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Law Schools Across the Country Train Students to Fight for LGBTQ Rights
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Andrew Mellon Foundation Awards $3.3 Million to Prison Education Programs

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation announced June 12 it will direct $3.3 million in grant money toward four of the country’s preeminent prison education and re-entry programs.

The foundation was established in 1969 with the purpose of strengthening and promoting the role of the humanities and the arts in a diverse democratic society. In recent years, its leaders have prioritized the issue of prison education, allocating nearly $18 million since 2015 toward organizations that focus on helping incarcerated individuals earn college degrees.

Investing in the higher education of these individuals has widespread effects. Providing them with educational opportunities has proven to reduce violence within prisons, strengthen prisoners’ connections to their families and communities prior to being released, decrease the likelihood of recidivism, and mitigate intergenerational poverty, according to Mellon Foundation Senior Program Officer Eugene M. Tobin.

These latest funds support four projects. One is John Jay College of Criminal Justice, which offers credit-bearing courses to prisoners who live at Otisville Correctional Facility in Orange County, New York, and who are eligible for release in within five years. Donors are hoping that the support will offer opportunity and hope to at least some of the 54,000 incarcerated people in the state of New York.

Another grant will go toward New York’s Marymount Manhattan College (MMC), which offers AA and BA degree-granting programs to approximately 200 inmates annually at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facilities for Women and more recently, the Taconic Correctional Facilities for Women. The grant will help expand these programs and allow them to collaborate more with each other and MMC’s main campus.

A third grant will support California State University, Los Angeles, which operates a bachelor’s degree program for incarcerated students at Lancaster State Prison as well as an in-person program on its main campus for prisoners who have recently been released.

Finally, the foundation will direct money to the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, a national prison education network that gathers and shares research about best practices for teaching incarcerated individuals. As educational programs for prisoners continue to grow and expand, the alliance plays an increasingly important role in addressing new challenges such as infrastructure needs and program quality.

Mellon Foundation President Elizabeth Alexander is optimistic that these initiatives can positively affect America’s crisis of mass incarceration.

“The Mellon Foundation believes in each and every student’s humanity and sees expanding access to higher education in prison as a public good,” she said in a statement.

— Ginger O’Donnell

Free State College Programs Are Growing, But Still Help Few Students

As 2020 presidential candidates debate America’s student debt crisis, researchers are measuring the effectiveness of current college funding strategies such as College Promise programs.

Promise programs guarantee free in-state tuition and are funded through state-controlled dollars. Such programs can be an essential part of academic and economic success for students, but certain states’ eligibility requirements limit the programs to a small percentage of students, according to a June report by The Century Foundation, a progressive, nonpartisan think tank.

Total investment in this type of aid has risen by an average of $107 million per year for the last three years. Yet they are projected to make up only 12 percent of all state public student aid in fiscal year 2020, according to researchers.

“Well-designed place-based tuition-free guarantees can, under the right conditions,” increase college applications and enrollment among low-income students, increase credential attainment, and even improve student outcomes at the K–12 level, the report states. “The rapid growth of such programs makes it even more urgent to ensure they are designed in a way that fulfills their promise.”

Most Promise programs offer last dollar funding, which requires that students use Pell grants and other awarded aid toward the cost of tuition before the state covers the remaining gap — a system that researchers say leaves out people who need additional financial help. “The hesitancy to commit to a truly universal “free college” model has meant that in some states as few as 5 percent of all students actually qualify for the program,” the study states.

Promise programs have been offered since 1990, but didn’t truly take off until 2014 when the Tennessee Promise Scholarship, which offers two-free years at a community or technical college, was enacted. Since then, 15 additional Promise programs have been implemented. There are currently 22 of these programs offered across 19 states.

Growth in popularity for the free aid programs has increased rapidly. They comprise nearly one-quarter of the growth in state public student aid since 2015.

— Mariah Stewart
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Dania Matos, JD, has been named associate chancellor of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of California, Merced. She previously served as the deputy chief diversity officer at William & Mary.

S. Jack Hu, PhD, has been named the University of Georgia’s senior vice president for academic affairs and provost. He previously served as vice president for research at the University of Michigan.

Marcella David, JD, was selected as senior vice president and provost at Columbia College in Chicago. She formerly served as provost and vice president for academic affairs at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

Sean Garrick, PhD, has been named vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Illinois. Garrick previously served as associate vice provost at the University of Minnesota.

Alison Bell, MA, has been named chancellor at Western Governors University. Bell previously served as director of degree completion at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis.

G. Marcus Cole, JD, has been appointed dean at the Joseph A. Matson Law School and professor of law at the University of Notre Dame. He formerly served as the William F. Baxter-Visa International Professor of Law at Stanford University.

Marcheta Evans, PhD, will become the first woman and first African American president of Bloomfield College. She formerly served as provost and vice president for academic affairs at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas.

Rev. LaKeesha N. Walrond, PhD, will become the first female president of New York Theological Seminary. Walrond formerly served as executive pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church in New York City’s Harlem.

Constanza Cabello, EdD, was selected as vice president of diversity, inclusion, and community engagement at Framingham State University. She previously served as assistant to the president for institutional diversity and director of intercultural affairs at Stonehill College.

Débora D. Ferreira, JD, has been named the chancellor’s liaison to the office of general counsel at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She formerly served as the university’s executive director of equal opportunity and Title IX coordinator.

Carmen J. Walters, PhD, was selected as president of Tougaloo College. She formerly served as executive vice president of enrollment management, student success, and institutional relations at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

Ariana González Stokas, PhD, has been named the inaugural vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion at Barnard College. She previously served as the dean of inclusive excellence at Bard College.

Brigette A. Bryant, has been selected as vice president for development and alumni relations at Arcadia University. She previously served as the founding vice chancellor for university advancement at City University of New York.

Dwan J. Warmack, PhD, has been named president of Claflin University. He previously served as president of Harris-Stowe State University.

LaNeeça R. Williams was selected as chief diversity officer and Title IX coordinator at Austin Peay State University. She previously served as chief diversity officer at the University of Evansville.

Hesham El-Rewini, PhD, was selected as new provost at Marymount University. He previously served as the dean of the college of engineering and mines at the University of North Dakota.
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In each issue, INSIGHT Into Diversity features diverse professionals in higher education. By Ginger O’Donnell

Gillian Lester, JSD, is dean and the Lucy G. Moses Professor of Law at Columbia Law School. In this role, she has expanded experiential learning opportunities at the school, created several new interdisciplinary courses, and launched a $300 million, five-year fundraising campaign that will help the school provide financial aid to highly qualified low-income students. Over the course of her career, Lester has taught at some of the country’s top law schools, including University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, Harvard Law School, and University of Chicago Law School. She serves on numerous boards, including the Legal Aid Society of New York and Columbia University’s Knight First Amendment Institute.

Jennifer L. Rosato Perea, JD, is dean and professor of law at DePaul University College of Law. Prior to joining DePaul, she served as the dean of Northern Illinois University College of Law for nearly seven years. One of only a few Latina law school deans in the United States, Perea is an accomplished scholar in numerous areas, including family law, bioethics, legal ethics, and civil procedure. She is also deeply invested in the future of legal education and the challenges it brings, a topic she has presented on at national organizations such as the Association of American Law Schools and the American Bar Association.

Garry W. Jenkins, JD, is dean and William S. Pattee Professor of Law at the University of Minnesota Law School. He previously served as associate dean for academic affairs and John C. Elam/Vorys Sater Professor of Law at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law in Columbus. Jenkins’ research and teaching interests include law and philanthropy and corporate governance, topics he has written extensively about in leading law reviews and interdisciplinary journals. Prior to his career in academia, he held the role of chief operating officer and general counsel at the Goldman Sachs Foundation, an international enterprise.

Vikram D. Amar, JD, is dean of the University of Illinois College of Law. He previously served as senior associate dean for academic affairs at UC Davis School of Law. Amar is a frequently cited authority in constitutional law, federal courts, and civil procedure. In addition to producing several books and over 60 articles in leading law reviews, he writes a biweekly column on constitutional issues for justia.com and a monthly column on legal education for abovethelaw.com. Amar is an elected member of the American Law Institute and has served as a consultant for numerous legal organizations such as the National Association of Attorneys General and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Michèle Alexandre, JD, is the first African American dean of Stetson University College of Law. She previously served as the associate dean for faculty development and intellectual life at the University of Mississippi School of Law. Her teaching and scholarly interests include constitutional law, international law, civil rights, disability law, and critical race theory. She is the author of the civil rights textbook The New Frontiers of Civil Rights Litigation as well as the book Sexploitation: Sexual Profiling and the Illusion of Gender. Alexandre has received multiple awards for the influence she wields as a lawyer and scholar. In addition, she was the first Black valedictorian of Colgate University.

Kevin R. Johnson, JD, is dean, Mabie-Apallas Professor of Public Interest Law, and professor of Chicana/o Studies at University of California (UC) Davis School of Law. He previously served as the school’s associate dean for academic affairs. Johnson has written extensively about immigration law and civil rights, including in two award-winning books: How Did You Get to Be Mexican? A White/Brown Man’s Search for Identity and Immigration Law and the U.S.-Mexico Border. In addition to teaching about immigration, Johnson focuses on topics such as critical race theory and the law’s effect on Latinx populations. In 1993, he was the recipient of the school’s Distinguished Teaching Award.
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2019 and 2020 Mark Anniversaries of First Female Lawyer in US and Women’s Suffrage

Two milestone anniversaries of significant legal achievements for and by women

By Kelsey Landis

In 2019 and 2020, the United States will celebrate legal achievements by women that changed the course of history. Next year marks the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage, which granted them the legal right to vote. Programs, events, and exhibits to celebrate the centennial are planned throughout the country in the interest of the continued advancement of women’s rights. To learn more about celebrating the women’s suffrage centennial, visit 2020centennial.org.

