the only one of interest is the one that assesses independence of the interaction of task group ratings by data grouping by task category. If the χ^2 values for any task category is found significant at the 0.0012 level, then those tasks will be further examined one by one to see where the rating differences lie.

Survey Results

Question: What tasks and categories of tasks are most important for success in law school courses in general?

Figures 1A and 1B summarize the responses to the survey by all respondents for all courses by task. The names of the tasks are abbreviated and next to the abbreviated name, in parentheses, is an abbreviation for the category to which the tasks belong (see the key for these abbreviations at Appendix B). For example, WR represents the category Writing. In the bar graphs, each bar represents a task and the proportion of the bar in each type of shading represents the proportion of responses for "highly important," "moderately important," "somewhat important," and "not important/not applicable." The number associated with each bar is the mean rating of that task for all respondents where highly important is valued 4; moderately important, 3; somewhat important, 2; and not important/not applicable, 1.

FIGURE 1a. Proportion of responses for all respondents for each task ordered by category, including mean values, for the first 29 tasks (N = 3,525)

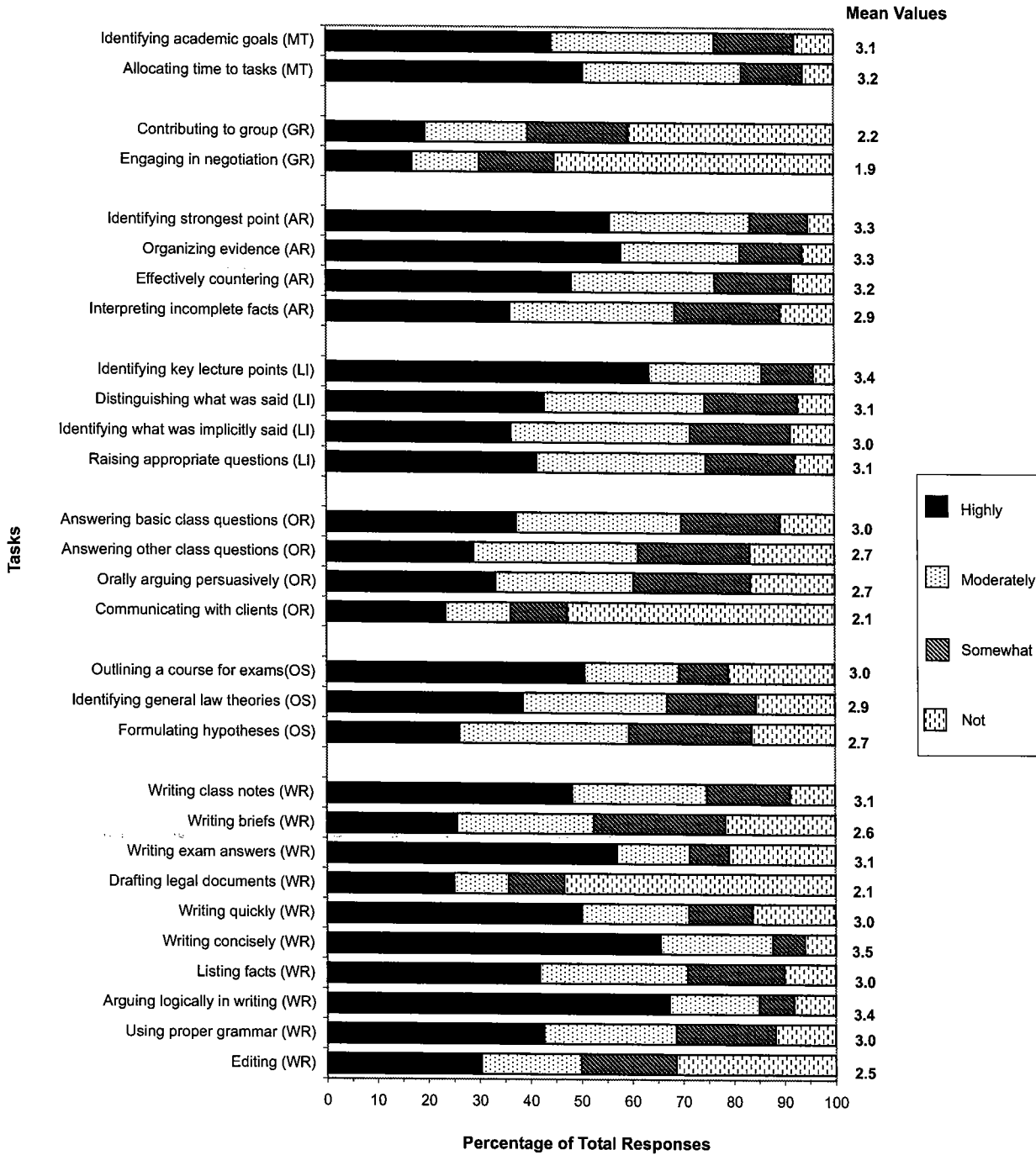
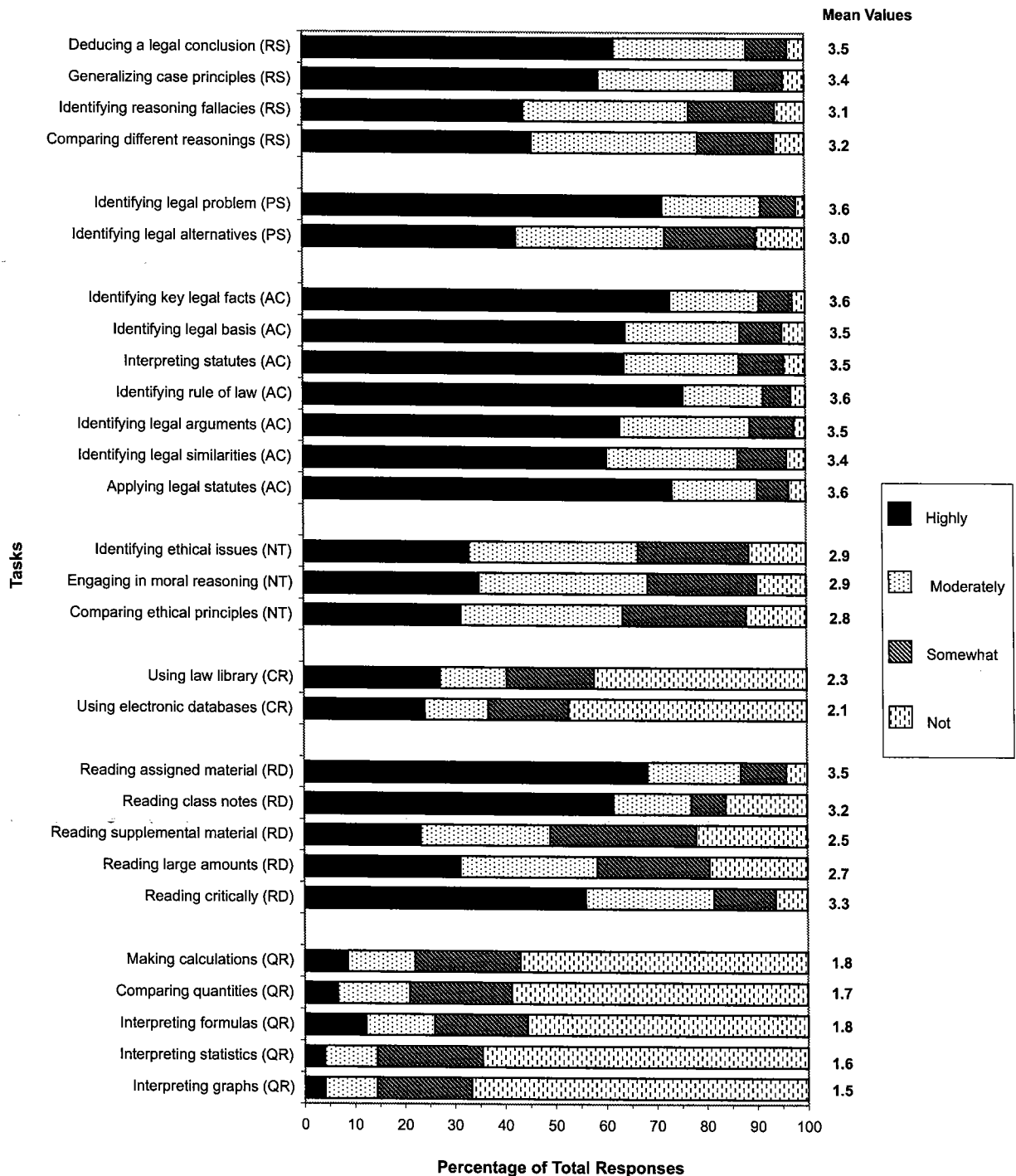


