

AALS Annual Meeting 2022
Increasing Global Engagement within U.S. Law Schools
AALS Section on Global Engagement (Chair Prof. John Smagula)
Empirical Research: Why Enroll in a U.S. LL.M. program
Fernando Villarreal-Gonda
Academic Dean and Professor of Law
Facultad Libre de Derecho de Monterrey, Mexico
January 07, 2022

AALS Annual Meeting 2022

Freedom Equality and the Common Good

Increasing Global Engagement within U.S. Law Schools

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Empirical Research: Why Enroll in a U.S. LL.M. Program

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1. Background

Facultad Libre de Derecho de Monterrey (FLDM Law School, for short) is a private, independent, boutique law school in Monterrey, Mexico. FLDM Law School alumni usually pursue master's degrees in Mexico or abroad.

What do they ponder? Do an LL.M. or get a job? Study an LL.M. or invest that money? Study more theory or do more practice? Broad education or specialization? In English or Spanish? Civil Law vs. Common Law? Close or far? The U.S. or Spain? New England or California? Quality of life vs. quality of the program? Prestige vs. cost of enrollment. Prestige vs. fit. Ranking or cost? This draft report briefly examines their decision-making.

2. Methodology

2.1. Survey Questions

2.1.1. Experimental Group

- Method: Survey.
- Topic: Why Enroll in a U.S. LL.M. program?
- Sample: 91 *Facultad Libre de Derecho de Monterrey* alumni.
- Date: December 10-13, 2021.
- Language: Spanish.
- Data collection: Online.
- Questions: 08 questions.
 - 06 Multiple Choice Questions:
 1. Why did you study an LL.M.?
 2. Why in the U.S.?
 3. Why not in Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Oceania?
 4. Why did you apply to that school?
 5. What did you contribute to the program/professors/peers?
 6. Something made you think twice?
 - 02 Open-Ended Questions:
 7. How has LL.M. impacted your personal/social/professional life?
 8. Feel free to add further comments.

2.1.2. Control Group

- Method: Survey.
- Topic: Why Enroll in a U.S. LL.M. program?
- Sample: 15 *Facultad Libre de Derecho de Monterrey* alumni.
- Date: December 14, 2021.
- Language: Spanish.
- Data collection: Online.
- Questions: 02 questions.
 - 01 Multiple Choice Question: Why in Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Oceania?
 - 01 Open-Ended Question: Feel free to add further comments.

2.2. Survey Responses

2.2.1. Experimental Group

- 51 alumni.
 - 49 LL.M.
 - 01 J.D.
 - 01 M.P.A.
- Wide variety of law schools and graduation years:
- 21 schools attended:

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| 14 | Harvard University | 01 | Columbia University |
| 05 | New York University | 01 | Northwestern University |
| 04 | Ohio State University | 01 | Southern Methodist University |
| 04 | University of California-Berkeley | 01 | Stanford University |
| 03 | Georgetown University | 01 | University at Buffalo-SUNY |
| 03 | Tulane University | 01 | University of California-Los Angeles |
| 02 | Boston University | 01 | University of Minnesota |
| 02 | University Illinois-Urbana | 01 | University of Southern California |
| 02 | University of St. Thomas, Minn. | 01 | University of Texas-Austin |
| 01 | American University | 01 | University of Virginia |
| 01 | Boston College | | |
- 23 graduation years:

| | | | | | |
|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| 02 | 1984 | 02 | 2007 | 04 | 2015 |
| 01 | 1990 | 02 | 2008 | 07 | 2016 |
| 01 | 1992 | 01 | 2009 | 05 | 2017 |
| 01 | 1993 | 02 | 2010 | 03 | 2019 |
| 02 | 2003 | 03 | 2011 | 02 | 2020 |
| 01 | 2004 | 02 | 2012 | 02 | 2022 |
| 01 | 2005 | 02 | 2013 | 01 | 2023 |
| 01 | 2006 | 03 | 2014 | | |

