

2020 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION

The West Virginia University College of Law (WVU Law) is committed to promoting genuine diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within its community, in the legal profession, and throughout society; and to educating leading lawyers with a deep appreciation and understanding of DEI. WVU Law recognizes that diversity promotes (1) *plural perspectives* that result in the best wisdom-of-crowds outcomes and (2) *individual fairness* where individuals who feel welcomed and valued can achieve their full potential. WVU Law also understands that plural perspectives are best obtained through the free exchange of ideas and the engagement of different viewpoints.

Deep diversity animates WVU Law's Mission, Values, and Learning Outcomes. As a land-grant institution, WVU is committed to increasing higher education access to all underserved populations.

Although the initial version of this DEI Strategic Plan had already been drafted in January, two events in the intervening months have highlighted the continuing critical need to improve genuine DEI in our society. Those two events are the COVID-19 pandemic and the police killings of George Floyd and other persons of color.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in 2020 has had a severe disparate impact on racial minorities, particularly Native, Black, and Latinx Americans. It has also prompted a pattern of racist verbal and physical attacks against Asian Americans. In March 2020, WVU ended all in-person classes and most on-campus operations for the rest of the spring semester in response to the continued health threat of COVID-19.

Second, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black American, was killed by a Minneapolis, Minnesota Police Officer who used his knee to pin Floyd's neck to the ground for over eight minutes. Floyd's death catalyzed mass protests demanding police reform in West Virginia, the rest of the United States, and the world.

The West Virginia Bar, WVU, and WVU Law have already addressed some aspects of these events. In adopting this DEI Strategic Plan, the WVU Law community opposes and condemns all forms of racial injustice, bias, and discrimination—systemic, institutional, implicit or otherwise—that continue to blight our nation almost two and a half centuries after its founding.

The WVU Law faculty recognizes that understanding of the impact of institutional racism and implicit bias is limited by white privilege and life experiences. So, while we take responsibility in this call to action, we commit to listening and learning from our faculty, staff, and students of color about how to best effectuate change. We pledge to consult with them and other marginalized groups and to engage with our broader community, including our alumni, to formulate policies and specific actions to advance racial justice on Law School Hill, the campuses of WVU, and beyond.

The WVU Law faculty passed this Plan on September 25, 2020.

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GOALS AND NEXT STEPS

The WVU Law faculty publicly commits to achieving genuine, measurable progress on the following four DEI goals:

- I. **Maintain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for students, faculty, staff, and alumni.**
- II. **Develop curricular programs that explore law and inequality and consider issues from multiple perspectives.**
- III. **Demonstrate and communicate that WVU Law considers diversity, equity, and inclusion essential to its mission.**
- IV. **Maintain accountability for real diversity, equity, and inclusion progress.**

The WVU Law faculty understands that true institutional diversity requires multidimensional strategic diversity leadership where DEI informs and influences everything WVU Law does or does not do. Moreover, true institutional DEI requires buy-in, coordination, and cooperation from the entire WVU Law community.

WVU Law will always strive to further all four DEI goals. Resource and time constraints, however, are unavoidable realities. Given that WVU Law above all is defined by its people, the first goal should take priority if not all goals can be pursued with equal vigor.

These four DEI goals can only be achieved through concrete actions. Consequently, after each DEI goal below are listed concrete steps unanimously recommended by a WVU Law DEI Committee of students, staff, and faculty. Some of these steps have already been implemented, but they are listed because this Plan is intended to incorporate best practices that transcend any particular regime or time period. Although these recommended next-action steps remain aspirational, the WVU Law faculty shall seriously consider these recommendations before taking other steps to further these four DEI goals.

I. Maintain a Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Community for Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni.

