



Washington Lawyer Preparedness Survey

A Comparative Look at Diploma Privilege & the Bar Exam

June 2025

Prepared by IAALS

Logan Cornett

Director of Research | Legal Education & Licensure

Courtney Petersen-Rhead

Program Associate

James Swearingen

Research Analyst

Delivered to Washington State Bar Association

Renata Garcia

Chief Regulatory Counsel

Catherine Schur

Assistant General Counsel

Contents

Introduction	1
Research Objectives	1
Methods.....	2
Survey Design & Procedures.....	2
Participants	3
Limitations	4
Results	5
Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts	5
Legal & Cognitive Skills.....	10
Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, & Self-Awareness.....	16
Practice & Service Delivery	22
Conclusions.....	33
Synthesis & Summary.....	27
Overall, how prepared for practice are Washington lawyers at the time they are licensed?	27
How prepared are Washington lawyers licensed by diploma privilege compared to those licensed by bar exam?	30
What modalities of education, training, and assessment do Washington lawyers believe to be most effective in preparing for practice?	31
Appendix: Participant Information	35

Introduction

As states explore alternatives to the traditional bar exam, there is a marked and growing shift toward data-informed innovation in licensure pathways that can ensure lawyers are competent to practice without creating artificial barriers to the profession. Washington’s decision to offer diploma privilege to a cohort of law graduates during the COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique natural experiment—an opportunity to examine whether licensure via means other than a standardized exam can still ensure minimum competence and preparedness for practice.

In July 2020, Washington implemented diploma privilege as an emergency response to pandemic conditions, which prohibited administration of the bar exam in the traditional method, allowing law graduates who met a set of specified criteria to obtain a law license without taking the bar exam. This temporary policy aimed to address public health concerns and concerns about an influx of pandemic-related justice needs, as well as to ensure early-career stability for impacted licensure candidates. Now, with several years of hindsight, this study provides empirical data on the effectiveness of diploma privilege as a pathway to licensure.

In late 2024, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) and IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver, launched a research effort designed to examine the preparedness of Washington lawyers licensed via diploma privilege, relative to their counterparts licensed via bar exam. Specifically, this project surveyed individuals licensed by diploma privilege in 2020, as well as exam-licensed lawyers admitted from 2019 to 2022. Ultimately, the primary objective of this study is to inform decision-making about the future of legal licensure in Washington.

The sections that follow outline the project’s objectives and goals, methods employed, analysis results, and potential implications of the data.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of diploma privilege as a licensure pathway, relative to those who contemporaneously obtained a law license upon bar exam passage. Table 1 presents the specific research questions that guided study design and approach.

Table 1, Research Questions

RQ1	Overall, how prepared are Washington lawyers at the time they are licensed with respect to the following areas? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal conceptsLegal and cognitive skillsProfessionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awarenessPractice and service delivery
------------	---

RQ2	How prepared are Washington lawyers licensed by diploma privilege compared to those licensed by bar exam with respect to the following areas? Knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts Legal and cognitive skills Professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness Practice and service delivery
RQ3	What modalities of education, training, and assessment do Washington lawyers believe to be most effective in preparing for practice?

Methods

Launched in October 2024 and running through March 2025, this study employed a survey methodology to gather both quantitative and qualitative data targeted at addressing the research questions (see Table 1). The sections below present details regarding who participated in the study, survey development, collecting responses, and analyzing the data.

Survey Design & Procedures

Instrument Development: Researchers developed an initial draft of the survey, relying on previous research by IAALS and other scholarly sources on lawyer competencies to inform specific survey items. WSBA and the Washington Supreme Court provided key insights that informed revisions and refinements to the survey prior to finalizing. IAALS secured approval from the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which provides ethical oversight for all human-subjects research conducted at the University.

Survey Content: The final survey instrument consisted of three primary sections, outlined in Table 2 below. The survey was structured to first assess respondents' self-perceived preparedness at the time they were first licensed across multiple domains (e.g., substantive knowledge, cognitive skills, professionalism, service delivery). Based on their responses, participants were shown tailored follow-up questions: those who reported being prepared in a given area were asked which experiences contributed to that preparedness, while those who reported being underprepared were asked to reflect on what additional education or guidance would have been most helpful.

Table 2: Survey Content Overview

Section	Subsections
Preparedness for Practice	Knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts Legal and cognitive skills Professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness Practice and service delivery

**Attainment of
Knowledge & Skills**

Knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts
 Legal and cognitive skills
 Professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness
 Practice and service delivery

**Respondent
Information**

Completion of educational requirements for licensure
 Year first admitted (in any state)
 Number of experiential courses taken in law school
 Employment status
 Practice setting and area(s)
 Gender identity
 Racial/ethnic identity

Programming: Researchers built and programmed the survey using Qualtrics survey software. Survey functionality included multiple layers of randomization to minimize potential bias (e.g., order effects, survey fatigue, etc.). Survey branching logic ensured that follow-up questions were shown only when relevant. For each domain, respondents first rated their preparedness. Depending on that response, they were shown open-ended or rating-based follow-ups to explore what helped or what could have helped them gain the necessary competencies. The survey underwent multiple rounds of functionality testing prior to distribution to ensure data integrity.

Administration & Field Period: Links to the survey were distributed via Qualtrics in late February 2025, with reminders sent periodically to encourage participation; the survey was live for approximately three weeks, closing in early March.

Participants

The target population for this study included lawyers who met the following criteria:

- Licensed to practice in Washington
- First admitted to practice between 2019 and 2022
- Not admitted via APR 6 (due to the likelihood of introducing confounding variables)

Survey links were distributed to approximately 2000 Washington lawyers meeting these criteria; the exact number of qualifying individuals who received survey links is unknown, due to particulars of the contact information used for distributing survey links). In total, we received 124 valid responses to the survey (response rate = 6%; note that this level of response is common for surveys of this nature).

