

INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY PLAN





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The law school, the proving ground for legal learning and practice, cannot be effective in isolation from the individuals and institutions with which the law interacts. Few students and no one who has practiced law would choose to study in an academic vacuum, removed from the interplay of ideas and the exchange of views with which the law is concerned.

**Chief Justice Frederick Moore Vinson,  
from the U.S. Supreme Court opinion in  
*Sweatt v. Painter* (1950)**

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# INTRODUCTION FROM THE DEAN

Dear New York Law School Community,

Making diversity and inclusion an essential aspect of life at New York Law School (NYLS) is critical to the future of our community, the legal profession, and a democratic society. As we celebrate our 125th anniversary, we are proud to present this Institutional Diversity Plan—a bold statement of principles and goals, and an ambitious course of action—to guide NYLS activities and realize the vision of our Strategic Plan.

Since 1891, NYLS has been a leader in attracting individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences and providing them with a rich legal education and opportunities to develop professionally and personally. In the 21st century, our goal remains to make NYLS a place where everyone can reach his or her potential, and beyond. This goal is possible only with the participation of our entire community.

As Dean and President, I, along with our Board of Trustees, believe that diversity and inclusion are essential components of the Law School's operations, including decision-making and planning in our academic program, admissions, recruitment, and placement efforts, and all of our internal and external community activities. Accordingly, the Institutional Diversity Plan serves as a touchstone for us to gauge progress and to develop and refine policies and practices that best serve the interests of diverse students, alumni, faculty, administrators, and staff, as well as the needs of the profession and civil society.

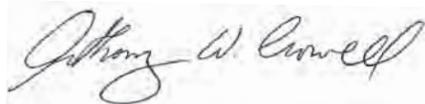
Our Office of Diversity and Inclusion is staffed by experienced personnel from key areas within the Law School. The Office works closely with our Faculty Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and our Dean's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, which is comprised of staff, student representatives, alumni, and outside diversity experts, so that we can collaborate on all levels to reach our goals.

We ask that our students, our student organizations, the Student Bar Association's Diversity Committee, and our alumni offer insights into institutional policies that can do more to support the success of diverse students. By extending an offer of admission to a candidate, we recognize the potential of each student and want to provide an educational experience that encourages the growth of skills and professionalism, challenges beliefs and values, and nurtures respect for all people and for the rule of law.

We ask that our administrators and staff take steps to make the best use of the talent among us to cultivate professional development, and to ensure that policies are fair and that appropriate services are available to all students.

And we ask that our faculty colleagues explore ways to make their teaching, both methods and content, challenging to all students, respectful of the unique histories that some of our students share, and revealing of ways that we can use the rule of law in service of a more just and equal society.

Thank you for joining us in our commitment to implement and benefit from the Institutional Diversity Plan. Please contact me or a member of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to share your ideas on how to maximize the opportunities this plan offers to NYLS.



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# DIVERSITY AT NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL



**We are New York's law school.** This statement is already infused with an institutional commitment to diversity; however, New York Law School intends to make its commitment explicit. With this Diversity Plan, we have created goals and implemented policies to ensure that New York Law School reflects the great diversity of this city and nation. Our intention is integral to the goals of our long-term Strategic Plan, first issued in 2013.

A 21st-century attorney requires an array of interpersonal skills to succeed in a pluralistic society and within a global economy. At NYLS, it is our responsibility to foster an ethic of true inclusion and to educate lawyers with an ability to move comfortably through multiple cultures. This interpersonal mobility is integral to modern professionalism. In April 2010, the American Bar Association (ABA) Presidential Diversity Initiative issued *Diversity in the Legal Profession: The Next Steps*, a report and recommendations on race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities. The ABA Presidential Diversity Initiative challenged law schools, law firms, government, the judiciary, and bar associations to examine their policies and operations so as to transform their institutions and, consequently, the profession, to gain real advancement toward a more diverse legal profession. Although we have taken the first steps by establishing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, appointing a Chief Diversity Officer, forming a Faculty Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, and convening a Dean's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, we understand that we have a long way to go before we are able, as a law school and as a profession, to reach our aspirational goal of full inclusiveness.

## NEWYORK LAW SCHOOL EMBRACES THE CHALLENGE

Sustaining a culture of diversity is an evolving process that will affect all aspects of the Law School: student admissions and retention, academic programs, hiring and promotion, staff development, career services, alumni engagement, and pipeline programs and partnerships outside of NYLS. Such a culture also requires active participation by all constituencies within the Law School:

- Board of Trustees
- Dean and President
- Office of Diversity and Inclusion
- Faculty
- Administration and Staff
- Faculty Committee on Diversity and Inclusion
- Dean's Council on Diversity and Inclusion
- Students and Student Organizations
- Student Bar Association Diversity Committee
- Alumni
- Employers

A culture of diversity celebrates our differences and acknowledges our commonality while helping us work together to attain shared strategic and professional goals.