FIGURE 1b. *Proportion of responses for all respondents for each task ordered by category, including mean values, for the last 28 tasks (N = 3,525)*



The most important tasks and categories of tasks for success in law school, in the judgments of the respondents, will be those with the highest mean scores and those rated highly important or moderately important by the most respondents. One way to rank the tasks and categories is to place them in tiers corresponding to levels of mean ratings of importance. All of the tasks with mean ratings of 2.5 or above can reasonably be said to have some degree of importance in law school courses generally. The following tiers represent what appear to be groupings of importance inherent in the data, as indicated in Figure 2:

Tier I (Mean rating of 3.4 or higher): Highly Important

- (1) All seven Analyzing Cases or Legal Problems tasks
 - Identifying key legal facts and issues (3.6)
 - Identifying a principle or rule of law operating in a case (3.6)
 - Applying a case, rule or legal statute to a hypothetical case (3.6)
 - Identifying the basis for a legal decision (3.5)
 - Interpreting statutes in relation to a case or problem (3.5)
 - Identifying and evaluating the legal arguments in a case (3.5)
 - Identifying similarities and differences between cases and problems (3.4)
- (2) Two of ten Writing tasks
 - Writing concisely and with clarity (3.5)
 - Arguing logically and persuasively (3.4)
- (3) Two of four Reasoning tasks
 - Deducing a legal conclusion (3.5)
 - Generalizing or synthesizing principles or rules from cases (3.4)
- (4) One of two Problem Solving tasks
 - Identifying a legal problem and the legal issues involved (3.6)
- (5) One of five Reading tasks
 - Reading assigned materials (3.5)
- (6) One of four Listening tasks
 - Identifying key points in lectures and discussions (3.4)

Tier II (Mean rating of 3.0 to 3.3): Important

- (1) Both Managing Time tasks
 - Allocating time to tasks based on priorities (3.2)
 - Identifying goals, priorities, and the tasks necessary to them (3.1)
- (2) Three of four Constructing Arguments tasks
 - Identifying the strongest evidence or reasons for or against a position (3.3)
 - Organizing evidence and reasons into a logical argument (3.3)
 - Countering or rebutting evidence or arguments against a position (3.2)
- (3) Three of four Listening tasks
 - Distinguishing precisely what was said and not said (3.1)
 - Raising appropriate questions and arguments in response (3.1)
 - Identifying what is implicit in what was said (3.0)
- (4) One of four Communicating Orally tasks
 - Answering basic class questions about assigned readings (3.0)
- (5) One of three Organizing and Synthesizing tasks
 - Outlining a course for final exams (3.0)
- (6) Five of ten Writing tasks
 - Writing class notes (3.1)
 - Writing answers to exam questions (3.1)
 - Writing quickly and fluently under time pressure (3.0)
 - Listing or describing facts (3.0)
 - Using proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling (3.0)
- (7) Two of four Reasoning tasks
 - Identifying and comparing patterns of reasoning (3.2)
 - Identifying contradictions and flawed reasoning (3.1)
- (8) One of two Problem Solving tasks
 - Identifying alternatives and developing a plan of action (3.0)
- (9) Two of five Reading tasks
 - Reading critically and interactively (3.3)
 - Reading class notes (3.2)