This year, America will recognize the 150th anniversary of the first woman to become a lawyer in the U.S.

Arabella Babb Mansfield was born in Des Moines County, Iowa, in 1846. She later graduated from Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and then studied the law under her brother’s tutelage at his law office.

At the time, Iowa prohibited women from taking the bar exam, but Mansfield managed to take it anyway and passed with high scores. She then went to court to challenge the law that prohibited her from practicing, eventually winning her case. She became the first female American lawyer in 1869, more than 50 years before women’s right to vote would be recognized.

To celebrate Mansfield’s contributions to the advancement of women in law, the National Conference of Women’s Bar Associations plans to release a special publication this year — Raising the Bar: America Celebrates 150 Years of Women Lawyers. To learn more, visit womenlawyers150.com.

Despite the many years that have passed since Mansfield created a path for others, women still have a long way to go in the progress toward equality, according to the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession.

In 2018, only 34.8 percent of the lawyers who are members of the American Bar Association (ABA) were women, according to the ABA. In the same year, female lawyers earned only 80 percent of their male counterparts’ annual salaries, according to the ABA.

“Within the legal profession, while we see more women achieving success as lawyers and attaining greater positions of authority, there remains much more to be accomplished, particularly for women of color, those who are [LGBTQ], those who live with disabilities, and those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds,” the institute stated in a news release.
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Clemson University has been ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* among the top-25 public universities in the nation for 11 straight years. The University has been classified as a Carnegie R1 research university that creates economic opportunities. Faculty, staff and students contribute to Clemson’s national reputation as a great place to study, live and work, and the University invites others to learn more about career opportunities at clemson.edu/careers. To promote inclusive excellence, the University’s Men of Color National Summit works to increase the number of African-American and Hispanic males who finish high school and attend college.

CLEMSON LEADING THE WAY
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- **Clemson Career Workshop** supports college readiness of high-achieving students from diverse populations.
- **Emerging Scholars** helps establish a college-going culture among students from the state’s economically disadvantaged areas.
- **The Erwin Center Summer Scholars Program** gives students from HBCUs and other universities an opportunity to engage with marketing, advertising and communication professionals.
- **The Harvey and Lucinda Gantt Multicultural Center** supports and advocates for all Clemson students’ needs while providing diverse and experiential learning opportunities.
- **PEER/WISE** provides collaborative experiences for underrepresented students and women in science and engineering.
- **Tiger Alliance** mentors and prepares African-American and Hispanic high school males for college entrance and success.

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The annual INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award is the only application-based higher education award that recognizes colleges and universities that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Community Colleges Endeavor to Serve Overlooked Populations Close to Home

By Mariah Bohanon

Only 97 institutions in the United States qualify as Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award winners. Of this elite group, just four are community colleges.

These schools serve as exemplars of what it means to meet students where they are, tailoring resources to improve lives in diverse communities. Below, two institutions are recognized for going the extra mile to ensure local underserved populations can benefit from all of the educational and professional opportunities they have to offer, from job skills training to cultural celebrations to personal enrichment courses for the general public.

Anne Arundel Community College

As with many two-year schools, Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) in Arnold, Md., has a sizable part-time enrollment, with just under 30 percent of students taking classes full-time. It offers an abundance of certificate programs and more than 2,500 noncredit courses in addition to its 46 academic degrees.

Offering flexible enrollment options and an array of educational opportunities for degree seekers and community members alike is intrinsic to AACC’s mission, says chief diversity officer Deidra Dennie, DPA. The college conducts outreach and recruitment in typically underserved areas so everyone in their community knows what AACC has to offer, which has helped the school achieve a diverse student body with underrepresented students comprising 35 percent of enrollment.

“We go into high schools and community centers and nonprofit organizations’ meetings to talk about the full cadre of credit and noncredit courses available,” Dennie says. “We recognize that not everyone wants a degree; some desire a certificate that articulates this person is skilled and certified in a specific or specialized area.”

Recently, being able to serve everyone has meant tailoring outreach methods for low-income, first-generation, and Hispanic and Latinx populations. Rather than relying on typical student recruitment strategies, AACC has used data from local poverty reports to determine which communities could most benefit from the college’s services and which are overlooked. This research helped AACC realize “that we had an underserved niche population in our county,” Dennie says. “There was a gap in our serving the Latinx community well.”

To adjust this issue, the college hired bilingual recruiters who could conduct outreach in high schools with large Hispanic and Latinx populations and other key areas in this community.
In addition, AACC focused internally on creating a welcoming environment by hiring bilingual staff. “We’ve intentionally focused on this population for student growth and hired bilingual advisers, recruiters, and financial aid and welcome desk personnel,” Dennie says.

AACC’s research on local poverty and high-need areas has helped them identify other gaps in educational and professional opportunities. “We realize we have the capacity to provide support resources to specialized groups,” Dennie says. This includes having customized outreach to low-income and first-generation students, letting them know that AACC’s staff is trained to support them with the unfamiliar transition from high school to higher education.

Additional strategies for easing the process include extra support for students who are parents. The college won a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund on-campus childcare for this population.

Other recent developments designed with student success in mind are AACC’s new Field of Interest organizations. These groups help those who plan to transfer to four-year colleges and universities connect with others who share their goals and academic interests. Together, they serve as networks of mutual support throughout their two years at AACC and help “make the pathway to completion simple,” Dennie says.

Pikes Peak Community College
Located in Colorado Springs, Colo., Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC) has in recent years made it their mission to meet the educational needs of its community’s burgeoning Hispanic and Latinx population. PPCC established this goal in 2017 while devising its newest institutional strategic plan, says Keith R. Barnes, PhD, executive director of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

PPCC is currently 19 percent Latinx and aspires to become a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in the near future, which would require one in four students to identify as this ethnicity. One of the college’s biggest priorities is establishing connections within this community to understand how PPCC, as a resource, could best serve their needs.

One strategy for achieving this end was the establishment of a Hispanic advisory council, which includes members of the local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, school district and business leaders, and other individuals who provide guidance and create community ties.
Council members and PPCC diversity staff attend monthly meetings known as Latino community luncheons in which “community members from across the city come together to discuss issues that could have a direct impact on the Latinx and Hispanic community,” Barnes says. “We are a partner in that organization in order to strengthen our community bonds, particularly within specific school districts.”

PPCC created new staff positions to help identify and connect with Hispanic and Latinx people both on and off campus. A designated bilingual, Hispanic and Latinx recruiter visits high schools and community centers and has created Spanish-language recruitment materials, as well as hosts family-friendly, Spanish-language events such as campus open houses and career fairs.

Other on-campus offerings include a Latinx student union, Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations, and enrichment experiences such as a panel discussion on Hispanic leadership, Barnes says. A recently piloted program known as United Men of Color provides social and educational support for Latinx and Hispanic male students in addition to those from other underrepresented ethnic and racial groups who tend to have low college enrollment and graduation rates.

Regular meetings and guest speakers for this group address “different aspects of being successful, having resiliency, and knowing how to navigate troubled waters,” to overcome common obstacles, Barnes says. Each participant is also assigned a mentor for individualized guidance on the unfamiliar collegiate experience, he says.

In addition, PPCC plans to develop more financial aid opportunities for Hispanic and Latinx students who may be undocumented, Barnes says. Until recently, the college was largely unable to provide funding for this high-need population due to federal policy. A new state law, however, will allow them to receive state aid, according to Barnes.

PPCC also dedicates support to military and veteran students. As the college is located near several military bases, a quarter of its enrollees have some military affiliation, according to Barnes. The institution’s Military Veterans Program (MVP) assists these students and their family members with the transition into higher education, “not only processing their veterans’ benefits but also coaching, mentoring, and support services for this population,” Barnes says.

Mariah Bohanon is the associate editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity. Anne Arundel Community College is a 2015, 2016 and 2018 HEED Award recipient. Pikes Peak Community College is a 2018 HEED Award recipient.
Florida State University College of Law is located in the heart of downtown Tallahassee—the capital of the nation’s third largest state. Preparing graduates to succeed in their careers is the most important thing we do. FSU has the #1 law school in Florida in terms of job placement. We are known for our world class faculty, our successful and friendly student body, and our location in Tallahassee that gives students a wide variety of opportunities to gain legal experience. Our students like their experiences at our law school and the careers we help them launch.

- **U.S. News & World Report** (2019) rates Florida State as the **48th best law school in the nation**. Florida State’s environmental law program is ranked 19th best nationally.
- According to a 2018 study of law faculty scholarly impact, **our faculty is #1 in Florida and #29 nationally**.
- **Black Student’s Guide to Law Schools and Firms** (2019) Ranks Florida State among the nation’s top 5 southern law schools for black students and the only Florida law school on the list.
Diversity Will Save Classical Music, and It Starts with Music Education

By Fred Bronstein

Classical music still has time to save itself from extinction.

But how can the art form I love avoid the fate of the dinosaur and the dodo? First, it must admit it still has a diversity problem; second, it must aggressively remedy that problem. The difficulty with that plan of action? Classical music in the United States purposefully avoided diversification for so many years. Let’s look at the history.

Classical music was once part of popular culture. As the groundlings once flocked to Shakespeare’s plays, Paganini and Liszt were rock stars in their day. Even in the early 20th century, classical music was featured in the Bell Telephone Hour on NBC and in Looney Tunes cartoons. Disney’s Fantasia brought Leopold Stokowski face-to-face with Mickey Mouse. But as time went on, classical music became an exclusive club for cultural elites, a closed inner sanctum that — certainly in the U.S. — represented and served a primarily older, Whiter, more affluent demographic.

