

Focusing on Learners and Reflecting on Practice in Aotearoa | New Zealand Law Schools



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Today's focus



- The legal profession's gender problem.
- Is the Aotearoa | New Zealand law student a gendered experience?
- How should law teachers respond?

The Longitudinal Study: Methodology



- Data collection from a self-selected cohort of students enrolled in first year law programmes in 2014 at the Universities of Auckland, Canterbury, Waikato, and Victoria University of Wellington.
- Data collected via seven online surveys across 2014—2019 (2 surveys in 2014 and one each of 2015—2019).
- We began with 780 participants and ended with 146. Seventy-five participants completed all seven surveys!
- By the time of the last survey, most of the cohort of 75 were employed in legal work that they reported to be satisfying and enjoyable.

- The law degrees at the participating universities all require the equivalent of a four-year, full-time undergraduate programme of study.
- These law degrees are Council of Legal Education approved.
- In their first two years of study, students complete CLE required courses.
- CLE courses have large enrolments and are taught via lectures and tutorials.
- In their final years of study, students complete “optional” 300 level courses with varying enrolment numbers and teaching modes.



What does the literature say?



- Persistence, engagement, and self-efficacy are significantly influenced by students' interactions at the universities at which they are enrolled (and students' backgrounds and external life events occurring whilst they are studying).
- The legal education literature reports gender differences in the way that female and male students engage in formal learning opportunities.
- The general higher education literature reports gender differences in self-reported confidence levels and self-esteem.
- Women find law school “more competitive than men, were more dissatisfied with their performance, spoke up less frequently in class, and were less happy about it.”

Findings: Demographics (n=75)

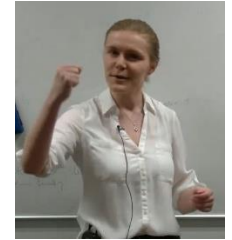
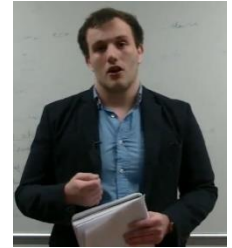


- 64 % female, 36% male.
- 81 % of females and 85% of males were aged 20 or under in 2014.
- 92 % of females and 82 % of males were studying full-time.
- 55 % of females and 78 % of males identified as NZ European | Pākehā, 2 females and 1 male as Māori, and 1 female as Pasifika.
- Most (94 % of females and 93% of males) did not have a disability affecting their ability to study and learn.
- 77 % of females and 52 % of males had no family or other connection to the law.
- A minority were likely to be the first in family to study at university.

Findings: Learning and Teaching – Formal learning opportunities (n=75)



- High reported attendance rates for both genders across time (80-100%)
- Females reported less frequent participation in whole class activities in large lectures, but proportionately greater participation rates in small lectures.
- There was no difference in female and male reported participation rates in tutorials.
- Females reported less frequent contact with their lecturers across their early years at law school.
- By the time of their later years at law school, a higher proportion of male students reported that their teachers knew them.



Findings: Learning and Teaching – Other (n=75)



- No reported differences self-study practices, including reported rates of studying with peers.
- No reported differences in reported grades.
- Although females and males began with similar confidence levels, a higher proportion of males were “very confident” in passing their law courses each year.
- But a higher proportion of male students reported lower than expected results. A higher proportion of female students reported higher than expected results.
- Male students were somewhat less satisfied than female students with their overall law school experience.

Findings: Confidence in Transitioning to the workforce (n=75)



- Across their time at law school, a high proportion of females and males reported they were “interested” or “very interested” in pursuing a legal career, with approx. 70 % expressing interest in a career in private practice.
- But, in their final year at law school:
 - 58 % of females and 50% of males did not have employment arranged.
 - Of those who did not have employment arranged, 64 % of females and 75 % of males were not confident they would find employment.
 - A minority (43 % of females and 40 % of males) felt “prepared” or “very prepared” to join the workforce.

Findings: Graduates



- By 2019, most were employed (93 % of females and 90 % of males).
- 54 % of females and 59 % of males were employed in a law firm.
- Most used their law degree in their employment (only 11 % of females and 6 % of males did not).
- Most would choose to study law again if they could go back in time.
- Most reported positive workplace cultures.
- The most frequently reported “positive” feature of their work was helping others.
- The most frequently reported “stressful” feature was time management.

Reflections



- Teaching and Learning.
- Self-efficacy.
- From law school to the workplace.

