

The Holistic Impact Report of Catholic Legal Education

2025 Catholic vs. Secular Law School
Graduate Outcomes

Commissioned by St. Mary's University School of Law
Conducted by YouGov



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Purpose of the Study

Study Summary

This study, commissioned by the St. Mary's University School of Law and conducted by YouGov, delivers powerful new evidence that Catholic law schools shape more than legal careers; they shape lives.

The data reveals a clear and consistent edge in purpose, ethics, and service among Catholic law graduates. Far from limiting professional success, this mission-driven approach strengthens it, reflecting exactly what today's law students are seeking in their education and in their future.

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Study Overview

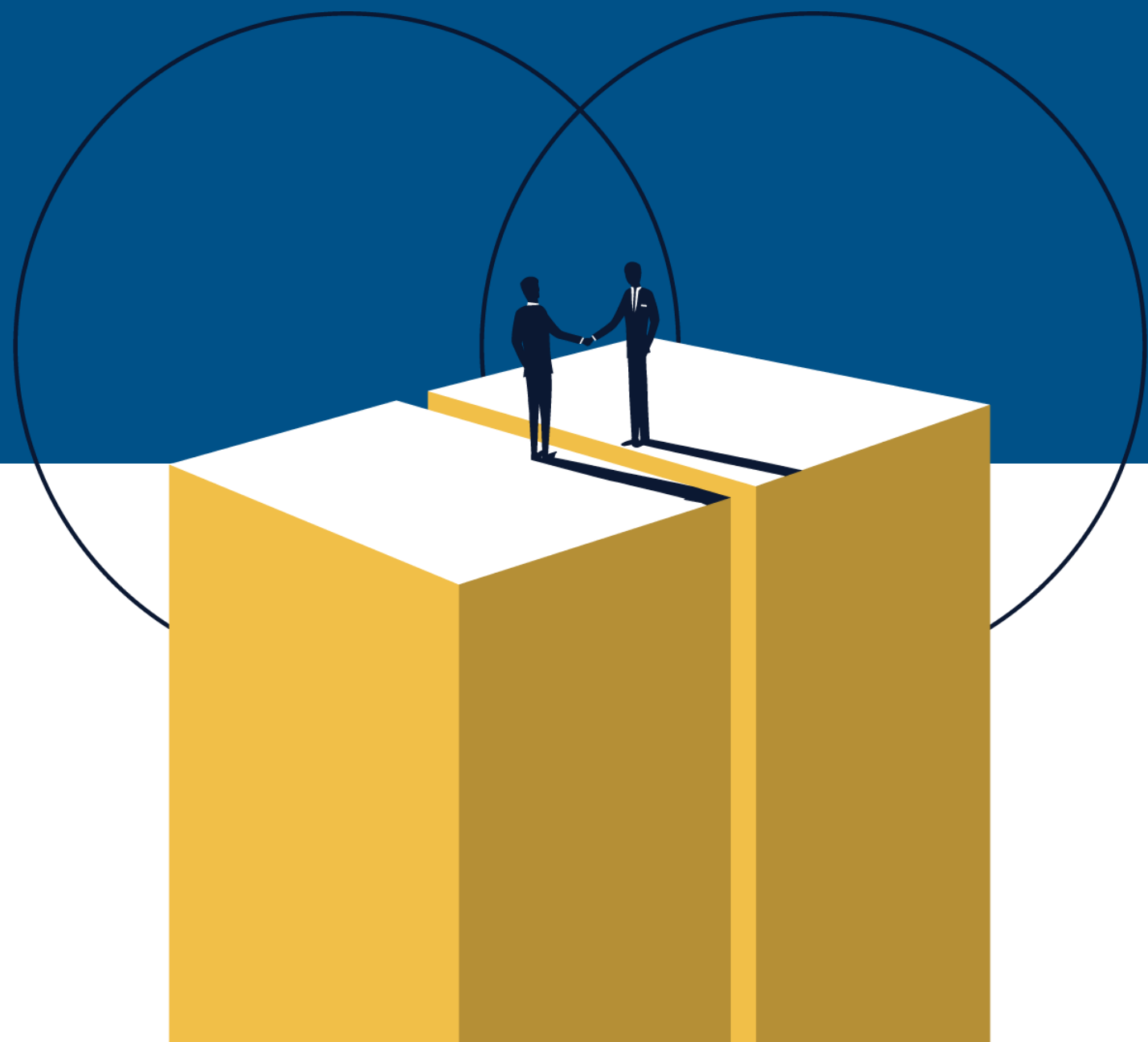
How the Study Was Conducted

YouGov

St. Mary's University partnered with YouGov, a global leader in public opinion research, to examine the long-term outcomes of Catholic law school graduates compared to their peers from secular law schools.