There were exceptions. Legendary African American singers Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson were crossover classical and popular stars (though both had to endure controversy that arose from their racial background). But — again, with notable exceptions — classical performers, conductors, and composers remained largely White. So did the audiences.
And so they remain today.

During much of the 20th century, Black students were not welcomed at the Peabody Institute or at many of the nation's other conservatories. Today, where I live in Baltimore, the orchestra has one African American musician. At other major ensembles, that picture is typical.

It’s not that we haven’t talked about this issue. For more than 30 years, orchestra leaders have discussed diversity in their ensembles. American orchestras have also talked earnestly about attracting more diverse audiences; they have launched sometimes impressive community engagement efforts.

Yet despite gains by women, our orchestras are no more diverse today with regard to underrepresented individuals, namely African American and Hispanic, than they were when this conversation began. Sadly, the same is true of their audiences.

Classical music audiences in the U.S. continue to contract. According to a National Endowment for the Arts survey, in the early 21st century, the percentage of U.S. adults who attended at least one classical music event a year dropped from 11.6 to 8.8 percent in just 10 years. That’s a bad trajectory.

Certainly, there are myriad reasons for this: gaps in music education in our schools, changing lifestyles, and technology, to name a few.

But we also have to consider demographics. As America becomes increasingly diverse, how does an art form imprisoned in its own exclusivity survive?

According to Census Bureau data, in 2014, the United States was effectively two-thirds White, one-third non-White.

By 2060, that will flip. And classical music, unless it fixes its diversity problem, will be recruiting its performers and attracting its audience from the minority. If, by that time, it survives at all.

So, how is the classical music field adapting to this reality? Essentially, only on the margins. Sure, some major institutions pay attention. The Mellon Foundation is funding projects to expand the pipeline for young musicians of color. The League of American Orchestras advocates on this issue. The Sphinx Organization does important work. But classical music as a field now must put this issue front and center.

Audiences of the future will have to be much more diverse than we can even dream of today. And audiences will only become truly diverse when the performers on our stages are diverse.

Two years ago, the Peabody Institute made diversity one of five central pillars of our strategic plan. Already, we have moved the needle on faculty diversity from 7 percent of total faculty to 11 percent. Thirteen percent of students at Peabody this year are underrepresented minorities.

Our pre-college program, the Peabody Preparatory, addresses the pipeline with, among other things, a program called Tuned-In, where more than 90 young students, mostly of color, are studying music seriously at the secondary school level.

We teach music composition at two Baltimore middle schools for low-income, mostly minority boys and girls. Our students teach local schoolchildren in the Baltimore Symphony’s OrchKids program and in Peabody’s Harp Adventures.

In addition, the Peabody Conservatory has launched a new and expanded jazz program, as well as classes in hip-hop. As part of our new Breakthrough Curriculum, we will soon provide improvisation training not just for jazz students, but for classically trained students as well.

Everyone in classical music leadership — in conservatories like ours, at orchestras and ensembles, at record labels, and elsewhere — must see diversity as more than the right thing to do.

It’s now a bottom-line question. An existential question. A strategic imperative as fundamental to classical music’s survival as the creation of new work. In fact, it is a prerequisite for survival.

Fred Bronstein is the dean of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, a pianist, and former president of the St. Louis Symphony.
In August 2017, just as the Houston Community College System’s 20 campuses were poised to start the fall semester, Hurricane Harvey dumped more than 60 inches of rain in four days over southeastern Texas. More than 200,000 Houston-area homes and apartment buildings were destroyed along with up to a million cars. Many students as well as faculty and staff suddenly were displaced from their homes, had lost their possessions, and had no way to get to classes.

“It was a wake-up call,” says Frances Villagran-Glover, who was then associate vice chancellor for special programs and success, of the hurricane’s impact on students’ anxiety levels. “Not only were they worried about basic housing and food because of challenges with their vehicles and road closures, but it might take up to four hours to get to class.”

After delaying the start of classes by a week, HCC sent students a survey. It had just one question: How are you doing? The response was overwhelming — more than 16,000 responses poured in, ranging from those who reported feeling suicidal and overwhelmed to those who passionately declared they’d keep up their studies no matter what.

“We implemented what’s called a ‘culture of care,’ which is something a lot of community colleges are adopting,” Villagran-Glover says. “It helped us erase the stigma in Houston of students asking for support.”

HCC students were lucky. Licensed counselors are always available on campus, and students were able to tap public and private agencies in the Houston area that offered hurricane-related assistance.

But how can community colleges, whose students rarely live on campus, offer mental health services on an ongoing basis?

Community college students have as many or more risk factors for behavioral and mental health issues as those at four-year universities.

“Community colleges serve the majority of first-generation and under-represented students in the United States,” says Martha Parham, senior vice president of public relations for the American Association of Community Colleges. “Our students tend to be a little older as well. The average age is 28.” Most students — 65 percent of full-time and 72 percent of part-time enrollees — juggle school with jobs to support themselves and families, Parham says.

In addition to the ongoing issues including anxiety, depression and substance abuse, community colleges are not immune from traumatic events such as mass shootings and weather-related catastrophes.

Within the past decade, there has been a “groundswell around recognizing and addressing the need for early intervention so students don’t develop long-term mental illness,” says Colleen Ganley, student services marketing coordinator at California Community Colleges.

California authorized $4.5 million in its 2017-2018 state budget
specifically to help its 115 community colleges provide mental health services and training; it more than doubled that allocation to $10 million for the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

But not every campus received equal amounts of money. Funds ultimately were distributed to 90 schools through a competitive grant process.

And despite this historic “incredible investment” from California lawmakers, Ganley says, “Both of those appropriations were designated as one-time funding and do not provide ongoing funding for this kind of service.”

An effective use of the money has been initiating Kognito online training, which has helped almost 90,000 students and faculty to recognize signs of mental illness, Ganley says.

Most California community colleges now offer one to three free counseling sessions as well as screenings for depression and substance abuse. The Center for Wellness and Well-Being at Santa Monica Community College has office hours five days a week. Four psychologists and two postdoctoral interns are on staff, and at least 12 and as many as 30 students seek their services on a given day, says Martha Whitfield, a student services assistant.

As an alternative to on-campus services, other community colleges rely on memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with area mental health service providers. But there appears to be little if any data on what typical MOUs contain beyond a list of phone numbers as a resource.

In Virginia, community colleges nearly always refer students to outside sources for counseling. In 2013, Virginia lawmakers mandated that these schools designate someone at each campus to refer students to mental health services in emergency situations. For less urgent needs, they allowed them to create MOUs with local mental health providers. A proposed 2014 Senate bill that would have mandated community colleges to create a plan to coordinate mental health services for uninsured students never passed.

John Downey, president of Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Va., testified before state lawmakers at the time, arguing that community college students are better served by mental health providers off campus.

Downey, who has a master’s degree in psychology, says, “The growth of mental health issues is significant. I don’t think there’s any doubt that the need is there for people to have access to good mental health counseling.”

But a staff counselor at a small, rural school like Blue Ridge would be less likely to have the breadth of experience that could be found at an established outside practice, Downey argues, adding that continuity of care is also unlikely at community colleges, which have a high turnover rate among students.

“When life circumstances and stress get in the way, often a student stops coming to a community college, and then there would be no [further] connection with the counseling center at that point, whereas if we’ve already referred that person to a community services board (CSB) for an assessment, there’s at least that connection where they figure out if they need more

“The growth of mental health issues is significant. I don’t think there’s any doubt that the need is there for people to have access to good mental health counseling.”

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As a first-generation college student, Dr. Jason F. Kirksey came to OSU as a walk-on football player in 1985. He left with two bachelor’s degrees and a master’s degree in political science. Dr. Kirksey went on to earn a doctorate in political science from the University of New Orleans in 1997, and since 2009 has championed inclusiveness as OSU’s Vice President of Institutional Diversity.

In 2018, Dr. Kirksey received the Commission on Access, Diversity and Excellence Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Public Land-grant Universities. This award is presented to one recipient nationally who broadened access and opportunity, and contributed to the achievement of diversity.

While his list of diversity awards is impressive, Dr. Kirksey’s efforts make a meaningful difference where it matters most – impacting dialogue, collaboration, and how we treat one another as students, faculty, and staff on our campus.
Vincent C. Flewellen, the chief diversity officer for Webster University in St. Louis, had a turbulent start to 2019.

In December last year, NBC News interviewed Flewellen for a nationally broadcast feature on “White spaces,” or discussion groups and workshops for White people to reflect on their racial identities, biases, and assumptions in order to become more proactive anti-racism advocates.

The backlash was severe. Flewellen and Patrick Giblin, director of public relations, received a deluge of phone calls and emails criticizing the prospect of introducing this type of program to a college campus. Close to 30 news outlets, primarily far-right publications, picked up the story, Giblin says.

Websites such as Breitbart and Campus Reform referred to the program as a “segregated safe space” for participants to come to terms with their inner racism while a Wisconsin radio station described it as “demonizing” White students. Far-right website The New American deemed it a “reeducation camp.”

Much of the coverage contained erroneous details, such as stating that the program would be offered as a class for students rather than a workshop series for faculty and staff, or that Flewellen was also responsible for introducing a White spaces program at Washington University in St. Louis.

Such vitriol towards the concept of examining Whiteness as a racial construct is hardly new, however. State representatives in both Arizona and Wisconsin have tried unsuccessfully to ban certain ethnic studies courses after universities in their states began offering classes titled “The Problem of Whiteness.” In 2018, a new Whiteness studies course at Florida Gulf Coast University was guarded by two campus police officers on the first day of class after a professor received multiple threatening emails and phone calls.