## DEFINING DIVERSITY

Opening the doors to the legal academy and profession requires that we welcome students, faculty, administrators, and staff from varied backgrounds, especially those who have been traditionally underrepresented in positions of power and influence. This definition of diversity includes the established categories of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation and identity, religion, and disability. At NYLS, this definition also includes military status.

The value of diversity is not limited to the benefits conferred on the underrepresented. As the ABAs *Next Steps* stated, fostering diversity within the legal profession and academy can be understood in a variety of ways: promoting democracy, enabling global business, nurturing leadership, and conforming to the changing demographics of this country. Diverse academic settings make good lawyers. Research has shown that students educated in diverse environments learn better and acquire invaluable skills to deal with complexity and nuance. The challenges posed by navigating diversity prepare students to live and work productively in a pluralistic and rapidly changing society; these challenges provide opportunities for students to grow beyond their personal experiences and assumptions. Acquiring knowledge is sometimes uncomfortable. Yet within a diverse environment that nurtures understanding, individuals can gain empathy and resiliency and develop complex interpersonal skills. These skills lead to better cooperation and collaboration, and can stimulate innovation.

By valuing diversity, we all benefit from the development of new professional norms and an expanding inclusiveness that is fundamental to a civil society.

# DIVERSITY AS A COMPONENT OF STRATEGIC GOALS

These five strategic goals were first outlined in the 2013 Strategic Plan. They remain central to how we measure progress and success.



## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

Ensuring Academic Excellence and Innovation by Aligning Our Offerings with Student Goals and the Needs of the Market



## CAREER SUCCESS

Supporting Students and Graduates in the Transition from Law Student to Lawyer



## INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Supporting the Scholarly Community



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening Partnerships and Connections Among Our Students, Faculty, Alumni, and Supporters Across the NYLS Community



## OPERATIONS

Driving Operational Efficiencies and Adopting a Culture of Transparency, Accountability, and Affordability

To accomplish these goals, we need to reflect the highest standards at all levels of leadership, educate and challenge ourselves, encourage participation, and nurture success for all students. Implementation also requires monitoring and accountability so that NYLS continues to be vigilant as new students, faculty, administrators, and staff enter our doors.

NYLS's vibrant learning environment can be fueled by the innovation and creativity resulting from true diversity so that together we can address the legal issues facing our city, nation, and world in the 21st century.



## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

As stated above, research supports the proposition that we all gain from learning and working in a diverse environment. Skills such as communication, cooperation, collaboration, and innovation are rooted in experiencing different perspectives with an open mind, free from judgmental assumptions. Diversity, therefore, affects New York Law School's ability to achieve academic excellence and innovation.

**Students:** A key component of academic excellence within NYLS is a diverse student body. However, the institutional culture must accommodate the differences that students bring so that those differences are enhanced, not forced into acculturation, which ultimately isolates and defeats diversity. As an institution, we will

- Strengthen recruitment efforts to attract students from different racial, ethnic, LGBTQ, and economic backgrounds and value these admissions with scholarships and grants to incentivize and encourage enrollment and retention.
- Examine how students interact with each other, the faculty, and each NYLS department—Admissions and Financial Aid; Accounting; Student Engagement; Academic Planning and Career Development; Clinical and Experiential Learning; and the Registrar—to identify barriers to service, including neutral policies that might have an unintended impact on diverse students, and implement procedures to enable full participation and benefit from NYLS.
- Illustrate NYLS's commitment to diversity at orientation so that incoming students see that diversity is valued throughout the institution.
- Encourage and support the participation of diverse students in career-building extracurricular activities, such as law review, moot court, and the various centers, and help prepare them for leadership opportunities within NYLS.
- Require training for all students to deal with diversity within legal practice through problem-solving exercises and cultural awareness.
- Provide opportunities for students to work together to enhance the overall educational experience at NYLS.

**Faculty:** Who teaches, what is taught, and the focus of scholarship all contribute to an institutional culture that values diversity. To effectively attract, engage, and educate a diverse student body, we will recruit and retain professors who bring their diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise into the classroom and broaden the intellectual community. Therefore, the recruitment, promotion, and retention of full-time and adjunct faculty who are themselves diverse are essential functions to the success of this Diversity Plan. To attract and retain all levels and types of faculty, we will

- Develop partnerships with various national and local affinity bar associations and bar committees to identify and provide resources to potential faculty candidates.
- Identify diverse NYLS alumni who have the potential to rejoin NYLS as faculty.



## ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION (continued)

- Affirm NYLS's commitment to fair and transparent hiring practices: public announcements of openings that include a description of qualifications and the hiring process, with broad dissemination to affinity bar associations and committees.
- Work with the administration and relevant faculty committees to ensure that programs are in place to recruit and retain diverse faculty.
- Offer training to all faculty in teaching best practices, engaging diverse students, and managing diversity discussions in class to further the education of all students.

