Defending DEI
Strategies from Leaders on the Front Lines

Law Students Tackle Veterans Cases • Tools for Conversations on Race • Latest in Neurodivergent Student Support
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Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President
UT Southwestern Medical Center

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Shawna Nesbitt, M.D.
Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer
UT Southwestern Medical Center
Cover Story: Defending DEI
University leaders and Champions of Higher Education advocates share tactics on fighting the anti-DEI movement.

Race-Conscious Admissions
Shirley Wilcher, JD, executive director of the AAAED, discusses the recent Supreme Court decisions on race-conscious admissions.

Gates Cambridge Scholar
First-generation student receives prestigious scholarship to further her research on the mythologies and personal narratives of the Central American diaspora.

Racial Discourse
Experts offer a framework for effective conversations about racial justice and equity.

Autism Support
New support programs for neurodivergent students make college more accessible.

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

Catherine Durham
Associate Professor and Assistant Dean
Graduate Practice Program
College of Nursing

Jay Henderson
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Mira Frazier
Law Enforcement Officer
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College of Nursing

Jay Henderson
Director of Business Operation
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HBCU Partnerships
HBCUs improve equity in the community and the law profession through key partnerships.

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University of Michigan students provide legal aid to veterans and gain valuable real-world experience.

Military Veterans
Warrior-Scholar Project
The Warrior-Scholar Project helps veterans pursue college education.

Empowering Student Veterans
Lawmakers propose funding to bolster student-veteran support services on college campuses.

LGBTQ+ Advocacy
The University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s Outlaw Legal Society provides pro bono legal support for LGBTQ+ clients.

Climate Concerns
Law Students for Climate Accountability calls on law schools to de-emphasize legal careers in fossil fuel advocacy.

Women in Criminal Justice
A new program matches women students with mentors to close the gender gap in the criminal justice field.

Juvenile Justice
Those who work with at-risk youth gain skills and resources in new program.
At IU McKinney, we believe that greater inclusion of backgrounds and attendant diversity in perspectives enriches the education our students receive and the educational community in which they pursue it, and improves their ability to succeed as citizens, professionals, and leaders in an increasingly multicultural society with global reach.

Karen Bravo
Dean and Gerald L. Bepko
Professor of Law

From IU McKinney’s “Commitment to Diversity & Inclusion”

Insights from our students and alumni

"I love that the McKinney community continues after law school. I appreciated the support during school and the alumni community just as supportive.”
Bre Robinson
J.D. '21

"As a non-traditional student in the part-time program, I have experienced the learning curve of balancing school, work, and life! I am incredibly thankful to be a part of such a resourceful community that is fully committed and invested in my success!"
J. Stephens
J.D. student

"As a foreign attorney, I appreciate the many opportunities The IU McKinney Law community has provided me with to successfully navigate the American legal system.”
Leyda Castro
LL.M. student

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July/August 2023
UPDATE: The War on DEI
Advocates Continue to Fight Proposed Anti-DEI Legislation

By Nikki Brahm

With Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas approving Senate Bill 17 on June 14, the state became the latest to reckon with extensive legislation that eliminates campus DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) offices.

The final text of the bill prohibits universities from creating diversity offices, hiring employees to conduct DEI work, or requiring any related training. Asking for diversity statements from students and employees is also now unlawful.

To comply, universities will undergo audits to ensure their spending of state funds is in accordance with the new law. A requirement to reassign staff to different, similarly paid positions at their institutions has been removed; instead, letters of recommendation can be provided for displaced employees.

Senate Bill 18, a measure that codifies tenure restrictions and increases the frequency of tenure review, was also approved by the Texas governor. “This is a sad occasion for all students at Texas’ public universities,” Paulette Granberry Russell, president of National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, said in a statement. “By dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and offices at these institutions, Texas lawmakers have chosen to prioritize a political agenda instead of the success of these students.”

The measure is comparable to Florida’s Senate Bill 266, which took effect on July 1. That legislation bans public colleges and universities from spending state or federal funds for DEI programs and activities that support or engage in political or social activism unless required by an outside accrediting body. It also eliminates general education course requirements that teach theories about how systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in U.S. institutions.

Required diversity statements in faculty hiring are also banned under Florida’s House Bill 931. In the states of Tennessee and North Dakota, governors have signed similar bills into law. Copycat bills and measures loom in other states including Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Oregon.

New Threat
The effect that anti-DEI measures would have on institutional accreditation has been a long-running concern. A Florida law proposed in early June, known as the Fairness in Higher Education Accrediting Act, puts diversity requirements for public colleges and universities at risk on a federal level.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., proposed the bill, which would prohibit higher education accrediting agencies from considering a school’s DEI and affirmative action policies, or lack thereof, as criteria for its accreditation.
New Program Offers Occupational Therapy Services to Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care

Approximately 20 percent of young adults become homeless just after they age out of foster care at the age of 18, and nationwide, 50 percent of the homeless population has been in foster care at one time, according to the National Foster Youth Institute, an advocacy organization.

Northern Arizona University’s (NAU) Department of Occupational Therapy is working to address these challenges by providing Arizona foster youth with skills, training, and support. The department recently received a $175,000 grant from Vitalyst Health Foundation, a nonprofit with a mission to improve health care in the state, to develop a new Medicaid reimbursement and implementation model that will allow more than 100 youth transitioning out of foster care to receive occupational therapy services.

Participants will have access to life skills training, mental health and wellness support, and help with moving into new life roles as well as maximizing functional cognitive skills. They will also receive education in areas such as self-care, health and safety, money management, and employment.

“These young people face a long history of disparities and inequity exacerbated by a history of trauma and instability,” said Amy Armstrong-Heimsoth, OTD, chair of the department and associate clinical professor at NAU, in a news release. “This new model for Medicaid reimbursement will ensure their occupational therapy needs, such as independence in self-care, family care, and in caring for their home and work environments, can be affordably addressed by highly trained health care professionals.”

IN BRIEF

Wyoming’s Native American Center Receives National Program Award

The Native American Education, Research and Cultural Center at the University of Wyoming was recently honored with the national 2023 Outstanding Indigenous Student Support Program Award.

The award was presented by the Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education during the organization’s annual conference. It recognizes student affairs professionals who impact the personal and academic development of Indigenous students by providing learning and development opportunities and enhanced campus experiences.

Schools Lead in Peace Corps Volunteerism

The Peace Corps recently announced its top 25 Peace Corps volunteer-producing colleges and universities since the agency was established in 1961. Over the years, more than 240,000 volunteers have served in 143 countries.

The list includes eight schools that have a Peace Corps Prep program, which provides enrolled college students the opportunity to build key competencies, including sector-specific skills, foreign language proficiency, intercultural competence, and professional leadership.

The top three institutions are the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and the University of Washington. Each of these schools has produced more than 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers.

UF to Collect Underground Railroad Oral Histories

The stories of freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad will be collected by students and staff in the University of Florida’s Samuel Proctor Oral History Program through a collaborative project designed to help build understanding around that social movement. The project is funded by a $350,000 grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior and will be guided by the National Park Service and its National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. The oral histories and family traditions of freedom seeker descendants and representatives will be preserved and transcribed for use in museums, K-12 classrooms, and documentaries.
Wesleyan Launches African Scholars Program

Wesleyan University has announced a Wesleyan African Scholars Program that begins in fall 2023. The program covers 100 percent of attendance costs for students through four years and is open only to those applying for need-based financial aid. The program is part of the university’s five-year goal to expand Wesleyan’s internationalization efforts.

Applicants to the program must be citizens or permanent residents of Africa. Individuals with dual U.S. citizenship or who are permanent U.S. residents are not eligible.

Currently, 10 percent of Wesleyan students come from abroad, representing 62 countries.

VCU School Offers New Degree Program Focused on Cancer Health Equity

The new School of Population Health at Virginia Commonwealth University launches in fall 2023. Students can pursue master’s and doctoral degrees in biostatistics, epidemiology, social and behavioral science, and health care policy and research. The school features the first master of public health program with a concentration on cancer health equity.

Through partnerships with various health agencies, students will have opportunities to engage in research and gain experiential learning in local communities.

Vanessa B. Sheppard, PhD, associate vice president for population and public health strategic initiatives in the Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences, is the school’s interim founding dean. A national expert in population health and health equity, Sheppard has been recognized as the American Cancer Society’s 2022 Researcher of the Year for advances in cancer research.

NIH Expands Funding to Support Diverse Research Faculty

In its third round of funding of the Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Program, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) approved four grants totaling more than $64 million to advance DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) efforts among biomedical faculty.

The funds will be used across five institutions, two of which are partnered under one grant, to recruit diverse, early-stage research faculty and create support systems to ensure their success. Institutions receiving FIRST Program funding are University of Michigan (U-M); University of Texas El Paso (UTEP); University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (UTSW); University of Texas at Dallas (UTD); and Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC).

At U-M, the funds will be used to bolster existing DEI efforts by hiring underrepresented faculty across 11 research units on campus, including biomedical, clinical and transplantation, and social and behavioral fields. UTEP will utilize FIRST funding to hire a diverse faculty cohort that will focus on researching health disparities among Hispanic and Latino populations, especially regarding cancer, diabetes, substance abuse, and mental health.

One of FIRST’s four grants supports a partnership between UTSW and UTD to recruit underrepresented individuals to tenure-track faculty positions in biomedical engineering, brain science, and cancer research.

VUMC’s grant funding will support diverse cluster hiring of early-career research faculty across the studies of neuroscience, genomics and health disparities, immunology and infection, and structural biology and imaging.

Funding will be awarded over five years, during which time the cohort will work with the FIRST Coordination and Evaluation Center at Morehouse School of Medicine, a historically Black institution, to measure how the efforts funded by the program support institutional cultural changes, diversity, and inclusion.
ARIZONA
Justin Mallett, PhD, has been appointed vice president for inclusion, diversity, and engagement at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. Mallett previously served as assistant vice president of diversity and inclusion at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville.

CALIFORNIA
Dyonne Bergeron, EdD, has been named chief diversity officer and vice chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the University of California, Irvine. Bergeron was vice provost and associate vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Nan Ho, PhD, has been appointed vice president of academic services at Las Positas College in Livermore. Ho previously served as dean of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics at the college.

J. Luke Wood, PhD, has been named president of Sacramento State University. Wood was vice president for student affairs and campus diversity and chief diversity officer at San Diego State University.

ILLINOIS
Pamela Haney, PhD, has been appointed president of Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills. Haney previously served as vice president for academic affairs at the college.

Michael P. McCorvey, MEd, has been appointed vice president of inclusive excellence and chief diversity officer at Regis College in Weston. McCorvey previously served as director of the Multicultural Center at Bentley University in Waltham.

Sheree M. Ohen, JD, has been named chief equity and inclusion officer at Amherst College. Ohen was the inaugural associate dean for equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging at Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge.

MICHIGAN
Nerita Hughes, EdD, has been appointed president of Bay College in Escanaba. Hughes previously served as interim associate vice president of academic affairs and workforce innovation and dean of the School of Business, Careers, Education, and Workforce Innovation at North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, Minn.