Vanderbilt University professor Jonathan Metzl was interrupted by a group of White supremacists in April while giving a presentation on his book Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment is Killing America’s Heartland. In a column in The Washington Post, he wrote, “For too long, many white Americans have avoided this conversation, and we’ve done so for a reason: We don’t have to see the color white. Race scholars often argue that white privilege broadly means not having to reflect on whiteness.”

Yet the concept is gaining ground. In White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Race, diversity trainer and scholar Robin DiAngelo argues that Whiteness as a race must be addressed in order to advance racial justice. As a White woman, she calls on White people themselves to do the work of dismantling racism. The book became a New York Times bestseller in 2018.

This responsibility on the part of White allies is also the premise of Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It by Shelly Tochluk, PhD, professor of education at Mount Saint Mary’s University in Los Angeles.

Being a White ally requires awareness...
of the “political, economic, sociocultural, and legal histories that shaped the meanings associated with whiteness,” Tochluk’s website states. It also requires White readers to reflect on how they have benefited from racial privilege and how their own assumptions and attitudes about race have shaped their thinking and interactions with people of color, Tochluk says.

While critical Whiteness studies as an academic subject has existed as a subgenre of race studies for several decades, Tochluk emphasizes that her work does not examine Whiteness through an academic lens. As a former teacher in a diverse K-12 school and a student of psychology, she was inspired to write the book in 2007 as a practical guide for White educators and other allies seeking to understand “what it means to be a White person who is conscious of race and has taken up the responsibility to do something about it,” Tochluk says.

Tochluk’s book is intended to help readers realize that “we’re actually more influenced by racism than we think,” she says. White readers are guided into recognizing systemic discrimination, their own unconscious biases, and the ways in which they personally benefit from White privilege. Lastly, the book addresses how to use newfound awareness to become a more conscientious, self-aware ally — one who can help share these lessons with the White community.

The concept of creating a “White space” for this type of work may seem contradictory, but there are several imperatives behind this decision. Reasons include the premise that people of color should not always have the full responsibility to educate others about racism and should not have to be subject to “further undue trauma or pain as [White participants] stumble and make mistakes” during candid discussions, according to the Alliance for White Anti-Racists Everywhere-LA (AWARE-LA), an organization that helped Tochluk develop her workshop series.

Furthermore, Witnessing Whiteness programs are intended as a supplement to, not a replacement for, multiracial discussions and efforts to combat racism, according to AWARE-LA.

“I think White people are increasingly hearing the call that we actually need to educate each other and not depend on people of color to be our educators,” Tochluk says. “That doesn’t mean that we don’t also have multiracial conversations, but hopefully when we do enter multiracial dialogues, we do so more effectively and without being too dependent on [people of color] for validation.”

Community groups nationwide, including the St. Louis chapter of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), have hosted such workshop series since 2008. The demand for this type of program increased following the 2014 shooting of African American teenager Michael Brown, Tochluk says.

It was at this time that Flewellen first contacted the YWCA Metro St. Louis about bringing the program to the private K-8 school where he was then working. Many White parents and teachers had been asking for this kind of opportunity, and the program led to unique anti-racism education efforts within the school, he says.

**WHAT IS CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES?**

Critical Whiteness studies leans heavily on critical race theory, which maintains that “race” is a social construct. As stated in *The Washington Post*, scholars in this largely interdisciplinary field believe “the concept of race was created by a rich white European and American elite, and has been used to deny property, power, and status to nonwhite groups.”
Flewelling notes that the YWCA Metro St. Louis provides trained, White facilitators to lead the program for schools, churches, and other groups who request it. The format and materials are based on those developed by Tochluk and AWARE-LA.

In June, the Webster University administration gave Flewellen full approval to move forward with bringing the Witnessing Whiteness series to campus. A pilot program for faculty and staff will launch in fall 2019. “As a result of the publicity we received in December and January, there were faculty and staff members already asking when we were going to start the program,” says Flewellen.

Both Flewellen and Giblin say that despite the backlash, having the support of their university as well as allies who called or wrote to them from across the U.S. made this experience a positive one. “We spent about two weeks receiving hateful messages,” Giblin says, “but in the end we were able to make some great connections that are going to help us offer even better diversity and inclusion programs than we had before.”

Mariah Bohanon is the associate editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.

MORE INFORMATION AND MATERIALS

Free information and materials on the Witnessing Whiteness workshop series can be found at shellytochluk.com. Users can also access information on Tochluk’s book Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice and accompanying workshop materials, in addition to lesson plans and professional development materials for educators.

AwareLA.org offers an additional anti-racist toolkit for groups, including information on White spaces and dialogue workshops.

For information on White Fragility and a reader’s guide, visit robindiangelo.com. The website also offers multiple free resources on learning to be a White ally, including self-reflection exercises, guidelines for parents, and reading lists.

An overview of the YWCA’s national Stand Against Racism campaign, advocacy agenda, and more can be found at ywca.org.

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From refugee to intern, UN shaped South Sudanese student’s life

 Gatluak Ramdiet was 9 years old, playing in the Nile River as he did many days, when the gunshots rang out. He and his brother dodged bullets as they ran.

 "Everything was destroyed, and things were so bad, my parents had to leave to find food," Ramdiet said. "They decided that it was time for my brother and I to go to a refugee camp, and arranged for some family friends to take us."

 The first time Ramdiet had access to education was at a United Nations (U.N.) refugee camp in Ethiopia.

 "Unfortunately, we could only go for an hour twice a week, but I was glad to be learning," he said.

 These opportunities had changed Ramdiet’s life, and he developed much respect for the U.N. workers at the camp and the programs that were assisting him.

 "All the people on the ground at these refugee camps are true heroes," he said. "They made me want to join the U.N. when I grew up. There is no more noble cause."

 Resettling in Nebraska

 His eldest brother had applied for resettlement before Ramdiet arrived at the camp, and he petitioned for guardianship of his two younger brothers in order to be resettled together. Ramdiet recalls a years-long process of interviews, background checks and medical checks while awaiting resettlement. Finally, in 2006, they received word they would be resettling in the United States.

 "They gave us only a few days to pack our stuff," Ramdiet said. "It was a really, really long process, and then suddenly, we had plane tickets and we were going."

 They arrived in Omaha on March 26, 2006. With rudimentary English skills, and very little previous schooling, their transition in the U.S. wasn’t easy.

 "I was perfecting my ABCs as a ninth-grader, but this was something I had felt deprived of so I just never stopped," Ramdiet said. "I was starved for knowledge. Learning to read opened up this whole new world."

 New York calling

 Ramdiet eventually earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and enrolled in the Nebraska College of Law in 2016.

 Ramdiet’s life came full circle while studying criminal and international law. Right away, he applied for an internship with the U.N., and wasn’t selected. The rejection stung, but an International Human Rights Seminar with Professor Brian Lepard convinced him to try again. This time, Ramdiet had more knowledge about the U.N. and was able to better articulate what he could bring to and gain from the experience.

 Ramdiet was selected for an internship with the U.N.’s Office of Legal Affairs, thanks in part to the mentorship of Lepard and Eric Berger, associate dean for faculty and professor of law.

 "I was able to introduce myself and talk with him a little bit about my experience, which was amazing," he said. "The whole experience was a dream come true."

 Ramdiet spent the summer of 2018 in New York working for the U.N., assisting with projects that exposed him to both international and domestic law. He also met the U.N. Secretary General who was the head of the refugee agency when Ramdiet was in the camp.

 "My background is that of chaos, and that was caused by the absence of the rule of law," Ramdiet said. "Those people in Sudan who burned our village and others still have not been prosecuted by anyone and that is something I live with every day because it changed my life."

 "If I can be in a position to help somebody, help a kid like me get some justice when a wrong has been done, that gives my life some purpose."
Students do research in the reading room of Georgetown Law’s Edward Bennett Williams Law Library. (Photo courtesy of Sam Hollenshead at Georgetown Law)
Approximately 28 percent of practicing lawyers in the United States struggle with depression, according to a recent study by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs. The Dave Nee Foundation was established to support those individuals.

Difficulties often begin in law school. According to the foundation, 8 to 9 percent of prospective law students suffer from depression prior to enrolling in school. By the time these students earn their degree, 40 percent of them are experiencing depression.

The foundation works to mitigate this problem. Founded in 2006 by three lawyers who were close friends of David Dawes Nee II — a third-year law student at Fordham University who took his own life while he was studying for the bar exam — the organization’s mission is to “eliminate the stigma associated with depression and suicide” according to its website.

Lawyers rank fifth in incidence of suicide by occupation.

During the academic year 2013-2014, the foundation made 41 presentations at 35 law schools across the U.S. through its Uncommon Counsel program, which provides information about suicide prevention and coping with depression.

The foundation also conducts research about mental health issues in the legal profession. For instance, it helped fund and organize the Institutional Review Board approved 2014 Law Student Well-Being Study, the first ever national, multi-school study of mental health concerns among law students.

For more information, visit daveneefoundation.org.

— Ginger O’Donnell
For more than 35 years, the AccessLex Institute has provided resources to law schools and scholars by recognizing student barriers and offering services that help improve legal education access. The institute is a self-funded powerhouse of reinvestments for legal education, with more than $2.5 million grants awarded to law students in 2018.

The nonprofit organization, which has nearly 100 employees, focuses on issues surrounding access to legal education. The institute conducts research, offers educational resources to students and administrators, and provides numerous services for advancement including two education centers: the Center for Legal Education Excellence (CLEE) and the Center for Education and Financial Capability (CEFC).