Participants represented a broad array of perspectives and personal backgrounds. Figure 1 summarizes key information about participants in the sample; more detailed results and breakdowns can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 1: Participant Information Summary

Legal Education & Bar Admission	Legal Employment	Individual Information
<p>A majority of respondents (58%) graduated from a law school in Washington; the remaining 42% completed law school elsewhere.</p> <p>The majority (69%) completed three or more experiential courses in law school, with 41% having taken four or more.</p> <p>Most participants (76%) were admitted to practice via the bar exam, while 24% were licensed through diploma privilege.</p> <p>Over half of all respondents (52%) passed the bar in Washington; 23% passed the bar in another state.</p>	<p>Nearly all respondents (90%) were employed in positions requiring a law license, with an additional 5% in law-related roles.</p> <p>Litigation was the most common practice area (61%), with transactional (26%) and regulatory (15%) following.</p> <p>The most common practice settings are private practice (40%) and government (27%), with public interest and nonprofit each accounting for 8%.</p>	<p>A majority of respondents identified as women (58%), with men comprising 37% of the sample.¹ A small portion identified as nonbinary (2%) or self-described (2%).</p> <p>Most respondents identified as white (75%), with the next largest proportions identifying as multiracial/multiethnic (8%) and Asian (6%). The following groups each represented less than 5% of the sample: Middle Eastern or North African (3%); Black or African American (2%); Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin (2%); American Indian or Alaska Native (1%).</p>

Limitations

This study offers valuable insights into perceptions of preparedness and pathways to licensure; however, a few limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, all data is self-reported and retrospective, meaning that responses may be informed by personal bias or hindsight rather than objective recall. Second, the overall response rate was relatively low (about 6%), which, while common, raises the possibility of nonresponse bias. Lastly, the actual number of responses is relatively low ($n = 124$), suggesting a need for caution when interpreting observed group differences.

¹ The higher proportion of women respondents may be explained, at least in part, by broader licensure trends in Washington; data from 2019 to 2022 shows that more women than men were licensed to practice law in the state each year during that period.

Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, including both quantitative and qualitative insights, detailing findings relating to four broad categories encompassing different aspects of competency for law practice:

- Knowledge of Substantive Law and Foundational Legal Concepts
- Legal and Cognitive Skills
- Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, and Self-Awareness
- Practice and Service Delivery

Each of these sections presents data in three subsections:

- *Preparedness for Practice*: This section presents data from the first stage of the survey, where respondents were asked to assess how prepared they felt in each domain at the time they were first licensed.
- *Helpfulness of Education & Experience in Preparing for Practice*: Provides data on responses to all survey questions for which participants rated the helpfulness of different components of education and experience that contributed to achieving at least adequate preparedness (for the competencies the participant indicated being prepared in).
- *Additional Guidance Needed to Support Learning*: Summarizes findings from open-ended questions asking participants to reflect on the kinds of additional guidance that would have been most helpful in achieving at least adequate preparedness (for the competencies the participant indicated being underprepared in).

Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts

The survey asked participants to indicate their preparedness with respect to 14 areas relating to knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts:

Administrative Law	Ethical Obligations of Attorneys
Business Associations	Family Law
Civil Procedure	Finance and Bankruptcy Law
Constitutional Law	Real Property
Contracts	Rules of Evidence
Criminal Law	Torts
Criminal Procedure	Trusts and Estates

Preparedness for Practice

The sections below summarize the preparedness data for competencies in the *knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts* section of the survey. Results are presented in three groups:

- Areas where the results were similar across both diploma privilege and bar exam participants (i.e., where the difference in the proportion that report being prepared is under 10%).
- Areas where diploma privilege participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more diploma privilege participants indicated being prepared than bar exam participants).
- Areas where bar exam participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more bar exam participants indicated being prepared than diploma privilege participants).

Participants responded to preparedness items using the following four-point scale: *not at all prepared, partially prepared, adequately prepared, more than adequately prepared*. The sections below collapse these into two categories: *not prepared (not at all prepared + partially prepared)* and *prepared (adequately prepared + more than adequately prepared)*.

Areas of Overlap Across Licensure Modalities

Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts		Not prepared	Prepared
Business Associations	Bar exam	71%	29%
	Diploma privilege	67%	33%
Criminal Law	Bar exam	44%	56%
	Diploma privilege	45%	55%
Criminal Procedure	Bar exam	54%	46%
	Diploma privilege	50%	50%
Ethical Obligations of Attorneys	Bar exam	66%	34%
	Diploma privilege	73%	27%
Family Law	Bar exam	71%	29%
	Diploma privilege	69%	31%
Finance & Bankruptcy Law	Bar exam	90%	10%
	Diploma privilege	93%	7%
Real Property	Bar exam	68%	32%
	Diploma privilege	60%	40%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Diploma Privilege Licensees

Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts		Not prepared	Prepared
Administrative Law	Bar exam	77%	23%
	Diploma privilege	53%	47%
Civil Procedure	Bar exam	47%	53%
	Diploma privilege	28%	72%
Constitutional Law	Bar exam	44%	56%
	Diploma privilege	34%	66%
Contracts	Bar exam	44%	56%
	Diploma privilege	33%	67%
Rules of Evidence	Bar exam	43%	57%
	Diploma privilege	33%	67%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Bar Exam Licensees

There were not any areas within the *knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts* category in which a meaningfully larger proportion (i.e., a difference of 10% or greater) bar exam participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*.

Helpfulness of Education & Experience in Preparing for Practice

Following the sections in which participants indicated their levels of preparedness, the survey presented participants with a list of items for which they indicated being *adequately* or *more than adequately prepared* and asked them to indicate the degree to which 10 different kinds of education and experience were helpful in becoming prepared (*extremely unhelpful*, *somewhat unhelpful*, *somewhat helpful*, *extremely helpful*). The survey also allowed participants to indicate areas where they had no experience (and thus would be unable to provide a rating for helpfulness). The table below presents this data for items in the *knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts* section of the survey.

Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts	Unhelpful	Helpful	No Experience
Lecture-based courses in law school	8%	92%	0%
Experiential courses in law school	1%	86%	13%
Participation in a law school clinic	0%	64%	36%

Participation in an externship or internship	0%	87%	13%
Experience in a summer associate position	1%	38%	61%
Experience in a summer internship position	1%	75%	24%
Life experience outside of law school	2%	94%	5%
Preparing for the bar exam	24%	71%	5%
Taking the bar exam	27%	56%	16%
Participation in a federal or state judicial clerkship	1%	21%	79%

Additional Guidance Needed to Support Learning

Practical Experience

Participants consistently emphasized a disconnect between theoretical education and the realities of legal practice. In fact, half of the responses to this question—50 comments—indicated a desire for some form of practical experience to support learning in competencies under the umbrella of *knowledge of substantive law and foundational legal concepts*.

"Law school teaches the language of the law, how to understand it—but not how to practice."

"Practical experiential learning was the best preparation I had for lawyering—not test prep or law school study."

"It would've been helpful to see something happen start to finish, especially in a real court setting."

