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Howard Hughes Medical Institute Commits $1.5 Billion to Advance DEI in Academic Science

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) in Maryland announced in May that it will commit $1.5 billion to a 20-year program designed to build a more diverse workforce in the field of academic science. The Freeman Hrabowski Scholars Program aims to hire and support up to 150 early career faculty members who are working to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the sciences. Eligible research fields include basic biomedical disciplines, bioengineering, biophysics, chemical biology, computational biology, evolutionary biology, and plant biology.

The program is named after Freeman A. Hrabowski III, the outgoing president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and a committed advocate of improving diverse scientist, engineer, and physician representation.

“For academic science to thrive in an increasingly diverse world, we need to attract and support scientists from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds,” HHMI President Erin O’Shea said in a press release. “Early career faculty play a key role because they are the leaders of tomorrow. We’re excited to support talented early career scientists dedicated to a model of excellence in science that combines innovative scientific research and intentional, inclusive development of postdocs, students, and other lab members.”

The participating scholars will remain at their home institutions but become HHMI employees with a full salary and be provided with research budgets, scientific equipment, and leadership and mentorship development opportunities. HHMI will fund up to $8.6 million per scholar, appointing 30 of them every other year for a five-year term. Scholars are expected to use a portion of the funding to incorporate DEI into their lab climate and practices.

“Our goal is to help promising researchers build the future of science,” said Leslie Vosshall, HHMI chief scientific officer and vice president. “In keeping with HHMI’s ‘people, not projects’ ethos, we want scholars to follow their own scientific curiosity, ask innovative research questions, and go where the science takes them.”

Applications for the program are due September 28, 2022, and the scholars will be selected in March 2023.

University of California System Launches the Center for Climate, Health, and Equity

The University of California (UC) system recently launched the UC Center for Climate, Health, and Equity at its San Francisco campus to find equitable solutions to health issues caused by climate change. The center will work to educate future climate and health leaders, conduct research on the health effects of climate change, and advocate for policies that support impacted underserved communities.

“We’re hoping to be implementing innovative health- and equity-focused climate adaptation solutions,” stated Sheri Weiser, founding co-director for the center, in a press release. “We are really keen on developing community health adaptation and resilience pilot programs that are going to be co-developed with frontline communities. And we’re also going to be convening partners, sharing solutions, and building capacity across communities.”

To mark the launch of the center’s programming in May, it debuted a series of virtual public conversations with UC leaders and educators, government officials, climate experts and activists, and representatives from marginalized and affected communities. Panel topics included health and health education, the fossil fuel industry, mental health, and public policy and equity as they relate to climate change.

In addition to education, research, and policy, the center will also work to develop preparations for climate-caused disasters and help implement them in at-risk communities.

Research shows that climate change is already causing food shortages and worsening health crises, such as the spread of HIV and other chronic diseases, in many low-income areas and countries.

“[T]he center recognizes that climate change will hit vulnerable people the hardest, including those in low wealth communities, communities of color, historically marginalized communities, communities impacted by systemic racism, and low-income countries,” a UC press release reads.

Although the center is based at UC San Francisco, it will utilize the knowledge of experts, educators, and students from across the university system. Already, leaders at the center have helped create health- and equity-related climate courses at other UC campuses.
AAUP Releases First Study on Tenure Since 2004, Revealing Major Changes in Faculty Career Tracks

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has released its first major study in nearly 20 years on tenure policies at U.S. institutions of higher education. The findings reveal significant changes in faculty career pathways over the last two decades, aligning with previous research that showed the decline in tenure at U.S. colleges and universities.

The 2022 report shows that 53.5 percent of higher education institutions have replaced tenure-eligible positions with contingent faculty appointments, compared with only 17.2 percent of colleges in 2004. In 2019, just 10.5 percent of faculty positions in the U.S. were tenure-track and 26.5 percent were tenured, according to the AAUP. Nearly 45 percent were contingent part-time, or adjunct, roles. One in five were full-time, non-tenure-track positions.

The study also indicates some positive developments in regard to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and supporting work-life balance.

Despite the decline in opportunities for advancement and promotion, the study revealed more equitable tenure policies have been implemented at many institutions. Notably, 82 percent of campuses now allow faculty to stop the tenure clock for childbearing or child-rearing obligations, compared with only 17 percent in 2000. More than 90 percent of institutions offer this option regardless of gender.

Such policies align with the AAUP’s past recommendations that colleges make the tenure process more flexible for faculty members with family obligations.

The study also assesses how DEI goals and standards play a role in tenure decisions, an aspect that has been overlooked in previous research, according to the AAUP. The association found that 21.5 percent of colleges and universities currently include DEI criteria in their tenure standards. Nearly 39 percent of respondents said they are considering adding such criteria. Furthermore, nearly 40 percent of institutions reported that their tenure criteria had been evaluated for implicit bias within the last five years. An equal number said that their promotion and tenure review committees must participate in implicit bias training.

“Press reports of such efforts at individual institutions have at times focused on opposition to them by faculty members, outside organizations, or state legislatures. … [T]he focus on opposition to such activities may have caused them to be viewed as ‘controversial,’ which may help explain the relatively high percentage of institutions that are not considering undertaking them,” the AAUP states.
READ, WATCH, LISTEN

READ: LGBTQ Leadership in Higher Education
Through the perspectives of 15 LGBTQ presidents and chancellors in higher education, this anthology examines why diverse leadership matters, especially when it comes to addressing challenges related to academia and human rights. In 12 essays, current and former campus leaders offer insights on topics such as mentorship, feminism, self-care, and coming out. By sharing their experiences, the authors provide an inspiring glimpse into how they have overcome personal struggles, managed intersectional identities, and become accomplished leaders who champion diversity, equity, and inclusion. Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

WATCH: The Janes
In the face of Roe v. Wade’s overturn, this timely documentary highlights the efforts of a group of Chicago women who helped provide abortions prior to the 1973 ruling. The women, who called themselves “Janes,” defied the Illinois state legislature to create an underground network that assisted those with unwanted pregnancies, all while putting their own personal and professional lives on the line. “We want young women and men to see this film and hear these women’s stories,” co-director Emma Pildes told Variety magazine. “They tell you what this country looks like when women don’t have the right to make this decision for themselves in vivid detail.” Streaming on HBO Max

LISTEN: SpeechMatters “Leading with Love in the Face of Targeted Harassment”
This episode of the SpeechMatters podcast, produced by the National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement at the University of California (UC), explores how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) professionals can remain committed to their work and lead with love, even when facing resistance or harassment. Dania Matos, vice chancellor for UC Berkeley’s Division of Equity and Inclusion, discusses her career in the private, nonprofit, and government sectors as well as her own experience being targeted as a woman of color working in the DEI field. Available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts

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Jamie Parson, JD, was appointed chief diversity officer at Appalachian State University in Boone. Parson will continue to serve as associate professor in the Department of Finance, Banking, and Insurance at the university’s Walker College of Business.

VIRGINIA
Malika Carter, PhD, has been selected as the inaugural vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion and chief diversity officer at James Madison University in Harrisonburg. Carter was chief diversity officer at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse.

WASHINGTON
D’Andre Fisher, MEd, will serve as the inaugural associate vice chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion at Seattle Colleges. Fisher was associate vice president for equity, diversity, and inclusion at North Seattle College.

WISCONSIN
Quin Brooks, PhD, will serve as inaugural assistant chancellor of equity, diversity, and inclusion at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Brooks previously served as the assistant dean of diversity, inclusion, and contemporary student services at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville.
MONTHLY OBSERVANCE

BIPOC Mental Health Month

Colleges and Universities Offer Psychological Services for Students of Color

This July marks the 14th annual observance of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) Mental Health Month, previously known as National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. The observance comes at a critical time on college campuses, as concerns regarding psychological and emotional well-being are at an all-time high for young people and students, especially those from underrepresented communities.

Ample research has shown that the educational, economic, and social turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased anxiety and depression among college students. For young people of color, these effects have been compounded by racial violence and discrimination. Yet this population is significantly less likely to obtain psychological support services due to the high costs of mental health care, the social stigma associated with seeking treatment, a lack of access to culturally competent counselors, and a general mistrust of medical professionals, according to the organization Mental Health America.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that among college students with clinically significant mental health problems, only one-third of Latinx students and one-quarter of Black and Asian students received treatment compared with half of White students.

Some colleges and universities are addressing these disparities by improving overall campus climate and mental health support for people of color. In observance of BIPOC Mental Health Month, INSIGHT recognizes some of the institutions whose innovative programs and initiatives are increasing access to crucial services and advancing psychological and emotional wellness for ethnically and racially underrepresented students.

Grand Valley State University
The Grand Valley State University Counseling Center in Allendale, Michigan, offers several mental health resources that are specifically for students of color. The Let’s Talk program allows these individuals to seek one-on-one culturally competent counseling at no cost. The center has also created the Racial Trauma, Management, and Self-Care Workshop, a virtual series that helps students identify and manage symptoms of race-related trauma and stress and develop healthy habits.

Illinois State University
Illinois State University offers the Students of Color Process Group through its group counseling services. The program provides individuals from ethnically and racially underrepresented backgrounds a safe space to discuss issues regarding their experiences as people of color in a predominantly White environment. Sessions are facilitated by culturally competent therapists and focus on topics such as imposter syndrome and microaggressions.

Celebrating BIPOC Wellness
In February 2022, Boston University hosted the inaugural BIPOC Wellness Fair in partnership with the BIPOC Mental Health Collective, the Queer Activist Collective, and the BU Student Government Mental Health Committee. Students who attended could visit with local mental health organizations, consult with therapists of color, and receive free self-care products. The fair was organized to bring more attention to the emotional well-being of people of color and to encourage diversity and better representation within the psychology profession.
University of California, Berkeley
The University of California, Berkeley houses several community-specific mental health resources for students from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups. These include services for students who are Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, international, Muslim, Northern African, South Asian, or Southwest Asian. The university offers tailored health coaching, group counseling, and free consultations with trained therapists for each of these demographics. It also connects students from these groups to various mental health forums, guided meditations, and other support services.

University of Florida
Through its Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC), the University of Florida offers numerous wellness and mental health services for ethnically and racially underrepresented students. These include group counseling for students of color in general as well as group sessions specifically for Black women, Black graduates, and Latinx students. The CWC also produces a podcast about mental health in college that focuses heavily on ethnicity- and race-related issues, such as White fragility and Black mental health. In addition, the center provides mental health materials in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and more.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) has a wide variety of counseling and psychological resources designed for underserved students, including bilingual services, support groups, and individual counseling with staff members of color. Support groups include Brothers United for men of color, Sister Circle for women of color, and the Latina Discussion and Support group for Latinx women. Ethnically and racially underrepresented students can also be referred to UNL’s Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center for individualized counseling.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
The Counseling and Psychological Services Multicultural Health Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill works to improve mental health care access for students of color through group therapy, outreach events, and individualized counseling. The therapy groups include sessions focused on empowering and supporting Black women and men, queer and transgender people of color, and graduate and

Promoting Native American Well-Being
The Native Center for Behavioral Health, a research center at the University of Iowa (UI) College of Public Health, aims to expand the behavioral health workforce in Indigenous communities through various community outreach projects and partnerships. These efforts include the creation of three technology transfer networks in the areas of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and counseling, and general emotional well-being services. The networks allow the center to easily work with local Native American behavioral health workers and organizations to build up their resources and capacity and develop a culturally competent approach to mental health support.
professional students of color. During the spring 2022 semester, the program hosted a graduate students of color workshop series, which focused on building confidence and overcoming self-doubt, managing school and relationships, and creative wellness. The university also operates the Carolina Collaborative for Resilience, which matches scholars with diverse faculty to develop coping strategies for issues related to race, belonging, and identity.

**University of South Florida**
The University of South Florida’s Counseling Center facilitates several diversity-focused mental health programs. Entre Familia is a counseling program for Latinx students to discuss culturally unique issues and concerns such as acculturation and immigration. Our Voices is a similar initiative for all students of color to experience a sense of community and support while on a predominantly White campus. The Let’s Talk program provides a space for international students to seek counseling if they have difficulty adjusting to the U.S. due to language, cultural, and other barriers.