The CLEE manages grant programs and concentrates on identifying plans to put underrepresented law students ahead, while the CEFC is available both online and on-campus to teach students to manage student loan debt and other financial responsibility.

AccessLex offers some tools for the public on its website, such as a student loan payment calculator and downloadable research data. But the majority of its services are offered to the 200 member schools, which include all American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law schools and a few for-profit institutions.

AccessLex formerly operated as a student loan lender exclusively for law students and was previously named AccessGroup. In 2013, the federal government cut out middleman loan providers and made student loans accessible directly from the U.S. Treasury. This move caused AccessGroup to be pushed out of the student lending market. The CEO and board of directors then decided to rename and refocus the organization on reforming legal education.

“Our funding comes from lawyers paying their loans back to us,” says Aaron Taylor, executive director of CLEE. “We use that money to make it better for the next generation of law schools and lawyers.”

Taylor describes AccessLex’s framework as a “pay it forward” story. Since 2014, the organization has awarded 79 grants totaling more than $8 million.

Furthering its commitment to eliminating disparities and improving law school entry, AccessLex offers a pipeline grant that provides up to $125,000 to higher education programs seeking to increase racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic diversity in legal education.

The institute offers an on-the-go, segmented, online curriculum called MAX, which is structured to complement the work students are already doing with loan repayment and personal finance. It also combines in-person workshops and one-on-one counseling.

Taylor says several schools have adopted the curriculum without a directive from the ABA or any other organization, which “really shows the value of the program.”

Next year, AccessLex plans to launch a summer program called LexScholars, which is designed to help people from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It starts as a four-week summer residential program in Washington, D.C., and offers a continued education component for one year.

“What we’re seeking to do is really move the needle on diversity by targeting students that have potential to be successful law students and lawyers,” Taylor says.

— Mariah Stewart
Syracuse University Hopes to Double Black Enrollment in College of Law through Admissions Program

By Kelsey Landis

For Syracuse University College of Law Dean Craig Boise, 10 percent African American enrollment in the 125-year-old college wasn’t good enough, even though that number is “pretty typical for law schools across the country,” he says.

The college hopes to double Black student enrollment within the next five years through a 3+3 admissions program, which is common in higher education. The idea is that it’s cheaper and quicker to complete two degrees when they’re bundled together. Syracuse’s program comes in the form of an agreement with three historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) in Atlanta — Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College.

Pre-law students who fulfilled the requisite coursework at their undergraduate institutions and meet admissions standards at Syracuse will be eligible to complete their bachelor’s and juris doctor degrees within six years, a year less than the typical seven.

“The problem from the standpoint of undergraduates going to law school is twofold,” Boise says. “One, cost is a big factor. Two, a lot of minority students, particularly African American students, come from a background where they have not had lawyers in their families or have not been exposed to the culture of … the profession.”

Despite these challenges, Boise says a lot of Black students know they want to become lawyers early in their academic careers. The 3+3 program at Syracuse offers a pathway for freshmen to go from undergraduate to law school in “as short a time as possible,” Boise says.

But 3+3 programs aren’t always effective, says Syracuse University assistant dean for enrollment management Denée Page. If an institution doesn’t inform its students in their first year about these programs, the likelihood of their completing them diminishes.

“If there’s one thing we know in admissions, it’s that students will come to us eventually, but we have to find a way to connect with them first,” Page says. “We are here to help them. It’s not just, ‘Apply when you’re ready.’”

Another problem with 3+3 admissions programs for underrepresented students is a lack of inclusion efforts at the post-graduate institution. To prepare faculty to welcome 3+3 enrollees in the fall, Syracuse plans to send professors this summer to Atlanta to personally visit the participating universities. They will provide short courses to students, give speeches and presentations, and tap into the Syracuse alumni network there.

“They’ll give students … a better understanding of the areas of law they’re interested in pursuing and also what it means to function in a professional workplace,” Boise says.

Syracuse will also help students prepare for the admissions exam, which can be a significant barrier to underrepresented applicants.

“Getting students of color into the profession is something we desperately need,” Boise says. “It is still, sadly, rare enough to see Blacks in the legal profession, and when we are, it’s really an inspiration.”

Kelsey Landis is the editor-in-chief of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
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The Government Plans to Audit Law Firms for Diversity, and Universities Can Help Them Improve

By Mariah Stewart

For decades, the legal industry has fallen behind in diversity and inclusion representation. Year after year, statistics show little change in demographics, and law firms that serve the federal government as contractors are no exception.

But this year, the federal government’s contractor watchdog announced it will hold those contractors accountable by auditing them for instances of pay inequity and discrimination.

Law firms “need to get their houses in order” before the audit, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) director Craig Leen said at a town hall in April, legal news website JD Supra reports. “There is a big problem at law firms for women and women of color.”

The U.S. Department of Labor agency is a civil rights entity responsible for ensuring contractors and subcontractors comply with affirmative action and laws that bar discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran. The agency’s announcement is expected to motivate firms across the country to increase diversity within their ranks.

Attorneys who serve as federal contractors provide legal services to government agencies. They help negotiate or secure contracts and subcontractors comply with affirmative action and laws that bar discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran. The agency’s announcement is expected to motivate firms across the country to increase diversity within their ranks.

Representation of women and racially underrepresented partners at law firms have changed even less than general lawyer rates in recent years, according to the National Association of Law Placement (NALP).

The consequences for law firms or any contractor not complying with an OFCCP review can mean loss of government business. In 2014, New Jersey law firm Shapiro, DiCaro & Barak, LLC, refused to submit the required information OFCCP requested. As a result, the law firm signed a consent decree which ordered that it could not participate in federal contracts for two years, according to Bloomberg Law.

For decades, the legal industry has fallen behind in diversity and inclusion representation. Year after year, statistics show little change in demographics, and law firms that serve the federal government as contractors are no exception.

According to Pillsbury Law, universities have an opportunity to bridge the disparity by providing a pipeline of more diverse law school graduates. Understanding how firms plan to boost diversity can help law schools set up their students from underrepresented groups for success in the workforce.

Nearly one in four American workers is employed by 200,000 federal contractors, according to the OFCCP website. Every year, the agency compiles a list — known as the Corporate Scheduling Announcement Letter (CSAL) — of those contractors that will be audited for compliance review. The selection process is executed differently each time, but OFCCP chooses contractors based on industries found to have the highest rates of discrimination. For the fiscal year 2019, which ends in September, the list names 3,500 contractors and subcontractors.

When businesses and organizations recognize they have a diversity and inclusion problem, they sometimes recruit outside help from experts who provide instruction on conscious and unconscious bias training and sexual harassment prevention. Mauricio Velásquez, CEO of the consulting agency Diversity Training Group, says he isn’t surprised about the federal government’s

The NALP says despite growth at big law firms among women, Asian American, Latinx, LGBTQ, and Black lawyers still lack representation. Though there has been a small increase of Black lawyers in the past three years, African American attorney rates have barely changed since 2009, according to the 2018-2019 National Association of Law Placement Directory of Legal Employers.

This year, 55 major law firms had at least 20 percent underrepresented attorneys, which is up from only 43 firms in 2018. Three major firms had at least 20 percent partners from underrepresented backgrounds, down from five big firms last year, according to The American Lawyer 2019 Diversity Scorecard.
plan to investigate law firms. “This is nothing new,” Velásquez says. “Some law firms will be more proactive. But most firms either don’t care or realize it’s going to take some heavy lifting, and they don’t have the capital or the energy or the time.”

It’s not clear whether law firms have a valid excuse for a lack of diversity when statistics show law schools are already diverse. Thirty percent of students who attended law school in the past 20 years were not White, according to the American Bar Association (ABA). Nearly 8 percent of the 2018 student body at law schools most popular within the American Law 200 are Black, according to ABA data. But Black students have a lower chance of being accepted to law schools than White students with similar scores, according to 2016 data by the Law School Admissions Council.

Velásquez says firms aren’t looking in the right places for hiring. “They’re not committed to widening the net to recruiting from a broader set of law schools,” Velásquez says.

Taking a Step in the Right Direction

For firms looking to improve, the ABA offers diversity and inclusion resources on its website. There are also organizations like the National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF) that work to increase the retention of underrepresented and women-owned law firms.

Several big law firms share their diversity efforts on their webpages, such as Haynes and Boone, LLP, which is listed on this year’s CSAL. The firm, which is located in several cities throughout the U.S. and around the world, told INSIGHT in an email it plans to cooperate with

the OFCCP review.

Ellen Clinton is a member of the diversity and inclusion committee at the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA), an organization that serves more than 8,500 legal professionals worldwide who are responsible for operations of management in law firms. ALA provides a variety of training and networking opportunities relating to professional development and management solutions.

Clinton says the first step firms should take is to “check their own front door” for diversity and inclusion issues. “Simply because you don’t see blatant intentional discriminatory issues doesn’t mean that they don’t exist,” Clinton says.

The second, Clinton says, is to monitor diversity statistics regularly and at all levels. Clinton suggests firms analyze various steps of an employee’s life cycle, beginning with the candidate pool and internal interviewing practices. “All too often we hire people who we have an affinity for as opposed to maybe who is the best candidate,” Clinton says. “Most likely, those that we have relationships with are very similar to us and come from the same neighborhoods or the same law schools.”

Posting positions on diversity job boards can help expand the hiring pool, and having a panel of diverse attorneys who are involved with both the selection and the interview can help make the recruiting process more objective, Clinton says.

The most indicative measurement for firms to analyze is turnover, according to Clinton, who says if firms aren’t measuring that, it’s going to be difficult to plan for improvement.

