



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that the University of Sydney is built upon, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We acknowledge that this was and always will be Aboriginal Land and are proud to be on the lands of one of the oldest surviving cultures in existence. We respect the knowledge that traditional elders and Aboriginal people hold and pass on from generation to generation, and acknowledge the continuous fight for constitutional reform and treaty recognition to this day. We regret that white supremacy has been used to justify Indigenous dispossession, colonial rule and violence in the past, and in particular, a legal and political system that still to this date does not provide Aboriginal people with justice.

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Introduction

In 2021, the Sydney University Law Society (SULS) conducted a comprehensive survey on behalf of the Education and Campus portfolio. The overarching objective of this survey was to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the student experience at Sydney Law School. By disseminating the survey through social media channels and the SULS Weekly email newsletter, the survey was able to collect a total of 332 responses.

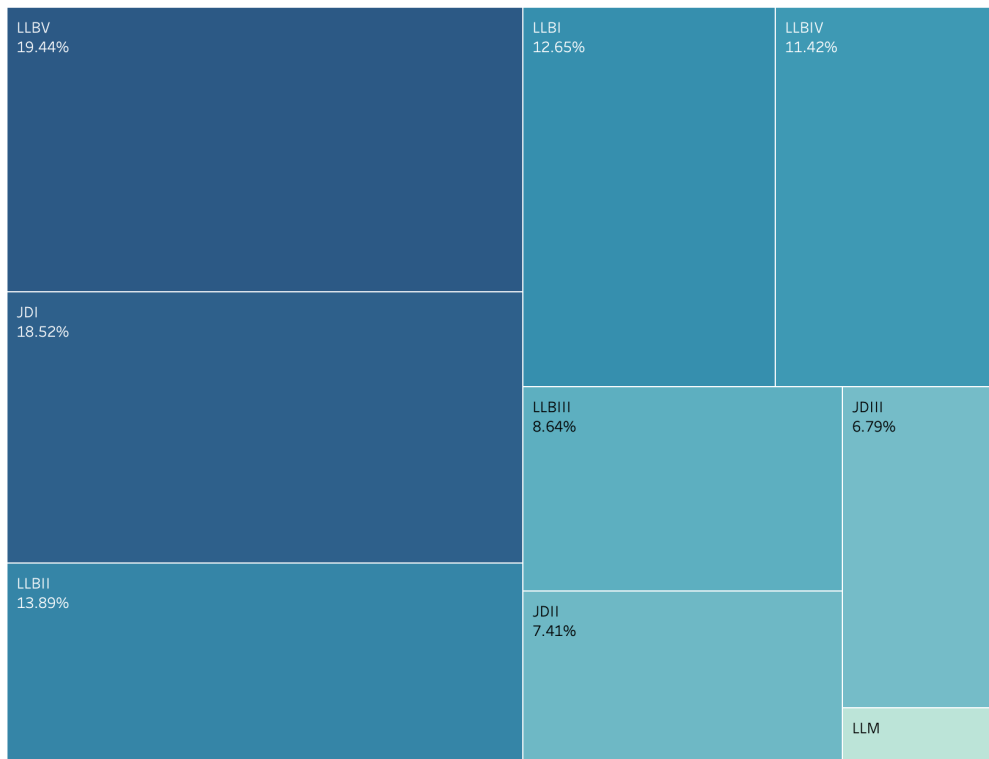
The Survey remained open for approximately two weeks and received responses from 24 April 2021 until 10 May 2021. To encourage participation, SULS ran a competition where the cohort who filled out the survey most would win free coffee vouchers and one respondent would receive limited edition SULS merchandise.

The SULS Student Body Survey 2021 (**'the Survey'**) was designed to explore the academic and social experiences of students. As such, the Survey included questions under the following sections: Remote Engagement, Assessment Structure, Content and Class Engagement, the Culture of USYD Law and Services. The following report will endeavour to summarise and analyse the data collected while also providing recommendations to enhance the student experience at Sydney Law School based on the survey results.

Demographics

We will firstly determine the responsiveness of each cohort to the survey and see whether our sample was skewed. The percentage of responses from each cohort is outlined below. Representation from JDII onwards was low with the majority of responses received from LLB students and JDI. JDII+ and LLM students tend to work full time or part time whilst studying. As a result, data collected on work/study circumstances may underestimate the percentage of students working whilst studying.

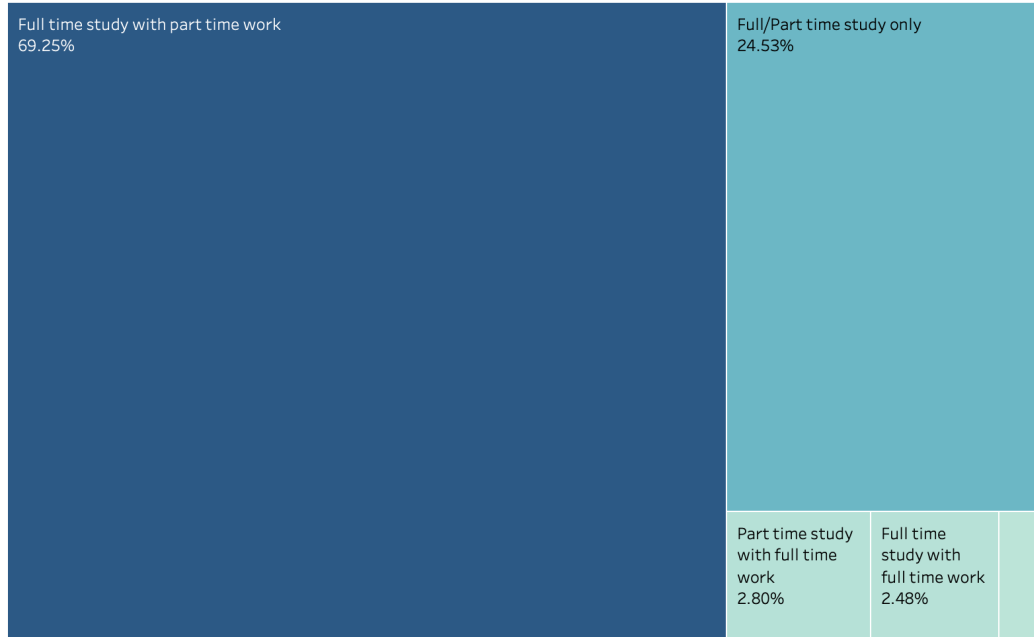
Cohort Distribution



The vast majority of students surveyed were undertaking full time study with part time work, 69.25%. Whilst, 24.53% of students were solely studying, either pursuing full time or part time study. A number of students were undertaking full time work, with half of those students studying full time and the other half part time. Students working full time and studying part time formed 2.8% of the sample and students working full time and studying full time formed 2.48% of the sample.