**University of Wisconsin-Madison**
As of 2021, the University of Wisconsin-Madison employed 11 mental health providers who work exclusively with students of color as part of its efforts to expand wellness resources for those who are underserved. These counselors are experts in the experiences of people who are marginalized and can help them navigate life on a predominantly White campus. Students of color have access to both individual and group counseling services from the providers.

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**Strategies and Recommendations**

In 2017, the Steve Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to the mental health of young people of color, and The JED Foundation, a nonprofit committed to suicide prevention among teens and young adults, created the Equity in Mental Health Framework. The framework offers a series of recommendations and implementation strategies to higher education institutions that want to develop or improve psychological support services for ethnically and racially underrepresented young people. Its 10 recommendations are as follows:

- Identify and promote the mental health and well-being of students of color as a campus-wide priority
- Engage students to provide guidance and feedback on matters of student mental health and emotional well-being
- Actively recruit, train, and retain a diverse and culturally competent faculty and professional staff
- Create opportunities to engage around national and international issues and events
- Create dedicated roles to support well-being and success of students of color
- Support and promote accessible, safe communication with campus administration and an effective response system
- Offer a range of supportive programs and services in varied formats
- Help students learn about programs and services by advertising and promoting through multiple channels
- Identify and utilize culturally relevant and promising programs and practices and collect data on effectiveness
- Participate in resource and information sharing within and between schools

Source: stevefund.org
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Towson University Works to Eliminate Graduation Gaps

By Erik Cliburn

Large gaps in graduation rates between White students and students of color have long persisted in U.S. higher education. As of 2021, White college students were 250 percent more likely to graduate than their Black peers and 60 percent more likely than their Latinx peers, according to the website The Hechinger Report. One institution that has achieved remarkable success in closing these gaps is Towson University (TU), located in Maryland.

For decades, TU has operated numerous student success programs and incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles to ensure that its large population of students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve their goals. All underrepresented groups at TU have a higher median graduation rate than those at peer institutions of similar size and demographics, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

In 2020, Black and White students at TU both had a six-year graduation rate of 74 percent, while the overall graduation rates at TU were at 73 percent. Black students have surpassed the overall degree completion rate at TU for more than eight years in a row.

Maggie Reitz, PhD, vice provost for academic affairs, attributes this success to TU’s longtime focus on recruiting and supporting underrepresented students. “We had that foundation very early on, before other people even recognized the need or had any interest,” she says.

Officials at TU credit this to a robust collection of programs that support economically disadvantaged, first-generation, and marginalized students through mentorship, community-building, and skills development. One of the most notable is the Students Achieve Goals through Education (SAGE) program, a long-standing initiative at TU that matches first-year underrepresented students with peer mentors from similar backgrounds. SAGE sponsors weekly events on campus aimed at promoting academic and professional growth, including social activities, learning workshops, career development courses, and financial planning sessions. Participants can also choose to live in the SAGE Community on campus, which houses members and mentors together in residence halls.

Having a peer-to-peer mentorship network is invaluable to building a sense of community, says Patricia Bradley, JD, TU’s vice president for inclusion and institutional equity. Programs such as SAGE help first-generation and marginalized students understand and manage the challenges of college, which in turn has a positive impact on graduation rates.

“We really do believe in the mindset of our students learning together, living together, and playing together,” she says. “It’s that togetherness and that sense of belonging that creates an environment where students can thrive and be successful.”

Another successful initiative is the Man 2 Man Program, which allows male-identifying students of color to connect with each other and discuss issues of masculinity, social pressure, race, culture, and more. It hosted a mental health conference in April aimed at helping men of color be more comfortable with speaking about emotional hardships.

 “[Man 2 Man] is providing a space to be authentic, to be vulnerable, and talk about emotion,” says Brian Jara, assistant director of diversity training and educational initiatives. “It’s social,
For other institutions seeking to close opportunity and graduation gaps, Bradley says it is important to be authentic, fully commit to DEI principles, and build a sense of community that can serve as a support system.

in developing a plan for their college careers, and helps them prepare for academic success at the collegiate level.

In addition to these student-focused programs, TU has implemented faculty and staff DEI initiatives to improve cultural competency on campus and encourage instructors to connect with diverse groups of students. These include LGBTQ ally training and anti-racism affinity groups and faculty dialogues.

For other institutions seeking to close opportunity and graduation gaps, Bradley says it is important to be authentic, fully commit to DEI principles, and build a sense of community that can serve as a support system. “You're just there as a support, so don't look at it from the perspective that these are the people who need the most help,” she says. “They've already proven that they can succeed.”

Erik Cliburn is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity. Towson University is a 2020 and 2021 recipient of the INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award.
Chief diversity officer (CDO) positions have become increasingly common across higher education in recent years, especially after the social unrest of 2020 and the demand for campuses to promote cultures of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In addition to these institution-wide positions, some colleges and universities have also hired academic diversity officers (ADOs) to lead DEI efforts within individual schools, departments, and campus units.

The CDO and ADO positions can differ in many ways, but together they help support institutional missions to bring about inclusive and equitable experiences for faculty, staff, and students.

ADOs can be especially effective at large flagship universities where DEI efforts are decentralized. The University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of Virginia all have these officers in addition to a campus-wide CDO.

At the University of Michigan (U-M), where nearly 48,000 undergraduate and graduate students attend, there are approximately 80 employees working in ADO or similar roles. The university added these positions to each academic and administrative department in 2015 in response to student and faculty demand for cultural change following national social unrest.

These roles assume a wide-ranging set of duties that involve leadership, programming, and faculty, staff, and student responsibilities. A 2019 U-M report about ADO experiences found that the role can include the following tasks:

- Event planning and management
- Responding to campus incidents
- Coordinating awards and ceremonies
- Conducting and participating in DEI-related training
- Faculty, staff, and student engagement in recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts

A major benefit of ADOs is that they are able to better understand DEI issues that are unique to certain academic disciplines, explains Tabbye Chavous, PhD, a former ADO in the U-M College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, director of the National Center for Institutional Diversity, and a professor of education and psychology. An ADO who works in an engineering college is likely to have different challenges and goals than one who works in a nursing college, because their student and colleague demographics are usually quite different, for example, Chavous points out.

“Getting the work done requires distributed leadership,” Chavous explains. “The ADO role is a way of infusing diversity leadership — and when I say diversity leadership, I mean people who have skills, training, and experiences around these processes that they will then be bringing to their local unit.”

Most of U-M’s ADOs have backgrounds as faculty members or are professionals in student affairs, general administration, and community organizing, according to the 2019 report. The university found that ADO training comes in a variety of forms, including formal education and lived experiences.

Compared to the position of CDO, this role is still new...
and evolving, according to Chavous, who recently presented a keynote about ADOs at a National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education conference. The association has launched a fellowship program to provide mentorship for early career ADOs in part, she says, because the position is so new.

Interest in learning more about the evolving nature of this position and the resources necessary to support its success is why U-M conducted its 2019 ADO study, Chavous says.

“There’s not always clarity around types of financial, staffing, or other kinds of support that are needed for the role,” she explains.

One of the major distinctions between this role and that of a CDO is the scope of the position, according to Julian Williams, JD, the inaugural vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of South Carolina (UofSC).

“The academic diversity officer is primarily focused on their particular college or school, and that specific focus allows them to really lead some transformative work in that unit because they don’t have to worry about what’s happening more broadly on campus or on other campuses,” he says.

At UofSC, which has nearly 35,000 undergraduate and graduate students, each academic college has at least one ADO, as does the athletic department and each campus library. Most of these positions are associate deanships and are responsible for developing and implementing DEI strategic plans at the unit level that focus on student inclusion and success. Many ADOs are faculty members or have an academic specialty that allows them to have a unique relationship with their department, dean, and faculty colleagues, according to Williams. Unlike CDOs, who report to the university president, they report to their college deans.

Williams works alongside the university provost and president to make sure UofSC’s ADOs are connected, sharing ideas, and not working in silos. “We really see [ADOs] as a source of strength for us,” he says.

Williams says he meets regularly with the college deans and with UofSC’s Council of Academic Diversity Officers several times each semester. The university developed the council to facilitate cross-campus ADO collaboration. This May, it hosted its first retreat for the officers; the two-day event included team-building exercises, conversations about mental health, and strategy sessions on topics such as economic leadership.

“[ADOs] as a source of strength for us,” he says.

Williams explains.

At UofSC, the funding for the ADOs comes from the individual academic departments. Some diversity officers are hired specifically to do DEI work full time, while others may receive a course release so that they can focus on this work. It varies depending on the unit, according to Williams.

Coretta Jenerette, PhD, is the ADO for UofSC’s College of Nursing and a professor. She says that 50 percent of her time is devoted to DEI work, such as implementing holistic admissions to

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nursing faculty of color.

While having a CDO lead campus-wide DEI efforts may seem obvious, establishing an ADO position to oversee these more specific programs can be crucial for their success, Jenerette says.

“You need a chief diversity officer, but you also need boots on the ground in all units, because those are the people who should be the eyes and ears of all constituents — the faculty, staff, and students — in order to communicate needs to the chief diversity officer, who is a member of the senior leadership of the university,” she says. “It’s like a government model where you have people out in the communities who can then bring in information, and it can go to the top where a lot of the decisions are made.”

Chavous, who will assume the role of U-M vice provost for equity and inclusion and chief diversity officer on August 1, says that current political pushback for DEI work on college campuses makes the ADO role more vital than ever. While each of these officers may deal with very different issues based on their academic disciplines and campus units, together they are crucial to supporting the overall success of the campus community.

“Now more than ever, these roles are often going to come up against resistance because of what’s happening societally with regard to divisive concepts legislation, what can be taught or not taught in educational spaces, and the things that are happening in terms of rolling back freedoms around personal voting and reproductive rights,” Chavous says. “There’s a need for even more engagement both within institutions and across [campuses] so that there can be important sharing and collective work related to addressing these new challenges, which are a form of resistance to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. On some campuses, one person doing this work is not enough.”

Mariah Stewart is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity. The University of South Carolina is a 2019 INSIGHT Into Diversity Diversity Champion and a 2012 and 2015–2019 recipient of the INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award. The University of Michigan is a 2018-2020 recipient of the HEED Award.

The September issue of INSIGHT Into Diversity will feature special reports on science, technology, engineering, and math schools, as well as our annual Inspiring Programs in STEM Award winners.

The advertising deadline is August 8. For information, please call 314-200-9955 or email ads@insightintodiversity.com.
As much of the U.S. labor market continues to contend with major shortages, college financial aid offices are struggling to find and retain qualified employees. While many had vacancies prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue has become exacerbated in the last two years amid increased demand for financial assistance from students.

Finding and retaining full-time employees for these roles is one of the primary challenges for colleges, with the NASFAA report showing that 84 percent of schools indicated it was “very difficult” to fill positions with qualified personnel. Respondents cited the following as the main reasons why:

- Not enough qualified applicants
- Unable to offer competitive salaries
- Delayed hiring process and lost candidates
- Unable to offer a permanent remote workplace
- Institutional hiring freezes

Despite these challenges, half of all the institutions surveyed said they do not use temporary staffing. Many financial aid roles are permanent, full-time positions that require thorough knowledge of complex federal and state regulations and the ability to help both colleges and students navigate intricate systems of grants and loans. Training temporary staff for such responsibilities is therefore not always feasible.

“I think the staff shortages are a combination of people who are retiring or they’re leaving the industry to do something else,” says Amy Cable, EdD, executive director of student services at the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), which has several campuses with open financial aid positions. “But I also think there are historical shortages in financial aid offices because they say, ‘Oh, we’re just a very small college, we only need a couple of people in our office.’ And then you see the repercussions of that when people start to leave.”
While shortages can be difficult to manage for any higher education office, a lack of financial aid staff can have serious ramifications across campus — including potentially affecting an institution’s ability to meet federal administrative capability requirements, according to NASFAA. Although the U.S. Department of Education relaxed some of these expectations during the pandemic, many colleges are concerned about what the future holds, especially since the department announced in October 2021 that it plans to re-establish the Office of Enforcement within Federal Student Aid. Designed to provide more oversight of institutional compliance with federal student financial assistance programs, the office has largely been inactive since it was “deprioritized” by the Trump administration, according to a government press release.

