The Politics of Enrollment

As the enrollment cliff looms, more students are considering a state's legislative landscape as they also factor the cost, degree programs, and location of a college. Are politicians paying attention?
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The advertising deadline is August 8. For information, please email ads@insightintodiversity.com.
Dear Readers,

As we wrap up our annual special section on law schools, I find myself thinking about the many ways the law itself impacts higher education. There has been a veritable flurry of legislative activity this academic year, much of which has curtailed, restricted, or dismantled various aspects of student experiences.

We've reported on the resulting closure of LGBTQIA+ centers, reductions in inclusive programming, eliminations of DEI offices, and concerns about free speech and freedom of expression in curricula and on college campuses.

And these lawmakers ... they’re getting it all wrong.

Why? Aside from my own personal convictions, I pose two universally challenging words to consider: demographic contraction.

The enrollment cliff is a looming, invisible threat that everyone feels, like thunder that’s closing in fast. The lightning strikes of that threat are its economic implications — fewer high school graduates will lead to even lower enrollments, hemorrhaging budgets, and decreased government funding.

This perfect storm will magnify the already decades-long trend of seeing students as customers that institutions compete to win over, and attracting them will become more difficult than ever before. I am not alone in arguing that institutions that are deeply aware of what matters to students are more likely to survive without significant damage.

Jeff Selingo, higher education journalist and researcher, makes the excellent point that differentiation will be of monumental importance. How does this university’s campus stand apart? What does this college offer that others don’t? Which tuition cost can I afford? Students will be asking these questions, certainly. But as “Policies and Laws: How They’re Impacting College Enrollment,” a recent report by Gallup and the Lumina Foundation points out, that is not all that they care about.

Here’s where the law comes in.

Many state (and some federal) laws are out of touch with what students value. There is a deep divide between the ideologies elevated in some states’ recent legislation and the real, daily concerns and needs of college students. And that legislation directs the policies of state colleges and universities, and their communities, who desperately need to appeal to ever-wider demographics of students, not fewer.

More than half of students surveyed by Gallup and Lumina said campus gun regulations matter to their enrollment decision and they prefer that their campus restrict firearms; reproductive health care is a concern and they would rather attend college in a state with fewer restrictions; restrictions on “divisive topics” is a deciding factor and they would prioritize a campus that allows for inclusive curricula. It is worth noting that the rate of these preferences didn’t fall as neatly along political party lines as one might suspect.

If colleges and universities want to weather the impending disaster, they’ll need to convince legislators to make policy decisions that will attract students to their state, provide them safe and inclusive spaces to live and learn, and help retain them once they enroll.

Katy Abrams
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are experiencing a period of expansion, with new programs and campuses being developed across the country as the number of applicants has increased for the second and third straight years.

Morgan State University, for example, has reported a record number of new students, while North Carolina A&T State University, Howard University, Wilberforce University, and University of Maryland Eastern Shore, among others, have also seen surging enrollment.

This growth reflects an increasing demand for higher education tailored to the Black community, amplified recruitment and retention efforts, innovative strategies to serve these student populations, and an increase in funding through federal and philanthropic avenues. The Supreme Court’s decision last June to discontinue the consideration of race in college admissions may also be contributing to this influx.

To accommodate this increase in student population and their needs, some HBCUs are also expanding their offerings. One prominent example is at Xavier University of Louisiana, which recently signed a partnership with Ochsner Medical Center to establish the first HBCU medical school in the Gulf South, Xavier Ochsner School of Medicine (EXOCOM). Their next step is to seek accreditation.

This initiative marks a significant milestone as it aims to address the underrepresentation of Black professionals in the medical field by enrolling and graduating more Black doctors and health care providers, thereby furthering the decrease in health inequalities in the region.

Alabama A&M University is also making meaningful strides by offering $52 million to procure the now-defunct Birmingham-Southern College property for use as a satellite campus.

If accepted, this would expand Alabama A&M’s footprint in the state and create new opportunities for students in Birmingham, enhancing educational accessibility and fostering community development. The acquisition would also be historic, as no HBCU has ever purchased a predominantly White institution in the South.

These expansions are not just about increasing enrollment but also about extending the reach and impact of HBCUs. By creating satellite campuses and new schools, these institutions are addressing the evolving educational needs of diverse communities, ensuring their long-term viability and relevance in the higher education landscape.

Documentary Explores “Belonging” in Nature for BIPOC Community College Students

In fall 2023, 26 North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) students participated in creating the documentary film “Belonging” through the college’s Environmental Justice through Community Building, Stewardship, Advocacy and Action program. Focusing on underrepresented students, the NHCC partnership with YMCA Camp Northern Lights and Three Rivers Park District is designed to bring contemporary environmental issues to the forefront by connecting young people with nature, elders, activists, and community in a five-day immersive learning experience.

The resulting documentary explores the students’ transformative learning experiences with Ojibwe and Lakota elders and reflects on key issues, such as climate change, water quality, food insecurity, and pipelines through tribal lands. Produced in association with local storytelling company BairStories, “Belonging” was named the 2024 Ely Film Festival’s Best Regional Film.

UTSA Dental School Launches Clinic for Patients With Disabilities

The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) School of Dentistry recently opened a groundbreaking dental clinic designed to serve individuals of all ages who have disabilities. The 4,300-square-foot Phil and Karen Hunke Special Care Clinic boasts seven specially equipped treatment rooms and a “Zen Den” to reduce patient anxiety.

The clinic can accommodate up to 40 patients daily. Jennifer Farrell, DDS, the clinic’s inaugural director said that it will act as a means to bridge gaps in oral health care for high-needs patients, particularly among children with disabilities. Besides patient care, the clinic offers cross-discipline training to dental students and serves as a resource for community dentists and health care providers, emphasizing inclusivity and specialized care.
Congratulations to these higher education administrators on their new roles!

**Mohamed Ahmed, PhD**
Associate Vice President for Equity & Inclusive Excellence and Chief Diversity Officer
Winona State University

**Mark Brown, EdD**
President and Chief Executive Officer
Tuskegee University

**Elizabeth Chilton, PhD**
President
University of New Hampshire

**Marcelle Haddix, EdD**
Dean, School of Education
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Anthony E. Jones, PhD**
Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre College

**Maurie McInnis, PhD**
President
Yale University

**Hridesh Rajan, PhD**
Dean, School of Science and Engineering
Tulane University

**Joanna N. Ravello Goods, PhD**
Vice President for Equity and Inclusion & Chief Diversity Officer
Roger Williams University

**LaVonda Reed, JD**
Dean
University of Baltimore School of Law

**Monica M. Smith, PhD**
Vice President for Inclusion and Belonging
University of Richmond

**Susie White**
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer
Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine
Researchers from the University of Michigan recently published a study that explores disparities in cancer clinical trial availability on a county level throughout the U.S. Focusing on the social determinants of health and their impact, the researchers conducted cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of trial availability for the most common forms of cancer: prostate, breast, lung, colorectal, bladder, uterine, kidney, and melanoma. Findings reveal that socially vulnerable counties are less likely to have any trials and have fewer population-adjusted trials compared to others. This disparity has worsened over time, highlighting the need to address the social determinants of health to improve representation in clinical trials and ensure equitable cancer care nationwide. To learn more, visit bit.ly/4dvNPVD.

Michael H. Morris, a professor at the University of Notre Dame’s Keough School of Global Affairs, recently published a study that examines the phenomenon of fear of success among low-income and disadvantaged entrepreneurs, a barrier often overshadowed by the fear of failure. Morris outlines five recommendations to help these entrepreneurs overcome this fear and break out of poverty. The recommendations stem from understanding the unique obstacles faced by underrepresented entrepreneurs, such as lower literacy levels, a scarcity mindset, and limited access to finance. The study emphasizes the importance of providing role models, early entrepreneurship education with experiential learning, and mentorship, as well as incorporating venture creation in workforce development programs and developing flexible microfinance programs tied to incremental progress. Morris’ suggestions guide policymakers and support organizations in effectively assisting disadvantaged entrepreneurs on their path to success and empowerment. To learn more, visit bit.ly/3wsHtWm.

A recent study by New York University researchers delved into the support systems for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA&NHPI) students in higher education, focusing on Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). Notably, the study highlighted the crucial role of teaching and mentoring in providing essential guidance to students from these backgrounds. Through mentorship, former students supported newcomers in navigating academics, programs, and scholarship applications, showcasing a vital aspect of AANAPISIs’ support structure. These findings underscore the critical role of AANAPISIs in supporting AA&NHPI students and highlight broader implications for educational equity and institutional support in higher education. To learn more, visit bit.ly/3URQ5IH.
Micro Grants Advance DEI at William & Mary

By Erik Cliburn

A little can go a long way. Through its Innovative Diversity Efforts Awards (IDEA) initiative, the College of William & Mary (W&M) is using small amounts of funding to create a large impact by fostering a sense of equity, inclusion, and belonging on campus.

Open to faculty, staff, and students, IDEA grants typically provide between $500 and $1,500 to proposals that advance DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) principles on campus. These can amount to full or partial funding for workshops, speaker series, documentary films, and faculty training, among other programs.

The awards have existed since 2011, but funding grew in 2022 with the creation of the Stuart Calvin, Frances Gloria, and Julie E. Williams Fund for Diversity Programming at W&M. Since then, 19 projects have been funded by IDEA grants, seven of which were approved in February 2024. The proposals are all reviewed by a group known as The Collective, which is composed of faculty, students, and staff who are dedicated to DEI.

“What excites me about this group of projects is the diversity of the array of ideas and collaborations. There are workshops that focus on our full community — faculty, staff, students and alumni,” said Fanchon Glover, EdD, W&M chief diversity officer. “Adding to the cultural experience of all members of our community is very important, and these creative and innovative ideas really make a difference. As we embrace our values of curiosity, discovery and belonging, these projects really aid in that goal.”