Focus

This national study focused on how legal education influences graduates' personal and professional lives over time. This includes purpose, values, community engagement, and career outcomes.



Key Findings Summary

Topline Differences Between Catholic and Secular law school Graduates

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14%

more are currently practicing law



10%

more cite the Rule of Law as a reason for attending law school



26%

higher participation in local elections



4X

as many have held elected community roles



15%

more felt a sense of community at law school



13%

more say their career aligns with personal values



12%

more say law school helped them find life's purpose



10%

more say law school clarified their broader purpose in the profession



84%

say the curriculum encouraged ethical discussions (vs. 76%)



>2X

as many tutored, coached youth, or served on bar committees



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Key Narrative

The Data Tells a Compelling Story

- Catholic law schools attract and shape students who are driven by purpose, ethics, and service and help them turn those values into long-term professional success.
- Their graduates are not only more aligned with values of ethics, service, and community, but they are also more likely to be practicing law today.
- This study provides compelling evidence that there is no trade-off between pursuing a purpose-driven, ethical education and achieving professional success. Graduates who prioritize ethics, justice, and community, hallmarks of Catholic legal education, are more likely to thrive in their careers.

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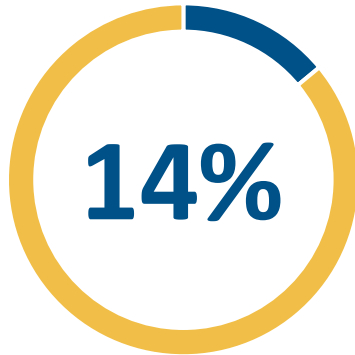
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more likely to be
currently
practicing law
(73% vs. 64%)



more say law school
clarified their
broader purpose in
the profession
(73% vs. 63%)



Detailed Finding

Career Outcomes and Professional Commitment



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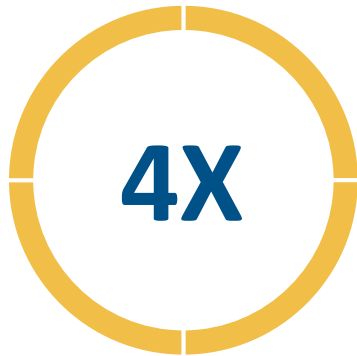
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higher participation
in local elections
(60% Catholic vs.
48% secular)



as many have
taken on elected
community roles
(8% Catholic vs. 2%
secular)



Detailed Finding

Civic Engagement and Community Leadership





10%

more cite upholding
the Rule of Law as a
core reason for
attending law school
(35% vs. 25%)



Catholic graduates
were also more likely
to cite helping others
and seeking justice
among their top
motivations



These motivations reinforce the
connection between mission-driven
education and long-term commitment to
ethical legal practice

Detailed Finding

Why Catholic Law Graduates Uphold the Rule of Law

Catholic law school graduates are significantly
more likely to say they were motivated to enter
the profession to uphold the Rule of Law —
reflecting a deeper sense of justice, duty, and
societal responsibility.

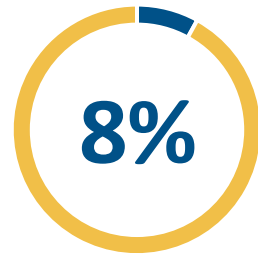




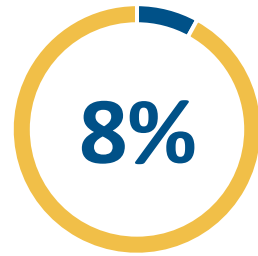
more say law school helped them understand their broader purpose in the legal profession (73% vs. 63%)



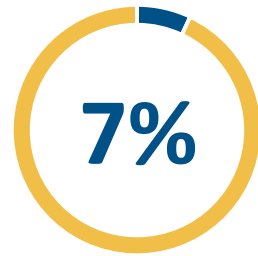
more agree legal education influenced how they contribute to their community (47% vs. 37%)



more say curriculum encouraged ethical discussions (84% vs. 76%)



more say education provided a framework for resolving moral or professional conflicts (56% vs. 48%)



more feel confident applying ethical reasoning in complex legal situations (78% vs. 71%)