NORTH CAROLINA
Naeemah Clark, PhD, has been named the inaugural associate provost for academic inclusive excellence at Elon University. Clark was a professor of cinema and television arts and J. Earl Danieley Distinguished Professor in the School of Communications at the university.

TEXAS
Imelda Wicks, MA, has been named assistant vice president of inclusion and belonging at The University of Texas at Arlington.

WISCONSIN
Monica Smith, PhD, has been appointed associate vice president for equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging for the University of Wisconsin System. Smith previously served as vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill.

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- We work with thousands of satisfied advertisers.

- INSIGHT has connected institutions of higher education to diverse talent since 1974 – almost 50 years!

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Student-Veteran Belonging in STEMM

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison recently published a paper that examines the social support and sense of campus belonging among student-veterans and enrolled military service members in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, math, and medical) fields. Despite accounting for a large portion of nontraditional learners, military-affiliated students are not typically included in research that measures belonging in STEMM programs for underserved student groups; this study, entitled “Exploring Student Service Member/Veteran Social Support and Campus Belonging in University STEMM Fields,” addresses that gap.

Researchers emphasize the need for colleges to help create opportunities for authentic interactions and connections between military-affiliated students and their peers, faculty, and staff.

DEI Efforts Among Businesses

As part of a collaboration with the University of New Haven (UNH) and Gender Fair, the Women Business Collaborative recently published a report that examines the public DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) information of 553 businesses, including Fortune 500 and 53 public and private companies. Students from UNH’s Pompea College of Business collected and analyzed the data and its accessibility on company websites. The report measured several DEI-related areas, including pay equity, supplier demographics, and workforce composition.

One key finding is that just 30 percent of companies indicated they conduct regular internal pay equity studies, a practice that could be used to address compensation disparities.

Indian American Family Study

A new sociological study at Indiana University Bloomington (IU) examines the views and experiences of family life among first- and second-generation Indian Americans. As part of the Indian American Family Study research, Keera Allendorf, PhD, principal investigator and associate professor of sociology at IU, studied changes in family life over time among those from Nepalese and Indian origins. From September 2022 to July 2023, Allendorf and her team interviewed participants to understand their views related to marriage, childbearing, intergenerational relationships, and general family life.

Researchers will use the findings to identify patterns and trends across the Indian diaspora in the U.S. and compare them to similar data from other Asian Americans and White Americans.

Community College Baccalaureate Degrees

Commissioned as part of its Civil Rights Project, a recent study from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) finds that the expansion of bachelor’s degree programs at community colleges could address racial inequities within the state’s higher education system. Researchers examined the outcomes of existing community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs and found that they lead to greater educational attainment, especially for underrepresented students. CCB students have higher graduation rates than transfer students from four-year colleges and experience high rates of employment postgraduation.

Based on these findings, the authors urged state lawmakers and education leaders to expand CCB programs throughout California.
Offering nationally ranked programs, the University of North Florida is inspiring and preparing students for the future of healthcare.
SACNAS Celebrates 50 Years of Success in STEM Diversity

By LeManuel Bitsóí, EdD

The Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. For the past five decades, SACNAS has served as an inclusive nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering the success of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans, from college students to professionals, in attaining advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership within STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Today the organization serves a growing community of over 28,000 supporters, more than 9,000 active members, and 132 student and professional chapters throughout the United States, including Guam and Puerto Rico. SACNAS influences diversity and inclusion in STEM through outreach, advocacy, recognition of STEM leaders, strategic partnerships and programs, and the annual National Diversity in STEM (NDiSTEM) Conference.

The first official SACNAS meeting was held in Atlantic City, N.J., on April 19, 1973. Eugene Cota-Robles, PhD, vice chancellor and professor of biology at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), was elected president and a board of directors was established. Approximately 50 members attended that first meeting, supported by funds from the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies. Scientific research was presented, and participants discussed the lack of diversity in STEM fields.

Today, the first board meeting was held on June 1, 1973, at Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kan., now known as Haskell Indian Nations University. It was hosted by Don Ahshapanek, PhD, professor of biology at Haskell (Nanticoke Indian Tribe). Richard Tapia, PhD, who is one of only seven educators designated as a University Professor at Rice University, was among those present.

Also in attendance were the following individuals, all of whom are now deceased: Cota-Robles; Arthur Diaz, PhD, chemist at IBM; Ciriaco Gonzales, PhD, microbiologist at the College of Santa Fe; and Alonzo Atencio, PhD, biochemist at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

As a first project, the board developed a proposal to launch a postdoctoral graduate fellowship program that would recruit and train Chicanos and Native American students in science. Their collective goal for SACNAS was to address the paucity of Chicanos and Native Americans in academia and government agencies by training students in the sciences and developing leaders to be at the tables where decisions are made.

Most of these early founders had already been involved in advocating for their communities and were aware of the difficult road that lay ahead for SACNAS. Many would have successful careers in the STEM fields. Cota-Robles would go on to oversee UCSC’s affirmative action policies, faculty development programs, and faculty-based efforts to improve precollege STEM education. Gonzales would serve as director of National Institute of Health’s Minority Biomedical Research Support Program. Tapia is a highly decorated mathematician, National Medal of Science awardee, National Science Board Vannevar Bush Awardee, and a member of the National Academy of Engineering. He is currently director of the Tapia Center for Excellence and Equity in Education at Rice, and is the namesake for the annual Richard Tapia Celebration of Diversity in Computing Conference.

Although science was dominated by men in 1973, it was not long after the founding of SACNAS that women became well represented among its leaders. Lydia Villa-Komaroff, PhD,
who was a graduate student in 1973 studying recombinant DNA, went on to make seminal discoveries in molecular biology and has since served as a senior executive and a board member for numerous biotechnology companies.

The first woman to preside over the SACNAS Board of Directors was Maria Elena Zavala, PhD, in 2001. Zavala is a decorated plant biologist, a fellow of multiple societies, and had received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring (PAESMEM) in 2000.

Another PAESMEM awardee, as well as a SACNAS president and decorated molecular biologist, Maggie Werner-Washburne, PhD, has mentored more than 100 students from groups underrepresented in the sciences to pursue and earn doctoral degrees in their fields.

Marigold Linton, PhD (Morongo Band of Mission Indians), was the first Native American to earn a doctorate in psychology. She performed fundamental research in long-term memory, presided over the SACNAS board, and was a PAESMEM awardee. In the late 2000s, she helped found the leadership program that now bears her name, the Linton-Poodry SACNAS Leadership Institute.

Today SACNAS welcomes more than 9,000 multicultural and multidisciplinary members in its programs and services. It provides career development and networking opportunities for students through programs such as NDiSTEM and SACNAS chapters and develops and celebrates STEM professionals through leadership institutes and distinguished awards. For all of its members, SACNAS advocates for important national issues that lie at the intersection of science, culture, and community.

SACNAS’ annual NDiSTEM Conference is now a premier event where participants gain new scientific knowledge, expand professional networks, and honor culture by bringing their whole selves to science. It is the nexus of the SACNAS community where higher education, government, private industry, and nonprofit organizations come together to invest in and advance the next generation of STEM leaders.

Juan Amador, SACNAS executive director, shares his vision for the future: “SACNAS’ future is guided by our vibrant members who understand and support the critical importance of our mission and validate our work through their individual contributions not only to their cultural communities, but to STEM leadership and research innovations. The growth of our inclusive, national network speaks to the power of representation and how that matters across all science.”

Current SACNAS Board President Charla Lambert, PhD (Haida and Tsimshian tribes), adds, “My vision for the future of STEM is one that is equitable, inclusive, and just; where fundamental scientific advancements occur alongside applied science that is centered on community needs, diverse input, and respect for the people and resources it involves. SACNAS and its members are essential to that vision because the SACNAS community has always been a space where culture, values, and intersectional identities are recognized and celebrated as integral parts of a career in science.”

Past president Pamela Padilla, PhD, adds, “SACNAS was foundational to my success as a scientist, researcher, and leader. My mentors and role models came from this organization, and I am forever grateful to know amazing leaders including Maria Elena Zavala, my PhD mentor Maggie Werner-Washburne, and all the SACNAS women who broke barriers within science.”

To commemorate the 50th anniversary, SACNAS will engage in a variety of activities throughout 2023. The NDiSTEM Conference is slated for Oct. 25-28 in Portland, Oregon, and will recognize 50 years of community building by celebrating founders, elders, past presidents, and other guests of honor; integrating cultural celebrations with scientific and professional development sessions; and assembling leaders who specialize in advancing diversity, inclusion, and justice in STEM.

> Submitted by Lee Bitsói´ and his fellow SACNISTAs. Bitsói´ is a member of the Navajo Nation and serves on the INSIGHT Into Diversity Editorial Board and the Board of Directors of SACNAS.

For more information about the upcoming 2023 NDiSTEM Conference hosted by SACNAS, visit sacnas.org.
Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard and the University of North Carolina:

A Temporary Swing of the Pendulum on a Trajectory Toward Inclusive Excellence and Achievement

By Shirley Wilcher, JD

In *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College and Students for Fair Admissions Inc v. the University of North Carolina* (SFFA), the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision on the constitutionality of taking race among many factors into account when selecting students entering selective colleges and universities. In *SFFA*, the plaintiffs, including White and Asian-American students, alleged that the universities violated their rights under the Constitution and under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In both cases, the lower courts found no discrimination and upheld the principle that diversity in admissions is a compelling interest under the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court overruled the lower courts’ decisions and held that the colleges violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution.

Historically, the Supreme Court has consistently affirmed that diversity is a compelling interest under the Constitution and that institutions of higher education may consider race as one of many factors in their admissions decisions. As a result, for 45 years since *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) underrepresented students of color have been able to access the kind of higher education that others have enjoyed since the founding of Harvard in 1636 – until today.

Notwithstanding the Supreme Court’s decision in *SFFA*, organizations including the American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity, and the Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access and Diversity will continue to speak out regarding the importance of affirmative action and diversity in educating the nation’s future leaders and promoting the benefits that flow from having a diverse student body. They will continue to argue that colorblindness perpetuates the status quo, and, like Justice Blackmun in *Bakke*, they will assert that “In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way.”

It is important to underscore the benefits of diversity in higher education. As one of the first “affirmative action babies,” I can attest to the opportunities that flowed from being able to attend selective institutions of higher education. Not only did we benefit, but the nation benefited as well in my view.

After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, selective colleges and universities — including the Ivy League (Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Penn, Cornell and Columbia), Seven Sisters (Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Barnard and Radcliffe), and the “Little Ivies” (Williams, Wesleyan and Amherst) among others — engaged in an enhanced recruitment effort to seek out and admit students of color. Previously, there had been minority students attending those institutions, but only a handful at best. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, we began to see a more “critical mass” of students of color.

