



THE NLMA RESEARCH SNAPSHOT No. 1

Legal Masters Degrees: An Early Research Snapshot

What NLMA is hearing from graduates and law schools, and what we are exploring next

AN EARLY LOOK

This snapshot brings together what NLMA has heard from two constituencies at the center of legal masters education: graduates and law schools. It summarizes early survey, focus-group, and advisory findings. It is intended to identify themes and questions for further research, not to offer definitive conclusions about programs or outcomes.

Why We Are Listening

NLMA was created to better understand post-baccalaureate legal masters degrees and the people connected to them. During the spring and summer of 2026, NLMA gathered perspectives from graduates and law-school faculty, staff, and administrators through surveys, graduate focus groups, and advisory discussions.

The graduate survey has received 272 responses. The law-school survey received 36 responses. These are meaningful early data sets, but neither is a probability sample; the findings should therefore be read as emerging patterns in the responses rather than definitive measures of the field.

At a Glance

272+ graduate survey responses	36 law-school survey responses	110 Law schools represented	109 graduates identifying career placement and outcomes as a gap	122 law-school respondents identifying employer recognition as a challenge
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1. Graduates report positive experiences.

Most graduate respondents described their program as a positive investment from their own perspective. In the survey, 236 graduates said their program provided “Very strong value” or “Good value.” Curriculum and coursework were also the most frequently identified valuable aspect of the program.

NLMA is not treating these responses as evidence that legal masters programs uniformly deliver strong educational or career outcomes. Graduate satisfaction is one piece of the picture. Questions about curriculum, practical experience, career outcomes, and return on investment require additional research.

2. Career pathways and employer recognition are concerns for graduates, and many law schools.

Among graduates, career placement/outcomes was selected by 109 respondents and employer recognition by 104. Those were the two most frequently identified gaps in the graduate survey.

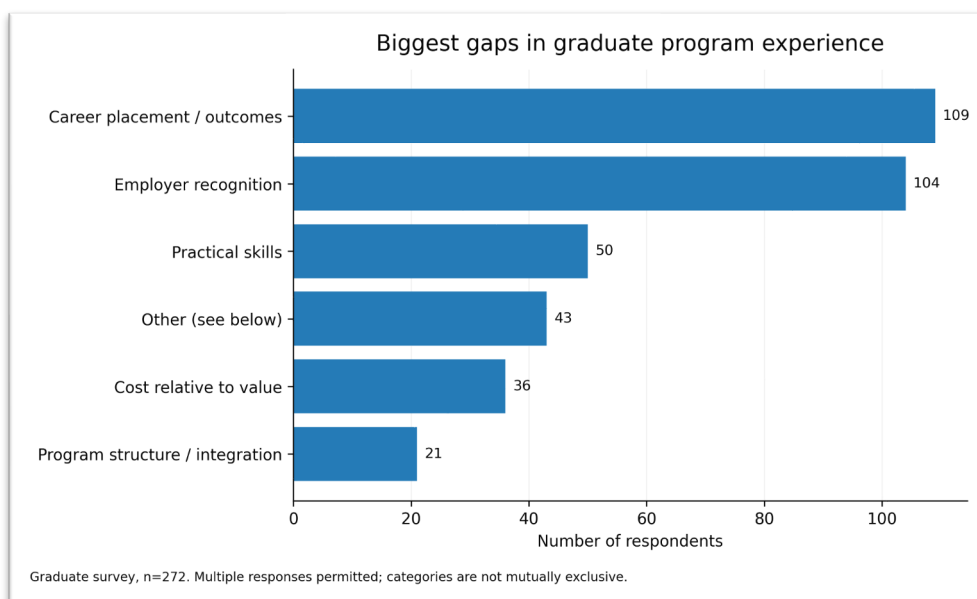


Figure 1. Program gaps selected by graduate respondents. Multi-response question; categories are not mutually exclusive.

The law-school survey points in the same direction. Employer recognition was the most frequently identified challenge, selected by 18 of 36 respondents (50%).