“We are stretched very thin and prioritize federal compliance ahead of other projects,” Elijah Herr, PhD, director of financial aid at Portland State University (PSU), told INSIGHT in an email. “That means that other institutional projects and priorities have to take a back seat to basic compliance and oversight. It also means our adaptive capacity is negligible, as is our ability to do long-term planning and systemic improvement.”

PSU’s financial aid office currently has five positions open. Although nine employees have been hired in the office within the last year and a half, Herr says that it is difficult to retain staff, especially those who are seeking remote work options and higher pay.

“Essentially, we are treading water hoping that there aren’t any large new regulatory burdens placed on our office from the Department of Education, the state, or our institution,” Herr says. To make up for shortages, the office’s leadership have had to take on more of the duties of daily operation, which “leaves less time for strategic planning, process improvement, designing contingency plans, professional development, or participation in our associations,” according to Herr.

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), which has eight vacancies in its Financial Aid and Scholarships office, has developed some creative solutions to address shortages. The office has shortened its hours and is working to automate as many of its functions as possible — such as creating a chatbot to answer questions for students in both English and Spanish, according to a spokesperson.

In addition, both PSU’s and UCLA’s financial aid units say they are now offering more remote employment options to compete with other positions in the job market. NASFAA stated in its report that it plans to work with its member institutions to determine better ways of classifying financial aid employees and the salary categories they fit into. These efforts could mean offices would be able to offer more competitive salaries, helping to alleviate one of the biggest challenges with recruiting and retaining staff. The association said it will also collaborate with schools to develop best practices for job duties and responsibilities for Federal Work-Study students and graduate assistants, which could help to create a pipeline of future qualified candidates.

Until more is done on a national scale to address the financial aid sector’s labor challenges, it is up to individual institutions to find the best way to support their staff, according to leaders like Cable at LCTCS. Reducing redundancies and automating processes can help to relieve the burden on overworked employees, but it is also important to focus on building supportive relationships with staff.

“[The system’s] goal is to really make sure that we have good relationships with the financial aid directors and the training teams at our colleges and let them know if they need something, we are here to help,” Cable says. She adds that, despite the tremendous work that these employees do, their contributions tend to be overlooked.

“I often say [financial aid staff] are the superheroes of the college,” she says, “but I think we are often thought of last.”

Lisa O’Malley is the assistant editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Top-Ranking Colleges and Universities Focus on Transfer Students as One Key to Increasing Diversity

By Carolyn Hogan-Downey, PhD

In recent years, especially in the wake of the 2020 racial justice movement, a growing number of higher education institutions have begun prioritizing diversity in admissions. While many of these colleges continue to focus primarily on first-year recruitment as a means of increasing multiculturalism on campus, some top-ranking schools have turned their attention to transfer students.

At some of the nation’s most competitive colleges, transfer acceptance rates are now even higher than first-year acceptance rates. Such is the case at a number of prestigious flagship institutions — including the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), University of Michigan (U-M), and University of Virginia (UVA) — and a small collection of highly selective schools, including the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), Cornell University, and Dartmouth College.

Students who transfer to a top-tier college are more likely to be ethnically or racially underrepresented or to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially if they are “upward transfers,” or students who transition from a two-year college to a four-year institution.

“Community college transfer students bring a really important perspective to campus,” says Tania LaViolet, PhD, director of the College Excellence Program (CEP) at the Aspen Institute. “Not only are they more racially and socioeconomically diverse, but they also have more diverse backgrounds in terms of age and life experience.”

At CEP, LaViolet helps lead the American Talent Initiative (ATI), a coalition of 128 high-ranking colleges and universities that share a commitment to “accelerating opportunity and expanding access and success for talented students from lower-income backgrounds,” its website states. Part of this commitment includes recruiting high-achieving students from community colleges. Member institutions such as UCLA, U-M, and UVA have seen notable increases in upward transfer rates through their work with the initiative.

Recruiting community college students begins with outreach and spreading the message that transferring to a top-ranking institution from a two-year school is possible, according to LaViolet. Many of these students “don’t see it as an option for themselves despite having all the talents to excel,” she says. “It’s really important for selective institutions to be out there, to say ‘We want you,’ to share stories of transfer students who are on their campuses and who contributed in really incredible ways to the campus culture and are doing great things.”

Partnerships with educational groups like ATI are another effective method for reaching potential transfers. With support from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, the initiative’s Transfer Scholars Network (TSN) allows four-year institutions to identify and reach out to community college students who have demonstrated that they can succeed in rigorous academic environments. The TSN asks faculty and advisers at two-year institutions to nominate high-achieving students for the network. It then connects these nominees with admissions staff at top-ranking colleges and universities. Thus far, LaViolet says, students have responded well to this type of recruitment method.

“They’re honored to be nominated,” she explains. “They’re incredibly talented, but they haven’t thought about transferring to a prestigious institution. It takes someone saying they think they’d be great at that school for them to consider it.”

Institutional partnerships are also useful for recruiting and retaining transfer students. For example, schools can work together to create articulation agreements — or documents that establish which credits transfer between their institutions — to establish clear and efficient transfer pathways. Students often find that the process of transferring credits is one of the most significant impediments to transitioning to a new institution, according to LaViolet. This can be especially true for upward transfers applying to more prestigious campuses.

“In some cases, there is some skepticism about whether or not those [community college] courses or the experience in those classrooms is equivalent to courses that the students would be taking at a selective college,” she says. Once schools begin working together, however, they tend to overcome this skepticism. Allowing faculty across different institutions to develop close working relationships while creating articulation agreements or other partnerships aids in this process. “When you bring faculty together, it really starts to demystify
what the community college experience is,” explains LaViolet.

One top-ranking institution that has successfully implemented some of the recruitment methods recommended by LaViolet is Cornell University. While transfer admission rates in Ivy League schools generally lag far behind first-year admissions, Cornell reverses this trend. It admitted 15.7 percent of transfer students applying to attend for the fall 2021 semester, compared with only 8.7 percent of its first-year applicants.

Shawn Felton, executive director of undergraduate admissions, says the university works closely with other institutions and organizations across the U.S. to ensure that individuals who are considering transferring to its campus know they will be coming to a welcoming, inclusive community.

“California, New York, and other states with strong two-year institutional options routinely send us transfer candidates,” he explains. “As New York state’s land-grant institution, Cornell also relies on rich partnerships across the state to build visibility and engage with other regional education centers.”

The university’s website provides multiple resources for current and potential transfers. In addition to a detailed guide on changing colleges, the site shares stories of individuals who have found success at Cornell after first attending other higher education institutions. The ATI points to these stories as a positive recruitment tactic in its booklet *The Talent Blind Spot: The Practical Guide to*

*Increasing Community College Transfer to High Graduation Rate Institutions.* “Signaling transfer-friendliness, these transfer student profiles and perspectives aim to counteract reservations held by many transfer students,” it states.

UCLA, UC Berkeley, and other schools within the UC system have also succeeded in this area thanks in part to robust online resources. On its landing page, UC’s admissions website provides the links for information on transfer admissions and freshman admissions next to each other, equally visible and accessible. The header on its transfer student webpage states that nearly a third of the system’s students start out at a community college — readily dispelling any doubts that potential transfers may have about being welcomed on a UC campus.

The system’s website also provides ample information about financial aid for transfer students, as well as the virtual Transfer Admissions Planner, which allows prospective applicants to input their coursework, track their progress toward meeting basic credit requirements, and communicate with UC staff about important steps in the transfer process. In addition, the site connects users to California’s Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer tool, an online resource that helps those at public higher education institutions throughout the state determine which courses are accepted for credit at different colleges.

UC also hosts special events year-round where future applicants can meet directly with transfer advisers. All of these efforts help to ease the often complex process of switching institutions, contributing to high transfer rates even at the system’s most selective campuses. For fall 2021, UCLA accepted 19 percent of its transfer applicants but only 10.8 percent of its first-year applicants. UC Berkeley’s transfer admissions rate was 22 percent, compared with 14.5 percent for first-year admissions.

Institutions seeking to increase their transfer student enrollment can learn more about successful outreach, recruitment, and support methods by accessing free tools and guides provided by organizations like the Aspen Institute, says LaViolet. As more colleges commit to diversifying their admissions and promoting accessible, equitable education, such resources play a pivotal role in expanding opportunities for all students across two- and four-year campuses.

“We can’t have equity nationally in higher education,” she says, “unless there are no bounds for the talent at community colleges.”

Carolyn Hogan-Downey, PhD, is a contributing writer for *INSIGHT Into Diversity.* To learn more about recruiting and supporting transfer students, visit americantalentinitiative.org or aspeninstitute.org/programs/college-excellence-program.
Prioritize diversity in your hiring process

Don't be swayed by low pricing for diversity “boosts” on other job boards. Job posts to external websites receive very little traffic and are often not higher education focused.

The best way to let jobseekers know you are truly intentional about diversifying your institution's workforce is by posting open positions with a diversity-only job board such as INSIGHT Into Diversity’s Career Center.

INSIGHT Into Diversity has been connecting underrepresented jobseekers with employers who want to hire the most qualified diverse candidates for nearly 50 years. More than 750,000 professionals from a spectrum of underrepresented groups visit our online Career Center each month.

Visit insightintodiversity.com to learn more.
University of San Diego Effectively Eliminates Remaining Tuition Costs for Active Military and Veteran Students

In June, the University of San Diego (USD) announced that it is expanding its Yellow Ribbon Program to provide more financial support to military-affiliated students, essentially eliminating tuition for service members and their spouses.

Through the program, a provision of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, USD contributes up to 50 percent of the cost of tuition and fees that are unmet by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) matches the other half. Until now, funds were available only to student veterans and capped for undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and law students. In the fall, the program will expand to include active-duty service members and military spouses, and all caps will be lifted.

“We are committed to serving our military-connected students in ways that empower them to stay on the leading edge of learning and to uncover new and innovative ways to contribute to positive changes as they pursue their education and careers,” Nelson Chase, director of USD’s Military and Veterans Program, said in a press release.

Eligible students will not need to apply for the funding as it will already be considered in their financial aid calculations.

“This additional investment in the Yellow Ribbon Program deepens our commitment to our active-duty military, veterans, and other military-connected students,” Charlotte Johnson, vice president for student affairs, said in a press release. “USD honors the sacrifice of these students and their families and I am so pleased we are able to support their education in this way.”

There are approximately 800 military-connected students enrolled at USD, which accounts for nearly 9 percent of the university’s total student population, including undergraduate, graduate, paralegal, and law students.

In addition to the Yellow Ribbon Program, USD supports military-affiliated students through its robust Military and Veterans Program, an on-campus center that provides networking opportunities and comprehensive information about VA benefits.

FAU Matches Veteran Students with Shelter Dogs to Support Mental Health

A new program at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) is being praised for supporting veteran students, advancing mental health research, and providing rescue animals with good homes.

Created in early 2022, the FAU Veteran Canine Rescue Mission matches trained shelter dogs with members of the campus community who previously served in the military.

The primary goal of the program is to provide veteran students and alumni with companionship, emotional support, and assistance with disabilities — factors that are especially crucial for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The new project operates in partnership with the Humane Society of Broward County and Happy with Dogs, a veteran-owned dog training center, and is part of the FAU Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing’s Canines Providing Assistance to Wounded Warriors (C-P.A.W.W.) initiative.

The mission of C-P.A.W.W. is to advance interdisciplinary research, education, and practices that support veteran health by developing canine-assisted therapeutic interventions. The FAU Veteran Canine Rescue Mission includes a research component that examines the emotional bond between humans and dogs and the impact of this relationship on mental health.

Preliminary findings have revealed reduced PTSD symptoms in veterans who have canine companions, according to Cheryl Krause-Parello, C-P.A.W.W. director and interim associate dean for nursing research and scholarship.

“Having a dog can be a lifeline for veterans struggling with reintegration into civilian life and living with psychological and cognitive wounds,” she said in a press release. “We have shown that just walking with a dog can decrease the severity of veterans’ [PTSD] symptoms and reduce stress …, making this work all the more vital.”