For many of us, these campus environments were new and different. Most of the students were White, and they emerged from different cultures, experiences, and expectations than most of us had known. For example, our dormitories offered “Gracious Living” in the afternoons, where we drank tea out of demitasse cups. (No longer offered.) Most of the students’ parents were affluent professionals or businesspersons and the classic collegiate, rural campus environment was decidedly different from what many of us had experienced. To compensate, Black students came together as a group of “sisters and brothers” in order to feel safe and to survive. While a few transferred to other institutions, most of us persisted for the remaining years and many of us went on to graduate and professional schools.

My college sisters are now retiring. A few have daughters who attended our alma mater or other prestigious institutions of higher education, and our legacy is being passed down to another generation. But our career trajectories were for the record books. My small coterie of Black women friends who meet occasionally on Zoom includes physicians and lawyers, an educator, and a judge. Others from that ’60s – ’70s cohort include PhDs and scientists. Two of us currently sit on the board of trustees of the very college we attended, and I received an Honorary Doctor of Laws. My sisters are phenomenal Black women, and we have Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement — along with our families and the colleges — to thank for our successes. What we call diversity today, born in an era of activism, yielded a lifetime of accomplishment and excellence.
In “The Shape of the River, Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions,” former university presidents William G. Bowen and Derek Bok wrote about the benefits of race-sensitive admissions. In studying a database of three entering student cohorts from 1951, 1976, and 1989, matriculating at 28 selective colleges and universities, this rich and comprehensive analysis led to their conclusion that:

“[T]here is a statistically significant association, on an ’other things equal’ basis, between attendance at the most selective schools within the C&B (College and Beyond) universe and a variety of accomplishments during college and later life. Generally speaking, the more selective the school, the more the student achieved subsequently...Also we saw that the C&B students as a group earned appreciably more money than did the subgroup of students in our national control with mostly As, which suggests that going to a C&B School conferred a considerable premium on all C&B students, and probably an especially high premium on black students. Black C&B students were also more likely than black college graduates in general to become leaders of community and social service organizations.”

The authors warned that reducing the number of Black students attending these colleges “would almost certainly have had a decidedly negative effect on the subsequent careers of many of these students and on their civic lives as well.” They added that since major law firms and medical centers recruit from the most selective institutions of higher education, the effects of race-neutral admissions would be more severe on the future leadership of Blacks in the professions.”

Since eight out of nine of today’s Supreme Court justices graduated from Harvard or Yale Universities, this point is indisputable.

Coupled with the recent assault on DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs in the states, the SFFA decision may be seen as a “perfect storm,” a blow to progress for an increasingly diverse population. However, remember that the reach of the SFFA decision is limited to higher education admissions. The equal opportunity and nondiscrimination statutes including Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have not changed. It would take an act of Congress for that.

We are optimistic that the collegiate sector will find a way to continue the progress toward equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusive excellence. Employers in the collegiate sector, private industry, and government should continue their efforts as well, for the good of their workplaces and the national economy.

Shirley J. Wilcher, JD, is executive director of the American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity (AAAED) and president and CEO of the Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access and Diversity (LEAD Fund).
The Influence of State Politics on College Decisions

One in four incoming college students rule out higher education institutions because of state politics, policies, and legal issues.

WHO ARE THEY?
- 31% Liberals
- 28% Conservatives
- 22% Moderates

WHAT SCHOOLS ARE THEY AVOIDING?
Liberal students tend to exclude institutions in the South and Midwest, while conservative students are more likely to reject schools in California and New York.

WHAT ARE THEIR TOP REASONS?
Liberal-leaning students are more concerned about issues affecting individuals, while conservative-leaning students have more generalized concerns.

LIBERAL STUDENTS
- Too Republican
- Lack of concern about racial equality
- Too-conservative LGBTQ+ laws
- Too easy to get a gun
- Inadequate focus on mental health support
- Too-conservative abortion and reproductive rights

CONSERVATIVE STUDENTS
- Too Democratic
- Too-liberal LGBTQ+ laws
- Conservative voices are squashed
- Too-liberal abortion and reproductive rights

HOW ABORTION ACCESS AFFECTS COLLEGE CHOICE
72% of college students say state reproductive health laws are at least somewhat important when deciding whether to remain enrolled at their current institution.

60% of enrolled college students consider it extremely important.

80% of Democrats are likely to find state laws governing abortion access important to their enrollment decision.

76% of college-enrolled women are likely to find state laws governing abortion access important to their enrollment decision.

Information courtesy of the March 2023 studentPOLL by Art & Science Group

Information courtesy of the Lumina Foundation-Gallup State of Higher Education 2023 study
Since achieving HSI status in 2019, Texas Tech University has continued to search for ways to better serve our first-generation, rural, Pell-eligible, and underrepresented students. As part of those efforts, we enthusiastically welcome Dr. Jarett Lujan as Texas Tech's inaugural HSI Director and look forward to his efforts to promote and coordinate HSI efforts across the Texas Tech campus.
As a young girl, Briseyda Barrientos Ariza spent summers visiting her grandparents in Guatemala, where her parents had grown up and where storytelling is a revered cultural treasure. She listened attentively and held close the many folktales and personal narratives shared during family gatherings.

Those intergenerational stories will take on even greater meaning this fall as she begins her studies as a Gates Cambridge Scholar at the University of Cambridge in Oxford, where she will pursue a master’s degree in philosophy in European, Latin American, and comparative literatures and cultures.

Barrientos Ariza, a first-generation college student, is one of only 77 individuals worldwide selected this year for the full-cost scholarship, a postgraduate award with a rigorous application process. She is the first recipient from Towson University, where she studied English literature and psychology in the Honors College.

Her honors thesis, supported by an undergraduate fellowship, involved conducting fieldwork in various regions of Guatemala to capture additional folktales and narratives. She explored the stories through the lens of collective colonial trauma experienced during the
Barrientos Ariza plans to expand her studies at Cambridge to include the broader Central American diaspora.

Erin Fehskens, PhD, professor and acting chair of Towson’s Department of English, served as co-adviser for Barrientos Ariza’s thesis. She touts her student’s theoretical knowledge.

“She’s able to think fluidly across a lot of different and difficult theoretical ways of understanding how we construct meaning in the world and how people respond to power,” says Fehskens. “But more than that, Briseyda is an excellent interpreter of text. I mean, that’s the bread and butter of a literature scholar.”

Guatemalan genocide, which targeted people of Mayan descent in the early 1980s as part of the nation’s civil war.

In particular, Barrientos Ariza examined the roles of two folklore characters who often appear in the stories: La Llorona (the Weeping Woman), who drowns her children and wanders the region mourning and wailing for their souls, and La Siguanaba (no translation), a seductive woman who lures men into secluded places, where she then transforms into a monstrous figure and traumatizes them to the point of muteness, madness, or death.

La Llorona can be viewed as a symptom of child loss — children were often the victims of mass killings — and La Siguanaba as a symptom of the sexual violence that took place during the war, says Barrientos Ariza. The figures drive the counternarratives that push back on government denials of the atrocities and serve as empowering strategies of resistance, she says.

“I argue that there is no such thing as postcolonialism if we continue to experience the unresolved trauma that colonization put on us,” she says.

“While oral histories and the interpretation of folk figures in terms of war and colonialism isn’t new, [Briseyda] examined an underrepresented area and produced fruitful observations about generational trauma, the ongoing consequences of historic colonization, and the manner in which those effects reverberate in folk traditions and art,” says Jennifer Ballengee, PhD, professor of English and director of Towson’s Global Humanities graduate program.

Ballengee was an adviser for Barrientos Ariza’s thesis work.

“This is the commitment and innovation that has impressed me since I’ve known her, and I’d guess it’s what impressed the Gates Foundation too — that commitment to her roots and to authenticity combined with intellectual vigor and dedication,” Ballengee says.

She does not take her academic success lightly, Barrientos Ariza says, recalling her early, frightening days as a first-generation student.

“Coming from the very Black and Brown community [of Hyattsville, Md.] to predominantly White Towson was … paralyzing,” she says. She relied on high school teachers who rooted for her success, and she connected quickly with other first-generation students.

“Navigating the process was super scary … it’s unlike anything else because there’s so much pressure for you to figure it out and not fail,” she says. “It’s a lot of knowing when to pivot and when to ask for help, a lot of relying on the kindness of others, and culture shock, and there’s also a lot of labor that other students comparatively do not have to undertake and undergo.”

For additional support, Barrientos Ariza became involved in peer communities on campus. She founded Honorables of Color — a group for students of color in the Honors College — and joined the Latin American Student Organization, along with other student associations.

Her story serves as inspiration for other first-generation students who must overcome barriers to education, says Fehskens.

“It’s really important to frame just how challenging it is, not only for a student to be a first-generation college student, but how exponentially difficult it becomes to be a first-generation graduate student.”

Erin Fehskens, PhD
Black Alumni Share Life Lessons in Drexel University ‘Legacy’ Book

By Janet Edwards

Personal stories shared by more than 50 Black alumni of Drexel University are featured in the book “A Legacy to Share: Navigating Life’s Challenges and Celebrating Our Greatest Achievements.” Their unfiltered experiences are meant to inspire current students to be resilient and achieve success through lifelong learning, say alumni who worked on the project.

The book features a historical look at the school’s first Black graduate in 1900 and spans the decades since. The professional roles of those featured include NASA scientist, architect, doctor, fashion designer, FBI agent, tech pioneer, college president, movie producer, airline pilot, professional basketball player, and others.

Angela Dowd-Burton, who attended Drexel in the 1970s — a decade that saw the university’s largest enrollment of Black students — was inspired to launch the project in 2020, at a time when she saw society struggling under the twin realities of the pandemic and social unrest and while she personally faced her husband’s illness. She found unexpected solace during that time by collecting stories and sharing them as inspiration for today’s students.

As the book idea was set into motion, Dowd-Burton focus and purpose, she says. Before the writing process began, however, she first met with current Drexel students and posed the question “If you could pull back the curtain and get straight answers from those who walked before you, what would you ask?”

“They wanted to know from people who looked like them and who had similar experiences,” Dowd-Burton says. “They asked, ‘How do you overcome the noise when you run into people who don’t have high expectations of you?’ ‘How do you balance work and life?’ ‘How do you walk into a room of strangers with a level of confidence that allows you to introduce yourself and ask questions?’ They wanted lessons you don’t find in a textbook.”

The narratives are written in the authors’ own voices, “sharing the grit while promoting the message of those who assisted along the way,” says Dowd-Burton. “One of the things that I assured them was that this was their story, their authenticity, so whatever that story was, it would be respected.”

The stories highlight many challenges and how they were overcome, she says. “We wanted readers to understand that life’s not easy … that there are people out there ready, willing, and able to help, but you have to know what you want,” says Dowd-Burton. “The important thing is to get started. You may not necessarily end up where you planned, but you’ll certainly get farther down the road than if you are paralyzed by the question ‘What do I do now?’”

Geoffrey L. Howland, a mechanical engineer, graduated from Drexel in 1976, and again in 1983 with a master’s degree in engineering management. He co-edited the book.