A. Students.

1. The WVU Law DEI Committee should develop and recommend an annual diversity pipeline program at WVU Law that would supplement existing diversity programs (such as the Appalachian Legal Diversity and Inclusion Pipeline Initiative).
2. The Assistant Dean for Student Life, the Assistant Dean for Career Services, the Director for the Center for Law and Public Service, and the Director of the Academic Excellence Center should continue to evaluate and improve mentoring programs that assist students academically, socially, in their career development, and in their Bar examination preparation (including the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) Success in Law School Mentoring Program).

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3. WVU Law should research student outcomes in multiple student domains while maintaining student anonymity to identify (1) whether there are any disparate results or obstacles to student success; and (2) if there are disparate results or obstacles, possible ways to address them.
4. The Office of Enrollment Management should continue to recruit in highly diverse cities including Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) Forum cities and to send student, staff, or alumni representatives annually to the New York City, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, Miami, and Washington, DC, LSAC Forums and recurring minority recruitment fairs—including but not limited to the Mid-Atlantic Pre-Law Conference, the National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Pre-Law Summit, the National Black Pre-Law Conference, and individual HBCU law fairs. Resource constraints will likely not allow visits to every forum and recruiting fair every year. The Office of Enrollment Management should carefully monitor the yield from recruiting trips to identify the number of diversity applications received and ultimate students admitted as a result of travel to a particular forum or fair. This information will enable the Office to use its diversity recruiting budget efficiently where resource limitations necessitate choosing to go to some events and to skip others.
5. The Office of Enrollment Management should continue to hold live and online diversity events to expand our reach and demonstrate our commitment to diversity and inclusion.
6. The Dean, the Office of Enrollment Management, and the Enrollment Management Committee should continue to refine our approach to scholarships to better utilize limited resources and to build a diverse class.

B. Faculty.

1. The Appointments Committee should clearly define the *hiring process* that precedes the recruitment, consideration, or identification of any faculty candidates.
2. The Appointments Committee should compose a specific job description, specific list of qualifications, and specific expected submissions from faculty candidates.
3. The Dean should ensure that the Appointments Committee is composed of people with a variety of perspectives, including a concern for DEI issues.
4. The faculty recruitment advertising plan should be wide-ranging and proactive, going creatively beyond traditional venues in order to reach a broader range of potential candidates.
5. The Appointments Committee should screen all applicants against the *specific qualifications* identified earlier for the position.
6. The Appointments Committee must ensure that they are aware of implicit bias by completing implicit bias training.
7. The Appointments Committee should create and maintain a comprehensive, easy-to-understand faculty appointments guide.
8. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Faculty Research and Development should continue to evaluate and improve faculty mentoring and support programs that assist all faculty in their teaching, scholarship, service, and overall wellness.
9. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs should continue to identify and mentor diverse alumni who might be interested in teaching at WVU Law, full- or part-time, in the future.
10. Understanding the unique constraints surrounding adjunct faculty, the Dean and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs should make their best efforts to hire diverse adjunct faculty.

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C. Staff.

1. The Staff Search Committee (whether ad hoc or permanent) should incorporate to the extent possible, consistent with WVU policy, provisions from the faculty hiring process into the staff hiring process to increase staff diversity.
2. The Staff Search Committee should ensure that job descriptions and lists of qualifications are specific and measurable.
3. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Administration should ensure that the Search Committee is composed of persons with a variety of perspectives, including a concern for DEI issues.
4. The staff advertising plan should be broad and proactive, going creatively beyond traditional venues in order to reach a broader range of potential candidates.
5. When screening applicants, the Staff Search Committee should carefully match the applicant and the specific qualifications.
6. Staff Search Committee members must ensure that they are aware of implicit bias by completing implicit bias training.
7. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Administration should continue to develop staff hiring checklists to monitor compliance with best practices.
8. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Administration should continue to develop, evaluate, and improve staff mentoring and support programs that assist all staff in their job performance and overall wellness.