Funded projects have touched on issues related to race and ethnicity, neurodiversity, gender and sexuality, and language and culture. The collection of individuals and proposed DEI programs applying for the grants vary significantly.

For example, a lecture series on race and religion — led by Endowed Professor of Judaic Studies Michael Daise — brings scholars from diverse backgrounds to W&M’s campus through a 2024 IDEA Grant. Topics discussed in the series include the impact of abolition and slavery on religious communities in the U.S. and Nigeria, respectively, and how those concepts tie to race today.

Another effort is an American Sign Language class operated by the W&M Libraries Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Having launched this spring, the class is open to students, faculty, and staff who wish to learn sign language and, in doing so, improve services and education and create a better sense of belonging for deaf and hard-of-hearing campus community members.

IDEA has also funded several initiatives focused on advancing diversity in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, including the Mentoring for Careers in Physics Pilot Program for Undergraduate Women, and a workshop series that integrates DEI into the classroom at W&M’s Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). The former program provides mentorship, career development, and networking opportunities for women wanting to enter the physics workforce, while the latter effort introduced methods for VIMS faculty to address hidden biases, celebrate underrepresented scientists, and apply DEI ideals in the classroom.

“Adding to the cultural experience of all members of our community is very important, and these creative and innovative ideas really make a difference. As we embrace our values of curiosity, discovery and belonging, these projects really aid in that goal.”

Fanchon Glover, EdD
Wolverines Elevated Graduates Inaugural Cohort

By Katy Abrams

Utah Valley University (UVU) marked a milestone in educational inclusivity with the commencement of the first cohort from Wolverines Elevated, a pioneering program designed for students with intellectual disabilities. A $1.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education helped launch this unique pathway to higher education that was previously inaccessible to this group of people.

Wolverines Elevated offers a three-year certificate in Integrated College and Community Studies that focuses on key areas such as self-determination, independent living, and career development. Participants also have the option to pursue a second certificate from any program offered at UVU, broadening their academic and professional horizons.

Additionally, they are able to join student clubs, engage in campus activities and events, and utilize all of the enriching experiences UVU has to offer.

The program’s holistic approach is evident in its comprehensive support system. Each student is paired with a peer mentor who assists in various aspects of college life, from time management and course navigation to social integration and career planning. This mentorship is pivotal, not only for academic success but also for fostering confidence and lifelong skills essential for future endeavors.

Anna Sisson, the program manager, highlighted the transformative impact of Wolverines Elevated in a public statement. “It is very exciting to see how their hard work and dedication has led them to accomplishing something they had only dreamed about. Coming to college has helped students gain confidence and lifelong skills that will help them in their career as well as any of their life pursuits.”

The certificate is overseen by Jane Carlson, PhD, the director of the Melisa Nellesen Center for Autism, who emphasized the program’s foundational belief. “When students with intellectual disability are provided with opportunity and high expectations, they can and do succeed in college.”

Graduation was celebrated during an event in May that recognized the academic achievement of those enrolled, and provided a testament to the program’s success in creating inclusive educational opportunities.

Wolverines Elevated stands as a beacon of progress, demonstrating that with the right support and opportunities, all students can achieve their college dreams. The program plans to continue paving the way for a more inclusive academic world, where every student has the chance to succeed and thrive.
The University of Kentucky is celebrating the inaugural cohort of graduates from its doctoral program in arts administration — housed in the College of Fine Arts, the program is the first of its kind in the nation. Launched in 2020, the degree prepares students for careers in the arts and cultural sector, which contributes over $1.1 trillion annually to the U.S. economy. The program is also entirely online, offering flexibility necessary for arts scholars to study in a rigorous degree program focused on field competencies and research methodologies.

The UK Department of Arts Administration has a long history of pioneering online arts administration education. In 2013, the department was the first public university to launch a Master of Arts Administration entirely online. Rachel Shane, chair of the department, says the Ph.D. is the latest step in their unwavering commitment to provide accessible, high-quality education for arts leaders.

"We believe this Ph.D. program fills a critical research gap within the academia, government, and arts and cultural industries," Shane said. "We're excited to see how it shapes the future of arts administration."

The five graduates are all working professionals whose diverse backgrounds and experiences speak to the program's ability to cater to a wide range of aspiring arts and culture researchers.

"Being part of this inaugural cohort has been the highlight of my academic career," said graduate Rebecca Ferrell. "Aside from the personal accomplishment I feel, this is also a milestone for the field itself, marking the recognition of arts administration as a stand-alone and important area of study worthy of doctoral-level inquiry."

"My goal was career advancement, but I found so much more," said graduate Heather McDonald. "I quickly felt like I was part of this incredibly supportive community of scholarship with my peers and faculty mentors that respected my work and that actually challenged me to respect my own work — something I hadn’t realized was a struggle for me. I can’t wait to continue our work in the field for years to come."

All five of the graduates traveled to Lexington, Kentucky last month to receive their diplomas on stage and be formally hooded as a Doctor of Philosophy during UK's Commencement Ceremonies.

Anastasia Curwood, history professor and director of the Commonwealth Institute for Black Studies at the University of Kentucky, is referring to the reaction of students to their work with the groundbreaking Civil Rights and Restorative Justice (CRRJ)-Kentucky project, a program stemming from the pioneering CRRJ project at Northeastern University School of Law.

Prompted by the national project and working with UK's J. David Rosenberg College of Law, UK faculty and students recognized the need to address unsolved murders in Kentucky tied to racism or racial hostility.

"Law and history are kind of detective disciplines," Curwood said. "We like to go back, excavate evidence, find it, build a case."

The multidimensional approach encompasses legal seminars, historical research and a restorative justice element, intertwining legal expertise and historical context to unravel mysteries dating back through the past 100 years.

The project is also bridging the gap between academic disciplines, offering students the opportunity to delve into cold cases that state agencies — hindered by resource constraints — often overlook or are unable to continue work on.

The significance lies not only in its historical inquiry but also in its potential to redefine how Kentuckians perceive their past. By investigating historical wrongs, the project seeks to create a more honest narrative of the Commonwealth, acknowledging the lasting impact on families and communities, which include descendants of victims who are still living today.

"Every single one of them said, ‘My God, I had no idea something like this happened.’ I think they are learning something about their communities that they didn’t know before.”

For more information, visit cibs.as.uky.edu/crrj-ky
Beyond the Divide

State Policies Are Factoring Into Enrollment Decisions

By Katy Abrams and Courtney Mullins
**Just as voters** might choose to live in states that align with their political beliefs to enhance their sense of belonging, students are increasingly considering the political climate in the home state of their potential alma mater when deciding where to attend college.

Organizations like Gallup, Lumina Foundation, and the consulting firm Art & Science Group have surveyed current and prospective students about the issues most important to them as they apply to, and then consider acceptances from, colleges and universities.

These groups found that students are closely monitoring several politicized policies when considering where to attend college, including those related to guns on campus, state legislation surrounding reproductive health, and curriculum restrictions, as well as a state’s perceived concern about racial equality and the availability of mental health care.

The Art & Science Group, publishers of “Politics, Policies, and Student Perspective - The Impact of State Social Policies on College Choice,” noted that in their national winter survey, aptly named studentPOLL, they found “a substantial fraction of high school seniors bound for four-year colleges as full-time students reported passing over a school they had initially considered, based exclusively on state-level political considerations. This was true across the spectrum of political ideologies.”

The demographics of these considerations are not as polarized as the survey topics might imply, suggesting that the anti-DEI movement may be alienating students on both sides of the political divide.

**The Issues**

While anti-DEI legislation is overwhelmingly written and supported by Republican lawmakers, Gallup and Lumina Foundation’s report, “Policies and Laws: How They’re Impacting College Enrollment,” found that across the political spectrum, “By margins between 52 and 68 percentage points, current and prospective students say they would prefer to attend college in states that are less restrictive of reproductive healthcare, more restrictive of guns on campus and less restrictive of the topics that can be discussed on campus.”

Affecting higher education perhaps most directly was the Supreme Court’s June 2023 ruling in Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, which effectively reversed affirmative action and banned any consideration of race in college admissions.

According to Gallup and Lumina Foundation, almost the same number of people who think the court’s decision will influence whether they apply to college also believe it will affect which schools they consider applying to — despite the fact that most students go to colleges that accept more than three-quarters of their applicants and probably didn’t use race as a factor in admissions before the ruling.

**Guns**

Today’s prospective college students grew up practicing active shooter drills and watching breaking news on TV about incidents like the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. They are acutely aware of, and concerned about, gun violence in schools.

As such, more than 67% of current and prospective students surveyed by Gallup and Lumina Foundation — across gender, race, age, and political party affiliations — said their preference is for more restrictive campus gun regulations, as this issue ranked at least “somewhat important” to their decision-making process when choosing where to enroll.

Despite this, 12 states have enacted legislation that effectively forces colleges and universities to allow concealed firearms on campus. Of that dozen, five are among the top 10 on the 2023 Guns and Ammo magazine ranked list of most gun-friendly states. Of those, both Utah and Montana faced decreasing enrollment numbers in 2023.

Meanwhile, numerous incidents involving the accidental discharge of loaded firearms have been reported in the last decade that put students and faculty at risk, according to research by Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund, which notes that college campuses are relatively safe environments when guns are not allowed.

Students want to feel safe on campus, and when it comes to their view on guns, that means fewer, not more. But the political trend in many states has increasingly leaned toward legislating in favor of firearms and allowing them to be concealed and carried on campus grounds.
Abortion
Among current and prospective students, 71% surveyed by Gallup and Lumina Foundation said they consider reproductive health care policies significant factors in their college enrollment decisions. This preference was particularly pronounced among women, Black and Hispanic individuals, and adults aged 25 or younger.