“Being a Black man, I am imagining if I had this book in my hand when I was a senior in high school or freshman coming into Drexel,” he told Drexel News. “If I had read all these stories of successful Black people and what they went through for that success, I think it would have further changed my trajectory of where my head was and where I was going.”

Dowd-Burton is a 1974 accounting graduate and a 1979 MBA alum. Her chapter in the legacy book is titled “Dream Big.” She describes a long and successful career in finance and procurement management as well as a lifelong dedication to learning and advocacy for women. She observes that it’s important for students to determine where they’re going and then to network — find those people along the way who are like-minded.

“A Legacy to Share: Navigating Life’s Challenges and Celebrating Our Greatest Achievements,” now in its second printing, earned over $25,000 in the first three months of sales. Proceeds support the Drexel University Black Alumni Council scholarship fund. The book is produced and distributed on campus and is available online from the campus bookstore.

There’s still time to schedule your campus climate survey administration for the Spring 2024 semester!

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Let’s Talk About Race

Difficult Conversations Lead to Courageous Leadership

By Janet Edwards
Talking about racism in interracial groups is difficult and uncomfortable and people sometimes go to great lengths to avoid the topic. But having such conversations is the only way to create more equitable, diverse, and inclusive spaces, says Glenn Singleton, founder and CEO of Courageous Conversation, a consulting and training agency that works with education, government, and business organizations.

Discussing race presents both challenges and opportunities, he says, and no matter the setting, the same issue arises: We don’t focus enough on our individual experiences, even though doing so would help us understand how they inform our actions.

“Each person comes into their environments — from students to teachers, and the professors, administrators, and community activists — with a personal narrative around race that needs to be at the foundation of their understanding of how their beliefs drive their behaviors,” Singleton says.

Commit to Conversation
Part of the role of colleges and universities is to advance dialogue on difficult topics, and a useful starting point for conversations about race is to actively commit to that responsibility, says Ruby Ababio-Fernandez, EdD, executive vice president of programming and development for Courageous Conversation.

“It has always been a taboo to have a conversation about race in the U.S.,” she says. “The first thing [to do is] take off the brakes and make it clear that our intention is to have this conversation.”

The word “courageous” is a core tenet of the framework on talking about racial equity for good reason — because such conversations precede courageous leadership, says Ababio-Fernandez.

“If you can talk about it, you can critically examine it,” she says. “If you can’t critically examine it, you don’t deeply understand it. And if you don’t understand it, you can’t address it.”

Singleton and his team provide parameters that help manage the discomfort that invariably arises and offer ways to help participants process their emotions. As part of that, facilitators elicit agreements at the outset that establish a safe space for faculty and staff to discuss the goal the group is hoping to achieve, he says, whether it is to create more equitable practices, provide a more culturally responsive classroom experience, or some other aspiration.

These buy-ins also involve a commitment to stay engaged, regardless of the intensity, and to be honest about one’s thoughts and feelings no matter how unusual or unpopular they fear those views might be.

As part of the process, group members must also accept a lack of closure, understanding that discussions about race are ongoing.

Strategies for Productive Dialogue
Before discussions get underway in a group setting, Singleton and his team teach mindful interaction and active listening techniques, key elements in advancing difficult conversations.

The skill of inquiry is also important because discourse on race is so rare that people may not actually know how they feel about racial issues, he says. In trying to formulate opinions on the spot, they may rely on problematic or unexamined perspectives, or stay silent.

Rather than mistake that silence for resistance to engage, or quickly deem a perspective to be a person’s fixed racist ideology, a discussion facilitator can engage participants using reflective questions, such as the following, to allow them time to reconsider opinions they expressed:

• Can you tell me what you mean when you say …?

• Is it possible for you to say more about …?

• Have the thoughts you shared been shaped by others, or is this your own personal perspective?

• Why do you think others might want to challenge your perspective?
In asking those questions, says Singleton, a facilitator is not judging; rather, the goal is to help the person to get to a deeper level of understanding and gain the ability to articulate that.

When a group member is afraid to share their personal story or what they think about what they heard someone say, it’s up to the facilitator to create a greater sense of safety, he says.

“I have to actually model that vulnerability, that willingness to share at a deep and personal level,” he says. “[That] provides for some people a level of permission and a higher level of safety to engage.”

A facilitator might also directly invite that person to share their own narrative, acknowledging that all perspectives are important, he says.

Persistence and practice are also important, Singleton says.

“The enemy of really healing around racial discourse is that [people] are often not courageous enough to jump back in when they make mistakes.”

Glenn Singleton

Practice Is Key

“The enemy of really healing around racial discourse is that [people] are often not courageous enough to jump back in when they make mistakes,” he says.

“Like anything else, like riding a bicycle or the first time we write something, we make mistakes. It’s not going to be perfect. This perfection becomes the enemy of progress. Relinquish this belief that it has to be perfect — practice is the goal.”

When people are persistent, he says, they learn when to be introspective and reflect on how they could have done something differently.
A discussion on race in some form is always taking place, Singleton says, so participants have ample opportunity to practice their skills beyond the initial conversation, which is highly recommended — and which emphasizes the original agreement that there is no closure when talking about racial justice.

But there is also a point at which leveling up is required, especially when individuals and groups are unprepared or unwilling to engage in charged discussions. In that case, says Singleton, a conversation before the conversation is important.

“For example, when George Floyd was murdered, many organizations weren’t situated to have any kind of conversations about challenging circumstances in the workplace. And so now this conversation also sits on top of it, and they want to go right to that,” he says. “Many times, they’re just not ready for that level of conversation given the lack of conversation, period, in the community.”

Building Capacity Is Imperative

It becomes a matter of building capacity in the organization, Singleton says. If they’re not already giving honest feedback to each other, if there’s not a high level of personal engagement, if people don’t feel connected and supportive of one another, then it’s going to show up in a more significant way when topics of racial justice are centered.

Singleton observes that in the years since the murder of George Floyd, his audience is typically no longer in a place where they need to be convinced that race matters. What they need now, he says, are tools to operationalize the fact that race matters and to ensure that this core value aligns with the direction of their organization.

Ababio-Fernandez says it would be wise for leaders in any environment to keep in mind that interracial conversations about race often take place organically among young people, and it’s incumbent upon everyone else to keep pace.

“This generation of children, and the generation before, are far more adept at having these conversations. It’s important that we catch up as adults, irrespective of our roles, especially and particularly in the higher education space,” she says.
The traditional path for more than 66 percent of students with autism was to not attend college within the first two years of graduating from high school, according to a report from Drexel University, “National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood.” Other research, published in the journal Research in Developmental Disabilities (“Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in College”), found that only about 41 percent of students with disabilities, including autism, graduate with a bachelor’s degree.

Today there are approximately 75 support programs offered for neurodiverse students in 29 states, mostly at four-year colleges.

“It’s changing for the greater good,” Brenda Dater, executive director at the Asperger/Autism Network, says. “[Autism support] programs address the whole college experience, not just academics. What makes these programs work is that everyone at these institutions is on board. They have an understanding of what is needed and how to work with students with developmental disabilities so they can succeed.”

Transitioning to Campus Life
From elementary school through high school, students with disabilities usually have individualized education programs (IEPs), which are legal documents that detail the specific special educational services each person needs. IEP services can include speech, physical, and occupational therapies. IEP plans end after high school because higher education operates under different guidelines.

Universities have campus accessibility offices that offer basic services for students with disabilities, ranging from scheduling more time to take tests to ensuring students stay on track academically. Some colleges also have a counselor in their accessibility offices.

Newer programs for students with autism, however, offer broad support and often involve multiple departments. For example, Rowan University’s Center for Neurodiversity Autism Preparation and Achievement in the Transition to Hire (PATH) Program is situated between the Office of Accessibility Services and the Office of Career Advancement. The three departments work as a team.

“PATH is dedicated to supporting autistic students and alumni.
Willamette University in Oregon offers the College Access Navigators program for neurodiverse students. With a range of support services offered through the program, students are graduating and thriving on campus, says Jeff Larson, director of accessible services at the school. (Photo courtesy of Willamette University)

in identifying their strengths and working as partners in meeting their goals,” says Chiara Jean Latimer, PATH career coordinator and co-director for the center.

**Designed for Student Success**

Programs like PATH teach students to ask for academic, social, and emotional support. It’s an adjustment from high school because many haven’t learned how to advocate for themselves, so they don’t ask for help.

“Learning to ask for accommodations is a huge step for some students,” Dater says. “And what makes these programs work is the flexibility; they’re tailored to the student’s needs.”

Some students check in with a counselor once a week; others need more support, which can include weekly meetings with graduate students who make sure they keep up with course loads, attending weekly events to socialize, and participating in emotional support programs, if needed.

“I think the workload in high school oftentimes is menial compared to a student’s true abilities,” says Cat Rogers, a Rowan student. Rogers participates in PATH and will graduate this summer with a master’s degree in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education. He already has a teaching job lined up for the fall.

Rogers made close friendships and found PATH to be a helpful program.

“The amount of involvement is entirely up to the teacher, parents, and students,” he says.

**Prioritizing Completion Rates**

Sparse research exists on why or to what extent autistic students are at higher risk of not completing college, according to the report “Dropping Out and Moving On: A Qualitative Study of Autistic People’s Experiences of University.” However, possible contributing factors include a lack of autism understanding, mental health challenges, feeling like an outsider, and culture shock.

The more successful support programs seek to reinforce an outcome of college completion. Willamette University’s College Access Navigators (CAN) welcomes 36 neurodiverse students into its program each year. Since 2019, students with autism, ADHD, and other developmental disabilities have applied to the program.

Like Rowan’s PATH program, which admits 15 individuals each academic year, CAN is free. Both are donor funded. Similar programs at most universities cost $5,000 to $7,200 a year, in addition to tuition.

Willamette students who participated in the program during their first and second college years and no longer need support can train to serve as mentors in their final two years.

Jeff Larson, director of accessible education services, says Willamette’s navigator assistants meet weekly to discuss any challenges a student may experience.

**“Students in the program graduate with degrees. Without these supports, students wouldn’t have the opportunity to experience college life. College should be the whole package. That includes participating in clubs and making friends.”**

Jeff Larson
Emory University School of Law engages in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts led by Darren Hutchinson, the chief diversity officer. Hutchinson also serves as the John Lewis Chair and leads The Center for Civil Rights and Social Justice (CCRSJ), our hub for research, teaching, and policy designed to combat systemic inequality. CCRSJ sponsors an array of engaging academic and professional programming:

- Symposia
- Social Justice Speakers Series
- Emory-Duke Social Justice Think Tank
- Emory-Duke Social Justice Workshop
- Postdoctoral Researchers

“We’re seeing success,” Larson says. “Students in the program graduate with degrees. Without these supports, students wouldn’t have the opportunity to experience college life. College should be the whole package. That includes participating in clubs and making friends.”

Finding a Match
High school guidance counselors may not be aware of newer support programs for those with developmental disabilities, says Jaime Smith, a certified education planner, so preparing for college can be a lesson in self-advocacy. Parents and students often do the investigative work themselves to obtain specific college information.

