

Roger Williams University School of Law

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

RWU Law

SEPTEMBER 1, 2018

Defining Diversity:

This Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Planning document states the commitment of RWU Law to build and support a community of individuals who are diverse with respect to race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, spirituality, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship, abilities, age, socioeconomic status, military status, domicile, life experiences, viewpoints, and philosophy.

Why We Value Diversity and Inclusion:

A diverse student body, faculty, and staff improves the educational experience by creating the conditions for an intellectually and personally challenging exchange of ideas inside and outside the classroom. It also helps create a culture in which all individuals are and feel valued, supported, and encouraged to excel. Moreover, engaging with a diverse community helps prepare students for their careers by accelerating development of the sensitivity, communication, and teamwork skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly diverse and global society.

Historically, the legal profession has been open to only a small segment of our society. As a matter of social justice, a legal education and career opportunities at RWU Law should be visibly open to all members of our heterogeneous society. Moreover, a diverse legal profession is more likely to reform laws that were created and have been maintained by a relatively homogenous and privileged segment of society. The legitimacy of the legal system is also enhanced when the members of the legal profession reflect the diversity of those who need legal representation.

Lawyers are community leaders, and they can more effectively lead if they reflect and appreciate the diversity of the communities they serve. A diverse student body, faculty, and staff should better understand the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the members of the communities that RWU Law is committed to serve.

The Institutional Context:

RWU Law has a longstanding commitment to non-discrimination, diversity, and inclusion. Those commitments are presently set forth in the Bylaws of the School of Law, the Faculty Handbook, the Office of Admissions Diversity Statement, and the Office of Career Development Employment Policies. RWU Law is also accredited by the American Bar Association (“ABA”) and a member of the Association of American Law Schools and is subject to and supportive of those organizations’ policies on non-discrimination, diversity, and inclusion.

Moreover, RWU Law’s stated commitment has been manifested in action. According to 2016 data submitted to the ABA, 24.8% of RWU Law students self-identified as members of a racial or ethnic minority group, the fourth highest percentage among twelve New England peer schools. That data also shows that 53.3% of the full-time faculty at RWU Law are women, the second highest percentage among those same peer schools.

RWU Law has a Director of Diversity and Outreach who reports directly to the law school dean, it has a robust portfolio of diversity and inclusion programs, and its Board of Directors has a Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Thus, RWU Law has notable strengths on which to build.

Notwithstanding these successes, much work needs to be done. Strategic planning is necessary to identify those areas in need of specific attention and to create a framework for gauging progress, which will in turn inform development and refinement of institutional policies, practices, and programs.

The following plan is organized around four primary goals:

- I. BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY
- II. DEVELOPING CURRICULAR, CO-CURRICULAR, AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS THAT FOCUS ON LAW AND INEQUALITY AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER ISSUES FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES
- III. CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATING AND COMMUNICATING THAT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE CENTRAL TO THE MISSION OF RWU LAW
- IV. REGULARLY TRACKING THE PROGRESS BEING MADE TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE PLAN

I. BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

A. Students

- i. Take aggressive and creative steps to attract a diverse student body with a critical mass of students from historically underrepresented groups.
- ii. Regularly record outcomes (*e.g.*, GPA, attrition, graduation, bar pass rates, employment) for all students and compare, with particular emphasis on students from historically underrepresented groups, the outcomes of subsets of the student body to those of the rest of the student body to identify and address disparate results.
- iii. Continue to evaluate and improve support programs that assist students academically, socially, in their career development, and in their preparation for licensing examinations.
- iv. Regularly communicate with all students, with specific attention to those from historically underrepresented groups, to assess the climate in the community and identify obstacles to student success.
- v. Continue to focus on affordability by, for example, the strategic use of scholarships, managing the cost of attendance, and providing financial counseling to students.

B. Faculty

- i. Take aggressive and creative steps to increase the diversity of the faculty – the tenured and tenure-track faculty, the long-term contract faculty, and the adjunct faculty - with a particular focus on attracting faculty members from historically underrepresented groups.
- ii. Identify obstacles to the retention of a diverse faculty, and take steps to remove those obstacles.
- iii. Refocus efforts on faculty development programs that assist all faculty in meeting their obligations in teaching, scholarship, and service.

C. Staff

- i. Take aggressive and creative steps to increase the diversity of the staff, with a particular focus on individuals from historically underrepresented groups.
- ii. Regularly invest in professional development of the staff, and particularly professional development about diversity and inclusion issues.

D. Alumni

- i. Take aggressive and creative steps to connect diverse alumni, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, with the Law Alumni Association and inform them of alumni events and other programs and events occurring at RWU Law, including student mentoring and networking events.
- ii. Communicate clearly to all alumni that the Office of Career Development is a resource available to aid in their career and professional development.

- II. DEVELOPING CURRICULAR, CO-CURRICULAR, AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS THAT FOCUS ON LAW AND INEQUALITY AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER ISSUES FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES
- A. Offer training to all faculty members in best practices for teaching to and engaging a diverse student body, including facilitating discussions in the classroom that provide opportunities for and encourage the civil but frank exchange of diverse views.
 - B. Continue to develop and offer courses that focus specifically on issues of inequality and social justice.
 - C. Address inequality and social justice issues in courses across the curriculum, identify teaching materials that facilitate consideration of those issues, and provide students the opportunity, where appropriate, to evaluate faculty members on the effectiveness of their efforts.
 - D. Continue to offer and expand co-curricular programs (e.g., Exploring Equality Roundtable Series, Martin Luther King, Jr. Lecture Series, Thurgood Marshall Memorial Lecture, Stonewall Lecture) that focus on inequality and social justice.
 - E. Consider a wide range of individuals when inviting guests and speakers to RWU Law for programs and events, and not just when the program or event is focused on inequality and social justice or diversity and inclusion.
 - F. Expand partnerships with groups outside the law school, and particularly in communities where students live while attending RWU Law, that focus on diversity and inclusion as well as inequality and social justice issues.
 - G. Support and encourage student groups to create programs and engage in activities that focus on inequality and social justice as well as diversity and inclusion.
 - H. Support and encourage faculty and staff to engage in activities that support diversity and inclusion in the RWU Law and wider community and identify obstacles to that engagement.

III. CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATE AND COMMUNICATE THAT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE CENTRAL TO THE MISSION OF RWU LAW

- A. Consider amending the RWU Law mission statement, which does not currently mention that diversity and inclusion are part of the school's mission.
- B. Highlight issues of diversity and inclusion when communicating with students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and include diversity and inclusion issues as priorities in the RWU Law marketing and communications plan.
- C. Consistently and emphatically communicate, both internally and externally, about the results of our diversity and inclusion efforts and the importance of those efforts.
- D. Examine the images and other representations of lawyers and other leaders displayed in and outside RWU Law buildings to ensure that they reflect the contributions and value of a diverse group of individuals.

IV. REGULARLY TRACK THE PROGRESS BEING MADE TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE PLAN

Create a permanent committee of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and directors that will report regularly to the RWU Law Board of Directors on the progress being made to operationalize or update the components of this planning document.