"Thinking like a lawyer' doesn't help when you don't have practical knowledge about how to actually practice the law."

"I would have felt more adequately prepared with some hands-on experience or some sort."

"I feel I could have been more prepared by training with internships/externships/fellowships etc. while in law school/before being admitted to the bar."

"When we step into the practice of law, it is good to have the broad scope of things, but it would be equally good to have some solid practical skills for what we will most likely face on a day-to-day basis."

"Practical experience on the day-to-day workflow in those fields rather than traditional case law-based education."

"In general, the areas that I was not prepared for would have been helped by training, that is, guidance and experience outside of the classroom. Many areas are highly complex and require familiarity beyond what is gained in the classroom to adequately practice."

"A required mentorship or having to work for a licensed attorney and actually doing the work under their supervision would have been the only way I can think of to get the experience."

Real-World Coursework

In addition to hands-on practical experience, participants frequently pointed to a need for coursework that is grounded in real-world contexts and incorporates critical aspects of the realities of practice.

"I was not taught how to file a lawsuit or hire a process server. I was not taught WHY a business would want to form a particular organization or how to help them choose. I was not taught HOW to record a deed. I was not taught at which stages of litigation the rules of evidence apply and how they change between each."

"Current event examples and explanations, experience with real documents such as complaints, TROs, etc."

"I did take the required contracts course and felt prepared on contract theory, but my job requires a lot more practical knowledge of contracts, drafting, redline etiquette, negotiation strategy, etc. I think I could have benefited from a contract drafting lab course in addition to pure theory - I really feel that this should be a required course for all attorneys."

"Some courses were very 'general' and just provided an overview of a field of law, which didn't help when I started to practice."

"More classes like trial advocacy in which you go through a case including drafting documents and meeting deadlines."

"More real-world exercises in class about how these concepts apply in day-to-day practice."

"More legal application to real life in these subjects rather than ancient case law."

Law School Curricula, Pedagogy, & Assessment

A large proportion of participants provided broad comments and reflections on the overall content of law school curricula, how law is taught, and how learning is assessed.

"Incorporating these topics into other courses, showing the overlap through cases and creating connections between concepts through examples."

"Many times, law school focuses on the exceptions or the exceptional cases. That does help you understand the scope of the practice area, but it does not come in handy nearly as well as it would if we worked on common cases."

"More real-life scenario exam questions, not hypotheticals that a new lawyer would never encounter."

"The theoretical and case-based approach is sufficient to a point, but not the most helpful when trying to advise lay persons with understanding legal risks."

"Instead of silly hypos to collect points, final exams should have been more experiential."

"Having now practiced family law, the typical family law class taken in law school does very little to actually prepare you for the practicing in a family law setting."

"Law school was almost singularly focused on the doctrine, and not the practice of law."

Legal & Cognitive Skills

The survey asked participants to indicate their preparedness with respect to 16 areas relating to *legal and cognitive skills*:

Distinguishing and identifying controlling sources of law relevant to a matter

Utilizing legal research techniques to identify issues, formulate arguments, and compile relevant authorities

Distinguishing and identifying legal processes relevant to a matter

Understanding court processes such as the various court levels, court rules and how to locate them, and the roles of court personnel

Interpreting statutes

Interpreting judicial opinions

Interpreting administrative code

Interpreting contracts

Utilizing legal reasoning and analysis skills to formulate sound legal advice

Negotiating on behalf of clients

Identifying key legal concerns presented by a set of circumstances

Identifying legal principles likely to impact the outcome of a matter

Identifying and collecting facts relevant to a matter

Interviewing clients and witnesses

Conducting depositions

Integrating legal skills and knowledge to develop a comprehensive understanding of a client matter

Preparedness for Practice

The sections below summarize the preparedness data for competencies in the *legal and cognitive skills* section of the survey. Results are presented in three groups:

- Areas where the results were similar across both diploma privilege and bar exam participants (i.e., where the difference in the proportion that report being prepared is under 10%).
- Areas where diploma privilege participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more diploma privilege participants indicated being prepared than bar exam participants).
- Areas where bar exam participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more bar exam participants indicated being prepared than diploma privilege participants).

Participants responded to preparedness items using the following four-point scale: *not at all prepared, partially prepared, adequately prepared, more than adequately prepared*. The sections below collapse these into two categories *not prepared (not at all prepared + partially prepared)* and *prepared (adequately prepared + more than adequately prepared)*.

Areas of Overlap Across Licensure Modalities

Legal & Cognitive Skills		Not prepared	Prepared
Distinguishing and identifying controlling sources of law	Bar exam	4%	96%
	Diploma privilege	10%	90%
Interpreting statutes	Bar exam	13%	87%
	Diploma privilege	10%	90%
Interpreting judicial opinions	Bar exam	10%	90%
	Diploma privilege	7%	93%
Interpreting contracts	Bar exam	36%	64%
	Diploma privilege	38%	62%
Negotiating on behalf of clients	Bar exam	60%	40%
	Diploma privilege	53%	47%
Utilizing legal research techniques	Bar exam	11%	89%
	Diploma privilege	10%	90%
Identifying legal concerns presented by a set of circumstances	Bar exam	20%	80%
	Diploma privilege	13%	87%
Identifying legal principles likely to impact the outcome of a matter	Bar exam	26%	74%
	Diploma privilege	24%	76%
Identifying and collecting facts relevant to a matter	Bar exam	26%	74%
	Diploma privilege	20%	80%
Conducting depositions	Bar exam	88%	12%
	Diploma privilege	80%	20%
Utilizing legal reasoning and analysis skills to formulate sound legal advice	Bar exam	29%	71%
	Diploma privilege	34%	66%
Integrating legal skills and knowledge	Bar exam	39%	61%
	Diploma privilege	30%	70%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Diploma Privilege Licensees

Legal & Cognitive Skills		Not prepared	Prepared
Distinguishing and identifying legal processes	Bar exam	36%	64%
	Diploma privilege	24%	76%
Interpreting administrative code	Bar exam	44%	56%
	Diploma privilege	28%	72%
Understanding court processes	Bar exam	43%	57%
	Diploma privilege	20%	80%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Bar Exam Licensees

There were not any areas within the *legal and cognitive skills* category in which a meaningfully larger proportion (i.e., a difference of 10% or greater) of bar exam participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*, as compared with diploma privilege participants.