Lenny Polidor, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and third-year FAU student, was the first person to sign up for the FAU Veteran Canine Rescue Mission. He was matched with Lena, a three-month-old Labrador-bulldog mix, to help him better manage the stressors that come with being a student, veteran, and security worker. In a press release, Polidor said he hopes his joining the program will encourage other veterans to do the same and to seek mental health services if they are struggling.

“This program is designed to address my stress and mental well-being, and Lena is going to help me manage my life more effectively,” he said. “More importantly, I hope that my participation in the Veteran Canine Rescue Mission program will bring awareness to other FAU veteran students who may need help.”
At MUSC we are proud of our military veterans.

We celebrate all who have served or continue to serve in our armed forces. Our veteran employees demonstrate leadership everyday through honor, commitment and teamwork in changing what’s possible at MUSC. We honor their dedication to service, and we invite all to consider MUSC to further their careers or education.

Use this QR code to find out more about job opportunities at MUSC.
FEDERAL VITAL PROGRAM DELIVERS EXTENSIVE CAMPUS SUPPORT TO STUDENT VETERANS

By Mariah Stewart

Many higher education institutions offer support to active military and veteran students through designated offices and personnel, but these individuals may still need to go off campus to receive additional services through their local Veterans Affairs (VA) facility. A growing number of colleges, however, are taking advantage of a unique federal program that allows them to streamline VA resources and better serve their military student populations.
The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program assigns VA staff members who specialize in mental health support or social work directly to college campuses, where they provide ongoing assistance with the process of transitioning to civilian life.

Unlike other campus military services, which are typically supported by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), VITAL is provided through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), explains Elizabeth Louer-Thompson, the program's national director. VITAL coordinators are VA employees who may work full time on a college campus or make regular visits to meet with students. The services they offer are wide-ranging and vary by school, but all are designed to support student veteran success and well-being.

“We try to tailor our services to the needs of the schools and our student veterans,” Louer-Thompson says.

According to the program's website, it strives to enhance academic retention through the following:

- On-campus clinical care and coordination
- Improving understanding of veterans' unique strengths and challenges through education and training delivered to the campus community
- Collaborating with the local VA medical center, the VBA, campus faculty and staff members, and community resources

Yvette Branson, PhD, a clinical psychologist and the VITAL coordinator for the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, explains that VITAL is “the only federal outreach program in mental health that addresses the needs of student veterans on college campuses.”

Branson, who works with schools such as Columbia University and Fordham University, says the program serves as a “one-stop shop” for engaging with student veterans while they are transitioning to campus life and studying for civilian careers. VITAL coordinators such as herself can help students enroll in VA benefits, find affordable housing and transportation, manage their finances, connect with peer mentors, and much more.

Having this extra support available on campus is especially valuable to student veterans because many of them are nontraditional students with busy schedules. Most are older than 24 and have families and other responsibilities outside of school, according to Branson. Many are also first-generation students and may not know how to navigate higher education environments.

Women are the fastest growing demographic group in the U.S. military, representing 17 percent of active-duty service members and 10.5 percent of U.S. veterans. Yet research shows that this population faces a myriad of unique challenges when transitioning back to civilian life. For those who are ethnically or racially underrepresented, these challenges can be compounded by systemic barriers related to having a marginalized identity, according to a 2021 study in The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.

In recognition of the unique obstacles faced by veterans who are women, some higher education institutions and organizations offer innovative programs tailored to serving this demographic.

The Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University offers the Focus Forward Fellowship, a competitive program designed to build skills, leadership, and a sense of community among military women. Fellows are matched with corporate mentors, learn how to discover and maximize their personal strengths, and more.

Stephens College, a private women's institution, recently founded the Mission Promise Kept program with the goal of improving retention, graduation, and career success for student veterans. Participants and their children will live in an on-campus community set to open in fall 2022 and have access to multiple services designed to support their personal and academic goals.

The Syracuse University D’Aniello Institute for Veterans and Families operates Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE), a three-part training program that helps women veterans and military spouses “find their passion and learn the business savvy skills necessary to turn an idea or start-up into a growing venture,” according to its website. V-WISE includes online coursework, a residency experience featuring Fortune 500 CEOs, and ongoing support focused on small business creation and growth.

The Women's Veterans Network (WoVeN) is a social support group founded by Boston University School of Medicine researchers that connects women who have served in the armed forces with information, education, and resources to improve their quality of life. In addition to mental health, career, and family support, WoVeN offers the BRIDGES program to provide ongoing assistance to those transitioning to civilian life.
The glitches and vagaries of transitioning from the military to civilian life have many challenges, so VITAL offers the support [student veterans] need right where they are,” Branson says. “We can even consider this a suicide prevention program, since helping veterans address any transition issues early in their separation from the military can only have a positive impact on their well-being.”

The program coordinators also provide training to faculty and staff on understanding the unique barriers to success that military students face. They seek to raise awareness of military culture, post-deployment adjustment, common psychological and physical conditions among veterans, and other factors that influence how these students perform and interact in the classroom.

“We understand that many postsecondary education professionals may not understand the experiences of these veterans,” the VA website states. “Our purpose is to educate members of the faculty, staff, and administration and students as well about the unique strengths and challenges of student veterans.”

VITAL coordinators also help these individuals succeed academically by assisting with skills such as time management and ensuring they receive necessary classroom accommodations. These can include extra time on exams for those who experience test anxiety, assistive technology for those with traumatic brain injuries, or unique modifications for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and related conditions.

“If being in a classroom environment was giving me too much anxiety, they were able to make it so I could be in a room with less people or be near a door or an exit, if that was my trouble,” a VITAL participant explains in a promotional video for the program. “I’d be reluctant going to schools where they don’t offer these type of services.”

Some colleges have partnered with the VITAL program to provide their student veterans with additional support in light of the hardships wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chris Bowers, the military transitions coordinator at Washburn University (WU) and a U.S. Army veteran, says that the pandemic diminished the sense of connectedness among military students that is usually quite strong. The WU student veteran community is tight-knit, but being unable to visit the campus’s Military-Student Success Center or gather with peers for meals, sports, and other activities on campus took a toll on its members, he says.

In spring 2021, Bowers’ office partnered with Topeka’s Colmery-O’Neil VA Medical Center to launch the only VITAL program in Kansas. A VA clinical psychologist and a social worker now spend one day a week at WU and are available via phone or email any time a student veteran needs extra mental health support.

“We’re just using a team of people to get them through [college] rather than [having] them wandering around campus on their own, trying to navigate all the stresses of being a student veteran,” says Bowers.

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), which is home to 1,800 student veterans, launched its VITAL program in fall 2021. James Taylor, a licensed clinical social worker and military veteran, serves as the on-campus coordinator. In a press release, he explained that students can call him for help with anything, whether it be issues with housing, medical problems, or a crisis situation.

“The goal is to provide services that a veteran would get at the VA hospital right here on campus,” Taylor stated in the release. “Sometimes when a veteran decides to get care at the VA hospital, it can be a huge headache, and because of that, they sometimes don’t get the help they need.”

Colleges and universities that are interested in launching their own VITAL programs should consult with their local VA medical center, says Louer-Thompson. Most of these facilities offer some level of services to student veterans.

“We work with medical centers to help them develop strong practices around serving the veterans and the institutions of higher learning in their communities,” she says. “Each facility is really encouraged to meet with school leadership and figure out what are the needs of student veterans on that campus and see if the capabilities that we have in the VHA really help to meet those needs.”

Mariah Stewart is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Rochester Institute of Technology is committed to supporting active duty military, veterans and their families. A good example is Amy Ortiz, assistant director of Veterans Upward Bound (VUB). Much of her work is done outside her campus office, in veteran’s shelters, coffee shops and yes, tattoo parlors.

“My job is to help military veterans continue their education goals, helping them to apply for college and navigate VA paperwork. To do this, I find and meet with military veterans in a 9-county region in upstate New York. I meet with these incredible men and women in a public place that is convenient for them. I listen to their story, try to understand their education goals, and help them execute a plan.”

This past academic year, she and her colleagues in VUB helped 125 low-income, first generation military veterans move into postsecondary education.

Veterans Upward Bound is one of a number of programs offered or supported by RIT. The Veteran Services Office has been around for half a century. The Veterans and Military Club and the ROTC Army and Air Force Programs are based on campus. RIT supports the Yellow Ribbon Program.

RIT’s longstanding Veterans Day Breakfast celebrated its 10th year in 2021. The event, open to the Rochester, NY community, always draws hundreds of veterans and their families to campus to meet, share a meal and honor the men and women who serve.

Others recognize RIT’s commitment. The university is consistently ranked among the best colleges for veterans by U.S. News & World Report. It is designated once again as a Military Friendly School, this year in the bronze category for 2022-2023 by the organization, The Military Friendly® Schools. RIT’s Air Force ROTC Detachment 538 has been named the “Right of Line Medium Size Detachment of the Year”, the highest recognition given to an AFROTC detachment.

Rachel Mathews, director of RIT’s Veterans Upward Bound says, “We understand active duty military and student veterans’ needs.”
University Research Centers Lead Groundbreaking Efforts to Improve Military Service-Related Mental Health

By Lisa O’Malley

The mental health crisis among current and former members of the armed forces continues to be a pressing concern nationwide, with much research showing that suicide rates for these populations have risen significantly in recent decades. A 2021 report from Brown University estimates that four times as many service members and veterans who served since September 11, 2001 have died by suicide than by combat.

Across the U.S., colleges and universities have identified military service-related mental health issues as a crucial area of study, education, and advocacy. Through cutting-edge research, treatment programs, and outreach initiatives, higher education institutions are working to find solutions to improve the health and well-being of veterans and their families.

INSIGHT highlights some of the most innovative research centers across the U.S. that are dedicated to helping veterans and current service members access the resources and support they need to thrive.

Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families
University of Southern California
Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work
Founded in 2009, the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families (CIR) is dedicated to increasing the number of clinical social workers and behavioral health providers who work with members of the armed forces.

In addition to conducting educational and behavioral health research, the center provides training to qualified community providers on how to treat veterans and current service members. A collaborative partnership with the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies makes it possible for CIR to incorporate artificial intelligence technology into these lessons. During training, social work students participate in consultations with virtual avatars who simulate the experiences of veterans who have been exposed to combat stress. CIR also created a computer-administered assessment to measure students’ communication skills, cultural awareness, understanding of potential ethical and legal concerns, and more. Efforts are currently underway to develop telehealth services and online behavioral health intervention models.

Military Family Research Institute
Purdue University
For nearly 30 years, the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) has specialized in studying the families of service members and determining best practices for improving their relationships and well-being. Research projects have focused on topics such as diversity among military families, shifting family roles during and after deployment, and the effects of parental deployment on young children. As part of its research, the MFRI has worked with the nonprofits Sesame Workshop and ZERO TO THREE — both of which focus on supporting the needs of babies and young children — to analyze the effectiveness of their educational materials for military families.

The MFRI also collaborates with organizations and institutions in Indiana and across the nation to support the academic and professional success of student veterans and military members. These efforts include launching a fellowship for women student veterans, offering hands-on assistance to colleges and student veteran organizations,
and providing more than $2.5 million in funding to bolster institutional support for this demographic.

Military Suicide Research Consortium
Florida State University
The Military Suicide Research Consortium (MSRC) was created by the U.S. Department of Defense to establish a multidisciplinary approach to suicide prevention among military service members and veterans. The consortium is part of the department’s National Research Action Plan that seeks to improve the scientific understanding of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries, and related conditions.

Though primarily operated out of Florida State University, MSRC staff members are also based at the Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center and the University of Washington (UW). There are currently 19 MSRC research projects in progress at multiple institutions, including Miami University, the University of Pennsylvania, and UW. Most of these studies are focused on evaluating innovative therapy methods and other intervention strategies that help clinicians identify and treat service members who are at risk of suicide.

Resilience Center for Veterans and Families
Columbia University Teachers College
Building resilience is a key strategy for helping veterans and their families adjust back into civilian life. The Resilience Center for Veterans and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University, aims to assist in this process by researching and assessing intervention programs that can positively affect health and well-being for military service members as they transition out of active duty.

The center has helped to change perceptions around military mental health through studies that show that PTSD is less of a concern for many recent veterans compared with the challenges of finding a job, working alongside other civilians, and maintaining relationships with family and friends.