To help these students best determine their fit at an institution, Smith says that admissions representatives should have ready answers to the following questions, since the disclosures may significantly impact a student’s success.

- What specific services are offered and what are the associated costs?
- Are standardized exams like the SAT required?
- What is the average class size and the ratio of faculty to students?
- How many classes are required each semester?
- How accessible are professors outside the classroom, and are they familiar with the support program?
- What is the four-year graduation rate?
- What is the retention rate from freshman to sophomore?
- What types of internships are available?

High school counselors might also suggest that students with developmental disabilities take a class at the local community college.

“Some students with special needs aren’t challenged in elementary and high school,” Smith explains. “Taking a [community college] class lets students know if they can handle the work.”
The new Office of Veteran Student Success at Rochester Institute of Technology is almost a year old. It is a one-stop-shop with a core mission of assisting veteran-affiliated students transition from military to college and then into their next career. The director is Chad Van Gorder, who spent more than 20 years in the U.S. Army before retiring. He says there are issues unique to military members who want to return to college and this is a dedicated space where they can get their questions answered.

“One of the biggest challenges is starting over. For many, their military career comes to an end and getting back into civilian life can be truly difficult. Those difficulties are compounded by veterans that have experienced combat, moving their family to a completely new city with no support systems in place and starting college.”

RIT’s Office of Veteran Student Success is open five days a week and is responsible for certifying military education benefits with the Department of Veterans Affairs, personal, academic, and professional support to students both through the office and by connecting veteran-affiliated students to resources across the RIT campus.

There is another benefit. There is a new Student Veteran Lounge and it’s become a “gathering space” for the 242 RIT veteran-affiliated students-and- the 150 cadets in RIT’s Army and Air Force ROTC programs. It’s a place where they can work, socialize, and connect. Some have even brought in military memorabilia to help make the space their own. When classes resume in the fall, they’ll see more changes.

“The entire space will be getting an overhaul in August. We will be bringing in a new sectional couch, refrigerator, television, and student work stations to allow students the ability to work and relax with their peers.”

Van Gorder knows that is just as important as the services offered to student veterans and their families. He says he is at his best when he is surrounded by other veterans and he wants to make sure students are too.

RIT is ranked among the 2023 “Best Colleges for Veterans” by U.S. News & World Reports.

Learn more about Rochester Institute of Technology’s Office of Veteran Student Success at bit.ly/3MU8Ywm
The Warrior-Scholar Project
Empowering Military Service Members to Earn College Degrees

By Nikki Brahm

After serving four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, Robert Liu came across a flyer advertising a workshop that helps former members of the armed forces transition into college.

“The biggest [challenge after military service was] not knowing what [college] is, and then, mentally, I put up a wall around higher education, kind of seeing it as something that I couldn't achieve,” he says.

After attending the workshop, he was inspired to pursue an academic degree — he’s now an accounting and management information systems student at Texas A&M University.

The college transition program Liu attended is one of many offered by the Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP), a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering enlisted veterans and active service members to successfully transition into the college classroom and enter the civilian workforce.

The WSP has one- and two-week academic boot camps with a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), the humanities, and business and entrepreneurship; Liu has since volunteered as a classroom facilitator in the latter. He also works as WSP's seasonal accounting assistant.

“I wanted to inspire other veterans and service members, just as the program did for me,” he says.

The WSP also offers academic workshops like the one Liu attended, which are of shorter duration than boot camps, as well as mentorship and resource programs for graduate students. Overall, the organization aims to build the confidence of veterans to pursue their academic goals by providing a community of WSP alumni.

“We're educating not only a workforce in the particular areas that are needed for our country, but also it’s an opportunity for civilians … to learn from their peers who are veterans and military connected about what it means to serve your country,” says LeNaya Hezel, PhD, chief programs officer.

Over the past 11 years, the organization has helped more than 2,000 veterans. It now partners with more than 20 universities across the U.S., including Georgetown University, the College of William & Mary, Cornell University, Harvard University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“We are partnering with universities and stakeholders throughout the country who are really invested in wanting to support this population, not because it’s the right thing to do, not because they have access to GI Bill benefits, but they’re recognizing that this is a population that is often overlooked when it comes to brick-and-mortar type institutions [and they should be seen as] an asset to the campus,” says Hezel.

Veterans face unique barriers when pursuing a college degree. Many feel they aren’t cut out for the classroom because they haven’t been in school for a number of years, some are concerned about deployment interruption or calls to service while enrolled, and others might have financial concerns or need assistance in understanding how the GI Bill applies to them, Hezel says.

In addition, the transition from military to civilian life can be jarring, as individuals oftentimes go from living in a gated community where they are told where to go, what to wear, and what to eat to making all their own decisions.

Veterans of color, women, and those from other underrepresented communities face additional barriers,
In a first of its kind report, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education asked senior diversity officers what it’s like to lead equity and belonging efforts on campuses now.

More findings, including salaries and job-satisfaction levels, can be found at [nadohe.org](http://nadohe.org).

**State of the CDO**

We Are Working For You

In a first of its kind report, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education asked senior diversity officers what it’s like to lead equity and belonging efforts on campuses now.

**THEIR COLLECTIVE VOICES TOLD US:**

- An overwhelming number of CDOs find it “extremely challenging” to make diversity, equity and inclusion outcomes more visible on their campuses.
- Nearly a third surveyed have operating budgets of $39,000 or less.
- One in 10 CDOs feels strongly that they lack adequate institutional resources, yet most said they found the work satisfying/rewarding/fulfilling.

Veterans engage in discussion during an academic boot camp at the University of Arizona. (Photo courtesy of WSP)

Hezel says. For nearly 17 years, the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy barred openly LGBTQ+ people from service, and rules and regulations regarding hair in the military may not align with a person of color’s cultural or personal identity.

“The transition isn’t just about coming to terms with your veteran status identity, but it’s also coming to understand — ‘What are the other intersecting identities at play that I didn’t necessarily get to show externally because of my identity not being the dominant one?’” says Hezel.

As a result, the organization works to ensure inclusivity, offering programs such as the Women Veterans Empowerment Dialogues, in which women talk about transition challenges. WSP also works with schools to provide similar student resources.

According to WSP’s 2021 report, 92 percent of its alumni reported they have completed or are on track to complete their degree. Since the program’s inception, alumni stay connected with the organization and continue to build community and advance their skills, Hezel says.
Lawmakers Advocate for Student-Veteran Centers on College Campuses

By Erik Cliburn

Proposed bipartisan legislation would provide funding that allows higher education institutions to establish campus centers designed to help student-veterans as they transition to civilian life, postsecondary education, and the workforce.

“We owe our veterans an immense debt of gratitude for the sacrifices they have made, and the least we can do is to make sure they are taken care of when they return home,” U.S. Senator Jacky Rosen, a Democrat from Nevada who co-sponsored the Senate bill, wrote in a statement.

Identical bills, known collectively as the Veteran Education Empowerment Act, have been filed in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, with support from both Democratic and Republican lawmakers.

As of early June, the bills were under review by the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs in both houses. If passed, the legislation would provide four-year grants of up to $500,000 that colleges and universities would use to create or bolster existing student-veteran centers on campus.

“Far too often, crucial resources and information are scattered between various administrative offices that remain disparate and inaccessible,” says Donald Franklin, legislative director of the Veterans Education Project. “Veteran students already face significant barriers to success as they pursue postsecondary education — they are often older, with families, and demanding fiscal obligations — that tend to diminish enrollment and weigh on persistence.”

In general, these centers provide mentorship, networking, career development, and tutoring opportunities and services. They also serve as spaces for student-veterans to meet and connect with each other, study, and learn more about outside services and benefits. Such centers lead to a greater sense of belonging and improved recruitment, retention, and graduation rates, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

These support systems are especially important given that 62 percent of student-veterans are first generation, according to federal statistics. Also, a large majority, approximately 85 percent, are ages 24 to 40, and nearly half are married and/or have children.

“As a mother of a U.S. Marine war veteran, I’ve seen firsthand the adjustment from military to civilian life,” U.S. Representative Lois Frankel, a Democrat from Florida who co-sponsored the House bill, wrote in a statement. “Providing a welcoming environment on college campuses to respond to veterans’ unique transition puts them on the path to their new journey.”

To utilize the funding, colleges and universities are required to partner with local workforce development organizations to assist student-veterans with career guidance and networking, hire veterans to staff the centers, and provide mental health counseling options to them and their families. If approved, the funding will be distributed equitably based on institution size, geographic location, and across both urban and rural communities. For institutions creating a student-veteran center from scratch, the bills require that they present sustainability plans to demonstrate the facilities will operate past the four-year grant period.

“I’ve seen firsthand the adjustment from military to civilian life.”

U.S. Representative Lois Frankel

At East Carolina University, we salute our U.S. veterans and military service members.

Recognized nationally as a top military-friendly university, ECU eases service members’ transition to college life with initiatives including a dedicated Military & Veterans Resource Center, specialized career services, peer advising, benefits support, and social and wellness events.

ECU continues its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as we honor our veterans, military members and their families and campus supporters.

mvrc.ecu.edu
Defending DEI

University Leaders Share Lessons Learned and New Strategies for Moving Forward

By Nikki Brahm
As public universities in Texas, Florida, Tennessee, and North Dakota prepare for and see new anti-DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) laws take effect, similar measures are proposed in other states that focus on closing DEI office operations, ending required diversity statements on student applications and in hiring, dispensing with mandatory DEI training, curbing curriculum regarding diversity-related concepts, and disallowing funding for DEI support.

In response to relentless anti-DEI measures, over 200 former college, university, and system heads have joined forces as the Champions of Higher Education coalition, an initiative created by PEN America, an organization that unites writers and their allies to celebrate free expression and defend the liberties that make it possible. As a united front, this group is sharing their expertise and calling on institutions to forcefully oppose efforts by public officials to censor and stifle free expression on college campuses.

These prominent leaders say it’s essential to break down silos in higher education across departments, disciplines, and institutions to create unified coalitions of political influence and align leadership as one voice.

Equally important is the need to craft and communicate clear, effective arguments to lawmakers in support of DEI efforts and to emphasize the negative economic, student, and human rights repercussions of anti-DEI laws.

Chilling Effect on Campus Climate

Although many colleges and universities in affected states report they continue to operate as usual, some deemed it necessary to pause DEI funding and programming even before laws were approved, such as the University of Texas System, which did so in February.

The deleterious effects of the state bills can be felt among faculty, especially in the state of Florida, according to Preliminary Report of the Special Committee on Academic Freedom and Florida, a study recently published by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The report finds that many of these educators have left or plan to leave their institution, and for those who do not have the option to leave, some find themselves self-censoring their teaching materials.

The AAUP concludes that many initial fears have come to fruition and that anti-DEI efforts are stifling academic freedom on campuses.

Neal Hutchens, JD, PhD, professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation at the University of Kentucky, specializes in law and policy research with an emphasis on issues of academic freedom and free expression. State legislators pushing these laws don’t have the long-term economic and political interests of their state at heart, he says.