Helpfulness of Education & Experience in Preparing for Practice

Following the sections in which participants indicated their levels of preparedness, the survey presented participants with a list of items for which they indicated being *adequately* or *more than adequately prepared* and asked them to indicate the degree to which 10 different kinds of education and experience were helpful in becoming prepared (*extremely unhelpful*, *somewhat unhelpful*, *somewhat helpful*, *extremely helpful*). The survey also allowed participant to indicate areas where they had no experience (and thus would be unable to provide a rating for helpfulness). The table below presents this data for items in the *legal and cognitive skills* section of the survey.

Legal & Cognitive Skills	Unhelpful	Helpful	No Experience
Lecture-based courses in law school	8%	92%	0%
Experiential courses in law school	3%	90%	7%
Participation in a law school clinic	3%	63%	34%
Participation in an externship or internship	0%	86%	14%
Experience in a summer associate position	1%	40%	59%
Experience in a summer internship position	2%	75%	23%
Life experience outside of law school	5%	93%	2%
Preparing for the bar exam	38%	56%	6%
Taking the bar exam	38%	46%	15%
Participation in a federal or state judicial clerkship	0%	22%	78%

Additional Guidance Needed to Support Learning

Respondents who indicated they felt underprepared in a given domain were shown follow-up questions asking what additional education, training, or guidance might have helped them feel more prepared.

Practical Experience

More than half of the comments in response to this question (68 in total) indicate the value of practical experience in achieving an adequate level of preparedness to practice.

"I had no experience in civil matters. So a civil externship might have been helpful."

"Practical experiences with direct services to clients would have helped me develop these skills more especially the application of laws facts to client needs, I gained the most helpful amount of those skills while actually practicing with clients and with more seasoned mentor attorneys."

"Clinical or apprenticeship-like experience; real world experience working closely with an attorney on day-to-day tasks."

"Law school clinics, internships, and externships were far more impactful and effective at preparing me to actually practice law. Because of this, most of the skills I felt underprepared to exercise were gained only after receiving my license, while trained on the job."

"While I took classes on negotiations and deposition practice, I needed actual experience as a lawyer to develop these skills. I am not convinced anyone would be adequately prepared with these skills sets simply by attending law school."

"Any training outside of classroom exercises would have been valuable. The classroom exercises failed to replicate real world conditions by a serious margin"

"Even though I took an ADR course in law and attended many mediations as a legal assistant, I was not prepared to negotiate on behalf of clients without assistance from a mentor. In part, this was because I did not know all the tools at my disposal. It was only through actual practice that I gained knowledge of the avenues I could take during negotiations."

Real-World Coursework

Participants frequently cited the need for coursework that reflects a higher degree of fidelity to what lawyers encounter in practice.

"More practicum experience offerings within the knowledge and theory classes as opposed to just as extracurricular or separate practicum classes. If there was a practical application or experiential practice component to each class to solidify the abstract theories, that might have been helpful."

"Changing the legal training model to require at least one year of post-law school work as a supervised attorney - akin to an intern after medical school - representing clients in civil or criminal legal matters to obtain practical skills like conducting depositions, formulating legal advice based upon a client's needs, and negotiating on a client's behalf."

"At the very least, it would have been helpful to go through more mock-style situations besides just trials."

"I feel like every time we talked about legal processes it was just a checklist of 'and then you do this!' without actually explaining what THIS was. 'You follow the rules of that court and then...' okay, but how do I find the rules of that court, and what happens if it's ambiguous? Is it okay to reach out and ask?"

"It would have been helpful to have more application practice. I would have felt more prepared if I had gone through repetitions of interviewing clients and applying facts while in law school."

"Participating in simulated real-life situations in the classroom should be a required part of every CORE class."

Law School Curricula, Pedagogy, & Assessment

Many participants also remarked on the content of what is taught in law school, how that content is taught, and how it is ultimately assessed.

"Explaining to 1L students (who don't have professional family members) what it means to be an attorney and the importance of these skills. I felt the instruction I received glossed over the 'why'. . . I was the first person in my family EVER to get an advanced degree, so I did not have connections to explain the day to day of lawyering. 1Ls NEED that background explanation."

"By studying concepts as units, it was often difficult to see how they interacted as part of an overall legal proceeding."

"You do not typically learn the law in an adversarial manner. It is more in a vacuum where you are comparing laws to facts and then analyzing it without caring about the other side. However, most law is working for the benefit of your client against the opposing party who is doing the same."

"I think it's not helpful when NO ONE knows what they're doing in a negotiation and tries to practice with each other. It's easy to give the other person the benefit of what they're angling for because you're all trying to get a good grade and that's the best way to do it."

"Exercises were long and complicated and we only did them once, which meant if you didn't get it the first time, you were on your own. It would have been helpful to start with something simple and work our way up to the ridiculously complex exercises we were provided, because I have yet to write something as long and involved as what we did in law school."

Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, & Self-Awareness

The survey asked participants to indicate their preparedness with respect to 10 areas relating to professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness:

Acting in accordance with the rules of professional conduct	Developing and implementing effective strategies for managing work-related stress
Familiarity with the rules of professional conduct	Monitoring your individual well-being and utilizing positive self-care strategies
Approaching work with diligence and conscientiousness	Identifying goals and forming plans to prioritize, organize, and achieve those goals
Adapting to changes and setbacks	Engaging in self-directed learning to address gaps in knowledge or gain additional expertise
Approaching work with integrity and honesty	
Approaching interactions with empathy and respect for others' perspectives and experiences	

Preparedness for Practice

The sections below summarize the preparedness data for competencies in the *professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness* section of the survey. Results are presented in three groups:

- Areas where the results were similar across both diploma privilege and bar exam participants (i.e., where the difference in the proportion that report being prepared is under 10%).

- Areas where diploma privilege participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more diploma privilege participants indicated being prepared than bar exam participants).
- Areas where bar exam participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more bar exam participants indicated being prepared than diploma privilege participants).

Participants responded to preparedness items using the following four-point scale: *not at all prepared, partially prepared, adequately prepared, more than adequately prepared*. The sections below collapse these into two categories *not prepared (not at all prepared + partially prepared)* and *prepared (adequately prepared + more than adequately prepared)*.