The Resilience Center also partners with the college’s Dean Hope Center for Educational and Psychological Services to recruit and train students to counsel veterans and their families.

Suicide and Trauma Reduction Initiative for Veterans
The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center
A national leader in suicide prevention and PTSD treatment, the Suicide and Trauma Reduction Initiative for Veterans (STRIVE) located at The Ohio State University (OSU) Wexner Medical Center has helped hundreds of veterans manage stress and trauma.

One of STRIVE’s key initiatives is a two-week intensive treatment program for veterans with PTSD that has successfully helped 75 percent of participants improve their symptoms. The free program is offered both in-person on OSU’s campus and virtually through daily telehealth appointments.

STRIVE also oversees ongoing research on ways to advance psychological treatments, including active studies investigating the efficacy of peer-to-peer programs, evaluations on military primary care screening methods for mental health and suicide, and more.

Lisa O’Malley is the assistant editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.

Student Veteran Mental Health

A 2019 study in the Journal of American College Health found that student veterans have high rates of mental health symptoms but are more likely to receive treatment than non-military students. Nearly 40 percent of student veterans surveyed in the study screened positive for depression, 35 percent for post-traumatic stress disorder, and 29.5 percent for anxiety.
Experts Encourage College Campuses to Prepare for Repercussions of *Roe v. Wade’s* Overturn

Reproductive justice advocates say that colleges must brace for the detrimental effects of state abortion bans, especially for marginalized students and employees.

By Mariah Bohanon
On June 24, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a ruling that had protected reproductive rights in the U.S. for nearly half a century. While many were expecting the court to reverse the 1973 case of Roe v. Wade, the backpedaling of such monumental legislation was nevertheless a drastic blow for equal rights advocates.

Experts in reproductive health had already begun encouraging colleges and universities to prepare for the ripple effects of the court’s decision since a draft opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito was leaked to the press on May 2. With 26 states having abortion bans, or trigger laws, set to take effect immediately, many of these experts have been cautioning that underserved students and employees will be the most impacted by the ruling.

“People of color and other marginalized people, like those who are low-income, are the most affected by abortion restrictions and will be most affected by an abortion ban,” says Asia Eaton, PhD, associate professor of psychology at Florida International University and director of the Power, Women, and Relationships Lab.

These issues can be understood through the lens of reproductive justice, she says, which is a framework founded by women of color that explores how systems of power, privilege, and oppression affect bodily autonomy, parenting rights, and more.

“Reproductive justice is about how all of these systems intersect to impact our ability to have families how and when we want and to parent them in a safe and healthy environment,” Eaton states.

Reproductive justice scholars note that women of color must contend with many socioeconomic barriers to health care in addition to disproportionately high rates of sexual abuse, reproductive coercion, and maternal mortality. As such, Black and Latinx women have the highest abortion rates in the U.S. and will be the most affected by bans, according to Eaton. This includes those who are attending or employed by colleges and universities.

“A ban on abortion will increase college dropout rates for women, especially women of color,” says Eaton. “Caring for a child that you haven’t planned for is at odds with attending college, not to mention the fact that you might have health complications that make it impossible to continue in school.”

Women of color are more likely to experience pregnancy-related complications and have higher maternal mortality rates than those who are White, and the U.S. overall has higher maternal mortality rates than other developed countries.

Furthermore, according to Eaton, researchers have found that unplanned pregnancy is a leading reason that young people drop out of college.

Forty percent of those who seek an abortion in this country do so because having a child could derail their education, she says. “Abortion restrictions, even if they are not an outright ban, affect dropout rates and educational attainment, so we’re going to see the education gap and income gap exacerbate.”

While some students may choose to attend college in states that protect reproductive rights, many who live in places with abortion bans do not have a choice, Eaton notes. Privileged students who have the ability to select from multiple colleges across the U.S. may opt for places that support reproductive justice, but it is rare that a student can afford to make a decision about where to attend school based on state abortion regulations, she says.

“That option applies less to low-income students, students of color, students who have tight-knit family communities, or who may be from more

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What Is Reproductive Justice?

According to Planned Parenthood, the term reproductive justice was “coined by a group of Black women in 1994 in recognition that the Women’s Rights Movement, led by and representing White women, lacked a lens that could more equitably fight for the needs of Black, Indigenous, and women of color, and other marginalized people. Reproductive justice looks at reproductive health and rights through a human rights and social justice framework. It fights equally for the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, the right to raise children in safe and healthy conditions regardless of socioeconomic identity, and the right to bodily autonomy.”

“A reproductive justice framework analyzes power systems and addresses intersecting oppressions,” according to Planned Parenthood. “Through a reproductive justice framework, we can begin to understand and dismantle the barriers that prevent people from being able to access health care, raise their families in safe communities, and make decisions about their health, their bodies, and their lives.”
collectivist cultures and want to stay near family,” explains Eaton.

She says that higher education institutions in states with abortion bans should ensure that their campus health centers make emergency contraception and other reproductive services easily accessible. For students and employees, especially those who are low-income, accessing these services off campus can be costly and burdensome. Having options readily available could prevent them from having to choose between traveling to another state to receive the overturn of Roe v. Wade. Michigan has one of the strictest trigger laws in the country, as state legislation passed in 1931 bans all abortions except to save the life of a mother. A judge recently granted a preliminary injunction on the law after Planned Parenthood filed a lawsuit to prevent it going into effect, but conservative state leaders have vowed to fight for its enactment.

“Me and my colleagues who provide reproductive health care, including abortion care, saw the massive impact that a ban on abortion said they would not take a job in a state that prohibits the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy, and nearly half said they would consider moving out of a state that passed such a law. Experts note, however, that changing jobs or choosing to go to college out of state is not financially or logistically possible for many people.

If Michigan does ban abortion, it is estimated that birth rates in the state will increase by 5 to 17 percent, according to Harris. The university’s task force is studying how this would

Some past research has found that college-educated workers are more likely to avoid or move out of states that pass restrictive abortion laws. In September 2021, the research firm PerryUndem revealed that 66 percent of people with college degrees said they would not take a job in a state that prohibits the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy, and nearly half said they would consider moving out of a state that passed such a law.

abortion care — an option that would be financially and logistically impossible for some — or having an unplanned pregnancy.

In addition to providing contraception, colleges located in states where abortion is outlawed should ensure that residence hall staff, mental health care providers, and others who work in student services know how to support someone who experiences an unplanned pregnancy, says Lisa Harris, MD, PhD, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the University of Michigan (U-M) Medical School.

Higher education institutions should also consider whether their student and employee health insurance will cover out-of-state abortion care and if campus support programs are in place to help students who unexpectedly become parents, she says. U-M formed a task force in May to research these and other issues in preparation for would have across the state and across the University of Michigan’s many missions, and we realized that this is something that needs preparation,” explains Harris, who serves as co-chair of the task force.

Some colleges and universities may not want to engage with these issues because abortion is so politicized, but campus leaders should realize that Roe v. Wade’s overturn will have significant repercussions on multiple aspects of higher education, Harris says. U-M is considering, for example, how long-term recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff may be affected if Michigan’s abortion ban is allowed to go into effect.

Some past research has found that college-educated workers are more likely to avoid or move out of states that pass restrictive abortion laws. In September 2021, the research firm PerryUndem revealed that 66 percent of people with college degrees increase demand on the U-M health system, especially its birthing center. It is considering other aspects of the law, such as whether U-M providers would be able to legally deliver preoperative or pre-referral care to people who decide to seek abortions outside the state. Another significant area of study is how underrepresented populations — both on campus and across the state — could be affected.

The task force is also concerned with how this could restrict medical education. U-M medical residents may have to be sent out of state to receive training in abortion care, which could affect accreditation or deter some future physicians from choosing to train with the university, Harris says.

“We’re thinking about if we will be able to remain one of the top programs in the country if we can’t continue to offer this care or if we need to send people out of state for their training,” she explains.

Pamela Merritt, executive director of the advocacy group Medical Students
How Campus Health Centers May Be Affected

With Roe v. Wade’s overturn, campus health centers across multiple states face uncertainties regarding what services they will be allowed to provide to students and employees. Some states have trigger laws that immediately banned all forms of abortion — including medication abortion — while others only outlawed the medical procedure. In a small number of red states, conservative lawmakers say they are considering introducing measures that would severely restrict or ban some contraception, including intrauterine devices and Plan B pills, though other government leaders have pledged to block such attempts.

By contrast, some blue states are pushing for colleges and universities to make contraception and medication abortion more accessible. California passed a law in 2019 declaring that all health centers at public higher education institutions must provide abortion pills by 2023, and Massachusetts lawmakers are currently considering a similar measure.

for Choice (MSFC), says that the overturn of Roe v. Wade will have major repercussions on how and where medical students choose to attend school. MSFC, which has 220 chapters worldwide, is already hearing from student members in red states that they are concerned about how their training and career prospects will be affected if they are unable to learn how to provide abortion care to patients.

“I don’t know very many people who want to go into a specialty like OB-GYN and practice in a state where they have to accept the death of a patient who could be saved simply because of legal policy, not medical ethics,” Merritt says.

It is extremely difficult to transfer medical schools and nearly impossible to change residency programs, so many MSFC members in states with trigger laws feel stuck, she explains. The organization is working, however, to encourage campus leaders to take a stand in supporting the rights of students to be trained in this procedure. It is currently circulating petitions to medical school deans across the U.S. asking them to publicly declare that their institution will still provide abortion training.

Despite the Supreme Court’s decision, MSFC will continue to fight to expand access to this service and promote reproductive justice, says Merritt.

“We were already in the position for about the last 12 months that we were going to see Roe fall,” she explains, “and I think the broader movement has pretty much been hoping for the best by organizing but anticipating the worst.”

Advocates also caution that overturning Roe v. Wade will have detrimental effects on women’s careers. Taking away this choice for women can interrupt or even end their career paths and the substantial gains they have made in the workplace.

“This is a huge setback,” outgoing Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg, an advocate for women’s rights in the professional world, posted online shortly after the Supreme Court’s decision was announced. “For ourselves, our daughters, and every generation that follows, we must keep up the fight. Together, we must protect and expand abortion access.”

Mariah Bohanon is the managing editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity.
Today’s law school students are learning legal education during unprecedented times. Recent controversial changes surrounding abortion rights, the COVID-19 pandemic, and federal Title IX policies are making law schools a focal point in higher education and attracting more students. In 2021, these institutions saw a nearly 12 percent increase in first-year enrollment compared with the previous year, according to the American Bar Association (ABA).

The enrollment spike has also brought forth record-breaking diversity for top law schools. The achievement is especially notable considering the legal industry was described as “the least diverse profession in the nation” in 2015 by The Washington Post. As more students of color and women pursue degrees in this field, a growing number of schools are introducing progressive policies designed to encourage and support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

In this special section, INSIGHT explores some of these policies and innovative programs at law schools across the U.S., highlights the ABA’s innovative steps to promote DEI in legal education, speaks with some of the nation’s groundbreaking legal scholars, and more.

Two Prestigious Law Schools Eliminate Tuition for Low-Income Students

Yale Law School (YLS) and Stanford Law School (SLS) each recently announced that they are eliminating tuition for low-income students, making them the first elite law schools in the country to offer such extensive need-based financial assistance.

YLS revealed in February that it would begin offering an annual scholarship to cover the full cost of tuition, fees, and some health coverage for students whose family income is below federal poverty guidelines and whose assets are worth less than $150,000.

In May, SLS Dean Jenny Martinez sent an email to students announcing a new scholarship that will cover tuition for first-year students whose family income is 150 percent of the poverty line — $41,625 for a family of four or $20,385 for an individual.

Both scholarship programs are set to take effect in fall 2022.

Proponents say the schools are taking a significant step in improving equity in legal education, especially among prestigious institutions. Only 2 percent of students at the top 20 U.S. law schools come from the lowest socioeconomic quartile, while more than 75 percent come from the highest socioeconomic quartile, according to SLS.

The announcements come as more top-tier institutions — including elite law and medical schools — are reporting record numbers of diverse applicants. In fall 2021, YLS reported that 54 percent of its first-year law students were people of color and 17 percent were first-generation college graduates.