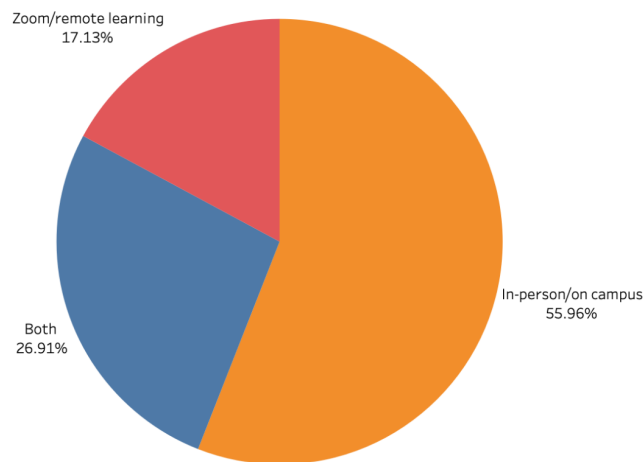


Work-Study Balance



We also sought to determine whether students were studying in-person or remotely. The majority of students sampled were studying in-person.

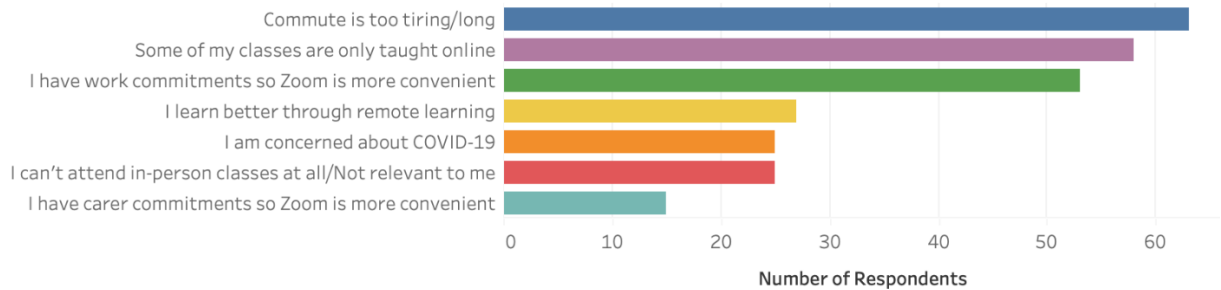
In-person, remote or a combination?



Of those who participated in remote learning we asked students to explain why remote learning was preferred to in-person classes.

The most prominent reason for opting in to remote learning was the commute being too long or tiring, secondly, that some classes are only being offered remotely and thirdly conflicting work commitments. Each of these reasons received over 50 responses indicating that each factor is a significant determinant of remote learning. Other reasons included concerns of COVID-19, carer commitments and better learning outcomes from remote study.

Why remote learning?