As with gun policies, the issue crossed the political divide; Democrat-, Independent-, and Republican-identifying survey respondents each expressed a statistically strong preference for states with less restrictive policies, which correlates with general national attitudes since the 2022 Supreme Court ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson rescinded the constitutional right to abortion.

The Pew Research Center reported this spring that approximately 63% of Americans support the right to an abortion in all or most circumstances, and students are clear that they prefer having the choice available to them while attending college.

But in the same counterproductive vein as the trends regarding guns, many states have enacted — or are attempting to enact — laws that ban or severely restrict abortions, including North Dakota, Missouri, and Florida, each of which saw student enrollment decline or stagnate in 2023. Again, the impact is being felt.

By legislating against the preferences of potential students, these states, and others who tighten reproductive health care safety nets, risk alienating incoming classes at a time when they need to be ensuring high enrollment numbers.

Curriculum
Approximately 75% of current and prospective students surveyed by Gallup and Lumina Foundation reported that state policies regulating classroom discussions on race, gender, and other "divisive topics" have at least some significance in their enrollment considerations, with a notable majority expressing a preference for institutions exempt from such constraints.

These "divisive topics" are not open to interpretation. They were spelled out in Executive Order 13950, which former President Donald Trump signed into law during his term, and are not limited to racially charged concepts. This executive order has informed much of the public debate around "divisive topics," both within and beyond higher education, since its publication in 2020.

Before now, there was only speculation about how these definitions and the resulting legislation would impact campus operations. As Gallup and Lumina Foundation explain, limitations on "divisive concepts" are unfavorable in most student enrollment decisions, which is more bad news for institutions pursuing increased enrollment.

The correlation between those states most successful in mirroring this philosophy and those seeing the biggest drop in enrollment seems to further evidence of the adverse effects of these policies.

In one example, Utah saw a 6.9% plummet in overall enrollment between 2021 and 2023 — the second biggest decline across all states — which directly coincides with Republican Spencer Cox’s term as the state’s governor. Cox has been pushing DEI restrictions since he took office and signed a bill prohibiting diversity training at state universities and in state government.

Undergraduate enrollment in Missouri dropped 4% between 2021 and 2023, which also aligns with the state legislature's efforts to decrease campus diversity practices.

Looking Forward
While considerations such as cost, proximity, and educational quality hold sway for many, Gallup and Lumina Foundation’s survey results reveal the significant role of state-level policies in college-bound students’ decisions; for most current and prospective students surveyed, issues like gun legislation, reproductive health care, and curriculum restrictions carry meaningful weight in their selections.

This underscores a broader pattern. Movements opposing diversity, equity, and inclusion risk isolating students across the political spectrum. It is clear that institutions seeking to actively recruit students and stabilize or increase enrollment must recognize that they care about these issues and consider their part in shaping the slope of the enrollment cliff.

As the enrollment cliff looms across higher education and political spheres, it is critical that decision-making bodies and higher education leaders come together to create policies and legislation that will attract as wide a net of students to their state schools as possible.

"Colleges and universities in states with less popular policies may risk seeing otherwise-interested students opt to pursue their degrees in a neighboring state whose policies match their preferences and may find it difficult to attract out-of-state students to fill the void."

Gallup and Lumina Foundation
KEEP YOUR STUDENTS ON TRACK

THE PROBLEM
Survey Question: In the past six months, have you considered stopping your coursework (withdrawing from the program for at least one term)?
Response: “Yes”

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<td>35%</td>
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THE CAUSE
Survey Question: Which of the following describes why you considered stopping your coursework?

- Emotional Stress 54%
- Mental Health 43%
- Cost 31%

SOLUTIONS
Develop initiatives that address the barriers to higher education cited by students:
- Work conflicts
- Emotional stress
- Program length
- Mental health
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Cost of degree/program
- Lack of remote learning

PACK YOUR PASSPORT!

Study Abroad Programs Center
Access to International Education

By Nikki Brahm
After hearing stories from her sister about studying abroad, Briana Johnson, a music performance student at the University of Kentucky (UK), began searching for an inspiring adventure of her own.

It wasn’t until her mother contacted her about the Explore First program, a study abroad initiative at UK focused on developing career skills for first-generation students, that she found an experience that accommodated her needs.

Her first study abroad trip was to Dublin, Ireland, where Johnson had the experience of a lifetime, including an unforgettable moment singing in a cathedral at the nearby Maynooth University.

“After that [trip] I was like, I want to go abroad again, so I’m actually going to Austria this summer,” says Johnson, who will travel with the American Institute For Foreign Study.

This new opportunity will allow Johnson to meet language credit requirements for the bachelor of arts program she is enrolled in at UK. Although credit won’t transfer for an additional course focused on Mozart, she is especially excited for this venture.

Despite an increase in underrepresented student participation in study abroad programs over the years, gaps in diversity persist. For example, only 8% of first-generation students have studied abroad compared to 15% of second- or later-generation students, according to The Consortium for Analysis of Student Success Through International Education, a research initiative led by the University System of Georgia.

While nearly 70% of study abroad program participants in 2021-2022 were White, only about 5% were Black or African American, 8% were Asian or Pacific Islander, 12% were Hispanic or Latino, 5% were multiracial, and less than 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native, according to data reported to NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Unfortunately, research finds that underrepresented students often feel unwelcome or uninformed about international education experiences. They are more likely to participate when programs are designed to serve student populations with similar backgrounds, according to the 2022 report “Study Abroad: Perspectives from Historically Underrepresented Student Populations,” published in the Journal of College Access.

To address this, higher education institutions and stakeholders are developing creative programs aimed at reducing barriers, cultivating skills, and building student confidence.

University of Kentucky
The Explore First program, launched in summer 2023, offers the opportunity for four cohorts of 15 first-generation students to participate in study abroad sessions each summer in Dublin or London.

The program is based on the National Association of Colleges and Employers Career Readiness Competencies, offering college credits in a professional development course. It was developed with this general focus in order to allow students with varying degrees to participate, says Niamh Larson, UK executive director of education abroad & exchanges.

“We know the skills that the students will develop from this program will help them when they try and apply for internships, maybe their junior or senior year,” she says. “They’re learning really tangible career skills that will hopefully then set them apart in all of their applications.”

Explore First covers almost all costs. Students who apply pay a $500 deposit.
toward the program, which then covers airfare, housing, all activities, and some group meals.

While financial barriers must be addressed when developing similar programs, institutional leaders should also focus on building a student’s skills and self-confidence, says Larson. That’s why UK created the cluster program that includes a weekly meeting allowing students to get to know each other and focus on travel preparation, whether it’s related to packing, budgeting, or researching the country’s culture.

“[Some students] may not even have plans to ever leave the state of Kentucky, but they don’t realize that some of the [employers] have a global reach,” says Larson. “Exposing students to how the world works allows them to better understand their own country, their own place, their own sphere of influence, but it also allows them to be able to engage and interact with people who may not be like them.”

University of Memphis

The University of Memphis (UofM) offers a similar initiative tailored for students from underrepresented backgrounds, known as the Study Abroad Access Initiative (SAAI).

While a different scholarship program is available at UofM for students interested in pursuing international education programs, those funds aren’t distributed until late in the process, says Jonathan Holland, assistant director of the Helen Hardin Honors College. SAAI is unique in that it addresses the hurdle of up-front expenses by off-setting the cost of a passport and a round-trip international flight.

To be eligible for an SAAI scholarship, students must be active members of the UofM TRiO program, a resource group for those who are first generation, low income, or have a disability, or in the Hooks African American Male Initiative (HAAMI), which works to improve African American male undergraduate collegiate experiences and graduation outcomes. To date, SAAI participants have traveled to Japan and Costa Rica, and will soon travel to Italy.

Since SAAI launched in 2017, UofM has seen an increase in the number of first-generation and low-income students studying abroad, says Rebecca Van Dyck-Laumann, JD, executive director of UofM’s Center for International Education Services. To continue expanding the initiative, new grant funds awarded last year will advance the training
of academic advisers to further expose eligible students to international education opportunities.

“Working with [TRiO and HAAMI] allows us to promote education abroad opportunities to an identifiable group of first-generation, low-income students who may not be aware of the possibility of engaging in an education abroad program as part of their academic career,” she says.

One significant obstacle is that students are typically unaware of available financial support for international education, adds Holland.

“[Students often] assume it is not possible to study abroad,” he says. “My advice is to talk to your campus study abroad office and you are likely to find an affordable program that fits [your] personal, professional, and academic needs.”

After her SAAI experience traveling to Costa Rica, Angelica Alaniz, a senior studying international studies and anthropology, with a minor in Spanish, was inspired to also pursue a master’s degree in public health and medical anthropology. For students who are interested in finding a program of their own but may feel intimidated, she says to not be discouraged.

“I [recommend] asking for help or advice,” she says. “It never hurts and everyone is always available and can get you access to what you need. I think that the hardest part that everyone worries about is the application process, money, and essays — but it’s not hard when you have the support.”

UDC Secures State Support for Student International Studies

At the heart of the nation's capital, the historically Black University of the District of Columbia (UDC) has recently secured a significant boost in its mission to globalize the educational experiences of its students.

Thanks to a generous grant from the U.S. Department of State's Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) Program, UDC joins an elite group of 37 U.S. colleges and universities dedicated to expanding students' ability to experience educational opportunities overseas, which is aligned with U.S. foreign policy goals.

UDC, unique not only as the only public university in Washington D.C. but also as the sole urban land-grant university in the country, is poised to enrich its study abroad programs.

“This funding will significantly enhance and expand our efforts to provide our students with invaluable, transformative international experiences,” stated UDC’s Chief Academic Officer, April Massey, Ph.D. The grant aims to provide students who might typically miss out on such opportunities — due to various competing responsibilities — the chance to gain a global perspective and acquire broad skills.