“Almost three-quarters of our students receive financial aid,” YLS Dean Heather Gerken stated in a recent video on the school’s donations website. “But as we brought in these extraordinarily diverse classes, we began to see a pattern, which is our students who come from families below the poverty line experience debt differently.”

The school’s new funding is made possible thanks to a $20 million gift by YLS alum Soledad Hurst and will continue to be endowed by alumni, Reuters reports. Scholarship recipients will remain responsible for covering their personal living expenses, including books, travel, and room and board.

SLS says the new scholarship is one of several financial initiatives designed to support diversity, equity, and inclusion. Other efforts include covering all student loan payments for graduates in qualifying jobs who make less than $75,000 annually.

SLS has not detailed how it will fund the new initiatives, The Stanford Daily reports, but says that it plans to spend $3.1 million annually on financial aid assistance.

“I think most law firms want to do more, but it’s a matter of [law schools] figuring out how to really be helpful to them, because we can’t keep doing the same old things or we’re going to keep getting the same results. We actually need to think bigger and differently than we’ve ever done before.”

Leonard Baynes, JD, dean of the University of Houston of Law Center, in “The University of Houston Law Center Dedicates DEI Efforts to Supporting Students at Every Stage of their Journey” on page 58
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In 2021, documentary filmmaker Evangeline M. Mitchell released “Becoming Black Lawyers,” a short film that highlights the law school experiences of five first-generation African American attorneys. The documentary features interviews with lawyers Veronica N. Dunlap, Paula T. Edgar, Natasha M. Nurse, Marcus Sandifer, and Alexi Thomas, who recount their path to the Juris Doctor degree and the hardships of being Black law students at predominantly White institutions.

The subjects of the film detail their experiences of overt and covert racism from other students and professors as well as their successes in being the first lawyers in their respective families. Mitchell was inspired to create the film based on her own experiences as a Black law student and practicing attorney. In an interview featured on the film’s website, Mitchell speaks about instances in which some White classmates assumed she was not accomplished enough to be in law school.

“Even if race was considered in admissions for diversity purposes, the way we were treated, to me, felt like some White students thought we didn’t have any academic or other accomplishments to justify our presence there,” she said. “The everyday treatment felt like they believed that the only reason Black students were admitted was due to our being Black — not because we were at the top of our class, not because we had beaten the odds, not because we had demonstrated excellence academically and in other endeavors.”

“Becoming Black Lawyers” has won several awards at notable film showcases across the globe, including the Paris International Film Festival Awards, the Toronto Black Film Festival, the Montreal International Black Film Festival, and Tokyo Shorts. Mitchell hopes that the documentary will spark conversations about institutional racism in legal education and encourage other African Americans to pursue careers in law.

“My hope is that viewers walk away with insight to make them think more deeply about what it means to be Black in law schools in America and why representation is so vitally important, particularly during this period of racial reckoning,” she said. “I want Black people who aspire to become lawyers to understand that there are many challenges ahead, but that they absolutely need to persist and stay the course.”

The film can be viewed by request at BecomingBlackLawyers.com or through the Black-owned streaming service UrbanFlixToGo.

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**THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION FALL 2021**

**FIRST-YEAR STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

**By Race**
- Asian Men = 1,081
- Asian Women = 1,841
- Asian Other = 16
- Black Men = 1,188
- Black Women = 2,263
- Black Other = 14
- Hispanic Men = 2,304
- Hispanic Women = 3,297
- Hispanic Other = 16
- Native American Men = 84
- Native American Women = 112
- Native American Other = 1
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Men = 30
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Women = 63
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Other = 2
- Two or More Races Men = 672
- Two or More Races Women = 1,103
- Two or More Races Other = 10
- White Men = 11,944
- White Women = 14,024
- White Other = 98

**By Gender**
- Minority Men Total = 5,339
- Minority Women Total = 8,679
- Men Total = 18,494
- Women Total = 24,032
- Total Other = 192

As the number of students attending law school continues to rise, so do job opportunities for new graduates. According to the American Bar Association, 83 percent of students earning a Juris Doctor (JD) in 2021 had secured either full-time jobs that required passing the bar or jobs for which a JD is an advantage within 10 months of graduation, compared with 77 percent of those who earned a JD in 2020.
At the University of Connecticut School of Law, we celebrate diversity, equity and belonging not just in what we say and believe but in what we do to honor each member of our community. We strive to ensure that every individual feels valued and that all people feel welcome to express their identities in matters of gender, race, ethnicity, religion and socio-political background. Each of their contributions build an inclusive culture of belonging at UConn Law, and our individual experiences guide us in how we look at and learn the law.

**Access and Opportunity:** Creating meaningful access to and opportunity in the legal profession is a priority at the UConn School of Law. In 2021, Dean Eboni S. Nelson established the Constance Belton Green Diversity Fund to provide broad support for diversity, racial and social justice initiatives at UConn Law. The fund enables scholarships, fellowships and initiatives that strengthen diversity, equity and belonging on campus. Our pipeline programs, which help middle school and high school students envision themselves as future lawyers, are among the ways we open pathways for members of groups underrepresented in the profession to enter law school and the legal profession.

**Curriculum:** The UConn School of Law strives to represent a diversity of thought and perspective in its curriculum. In addition to Critical Race Theory and Race and the American Legal System, the law school regularly offers such courses as Access to Justice, Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession, and Insurance and Discrimination.

**Affinity Groups:** Since the Black Law Students Association was founded in 1969, more than a dozen additional student affinity groups have flourished at the UConn School of Law. These organizations—based on national origin, heritage, gender identity, sexual orientation, faith or first-generation status—offer support to their members as well as outreach, education and service to the law school and broader community.

**Diversity, Equity and Belonging Committee:** In 2021, Dean Nelson established the Diversity, Equity and Belonging Committee, composed of graduates, faculty members, staff members and students. She charged the committee with examining the state of diversity, equity and belonging at the UConn School of Law—to hold a mirror up to the school and suggest concrete ways to transform the community so that it can better embody these core values.

**Diversity Month:** Diversity Month is an annual celebration that showcases and strengthens the law school’s commitment to providing a safe and inclusive environment for all students. Throughout March, a variety of events asks community members to pause and appreciate how each member contributes to campus culture and encourages them to express support and appreciation throughout the year.

**Access to Justice:** The UConn School of Law strives to extend legal services to underserved individuals and communities through our clinics, pro bono program and legal incubator. Our clinics serve immigrants, low-income taxpayers, criminal defendants, new entrepreneurs, veterans, children and the elderly. The incubator provides legal services at reasonable rates to low- and moderate-income residents. And the Pro Bono Pledge asks students to provide free legal service to those in need. Faculty and administrators serve as thought leaders on boards, committees and commissions dedicated to Access to Justice.

**Our Commitment:** As we celebrate our centennial year and move into our second century, UConn Law is engaged in a strategic planning process that emphasizes diversity, equity and belonging as core values in our mission to provide an excellent and affordable legal education that is accessible to all people.
Three law schools in Washington state have joined together to create a pipeline program with Heritage University (HU), a rural Minority-Serving Institution, to encourage more Latinx and Indigenous students to pursue legal careers. The Washington Law Schools-HU Collaborative includes Gonzaga University, Seattle University (Seattle U), and the University of Washington.

The program launched with a three-week course in June for HU students interested in learning more about the law. Participants were able to meet with justices from the Washington Supreme Court, have discussions with leaders of minority bar associations, and engage in mock law school classes with faculty from the partner schools. They also visited the partner institutions and learned about the law school application process.

The collaborative includes a shorter follow-up session for participating students in October 2022. Those who complete both programs will receive a stipend to assist them in pursuing a law degree.

Located on the Yakama Indian Reservation in the central region of the state, HU is one of only two colleges in the country to be designated as both a Hispanic-Serving Institution and a Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institution. Historically, very few of its graduates have pursued legal careers, and no HU graduate has enrolled in a law degree program since 2017, according to a press release. The high cost of applying to and attending law school, the need to relocate, and a lack of confidence all serve as deterrents, according to HU administrators.

Initiatives like the collaborative are vital to improving Latinx and Indigenous representation among lawyers in the state and improving the significant shortage of attorneys in the region, said Annette E. Clark, Seattle U School of Law dean, in a news release.

“Our goal with this partnership is to expand these students’ horizons and make a legal career an achievable goal,” she stated. “This will also help address the critical shortage of diverse lawyers in the region, thus enhancing access to justice for the clients and communities they will serve.”

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The University of Houston Law Center is proud to debut a new publication for undergraduate students nationwide interested in attending law school. Aspiring Lawyer magazine features insights, tips, success stories, and guidance for pre-law students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

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Haley Taylor Schlitz Becomes America’s Youngest Black Law School Graduate

By Mariah Stewart

Nineteen-year-old Texas native Haley Taylor Schlitz recently made history as the youngest Black American to ever earn a law degree when she graduated from the Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law (SMU Law) in May 2022.

Her accomplishment is particularly extraordinary considering only 5 percent of all lawyers in the U.S. are Black, according to the American Bar Association. Taylor Schlitz chose to pursue this field because she wants to help reform the nation’s education laws to be more equitable for all students, she says.

“I wanted to be a doctor like my mom up until about halfway through my undergraduate degree,” she explains. “I majored in chemistry, but then I did a lot of self-reflection on what I want to do with my life, who I want to be, and what impact I want to make. …so I switched my major to education because I want to change the way our K-12 system functions, which also led to me to law school and education policy.”

Her passion stems from her childhood experience being denied access to gifted education programs in public school before being homeschooled by her parents. She co-wrote a book titled The Homeschool Alternative: Incorporating a Homeschool Mindset for the Benefit of Black Children in America with her mother, the celebrated physician Dr. Myiesha Taylor, about these experiences. Her goal is to help other students who may be denied educational opportunities and whose families do not know that homeschooling is an option or do not have the ability to pull them out of public schools, she says.

Taylor Schlitz graduated from high school at the age of 13 and earned her undergraduate degree from Texas Woman’s University at the age of 16.
After being accepted into nine different law schools, she chose to attend SMU Law because she was impressed by the passion exhibited by its faculty and by the inclusiveness of the campus.

“Being so young and also being a Black woman, I was wondering how I would fare in law school — not questioning whether or not I’d be successful, but more of what law school would look like for me,” she explains. “But the student body was very accepting. I wasn’t hazed or discriminated against, and everybody was very supportive of me.”

Her sociocultural identity and age gave her a distinct viewpoint of higher education and law school, Taylor Schlitz says.

“I think that the intersectionality of everything that I am — being Gen Z, being Black, being a woman, and being so young — provides me with a unique perspective on our education system and on civil rights and advocacy,” she explains. “Gen Z is very politically active, but on top of that it’s the first generation that America has ever seen that’s majority-minority. Being part of that generation, being able to speak with and align with a lot of my peers who are also minorities, and being young in law school all [relate to] a lot of politics, advocacy, and leadership in that area.”

Her age is especially relevant for someone wanting to pursue a career in educational policy because so many of the decision-makers crafting today’s K-12 and higher education laws are older, she says. “I am of the age where the legislation that is being written impacts my generation, but a lot of the people who write legislation are significantly older and the laws that they write for our school systems specifically and other systems that impact youth do not affect them directly,” Taylor Schlitz states. “I represent the majority of my generation when I speak on issues that affect minorities, so I definitely have this ground view and am in a unique position to be an advocate.”

Thus far, she has found significant success as a youth activist. In addition to her work as an author and proponent of equitable education, Taylor Schlitz has participated in the American Civil Liberties Union’s Teen Summer Public Policy Program and served as the youngest delegate ever to the Texas Democratic Party convention. Her academic accomplishments have earned her numerous national honors, and her graduation from SMU Law was featured in news stories around the world.

While the future clearly looks bright for Taylor Schlitz, right now she is focused on preparing to take the bar exam in late July. Her immediate career plans include teaching government and politics at E.A. Young Academy, a nonprofit institution for gifted students, where she says she is excited to be able to create a positive educational environment for other young people.

Mariah Stewart is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
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Multiple studies have proved that diversity is a critical component in driving innovation. Yet when it comes to applying for patents in the U.S., women and people of color are severely underrepresented due to barriers such as a lack of awareness and financial resources. A 2020 report from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) found that less than 13 percent of all inventor-patentees are women. Meanwhile, only 1 percent of African American and Latinx college graduates hold patents, with an application rate that is half that of White inventors, according to a 2018 study in the journal Technology and Innovation.