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2.2.2. Control Group

- 10 alumni.
 - 09 LL.M.
 - 01 Master Program in Urban Studies
- A small variety of countries and graduation years:
- 05 countries:
 - 04 Spain
 - 03 United Kingdom
 - 01 Europe (4 cities program, in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain)
 - 01 France
 - 01 Italy
- 08 graduation years:

| | | |
|---------|---------|---------|
| 01 2004 | 01 2017 | 01 2022 |
| 02 2012 | 01 2018 | 01 2023 |
| 01 2014 | 02 2019 | |

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3. Results

3.1. Experimental Group

3.1.1. Why did you study an LL.M.?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

- 80% To become more attractive to prospective clients and employers.
- 75% To become a better lawyer.
- 67% To get greater professional recognition.

Other Answers

- 59% To belong to a new learning environment.
- 51% To meet people from other countries.
- 38% To become more intercultural.
- 33% It was instilled in me by my undergraduate law professors.
- 28% To improve my English.
- 16% To improve my legal writing skills.
- 16% To advance my research skills.
- 10% It has always been my dream.
- 10% Greater social recognition.
- 06% Everyone in my family has graduate studies.

Comments

- My law firm required me.
- My boss inspired me.
- To work in the U.S.
- To sit for the bar.

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3.1.2. Why in the U.S.?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

- 55% Due to the economic ties between the U.S. and Mexico.
- 53% Because the U.S. programs are very rigorous.
- 43% Because the U.S. programs attract students of all nationalities.

Other Answers

- 41% Because I anticipated having American clients (or clients doing business with American companies).
- 41% Because I wanted to work for American law firms or companies.
- 39% Because the U.S. is very advanced in the topics I studied.
- 35% Because studying in the U.S. is very prestigious.
- 28% Intrigued by the common law tradition.
- 24% Because U.S. schools have better facilities.
- 22% Because I wanted to stay, live, and work in the U.S.
- 20% Because the program is taught in English, a language I already mastered.
- 18% Because I wanted to take and pass the bar exam.
- 18% Because the U.S. is the most powerful country in the world.
- 16% The OPT program would allow me to stay and work for one more year.
- 12% Because the U.S. schools give better information (e.g., websites, brochures, calls).
- 10% Because everything is efficient in the U.S. (e.g., enrolling, paying, getting the visa, renting an apartment, opening a bank account).
- 10% It is easier to live in the U.S. because the rules are clear (e.g., what is legal vs. illegal).
- 08% In the U.S., everything works well (e.g., internet, telephone, transportation, fast food, banks).
- 00% My partner preferred the U.S.

Comments

- The U.S. offers a unique mix of a great legal system, huge law libraries, and a combination of American students and international students.

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3.1.3. Why not in Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Oceania?

(Select all applicable)

(You may have more than one graduate degree in the U.S. and elsewhere, but the question refers to the year you opted for studying in the U.S.)

Top 3 Answers

- 49% Studying in other places is less prestigious than in the U.S.
- 37% The U.S. is closer geographically to Mexico.
- 29% Studying in other places was not relevant to my prospective clients and employers.

Other Answers

- 26% Studying in other places is less challenging than in the U.S.
- 24% The U.S. is closer culturally to Mexico.
- 20% Studying in other places is less rigorous than in the U.S.
- 18% It was easier to study in the U.S. (English language).
- 06% Other countries are more complicated (e.g., enrolling, paying, getting the visa, getting an apartment, opening a bank account).

Comments

- You do not say no to Harvard Law School!
- I never considered other countries.
- Live and work in the U.S.

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3.1.4. Why did you apply to that school?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

- 61% That school has well-known professors for the classes I would take.
- 43% That school is one of the best for the specific LL.M. program I was looking for.
- 41% That school gave me a scholarship.