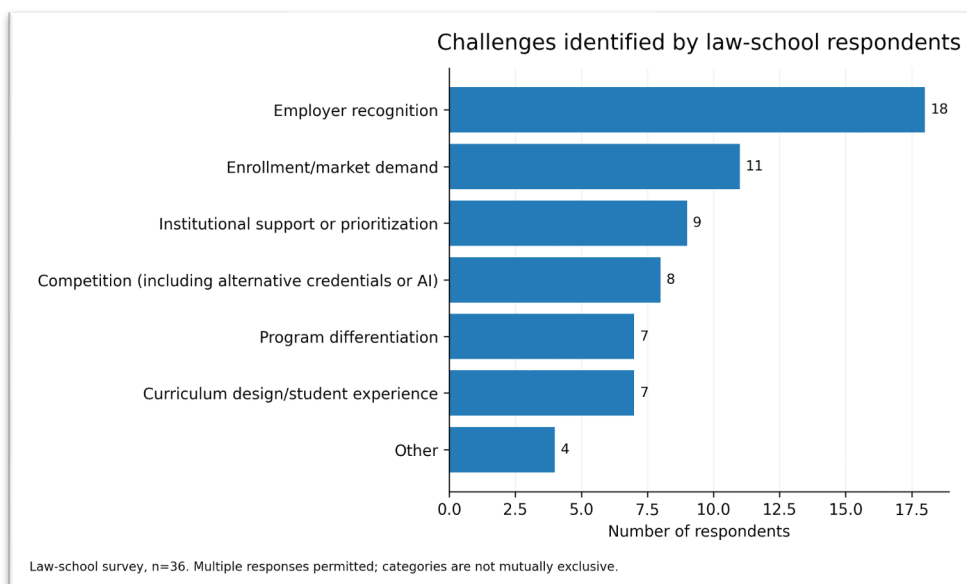


Figure 2. Challenges identified by law-school respondents. Multi-response question; categories are not mutually exclusive.

The convergence is notable. Graduates describe difficulty explaining the degree and its value to employers; law-school respondents identify employer recognition as the field's leading challenge.

Law-school advisory discussions add an institutional dimension: participants described limited capacity to provide dedicated career services for legal masters students and suggested that NLMA explore whether some career coaching or career-services support could be provided collectively across institutions.

3. Graduates are asking for an organization that helps build the professional ecosystem around the degree.

When asked what would be most valuable from an organization like NLMA, graduates most frequently selected advocacy and recognition of the degree, career pathways and job opportunities, professional connections, and continued learning or skill development.

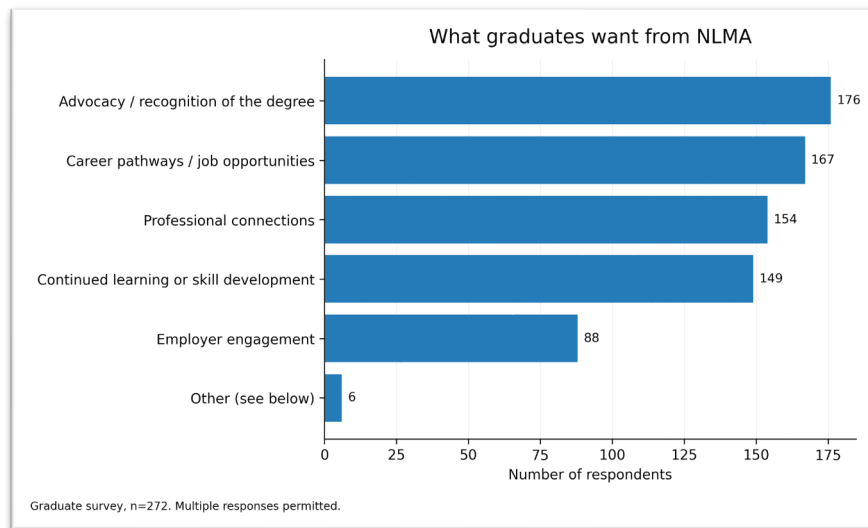


Figure 3. Support selected by graduate respondents as potentially valuable from NLMA.

These responses suggest that graduates are looking for more than a stronger public profile for the degree. They also want ways to continue developing professionally, connect with peers across institutions, and translate their legal education into recognizable professional value. Given that many legal masters degrees are drawing prospective students away from an MBA or other comparable graduate degree, institutions would be well advised to meet those expectations.

4. What comes after the degree?

The survey and early focus-group conversations raise a question NLMA wants to explore further: whether legal masters graduates need forms of professional development and demonstrated competency that traditional degree programs do not easily provide.

Focus-group conversations raised interest in opportunities that could sit alongside or follow the degree. Focus group participants urged us to study opportunities for:

- continuing education
- specialized credentials or certificates
- ways to demonstrate current or specialized competencies
- mentoring
- career boards and career transition resources
- intentional networking among graduates from multiple schools and programs
- stronger connections to specialized employers and professional associations

This is an especially interesting area for further research because it potentially connects a graduate need with an opportunity for collaboration across institutions. At this stage, NLMA is treating these possibilities as research questions, not proposed products or services.