The IDEAS Program plans to propel U.S. study abroad initiatives to 36 destinations worldwide. Since its inception in 2016, IDEAS has awarded 216 grants to 205 institutions across 49 U.S. states and territories, expanding U.S. study abroad programs to over 95 countries.

Heidi Manley, Chief of USA Study Abroad, highlighted the strategic importance of the initiative. "Increasing the number of U.S. students with international experiences is part of our investment in ensuring that our country’s future leaders have the skills they need in fields ranging from global health to technology and innovation."

This ambitious initiative not only exemplifies UDC's commitment to education, research, and community service but also reflects its dedication to preparing students for leadership in a global context, reinforcing its status as a pivotal educational institution in the U.S.
The Tech Bar Pipeline for TMT Law

The Federal Communications Bar Association (FCBA) — often referred to as the Tech Bar — has been celebrated for its exemplary contributions to the legal profession, specifically in the fields of technology, media, and telecommunications (TMT) law. Renowned for its collegial atmosphere and robust support for young lawyers, the association is dedicated to leadership, professional excellence, and community engagement.

A key aspect of FCBA’s mission is fostering diversity within the legal profession. The association emphasizes the importance of reflecting a broad spectrum of talent, perspectives, and experiences in TMT law and policy. This commitment is evident in the strategic initiatives designed to attract diverse law students and guide them toward successful careers.

Central to these efforts is the FCBA Diversity Pipeline Program (DPP), a pioneering initiative aimed at bridging the gap for law students from historically underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds.

As a selective internship and legal skills enrichment program, DPP readies underrepresented law students for careers in TMT law and policy by connecting participants to paid internships through the DPP Internship Program, introducing them to the field via the TMT Law & Policy Certificate Program, and offering ongoing support and education by way of the Summer Series and Mentorship Program.

The DPP is a comprehensive career development journey. Students receive continuous support from FCBA, which hones their legal and policy expertise and prepares them to succeed in demanding, elite legal careers.

FCBA’s commitment to diversity underscores its belief that a varied workforce enhances productivity, creativity, and decision-making, while also fostering employee engagement and improving organizational reputation. By increasing diversity in the TMT field, the FCBA aims to cultivate a more equitable and effective legal profession.

Scholarship Sending Native American Scholars to Harvard Law

The American Indian Law School Scholarship from the American Indian College Fund, a nonprofit organization that supports Native American students through higher education funding, is sending its third Native American student to Harvard Law School in fall 2024.

The program is supported by an anonymous $1 million donation, and accepts applications annually in the spring.

A law degree is essential for Native leaders to ensure the rights of their sovereign Nations and citizens, according to the organization. Samantha Maltais, the previous recipient, is an enrolled member of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah in Massachusetts and was the first Wampanoag tribal member to graduate from law school this spring.

Maltais is a Dartmouth College graduate and an American Indian College Fund student ambassador and Full Circle Scholar.

Learn more at collegefund.org.
The South Texas College of Law (STCL) Houston campus’ cornerstone of cultivating inclusion in the legal field is getting a makeover.

According to Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Donna M. Davis, JD, The Benny Agosto, Jr. Diversity Center, established in October 2021 through a $3 million donation from alum Benny Agosto Jr., serves students, staff, faculty, and alumni of STCL Houston.

A managing partner with the Houston-based firm of Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Agosto, Aziz & Stogner, Agosto Jr. is an accomplished attorney who has dedicated much of his career to supporting student inclusion efforts at his alma mater and in the broader community. He has twice been honored on the Top Latino Lawyers List.

Agosto Jr., who himself made the first strike toward demolition at the construction kick-off celebration in April, said, “We are grateful that, at a time when our country is so divided, the Agosto Diversity Center brings people together — all people, from every background, color, creed, nationality, and viewpoint.”

The rebuilt space will allow the center to better accomplish their mission to foster opportunities for quality legal education and constructive dialogue through an array of student, faculty, staff, and community engagement programming.

“Our work has provided the STCL Houston community with an opportunity to learn, grow, and support the mosaic of differences among us,” said Davis. ●
Resource Offers Data on Law School Deans  
By Nikki Brahm

Tracking law school deans across the U.S., Rosenblatt’s Dean Database offers a rich repository of real-time information for the higher education sector.

The resource was created in 2007 by Jim Rosenblatt, JD, professor of law and dean emeritus at the Mississippi College School of Law. The focus is to collect data related to law school deans, allowing users to access real-time information regarding terms, career trajectory, and more.

While this remains the cornerstone of the project, data fields have been expanded based on interest from the public to include gender and ethnicity, interim and full-time status, prior job roles, and new positions achieved after one’s deanship.

The most often accessed data shows seniority in terms of tenure, both in current deanship and in cumulative deanships, Rosenblatt says. “You can see people very rapidly move up what I call the order of merit list, up the letterhead as they stay around, because there’s such turnover, there might be as many as 40 deans [who] turn over in a year,” he says.

It’s rare for a law school dean to stay in their role for 10 years or more, Rosenblatt says. However, there’s an advantage to having people that stay for extended terms.

“Many deans say that the longer they stay, the more effective they think they are in the broader scheme of things,” Rosenblatt says.

In terms of demographic data, men comprise approximately 57% of law school deans, while women hold about 43% of these positions. Nearly 67% are Caucasian, 21% are Black or African American, 6% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% are Native American, and less than 1% are Asian American, Iranian American, Arab/Middle Eastern, or Filipino.

Rosenblatt says he’s seen progress in this representation over time; however, there is room for improvement. “I think under … the goals of the Association of American Law Schools, that there’s a great emphasis on [improving diversity],” he says. “A lot of it is intentionality — when you conduct your dean searches, you want to widen your applicant pool, you want to encourage applicants that come from diverse backgrounds, you want to look at diverse members of your own faculty.”

Lean Into Your Future

Albany Law School is committed to building a community that is supportive, inclusive and focuses on the whole person to develop and maintain a sense of belonging among everyone at the law school. We value and celebrate the differences and the similarities that work together to foster a rich and diverse academic and social experience.

Our innovative Lean Into Success program, which centers the experience of first-generation students and students from historically excluded communities, is one of the many ways we give focus to equity and inclusion in legal education.

The program focuses on developing a sense of belonging and confidence by engaging with alumni, current students, faculty, and staff while getting acclimated to the rigors of the law school classroom.

Find out more about Lean Into Success and our other DEI efforts at albanylaw.edu.
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To address disparities in the legal profession and advance the study of issues related to the law as it impacts Latinx people, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law’s Critical Race Studies Program (CRS) recently announced the creation of the Laura E. Gómez Teaching Fellowship on Latinx People and the Law.

The two-year academic fellowship, which begins July 1, 2024, honors Laura E. Gómez, a pioneering scholar and one of the first Latina professors to receive tenure at a Top 20 U.S. law school. Funded by a $1 million donation from UCLA Law alum Alicia Miñana de Lovelace, the fellowship recognizes Gómez’s significant contributions to legal scholarship on Latinx communities.

“Boosting opportunities and creating meaningful change is never easy and takes a group effort — which is precisely what UCLA Law and CRS have been doing for a long time now,” Miñana de Lovelace said in a statement announcing the fellowship. “This is the perfect place to continue tackling these challenges head-on.”

The fellowship offers a unique opportunity for emerging scholars to develop their academic careers through teaching, research, mentorship, and active participation in CRS, while making significant contributions to the understanding and advancement of legal issues affecting Latinx communities.

The fellow will continue the legacy of Laura E. Gómez, whose work has profoundly impacted the field of legal scholarship on race and law.

Designed for individuals engaged in legal research related to Latinx people in the U.S., the fellowship’s potential areas of study include criminal, labor and employment, immigration, voting and political rights, civil rights, sexuality and gender, and family law.

During the first nine months, the
fellow is expected to complete a scholarly article to be presented to the UCLA Law faculty and submitted for publication, therefore contributing to the ongoing academic discourse on Latinx legal issues.

One of the primary responsibilities is teaching an annual course focused on the intersection of Latinx persons and the law, providing students with critical insights into the legal issues affecting these communities. The course aims to deepen students’ understanding of the intersectionality of law, race, and society.

“UCLA is progressing toward receiving the federal designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and law students will benefit immensely from a regular course offering on Latinx people and the law that covers topics including voting rights, immigration law and policy, and racial disparities in the criminal justice system,” Gómez said in response to the fellowship’s creation.

Established in 2000, CRS is the first law school program dedicated to incorporating Critical Race Theory (CRT) into legal scholarship and teaching, emphasizing the influence of race and racism on American law and society. CRS faculty research often explores these dynamics at the intersections of various social structures, such as the legal system, the labor market, property and zoning, education, and migration.

Mentorship is another crucial component of the program. The fellow will mentor law students, with a particular emphasis on first-generation and underrepresented scholars, and work with two CRS faculty mentors. This close collaboration with experienced faculty will support the fellow’s growth as an academic and researcher.

Additionally, they will be actively involved in the CRS intellectual community, attending and participating in symposia, workshops, faculty paper presentations, and other CRS activities.

“This fellowship will ensure that current and future legal scholars will take up [Gómez’s] mantle and become the changemakers who further advance Latinx legal studies here at UCLA Law,” Miñana de Lovelace said in the statement. “Thanks in no small part to Laura’s leadership, CRS has become a signature part of the law school’s curriculum and reputation.”

Boston University School of Law is committed to an institutional culture where every member of our community feels welcomed and has the support they need to succeed. We are proud to offer:

- The BU Summer Pre-Law Academy, an LSAC Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) program that prepares aspiring law students from underrepresented backgrounds with tools to thrive in the law school admission process
- ASPIRE (Antiracist Scholars for Progress, Innovation, and Racial Equity), which provides a full scholarship to a select number of students who have demonstrated a commitment to antiracism, social justice, and social equity
- A number of student affinity groups where students can build community, access support and mentorship, and develop networks to last a lifetime

bu.edu/law/diversity
Revitalizing a critical space for advocacy and support, the Black Law Student Association (BLSA) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) College of Law is championing diversity and representation within the legal community.