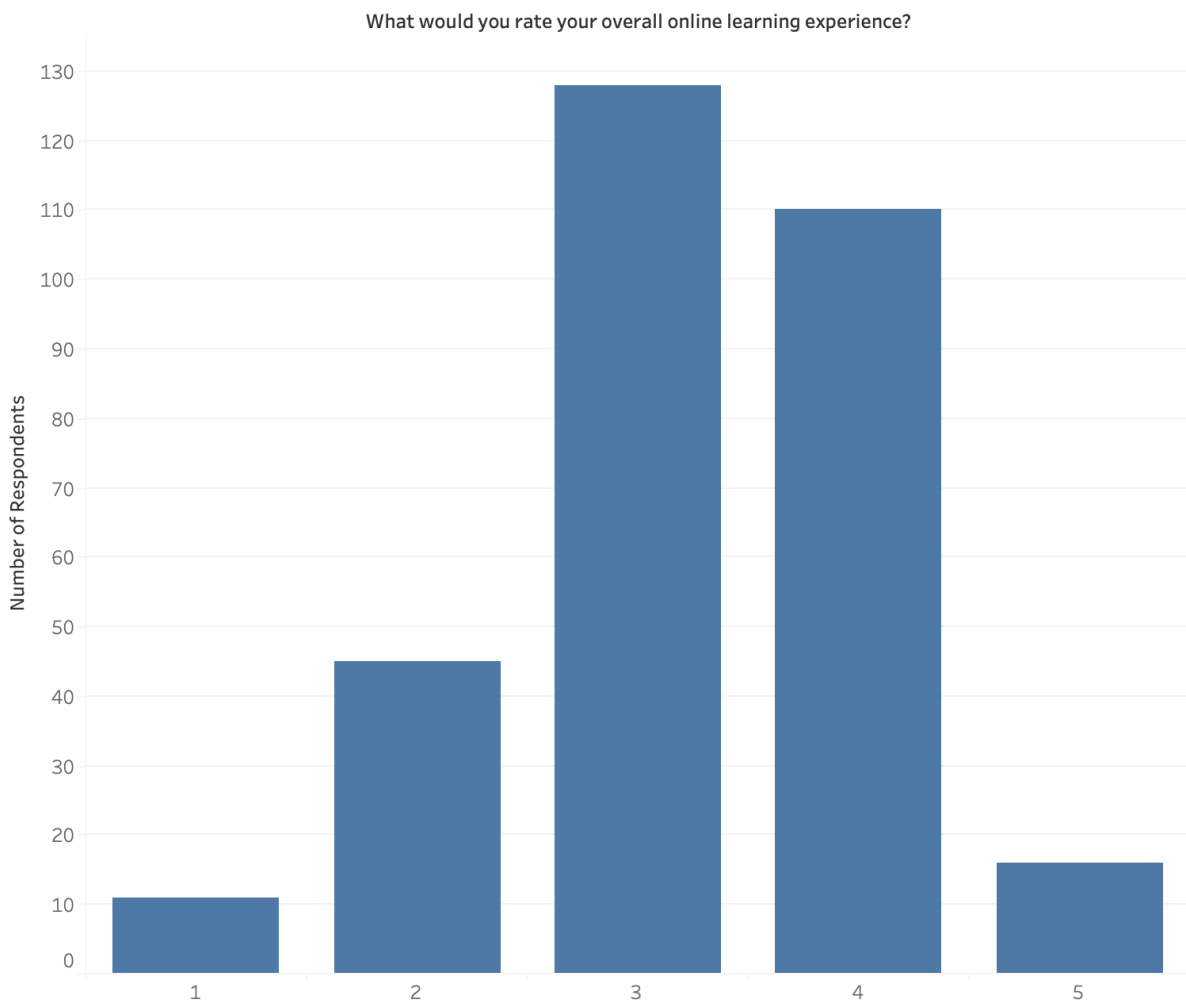


Education

Remote Engagement

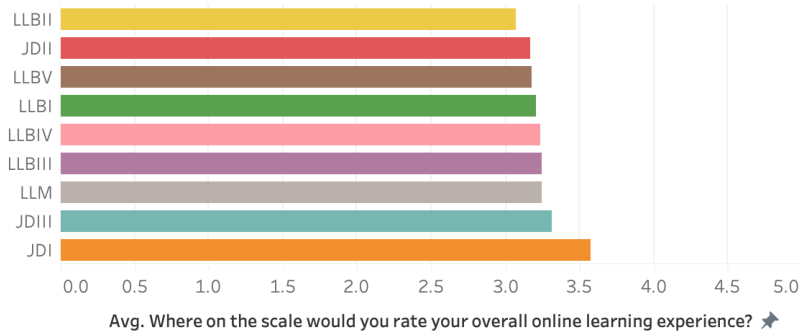
When asked to rate the online learning experience at Sydney Law School thus far, on a scale of one to five, 41.5% of respondents selected a rating of three and 35.4% selected a rating of four. Only 5% of respondents selected a rating of five as opposed to 18% that selected a rating of two or below. The majority selected three out of five or lower indicating that most remote students think there are some significant areas in which the school could improve online learning.

Online Learning Experience





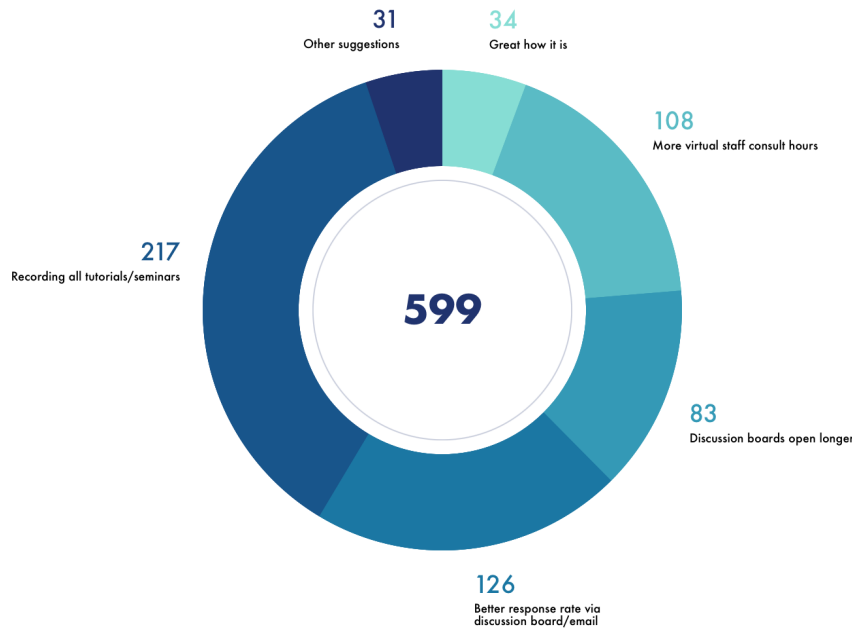
Online Learning Experience by Cohort



The online learning experience of respondents varied based on cohort group. JDI and III respondents rated their online learning experience the highest. Whilst LLBII respondents showed the greatest distaste of online learning. This could suggest the need to tailor certain units to online learning and would be largely reflective of the teaching of LLBIs in 2020. Perhaps also changing expectations of students as they moved from high-school to university. On average, respondents across the law school rated their overall online learning experience 3.254 out of 5.



How can online learning improve?



'Modern universities should recognise that the age where students can still live comfortably at home and have no competing priorities are over. Modern students are diverse in needs and may need to balance work, carer commitments, long commutes and more'

To ascertain areas for development, we asked respondents to indicate how they felt their online learning experience could be improved. The most common suggestions included recording all seminars and tutorials was selected by 36% of respondents, a better response time to discussion board and email messages was selected by 21%, more virtual staff office consultation hours was selected by 18%, and leaving discussion boards open for longer was selected by 14%. Only 6% of respondents indicated that they thought the online learning experience at Sydney Law School was effective in the status quo.

Common 'other' responses:

- Uploading recorded lectures and slides sooner (popular suggestion)
- Allowing other students to participate in class, not just those on-call, reducing the stress for on-call students and allowing those not on-call to still discuss and learn (popular suggestion)
- Eradicating class attendance (attendance does not cater for competing responsibilities, school/work/life balance and diverse backgrounds)
 - Quote: 'Modern universities should recognise that the age where students can still live comfortably at home and have no competing priorities are over. Modern students are diverse in needs and may need to balance work, carer commitments, long commutes and more.'
- Lectures that correspond with the time allocated to them in the timetable
 - Quote: '[N]o 3 hour lectures when we are only allocated 2 hours.'
- More support for international students trying to learn in a second language over Zoom - suggestion: uploading a transcript for lectures and a general transcript for tutorials.
- Having clear lesson plans, talking points and times for questions/comments to prevent chaotic zoom classes
 - Quote: 'The online world has more problems with larger groups when lots of people want to speak or add to a conversation at the same time. Having a lesson plan with clearly stated goals and timing points of when things will be discussed would be helpful'.
- Incorporate debating as opposed to presentations.
- Actively seeking student feedback (individual tutor/unit surveys so currently enrolled students can reap the benefits rather than just next year's students)
- Avoid unnecessary/vague/endless announcements
 - Quote: 'My school email is filled with so many unnecessary notifications from tutors I don't have, that I sometimes miss information I need'.