Mariah Stewart is a staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
ENVIROMENTAL LAW STUDENTS ARE BEHIND A MOVEMENT TO PROTECT UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

By Kelsey Landis

The impact of climate change hits politically, socially, and economically disadvantaged communities first and hardest.

After a decade of recession in Puerto Rico, where almost half the population lives below the poverty line, Hurricane Maria resulted in over 3,000 fatalities. The disaster left more than a million people without power or adequate resources.

More than a year after flooding from Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston area in 2017, causing over $125 billion in damage, three in 10 Texas Gulf Coast residents say “their lives remain disrupted,” according to the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Episcopal Health Foundation. Black and Hispanic residents and those with lower incomes were more likely to report being affected by the hurricane.

“One year later, many of those with the fewest resources are still struggling to bounce back from Harvey’s punch,” Elena Marks, president and CEO of the Episcopal Health Foundation, said about a 2018 study on the hurricane’s impact.

A 2018 special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations body for assessing the science related to the issue, found climate change has a bigger impact on the following groups: coastal communities, Indigenous groups, agriculture-dependent areas, elderly, disabled, impoverished, people of color, and women. Reducing global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with 2 degrees Celsius “could reduce the number of people both exposed to climate-related risks and susceptible to poverty by up to several hundred million by 2050,” according to the panel’s report.

Environmental justice lawyers are among the strongest advocates for underrepresented communities affected by disasters such as Hurricanes Harvey or Maria.

As the effects of climate change worsen, the need for lawyers in this field grows. Law school administrators and students across the country have responded, says Jennifer Rushlow, PhD, associate dean for Environmental Programs at Vermont Law School.

“The environmental community has been very slow to widen the umbrella to include more than just the traditional, male-led, White efforts on national resources conservation,” Rushlow says. “I believe the movement will fail if it doesn’t change.” But students at Vermont Law and at law schools nationwide are “a force to be reckoned with,” she adds.

Practical application of theories learned in the classrooms is the most effective method for preparing students to help underrepresented communities, says Roger Lin, PhD, clinical supervising attorney at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) School of Law Environmental Law Clinic.

The clinic, Lin says, is “basically a law firm” that employs students to represent environmental justice groups across the state. “They get to experience every single aspect of the case,” he adds.

Practical experience prepares graduates to jump directly into working on international climate negotiations, developing federal...
policy, or advocating for communities on the local level, says Lisa Benjamin, PhD, a professor in the Environmental, Natural Resources, and Energy Law Program at Lewis and Clark Law School.

“Lewis and Clark students are very civic-minded,” Benjamin says. “A number end up at [non-government organizations], working with community organizations where they’re able to rectify wrongs or are able to be involved in policy formation.” Increasingly, law school students are not only interested in advocating for underrepresented communities, but they’re also beginning to reflect those communities, says Rushlow, who is also acting director of Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic. Twenty-three percent of students at Vermont Law are people of color, and 57 percent are women.

“We have a lot of student leadership from our students of color. They want to see environmental issues addressed that impact them,” Rushlow says. “People of color care about the environment, and they care about protecting their communities. Any assumption that’s not the case is incorrect. … It’s time for the movement and for the academy to do its part in fostering leadership and building skills.”

Making Change Well Before Graduation
Lin's students in the UC Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic achieved a big win recently, well before they had earned their law degrees. They successfully fought for and won $60 million in pilot projects for 11

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY?

Internationally: The Paris Agreement required participating countries to submit nationally determined contributions that stipulate climate change mitigation goals.

U.S. Federal Government: Participating countries decide how to implement the Paris Agreement stipulations. The plans are supposed to be community-driven and sensitive to vulnerable populations. President Donald Trump announced in June 2017 the United States would withdraw from the pact, saying it would “undermine” the American economy. The earliest the U.S. can pull out of the agreement is November 2020 under the Agreement’s terms.

Locally: Cities, communities, and states are driving national action on climate. Young people are also protesting and demanding action at the federal and local level

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communities in the state’s Central Valley that don’t have access to reliable electricity. Allensworth, Calif., is one of those communities. Founded by Lt. Col. Allen Allensworth, a Black man born into slavery who escaped to join the Union army, it became known as the first African American town to be established after the Civil War.

While the town was created with the idea that Black citizens could pursue their own American dream, Allensworth became “redlined out of investment,” Lin says. The state didn’t pay for infrastructure there, and over time, residents turned to other means for energy. Still today, the few hundred people living there, most of whom are African American, use wood and propane to heat and cool their homes. Extreme weather swings in the Central Valley connected to climate change are making things worse.

Students in the Environmental Law Clinic helped amplify residents’ voices. State assembly bill 2572 ordered the California Public Utilities Commission to investigate ways to provide affordable energy to communities such as Allensworth, of which there are 170 statewide. Lin says he hopes solutions can be replicated in the other 159. Most of the pilot projects include solar options for power.

“You do need a lawyer for every single step to work closely with residents to make sure we get their opinions and uplift their voices,” Lin says. “It’s really important for the role of the lawyer to be a guide for the residents, for folks who don’t understand the legal system, to open doors for them, to translate all the technical terms.”

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At Lewis and Clark Law, the Green Energy Institute and the International Environmental Law Project provide practice in applying the law in real-world situations. Recently, students in the institute worked with local county officials to reduce carbon emissions from diesel trucks, Benjamin says. People who cannot afford healthcare for illnesses caused by poor air quality are at an inherent disadvantage.

“The reason they are so highly impacted is because socially, politically, economically, they are disadvantaged.
already,” Benjamin says. “Environmental issues are mediated through these social structures as disadvantages, and the vulnerable are impacted more.”

Next year, Vermont Law plans to launch an Environmental Justice Clinic where students will work with community groups nationwide to address policy issues. The new effort will complement the existing Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic, which allows students to serve as the lead attorney in environmental cases under the supervision of an experienced lawyer.

**Trends in Environmental Justice Cases**

One of the exciting trends in environmental law is youth bringing litigation to challenge government inaction, Rushlow says. As part of a 2016 case in Massachusetts, Rushlow helped four teenagers sue the Department of Environmental Protection to force them to uphold regulations in the state’s Global Warming Solutions Act. The state’s highest court ruled in the teens’ favor, forcing the state to do more to reduce emissions.

*Juliana v. United States* is another lawsuit brought by a group of young people. In 2015, they claimed under the Public Trust Doctrine that the federal government violated their constitutional rights by allowing dangerous levels of carbon dioxide to develop. The case continues in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, headquartered in San Francisco.

“The concept is that the government holds public resources in trusts for the public,” Rushlow says, and by failing to control atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, they have endangered the lives of children.

Lin says he hopes to see more cases like these. “Court cases can make a big splash,” Lin says. “As long as it keeps pushing the movement forward, I very much hope that it does [continue to happen].”

As climate change continues to make conditions more extreme, especially for people in underrepresented communities, environmental justice attorneys trained with practical experience in law school will become all the more important, Lin says. “Students meet the families whose lives are going to be changed by these projects,” Lin says. “They’re seeing every aspect from start to finish and in the real world.”

Kelsey Landis is the editor-in-chief of *INSIGHT Into Diversity.*
Law Schools Across the Country Train Students to Fight for LGBTQ Rights

BY GINGER O’DONNELL

Above: Professor Katherine Franke, left, with Columbia Law alumna Chinyere Ezie, a staff attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights. Ezie gave a presentation as part of the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law’s Fall 2019 series, “On The Front Lines of Gender Justice.”
The emergence of a public LGBTQ community in the United States is in many ways a legal story, according to Michael Boucai, JD, an associate professor at the University of Buffalo School of Law in New York. “The criminal illegality of homosexuality gave any kind of reform work on LGBTQ issues a legal focus,” he says.

While the beginning of the 21st century has produced some significant gains in LGBTQ rights — most notably, the right to marry — the community still faces legal challenges in almost every facet of their lives, from work to family to healthcare.

President Donald Trump’s administration has seriously compounded these issues, most recently announcing plans to rescind nondiscrimination policies intended to protect the rights of transgender and other LGBTQ people by allowing healthcare workers to deny services to them based on religious grounds.

Law schools across the country are training students to combat legal discrimination against the LGBTQ community in whatever area they practice, as well as to broaden their vision for LGBTQ equality under the law, especially as it pertains to those with intersectional identities.

Almost every legal specialization includes opportunities to improve LGBTQ rights, and many schools incorporate this lens into their established curriculum. A growing number provide classes specifically concentrating on legal issues pertaining to gender and sexuality. The legal profession typically refers to this area of work as LGBT law.

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law offers a course called “Sexuality and the Law,” which covers a slew of issues, from the decriminalization of gay sex to the first laws that established basic rights. Other courses across the country concentrate on policies affecting the AIDS epidemic, how gender determines outcomes in the criminal justice system, and more.

According to the LGBT Bar Association’s 2019 Law School Climate Survey, 50 out of 67 of all American Bar Association (ABA)-accredited law schools offer courses on LGBT law. Meanwhile, 87 out of 100 respondents to a 2018 survey conducted by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) said they offered LGBT law courses.

A few schools have put sexuality and gender issues at the forefront of their educational offerings, establishing themselves as top destinations for students and faculty who want to specialize in LGBT law.

The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law

Founded in 2001, the Williams Institute is a think tank designed to provide empirical research about LGBTQ individuals with the goal of informing policy. The institute also plays a major role in building young lawyers’ expertise and has served as a training ground for academics who want to teach this field of law at other universities across the country.

Much of the institute’s early

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Pioneers in LGBT Law Education

Bill Rubenstein, JD, is a professor at Harvard Law School who began his career in “impact litigation”—i.e., arguing cases that engineered major advances for the LGBTQ community. In his early years at Harvard, Rubenstein authored the first law school casebook on LGBT law, which was widely circulated, now titled *Cases and Materials on Sexual Orientation and the Law*. He is also responsible for founding the Williams Institute at UCLA Law School.