Areas of Overlap Across Licensure Modalities

Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills & Self-Awareness		Not prepared	Prepared
Acting in accordance with the rules of professional conduct	Bar exam	10%	90%
	Diploma privilege	10%	90%
Familiarity with the rules of professional conduct	Bar exam	12%	88%
	Diploma privilege	7%	93%
Approaching work with diligence and conscientiousness	Bar exam	5%	95%
	Diploma privilege	3%	97%
Adapting to changes and setbacks	Bar exam	15%	85%
	Diploma privilege	10%	90%
Approaching work with integrity and honesty	Bar exam	0%	100%
	Diploma privilege	3%	97%
Approaching interactions with empathy and respect	Bar exam	3%	97%
	Diploma privilege	3%	97%
Monitoring your individual well-being and utilizing positive self-care strategies	Bar exam	44%	56%
	Diploma privilege	50%	50%
Identifying goals and forming plans to prioritize, organize, and achieve those goals	Bar exam	32%	68%
	Diploma privilege	30%	70%
Engaging in self-directed learning to address gaps in knowledge or gain additional expertise	Bar exam	15%	85%
	Diploma privilege	30%	70%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Diploma Privilege Licensees

There were not any areas within the *professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness* category in which a meaningfully larger proportion (i.e., a difference of 10% or greater) of diploma privilege participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*, as compared with bar exam participants.

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Bar Exam Licensees

Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills & Self-Awareness		Not prepared	Prepared
Developing and implementing effective strategies for managing work-related stress	Bar exam	49%	51%
	Diploma privilege	60%	40%

Helpfulness of Education & Experience in Preparing for Practice

Following the sections in which participants indicated their levels of preparedness, the survey presented participants with a list of items for which they indicated being *adequately* or *more than adequately prepared* and asked them to indicate the degree to which 10 different kinds of education and experience were helpful in becoming prepared (*extremely unhelpful, somewhat unhelpful, somewhat helpful, extremely helpful*). The survey also allowed participant to indicate areas where they had no experience (and thus would be unable to provide a rating for helpfulness). The table below presents this data for items in the *professionalism, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness* section of the survey.

Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills & Self-Awareness	Unhelpful	Helpful	No Experience
Lecture-based courses in law school	28%	72%	0%
Experiential courses in law school	11%	80%	9%
Participation in a law school clinic	4%	62%	34%
Participation in an externship or internship	3%	83%	14%
Experience in a summer associate position	2%	43%	55%
Experience in a summer internship position	2%	72%	26%

Life experience outside of law school	3%	97%	1%
Preparing for the bar exam	52%	42%	6%
Taking the bar exam	49%	37%	15%
Participation in a federal or state judicial clerkship	3%	19%	79%

Additional Guidance Needed to Support Learning

Clarity & Transparency About the Realities of Practice

A large number of participants indicated a need for greater clarity and transparency provided during law school about the demands of law practice—particularly with regard to managing stress and workloads.

"I had no idea how stressful being an attorney would be or how much adaptation would be needed in litigation. Again, warnings early in 1L would have helped, rather than jumping straight into reading case law. I love analysis and research, but I had a disconnect with the demands of the job like deadlines and client control."

"I did not have a good handle on how stressful it is working in legal aid as the clients all suffer from multiple issues brought on by poverty."

"I think this is the least focused on area in law school. Even the most compassionate professors don't have great answers from their career experience. We learn about how to be lawyers through clinics and internships and think like lawyers through our classes but no one talks about the immense stress of being the advocate in the room, the one your client looks to and the judge questions. The one who can do the best but even the best attorneys don't always get it right and don't always win. The jump to the work life of an attorney is something we never talk about and I have spoken to multiple colleagues that this is one of the most challenging shifts."

"Law students should know ahead of time that they are entering a high-stress career so they are not surprised and can assess their ability to take on such pressures before entering the field."

"I thought that my experience as an Army combat veteran was adequate to prepare me for anything the civilian world could throw at me. That was sadly not

the case. I was not prepared for the near-crushing workload and stress that I experienced."

Curricular Gaps

Many participants noted the lack of guidance on these topics in law school and suggested that schools should do more to integrate these critical aspects of law practice into their curricula.

"It would have been helpful to have a class that taught work management, i.e. utilizing a calendar, prioritizing tasks, time management, managing client expectations, engaging with opposing counsel, etc."

"I don't recall anything like this being part of my legal education, but it was vital to learn as a lawyer."

"Law school did not seem to sufficiently prepare graduates for handling the amount of stress in the legal profession. There were no tools or methods that were provided for self-monitoring and self-care strategies."

"Part of being an effective and ethical attorney is recognizing your bandwidth and operating within that. It is when I start saying yes to too many projects that my performance starts slipping. Recognizing that self-care IS client care was an Ah-Ha moment. When I am healthy and set healthy, realistic boundaries, I provide better quality service. Perhaps guidance on saying 'no' in a professional way would be helpful."

"Guidance in school, opportunities for building/developing skills while still in school"

"I work in the public sector which is notorious for poor work life balance (and heavy caseloads). Having a class that is designed to teach future lawyers how to balance the demands and stress of practicing law and maintaining one's own mental health."

Support from the School

Several commenters indicated that there were resources that law schools could provide—outside the classroom context—to provide guidance to students in these areas.

"One thing I might suggest is requiring all law students to check in with a guidance counselor once per year to discuss stress management, self-care/well-being, goals, self-directed learning, etc. just so that these are things students are thinking about throughout their education and after."

"Law school isn't known for its ability to support students struggling. I unfortunately went through school during the pandemic, so the faults there were especially glaring."

"Law school and the practice of law are stressful, and law schools could do more to acknowledge that fact and encourage self care through programs."

"I have always known that I had ADHD, but managed it without any medication due to external pressures to just 'live life without it.' When I started practicing law, I got to a point where I could no longer manage my caseload and not have a plan to manage my ADHD . . . If I would have had someone sit me down at the beginning of law school and discuss this with me, I would have likely had an even more successful experience in school."

Calls for Systemic Change

A few participants provided comments that suggest the need for broader, more systemic changes in the profession.

"We love to talk about self-care in theory, but in practice it is never an employer's priority and we're expected to give all we can to our clients, either because of what the firm demands or because our clients are facing their own stress that we're told only we can fix."

"I hate working weekends, but most of us in the profession have done so. If there was a consensus to take it down a notch that would help the profession as a whole be healthier."

"Honestly we need more funding for civil legal aid, and a more just world. Providing services to low-income residents is rough and it's a systems problem, not a training problem."