Detailed Finding

Purpose and Professional Ethics





as many served on
bar committees
(9% vs. 4%)



as many tutored
youth or
community
members
(13% vs. 7%)

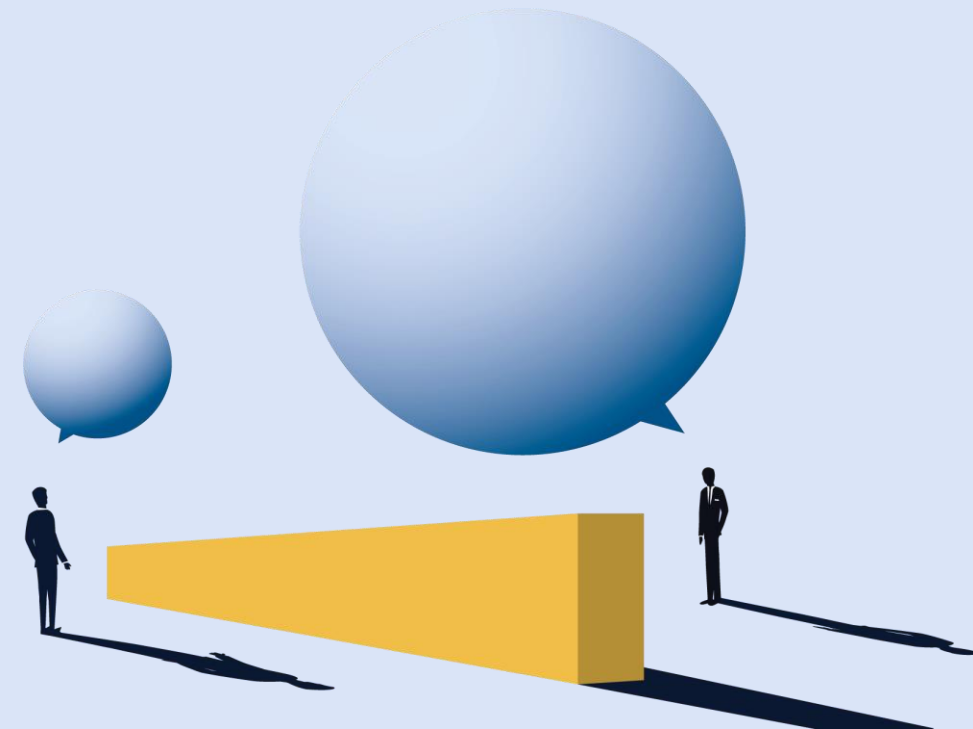


as many coached
youth sports
(10% vs. 4%)



Detailed Finding

Professional and Community Service



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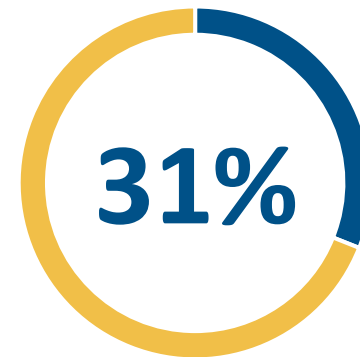
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Where Secular Law Schools Lead



of secular graduates say their professional conduct is influenced primarily by personal beliefs (compared to 24% of Catholic graduates)

NOTE: This may reflect Catholic law schools' stronger institutional influence on graduates' professional values.

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The Big Idea

- This study offers the first data-backed proof that the supposed trade-off between ethics and professional success is a false dichotomy.
- Graduates who prioritize ethics, purpose, and community are not just more likely to be employed, they're empowered to create lasting impact in the legal profession and beyond.
- Catholic law schools don't just produce graduates, they produce practicing lawyers who lead with integrity and serve the common good.

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A Leadership Vision

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These findings affirm what we’ve long believed. A Catholic legal education equips graduates to lead lives of service and impact. At St. Mary’s, our mission is not only to develop skilled attorneys, but to form individuals whose work is grounded in justice, ethics, and a deep responsibility to their communities and the rule of law.”