Assessment Structure

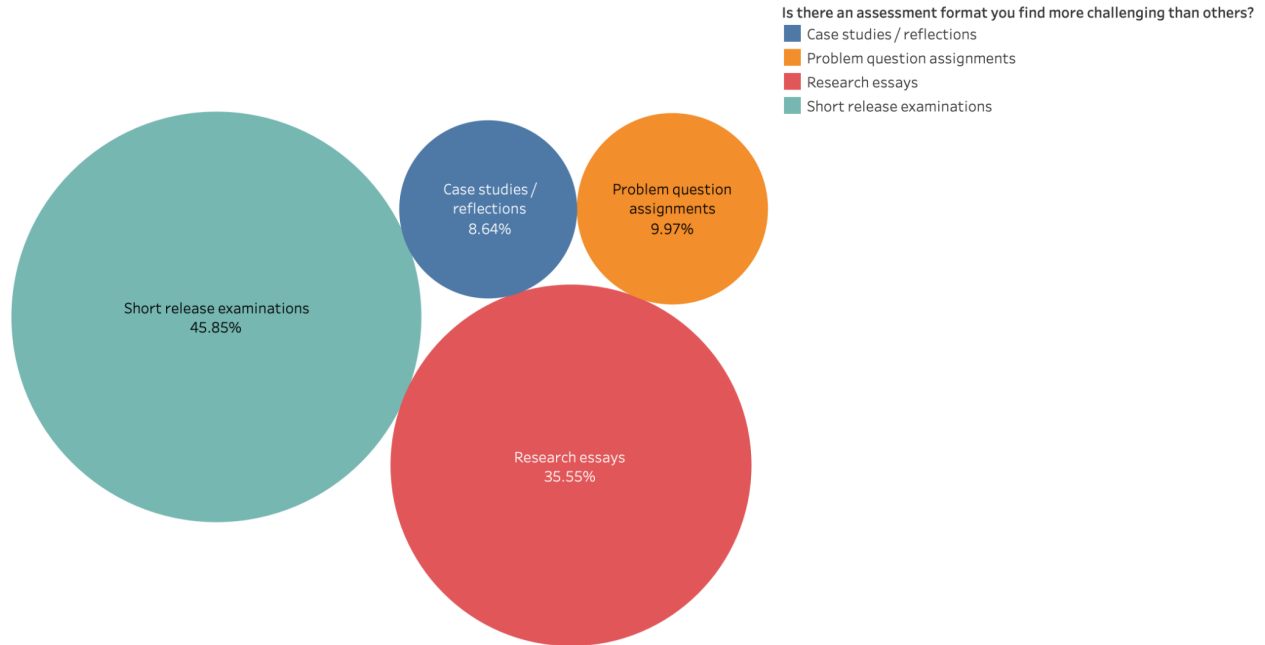
1) Mode of Examination

When asked what exam format was most suited to their educational needs, an overwhelming majority of students preferred take-home exams over 24 hours (78.9% of respondents), with only 20.7% of respondents opting for short release exams under 4 hours as their preferred examination method. There was also a preference for longer duration take-home exams. Online exams were also more popular than in-person exams. It is thus apparent that the majority of student respondents feel most comfortable in preparing for online examinations which are longer than the short-release format.

2) Assessment Format

Student hesitation towards short release examinations is also evident from the survey response on assessment formats which students find to be more challenging than others. Just shy of half of the survey respondents (45.85% of respondents) stated that they found short release examinations to be the most challenging. This was followed by research essays (35.55% of respondents), problem question assignments (9.97% of respondents) and case studies/reflections (8.64% of respondents). It is evident from the survey results that the two most challenging assessment formats are short-release examinations and research essays, as these two formats alone formed an overwhelming majority (78% of respondents). Students are hence likely to benefit from education panels and preparation resources directed towards approaching short release examinations and research essays, both of which are very different in nature.

Assessment Formats Students Find Most Challenging

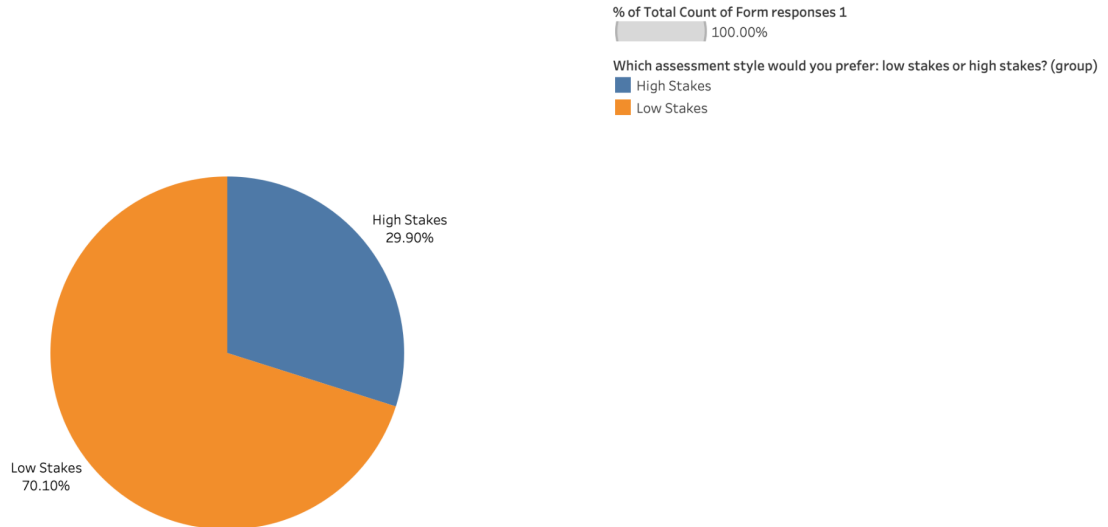


3) Assessment Style: Low Stakes or High Stakes?