Practice & Service Delivery

The survey asked participants to indicate their preparedness with respect to 10 areas relating to practice and service delivery:

Working cooperatively and collaboratively with colleagues to achieve common goals	Communicating complex legal information to clients in a clear, jargon-free manner
Expressing disagreement and resolving conflicts in a thoughtful and constructive manner	Managing the logistical and administrative aspects of client matters
Taking necessary steps to establish and terminate attorney-client relationships appropriately	Managing the financial aspects of client matters
Prioritizing and managing a law-related workload	Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when speaking or providing information in an equivalent real-time modality, where appropriate (e.g., sign language, text-to-speech)
Maintaining consistent, proactive communications with clients and colleagues	Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when writing

Preparedness for Practice

The sections below summarize the preparedness data for competencies in the *practice and service delivery* section of the survey. Results are presented in three groups:

- Areas where the results were similar across both diploma privilege and bar exam participants (i.e., where the difference in the proportion that report being prepared is under 10%).
- Areas where diploma privilege participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more diploma privilege participants indicated being prepared than bar exam participants).
- Areas where bar exam participants reported higher levels of preparedness (i.e., where at least 10% more bar exam participants indicated being prepared than diploma privilege participants).

Participants responded to preparedness items using the following four-point scale: *not at all prepared*, *partially prepared*, *adequately prepared*, *more than adequately prepared*. The sections below collapse these into two categories *not prepared* (*not at all prepared* + *partially prepared*) and *prepared* (*adequately prepared* + *more than adequately prepared*).

Areas of Overlap Across Licensure Modalities

Practice & Service Delivery		Not prepared	Prepared
Working cooperatively and collaboratively with colleagues to achieve common goals	Bar exam	6%	94%
	Diploma privilege	3%	97%
Expressing disagreement and resolving conflicts in a thoughtful and constructive manner	Bar exam	20%	80%
	Diploma privilege	20%	80%
Taking necessary steps to establish and terminate attorney-client relationships appropriately	Bar exam	47%	53%
	Diploma privilege	47%	53%
Prioritizing and managing a law-related workload	Bar exam	40%	60%
	Diploma privilege	41%	59%
Maintaining consistent, proactive communications with clients and colleagues	Bar exam	24%	76%
	Diploma privilege	24%	76%
Communicating complex legal information to clients in a clear, jargon-free manner	Bar exam	27%	73%
	Diploma privilege	30%	70%
Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when speaking or equivalent real-time modality	Bar exam	51%	49%
	Diploma privilege	50%	50%
Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when writing	Bar exam	6%	94%
	Diploma privilege	7%	93%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Diploma Privilege Licensees

Practice & Service Delivery		Not prepared	Prepared
Managing the logistical and administrative aspects of client matters	Bar exam	54%	46%
	Diploma privilege	40%	60%
Managing the financial aspects of client matters	Bar exam	72%	28%
	Diploma privilege	63%	37%

Areas of Higher Perceived Preparedness for Bar Exam Licensees

There were not any areas within the *practice and service delivery* category in which a meaningfully larger proportion (i.e., a difference of 10% or greater) of bar exam participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*, as compared with diploma privilege participants.

Helpfulness of Education & Experience in Preparing for Practice

Following the sections in which participants indicated their levels of preparedness, the survey presented participants with a list of items for which they indicated being *adequately* or *more than adequately prepared* and asked them to indicate the degree to which 10 different kinds of education and experience were helpful in becoming prepared (*extremely unhelpful*, *somewhat unhelpful*, *somewhat helpful*, *extremely helpful*). The survey also allowed participant to indicate areas where they had no experience (and thus would be unable to provide a rating for helpfulness). The table below presents this data for items in the *practice and service delivery* section of the survey.

Practice & Service Delivery	Unhelpful	Helpful	No Experience
Lecture-based courses in law school	37%	63%	0%
Experiential courses in law school	11%	81%	8%
Participation in a law school clinic	1%	66%	33%
Participation in an externship or internship	3%	82%	16%
Experience in a summer associate position	4%	38%	58%
Experience in a summer internship position	4%	71%	25%
Life experience outside of law school	1%	99%	0%
Preparing for the bar exam	60%	33%	7%
Taking the bar exam	53%	31%	16%
Participation in a federal or state judicial clerkship	1%	20%	79%

Additional Guidance Needed to Support Learning

For areas where participants considered themselves underprepared, the survey asked them to reflect on the kinds of guidance or resources that would have helped them attain an adequate level of preparedness. The sections below present broad themes that emerged through qualitative analysis of responses to this question for competencies in the *practice and service delivery* area which include practical experience, real-world coursework, and curricular gaps.

Practical Experience

A substantial share of participants indicated that having opportunities for hands-on experiences would have been helpful in supporting development of competencies related to *practice and service delivery*.

"I think more time in experiential setting could provide the practice of these skills in various settings. Especially now a days where there is a hybrid litigation world of phone, video and in person. I think there are strategies in each of these areas that can vary!"

"Additional training beyond the regular classroom would have been helpful. It is one thing to know what you are supposed to do, but it is also necessary to know the proper procedures generally established in most law firms."

"I think having more practical experiences in school, like practicum or a residency type program where students are supervised with real cases and are shown how to do apply these skills in real life would have been greatly beneficial to learning these skills."

"I was an older law student when I went to law school. I had a lot of these skills already from prior work experience. I see these skills less in attorneys that went from undergrad to law school. Maybe having required work experience prior to law school would help here."

"I think lawyers should need to intern just like doctors. We should not be blessed with a license and set free on the world, as if we know everything!!!"

Real-World Coursework

Another common theme in these responses was a recognition of the need for coursework in law schools to be more directly tied to the realities of practice.

"We had minimal coursework focusing on the practicalities of the practice of law. We were well versed in the Rules of Professional Conduct, but never had an opportunity to write a close letter to a client or a termination of representation. I actually was more than prepared to communicate with clients and colleagues, but it wasn't because of law school. It was because I did as many internships/externships as possible during law school to gain those practical skills that law school ignored."

"I don't recall having any training at all regarding conflict resolution. A class and or/interactive workshop would have been great."

"I had no idea how a law firm worked. Even in my internships, I was given a task with no explanation of how the background (client intake, billing, etc.) worked, let

alone how to terminate a client or "paper the file". This is what we learn on the job, but when I was going to law school full time I did not have time to work in a law office all year. These issues should be addressed in Professional Responsibility classes."

"Training on how to actually be a lawyer. Training on how to talk finances with clients, how to deal with difficult clients, how to manage client expectations."

"Law school doesn't actually prepare you for the logistics of practicing law, law school teaches you how to analyze cases and statutes."

Curricular Gaps

Many also referenced areas where gaps in law school curricula may exist—and that filling them would be helpful in achieving adequate preparedness for practice.

"I am not sure exactly why but my law school seemed to have a hard time capturing real life practice. Often precise language was preferred over casual when in my practice area it is very important to use language my clients understand."