A chapter of the National Black Law Students Association, the BLSA provides academic and professional support to Black law students. The UNL chapter was reactivated in 2022, thanks to the efforts of recent graduate and outgoing BLSA vice president Lionel D’Almeida, who recognized the need for more open discussion about race and ethnicity in legal contexts.

"It was important to give Black law students an organization that they know will champion them, especially given the low percentage of Black lawyers," D’Almeida said in a statement.

The representation of Black lawyers in the legal profession remains disproportionately low. According to the American Bar Association, only 5% of lawyers in 2023 were Black, despite Black Americans making up 13.6% of the population. This statistic has grown fractionally from 4.8% in 2013, highlighting a significant gap.

D’Almeida emphasized the importance of representation, especially in criminal law, where Black individuals, particularly men, are often defendants. "Having an attorney who looks like you is crucial," he said.

BLSA’s initiatives involve connecting UNL law students with prominent Black attorneys, community leaders, and legal advocates in Nebraska and throughout the U.S.

For example, in 2023, BLSA hosted Shakur Abdullah, a restorative justice coordinator with the Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic at at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and senior restorative justice intervention trainer/facilitator and outreach specialist for the Community Justice Center in Lincoln. Abdullah, who was first sentenced to death for first-degree murder and later had his sentence reduced to life without parole at age 17, “took advantage of habilitative opportunities (personal, academic and vocational) to be released from prison better not bitter,” he wrote in his autobiographical statement.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that life sentences for minors were unconstitutional, and Abdullah was resentenced and released on parole. He uses his story to highlight the experiences of Black men in the criminal justice system — particularly as it relates to juvenile justice — and urges law students to consider social justice issues when they enter the legal field.

“If I can help maybe spark some interest in their mind about working on some of the social ills that exist, I think it’s important for me and others to come and do that," Abdullah told a local news station after the event.

Recognizing the importance of reaching potential law students early, BLSA also organizes outreach to underrepresented middle and high school students to offer education, mentorship, and support throughout the process of pursuing a legal education.

"It’s important to start early in order to make people understand that it’s possible and that they would be supported here,” D’Almeida said.
UIC Law is privileged to be home to some of the best and brightest aspiring attorneys in this city, and that distinction is not possible without our diverse student body.

Recognized as a “Best Law School” for African American, Hispanic, and Asian students, UIC Law constantly works to promote an institutional culture of empathy and respect. We cultivate thought, dialogue, and active engagement that elevate the skills and deepen the understanding for all members of the law school community.

We value students with a strong commitment to social justice who are empowered to make a difference in the lives of others, no matter what. Being the only public law school in Chicago committed to providing access and opportunity to those who seek a higher education, you are not just another number; you are family.

You belong here, at UIC Law.

law.uic.edu/belong
CLE Fosters Inclusion and Addresses Bias

By Erik Cliburn

Though required by a majority of state bar associations for ongoing licensure, continuing legal education (CLE) credits are not just about fulfilling professional requirement — they are a vital mechanism for attorneys to stay current, expand their knowledge, and uphold ethical standards.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on equity, fairness, and inclusion within the legal profession, prompting legal institutions and organizations to offer specialized CLE programs. They are designed to address biases, promote cultural competency, and foster a more inclusive work environment.

They are also intended to promote a fair and just judicial system by equipping attorneys with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate complex societal challenges through examining their own biases. This work helps them better understand diverse perspectives and more effectively advocate for people from underrepresented communities.

One notable example is an event hosted in late 2023 by Villanova University’s Law Library and Girard-diCarlo Center for Ethics. An exhibition based on the book “Lawyers Without Rights: Jewish Lawyers in Germany Under the Third Reich,” delved into historical injustices leading up to and during the Holocaust in order to underscore the importance of upholding the rule of law and safeguarding against arbitrary practices.

“Yes, this exhibit is about Holocaust education and remembrance, but it’s also a vivid and sad reminder that when lawyers, the judicial system, and the just rule of law are undermined, and when abuses go unchecked and are permitted to flourish, great tragedy can follow,” William J. Choyke, JD, the book’s editor and senior strategist for the American Bar Association, said at the event. “This is what happened in Germany in 1933. Too many people were silent and we can’t look away again.”

The event, which provided ethics CLE credits to attending attorneys, featured discussions led by Douglas Morris, author and former federal defender for New York City, and David Gill, consul general of Germany.

The exhibit, which has since moved to other universities and community institutions throughout the U.S. — most recently the Michigan State University College of Law — serves as an important educational tool for practicing attorneys and students about the dangers of authoritarianism and the degradation of legal systems.

“If we really mean ‘never again,’ we must commit ourselves to that goal and start with vigilance globally and the degradation of legal systems.

“Oppressive Trauma Informed Care and Healing Practices for Law Students and Lawyers,” featured discussions on the relationships between mental health, historical oppression, and the judicial system. The conversations were led by leaders of two Minnesota nonprofits: Creative Kuponya — which provides mental health support through a DEI lens — and the Legal Revolution.

The latter operates the Prison to Law Pipeline program, which facilitates paralegal degrees for incarcerated students. Through the event, and in their general partnership, the leaders discussed ways to provide mental health care to those impacted by the legal system.

Sara Stamachor-Lott, director and co-founder of Creative Kuponya, said at the event, "Our purpose is to think through, ‘How do we embed wellness into The Legal Revolution, into the Pipeline, and on a larger level how do we embed wellness into the work of the law?’"

CLE programs like these bridge the gap between legal education and real-world practice, empowering attorneys to advocate for fairness, equity, and justice. Universities play a vital role in organizing these events and fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging within the legal profession and within their own institutions.
THERE’S ONLY ONE COLLEGE OF LAW

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Students and faculty at Stanford Law School are leading advocacy efforts in intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD) law and policy by developing new resources and increasing awareness of, and access to, existing services and supports.

Utilizing student engagement, policy analysis, and academic research, the Stanford Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Law and Policy Project (SIDDLAPP), in recognition of the divide that can exist between legal policies and affected people’s lived experiences, creates comprehensive tools that improve transparency and empower stakeholders, particularly those with I/DD and their families.

The initiative, launched in 2019, was inspired by Alison D. Morantz, JD, PhD, director of SIDDLAPP, James and Nancy Kelso Professor of Law, and senior fellow of the Stanford Institute of Economic Policy Research, who had spent a number of years learning about complex I/DD policies and systems in an effort to help her son, who is autistic and developed severe mental illness at eight years old.

“I am incredibly advantaged compared to 99% of parents, yet I felt outgunned and overwhelmed,” Morantz says. “I wanted to help disability laws work better for the people they are supposed to serve, and try to make the system as a whole more transparent and accountable for its performance.”

In an effort to enhance the welfare of those impacted by the Lanterman Act, a California law that gives people with I/DD the right to services and support needed to live an independent life, SIDDLAPP’s work largely focuses on researching and developing initiatives that educate and galvanize individuals interested in improving existing policies and holding the state accountable for providing necessary services.

One such resource is the Lanterman Fair Hearing Smart Search Tool, an interactive search engine designed to help users find and download fair hearing decisions published by the Office of Administrative Hearings. The fair hearing process is used to resolve disputes regarding the nature, scope, and eligibility of government services and supports. People can use this information to prepare for their own proceedings. Also created by SIDDLAPP is the Lanterman Transparency Tracker, an interactive tool under development by students like Antonio Milane, a Stanford sophomore majoring in computer science. It is designed to help stakeholders monitor the compliance of the California Department of Developmental Services, a state agency that provides services and support to people with developmental disabilities, and its Regional Centers, by grading these entities on how well they comply with the state’s disclosure and transparency mandates.

Milane, who has cerebral palsy, became involved in SIDDLAPP to further his longtime advocacy. One thing he finds surprising about the tracker is how many Regional Centers are failing to comply with state laws.

“As a person who is disabled myself, it bothers me because these services are supposed to protect and ensure that those who are unable to protect themselves are taken care of, and [we are] just seeing mass noncompliance in some fields,” Milane says.

In addition to these projects, SIDDLAPP is focused on research and development of policy reports, often designed for policymakers. For example, one report, titled “Unfair Hearings: How People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Lack Access to Justice in California,” highlighted problems in the administrative appeals process, and
has led to significant policy reform, says Morantz. The Racial and Disability Justice Pro Bono Project (RAD Justice), another Stanford Law project developing similar materials, is operating in partnership with the nonprofit Integrated Community Collaborative (ICC) as a support network for Latinx people with I/DD and their caregivers. The initiative is designed to address the disparity of services provided by Regional Centers to people with these intersecting identities.

Carly Frieders, a second-year law student involved in RAD Justice, says that, as with many individuals who are a part of SIDDLAPP, the program is meaningful to her personally because her brother is on the autism spectrum.

“Bureaucracies can make it very challenging in some instances for people to get the services that they need — unless they have advocates like the people who run the ICC, who have been through this process themselves and really know how to advocate for families, or in some cases, advocates like us, who have some knowledge of the legal system and [how to] be persuasive,” Frieders says.

Why is it important to center disability rights within law schools?

“Encouraging more people with disabilities to become lawyers can enrich the profession. People with lived experience are uniquely well equipped to identify barriers to full inclusion and find workable solutions. Attorneys who do not have a personal connection to disability issues should educate themselves about the felt needs, challenges and priorities of their clients, some of whom have I/DD or other disabilities. That is the best, and sometimes the only, way to build rapport and advocate effectively on their clients’ behalf.” - Alison D. Morantz, JD, PhD

What is the Lanterman Act?

The Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act of 1969, now codified in the California Welfare and Institutions Code, declared that “[a]n array of services and supports should be established which is sufficiently complete to meet the needs and choices of each person with developmental disabilities, regardless of age or degree of disability, and at each stage of life, and to support their integration into the mainstream life of the community.” As the first state in the U.S. to guarantee individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) the right to access services and support necessary for living more independent lives, California remains unique in recognizing the civil right and individual entitlement of individuals with I/DD to be supported in the least restrictive environment possible.
Law Schools
Navigate the Shifting
Inclusion Landscape

By Erik Cliburn
As law schools across the nation grapple with the tidal wave of recent anti-DEI laws, the foundation of inclusion and equity in legal education is being profoundly challenged, forcing law schools to rethink their approaches to fostering a wide net of representation.

New state laws often target inclusion initiatives by defunding related offices at public universities, banning discussions of certain “divisive concepts” related to race, gender, or sexuality, and imposing penalties on institutions that fail to comply. The impact on law schools is profound, affecting everything from teaching and curricula to programming and campus climate.

Recent Changes in Laws
Florida’s Stop WOKE Act, which has been in effect since 2022, mandates stringent rules on how race and social justice issues can be included in public school curricula. Similarly, Texas’ SB 17, passed in 2023, banned public universities from maintaining inclusion offices and curtailed scholarship related to race, gender, and sexual identity. Although similar legislation has passed in other states, these two laws served as the catalysts and have, so far, led to the most sweeping changes in universities policies.

“These two laws create environments that are not only hostile to DEI efforts, they all but exclude any intentional DEI efforts as they relate to race and LGBTQ+ identities,” wrote Kerii Landry-Thomas, JD, associate vice chancellor of equity, inclusion, and Title IX at Southern University Law Center. “Anyone working in this area can attest that this type of environment effectively ends DEI work in Texas and Florida, and burdens DEI efforts around the country as more state legislators become emboldened to challenge the premise of DEI efforts.”

The U.S. Supreme Court’s 2023 decision to ban race-conscious college admissions practices has stirred significant concern among law schools regarding their ability to maintain racially diverse student bodies.

According to a survey by Kaplan — a test preparation and education services company — which included responses from 85 law schools, a substantial number of admissions officers are worried about the implications of the ban. Specifically, 18 law schools reported being “very concerned” and 32 were “somewhat concerned” about their ability to create a racially diverse student body. Only a small fraction expressed being unconcerned.

The broader impact on law school diversity was even more pronounced, with 46 schools reporting being “very concerned,” 28 schools “somewhat concerned,” and only two schools “very unconcerned” about the ripple effects.

Further underscoring the potential impact of race-conscious admissions bans, a recent study by law professors from Yale University, New York University, and Northwestern University found that racial diversity at law schools in states with such bans has decreased substantially. The study revealed that minority enrollment at these schools dropped by 10 points to 17%, with more significant declines at top-ranked institutions.

Despite these concerns, there is a silver lining. Data from the Law School Admission Council indicates that over 43% of the current national applicant pool includes people of color, the highest percentage on record.

However, maintaining this trend will be challenging under the new legal framework, according to Amit Schlesinger, executive director of legal and government programs at Kaplan. “It’s unlikely this streak will continue given the Court’s decision, but law schools will likely do their best to stem the bleeding, while not violating the ruling,” Schlesinger wrote in a statement.

One positive strategy that law schools are adopting is broadening applicants’ personal statement criteria, Schlesinger said. This allows admissions officers to gain a deeper understanding of their backgrounds and experiences without explicitly considering race, thereby adhering to the Supreme Court’s ruling.

Law school admissions officers may also adjust how they view students’ applications and give greater priority to certain facets that could adjust for the inability to account for race, says Sydney Montgomery, JD, executive director and founder of the nonprofit Barrier Breakers, which works to improve access to and success in higher education for students of color and first-generation students.

“Maybe there are points or more weight given to the things [law schools] see in admissions essays,” Montgomery says. “They don't necessarily even have to be about race. [This] could affect first-generation students [or] those who've had to overcome some hardship in their educational background or a hardship in their socioeconomic status. So the
weighting might be in different places, but the end result might be similar. I think all schools really do care about building a diverse class.”

Scholarships
Even in states that have less restrictive policies or have not passed such laws, legal challenges still threaten equity and inclusion efforts in legal education. Stemming from frameworks laid out by the Supreme Court ban on race-conscious admissions, attacks are being made on scholarship, internship, and other DEI-related programs.

For example, the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) sued the State Bar of Wisconsin over its Diversity Clerkship Program. WILL argued that the program’s criteria and selection processes, which were designed to benefit minority students, were discriminatory. A settlement was reached in April 2024 that opened the program to all first-year law students, irrespective of race, reflecting a broader trend toward dismantling targeted diversity initiatives.

Despite highly publicized arguments that White law students face discrimination when applying for scholarships, recent statistics from the American Bar Association’s (ABA) Data Policy and Collection Committee reveal quite the opposite. White law students, who constitute 61% of those surveyed, receive 70% of full-ride scholarships. Conversely, students of color, making up nearly 32% of the student population, are awarded only 22.5% of these scholarships.

When students of color do receive full scholarships, they are often designated for diversity purposes, and are currently under threat following the Supreme Court ruling. These disparities contribute to higher debt levels for underrepresented students, with 44% of Black and 48% of Hispanic law students owing over $120,000 upon graduation, according to the ABA’s Law School Survey of Student Engagement.

Teaching and Curricula
The impact on teaching and curricula in law schools is significant. Traditionally, equity initiatives have aimed to enrich legal education by incorporating discussions on implicit bias, racism, equity, and cultural competency.

The ABA had passed accreditation rules requiring law schools to educate students on these topics. However, with the new legislative restrictions, the ability of law schools to explicitly address these issues is severely curtailed.

In a recent essay, “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Era of Hostility: A Plea for Action and a Roadmap for Moving Forward,” published in the University of Toledo Law Review, Landry-Thomas noted that anti-DEI laws create a chilling effect on these efforts by sowing mistrust among faculty, staff, and administration. Along with effectively ending diversity work in states like Texas and Florida, such laws have burdened efforts nationwide.

Despite the challenges brought on by this legislation, Landry-Thomas suggested that this hostile environment might push institutions to integrate equity work more subtly and pervasively into their curricula.

“With the steady trickle of disdain for anything DEI in colleges, businesses, and state legislatures, it is a necessity to move from a programmatic framework to an institutional framework where it does not matter if you use the language of DEI, but instead what matters is if you do the work of DEI.”

Kerii Landry-Thomas
businesses, and state legislatures, it is a necessity to move from a programmatic framework to an institutional framework where it does not matter if you use the language of DEI, but instead what matters is if you do the work of DEI,” Landry-Thomas wrote. “For example, law professors do not need to state that they are covering equity when they cover Brown v. Board of Education because they can cover the case exactly as it was written and navigate through the legal reasoning, the multiple follow-up cases, and even discuss the state of current public education. No student can leave that class discussion without recognizing inequality; even those students that hate any forced DEI efforts.”

This approach ensures that students understand these crucial concepts without the need for explicit language, which might be restricted by state laws.

Some experts believe that the current legislative environment may actually force law schools to adopt more substantial and effective diversity strategies. According to Landry-Thomas, increased enmity toward these efforts necessitates a shift from programmatic to institutional frameworks. This means moving beyond surface-level approaches and embedding the principles of equity and belonging into the core operations of institutions.

This shift involves diversifying faculty and administration, broadening recruitment and admissions policies, and creating accessible environments for all students. By focusing on the substance rather than the label of DEI, institutions can continue to advance diversity and inclusion in ways that comply with restrictive laws.

Looking Ahead

Law schools may be compelled to create more integrated and effective approaches to DEI to ensure that these principles remain a vital part of the education they provide to their students. Law firms and other organizations hiring their graduates still have an expectation that those joining their workforce have an understanding and appreciation of these principles.

The long-term impact of the legislative changes remains to be seen, but the resilience and adaptability of law schools and their commitment to diversity and inclusion will be crucial in navigating this complex landscape.

“I do believe that the growing hostility towards DEI is now forcing institutions to no longer rely on low-impact initiatives but to thoughtfully consider how to really diversify their faculty and administration, broaden recruitment and admissions policies and procedures, and create environments that are accessible to all that attend the institution,” Landry-Thomas wrote. “This is not the end but simply a new beginning.”
The Mansfield Rule suggests that 30% of the talent pool considered for leadership roles in legal professions be from underrepresented backgrounds.

The Harvard Business Review found that if there were at least two women in the final pool of candidates, chances were 79 times greater that a woman would be hired.

Similarly, if there were at least two minority candidates in the final pool of candidates, there was a 193% greater chance of the hired individual being a minority.

In 2023, 360+ law firms and 75+ legal departments across the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. participated in the Mansfield Certification process.

This content was not endorsed or authored by Diversity Lab, the facilitators of Mansfield.
Empowering Veterans in Emerging Technology

By Erik Cliburn

In a move to empower veterans and bridge critical gaps in emerging technology sectors, the Experiential Learning for Emerging and Novel Technologies (ExLENT) program at the National Science Foundation (NSF) has recently allocated significant funding to two pioneering university projects.

The University of Florida (UF) Pivots: VETS-HASTE (Veterans SkillBridge through Industry Based Hardware Security Training and Education), led by educational technology professor Wanli Xing, PhD, and computer engineering professor Sandip Ray, PhD, focuses on providing hardware security training specifically tailored for veterans. This initiative — which received $1 million in NSF ExLENT funding — acknowledges the potential contributions of veterans to cybersecurity and aims to address the increasing demand for skilled professionals in this sector.