“I’m not sure it’s going to take decades to tear them down.”

In agreement with the stance of the Champions of Higher Education, Hutchens says anti-DEI laws focused on curriculum encroach on the academic freedom of faculty and the right of students to learn.

“It’s viewpoint discrimination,” says Hutchens. “They’re wanting to say that only certain views about race and ethnicity and gender are acceptable. Other views are just off the table, you can’t talk about them. If you talk about them, we can fire you. That idea is just so contrary to how higher education is supposed to operate.”

Although the intentions of anti-DEI bills are clear, the laws are poorly written, Hutchens says, which makes them difficult to interpret. Because of this, institutional leaders may be hesitant to fight for DEI initiatives out of fear they might violate a new law, and faculty may choose to follow their example.

Lessons in Strategy

The AAUP report accuses academic administrators in Florida of not only failing to contest attacks, but in some instances being complicit or explicitly supporting them. Overall, Hutchens feels university leadership may have
initially tried to avoid upsetting politicians, afraid of causing greater harm. Although he sympathizes with this fear under these abnormal circumstances, he says that’s a lesson learned, and more needs to be done.

“The deafening silence of a lot of institutional leaders — it makes you wonder, is there no limit to how far you can go before they say, ‘This is not acceptable?’” Hutchens says.

He points to actions by the Board of Trustees of The Ohio State University as an example of how to fight back. In May, the board released a collective statement opposing Senate Bill 83, which, among other things, would prevent new school partnerships in China, limit DEI training, prevent university employees and staff from striking, enlist new tenure evaluation requirements, and require certain American history courses for students.

A similar response occurred in Iowa, where presidents of the state’s three regent universities defended their DEI programs against Iowa House Republicans in February.

Despite their efforts, the fight continues in these states. Ohio’s law is pending before the state House of Representatives, and Iowa’s three public universities have been ordered to pause new DEI programs by the state’s regent board while a study is conducted on related efforts at the schools.

Although Senate Bill 83 is still on the table in Ohio, Hutchens says appeasement and silence isn’t an effective approach. He advises any university leadership under attack for DEI and free speech initiatives to act proactively to persuade lawmakers to consider their arguments, to expand public knowledge of the implications of such legislation, and to maintain the morale of the campus community.

Mike Martin, PhD, former Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) president who stepped into the interim president position amid a search for his successor, signed on to the Champions of Higher Education group before leaving FGCU effective at the end of June. At FGCU, diversity programs continue to move forward while Martin awaits further guidance from the Florida Board of Governors, and no matter what happens, the institution will work hard to continue these initiatives, he says.

Higher education leaders are hesitant when it comes to taking a public stance on political issues because they fear consequences like budget cuts or layoffs, he says, but the reluctance to speak up among chancellors and presidents in Florida didn’t result in effective political participation.

“I don’t think many of us spoke up quite as affirmatively and positively about [DEI] when this movement legislatively began. … We probably should have been [speaking to lawmakers] sooner and we probably should have been a little more fully coordinated and fully consistent in the stories we were telling,” Martin says.

Leaders facing political and legal DEI backlash need to treat such legislation as a high priority and respond quickly — and not become distracted by other issues unique to their institution, he says. Martin also advises campus leaders to coordinate their efforts and speak as one voice in opposition to anti-DEI measures.

Patricia Okker, PhD, former president of the New College of Florida, says she joined the Champions of Higher Education with a focus on fighting legislation aimed at book bans...
and a goal of advancing bipartisan advocacy for free expression on college campuses.

The New College of Florida took center stage early in the fight for DEI principles. Six partisan allies of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) were appointed to the college’s board of trustees, and Okker was ousted from her position as president in February.

The AAUP report views the takeover of the school as a “test case” meant to intimidate other institutions.

Okker declined to comment on her relationship with the college but says she will continue to engage in meaningful dialogue with critics of DEI programming to learn how best to improve the climate on college campuses. She strongly objects to the idea that the only reasonable action is to eliminate DEI efforts.

“Raising awareness is important. Making statements in support of free expression is important. But we’ve got to do some old-style organizing [by] building a coalition of people that want to advocate for freedom of expression.”

Patricia Okker, PhD

“I have seen firsthand the benefits of thoughtful work in DEI, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work alongside DEI professionals with significant expertise mediating tense situations among people with strongly opposing views,” Okker says. “That kind of expertise is something we need more, not less, of.”

DEI practitioners and university leaders have ongoing, hard conversations on program concerns, and it’s important to pave the way for those discussions to include legislators, she says.

In defending free expression on campus, Okker focuses on long-term strategies, and says it’s vital to create bipartisan coalitions that have influence on lawmaking by connecting faculty and staff across sectors, including disciplines, institutions, and K-12 schools.

“Raising awareness is important,” she says. “Making statements in support of free expression is important. But we’ve got to do some old-style organizing [by] building a coalition of people that want to advocate for freedom of expression.”

Patricia Okker, PhD

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Effective Arguments
In North Dakota, Larry Isaak, who served as the North Dakota University System chancellor for approximately 10 years and as president of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, has spoken out publicly against anti-DEI bills since they were first proposed in the state and has raised awareness around the negative impact earlier drafts would have had on accreditation.

Isaak praises the actions by The Ohio State University Board of Trustees, something he encourages more boards and education leaders to do, despite political pressures.

“During my time as chancellor, I was accused by Democrats of leaning Republican,” he says. “I was accused by Republicans of leaning Democrat. My point is, I didn’t let that stop me from advocating for what was right.”

Isaak points to effective arguments that should be emphasized, including the limitations on freedom of speech and expression, which he says is a bipartisan issue most individuals can agree upon.

Beyond the moral imperative of DEI work, there’s an important pragmatic argument to be made, says Martin, specifically, the negative economic consequences of the legislation.

“If we in some way send a message that [Florida] isn’t a welcoming place and [because of that] we lose people who want to come here and get an education to serve, this region will be adversely affected,” Martin says.

Another critical point, says Hutchens, are the legal implications of the legislation. With gutted DEI offices, students and employees of institutions are more vulnerable to acts of discrimination, which in turn also makes colleges and universities more susceptible to litigation.

Other consequences extend to the entire campus community, Hutchens says, including work to recruit and retain talent. With leadership yielding to anti-DEI practices, employees and students of color especially may feel unsupported in their values, causing them to leave for other institutions or states, he says.

Isaak suggests students also lose in the anti-DEI movement due to constraints on curriculum and research. Students will receive an education that shields differentiating viewpoints, he says.

“Curriculum should include various viewpoints and not be determined by legislating partisan political ideology that limits presentation and discussion of these viewpoints … and college leaders and presidents need to bring this [up] more: What is the impact on students?” he says.

Pre-Law Pipeline Program

The First Step Toward A Legal Career

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

To learn more about the University of Houston Law Center Pre-Law Pipeline Program, visit law.uh.edu/pipeline.
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STEPPING STONES.
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Incarcerated individuals are given an unusual opportunity to give back to their community as well as pursue an education by enrolling in the paralegal program at North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) in Brooklyn Park, Minn. Program leaders say this education also helps foster positive change for those in the criminal justice system.

NHCC, which operates the first and only American Bar Association-approved paralegal certificate program for incarcerated students, collaborated with The Legal Revolution, an initiative of the nonprofit All Square that helps facilitate legal education in prisons, to provide remote internships for incarcerated paralegal students. The program began in the fall of 2021 with a cohort of five people from the Stillwater and Shakopee correctional facilities. Over the past two academic years, the students have enrolled in two or three paralegal courses each semester. Their studies culminated with real-world experience in spring 2023, when they prepared 26 criminal expungement cases for hearing. All of the students graduated in May.

In a press release, Mary Fenske, JD, director of the NHCC Paralegal Program, highlighted the current opportunity and demand for improvement in the criminal justice system and stated that providing a high-quality legal education to justice-impacted individuals can contribute to that progress.

The program is designed to provide those who are incarcerated with opportunities to engage in personal growth. A graduate who shared their experience expressed gratitude for the chance to help others through expungements and to redefine themselves through actions that empower their community.

“The very concept that as a prisoner I am being given the opportunity to give back to a community I damaged is astounding,” the graduate said in the press release. “When we work on expungements, we get to help others who will never know that I was the one helping them. This is important because I get to give without any expectation of a return. I just get to be a part of the solution.”

The NHCC Paralegal Program recently received a 2023 Improving Access to Justice Excellence Award from the Hennepin County Bar Association for its dedication to educating and assisting currently and formerly incarcerated individuals.
Sherrilyn Ifill to Launch 14th Amendment Center at Howard University

Sherrilyn Ifill, JD, civil rights lawyer and scholar (pictured right), has been appointed the inaugural Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Esq. Endowed Chair in Civil Rights at Howard Law School. As part of that role, Ifill will launch the school’s 14th Amendment Center for Law & Democracy.

Ifill recently served as the seventh president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund Inc. (LDF). During her nine years of leadership with the LDF, Ifill became a leading voice in race and civil rights discussions across the nation.

The new Howard institute will be a multidisciplinary center focused on promoting the vision of equality espoused by the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as the central source of America’s post-Civil War identity. It features a collaboration of institutions in law, business, and the arts, including the Charles Hamilton Houston Center at Harvard Law School and the Harvard Radcliffe Institute.

“At this moment of democratic crisis in our country, we must return to the 14th amendment and its powerful and pragmatic conception of a post-Civil War America grounded in the values of equality, justice, and a reimagined vision of citizenship,” Ifill says in a statement. “That vision includes a clear-eyed confrontation with the stubborn persistence of White supremacy and its ongoing threat to the promise of our new country.”

Ifill served as professor at the University of Maryland School of Law for 20 years, where she taught civil procedure and constitutional law and created innovative clinical offerings. In 2021, she was appointed to President Biden’s Commission on the Supreme Court. She is a recipient of the Radcliffe Medal, the Brandeis Medal, the Thurgood Marshall Award from the American Bar Association, and the Gold Medal from the New York State Bar Association.

Ifill’s appointment honors the late Vernon Jordan Jr., Esq., a Howard University graduate who served as a business leader and civil rights activist. Jordan participated in many impactful Civil Rights Movement efforts, including serving on the legal team that successfully challenged segregation at the University of Georgia. Throughout his career, he worked with the NAACP, Southern Regional Council, Voter Education Project, LDF, United Negro College Fund, and the National Urban League.

Penn Carey Law School Names Dean

Sophia Z. Lee, JD, PhD, has been named dean of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) Carey Law School. She has been a member of the Penn Carey Law faculty since 2009. Her 2015 book, “The Workplace Constitution from the New Deal to the New Right,” interweaves the histories of the Civil Rights Movement and “right-to-work” movement.
Boston University School of Law is committed to increasing diversity in the legal profession. Since 1872, our commitment to justice and equality has set the bar. Today, we’re building a better legal community through the following initiatives:

- BU School of Law offers the BU Summer Pre-Law Academy, an LSAC Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) program that prepares aspiring law students from underrepresented backgrounds with the tools to thrive in the law school admission process and beyond.