Arthur S. Leonard, JD, is a professor at New York Law School. He is widely known for chronicling legal issues affecting the LGBTQ community in an online publication called *LGBT Law Notes*, available on the New York Law School website. The notes have served as a key source for numerous law review articles and books.

Nancy Polikoff, JD, is a professor at American University Washington College of Law who co-authored one of the first law review articles on the custody rights of lesbian mothers. She has spent nearly 40 years teaching and working in the field of LGBT law and is responsible for developing prominent legal theories supporting adoption, custody, and visitation rights for same-sex couples.

Nan Hunter, JD, teaches at Georgetown Law. An expert in the field, she co-authored an important casebook with William Eskridge, JD, Yale Law School professor, that “conceptualized sexuality and gender law as a dynamic relationship between state regulation, sexual practices, and gender norms,” as stated on Georgetown’s website.
research centered on providing a reliable demographic portrait of LGBTQ individuals, says Brad Sears, JD, UCLA’s associate dean of public interest programs and the institute’s David Sanders Distinguished Scholar of Law and Policy as well as its founding executive director.

“We realized that myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ people were determinative for judicial opinions and legislations. Without rigorous research to counter those stereotypes, we weren’t going to advance in [either] arena,” he says.

In the nearly two decades since it was formed, the institute has met its goal of helping to further LGBTQ rights. As the fight for marriage equality made its way through the courts, the institute’s studies were repeatedly cited in numerous cases, including Obergefell v. Hodges, the landmark Supreme Court civil rights case.

More recently, some of the institute’s summer fellows have documented discrimination as evidence for the necessary passage of the Equality Act, a federal law that passed the U.S. House of Representatives and is awaiting consideration in the Senate. It would amend Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In terms of educational opportunities for young lawyers, the Williams Institute is home to the Dukeminier Awards Journal of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law, which hosts an annual writing competition open to all students enrolled in ABA-accredited law schools. The competition is an opportunity for law students to conduct their first scholarly research in LGBT law.

The institute also hosts a national moot court competition every year, with over 40 teams competing annually, according to Sears. In recent years, students have presented cases about the legality of religious exemptions to Title VII as well as free speech issues surrounding LGBTQ issues in schools, he says.

In addition to the educational opportunities at the Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law offers a Master of Laws degree with a specialization in law and sexuality, including coursework in HIV AIDS law, international human rights and sexuality, and more. This program is primarily geared toward international students. “We’ve had students come from all over the world — Colombia, Chile, Iran, Vietnam, South Africa — and then return to their home countries and work on LGBTQ issues,” Sears says.

Brad Sears greets former President Barack Obama at the signing of an executive order prohibiting workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Center for Gender and Sexuality Law in 2004. The purpose of the center, she says, is to expand upon the widespread interest at the school, with the hope of eventually attracting more law students specifically interested in pursuing the field.

Franke also wanted to create a space for the many Columbia Law alumni who were leading successful careers in LGBT law to return and share their expertise as adjuncts, speakers, and student mentors.

Like the Williams Institute, the center builds students’ skills and knowledge in the field through multiple publication opportunities, including the Columbia Journal of Gender and Law, open for submissions by first-year law students as well as upperclassmen.

Another publication is Gender and Sexuality Law Online, a website where lawyers-in-training can publish work about gender and sexuality issues that a print journal might not have accepted. There’s also a blog where students can
discuss LGBTQ legal issues in a more informal way.

The center offers an official certification in the study of gender and sexuality law. To earn this credential, students must take several classes in LGBT law and write a master's thesis on a legal issue pertaining to sexuality and gender.

Professor Suzanne Goldberg, JD, an LGBT law litigator who leads the center, emphasizes its impact on building a community of people interested in these legal issues, both inside and outside of Columbia Law School.

“Students come together with other students, faculty, and practicing lawyers and study how profoundly the law has shaped policies and practices around sexuality and gender,” she says.

Columbia Law School is also home to a Sexuality and Gender Law Clinic. Founded in the fall of 2006, it is the oldest clinic in the country staffed by a full-time faculty member. It has played an important role in more deeply connecting legal work around sexuality and gender, Goldberg says — two domains that weren’t always so closely linked.

Students typically participate in the clinic for one semester, building their skills in a seminar class while working on self-selected projects such as representing asylum seekers who have fled their home countries due to persecution for their LGBTQ status or writing amicus briefs relevant to cases affecting LGBTQ individuals.

During the class, Goldberg focuses on oral and written communication skills, collaboration, and conducting interviews with clients who may have traumatic histories and who are concerned about revealing their LGBTQ identity.

More than 100 students have participated in the clinic since its founding. Graduates have helped cities enact laws that allocated benefits to same-sex partners prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage, and they have drafted a report in conjunction with the New York City Human Rights Commission on the prevalence of sexual harassment.

Columbia Law Center also offers the Law, Rights, and Religion Project, founded and directed by Franke. The goal of the project is to advocate for a balance between religious liberty and other fundamental rights, including LGBTQ rights. Work there takes the form of writing policy papers and amicus briefs as well as analyzing proposed legislation, among other efforts.

“I started it [in 2013] when I could see that the backlash against marriage equality would take the form of [religious] exemptions,” Franke says. However, once Trump took office, it became clear to her that those on the political left were also going to claim religious exemptions to protest some of the administration’s policies. For instance, some immigration rights activists claimed religious liberty when they were sued for providing food to migrants on the border.

Franke’s goal is to bring religious liberty advocates together with LGBTQ advocates so they can understand how they’re affecting each other across movements. She believes this work is not only fundamentally important to gay and transgender people, but also to other underrepresented groups, such as people of color.

“I believe that the longer-term goal of some of the more extreme right-wing evangelicals who are making [the religious liberty] argument is to use LGBTQ rights to really unravel anti-discrimination law in general,” she says. “There’s a lot at stake.”

Tulane Law School and Georgetown Law School
Other noteworthy contributions to LGBT law include Tulane Law School’s Journal of Law and Sexuality: A Review of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Law, founded in 1989 and first published in 1991. Tulane’s website states the journal was “the first … student-edited law review in the country devoted solely to covering legal issues of
The First Step Toward A Legal Career

The award-winning UHLC Pre-Law Pipeline Program is designed to increase the diversity of law school applicants for undergraduate students who are first-generation, low income, or members of groups underrepresented in the legal profession. The Pipeline Program provides law school preparatory resources — LSAT preparation, introductory law school classes, internships, and professional development sessions.

To learn more about the University of Houston Law Center Pre-Law Pipeline Program, visit www.law.uh.edu/pipeline.

Other schools in addition to Columbia Law host clinics focused on sexuality and gender law: New York University School of Law is home to an LGBTQ Rights Clinic, while Cornell Law School runs a Gender Justice Clinic. In addition, the Law School Admission Council reports that Harvard Law School plans to open an LGBTQ+ rights clinic in the fall of 2019.

The Raymond Pace and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Award for Excellence in Pipeline Diversity

The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university and an EEO/AA institution.
Nonprofit Provides Pivotal Reference Data for Underrepresented Law Students

By Mariah Stewart

For the first time, a comprehensive listing of Black attorney employment rates in the United States is now available, providing valuable information to both law firms and students.

The listing, titled Black Student’s Guide to Law Schools & Firms, is in its third edition. This latest version also covers nearly 400 law practices, including some of the nation’s largest firms.

The report comes from the decade-old nonprofit Lawyers of Color, which promotes diversity in the legal profession by engaging in research regarding job opportunities. The organization also seeks to advance democracy and equality in marginalized communities.

Lawyers of Color contacted nearly 100 firms where Black attorneys comprise less than 1 percent of the staff. Only three firms responded.

Two of the three claimed it was difficult to find Black law students to employ. In response, Lawyers of Color announced it would create a free Black law student résumé bank and pre-screening interview service for law firms. The nonprofit also says it plans to design a national legal model that provides stipends, training, and expert advisors to support small nonprofit law firms.

The organization’s recent research reveals that more than 40 law firms have no Black attorneys, and an additional 80 firms have less than 2 percent. Five of the firms with no African American presence employed more than 100 lawyers. Most of the firms with no Black attorneys were considered boutique firms; the smallest had 20 attorneys total and the largest had 134.

The guide also provides a list of the best law schools for students of color, ranking Howard University — the oldest historically Black college or university law school — at number one. Also in the top five are Columbia University, University of Chicago, Harvard, and Duke University.

Bargain schools are featured, with the David A. Clarke School of Law at the University of the District of Columbia having the lowest resident tuition rate of under $13,000.

Vermont Law School holds the highest percentage of African American faculty for a non-historically Black college or university with 33 percent Black faculty members, according to the guide. University of Michigan and University of Minnesota come in near the bottom of the list at less than 2 percent.

The guide also explores the challenges — and sometimes the rewards — of being the only person of color in the classroom. Two law students shared their experiences of culture shock at smaller schools, the University of Nebraska Omaha and University of Utah’s S.J. Quinney College of Law. The students said the institutions were proactive about inclusivity and they were able to find a sense of community.

Lawyers of Color’s research points to the New York City-based Paul, Weiss law firm for employing the highest percentage of African American lawyers, including former U.S. attorney Loretta Lynch. The firm made history as the first law practice to hire Black attorneys, both male and female.

The firm has more Black partners — a total of six — than nearly all large law firms, according to the guide. It also served as pro-bono counsel for Thurgood Marshall on the Brown v. Board of Education landmark Supreme Court civil rights case in 1954.