Experts believe insufficient diversity among inventors has serious consequences on the country’s economic growth and innovation leadership. “If women, minorities, and children from low-income families were to invent at the same rate as White men from high-income (top 20 percent) families, the rate of innovation in America would quadruple,” according to a 2017 working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

In October 2021, the USPTO announced that U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo would lead a national initiative to promote innovation by diverse inventors as part of the Biden administration’s broader strategy to improve gender equity. The Council for Inclusive Innovation, formerly known as the National Council for Expanding American Innovation, works to promote groups that are underrepresented in patenting.

At Yeshiva University’s Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law (Cardozo), there is an ongoing effort to close this “patent gap.” The New York City law school launched the Cardozo Patent Diversity Project in 2019 to boost the number of patents issued to underrepresented inventors by connecting them with pro bono legal assistance to navigate the complicated process.

By drawing upon its alumni network, Cardozo was able to establish a list of 20 distinguished law firms and professionals to provide legal help, says Victor Wang, JD, the project’s director. Alumni connections also aided the program in securing a $200,000 grant from Google.

Now in its third year, the project is currently working with 10 underrepresented inventors to secure patents. Applicants are screened for several factors, including gender, ethnicity, financial resources, prior patent experience, and baseline knowledge of the USPTO process.

Once accepted, the inventors are then matched with a participating law firm or attorney.

Ensuring economic equity is a critical part of the project, Wang says. Significant costs required to obtain a patent are a key barrier for many underrepresented inventors. Just filing for a patent can cost $5,000 to $10,000, while the entire process can run as high as $50,000, depending on the complexity of the technology. In addition to providing pro bono legal support, Cardozo law students assist participants by conducting patentability searches. These searches entail analyzing pre-existing patent applications to determine the likelihood of an invention being deemed novel enough to receive a patent from the USPTO. Students also offer inventors guidance on how the patent process works to help them make the best financial decisions.

“By providing this type of analysis that I personally believe the firms do not usually provide, I think it’s a little bit more helpful for the inventors,” Wang says. “Because with limited representation comes limited resources, and if you spend all your limited resources on patents, that might be to your detriment.”

Cardozo students are able to provide this guidance for the inventors throughout the patenting process without minding the billable hours or costs, he adds.

Although the process of obtaining a patent can take several years, the project already boasts one success story. Rose Coppee, a Black woman inventor, was able to secure a patent with the help of Cardozo and the law firm Jones Day. Her design, a modular hairbrush with a specially designed handle, allows users to distribute styling products directly through its bristles.

The program helped Coppee connect with an attorney who, she says, did more than simply help her fill out the patent application. “He educated me on the whole process of going through patents,” she states in a video for the project. “It’s very important that you have someone hold your hand and walk you through it.”

Coppee was linked to Cardozo through Start Small Think Big, a nonprofit that helps small business owners who are low income or from marginalized communities access the resources and support they need to be
In September 2021, Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) introduced a bipartisan bill aimed at expanding opportunities for people of color, military veterans, and other underrepresented groups to obtain patents.

The Unleashing American Innovators Act would require the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to conduct outreach to these diverse populations to provide education and encourage participation in the patent system. The bill would also lower application fees for small business owners and establish a pilot program that would help first-time applicants determine whether their ideas are patentable.

“Expanding access to the patent system is not a partisan issue; it is an issue of maintaining American competitiveness and extending opportunity to all Americans, no matter their background, economic status, or location,” Leahy stated in a press release.

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The University of Louisville is home to a community of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Working together, we address global challenges and drive needed change to build a better world here and beyond.

The Brandeis School of Law believes a diverse population of attorneys is essential in strengthening the profession. Initiatives like the Human Rights Advocacy Program that assists immigrants, refugees and non-citizens or the Central High School Partnership that promotes diversity in the legal profession, allow Brandeis School of Law to constantly push for progress.

The school’s Diversity Committee expands the culture of inclusiveness, tackling hot-button issues such as affirmative action, gay marriage, racial profiling and more, and helping students learn to fight for the rights of their clients. The school is preparing passionate legal champions who will be staunch advocates for their clients and communities.

Proud to be a 2021 Diversity Champion.
The American Bar Association Leads the Charge to Increase DEI in Law Schools Through Revisions in Accreditation Standards

By Erik Cliburn
The American Bar Association (ABA) has become a leading voice in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the legal profession and in law schools. Since 2008, one of the association’s primary goals has been to eliminate bias and enhance diversity within its membership, the attorney workforce, and the legal system overall.

One of the most important aspects of meeting this goal is promoting DEI in the area of legal education.

In recent years, the ABA has instituted numerous programs and initiatives and changed accreditation policies to make law school more attainable for underserved populations. These efforts are especially important to outgoing ABA President Reginald Turner, JD, who is only the fourth Black person to lead the association in its 144-year history. Having served as chair of the ABA Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession and worked as a longtime DEI advocate, Turner says that he wants to ensure the organization is doing all it can to live up to its commitment to enhance diversity and eliminate bias.

“The full panoply of diversity issues are now major programs through the American Bar Association,” he says. “We continue to support those entities to ensure that we are increasing the opportunities for people from all backgrounds. It’s very personal to me, but it’s also an ethic and one of the four goals of the [association].”

The ABA Center for Diversity and Inclusion in the Profession includes numerous commissions and coalitions that touch on nearly every aspect of DEI. Specific issues addressed include disability rights, ethnic and racial justice, Hispanic and Latinx rights, sexual orientation and gender identity protections, and support for women in the legal profession.

The center also features the Council for Diversity in the Educational Pipeline, which facilitates several scholarships and recruitment programs that help marginalized students pursue legal careers. One of these offerings, the Judicial Clerkship Program, connects underrepresented students with judges and law clerks to improve diversity within clerkship opportunities through training and networking.

Having served as a member of the Michigan and Detroit boards of education and as a law clerk for Dennis Archer — a former Michigan Supreme Court justice, former Detroit mayor, and the ABA’s first Black president — Turner recognizes the importance of empowering and encouraging students from all backgrounds to enter the legal profession.

“The education of all students from all backgrounds and creating programming that helps level the playing field with respect to racial and ethnic diversity is a passion of mine,” Turner says.

The council also organized the Community College Pathway to Law Toolkit, a guide for two-year colleges seeking to build a legal education pipeline program. The toolkit provides detailed instructions on how to conduct feasibility studies, establish an advisory group, and secure funding for a pre-law program. Given that community colleges are generally more accessible to underserved and economically disadvantaged students, these programs are vital to increasing diversity within legal education and advancing the conversation around institutional racism, according to the ABA.

“Many community colleges have launched ‘calls to actions’ to reduce the effects of structural racism,” a March 2022 ABA article reads. “One of the ways to accomplish this goal is through the legal system. Creating a pre-law program provides opportunities for students to discuss structural racism and eventually work toward dismantling this system.”

Along with the association’s direct initiatives to support underrepresented law students, the ABA Council of
Building an engaged and inclusive community.

Announcing the Director of the Center for Civil Rights and Social Justice

Professor Darren Lenard Hutchinson leads the Emory University School of Law Center for Civil Rights and Social Justice. The center will enhance the law school’s already rich focus on issues of civil rights, human rights, and social justice. It will serve as a hub for interdisciplinary scholarship, research, teaching, evidence-based policy reform, and community outreach that improves the lives of individuals who have experienced violations of their civil rights and been impacted by social injustice.

In 2021, racially and ethnically underrepresented students accounted for 33 percent of first-year law students, according to the American Bar Association. This marks a 10 percent increase since 2008, when the association first adopted its diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. In the decade prior to 2008, first-year enrollment of diverse law students had stagnated between 20 and 22 percent.

the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar recently approved a resolution that made several DEI-related changes to law school accreditation standards. These include a new curriculum requirement focused on bias, racism, and cross-cultural competency. Under the new standard, institutions must provide DEI-focused education and training to all students upon entering law school and at least once more prior to graduation. This can be achieved through various courses, lectures, orientation programs, and other educational experiences. This requirement reflects the priorities of modern law schools, as the deans of ABA-accredited colleges have called on the association in recent years to incorporate anti-racist practices into its accreditation standards.

The ABA’s resolution also requires law schools to adopt and follow a nondiscrimination policy that includes updated language regarding ethnicity, gender identity, and military status. ABA-accredited institutions must now provide certain resources that promote student well-being, including support services for mental health and substance use disorders as well as access to food pantries and emergency financial assistance. Making these types of supports mandatory aligns with the recommendations of multiple legal scholars and organizations that have called for schools to be more proactive in protecting student wellness.

In addition to these revisions, the ABA’s Strategic Review Committee recently recommended that JD-granting institutions move to standardized test-optional policies for their admissions processes. Opponents of standardized admissions tests, and specifically the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), argue that they are inequitable to economically disadvantaged students and those from underrepresented communities. A 2019 study by Florida International University legal researchers found that on average, Black test-takers scored 11 points lower on the LSAT than their White and Asian peers.

While the ABA’s recommendation is not binding and law schools still have significant latitude in their admissions policies, it contributes to a growing shift against the LSAT. More than a dozen law schools, including those at Columbia, Cornell, and Harvard Universities, had begun accepting Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores in lieu of the LSAT even prior to the ABA’s announcement.

Although the ABA’s recent initiatives have been vital to advancing DEI within legal education and the profession, Turner hopes to see the association expand its efforts even further in the future. “There is still more to do yet, and we will keep doing it,” he says. “We are committed, and we’ve made, in my view, significant progress over the course of time. I’m confident that our efforts have borne fruit for people who would not have had the opportunities to matriculate into law school and the legal profession.”

Erik Cliburn is a senior staff writer for INSIGHT Into Diversity.
An open invitation.
For us, diversity and inclusion are the normal, the now, and the necessary.
The University of Houston Law Center’s Pre-Law Pipeline Program prepares underrepresented students and working professionals from across the U.S. for careers in the legal industry.
The University of Houston Law Center Dedicates DEI Efforts to Supporting Students at Every Stage of their Journey

By Mariah Bohanon | Photos courtesy UHLC

“Diversity Champions exemplify an unyielding commitment to diversity and inclusion throughout their campus communities, across academic programs, and at the highest administrative levels. INSIGHT Into Diversity selected institutions that rank in the top tier of Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award recipients.”

The University of Houston Law Center (UHLC), located in one of the most multicultural cities in the U.S., is one of the nation’s most diverse law schools. Nearly 40 percent of first-year students in 2021 were members of underrepresented ethnic or racial groups, almost 25 percent were nonresidents of Texas, and more than half were women. The school attributes its ability to cultivate such a diverse student body to its comprehensive efforts to support underrepresented students, starting early in their educational careers and continuing through their time in the workforce.

Leonard M. Baynes, JD, became the first Black dean of UHLC in 2014. A longtime advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), he has worked to instill these principles into every aspect of the law school. It is the institution’s responsibility, he says, to support underserved students throughout their entire education and career journey, not just during their enrollment.

“What I aim for with our law school is to make sure we support [DEI] for students starting before they even enroll all the way through to the time when they are working,” he explains. “We try to make sure that we are there for every aspect of their journey.”

These efforts include unique pre-law programs tailored to underrepresented individuals, innovative courses dedicated to racial justice in law, DEI outreach and discussion with law firms, and much more.

Pre-Law Pipeline Program

UHLC’s Pre-Law Pipeline Program, which is designed to increase the number of underrepresented students who pursue legal education and graduate school, has been one of the center’s most successful DEI efforts since its launch in 2015. Of the 307 students and working professionals who have completed the program, nearly 100 have been accepted to UHLC or other law schools, receiving a combined $7.6 million in scholarships. Sixty-five percent of participants who have
completed the program and graduated from college have gone on to pursue some form of graduate education.

Kristen Guiseppi, the program's director, credits Baynes's commitment to diversifying the legal profession for inspiring the pipeline's creation. His vision, combined with funding and support from UH and partner institutions, have led to a thriving program that helps future lawyers at multiple stages of their educations and careers, she says.