- Dean and Ryan Roth Gallo & Ernest J. Gallo Professor Angela Onwuachi-Willig is the founder and organizer of the Lutie A. Lytle Black Women Law Faculty Workshop, which has spent 16 years promoting and supporting the advancement of current and aspiring Black woman law professors.

- Our unique and student-founded First Generation Professionals (FGP) group offers support and guidance to first-generation law students and connects them with first-generation alumni to serve as mentors.

Learn more about our commitment to increasing diversity: bu.edu/law/diversity

State lawmakers around the country introduced over 525 anti-LGBTQ+ bills during the most recent legislative session, and more than 70 were signed into law, according to the Human Rights Campaign. In the midst of this surge of discriminatory bills, groups such as the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s OutLaw Legal Society are stepping up to provide timely legal support and advocacy for the local LGBTQ+ community.

Established in 2009, the organization is composed of about 50 students, faculty, and staff members at the university’s William H. Bowen School of Law.

Through events known as rainbow clinics, the society works with local community organizations, law firms, and library systems to offer pro bono services to low-income individuals in the state who need assistance with LGBTQ+ legal issues, including name and gender marker changes.

To help support these efforts, the Arkansas Community Foundation recently provided OutLaw with a $15,000 grant that will aid in the development of a tool kit for attorneys that explains how to navigate gender- and name-change legal processes.

“[The tool kit is] mainly about educating folks on what the processes are, where you would go to do the things that you need to, what documents you can and can’t change, things like that,” says Zach Baumgarten, JD, staff adviser for OutLaw and program director of Bowen’s Veterans Pro Bono Services Center. “So really focusing on helping clients know what their rights are.”

The two-year grant will also support a variety of continuing legal education and professional development events...
focused on LGBTQ+ issues in Arkansas for law students and attorneys. These programs will provide participants with the knowledge and skills they need to represent LGBTQ+ clients effectively and advocate for their rights.

In addition to local outreach, OutLaw also provides community and connection for LGBTQ+ students and allies on campus. The society hosts several annual networking events, including a volleyball tournament for incoming students and a “Friendsgiving” dinner for students who are unable to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday with their families. Maddie Arey, incoming OutLaw president and third-year student in the law school’s part-time program, says these events provide a much-needed space for LGBTQ+ students to feel supported and to connect with others who share their experiences.

Approximately 16 percent of the incoming 2024 class of law students identify as LGBTQ+, the highest percentage the school has ever seen, says Baumgarten. This uptick in representation comes at a time of heightened political challenges, and Arey and Baumgarten emphasize the importance of establishing a robust support network for LGBTQ+ students.

“I think it’s important to have OutLaw, just in the law school space, period,” says Arey. “Especially where we are in these times, it is good to have a space for students who are a part of the [LGBTQ+] community or want to support the community to be able to do so in a very safe and welcoming environment.”

Kiana Parkes (JD, 2024)
Vice President | Black Law Students Association
Events Coordinator | Asian Pacific Amer. Law Students Assoc.
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Law Students Push Schools Toward Climate Accountability

By Nikki Brahm

A new national student organization known as Law Students for Climate Accountability (LSCA) is putting pressure on the nation's top-ranked law schools to gradually eliminate paths toward careers in fossil fuel representation and instead support those that foster a just and livable future for everyone.

The top 20 law schools in the U.S. News & World Report rankings have produced fossil fuel lawyers at more than three times the rate of the average legal institution, according to LSCA’s March report, “Fueling the Climate Crisis: Measuring T-20 Law School Participation in the Fossil Fuel Lawyer Pipeline.” The study points out that prestige in the field is often awarded to schools and individuals who advance climate injustice.

Institutions can alleviate influences that push students toward fossil fuel work by mitigating the amount of student debt; providing more informational resources regarding the corporate nature of such work; offering courses, clinics, and journals that advance students’ pursuits of careers in environmental law; and preventing fossil fuel lawyers from serving in law school governance or teaching courses, the study concludes.

Nathaniel Waldman and Jamie Smith, law students at New York University, are among the five lead authors of the study. Both say they joined LSCA after the organization released its 2022 scorecard that ranked Vault Law 100 Firms — the most prestigious law firms as ranked by peers — on their climate change impact. The March 2023 study expanded on this research by analyzing the law school origins of approximately 3,300 U.S. lawyers that have participated in fossil fuel work in significant ways.

“In the context of several of the top schools pulling out of the U.S. News & World Report rankings, we wanted to use [this] moment to say we can reevaluate how we do rankings and incorporate moral, just transition work into how we evaluate schools — and we should do so, because we as a society need to work towards mitigating the climate crisis,” Smith says.

Not only is this work valuable for law students, but it’s also important for people of color. Waldman points to a 2017 study by the NAACP and the Clean Air Task Force that finds Black Americans are 75 percent more likely to live in fence-line communities, or areas that produce hazardous waste.

“One of the main points that we try and drive home through Law Students for Climate Accountability is that 86 percent of low-income people are not able to find a lawyer to defend themselves in lawsuits,” Waldman says. “When we look at fossil fuel companies, every single company either has a lawyer on retainer or in-house lawyers. It’s very clear that it is much harder for [low-income] communities to fight back … when they don’t have the same access.”

Overall, the goal of LSCA is to shift the conversation around legal work so the practice isn’t viewed as neutral. While students can make a difference by becoming involved with LSCA and persuading their schools to divest from fossil fuel interests, the organization is especially focused on changing the legal institution as a whole and the systems that push students into work that exacerbates climate change. In the future, LSCA hopes to expand their research with this focus, Waldman says.

Learn more about the LSCA at ls4ca.org
The Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville is preparing passionate legal champions who will be staunch advocates for their clients and communities. Following in the footsteps of its namesake with a focus on public service, the school believes a diverse population of attorneys is essential in strengthening the profession and allowing Brandeis School of Law graduates to constantly push for progress.

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Community service and institution-wide partnerships are key tools being used by two historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), among other schools, to address long-standing inequities in the criminal justice system and legal profession. One initiative helps community members with nonviolent criminal records navigate the legal system and the other provides robust learning opportunities for underserved students interested in pursuing a legal career.

In Baton Rouge, La., residents can receive expert advice on how to get applicable nonviolent charges removed from their criminal records, thanks to efforts by students of the historically Black Southern University Law Center (SULC).

Through a partnership with local governments and state workforce agencies, SULC regularly hosts events in which law students review individuals' records and determine what charges can be expunged — an important service that will make it easier for those impacted by the criminal justice system to find employment and housing.

The cost of expunging criminal records creates a significant barrier for someone who has experienced limited employment options due to their record, so the free service provided by SULC students fills a much-needed gap, says Marla Dickerson, JD, vice chancellor of innovation and strategic partnerships and initiatives at SULC.

"Expungement fees are $550 per arrest date, so that's a large chunk of money for people who may have been denied employment in a capacity that allows them to pay that amount of money," says Dickerson. "We hear stories from people who come in and ... say they have jobs but were refused promotions or were not able to even find housing or employment."
Through these Expungement Initiative events, the Louisiana Workforce Commission covers legal fees, while SULC students assist formerly incarcerated individuals in filing the necessary paperwork. Each event has helped hundreds of people, but they have also served as learning opportunities for the students who get face-to-face experience in working with the public and those who have been involved in the criminal justice system, says Dickerson.

As part of a recently established partnership between Simmons College of Kentucky, a Louisville-based HBCU, and the University of Kentucky (UK), the institutions are creating a pre-law constitutional studies program at Simmons, which has not had a law school since the 1930s.

Per the agreement, the UK J. David Rosenberg College of Law’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Student Advisory Board will provide pre-law programming to select Simmons students interested in pursuing a career in law.

In addition to the pre-law program, the agreement provides professional development opportunities for Simmons students through the law school. These include “law student for a day” events as well as access to keynote speakers, student organizations, and court proceedings. UK law faculty and administrators will also participate in seminars and presentations at Simmons to discuss civil rights and constitutional law.
Mentorship Program Supports Women Pursuing Criminal Justice Careers

By Nikki Brahm

As a woman just entering the criminal justice field at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-Platteville), Jolene Las had questions about her future career but wasn’t sure where to find answers. A new virtual mentoring program, however, helped her gain both focus and practical experience.

The University of Wisconsin Women in Criminal Justice Mentoring Program (UW-WICJ), launched in fall 2022, pairs students with mentors from a variety of agencies at local, state, and federal levels, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) Police Department, Dane County Sheriff’s Office, U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services System, Wisconsin Division of Hearings and Appeals, and Federal Bureau of Prisons.

When Las signed up for the program, she was matched with a woman state patrol officer who offered to answer any questions she had about the job. Their professional relationship began over email and eventually led to experience with a police ride-along. Las continues to communicate with her mentor via phone.

“Having that [early] guidance and support and that encouragement, especially from another [woman] in a mostly male-dominated field, was very, very helpful,” Las says.

After graduating this year with a dual major in criminal justice and political science, along with a minor in forensic investigation, Las looks forward to building a career in federal law enforcement.

Guidance is essential in encouraging women to enter the field, says Beth Tremelling, academic advisor and coach in the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Sciences at UW-Platteville.

Tremelling developed the idea for the program after too many women students came to her office with a lack of confidence.

The UW-WICJ was created through a partnership between Tremelling’s department; UW-Madison’s Center for Law, Society, and Justice; and the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation. A total of 54 mentees and 38 mentors from 26 agencies and divisions participated this year.

The 30x30 Initiative identifies many
benefits to having women work in policing, pointing to research that shows they use less force, are named in fewer complaints and lawsuits, are seen by community members as more honest and compassionate, achieve better outcomes for crime victims, and make fewer discretionary arrests.

As a first step for the UW-WICJ, via virtual speed mentoring in the fall, students were introduced to mentors and later matched with one based on their interests. An in-person event took place in April, where they met face to face and participated in presentations focused on such topics as tactics, virtual reality training, fingerprinting, and mental health.

“After the in-person event, [students] were all excitedly talking about what they got to do,” Tremelling says. “Same with their mentoring relationship, some of the students have been really excitedly talking about the types of things that they’ve gotten to see, like sitting in on some of the court cases.”

Tremelling plans to continue the program next year, with changes based on feedback from participating agencies and student surveys. She hopes that one day the project will become a national organization.

“It’s a mutually beneficial experience for the mentors and the mentees, which I think is really great. … It’s an important program, and the more people hear about it, the more [support] it will [receive],” Tremelling says.
Michigan Law Students Provide Vital Legal Services to Veterans in Need

By Erik Cliburn
Through the Veterans Legal Clinic (VLC), students at the University of Michigan (U-M) Law School provide critical services for local veterans and at the same time gain valuable, real-world experience in the civil court system.

Established in 2015, the VLC serves a 10-county area in southeast Michigan, encompassing about half of the state’s veteran population. With a focus on providing general civil legal services for those with low or limited incomes, the clinic takes on cases that address housing, family, consumer matters, financial exploitation, and employment issues related to veterans and their families. Each year, the VLC accepts approximately 50 cases.