5. Law schools are identifying opportunities for shared infrastructure.

The law-school perspective adds another dimension to the findings. Programs vary considerably in their institutional role and resources, but advisory discussions identified several needs that may be difficult for individual programs to address on their own. Among those areas:

- Career support. Participants suggested exploring collective career coaching or career-services support for schools that lack dedicated resources for legal masters students.
- Data gathering and analysis. While schools often survey students for marketing purposes, focusing on incoming cohorts, benchmarked surveys and comparative reports of graduates that would allow participating schools to compare their graduates' experiences and outcomes with national results.
- Specialization networks. Program managers saw advantages of connecting recent program graduates with specialties with similar graduates from other schools for networking, and an enhanced sense of professional identity.
- Limited Licensing. Law schools in states with limited license opportunities, or where such legislation has been proposed, seek to explore how legal masters programs might interact with this emerging field of practitioners. Every state is model is different and some program managers would welcome opportunities for information sharing across state lines and institutions.

Advisory participants also discussed whether schools might be willing to support such services financially. NLMA is not yet drawing conclusions about demand, pricing, or the appropriate model. Instead, these discussions point to questions worth testing: What services are most needed? What could be done more effectively at a national level? And what information would schools find valuable enough to support financially?

WHAT LAW SCHOOLS TOLD US

In the June advisory discussion, participants specifically suggested benchmarking reports, collective career support, and stronger professional development and community opportunities. They also described the lack of employer recognition as a challenge that validates what NLMA is hearing from graduates.

6. Where the perspectives meet

The most useful findings may be the places where graduate and law-school perspectives intersect.

Career pathways. Graduates want stronger pathways from education to professional opportunity. Law schools recognize the need but may not have the resources to build dedicated career services for these students.

Employer recognition. Graduates describe difficulty explaining the degree and its value to employers. Employer recognition was also the most frequently selected challenge in the law-school survey.

Professional development. Graduates want continued learning, connections, and ways to demonstrate expertise beyond the degree. Advisory participants want NLMA to explore ways to support those needs across institutions.

Better information. Graduates want clearer professional pathways and recognition. Law-school participants want comparative data and benchmarks that can help them understand and improve their programs.

A WORKING HYPOTHESIS

The challenge may be less about creating more legal education opportunities and more about strengthening the professional infrastructure around legal masters degrees. NLMA will test – and potentially revise – that hypothesis through additional research.

What We Are Exploring Next

- how graduates use their legal masters education in the workplace and how they describe its value;
- how employers understand, evaluate, and use legal masters credentials;
- career pathways and the kinds of career support graduates find most useful;
- professional development, continuing education, and opportunities to demonstrate specialized competencies after the degree;
- professional identity, community, and connections among graduates across institutions;
- what forms of shared career support or benchmarking law schools would find useful; and
- how law schools and NLMA might work together to address gaps identified by graduates and employers.

NLMA expects to continue this work through additional graduate focus groups, surveys, advisory discussions, and research with other constituencies. The timing and design of future research will be shaped in part by what we learn from the current work and by the willingness of law schools, graduates, employers, and others to participate.

About the Research

This snapshot draws on NLMA's graduate community survey (272 responses); an earlier law-school survey (36 responses); graduate focus groups; and law-school advisory discussions conducted in 2026. A small follow-up survey of focus-group participants was used primarily to assess the focus-group experience rather than as substantive evidence about the field.

The surveys were distributed through NLMA's developing community network and participating contacts. Neither survey was designed as a probability sample, and NLMA does not yet have enough information to assess how closely respondents reflect the full population of legal masters graduates or programs. Several questions allowed multiple selections, so counts from those questions should not be added together.

This is an early research snapshot. As NLMA's research base grows, subsequent reports will revisit these themes, add perspectives from employers and other constituencies, and test whether the patterns identified here persist.

About the Authors

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HELP SHAPE THE NEXT QUESTIONS

NLMA is building its research agenda with input from the people connected to legal masters degrees. Graduates, law schools, employers, allied professional organizations, and others interested in this work are invited to participate in future surveys, focus groups, and advisory discussions. For more information, or to indicate interest in future research projects, please reach us at nationallegalmastersassociation.org or email info@nationallegalmastersassociation.org.