- Patricia Roberts

Dean &
Charles Cantú Distinguished Professor Of Law,
St. Mary’s University School Of Law



A Scholar's Perspective

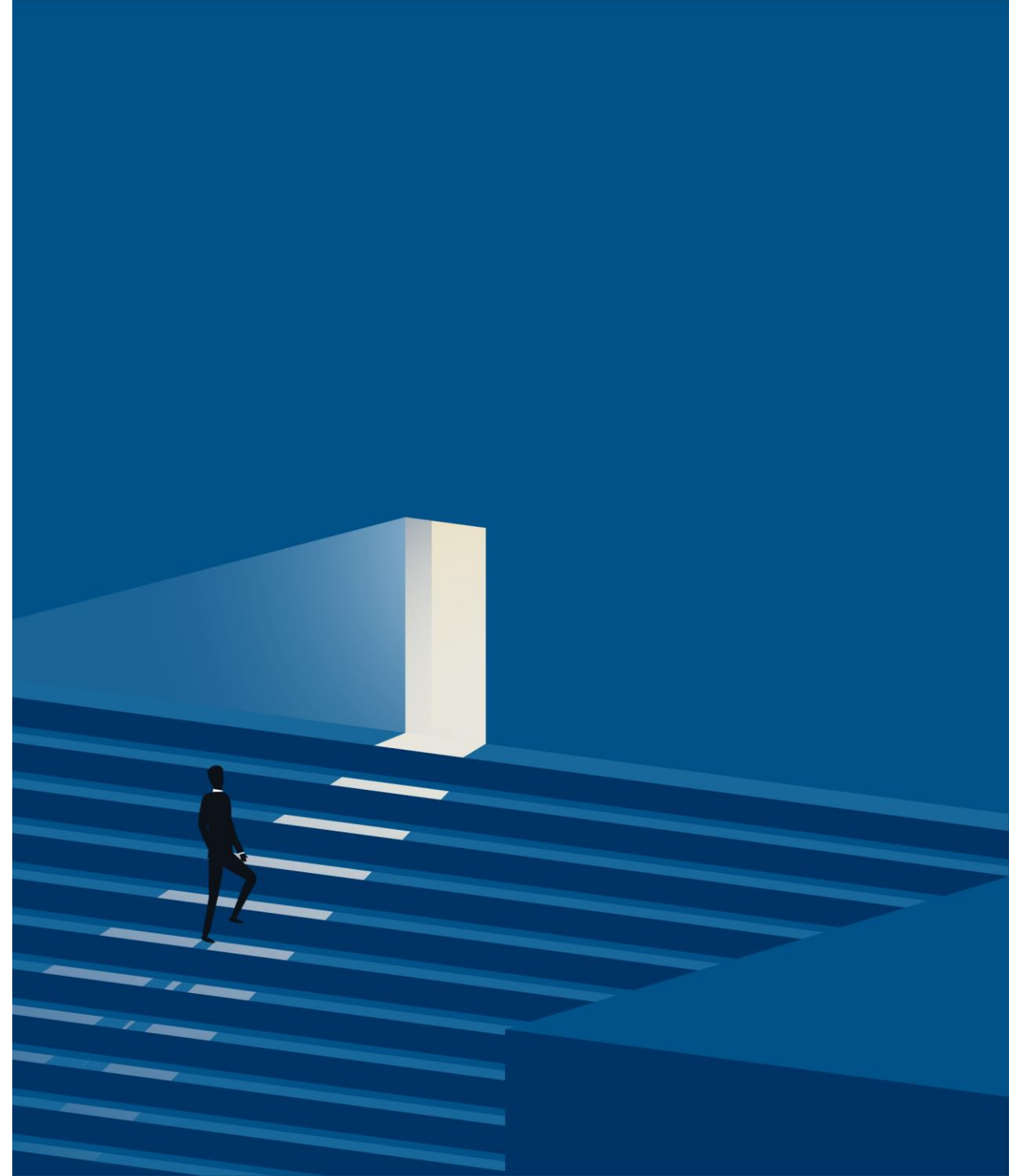
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Catholic law schools do something profound. They don't just prepare students to practice law, they help students discover who they are called to be in the world. This study shows that when legal education is rooted in ethics, purpose, and service, it doesn't diminish professional outcomes. It enhances them. These graduates are not only successful lawyers. They are principled leaders, committed to justice and the common good.”

- Jason King, PhD
Beirne Director &
Chair Center For Catholic Studies,
St. Mary's University

Closing Thoughts

Catholic law schools stand out for attracting and shaping students who are professionally accomplished, civically engaged, and purpose-driven. These findings reinforce the societal value of Catholic legal education and affirm that a holistic, mission-aligned approach yields stronger outcomes. By helping students align purpose with profession, Catholic law schools prepare graduates to not only succeed in their careers, but to lead lives of service, leadership, and contribution.



Want to Learn More?

For more information about the study,
media interviews, or to explore
partnership opportunities, please contact:

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Thank You