“Veterans are often not eligible for legal aid services because many of them have some benefits that take them above the very low threshold for legal aid, but they still can’t afford to pay for an attorney,” says Matthew Andres, JD, VLC director and clinical assistant professor of law. “We really take on any kind of civil legal case for a veteran, especially one that might go to court.”

Each semester, up to 16 second- and third-year U-M law students participate in the clinic, with rising second-year students also hired as interns during the summer. Most are dedicated to the cause even before they begin clinic work, says Andres.

Clinic cohorts typically include several student-veterans or those who are interested in joining the Judge Advocate General’s (JAG) Corps — a legal branch of the military that provides services and advice to military personnel, their families, and the military as a whole — after law school. Many have military connections through family or friends, and others have no military affiliation but want to give back to veterans in the community, says Andres.

A large percentage of those who participate in the clinic go on to work in service-focused law, such as public defense, the JAG Corps, or legal aid nonprofits. Even those who plan to work in major law firms perform clinic work, especially taking on pro bono cases, to gain valuable courtroom experience, says Andres.

“Our students work incredibly hard for our clients,” he says. “They don’t have much legal expertise or experience, but what they have more than anything is a desire to work hard and a willingness to really dive into the legal
issues and solve whatever problem the client needs solving.

In at least one instance, the clinic’s work has led to more equitable legislation being passed in the state. The clinic represented a client who was denied food assistance due to felony drug convictions on his record. After the clinic filed a federal lawsuit against the state, Michigan legislators capitulated and passed a law that prevented such exclusion in food assistance programs.

Though a wide range of civil cases are handled through the clinic, much of the work centers on housing, both in fighting to prevent or delay client evictions and filing suits regarding poor living conditions.

In 2022, for example, two VLC students, one of whom is a veteran, successfully helped a client facing eviction from her home in Ann Arbor. The client, a U.S. Army veteran, received an eviction notice from the new management of her mobile home park, despite having lived there for eight years and being a responsible tenant. The team filed a declaration under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s COVID eviction moratorium and sought protection for the family. They argued that a state law protecting owners of mobile homes from eviction should also apply to renters.

During the court proceedings, it became evident that the judge did not agree with the students’ interpretation of the law. However, due to the strong legal groundwork laid by the students, the team signaled their intention to appeal the decision if it did not favor them, says Carrie Floyd, JD, a VLC clinical teaching fellow and the supervising attorney for the case. This led to a favorable settlement agreement between the mobile home park management and the family, allowing them to remain in their home rent-free for almost four months while they secured funding and looked for new housing.

“Because [the students] had done a really good job setting up the legal issue, we were able to signal that we would appeal the decision if the court didn’t rule in our favor,” says Floyd. “They went toe to toe with the judge who didn’t agree with them and knew when they’d said enough to preserve the issue.”

The outcome prevented the family from having an eviction on their record, which would have negatively impacted their chances of finding future housing. Floyd had accepted the case knowing it could potentially lead to an appeal and a change in the law.

In working with student-veterans and client-veterans, non-veterans in the clinic interact with people who have had vastly different life experiences. Students also engage with peers and clients who hold a wide range of worldviews and political perspectives, says Andres.

“They get to see the diversity of veteran experiences and how the military can be a real benefit to some people while presenting challenges to others,” he says. “We’ve also come to find that our clients have very different viewpoints on the world amongst themselves and that

In a 2021 survey of more than 4,000 individuals, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) found that seven of the top 10 unmet needs to prevent veteran homelessness involve some form of legal assistance. The top areas of legal assistance were identified by both homeless veterans and providers as:

- Child support
- Court fees and fines
- Credit issues and debt collection
- Discharge upgrade appeals
- Expungement of criminal records
- Family law
- Tax issues

Through the Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups report, the VA surveyed nearly 1,800 homeless veterans and more than 2,300 providers, which includes VA staff, state and public officials, community leaders, and volunteers who work closely with veterans. In the report, the VA noted that these unmet needs cannot be addressed directly by the department, which highlights the importance of collaborating with community organizations and legal aid clinics, such as the work being done by Veterans Legal Clinic at Michigan Law, to prevent and address existing veteran homelessness. In fact, the agency has identified coordination with legal services organizations as a key strategy in ending veteran homelessness.

“Civil legal services attorneys are essential partners in removing barriers to housing and employment by preventing avoidable evictions, navigating outstanding warrants, expunging criminal records, and securing targeted and mainstream benefits,” according to the VA report.

“Legal services attorneys can also engage in systemic advocacy (to the degree allowable by law) to promote Housing First* practices among public housing authorities and housing assistance programs. [Communities] should ensure that homelessness assistance programs coordinate with legal services organizations to address individual and systemic legal needs.”

*Housing First is a homeless assistance model that prioritizes finding permanent housing and fulfilling other basic needs for those experiencing homelessness before addressing other issues, such as employment, substance abuse, or budgeting.
“[Students] also learn about the power that they have to really impact people’s lives and the good they can do for individuals with the legal knowledge and skills they’ve acquired in the clinic. It is very empowering, and it inspires them to go out and do good things.”

Matthew Andres

there is really not a profile of a typical veteran. Our clients are as diverse as the general population.”

Recognizing that veterans often face multifaceted challenges, the clinic collaborates with the social work and psychology programs at U-M.

For example, a graduate student in social work gains field experience with the clinic by providing holistic support to clients and connecting them with various health and benefits resources on campus and in the surrounding community.

“Our clients really do appreciate the assistance,” Andres says. “We have found that many veterans will not seek out help unless they know it is designated for veterans. They feel like they shouldn’t be taking up resources that other people might need.”

The VLC offers students the invaluable experience of assuming responsibility for a client and tackling the complexities of real-world legal problems, says Andres. And unlike much of law school, which involves examining established legal cases on appeal, clinic students tackle actual problems rather than predefined legal issues. They gather facts from clients and other sources, identify the legal matters at hand, explore potential solutions, and take decisive steps to solve the problem — a multipronged approach that sets the clinic apart from other learning opportunities in law school, he says.

“Students are able to learn a lot of great legal skills, and really understand what it is to be an attorney and feel the weight of responsibility that handling real legal cases places on an attorney,” Andres says. “They also learn about the power that they have to really impact people’s lives and the good they can do for individuals with the legal knowledge and skills they’ve acquired in the clinic. It is very empowering, and it inspires them to go out and do good things.”
Certificate Program Empowers Professionals to Drive Change in Juvenile Justice System

By Erik Cliburn

Professionals working with youth who are in, or at risk of becoming involved in, the juvenile justice system have the opportunity to hone their skills and learn best practices that can lead to equitable change through the new Juvenile Justice Certificate Program at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO).

The program, which launched in August 2022, graduated its first cohort of five professionals in May at the Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association Conference following final projects presented by the participants.

Project topics showcased the cohort’s ability to think critically and propose innovative solutions, such as a new gang intervention program model, adolescent development training for policymakers, and measuring restorative justice attitudes in a probation district.

Of the five graduates, three work in a community organization focused on helping youth, one works as a juvenile probation supervisor, and another is the communications director for a Nebraska state senator.

Operated as a partnership between UNO’s School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and its College of Public Affairs and Community Service’s Juvenile Justice Institute, the curriculum was structured around monthly themes critical to juvenile justice work. Over an eight-month period, participants met regularly with local and national speakers who discussed such topics as educational rights, equity and inclusion, policy and reform, youth engagement, and the education-to-prison pipeline.

“My experience this year with the UNO certificate program was extremely valuable,” says Matt Allen, a program graduate and executive director of Community Based Services, an Omaha company that helps prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system. “From the relationships developed, content learned, along with the leadership of this program, I feel we are more equipped to inspire change at every level in the communities we serve.”

The cohort had the opportunity to engage with youth trainers and coaches who shared their own lived experiences in the juvenile justice system and offered firsthand understanding of the challenges and opportunities it presents.

The ultimate goal of the program is to provide evidence-based best practices to juvenile justice professionals in the state who can then form a resource network to support equitable change within the system. The program also serves professionals in a variety of fields who interact with or influence youth, including those who work in education, social work, and child welfare.

“Along with the leadership of this program, I feel we are more equipped to inspire change at every level in the communities we serve.”

Matt Allen
At the University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg College of Law, alumni are giving back.

Through the college’s “Pioneers for Progress” program, Black alumni and graduates of color are invited to share their stories and experiences — many of which have been lost — with a new generation of students, faculty and staff.

This spring, the college welcomed A. Hasan Davis, author, consultant and 1996 graduate of UK Rosenberg College of Law, back to campus.

After an early encounter with the law as a pre-teen and expulsion from an alternative school, Davis earned his GED and then attended Berea College in Kentucky. In his keynote address to the college, Davis talked about navigating Berea College, and eventually law school at UK, with ADHD and dyslexia.

“This was a crossroads for me,” Hasan said. “I was still struggling, but I really wanted to make it. And for the first time ever, I believed it was possible.”

In 2008, he joined the executive leadership team of the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice as deputy commissioner of operations. In 2012, he became Kentucky’s fifth commissioner of juvenile justice and was instrumental in moving juvenile justice reform in Kentucky.

Through his experience, Hasan has worked to transform organizations and public systems to ensure they have the capacity to meet the needs of the children and families they serve.

Today, he works to inspire and motivate youth and adults, including his fellow alumni of the UK Rosenberg College of Law, to find their voice and personal power.

Co-sponsored by The John Rowe Chapter of the National Bar Association, UK’s “Pioneers for Progress” focuses on engaging Black alumni and graduates of color and supporting the next generation of law students.
“…Deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life. … Race still matters to the lived experiences of all Americans in innumerable ways, and today’s ruling makes things worse, not better. The best that can be said of the majority’s perspective is that it proceeds (ostrich-like) from the hope that preventing consideration of race will end racism. But if that is its motivation, the majority proceeds in vain. If the colleges of this country are required to ignore a thing that matters, it will not just go away. It will take longer for racism to leave us. And, ultimately, ignoring race just makes it matter more.”


Source: supremecourt.gov
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Northwestern University’s Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (OIDI) embraces and upholds the values of inclusion, diversity, equity, and assessment (IDEA) as fundamental principles.

HOW WE PUT IDEA INTO ACTION:

- Lead and coordinate university-wide DEI efforts.
- Develop innovative solutions to address discrimination, marginalization, and disparities among underrepresented communities.
- Create avenues to enhance recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff.
- Provide educational opportunities, training, and guidance for University community members.

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The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences’ (UAMS) Division for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strives to create a campus environment that welcomes people of all backgrounds. In partnership with student- and employee-led organizations, we’ve invested our time and effort to create programs that benefit veterans, underrepresented minorities, individuals with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ community.

We’re committed to making STEM-H education and health care careers attainable for everyone, opening new opportunities for students from underrepresented or underserved groups. Our K-12 and undergraduate programs reach hundreds of individuals each year and form a route for those who dream of pursuing a degree in the health professions field.

It’s an honor to receive the Health Professions HEED Award in recognition of UAMS’ continuing efforts to serve as a national leader win the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education.

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