"A stronger focus on meeting deadlines and less leniency when it comes to extensions on assignments. There are generally no extensions in real practice unless you can convince opposing counsel to agree."

"My impression from my personal experience is that law school was almost entirely devoid of preparation related to workload management, communicating with clients, financial aspects of practice, alternative means of communication, and client conflict management."

"How about a class on billing practices and law practice management software?"

"A class about the financial aspects of client matters (i.e., how to bill, the relationship between third-party payors and/or insurance defense, etc.) would have been immensely helpful"

"I was taught everything I need to pass the bar exam. None of the above would be deemed relevant to the law school I went to, where the focus is on the bar pass success rates."

"I have no idea how to terminate an attorney/client relationship. Thankfully in my line of work I don't have to, but I would have no idea how to do that."

"Learning client management skills would have been extremely helpful. It also would have been helpful to be introduced to the interworking's of private practice and common expectations when it comes to billing and case load management."

Synthesis & Summary

Overall, how prepared for practice are Washington lawyers at the time they are licensed?

A key goal of this research is to understand how prepared Washington lawyers are, generally, at the time they are licensed. The two subsections that follow present areas of high overall preparedness and low overall preparedness as reported by participants.

Areas of High Overall Preparedness

To serve as a valid approach to ensuring competence to practice, any system of licensure must consist of educational and assessment procedures that effectively instill and measure the competencies required for practice. The table below summarizes the competencies for which at least half of participants indicated being at least *adequately prepared*. These results are separated into three categories:

- **Modest majority:** More than 50% of participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*
- **Solid majority:** 70% or more of participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*
- **Substantial majority:** 80% or more of participants reported being at least *adequately prepared*

	Moderate Majority >50% prepared	Solid Majority >70% prepared	Substantial Majority >80% prepared
Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts	Civil Procedure	None	None
	Constitutional Law		
	Contracts		
	Rules of Evidence		
	Criminal Law		

	Moderate Majority >50% prepared	Solid Majority >70% prepared	Substantial Majority >80% prepared
Legal & Cognitive Skills	<p>Interpreting contracts</p> <p>Distinguishing and identifying legal processes</p> <p>Interpreting administrative code</p> <p>Understanding court processes</p>	<p>Identifying legal principles likely to impact the outcome of a matter</p> <p>Identifying and collecting facts relevant to a matter</p> <p>Distinguishing and identifying legal processes</p> <p>Interpreting administrative code</p> <p>Understanding court processes</p> <p>Utilizing legal reasoning and analysis skills to formulate sound legal advice</p> <p>Integrating legal skills and knowledge</p>	<p>Distinguishing and identifying controlling sources of law</p> <p>Interpreting statutes</p> <p>Interpreting judicial opinions</p> <p>Utilizing legal research techniques</p> <p>Identifying legal concerns presented by a set of circumstances</p>
Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, & Self-Awareness	<p>Approaching work with integrity and honesty</p> <p>Approaching interactions with empathy and respect</p>	<p>Identifying goals and forming plans to prioritize, organize, and achieve those goals</p> <p>Engaging in self-directed learning to address gaps in knowledge or gain additional expertise</p>	<p>Acting in accordance with the rules of professional conduct</p> <p>Familiarity with the rules of professional conduct</p> <p>Approaching work with diligence and conscientiousness</p> <p>Adapting to changes and setbacks</p> <p>Approaching work with integrity and honesty</p> <p>Approaching interactions with empathy and respect</p>
Practice & Service Delivery	<p>Taking necessary steps to establish and terminate attorney-client relationships appropriately</p>	<p>Maintaining consistent, proactive communications with clients and colleagues</p>	<p>Working cooperatively and collaboratively with colleagues to achieve common goals</p> <p>Expressing disagreement and resolving conflicts in a</p>

Moderate Majority >50% prepared	Solid Majority >70% prepared	Substantial Majority >80% prepared
Prioritizing and managing a law-related workload	Communicating complex legal information to clients in a clear, jargon-free manner	thoughtful and constructive manner Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when writing

Areas of Low Overall Preparedness

Areas in which 50% or less participants reported being at least *adequately prepared* are listed below.

	Majority Not Prepared Less than 50% prepared	
Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts	Administrative Law	Family Law
	Business Associations	Finance & Bankruptcy Law
	Criminal Procedure	Real Property
	Ethical Obligations of Attorneys	
Legal & Cognitive Skills	Negotiating on behalf of clients	Conducting depositions
Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, & Self-Awareness	Monitoring your individual well-being and utilizing positive self-care strategies	Developing and implementing effective strategies for managing work-related stress
Practice & Service Delivery	Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly when speaking or equivalent real-time modality	Managing the financial aspects of client matters
	Managing the logistical and administrative aspects of client matters	

How prepared are Washington lawyers licensed by diploma privilege compared to those licensed by bar exam?

An additional critical focal point of this study is to understand whether areas of substantial difference exist between preparedness for those licensed via diploma privilege versus those licensed via bar exam—in particular, for competencies in which a majority of participants overall reported being at least *adequately prepared*. To safeguard against over-estimation of between-group differences, we have set the criterion for a difference to be considered substantial at 10%; that is, to be considered substantial for purposes of this study, we have only highlighted competencies for which there is a 10% or greater difference between preparedness levels for diploma privilege and bar exam participants. The table below presents the competencies for which this criterion was met.

	At Least 10% Higher Preparedness for Bar Licensed Participants	At Least 10% Higher Preparedness for Diploma Privilege Participants
Knowledge of Substantive Law & Foundational Legal Concepts	None	Civil Procedure Constitutional Law Contracts Rules of Evidence
Legal & Cognitive Skills	None	Distinguishing and identifying legal processes Interpreting administrative code Understanding court processes
Professionalism, Interpersonal Skills, & Self-Awareness	Developing and implementing effective strategies for managing work-related stress	None
Practice & Service Delivery	None	Managing the logistical and administrative aspects of client matters

Across most competency areas, respondents licensed via diploma privilege reported similar or slightly higher levels of preparedness compared to those who were licensed by bar examination. It is important to note that the Washington Supreme Court granted diploma privilege in Washington on June 12, 2020, and was offered only to individuals who had registered for the July bar examinations. As such, these respondents had completed their legal education and were on track to take the bar, which may indicate a comparable level of academic and exam preparation to their bar-

exam-licensed peers. This context may be relevant in interpreting the higher preparedness ratings reported by diploma privilege respondents in some domains.

What modalities of education, training, and assessment do Washington lawyers believe to be most effective in preparing for practice?