Other Answers

- 29% That school has a very active learning system (e.g., Socratic method).
- 22% Had to be a well-known school in Mexico, in general.
- 18% That school has a great law library.
- 18% Because being in that school was a dream since my childhood.
- 14% Several of my undergraduate law professors studied at that school.
- 12% Had to be a California school because there is more innovation.
- 10% It had to be a well-known school to the people I worked with before I left.
- 10% It had to be a New England school because they have much tradition.
- 06% That school has the legal clinic you were looking for.
- 06% Various friends had studied in that school.
- 04% To feel like in movies and series.
- 04% It had to be a school well known to my family.
- 04% Because my partner liked or suited that school more than others.
- 00% Because that school has world-class dormitories.

Comments

- It is the oldest and most prestigious school.
- Cross-registration was possible.
- New York City.
- Networking.
- Football team.
- Tuition cost.
- Good quality of life.

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3.1.5. What did you contribute to the program/professors/peers?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

73% Contributions to class discussions.

71% Cultural diversity.

59% A Latin touch.

Other Answers

45% A different way of looking at legal problems.

22% Contributions to a legal clinic program.

20% Research contributions.

00% Nothing.

Comments

- (Up to 10 years of) practical work experience.

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3.1.6. Something made you think twice?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

- 57% Tuition costs.
- 35% Scarce scholarships.
- 24% Currency fluctuations.

Other Answers

- 20% I was not sure about leaving my job.
- 14% City weather.
- 10% Hostility against Mexicans.
- 08% I was not sure about leaving my family.
- 08% Campus shootings.
- 04% Healthcare is costly.
- 04% Campus sexual violence.
- 02% City crime.
- 00% Sexually transmitted diseases were a concern.

Comments

- Nothing at all!
- My age at that time.
- Making a business investment with the same amount of money.

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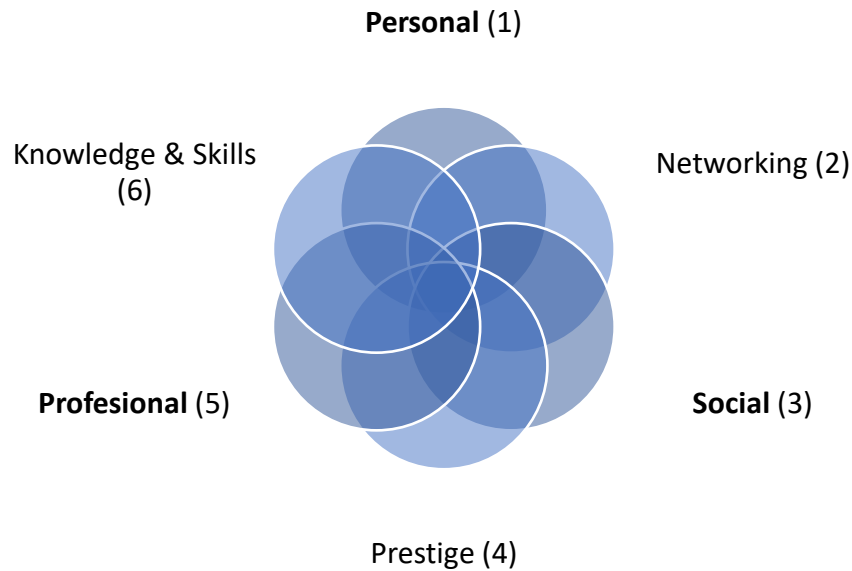
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3.1.7. How has the LL.M. changed your personal/social/professional life?
(Open-Ended Question)



1) Personal

- Self-knowledge.
- Personal, intellectual, and cultural growth.
- Break self-imposed limits.
- Personal independence.
- Personal courage.
- Personal trust.
- Perspective.
- Self-pride.
- Cultural sensitivity.
- Global mindset.

2) Networking

- Professional contacts (including law professors and practicing attorneys).

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3) Social

- Close friends worldwide.
- I became more extroverted.

4) Prestige

- Academic prestige.
- Professional recognition.
- Social status.

5) Professional

- A much better job.
- Many career opportunities.
- A more impressive resume.
- Access to the U.S. legal market (law firms and companies).
- The bar exam.
- A break.