Students were also questioned on their preference for low stakes or high stakes assessment structures. An example of a low stakes assessment structure is the assessment style for Corporations Law in semester 2 of 2020 – class participation (2 x 10%), mid-semester exam or research essay (40%) and final examination (40%). High stakes assessment styles have 20%-30% mid-semester assessments and 70%-80% final examinations, as is the case for subjects such as Public International Law, Administrative Law, Federal Constitutional Law and Intro to Property and Commercial law.

Just over 70.10% stated that low stakes assessment styles with final examinations worth approximately 40% were more preferable. Whilst 29.90% of respondents who voted for high stake assessments with final examinations worth approximately 70%-80%. A majority of students preferred low stakes assessment structures which offer more opportunity to obtain marks throughout the semester and place less emphasis on the final examination.

Assessments: High Stakes or Low Stakes?



4) Oral Presentation Skills

Students were also asked if and how they would like to be assessed more on their oral presentation skills. A strong majority of students stated they would like to be assessed more on their oral presentation skills. The most popular method was structured class participation (50.2% of respondents), followed by unstructured class participation / moots (both 32.8% of respondents), mock trials (30.5% of respondents), negotiations (30.5% of respondents) and speeches (23.4% of respondents). Only 22.4% of respondents stated that they did not want to be assessed more on their oral presentation skills.

5) Winter and Summer School

When asked why winter and summer school being offered is important to the student, the most popular response (67.8% of respondents) was that students want to underload during the semester. The next most popular reason was that students wished to complete their studies earlier (38.5% of respondents). This will often be an important consideration for students who have transferred into the LLB or JD program from another degree or another university, to facilitate course progression (17.7% of respondents). A large number of respondents also rely on winter and summer school in case they fail a subject (30.6% of respondents). It is hence



clear that winter and summer school offerings provide a number of benefits for students. Only 14.2% of respondents stated they were indifferent to the offering of winter and summer school.

Content and Class Engagement

1) Hours of study spent on a law subject per week

Analysis

Student participation was extremely high with 326/332 (98.2% of respondents) responses recorded with students having the option to select more than one response. Most students (210, 64.4% of respondents) allocate their study time focussing on upcoming assessments or exams and unevenly study for subjects dependent on assessed tasks. 147 students spend the “recommended amount of 4-6 hours” per subject per week studying (45.1% of respondents), closely followed by 100 students stating they study depending on which subject they are most behind in (30.7% of respondents). A small number of students, 29, stated they spent less than 2 hours per subject per week studying (8.9% of respondents). There were 9 extra responses (2.7% of respondents) also collected, all generally stating they spend more time than the recommended 6 hours per subject per week.

Recommendations

The survey found students are tending to spend more than the “recommended” amount of study time for each subject per week. This could be attributed to the number of “necessary” readings provided to students although later questions provide evidence that most students do not complete these readings nor find them “necessary”, spending too much time on readings that do not benefit extra learning. An administration recommendation would be to limit the number of options a student could choose for this question to achieve more succinct results rather than allow students to choose multiple options.

2) Any changes you want to see be made to how a law unit is taught or its content?

Analysis

This optional question recorded 128/332 (38.5%) responses. As students could give their own opinions, results were varied, however an overwhelming number of responses related to the



overwhelming number of “necessary” readings. Students feel the number of readings can be repetitive and time consuming and not discussed further by the lecturers or tutors and have seen some readings as a waste of valuable time. We also received numerous requests for lecturers to adhere to the 2-hour lecture limit where some students find lectures can go for up to 2.5 hours. Students also felt a lack of connection in classes where they were not “on-call” and found they were not participating but merely spectating. A lecture/tutorial format is unanimously requested for in comparison to a Seminar-only taught unit. Finally, there were many responses pushing for in-person lectures questioning whether we will return to an in-person form of lecturing in a post COVID-19 era.

Poignant remarks by students

- *‘More support, less overloading with information and expecting too much from JDs with zero feedback on performance! Should offer more mock assignments or assignments worth 10% before big assignments so JD students know how to do well in their assignments’*
- *‘More interaction with lecture material by tutors, as opposed to solely focusing on problem question responses’*
- *‘Tutorial recordings really assist students who are behind due to extenuating circumstances’*

Recommendations:

- Propose to unit coordinators to reduce or limit the amount of examinable readings to those only necessary for the unit outcomes. Whilst still encouraging students to access extra readings, we can do so by not making them examinable.
- Request for lecturers to limit online lecture recordings to no more than 2 hours as would be the case for lectures taking place in-person.
- Request for on-call participation marks to be scrapped in favour of a semester-long participation mark for each student so that every student feels a part of the tutorial as well as incentivises all students to keep up to date with teaching materials. Further,



request online tutorials to be recorded to assist in exam preparation and students who cannot attend classes on given days.

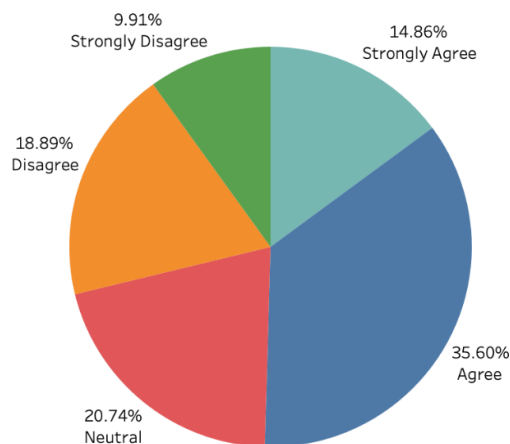
- Request unit coordinators to bring back COVID-Safe lectures for students on campus to be more involved with lecture materials and lecturers.

3) Have you found subjects in which there is a mark for class participation that creates a more engaging class experience?

Analysis

Whilst 28.80% (109) of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, a majority of students (50.46%, 164) agreed or strongly agreed. The data shows a preference for class participation in order to create a more engaging experience. This is mimicked in the responses given by students in the previous question where students showed an interest in class participation however called for a more wide-range of participation rather than just focussing on students on-call.

