

Michigan Access Program (MAP): Promoting Law School Student Engagement and Leadership

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About MAP

The Michigan Access Program (MAP) seeks to:

- Build and support a community of social justice leaders within the Law School
- Teach leadership and conflict resolution skills with an emphasis on intercultural competence
- Provide students opportunities to explore their own thinking, histories, and beliefs around the concepts of social identity and social justice
- Build cross-racial allies

A four-day August Pre-Orientation for 26 students included the following elements:

- Team building and introduction to social justice concepts
- Introduction to cross-cultural lawyering skills through guest speakers and negotiation exercises
- Self-assessments of preferences for conflict styles/modes
- Criminal law classroom conflict simulation and debrief

Five follow-up academic year workshops were also offered.

Methodology

To assess the impact of the MAP program:

1. A survey assessed key objectives of the program at the conclusion of the Pre-Orientation. Over 96% of the participants completed the survey.
2. A one-hour focus group with seven MAP participants midway through their first year asked whether/how students applied concepts they learned during their MAP participation.
3. All 26 MAP participants were surveyed at the end of their 1L year, with a focus on perceptions of the long-term impact of the initiative. 89% responded.

“Every time I'd be feeling like, ‘I can't do this, this was a terrible decision,’ ...I would run into someone [from MAP], and we'd have just a really good conversation ... **That's why I'm still here.**”

MAP Evaluation Results

Participant perceptions of the MAP Pre-Orientation's ability to meet its objectives were overwhelmingly positive (Table 1).

Table 1: Pre-Orientation helped me develop: (1 = Strongly Disagree...5 = Strongly Agree)	Start of Year MEAN (SD)
A personal commitment to creating a more socially just environment in the Law School	4.8 (0.4)
Intercultural communications skills for relating to diverse clients	4.6 (0.6)
Inclusive leadership skills within the legal profession and Law School environment	4.6 (0.6)
An awareness of my own assumptions about identity and social justice and how I developed these	4.4 (0.8)
Tools for creating a more socially just environment in the Law School	4.2 (0.8)
Conflict resolution skills	3.6 (0.8)

At the end of their first year at the Law School, participants reported that they had applied skills and concepts learned in MAP (Table 2).

Table 2: Because of my experience in the MAP Program, over the past year I: (1 = Strongly Disagree...5 = Strongly Agree)	End of Year MEAN (SD)
Developed connections to a community of social justice leaders within the Law School	4.8 (0.5)
Participated in leadership opportunities in the Law School	4.3 (1.1)
Effectively intervened in identity-related conflicts as they arose in the Law School (e.g., email and classroom discussions)	4.0 (0.7)
Felt confident in the Law School classroom	3.8 (1.0)



Focus Group

In a focus group several months after the MAP Pre-Orientation, participants reported several enduring impacts:

- **Tools to address interpersonal and classroom conflict around issues of identity**
“Having a community gives [me] courage to address the biases and privilege we encounter in class.”
- **Opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural and cross-racial engagement**
“Meeting new people, talking honestly with people from different backgrounds [is a key outcome of my MAP participation].”
- **A sense of community and allyhood**
“[MAP offered] the realization that we can stand as allies for each other across ethnic and racial lines.”
- **Confidence to participate in the classroom, especially if raising a dissenting view**
“Knowing ...if you say something you'll get backed up. It's helpful. Otherwise, I would be a lot more reticent to speak up when I know I'm not in a popular position.”
- **A greater sense of belonging in the Law School**
“Within a week [of the Pre-Orientation], I feel like I knew 15 or 20 2Ls or 3Ls, and I feel like that can also be a hard barrier to cross. MAP helped us cross it with flying colors.”