**Curriculum:** Our pursuit of academic excellence requires development of complex thinking and problem-solving to prepare our graduates to participate as attorneys, government officials, judges, and leaders in a pluralistic society and global economy. Diversity issues should not be isolated in a few boutique seminars. To prepare our graduates to navigate professionally and ethically as lawyers, we will infuse diversity issues throughout the required and recommended curriculum. True diversity will bring different perspectives into the classroom and will deepen student understanding of those perspectives that have traditionally been excluded from legal and policy discussions. By broadening students' access to information and improving students' critical thinking skills, we can educate culturally and socially aware students who will become more effective professionals in our diverse world.

Including diversity issues in our classes requires that faculty and students learn how to engage in these sometimes difficult discussions so that everyone learns from the experience. We will

- Facilitate faculty development so that professors feel competent to moderate class discussions that might involve responses that adversely affect diverse students.
- Identify and develop innovative best practices for diversity learning opportunities to implement effective teaching techniques, to address implicit bias, and to refine classroom discussions.
- Host regular discussions open to students, faculty, and staff on diversity issues.

**Administration and Staff:** To support a diverse student body and faculty, administration and staff, too, should reflect the diversity of New York City. NYLS is committed to a working environment for administrators and staff that promotes professional development and collaboration and recognizes the contributions of a diverse workforce to the overall culture of the School. We will

- Invest in the professional development of NYLS administration and staff with the goal of fostering the growth of their talent and expertise.
- Affirm NYLS's commitment to fair and transparent hiring practices: internal and public announcements of openings that include a description of the qualifications and the hiring process, with broad dissemination to diverse audiences.
- Offer training to administrators and staff to promote engagement with diverse students and support their membership in the NYLS community.



## CAREER SUCCESS

We can help diverse students work successfully toward their career goals by recognizing their talents early and connecting them with faculty, mentors, alumni, and opportunities that will nurture those aptitudes. Success means setting high expectations and facilitating leadership development while in law school. To support these efforts, New York Law School will provide guidance and mentorship that is trusted and realistic. We will

- Promote full engagement in academic studies, law school activities, and leadership opportunities to each of the student affinity groups and offer individual counseling to assist students in making career decisions.
- Provide appropriate career counseling that helps diverse students understand how to effectively procure internships and legal positions while attending law school.
- Encourage diverse students to join bar associations and committees to extend their networks beyond law school and into the professional community.
- Engage with law firms, businesses, financial institutions, and government offices to strengthen our partnerships and prepare diverse law school students for professional careers.
- Encourage diverse alumni to return to NYLS to mentor and counsel current students so that they feel guided into the legal profession.
- Develop a professional network to teach new attorneys who recently passed the bar law practice realities and skills, such as how to bill, how to manage time, and how to practice.
- Determine the cause of any bar passage disparities (social, financial, and academic) and provide assistance to remedy deficiencies.
- Develop scholarship funding to assist diverse students with bar review and living costs so that they can devote themselves to their studies full-time.



## INTELLECTUAL LIFE

New York Law School is dedicated to creating a vibrant institutional culture that promotes both our differences and our commonality. The key to the success of all students and faculty at NYLS is a vital intellectual life that inspires learning, innovation, and respect for human dignity. We will

- Encourage scholarship that examines diversity issues and how to use law to end discrimination and exclusion.
- Support programming for faculty and students on diversity issues throughout the academic year.



## INTELLECTUAL LIFE (continued)

- Celebrate achievements by diverse faculty and students internally and externally.
- Host an annual diversity event at NYLS to bring together thought leaders to discuss current topics in diversity as well as best practices for addressing ongoing issues in achieving diversity and inclusion.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As New York's law school, it is imperative that we engage with and support underresourced neighbors and communities, framing these experiences for our students and potential employers so that public service is seen as a truly valued component of professional responsibility. These resources can be offered through the Impact Center for Public Interest Law as well as through the Office of Clinical and Experiential Learning and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. We will

- Develop programs for local nonprofit organizations serving diverse constituencies on management, fundraising, tax-exemption limitations, and employment law to assist them in meeting their organizational goals.
- Develop initiatives to promote emerging businesses in underresourced communities.
- Support community organizations' initiatives and advocacy, as they pertain to advancing diversity and inclusion.



## OPERATIONS

As part of our efforts to attract diverse applicants, specifically applicants from all economic backgrounds, we need to increase affordability for our students. We will

- Establish more scholarships to increase the amount of financial aid available for diverse students.
- Enhance financial aid counseling and support to further meet the needs of diverse students.
- Emphasize the availability of scholarships as part of recruitment efforts geared to diverse students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through this Diversity Plan, New York Law School affirms its commitment to promoting an institutional culture that is welcoming and supports the professional development of all students, faculty, administration, staff, and alumni. Our goals, as outlined by the 2013 Strategic Plan and echoed in updates to that plan, require a commitment to respecting the potential of every person within this community and promoting engagement and success based on both our differences and commonalities. By doing so, we will manifest our vision as New York's law school.

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