"A big reason why this program exists is just to ensure that our students know how to move forward," Guiseppi explains. “All of our [participants] are capable, all of them are stellar, but in many cases, they don’t know how to go about the journey of getting to law school. This program does a very good job of demystifying that process and helping students figure out what their next steps will be.”

The pipeline agenda is divided into the following four tracks:

- Scholar I, for first- and second-year undergraduates nationwide
- Scholar II, for rising college seniors nationwide
- UH Cougar Law, for rising college seniors at UH
- Working Professional, for college graduates nationwide

Each track lasts several weeks. Originally designed as summer residential experiences at UHLC, they have operated online since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This transition has not, however, diminished the robust learning that takes place, according to Guiseppi.

Some of the program participants take introductory law school courses led by UHLC faculty on topics such as criminal law, torts, property, civil procedure, and contracts. In addition, the Scholar I program offers legal writing and trial advocacy curricula and connects students with summer law internships. All participants also learn about mental health and wellness, especially when it comes to issues that uniquely affect underrepresented students, such as imposter syndrome. Each is paired with law student and attorney mentors who match their professional interests.

The Scholar II, UH Cougar Law, and Working Professional programs provide comprehensive Law School Admission Test (LSAT) preparation and assistance with law school applications and resumes.

While the students come from many different walks of life, they are all underrepresented in legal education and professions. Half are first-generation students, and 54 percent come from families earning less than $50,000 annually. Nearly 50 percent are Black, 30 percent are Hispanic or Latinx, and 12 percent are Asian American or Pacific Islander. The majority — 75 percent — are women.

The program recruits students from across the U.S. with the help of its partner institutions — Dillard University, a historically Black institution in New Orleans, and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a Hispanic-Serving Institution in New York City. The application process mirrors that of law school and includes a personal statement, writing sample, and letters of recommendation. In addition to requiring a minimum 3.0 GPA, the program considers how passionate applicants are about pursuing legal careers, according to Guiseppi.

“We’re looking to see whether or not a student is able to demonstrate a true commitment to law,” she explains. “Also, we’re looking at their college experiences and just ensuring that we have a good sense of who the student is, what they’re trying to achieve, and what is their ‘why’ in wanting to be part of this program that can help them get to the next level professionally.”

The UHLC Pre-Law Pipeline Program ranges in cost from $600 to $1,600, depending on the track, and financial aid is available for low-income students. By comparison, private law school admissions consulting tends to range from several hundred to several thousand dollars per session, and the most popular LSAT preparation courses range from $300 to $1,850.

The pipeline program is designed with the understanding...
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that one size does not fit all, and that it is important to meet students where they are on their individual education and career paths, Guiseppi says. Program staff and mentors also keep in touch with participants long after they finish their summer sessions, continuing to provide professional guidance and support, she adds.

“Our students say that this program has changed their lives by providing much-needed clarity and direction,” she says. “That doesn’t end once they have completed the summer program. We maintain contact with everyone who participates to ensure that they are continuing to make the best choices for their goals.”

**“George Floyd and the Aftermath: Equal Justice and the Law” Intersession Course**

Another way that UHLC promotes DEI across campus and in the legal profession is by providing students with in-depth educational opportunities on a wide range of subjects related to DEI and law. In January 2021, the school introduced an innovative new course for those interested in learning specifically about the impact of George Floyd’s murder on racial justice, criminal law, and more.

UHLC was motivated in part to create the course because Floyd grew up in Houston’s Third Ward neighborhood, a historically Black community near campus, explains Meredith J. Duncan, JD, the Alumnae College Professor of Law and assistant dean of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Metropolitan Programs.

“Because of his ties to Houston and because of the magnitude of the racial awakening, for lack of a better term, that occurred, we just felt that it was important and necessary for us to address this issue with our students and with the surrounding community,” she says. “So this intersession course is one of the good things that we did to address these issues and not let the George Floyd incident and all that has come of it just go by unacknowledged by the law center.”

The class, titled “George Floyd and the Aftermath: Equal Justice and the Law,” has been offered twice thus far as an online, one-credit hour intersession course held for a week between semesters. Students meet for approximately four hours a day to discuss topics ranging from Floyd’s childhood to immigration policies to the death penalty. Experts from UH and across the legal industry serve as guest speakers for each topic, and students must submit daily reflections that discuss how they are relating to the material.

Duncan, who leads the course, limits enrollment to 25 students because having a smaller class size helps participants feel more secure in confronting some of the course’s emotionally challenging material, she says. This is especially important for helping the class bond as a group over a short time and feel comfortable enough to have frank discussions about topics touching on race, privilege, and identity. Students who want to take the class must apply and provide a written statement about why the topic is important to them, Duncan explains.

Those who are accepted must read two books prior to the first class that explore how attorneys have fought to defend Black Americans from the U.S.’s discriminatory justice system: *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* and *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America*. They must also read a series of articles from *The Washington Post* exploring Floyd’s life and how his community, education, and more were affected by systemic racism.

Many students, especially those who do not come from communities of color, say that the course covers topics their education has never addressed, according to Duncan. “I get a lot of comments saying that this should be a required course for all students, because they’re learning new things about the country they live in that they weren’t aware of before,” she says. “Some of them say it is a life-transforming class.”

Students of color have also expressed relief that some of the issues brought up in the class are finally being discussed openly in an educational setting, says Duncan. “Most of my students who provide feedback say that they find it to be very refreshing even though it is very challenging,” she explains.

Based on her students’ urging, Duncan and UHLC are currently exploring how to convert the class into a semester-long course. Doing so would help meet the significant demand from students who are eager to learn more about race and the law in the U.S.

“If it’s turned into a semester-long course, I intend to have an even more structured approach that will help students deal with the somewhat gut-wrenching and introspective materials that they will be asked to grapple with,” Duncan says.

**Dean’s Diversity Dialogues**

For Baynes, promoting DEI includes supporting diverse representation and inclusive climates in the workplaces where students will one day be employed. Last year, he and UHLC developed a unique method for spreading this message within the legal profession when they launched the Dean’s Diversity Dialogue series.

The series consists of Zoom discussions with managing and hiring partners from law firms across Texas and the nation. Sessions focus on specific DEI-related topics and typically include a short reading on the subject. Baynes then leads the participants in discussing how the issue at hand relates to the legal profession.

The dialogues range in size depending on their subject and scope. In April, 64 Black attorneys from across the state joined a session titled “Texas Big Law, Black Law Partner/Corporate Counsel...
As one of the nation’s leading social justice law schools, the newly created Concentration in Social Justice is designed to allow Cincinnati Law students to demonstrate their advanced knowledge of the subject area. Housed within the Nathaniel R. Jones Center for Race, Gender, and Social Justice, the Concentration connects coursework, experiential and extracurricular opportunities to provide a well-rounded education to the next generation of social justice lawyers and leaders. law.uc.edu/jones-center
Summit,” that focused on the recruitment and retention of African American lawyers. Participants heard from a panel of speakers before gathering in breakout sessions to discuss how they might work together to promote mutual success, according to Baynes. While some of the dialogues are intended as interracial discussions, this event helped Black law firm partners — who tend to be both severely underrepresented and thinly spread throughout the state — to connect.

“Sometimes these partners don’t know each other, but they can be pretty influential,” Baynes says. “They can help each other, and they can influence their firms to do more in support of [DEI].”

Another recent conversation focused on diverse hiring issues. Baynes asked the participants to read an article about the process for selecting a successor for longtime “Jeopardy!” gameshow host Alex Trebek, and then led them in a discussion about how that highly publicized search correlates to hiring patterns at law firms. He asked attendees to consider how the candidate pool for Trebek’s replacement appeared somewhat diverse while still excluding certain demographics, the ways in which the candidates of color were put at a disadvantage, and the implications of a White male producer initially being chosen for the role. These factors all reflect aspects of hiring in the legal field, where job seekers of color often face hidden obstacles and those with insider connections have advantages, says Baynes.

“It was really helpful for us to have these kinds of conversations with lawyers, both in Houston and elsewhere, where we could all brainstorm about what barriers there might be to hiring lawyers of color and how you can overcome those barriers,” he explains.

Providing a space for professionals at law firms to talk frankly about these issues and to collaborate on more equitable hiring strategies benefits UHLC’s underrepresented students once they enter the workforce, as well as current job-seeking alumni, according to Baynes. He also sees these dialogues as necessary for cultivating broader change in this sector.

“The legal profession can open doors and dismantle segregation, yet it’s one of the least diverse professions,” he says. Despite decades of working to improve access and inclusion, people of color remain extremely underrepresented in this field, proving that new and innovative steps must be taken to create real change, according to Baynes. These efforts must include law schools and firms working together.

“I think most law firms want to do more, but it’s a matter of [schools] figuring out how to really be helpful to them, because we can’t keep doing the same old things or we’re going to keep getting the same results,” he explains. “We actually need to think bigger and differently than we’ve ever done before.”

Baynes says his goal with the dialogue series is to continue to grow and eventually have every managing partner in the state of Texas participate in at least one session. Past attendees have already expressed their eagerness for follow-up discussions that will allow them to continue brainstorming how to overcome hiring and retention barriers for underrepresented attorneys. Some have created similar dialogues within their firms or spread the word about the opportunity to their colleagues. This all indicates to Baynes the power that such open conversations can have on the profession.

“I feel like I have a responsibility, because I am unique to this role, to think about creative solutions and provide opportunities for creative conversations that will help us move further along the path to diversity,” says Baynes, who is both a first-generation American and first-generation college graduate. “So many times in my career I’ve been the first, and I don’t want to be the last.”

Mariah Bohanon is the managing editor of INSIGHT Into Diversity. The University of Houston Law Center is a 2021 INSIGHT Into Diversity Diversity Champion and a 2016-2021 recipient of the INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award.
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In May, valedictorian Elizabeth Bonker broke the mold of a traditional commencement speaker at her graduation from Rollins College, a private liberal arts institution in Winter Park, Florida. Bonker, who is affected by nonspeaking autism, delivered her address through a keyboard using a text-to-speech program, her sole form of communication.

Bonker’s message focused on the importance of perseverance in the face of personal challenges and the acceptance she has received from her peers and mentors.

“As I prepare to graduate, I reflect on the questions I first had when I came to Rollins: ‘Would I fit in? Would people take the time to get to know me despite my slow typing?’” she wrote in a press release through an intermediary. “Happily, I’ve been embraced by my professors and fellow classmates, and I have cherished being treated like every other student. I hope Rollins has also been impacted by my time here in some small way, in seeing the potential in students who don’t look and sound like everyone else.”

Bonker closed her speech by encouraging her fellow graduates to bring about change in their community through service.

“God gave you a voice,” she said. “Use it.”

With college now behind her, Bonker plans to grow her nonprofit organization, Communication 4 ALL, which provides communication resources to other individuals with nonspeaking autism. An estimated 40 percent of people diagnosed with autism are nonverbal, according to the nonprofit association Autism Speaks.
Kelly Daniel and Jocelyn Lucero are leaving their mark on the history of the University of Kentucky and the J. David Rosenberg College of Law – they’re the first two women of color to simultaneously hold the college’s prestigious student law journal leadership positions of editor-in-chief.

Daniel has the distinction of being the first Black editor-in-chief for the Kentucky Law Journal, and Lucero, who is Latinx, is the outgoing head of the Kentucky Journal of Equine, Agriculture and Natural Resources Law.

These first-generation college graduates are paving the way for future students.

The UK Rosenberg College of Law prepares students for meaningful and responsible engagement within and across diverse communities, consistently striving to improve its efforts to build a diverse and enriching environment, and to raise the awareness of the importance of such efforts.

Learn more about the UK J. David Rosenberg College of Law and its commitment to diversity and inclusion: law.uky.edu
In 1872, our founders put forth a bold vision. Less than a decade after the end of the Civil War and nearly 50 years before women won the right to vote, they envision a law school open to everyone.

Throughout the century and a half that followed, our alumni have served on the front lines of the fight for equality in all its forms, ever aspiring to achieve the nation’s founding promise of equal justice under law for all people.

Today, in the spirit of our founders, we have embraced a bold vision and enacted an ambitious plan to help build a future in which the legal profession fully reflects the rich diversity of the United States.

The work continues.