D. Alumni.

1. The Dean, the Assistant Dean for Career Services, and the Assistant Dean for Development should continue to conduct focus groups with diverse alumni to identify ways WVU Law can sustain and improve its DEI efforts; and ensure that the results are constructively incorporated into WVU Law's current and future planning.
2. The Dean, the Assistant Dean for Career Services, and the Assistant Dean for Development should continue to evaluate and improve ways to connect diverse alumni with the Office of Career Services and the Alumni Association.
3. WVU Law should continue to communicate clearly to all alumni that the Office of Career Services is a resource available to aid in their career and professional development.
4. The Dean and the Associate Dean for Faculty Research and Development should continue to identify and mentor diverse alumni who might be interested in teaching at WVU Law, full- or part-time, in the future.

II. Develop Curricular Programs that Explore Law and Inequality and Consider Issues from Multiple Perspectives.

1. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Academic Planning or DEI Committee should continue to inventory existing curricular programs that focus on law and inequality.

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2. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Academic Planning or DEI Committee should continue to identify gaps concerning law and equality and multiple perspectives in existing curricular programs to remedy with future programming.
3. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Academic Planning or DEI Committee should offer training to faculty members in best practices for engaging a diverse student body.
4. The Associate Dean for Faculty Research and Development or DEI Committee should offer training on cultural competency and DEI.
5. The Associate Dean for Faculty Research and Development or DEI Committee should continue to develop a systematic approach to addressing DEI issues in courses across the curriculum and provide resources to faculty to enable incorporation of these issues in existing courses.
6. When inviting guests and speakers to WVU Law for programs and events, the Dean and Associate Dean for Faculty Research and Development should continue to solicit recommendations from student organizations, staff, and faculty to ensure consideration of a wide range of individuals.
7. WVU Law should continue to encourage students, staff, and faculty to engage in activities that support DEI in the WVU Law and wider community.
8. The Dean and the Appointments Committee should continue to consider curricular programs that focus on law and inequality in faculty hiring processes.
9. The Dean and Associate Deans should continue to maintain a database of law and equality expertise within WVU Law and the broader WVU community; and utilize this database when considering expanding course and program offerings.

III. Demonstrate and Communicate that WVU Law Considers Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Essential to Its Mission.

1. The Dean and the Director of Marketing and Communications should continue to make DEI a priority in the WVU Law marketing and communications plan.
2. The Dean and the Director of Marketing and Communications should assist the entire WVU Law community to communicate consistently, both internally and externally, the importance and results of our DEI efforts.
3. The Dean and the Director of Marketing and Communications should continue to review the WVU Law and University branding programs and identify opportunities to develop a WVU Law branding program consistent with WVU's program that emphasizes DEI.
4. Everyone involved in WVU Law's marketing and communications should receive training on how best to communicate DEI excellence.
5. Send WVU students, staff, and faculty who represent diverse groups to regional and national diversity events.
6. WVU Law should target marketing to diverse communities to build awareness of WVU Law's diverse and welcoming environment.
7. In coordination with the WVU Division of DEI (WVU DEI), proactively learn from past conflicts that may reoccur concerning DEI at WVU Law and other law schools, and in Morgantown and other university communities, to develop effective, comprehensive institutional responses before an actual crisis that balances inclusive excellence and freedom of speech.

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IV. Maintain Accountability for Real Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Progress.

1. The Dean and the DEI Committee should create a core regular routine of annual diversity events, tasks, and benchmarks for the WVU Law DEI Committee and the broader WVU Law community.
2. The Dean and the DEI Committee should determine ways to hold WVU Law accountable for all of the DEI goals in this strategic plan.
3. The DEI Committee Chair should periodically survey administrators, faculty, and staff to catalog the specific ways they are incorporating DEI in their scholarship, teaching, and service.
4. The WVU Law faculty should review and refine this DEI strategic plan at least every three years.
5. The DEI Committee should develop an annual DEI reporting format for WVU Law.
6. The DEI Committee should develop a WVU Law diversity scorecard to provide a concise dashboard of our most important DEI performance measures to supplement the required ABA Standard 509 Report.