Have you found subjects with class participation marks create a more engaging class experience?



Recommendation:

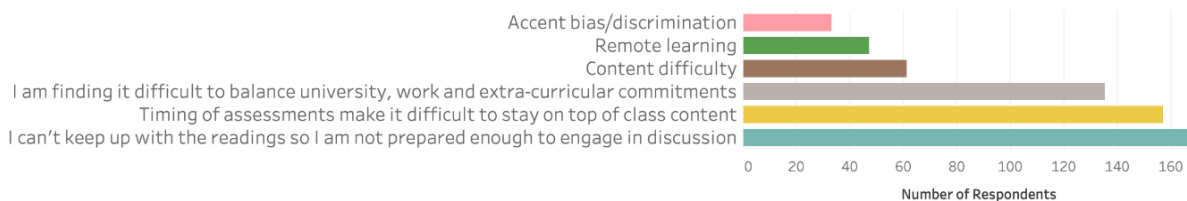
Request for on-call participation marks to be scrapped in favour of a semester-long participation mark for each student so that every student feels a part of the tutorial as well as incentivises all students to keep up to date with teaching materials.

4) Is there a particular factor(s) which may make it difficult to engage in class participation?

Analysis

Students were able to choose multiple factors when answering this question. The overwhelming majority of factors were not being able to keep up with readings (189 responses, 56.9% of respondents), timing of assessments make it difficult to keep on top of class topics (176 responses, 52.9% of respondents) and difficulty in balancing university, work, and extracurricular commitments (152 responses, 45.8% of respondents). Content difficulty (69 responses, 20.9% of respondents), remote learning (52 responses, 15.8% of respondents) and accent bias or discrimination (37 responses, 11.1% of respondents) were also common concerns. Several students (38 responses, 11.4% of respondents) also submitted their own responses with responses focussed on confidence, anxiety, and “awkward” Zoom tutorials. There is a request for smaller class sizes for students to feel less intimidated. Students also have concerns about judgmental/discriminatory tutors and accent bias or their lack of verbal English skills. Finally, again there is a consensus that students do not learn when they are not on-call and attention is only given to those students in that class.

Engaging in Class



Recommendation:



- Here, once again the majority of responses pertained to the difficulty with keeping up to date with “necessary” readings. We can request unit coordinators to reduce/limit the number of necessary readings whilst still recommending extra non-examinable readings.
- Request unit coordinators to coordinate with other UCs where students take concurrent units to space out assessments to not overwhelm students. As most JD students must complete JDI and II doing the same units, UCs can confer with others to reduce assessment stress.
- Promote a welcoming and safe space for students no matter their accent and take into consideration oral-language barriers.

5) What alternatives to current models of class participation would you like to see?

Analysis:

Students were able to choose multiple factors when answering this question. Overall, three main alternatives were chosen by students. Non-weighted class participation (mandatory attendance but not participation) (118 responses, 35.4% of respondents), no change to the current models (111 responses, 33.4% of respondents) and reduced weight class participation (102 responses, 30.5% of respondents). Posting on a discussion board (81 responses, 24.4% of respondents) and pre-recorded presentations (60 responses, 17.9% of respondents) were also chosen factors. 17 students (5.1% of respondents) also added in their own responses, with a consensus for overall class participation rather than on-call students only.

Recommendation:

A change to the current on-call model is required. Noted three prior questions too, on-call participation is not widely favoured. There is a push for either non-weighted but mandatory class participation or wider class participation with reduced weight throughout the semester.

Wellbeing

Culture

Sydney Law School's Support of Student Wellbeing

When asked the extent to which the Sydney Law School was supportive of Student Wellbeing, answers reflected a positive reception towards the Law School's culture. There was a fine split regarding the law school's culture being average and effective in supportiveness. 33.8% of students rated the law school's supportiveness a four out of five and 31.7% of students rated the law school's supportiveness a three out of five. That the law school was not supportive of student wellbeing was a minority opinion with 8% of students rating the culture a one out of five and 16% of students rating the culture a two out of five.

Teacher-Student Bonding Initiatives

The majority of students surveyed said they would attend in-person events with their tutors. Events that were not academic related were most popular amongst students. The four most popular initiatives were: coffee-catch ups (63% of respondents), activity based events (50.3% of respondents), student vs staff sport matches (35.7% of respondents) and online trivia (27.6% of respondents). 12.5% of students expressed a disinterest towards teacher and student bonding.

