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The number of law schools with academic support programs increased dramatically over the past decade. The vast majority of ABA-accredited law schools now offer some form of academic support program. The question at these schools is no longer 'should we have an academic support program?' Rather, program directors, students, faculty, law school and university administrators, members of accreditation teams, and others now ask 'is the academic support program successful?' and 'what can be done to make the academic support program even more successful?' In order to answer these questions with more than equivocal and unsubstantiated statements, a methodologically sound evaluation must be conducted. Despite the importance of program evaluation, a paucity of literature exists concerning the evaluation of law school academic support programs.

General agreement exists about the need to evaluate academic support programs. General uncertainty exists, however, regarding both the attributes of a methodologically sound evaluation and the appropriate types of data to be used in an evaluation. Personal experience and anecdotal evidence indicate that this uncertainty generates two unfortunate outcomes. First, uncertainty regarding methodology results in paralysis. People fail to undertake evaluations for fear they will design them improperly. Second, even if people conduct an evaluation, they use too narrow a set of data to yield meaningful results.

A discussion of the fundamental nature of educational evaluation is a good starting point. For the purpose of this article, 'educational evaluation' is defined as an empirical, systematic process for examining a single aspect or multiple aspects of an educational program. An evaluator may desire to assess an entire academic support program. However, the assessment of an entire program may be, or may seem to be, too daunting a task for an initial effort at evaluation, or the evaluator may lack the resources required to evaluate an entire program. The evaluator should remember, therefore, that one may evaluate (1) an entire academic support program, (2) a single aspect of a program, such as a recently established web-based component, or (3) something in between.

Evaluation is empirical because it is based on data obtained from observing and measuring the content, structure, sequencing, operation, and effects of an educational program. Furthermore, it attempts to discover what actually is occurring within and as a result of the program being evaluated.

Even if an evaluator conducts an empirical study and avoids statements based solely on theory or comparisons to templates, he or she must remember to observe and measure what actually is occurring within, as well as what is occurring as a result of the educational program being evaluated. The evaluator should avoid observing and measuring only a program's supposed outputs or effects.

Evaluation is systematic in the sense that a good evaluation requires the evaluator to design and implement a well-conceived and project-specific methodology. No single, 'correct' evaluation methodology exists. General education literature contains a number of guidelines for developing evaluation methodologies.

An evaluation should be based on multiple data sources and multiple data types. This methodological requirement sometimes is referred to as 'triangulation,' and it reflects the belief that comprehensive and accurate program evaluation is possible only if the program, its implementation and its effects are examined from a variety of angles. The use of multiple data sources recognises that a greater variety of insights, as well as more subtle insights, will emerge if a program, its implementation, and its effects are scrutinised from a variety of angles.

The use of multiple data types recognises that each type of data has its unique strengths and limitations and can reveal only part of the picture of what is going on with a program. Potential data types include analyses of the scope and accuracy of the content of workshops, presentations, tutorials, and handouts; one-on-one interviews with students or faculty; comments made during focus groups consisting of students or faculty; surveys of students or faculty; the structure and content of answers to practice problems and practice exams; answers written during final exams; individual course grades; grade point averages; participation in such activities as law review, moot court, mock trial competitions, legal clinics, writing competitions, internships and judicial clerkships; and the frequency and timing of individual attendance at academic support program functions.

The evaluation design should reflect the perspectives and needs of both the person who requested or initiated the evaluation and of the members of the various groups which may form the audience for the evaluation's results. An evaluation will be of little or no use to an individual or a group whose perspectives and information needs are not taken into account. An initial step in every evaluation, therefore, is to consider the identity, interests, perspectives, and needs of each individual and group who will constitute the evaluation's audience.

At many schools, the academic support program offers courses, workshops, and presentations designed to assist current students in developing study skills, exam-taking skills, and skills in legal analysis that are intended to be applicable to all courses. Faculty members at these schools may be concerned that their authority is being undermined and that the information being imparted and the skills being developed are not compatible with their perspectives and pedagogical aims.

Members of the law school administration and administrative staff may use evaluation results to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The program director has an obvious interest in evaluating the program in order to make adjustments in the program and to justify budgetary support. Other potential audiences include such law school administrators as those who are responsible for supervising the program.

Evaluation results may be of interest to a variety of other 'stakeholders,' such as: prospective students, who may consider the existence, attributes, and effectiveness of an academic support program as factors when deciding whether to apply for admission and to matriculate if admitted; accreditation entities, both for the law school and for the university as a whole, for which retention rates, particularly for historically underrepresented groups, may be considered in the accreditation process; members of a state legislature or a committee thereof who are involved in appropriating funds for state colleges and universities; state bar examiners and others who are concerned about the bar admission process; and prospective employers, who may base their hiring decisions upon factors that may be affected by the academic support program.

In any evaluation, the goals and objectives of a program to be evaluated must be specifically and precisely stated. Some evaluations founder because the evaluator fails to consider the program's goals and objectives. Other evaluations founder because the evaluator selects the wrong goals and objectives, frequently choosing goals and objectives that seem easy to assess given the available data rather than goals and objectives in which the evaluator really is interested.

Evaluation is a necessary component of any academic support program. This article provides an evaluator with basic guidelines to assist in the development of a methodologically sound program evaluation. Overall, the evaluation should be empirical and systematic, based on a variety of data sources and data types, including both quantitative and qualitative data, and conducted within the context of the program's goals and objectives using data that relate directly to those goals and objectives.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The cost and financing of legal education

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While the decade of the 1990s produced tremendous growth and significant improvements in legal education, by the start of the twenty-first century a number of factors had combined to create great challenges for the legal education community. Some of the most important are: a very substantial increase over the 1990s in the tuition charged JD students at both private and publicly assisted law schools; a similarly substantial increase in the expenditures on their programs by ABA-approved law schools; a significant reduction in the relative level of financial support provided by state governments to public higher education in general, and to publicly assisted legal education in particular; and a dramatic increase in the amount of borrowing by law students and in the average indebtedness of graduating law students.

Average per-student expenditures at ABA-approved law schools have quadrupled in the past twenty years. Some of those increased expenditures have resulted in the average student-faculty ratio at ABA-approved schools over the same period having dropped substantially. This reduction in student-faculty ratio has made possible the vast increase in the amount and quality of skills training in law schools over the past twenty years.

By far the largest percentage increase in expenditures over this seven-year period was for student financial aid. Second, while library costs may have been a driving force in law school cost increases of prior decades, library costs were the smallest contributor among the major expenditure categories to the cost of increases of the 1990s. Third, the major increase in the other law school operations category suggests there was a significant shift in expenditures over the late 1990s to some activities that previously were not large items in a typical law school budget. Finally, the significant increase in expenditures for administrative salaries evidences a substantial increase in various support services at law schools over the 1990s.

Between 1990–91 and 1999–2000 there was a dramatic increase in the annual amount of borrowing by law students. What income do graduates have with which to pay off that debt? The National Association for Law Placements reports that the median starting salary for all law school graduates in the class of 2000 was \$51,900. At the level of borrowing that is typical of many law school graduates