Similarly, Illinois Institute of Technology (Illinois Tech) was awarded more than $875,000 in NSF funding for its Sensor Technology for Experiential Learning program, led by chemistry professor Rong Wang, PhD. The program is designed to prepare veterans and underrepresented groups for roles in sensor technology — a field with broad applications across a wide range of industries. The nine-credit certificate’s emphasis on hands-on training and industry collaboration underscores its commitment to providing participants with practical skills and industry-relevant experiences.

“Veterans are unique,” Wang says. “They are among the first to adopt new technologies as they have used some of the most sophisticated technologies in the world. However, military experience and training are frequently not the perfect match of skills needed to perform the jobs today.”

Overall, these initiatives exemplify ExLENT’s mission to promote diversity and inclusion in STEM fields while addressing pressing workforce needs in key technology sectors. In late 2023, the foundation approved nearly $19 million in ExLENT funding to 27 higher education institutions. By investing in programs that facilitate experiential learning and industry engagement, NSF aims to cultivate a skilled and diverse workforce capable of driving innovation and combating emerging challenges across the cybersecurity landscape.

Hardware Security

Hardware security involves safeguarding computer systems using physical devices rather than just software. These devices can scan systems, monitor network traffic, or manage cryptographic keys for encryption and authentication. Examples include hardware firewalls, proxy servers, and security modules. Hardware security not only protects against digital threats but also defends physical systems from damage, especially in environments where many interconnected devices need protection. It adds an extra layer of defense, making it harder for attackers to compromise critical functions and ensuring stronger overall security for mission-critical systems.

Sensor Technology

Sensors are devices that detect and measure properties of the environment or changes to those properties. They are found in numerous everyday items, from smartphones to cars, and they play a critical role in medicine, energy, security, space exploration, and environmental monitoring. Their applications range from diagnostics in healthcare to enhancing energy efficiency and ensuring safety and security.
Just over 80 years ago, on June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill.

It has since been recognized as one of the most influential pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government, providing World War II veterans with funds for college education, unemployment insurance, and housing benefits.

The bill provides money for tuition, books, supplies, counseling services, and a living allowance, and its implementation has resulted in a significant spike in college enrollment. Within the first several years of its enactment, approximately 8 million veterans utilized GI Bill benefits, resulting in more than double the number of university degree holders between 1940 and 1950, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

More Americans obtaining a college education meant more were earning higher wages, creating economic stability and high rates of employment during the baby boom.

Although the original GI Bill expired in 1956, newer versions continue to benefit veterans today.

Joseph Garcia, executive director of education service within the Veterans Benefits Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has felt the impact of these benefits personally; he served 28 years in the Air Force and his father served in World War II.

Facing economic hardship, Garcia entered the military right out of high school and later became a first-generation college student, an identity shared by 62% of student-veterans today, according to the VA.

“I would not be here without the GI Bill, period, and my story, I don’t think it’s that unique, [as approximately] 27 million have used the GI Bill, and it’s such a game changer,” he says. “All [GI] benefits are important [like] insurance [or] home loans — but education changes lives.”

In his role at the VA, Garcia leads more than 1,500 employees in the delivery of education and training benefits. Overall, these programs demonstrate appreciation to those who have served the country, enhance the lives of recipients and their families, and expand opportunities to achieve academic goals, Garcia says.

The GI Bill Today
Continuing upon the legacy of the original bill is the Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty legislation, established in 1984, which provides funds for education and training programs for those who have served in active duty. The Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve, created in 1985, offers up to 36 months of education and training to members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard Reserve,
Army National Guard, or Air National Guard. Of all the GI Bills currently in place, the most widely known is the Post-9/11 GI Bill (PGIB), established in 2008, for those who were on active duty after September 10, 2001. This bill covers up to 100% of tuition and fees, and offers allowances for housing, supplies, and more. It also allows for the service member to transfer some or all of their educational benefits to a spouse or dependent.

Between 2009 and 2019, approximately half of PGIB-eligible veterans used their benefits and half completed their degree within six years, according to the 2024 study “A First Look at Post-9/11 GI Bill-Eligible Enlisted Veterans’ Outcomes” by the American Institutes for Research.

Positive effects can be seen across generations, says Garcia, as his son, who received benefits through the PGIB, recently passed on to his daughter, who received her commission in the Space Force as a second lieutenant.

Among a variety of other programs that furthered veteran support, the Veterans Readiness and Employment initiative assists veterans who have service-connected disabilities, and also includes financial assistance for postsecondary education, counseling and rehabilitation planning, and various employment services.

In 2017, the PGIB was updated as the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, more commonly known as the Forever GI Bill. It expands and enhances education support for veterans, service members, families, and survivors. Some changes include the removal of the 15-year limit to apply for benefits under the PGIB for veterans discharged after January 1, 2013; expanded benefits for Purple Heart recipients; and further support for veterans pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degrees.

History demonstrates that veteran and military initiatives evolve to better meet the needs of the populations served, Garcia adds. For example, work began in 2021 on the GI Bill modernization initiative, which will consolidate GI Bill capabilities to a single digital platform.

“I like to call it ‘The Arc of Change,” Garcia says. “We weren't satisfied as a nation to just keep that original GI Bill from 1944. I think we've done a good job of progressing with the times.”

To learn more about veteran education benefits, visit va.gov/education.
Colleges Offer Critical Support for Student-Veterans

By Nikki Brahm

Arizona State University hosts an annual Salute to Service week that honors student-veterans and those in active service. (Photo courtesy of Arizona State University)
Military-friendly schools play a crucial role in helping veterans transition from military to civilian life by providing them with essential skills and qualifications for successful careers, while honoring their service and sacrifice.

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights, established the foundation for today’s schools to support veterans by providing financial assistance for education and prioritizing veteran-focused policies and programs.

Over the years, colleges and universities have expanded their efforts to include a wide range of initiatives, such as dedicated veterans offices, specialized academic counseling services, scholarships and financial aid, and student clubs and organizations.

This work is crucial, as veterans face unique obstacles and challenges when entering college, adjusting to a nonmilitary environment, and managing ongoing physical or psychological injuries. In addition, only 15% of student-veterans are the traditional age of college students and nearly half have children or are married, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Institutions offering tailored resources and support systems that address their specific needs result in a more inclusive and supportive educational experience. Auburn University, Coastal Carolina University (CCU), and Arizona State University (ASU) are at the forefront with innovative initiatives.

Auburn University
The Veteran Resource Center at Auburn University works to ensure the success of nontraditional veteran and military students beyond simply managing the educational benefits at the state and federal level, says Paul Esposito, director of the center.

“One of the biggest misconceptions is that a student-veteran gets everything covered ... and that couldn’t be any further from the truth,” he says. “A lot of them [are] struggling and as we discovered this, we [found ways] to support them in more than just getting their benefits taken care of.”

One unique program is Operation Iron Ruck, a partnership between student-veteran associations at Auburn University and the University of Alabama to raise awareness and funding for suicide prevention.

In the days preceding the Iron Bowl — the annual rivalry football game between the two schools — student-veterans each take 22 pounds of donatable items in their rucksack and carry the Iron Bowl game ball across 151 miles from the visiting school’s stadium to the home team’s stadium. The 22-pound weight signifies the estimated number of veterans who die by suicide every day, a statistic largely cited by advocacy groups from a 2011 VA study.

“The highlight for me has always been the fact that it’s not just to raise awareness; people use it as almost a cleansing,” Esposito says. “They need to get out there and be amongst other people trying to stop this epidemic.”

Other initiatives advance fundraising across the university, including the Auburn Student Veterans Association Gala, which raises money for military-affiliated student scholarships.
Additional programs include the Auburn Warrior Orientation and Learning program, a veteran-specific experience for incoming students; Green Zone Training, which allows staff and faculty to learn how best to support and interact with veterans; and a clothing locker and book exchange for those who need assistance in meeting basic needs.

Coastal Carolina University

At Coastal Carolina University (CCU), the office of Military and Veteran Services provides a physical location to make connections and discover resources.

Dance Killough, who served in the army and is currently a junior studying anthropology and geography, says the most impactful program for him has been Warrior Wednesday, a weekly meeting where student-veterans on campus have lunch and converse for a couple of hours.

“There are even times when we can invite local veterans groups to the meeting to tell us about other veteran programs,” says Killough. “[It] gives us a break from normal student life.”

Recently, the CCU Board of Trustees approved a financial aid program that offers a reduced tuition rate for individuals who are serving active duty National Guard or as a reservist in local units. For those who qualify, tuition totals $250 per credit hour for part-time students and $3,750 per semester for full-time students.

“Talking to some of the National Guard folks, they have a difficult time because … they have so many different commitments that working during school is not [possible]. … So any kind of extra benefit that we can provide to them is certainly a help,” says Randy Burk, director of Military and Veteran Services at CCU.

CCU also offers the Boeing Military to Civilian Success Program, launched in 2019, a career and transition leadership development program for veterans. Students learn techniques on how to succeed as a leader and transfer learned skills to the civilian workplace.

The university also offers recognition to service members, including military appreciation games in collaboration with the athletic department, and a veteran graduation reception complete with regalia specific to one’s military branch.

Green Zone Training is also available to faculty and staff at CCU.

Arizona State University

The Pat Tillman Veterans Center (PTVC) at Arizona State University (ASU) assists active-duty, veteran, and veteran-dependent students. The PTVC works in conjunction with the school’s Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement, which promotes dialogue, teaching, and research on military, civilian, and academic cultures across campus.

Shawn Banzhaf, PTVC executive director, says efforts are developed with a trauma-informed approach, focused on ensuring active-duty service members and veterans feel welcomed, loved, and cared for.

“[Our student-veterans] don’t know their intrinsic individual value away from their team. We’re trying to add value back into the veteran. That’s a big obstacle.”