Initiatives from SULS

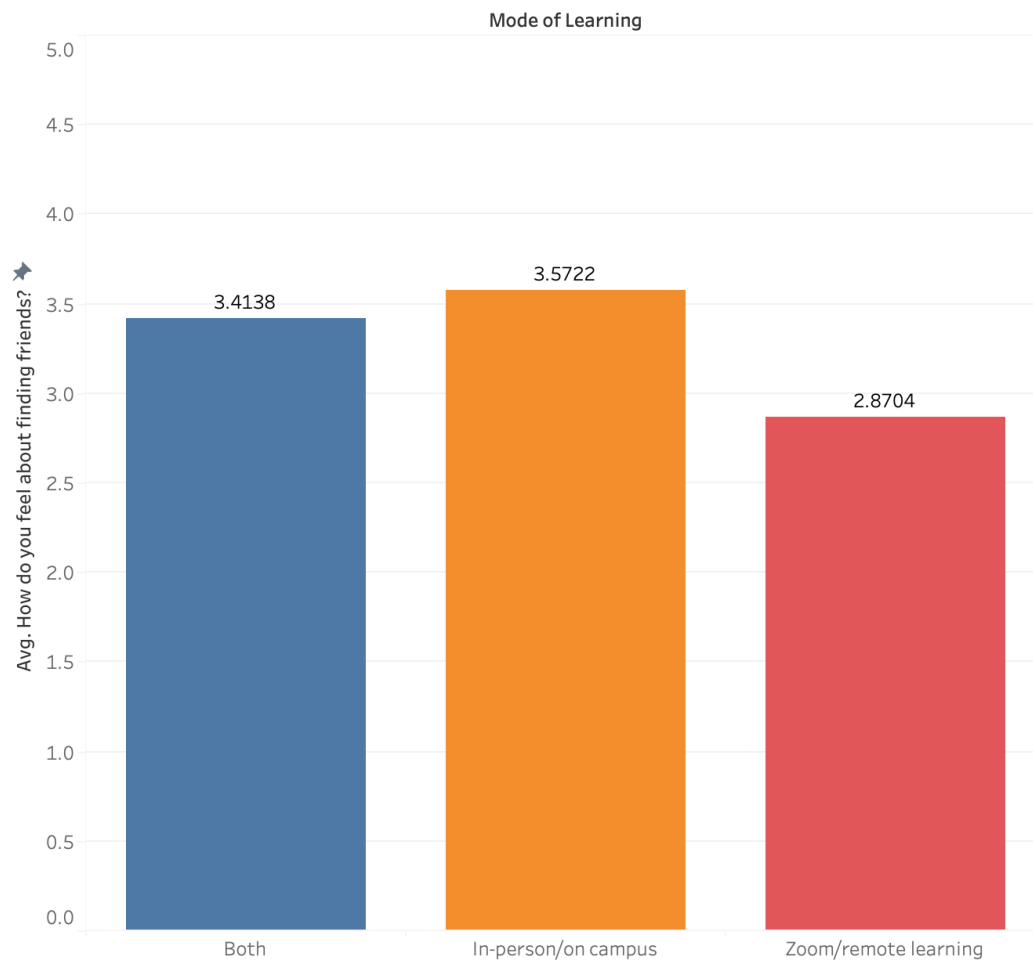
An overwhelming majority of students want more cohort specific events to be organised by the Sydney University Law Society, with 70.1% of students surveyed selecting the option. Other popular events amongst students included career events (49% of respondents) and inter-cohort socials (40.7% of respondents). It appears that students favour SULS to have a balance between fun events and events geared to academic purposes. Students also expressed that they wanted to see wellbeing events with 27.2% of students selecting that they wanted to see more mental health awareness events.

Finding Friends at the Law School

The confidence students have with regards to making friends is varied. Most students have at least an average extent of confidence with regards to finding friends at the Sydney Law School.

17.4% of students found that they were quite confident with making friends at law school. However, nearly a fifth of students found that they were not confident with finding friends at law school.

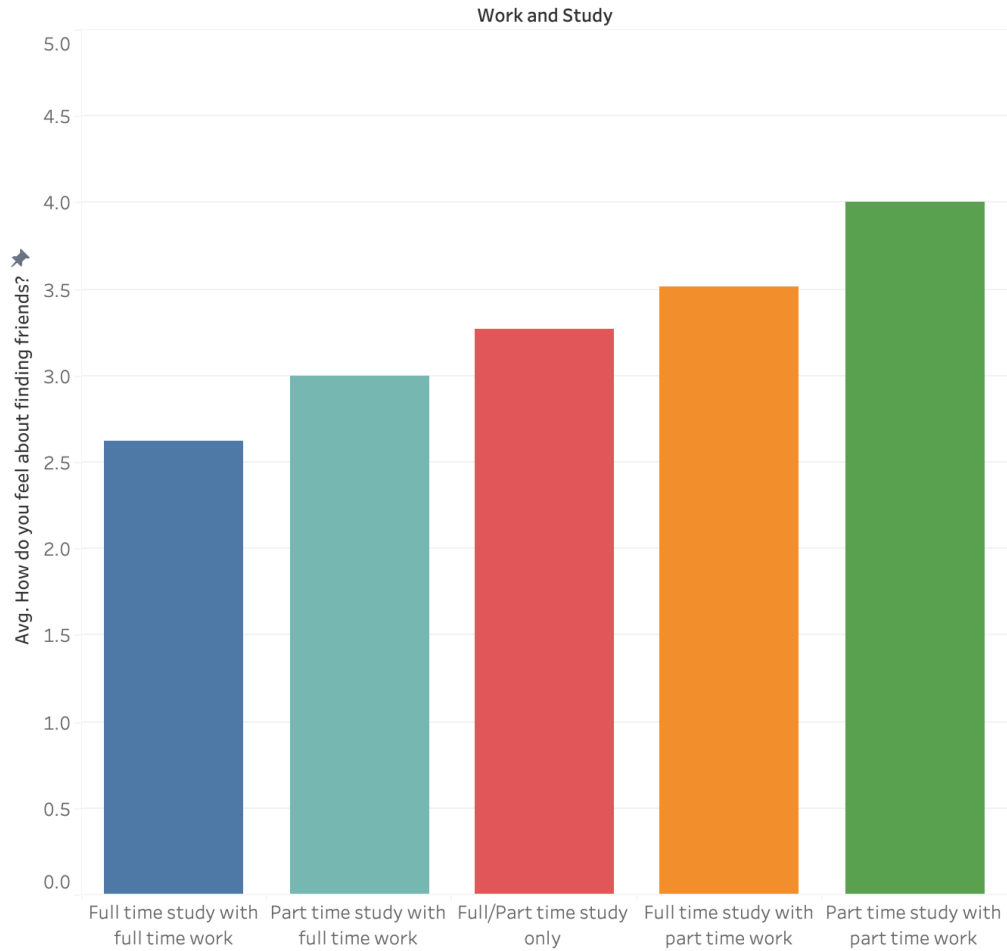
Finding Friends: On-Campus and Online



As evidenced by the graph above, students felt most confident finding friends whilst on campus. Students also had significant confidence in finding friends where there was a mixture of online and in person campus learning. Students felt least confident in finding friends from purely online learning.