In answering the third key research question for this study, we analyzed responses from participants that described the guidance they viewed as most helpful in achieving at least adequate preparedness prior to licensure. At the highest level, responses to these questions fall into three broad categories: (1) fidelity of education to the realities of practice (practical experience and real-world coursework), (2) law school curricula and pedagogy (what is taught and how), and (3) support and clarity from the law school (noncurricular supports and information).

Fidelity of Education to the Realities of Practice

Across all competency groups, participants overwhelmingly pointed to the need for law schools to have a higher degree of fidelity to real-world practice—both in terms of more hands-on practical experience and greater focus on skills development in coursework (as opposed to theory). Representative quotes presented below are reproduced from previous sections in this report.

"In general, the areas that I was not prepared for would have been helped by training, that is, guidance and experience outside of the classroom. Many areas are highly complex and require familiarity beyond what is gained in the classroom to adequately practice."

"I was not taught how to file a lawsuit or hire a process server. I was not taught WHY a business would want to form a particular organization or how to help them choose. I was not taught HOW to record a deed. I was not taught at which stages of litigation the rules of evidence apply and how they change between each."

"Practical experiences with direct services to clients would have helped me develop these skills more especially the application of laws facts to client needs, I gained the most helpful amount of those skills while actually practicing with clients and with more seasoned mentor attorneys."

"Any training outside of classroom exercises would have been valuable. The classroom exercises failed to replicate real world conditions by a serious margin"

"Participating in simulated real-life situations in the classroom should be a required part of every CORE class."

"More real-world exercises in class about how these concepts apply in day-to-day practice."

"I think lawyers should need to intern just like doctors. We should not be blessed with a license and set free on the world, as if we know everything!!!"

Law School Curricula & Pedagogy

In addition to calls for more hands-on, real-world curricular content, many participants indicated that changes to broader law school approaches to teaching law could improve preparedness levels.

"A stronger focus on meeting deadlines and less leniency when it comes to extensions on assignments. There are generally no extensions in real practice unless you can convince opposing counsel to agree."

"Having now practiced family law, the typical family law class taken in law school does very little to actually prepare you for the practicing in a family law setting."

"Law school was almost singularly focused on the doctrine, and not the practice of law."

"I think it's not helpful when NO ONE knows what they're doing in a negotiation and tries to practice with each other. It's easy to give the other person the benefit of what they're angling for because you're all trying to get a good grade and that's the best way to do it."

"It would have been helpful to have a class that taught work management, i.e. utilizing a calendar, prioritizing tasks, time management, managing client expectations, engaging with opposing counsel, etc."

"Law school did not seem to sufficiently prepare graduates for handling the amount of stress in the legal profession. There were no tools or methods that were provided for self-monitoring and self-care strategies."

"I was taught everything I need to pass the bar exam. None of the above would be deemed relevant to the law school I went to, where the focus is on the bar pass success rates."

"My impression from my personal experience is that law school was almost entirely devoid of preparation related to workload management, communicating with clients, financial aspects of practice, alternative means of communication, and client conflict management."

Support & Clarity from Law Schools

Many participants also noted that law schools could provide greater support structures for students—particularly with respect to aspects of individual well-being and how that manifests (or does not) in practice.

"Explaining to 1L students (who don't have professional family members) what it means to be an attorney and the importance of these skills. I felt the instruction I received glossed over the "why". . . I was the first person in my family EVER to get an advanced degree, so I did not have connections to explain the day to day of lawyering. 1Ls NEED that background explanation."

"I thought that my experience as an Army combat veteran was adequate to prepare me for anything the civilian world could throw at me. That was sadly not the case. I was not prepared for the near-crushing workload and stress that I experienced."

"I did not have a good handle on how stressful it is working in legal aid as the clients all suffer from multiple issues brought on by poverty."

"Law school isn't known for its ability to support students struggling. I unfortunately went through school during the pandemic, so the faults there were especially glaring."

"Law school and the practice of law are stressful, and law schools could do more to acknowledge that fact and encourage self care through programs."

Conclusions

This study offers valuable empirical insight into how Washington lawyers perceive their preparedness for legal practice and the effectiveness of various educational experiences. Across most competency areas, diploma privilege licensees reported similar or higher levels of preparedness compared to their bar exam licensed counterparts, especially in competencies closely tied to real-world experience, such as understanding court processes and managing administrative

aspects of client matters. Across all groups, participants emphasized the need for more practical experience and greater alignment between law school education and the realities of practice. These findings suggest that ecosystems of legal education and licensure may better support early career competence by shifting toward more experiential and practice-oriented preparation.

Appendix: Participant Information

		n	%
Legal Education	Completion of Educational Requirements		
	Graduated from a law school in WA	72	58.1%
	Graduated from a law school outside WA	52	41.1%
	Graduation Year		
	2022	14	11.3%
	2021	30	24.2%
	2020	34	27.4%
	2019	22	17.7%
	2018 and earlier	24	19.4%
	Experiential Courses Completed		
	0	1	0.8%
	1	13	10.5%
	2	25	20.2%
	3	34	27.4%
	4+	51	41.1%

		n	%
Bar Admission	Licensure Modality		
	Passed the bar exam	94	75.8%
	in WA	65	52.4%
	in another state	29	23.4%
	Diploma Privilege	30	24.2%
	Year First Licensed		
	2022	21	16.9%
	2021	35	28.2%
	2020	40	32.3%
	2019	28	22.6%

		n	%
Legal Employment	Employment Status		
	Employed in a position requiring a law license	112	90.3%
	Employed in a law-related position that does not involve providing legal services	6	4.8%
	Not currently employed	6	4.8%
	Practice Type (multiple selections allowed)		
	Litigation	75	60.5%
	Transactional	32	25.8%
	Regulatory	19	15.3%
	Other	19	15.3%
	Practice Setting		
	Private practice	49	39.5%
	Business in-house	8	6.5%
	Government	33	26.6%
	Public interest	10	8.1%
	Non-profit	10	8.1%
	Other	2	1.6%

		n	%
Individual Information	Gender Identity		
	Woman	71	57.7%
	Man	47	37.4%
	Nonbinary	2	1.6%
	Prefer to self-describe	3	2.4%
	Racial & Ethnic Identity (multiple selections allowed)		
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.8%
	Asian	7	5.6%
	Black or African American	3	2.4%
	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	2	1.6%
	Middle Eastern or North African	4	3.2%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
	White	93	75.0%
	Multiple racial/ethnic identities	10	8.1%