6) Knowledge & Skills

- Learning skills.
- Soft skills.
- Legal communication skills.
- Navigating the international business environment.
- U.S. Law.
- Corporate finance.

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3.1.8. Feel free to add further comments.

- It was a watershed in my professional career. A life-changing experience. I would not exchange that year of personal, academic, legal, and cultural growth for any other.
- Expand your mental horizons!
- Rewire my brain: the common law system has an entirely different logic.
- #FriendsForever.
- The cultural contribution of the country and the university you choose is just as significant as your academic achievements.
- People frequently question the value of an LL.M. (“Nothing you learn there will apply in Mexico.”). The value of an LL.M. is not dependable on the substantive law that you study. You learn to think differently! You learn not only from the teaching method but the constant interaction with your fellow students, most experienced lawyers from all over the world, and different legal systems. Legal analysis, negotiation techniques, and legal writing are the best part of the LL.M. experience. For a year, you will be part of a utopian environment that no job or experience can give you. This experience will be beneficial in the daily exercise of your profession, regardless of the applicable law.

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3.2. Control Group

3.2.1. Why in Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Oceania?

(Select all applicable)

Top 3 Answers

100% Studying in this place was better for the subject matter I specialized in.

50% Studying in this place is equal to or more prestigious than in the U.S.

40% Studying this place is equal to or more challenging than in the U.S.

Other Answers

30% Studying and living in this place is cheaper than in the U.S.

30% In this school, I won a scholarship.

30% The U.S. is too close to Mexico, culturally.

30% Living in this place is more fun than in the U.S.

20% Studying in the U.S. was not relevant to my clients and employers.

10% The U.S. is too close to Mexico, geographically.

10% Professors' influence.

10% Other.

10% My partner preferred this other place.

10% I wanted something different; too many people go to the U.S.

10% I preferred to study in a third language; I already spoke English well.

10% Family influence.

10% My boss's influence.

00% My English was not so good.

00% Living in this place is more convenient because there is less discrimination against Mexicans.

00% I wanted to become completely independent of my family.

00% Friends influence.

Comments

- The admissions process was more straightforward in European schools.
- Cultural richness.

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3.2.2. Feel free to add further comments.

- Living and studying in Europe is much cheaper than in the U.S.
- I was always more attracted to the European culture and quality of life.
- We must look beyond the Ivy League Schools.
- I believe that Europe is the place where I can best practice Sports Law.
- The fact that we share the same legal family (civil law) is a point in favor of practicing in Europe.

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4. Conclusion

4.1. To do or not to do an LL.M.?

For the experimental group, the top 3 reasons for doing an LL.M. program are to become more attractive to prospective clients and employers, to become a better lawyer, and to gain professional recognition. Notice that this is 100% professional logic. Personal, family, and social motivators seem irrelevant when getting into Law School.

Still, after getting out of Law School, they gained substantial personal and social benefits. The former include personal independence, courage and trust, perspective, cultural sensitivity, and a global mindset. The latter comprises numerous professional contacts and countless close friends worldwide.

4.2. Selecting the Country

FLDM alumni consider only two places for an LL.M.: the U.S. and Europe (particularly Spain and the U.K.).

For the experimental group, the top 3 reasons to study in the U.S. are also 100% professional: the economic ties between the U.S. and Mexico, the program rigor, and its international ambiance. FLDM alumni who choose the U.S. also ponder prospective American clients and employers. Their impression that studying in other latitudes may be less prestigious, less challenging, or less rigorous confirms their choice in favor of the U.S.

Studying in Europe may be better for the control group for certain subjects under equal program prestige and program challenge conditions. They also claim that tuition is cheaper and that European countries offer a better quality of life and cultural richness.

4.3. Selecting the Law School

FLDM alumni who choose the U.S. tend to favor those schools that, in their opinion, have the best law professors and the best specific LL.M. program for their interest. Getting a scholarship is a determinant factor.

Tuition costs, the lack of scholarship opportunities, and currency fluctuations make FLDM alumni think twice during their application, admission, and enrollment process. Campus shootings or city crime seem unrelated.