Finding Friends: Working and Studying

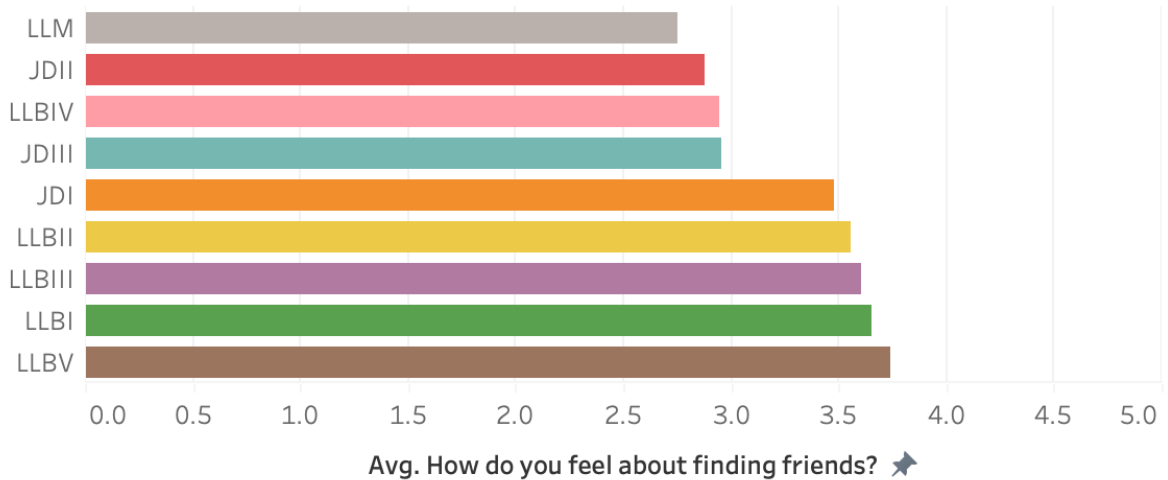


Students who study part time and work part time found it significantly easy to find friends. Students who undertook full time work generally found it most difficult to find friends in law school.

Generally, older students found it more difficult to make friends at law school. The cohorts experiencing particular difficulty were students studying their Masters, who were in JDII, LLBIV and JDII. Younger cohorts tended to have greater confidence in making friends. Surprisingly, LLBI and LLBII had significant confidence in finding friends despite their lockdown experiences.



Finding Friends in Each Cohort



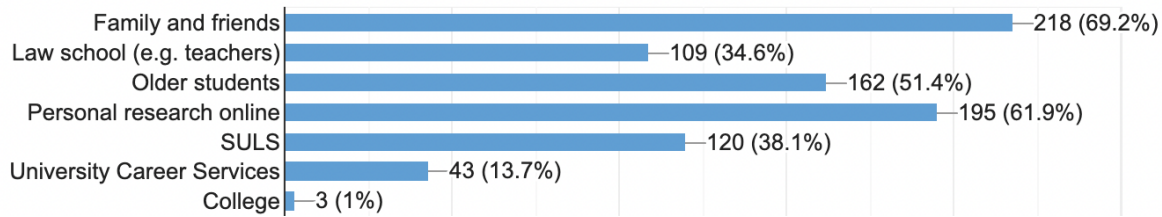
Online Connections

A large portion of students found that it was not preferable to connect with others online as it was a difficult process. Students that found it preferable to connect with others online said that tutorials were the best medium for that to occur. Nearly a fifth of students found study groups useful in connecting with other students. Online SALS events and speed-friending were not as preferred by students.

Services

How do you receive career development advice and support?

Being able to select multiple responses, the majority of respondents indicated that they received career advice from family and friends (69.2% of respondents), personal research online (61.9% of respondents) and from older students (51.4% of respondents). The role of university-led initiatives such as SALS, faculty members from the law school and University Career Services have a relatively smaller impact than the former as illustrated in the graph and pie chart below.

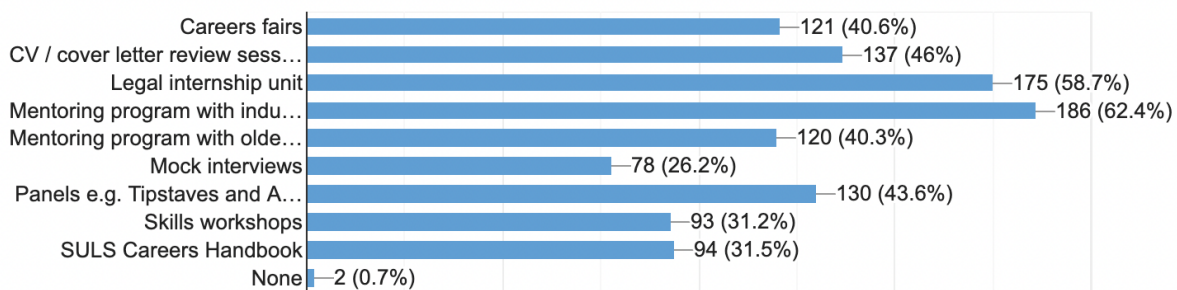


Would you want to undertake a legal internship unit within your law degree? If so, at what stage and when?

In terms of a particular time frame within the year, the majority of respondents have selected during the winter (60.2% of respondents) and summer break (68.3% of respondents) as opposed to during the university semester (24.1% of respondents). Students were also asked which year of their degree they thought would be the most appropriate stage for the unit. In this case, the majority placed indicated their penultimate year (57.7% of respondents) followed by pre-penultimate (46.7% of respondents) and final year (34.5% of respondents).

Which career development initiatives do you find the most valuable?

Overall, the reception of different career development initiatives has been quite evenly spread. However, stand-outs include mentoring with industry professions (62.4% of respondents) and the legal internship unit (58.7% of respondents). This is followed by cover letter review sessions, careers fairs, panels and mentoring with older students at a similar level of reception around 40% of respondents. However, the least valued career development initiative was mock interviews, at an approval rate of 26.2% of respondents.



Conclusion

The Student Body Survey 2021 was a great success as we were able to achieve a large sample size, from this SALS was able to collect insightful information about important areas of the Sydney Law School experience. In terms of the education at Sydney Law School, the key areas students believed could be improved included by the provision of class recordings, attendance requirements, assessment feedback, unmanageable content load and diversifying of assessment types, for example, oral communication tests rather than heavily weighted exams. As for the area of wellbeing at Sydney Law School, the general consensus was that the wellbeing support provided by the school is average and that the majority of students are interested in social initiatives with teachers. Further, one poignant result of this survey was that almost all students want the law school to provide a legal internship unit specifically in the winter or summer break.