Shawn Banzhaf
One distinctive program is called Treks for Vets, which invites student-veterans to take a four-day hike in the wilderness — totaling more miles than a marathon — that allows them to participate in philosophical discussions, face physical challenges, and make friends.

“The veterans really get a sense of healing from everything — the wilderness, the food, the camaraderie, the readings, all of it works in synchrony to create some healing space,” says Banzhaf.

There are nearly 21,000 military-connected learners at ASU, and Banzhaf has conducted what he calls an informal survey with a small pocket of veterans across campus, asking them how they value themselves on a scale of 1 to 10.

“The average is usually around a three,” he says. “So that tells me something: That they don’t know their intrinsic individual value away from their team. We’re trying to add value back into the veteran. That’s a big obstacle. I see it continuing [for some time].”

ASU is also a part of Veterans Upward Bound, a federal program. At the university, the initiative assists low-income or first-generation veterans in Maricopa and northern Pinal Counties with improving their academic skills and transitioning to college.

Further efforts recognize and support veterans across campus. Similar to Green Zone Training, the Proving Grounds program trains and educates faculty and staff on military culture. A campuswide event known as Salute to Service also celebrates veterans for 10 days.

Learn more about the Applied Military and Veterans Studies Bachelor’s Program led by the Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement at Arizona State University on page 49.
Universities Expand Veteran and Military Studies Offerings

By Nikki Brahm

Recognizing the profound impact of military history on global events, as well as the importance of understanding the experiences and contributions of those who have served, higher education institutions are increasingly creating and expanding military and veteran studies programs.

Such curricular offerings are essential for advancing the understanding of military and veteran populations across various contexts, including historical, cultural, psychological, and policy development (both national and global).

The demographics of veterans continue to change. For example, in 1980, they represented approximately 18% of the adult population, but the number dropped to approximately 6% by 2022, according to “The Changing Face of America’s Veteran Population,” a 2023 study by the Pew Research Center.

While this group is expected to become increasingly diverse, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs predicts a continued decrease in the number of living veterans over the next 25 years.

“Currently, we have a little over 18 million veterans in the United States and 1.3 million military service members. … The military is getting smaller, they’re getting more mobile, they’re getting faster, there’s better technology [and as a result] the education about them is also smaller,” says Wanda Wright, MBA, MPA, director of the Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement at Arizona State University (ASU).

This area of study offers a variety of career pathways with an
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Green Zone Program: Military culture awareness training for faculty and staff

We offer a place of belonging for military-connected students as they pursue their educational goals.

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interdisciplinary focus, such as criminal justice, social work, law, business, technology, health and sciences, education, and human resources.

Leading the charge with exemplary programs that include certificates, minors, and bachelor’s degrees, are Arizona State University, the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), and Eastern Kentucky University (EKU).

**Arizona State University**
In spring 2024, ASU launched the online and on-campus interdisciplinary applied military and veterans studies bachelor of arts degree. This program provides a comprehensive understanding of U.S. military history, political systems, national security, public policy, leadership, and military and veteran care.

The degree is built upon work toward the veterans, society and service certificate program, which currently requires 18 credits of theme-specific courses offered in fields such as communications, history, politics and global studies, and integrative social science, as well as a 3-credit internship.

An introduction to military studies course was developed through interviews with 10 veterans of varying eras, says Wright.

Following this overview, students can enroll in a variety of specialized classes, such as interdisciplinary approaches to conflict and war, military culture and American society, military theory and practice, and representations and self-representations of veterans in the media and the arts.

Although veterans and military service members have lived experiences that enhance their knowledge on these topics, the program provides additional insights and perspectives, Wright says. She also emphasizes the importance of educating civilian students about military populations to prepare them for future interactions in the workforce.

“We have this military and civilian divide that is really created on top of a mountain of unrealities,” Wright says. “Civilians think things about the military and they aren’t always true. … It’s important for civilians to understand the real stories about military service and about what it’s like to be a veteran after your service, and these classes support that work.”

**University of Missouri-St. Louis**
Through the Department of Sociology, students at UMSL may pursue a minor in veterans studies — which encompasses a foundation course, a series of electives, and a capstone — or a self-designed bachelor of interdisciplinary studies.

The 15-credit minor prepares students to work with and for veterans, and allows student–veterans to reflect deeply on their military experiences. The curriculum focuses on cultural, relational, institutional, and clinical understanding through the lens of veteran populations and military service.

Students interested in earning a bachelor’s degree on the topic can apply for the interdisciplinary studies program, which allows students to create their own 36-hour interdisciplinary major studying the veteran experience.

Elective courses include options such as Islamic philosophy, international law, psychology of trauma, social work and social issues, and crime and justice in a globalized world.

UMSL advisers and faculty provide direction for those enrolled in the program, enabling them to meet educational goals not offered by any other degree program at UMSL.

Students may further their expertise by participating in a supervised professional internship, service internship, or research.

**Eastern Kentucky University**
The Kentucky Center for Veterans Studies (KCVS) at EKU offers both a minor and university–level certificate in veterans studies. These programs are available through either in-person or fully online modalities.

The certificate — earned through 24 hours of coursework — is described by KCVS as a “deep exploration in veterans’ identities, cultures, and experiences,” and is ideal for students whose goal is to expand their knowledge of veterans through interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

As core competencies, the certificate requires that students complete an Introduction to Veteran Studies and either Veteran Identity Theory or completion of a veteran studies capstone. A wide variety of electives are available through fields like sociology, psychology, and English.

The minor in veterans studies at EKU was launched in 2010, and was the first offered in the nation. The program, which has an 18-credit requirement, is especially recommended for individuals pursuing “helping professions” that provide services directly to veterans and their families, such as psychology, social work, nursing, and occupational therapy.

Students enrolled in either program can connect with KCVS for further professional opportunities, including internships with community partners, research, and outreach program development or participation.
‘Freedom Walk’ Addresses Historical Injustices

By Katy Abrams

William Jewell College created a series of commemorative plaques this spring as part of a broader initiative — led by the school’s Racial Reconciliation Commission — to acknowledge and rectify the school’s historical ties to slavery and segregation.

The Freedom Walk, consisting of four bronze plaques placed throughout the campus quad, highlights different eras in the college’s 175-year history.

Each plaque serves a distinct purpose: honoring the enslaved Africans whose labor from 1848 to 1865 contributed to the college’s establishment; remembering by name the 25 African Americans who worked at the college between 1868 and 1962 but were not permitted to enroll; commending the first 75 African American graduates, who began attending in 1962; and supporting the ongoing journey toward inclusion and freedom for current and future students and faculty.

Rodney Smith, PhD, vice president for access and engagement and chair of the Racial Reconciliation Commission, emphasized the importance of the Freedom Walk in a statement to KSHB Kansas City. “Our goals are to remedy a glaring absence in the physical memorialization of the earliest period in the College’s history, addressing historical inaccuracy, commemoration, repair and restoration as well as creating a better future.”

The dedication ceremony included a poignant moment as some of the first African American graduates were named and honored. A.J. Byrd, a 1969 graduate, reflected on his time at the college. “We weren’t being invited or encouraged to participate in the various organizations or societies,” he told KSHB Kansas City. “It was a lonesome experience.”

Byrd and other graduates, former employees and their families, along with the college’s first African American faculty — Pauline Oliver, Robert Parker, and Cecelia Robinson — are now permanently recognized on the plaques.

This not only sheds light on the unacknowledged contributions of African Americans to the college, but also sets an example for other institutions grappling with similar historical injustices.

Smith has received an outpouring of messages supporting the Freedom Walk. “While I understand and appreciate the significance of this work, I did not anticipate the overwhelmingly positive response from alumni and the community at large,” he says. “I believe that there is a shared agreement that we cannot heal as a country without acknowledging our past. There seems to be a collective understanding that our nation will emerge stronger as a result of remembering.”

Left: Descendants of the African Americans honored on the memorials took part in the Freedom Walk dedication. Extensive research has been completed on the enslaved people known to have worked on the building of Jewell Hall, as well as those who were employed at the college before African Americans were permitted to be enrolled as students. QR codes will be added to the sign with a link to the research, and it will be provided to the Black Archives Mid America located in Kansas City. Right: Eileen Houston-Stewart is a 1979 Jewell graduate and the first African American woman to join a Jewell sorority. She is a Jewell trustee emerita, a Racial Reconciliation Commissioner, and received a Citation for Achievement given to distinguished alumna. Houston-Stewart’s father and aunt are named on a plaque as having worked at William Jewell College at a time when neither they nor their families were allowed to enroll as students.
Howard University Elects Its First Transgender Student Body President

A political science major and rising senior, Jay Jones is the newly elected Student Association President for 2024-2025 — and the first transgender woman to hold that role — at historically Black Howard University. She is currently interning for the Chase Bank Leadership Development Program on the Learning, Training, and Reinforcement Team.

Jones says she was extremely motivated to take on the challenge of running for, and serving in, the presidency. “I knew during my time as vice president [this past year] there is only so much you can get done. It’s the kind of role that doesn’t ruffle many feathers. All my life I have sold myself short. So when I ran for president it was a testament to the impact I thought I could have, and also a reflection of myself, my understanding that I wasn’t done. I knew that win, lose, or draw, I would be proud of my decision [to run].”

“I wanted it to be a movement, not just a platform,” Jones says of her decision to campaign on the ONWARD platform, which focused on cultivating student experience in five key areas: Housing, Academics, Safety, Legacy, and Community. She is currently working with her leadership team to establish Project Onward, a Washington, D.C.-area initiative committed to engaging and mobilizing young voters in local and national elections and increasing diverse representation on campaign staffs.

Jones has experienced an outpouring of support. “The ceiling is never the ceiling, and I am so grateful I have people in my life who tell me I can go higher.”
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