OU LAW DIVERSITY UPDATE

Philosophy:

The diversity philosophy of the College of Law is built around our mission, which includes recruiting and retaining a diverse group of students, staff and faculty who, depending on the COL role that they play, can “incorporate their legal training in preparation for the practice of law, judicial service, and other leadership positions in Oklahoma, the nation, and the world.”

We recognize that strength lies in diversity. Effective lawyers and leaders – indeed, all citizens – must be able to see issues from varied, and often, competing, perspectives. The greater the diversity in such factors as race, ethnicity, thought, opinion, and experience of the members of our community, the richer the depth and breadth of the educational experience that the COL provides will be.

Strategy:

1. Recruit and retain a talented and diverse student body, including creative means for outreach;
2. Recruit and retain faculty, staff, and administration of excellence who are committed to the COL mission;
3. Create and secure contributions toward the funding of an endowed faculty position with focus on civil rights;
4. Focus on support systems through which to ensure student retention, bar passage, and career planning and development to assist students in setting and meeting personal and professional goals; broaden scope of placement in terms of nature of opportunity, geographic scope, and other factors;
5. Assist in the development of strong connections between current students and alumni mentors.

Implementation:

Legal education experienced a steep decline in application to and enrollment in law schools in 2010. During a period where a number of other law schools either faltered or failed, the COL thrived despite the difficulties occasioned by that factor and confluent economic ones, and largely owing to the leadership and perspicacity of Dean Harroz in identifying creative positioning strategies, stabilizing and strengthening internal operations, and securing alternate means of revenue growth. Remarkably, the overall quality of students entering OU Law continues to improve despite an annual applicant pool that remains at roughly 60,000 less than it held in 2010.

A key internal step that Dean Harroz took was to consolidate all aspects of recruitment, admission, placement, and student life under the umbrella of the Associate Dean for Students, which provided a necessary central focus. Moreover, rather than downsize administrative staff – a move that many other schools undertook to weather the crisis – Dean Harroz added to that staff in size, experience, and diversity.
The Dean of Students supports a comprehensive although time-intensive policy of ensuring that each student applying to the College of Law is interviewed. This step has provided the college with an excellent view, beyond written applications, of the needs, goals and motivations of our applicants and admittees, which has enhanced their sense of belonging and has led to an extremely high acceptance rate.

During this overall downturn, the acceptance rate of students who self-identified as a member of a historically underrepresented group also declined, reaching a low point with the class entering fall 2014. This decline is attributable to two key factors: (1) smaller pools tend to decline within larger pools; (2) prior steps taken to recruit and offer admission to members of historically underrepresented groups nationally had fallen off.

Fall 2014, Dean Harroz and administration took steps to reverse the trend. Dean Harroz sought for the College of Law to continue its mission and past practice of welcoming diversity and seeking position as a change agent within the legal community. Several actions were implemented:

- Dean Harroz created a Diversity Council, chaired by the Dean and comprising (1) alumni and community leaders connected to minority communities, (2) the Dean of Students, and (3) the admissions staff. The Council was asked to assist the school in ensuring renewed and continued commitment to a diversity focus within its larger mission.
- Assistant Dean Stan Evans, former Dean of Students (who retired in 2011) was asked to return and become active in recruitment and mentoring, and as advisor to the Dean. His role had been critical in past years, when minority enrollment at OU Law jumped from 13% to 23%.
- The admissions staff was encouraged to renew their attention to quality applicants of diverse backgrounds to recommend to the Admissions Committee.
- The Admissions Committee was asked to continue its historically balanced approach to admission, continuing to focus on the overall quality and potential of the applicant but also to seek explanation for lower proxy factors that themselves could reveal, independently, demonstrated potential for leadership and success.
- Aware that financial obstacle often hit, acutely, recruitment and retention efforts, Dean Harroz sought alumni donations targeting scholarship funds. Efforts continue to initiate programs and development opportunities for student support.
- Current students are now involved, actively, in recruitment, to discuss with prospective students their life experience at the College of Law. On several national surveys, OU College of Law has been highly ranked in the college experience and in support for students. Current students can best communicate this message.
- Continued programming to reveal the OU College of Law, and all that it offers, to underserved minorities. Special “days,” outreach, and pipeline programs aim toward high school students or college freshman and sophomores.
- Maintained support for organizations such as APALSA (Asian Pacific American Law Students Association); BLSA (Black Law Students Association), HLSA (Hispanic Law Students Association), NALSA (Native American Law Students Association), and OUtlaw (University of Oklahoma LGBTQ organization).
Dean Harroz created several sensitivity programs to train lawyers to be more accepting of differing backgrounds of their peers and of their future client base. He has instituted a program called “Let’s talk about it” which consists of a series of panel discussions and workshops for students and faculty.

Dean Harroz instituted a session with the incoming class during Orientation where he leads a conversation on diversity and the importance of understanding the role of lawyers-to-be in changing the landscape.

To ease transitions from legal education to practice, the College of Law is strengthening ties to the practicing bar.

The College of Law is reviewing procedures to ensure that students and others know and understand the proper reporting process through which harassment complaints are made.

**Results:**

- OU College of Law has maintained minority enrollment of over 20% every year since 2004.
- The 2018-19 entering class enrollment is 32% minority enrollment – the highest in the history of the College of Law. Assessed against 2018 numbers reported by the American Bar Association, that percentage met or exceeded minority enrollment in law schools of every state except for California, Texas, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Delaware. The 2019-20 entering class enrollment is 29% minority enrollment.
- Since 2006, OU College of Law has had the highest Native American enrollment of any law school in the nation, and a very high graduation rate.
- Over that same period, African American enrollment has increased by 150%; Asian and Hispanic enrollment by 100%.
- The 2018-19 class has the highest Hispanic enrollment in the history of the College.
- Enrollment of women in the student body has ranged between 44% & 53% over the past twelve years. The current first year class reflects over 50% female enrollment.
- In 2012, OU College of Law had its first African American Student Bar president (SBA). It had another African American SBA president in 2013. There has also been a Native American SBA president and Asian class presidents.
- The OU Law overall first-time bar passage rate has been consistently over 90%.
- The College of Law has consistently had a minority bar passage rate of 80% or higher, with three times 100% over the past twelve years. The bar passage rate for minority graduates nation-wide ranges around 50%.
- In 2009, OU Law was selected by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top 25 schools in the nation for diversity.
- OU Law placement of minority graduates into key positions and prominent law firms has risen dramatically over the past fourteen years. Almost all of the key law firms and major corporations in the state of Oklahoma have hired OU Law minority graduates. There are also OU Law minority graduates rising in the state DA offices and in Dallas and Houston. The opportunity for students who have aspirations in the national political landscape is rising too. Recent OU Law minority alums have found positions at the White House staff and the staff of the U.S. Senate. Kendra Horn, the newest Oklahoma Congressperson hired two of our recent grads.
• As of 2019-2020, OU Law formalized its Diversity and Inclusion initiatives into a working group charged with leading the OU Law community in the creation of a Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Plan.
• The 2018-19 entering class enrollment is 51% female and 29% minority – the second highest in OU Law history.

The quality of graduates produced by OU Law has led to a significant change in the hiring outlook for minority lawyers in Oklahoma and elsewhere.