In the editor’s letter about the guide, Lawyers of Color CEO Yolanda Young says the true focus is the data. She writes, “The facts don’t lie. And the fact is there is considerable work to be done in the area of diversity.”

Black Student’s Guide to Law Schools & Firms can be found online at lawyersofcolor.org.

Mariah Stewart is a staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Law Students Serve as the Frontline of Protection for the Undocumented

By Mariah Bohanon

Kathryn Redmond, JD, spent spring break of her final year of law school in a San Antonio bus station. As a student volunteer with the Saint Louis University School of Law (SLU Law) Removal Defense Project, part of her duties involved handing out backpacks of food and supplies to newly arrived undocumented immigrants.

Another responsibility: teaching them the complex and lengthy process for gaining asylum.

“Even for people trained in the legal field, immigration law is very complicated,” Redmond says, adding that she took several classes in this area before enrolling in the defense clinic.

“Redmond’s decision to study immigration law and to share her knowledge with the people who need it most represents a growing trend. A November 2017 report by the American Bar Association Journal states that “interest in immigration law is surging,” thanks to President Donald Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. Class sizes in immigration courses at some law schools have doubled or even tripled since the presidential election, according to the American Bar Association (ABA). Duke, Northeastern, and Vanderbilt University, among others, have joined SLU in opening their first immigration law clinics in recent months.

Aida Farahani, JD, a lawyer with the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), says law schools are offering increased opportunities to become involved in this work as students become more impassioned. As the pro bono attorney coordinator for RAICES’ Karnes Pro-Bono Project, Farahani organizes legal aid for undocumented families at the Karnes County Residential Center, an hour outside of San Antonio and three hours from the Mexican border.

At first, only nearby attorneys and law schools like St. Mary’s University and University of Texas at Austin visited. As word spread, however, schools from across the United States began contacting Farahani asking if their law students could provide assistance.

“We’ve had such a great experience working with law students … because of the [knowledge] they have and how passionate they are in helping our groups of detainees,” Farahani says. Most groups who visit do so during spring or winter break, and the center is booked for student volunteers through spring break 2020. Farahani does outreach with law schools to see if they are willing to send interns or create externship programs at Karnes so there would be steady assistance, not just during school holidays, she says.

Helping vulnerable immigrant populations doesn’t necessitate prior training in immigration law or even clinical law. RAICES trains all volunteers before they arrive, preparing them to do tasks such as “know your rights” presentations and drafting declarations.

“Volunteers are attorneys, law students, retired professors — honestly anyone that we feel is open and willing to learn what asylum is in order to provide the legal services we give [detainees] every day,” Farahani says.

Helping advocate for and protect asylum seekers, however, doesn’t only happen near the border. Legal educators and students across the U.S. are finding innovative ways to reach vulnerable immigrant populations.

CREDIBLE FEAR AND TRAUMA TRAINING

Before helping detainees prepare for what are known as “credible fear interviews,” students enrolled in SLU Law’s Removal Defense Project received therapy training from St. Francis Community Services, which co-sponsored the project. During these interviews, individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. must prove they have a “credible fear” of persecution in their native countries. They are often required to discuss the traumatic experiences that caused them to flee from their homes.

Noncitizens do not have the right to a free public defender in civil matters, including deportation.
within their communities, such as the UCLA School of Law Immigrant Family Legal Clinic. Located within the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Community Schools complex, the clinic, which opened in January 2019, is the first of its kind to be situated on a K-12 campus.

“One of the struggles for reaching immigrants is the climate of fear and in many ways living below the radar,” says Nina Rabin, JD, the clinic’s executive director. “But schools are particularly trusted by people and their communities.”

The RFK schools see an especially high number of students who arrived in the U.S. as unaccompanied minors or whose families are recent immigrants and “in pretty urgent need of legal help,” Rabin says. Unlike student service trips to Karnes or SLU Law’s Removal Defense Project, which consists of a semester-long class and one week in Texas, law students in the UCLA immigrant family clinic spend an entire semester working on select cases for RFK students or their families.

An additional benefit of the clinic is that some of Rabin’s students and the UCLA undergraduates who help operate and interpret for the clinic are themselves immigrants, first-generation students, or individuals who have overcome other disadvantages, Rabin says. As such, they serve as excellent role models for RFK students who may visit for walk-in consultations or see them around the RFK campus. “They see really accomplished young people who may just be a little older than them that are going on to law school,” Rabin says. “It’s just another great aspect of [the clinic].”

Cases selected by the clinic are urgent and can be completed within a semester’s time; lengthier ones are passed on to other nonprofits. One of the greatest successes of the clinic’s first semester involved a 17-year-old LGBTQ Asylum Seekers

Since 1994, the U.S. has recognized persecution on the basis of sexual or gender identity as a qualification for asylum. LGBTQ asylum seekers report being at increased risk of discrimination and violence among their fellow migrants. In November, approximately 80 gay and transgender immigrants formed their own caravan after experiencing problems among a larger group that arrived from Central America, according to CBS News. LGBTQ individuals have also reported frequent discrimination in detention centers, prompting the American Civil Liberties Union and other equal rights advocates to call for better treatment on their behalf. Johana Medina Leon, a 25-year-old transgender asylum seeker from El Salvador, died in early June after she was released from an immigration detention center in El Paso. Her death comes after another transgender asylum seeker, 33-year-old Roxsana Hernandez of Honduras, died in May 2018 in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody.
A TIMELINE OF IMMIGRATION POLICIES FROM 2017 TO 2019

President Donald Trump’s campaign focused heavily on promises to curb immigration into the U.S. Since taking office, the president and his administration have taken numerous measures to discourage asylum seekers and deport undocumented immigrants. Below is a brief timeline of major decisions affecting legal protections and proceedings for individuals illegally crossing the southern border.

2017

January 25: Trump issues two executive orders on immigration. They include measures to amplify immigration enforcement across the U.S., expand apprehension and detention capabilities along the southern border, expedite asylum claims, and initiate plans to build a border wall.

June: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announces an initiative that increases risk of detention and deportation for parents and sponsors of unaccompanied minors.

September 5: Attorney General Jeff Sessions announces the rescission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Ongoing lawsuits have postponed this measure.

2018

March 9: The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) sues California for being a sanctuary state and protecting undocumented immigrants from federal enforcement laws.

April 2: The DOJ requires immigration judges to meet a quota of 700 cases annually.

April 6: Sessions announces a “zero tolerance policy” for illegal border crossings, meaning all adult asylum seekers not reporting to an appropriate port of entry can be detained and prosecuted.

As U.S. law restricts housing children in incarceration facilities, minors who accompany these adults are housed in separate shelters. Within six weeks, nearly 2,000 children are taken into custody of Health and Human Services (HHS).

May 18: Sessions announces that judges cannot use administrative closure, the common practice of putting deportation cases for nonviolent immigrants on hold indefinitely.

June 20: In response to national outcry, Trump signs an executive order ending family separations.

November 21: A federal judge overrides a November 9 mandate restricting asylum eligibility only to those who cross through legal points of entry.

December 19: A federal judge rules against the DOJ’s declaration that gang and domestic violence are not grounds for asylum.

2019

January 27: The longest government shutdown in U.S. history comes to an end as Trump concedes to Congress’ refusal to provide border wall funding.

February 15: Trump declares a national emergency along the Mexican border.

April 17: The DOJ announces that individuals who have proven credible fear cannot be released on bail until after their immigration cases conclude, which can take months or years. Families and children are excluded.

April 29: Trump gives officials 90 days to write stricter asylum policies, including implementing fees, restricting work permits, and requiring immigration courts to decide on the more than 800,000 pending cases currently in their backlog.

June 4: Trump threatens to use tariffs to punish Mexico for an “invasion” of migrants. Negotiations continued at time of publication.


For more information on providing legal services for undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers, visit http://abaforlawstudents.com/category/immigration-law.

- Mariah Bohanon is the associate editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
inclusion

We work to create a community diverse in both thought and practice. Diversity and inclusion are not abstract concepts. They are day-to-day commitments.
Earlier this year, Netflix released a documentary of Beyoncé’s performance at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, held annually in Indio, Calif. Approximately one year before, the pop icon was the first African American woman to headline the affair. She marked the occasion by paying tribute to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), assembling a group of more than 150 former HBCU band members and dancers who embellished her hit songs with drum lines, step-dancing, and other signature moves of Black college culture.

Shortly after the performance, she established the Homecoming Scholars Award Program, which donated $25,000 to one student each at four different HBCUs for the duration of the 2018-2019 school year: Xavier University, Wilberforce University, Tuskegee University, and Bethune-Cookman University.

The Netflix film mixes rehearsal footage with that of the actual performance, punctuated by inspirational quotes from famous HBCU graduates. It shows Beyoncé telling a group of young dancers that she “had always dreamed of going to an HBCU” before her life took a different direction with the band Destiny’s Child. Of the young Black artists assembled for the performance, she said, “The amount of swag is just limitless.”
Top Ranked for Diversity*

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*Ranked as a top law school in California for Hispanic and African American students by prelaw Magazine.

*Ranked No. 11 among ABA-accredited law schools nationwide for largest female student enrollment in 2018 by Enjuris.
The Winning Initiatives

UNL’s Husker Dialogues series is an annual event for first-year students. It facilitates conversations that promote respect and understanding across different perspectives and identities. It also introduces tools students can use in conversations about diversity and inclusion. The Inclusive Leadership Retreats are daylong events designed to help students think more broadly about diversity issues. It helps them lead inclusively in the classroom, in the community and in their extracurricular activities.

Both initiatives help build a climate in which all are valued—and have engaged more than 9,000 students in conversations about diversity, inclusion, leadership and communication.