

## **Anti-Racism Steering Committee Agenda, 2020-21**

Race, and racism, have never lost contact with American law. The recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others have underscored the urgency of reckoning with the role that racism continues to play in structuring our legal institutions. As a training ground for future leaders in the legal profession, Columbia Law School has a special responsibility to engage in this endeavor and to advance anti-racist principles throughout the education that it provides, in its classrooms, in its hallways, and in its engagement with the University and the wider world.

In recognition of this responsibility, Dean Gillian Lester formed an Anti-Racism Steering Committee this past summer composed of faculty, senior administrators, and students. The mission of the Steering Committee is to evaluate, coordinate, and strengthen the Law School's anti-racism efforts. These efforts include but are not limited to identifying and recruiting a diverse faculty; developing inclusive pedagogical practices; integrating anti-racism into the curriculum; supporting the professional success of students and graduates from a diverse range of backgrounds; ensuring that the campus environment is secure for and respectful of all students, faculty, and staff; and strengthening the Law School's relationship with the Harlem community.

We elaborate below on the Steering Committee's goals and plans and on their relationship to anti-racist work being done by other entities within the Law School. Over the summer, the Steering Committee convened discussions with an array of student organizations. The goals and plans described in this Agenda have been shaped in significant part by those conversations and, in particular, by points raised by the Law School's Black Law Students Association (BLSA) in conjunction with allied groups. The Steering Committee recognizes that each item on this Agenda is one part of reckoning with the role of racism in legal institutions and the Law School. Given the breadth of this task and the need to make lasting rather than fleeting change, the Steering Committee intends to collaborate with partners across the Law School community to translate these Agenda items into action.

### **1. Increasing recruitment and hiring of faculty from underrepresented minority groups**

Beginning this past summer, the responsible committees (Clinical Appointments, Entry-Level Appointments, Lateral Appointments, and Adjunct Instructors) have been exploring ways to better support the goal of constructing a diverse faculty, both in the short term and over the longer run. The committees have identified a number of practices that they can adopt, or apply in a more systematic manner, consistent with the University's *Guide to Best Practices in Faculty Search and Hiring*. These practices include broadening search criteria and methods to ensure a more inclusive pool of finalists, conducting targeted searches for scholars of race and the law and related subjects, and actively encouraging promising candidates to engage with the appointments process even if they are not formally on the job market. In support of these ongoing efforts, the Steering Committee will work to:

- Ensure that the Law School's appointments committees maintain these efforts over time, as it will take multiple hiring cycles to achieve significant progress;

- Elevate the importance of these efforts with the entire faculty and facilitate the faculty's reconsideration of structural and historical impediments to racially inclusive hiring practices and outcomes;
- Engage more actively with students about ongoing institutional hiring efforts;
- Identify gaps that might exist among the mandates of the different appointments committees to ensure that promising candidates who do not fit within the traditional boundaries of these committees are not overlooked; and
- Promote more robust and sustained programming to mentor Law School students, fellows, and other Columbia affiliates who have the potential to become future members of the faculty.

## **2. Promoting inclusive pedagogy and enhancing the cultural competency of classroom instructors**

In recent years, the Student Affairs Committee's subcommittee on diversity and inclusion (SAC Committee) has focused on inclusive pedagogy and developed a series of initiatives to change the culture of teaching and learning at the Law School. The SAC Committee's ongoing work in this regard includes:

- Facilitating an annual "teaching letter" to the faculty from the Dean and the Vice-Dean for Curriculum that provides information and guidance on creating inclusive classrooms, such as resources for proper name and pronoun identification and disability accommodation, ideal block times for scheduling office hours and sections for first-year courses, and links to best-practice guides;
- Facilitating the "onboarding" of new faculty to ensure that every professor receives anti-discrimination training and is provided with resources and support for effective and inclusive teaching;
- Holding regular workshops for full-time faculty and adjunct instructors on inclusive teaching, building on prior workshops and discussions on this subject at the March 2019 Women's Advocacy Project Faculty Symposium on Inclusive Pedagogy, the September 2019 faculty retreat, July 2020 online teacher trainings, and an inaugural August 2020 workshop for first-year instructors on Race and the 1L Curriculum; and
- Gathering information more regularly and effectively from students about their classroom experiences, as through a new set of questions about inclusive pedagogy that will be added to student course evaluations beginning this Fall.

The Steering Committee fully supports these ongoing efforts and intends to build on the SAC Committee's work by:

- Examining the efficacy of these initiatives and proposing modifications and additions as warranted;
- Broadening the scope of faculty discussions on race and teaching to encompass not only first-year instructors but also the full faculty;
- Promoting inclusive pedagogy and cultural competency among all instructors as core Law School values and an institutional expectation; and
- Taking up a recommendation from the SAC Committee that the Law School consider creating a new standing committee on teaching.

### **3. Enhancing attention to issues of racial justice and related topics in the classroom and curriculum**

Through programs such as this past summer’s online teacher trainings and workshop for first-year instructors, noted above, faculty members have begun to discuss how Law School courses can more effectively recognize, highlight, and advance the study of race and inequality—both to deepen understanding of these issues and their pervasive effects on the law’s development and to better prepare students to address these issues in their professional careers. To promote this goal, the Steering Committee will work with the faculty through the Vice-Dean for Curriculum, the Curriculum Committee, and other appropriate committees to:

- Help instructors collaborate with other instructors of the same subject to identify opportunities to address race and inequality in their courses, and to develop and implement strategies for teaching this material and facilitating class discussions;
- Create new pathways for students to provide input regarding the courses they would like to see offered;
- Encourage the offering of additional upper-level courses that address racial justice, critical race theory, and related topics;
- Sponsor and support reading groups, roundtables, and other programs to engage with anti-racism topics outside of required courses; and
- Consider the establishment of new prizes or other supports for student-authored scholarly papers on race and the law, antidiscrimination theory and practice, or related topics.

### **4. Ensuring appropriate anti-bias training and oversight of on-campus security**

In recent weeks, the University has convened a working group to support inclusive public safety on Columbia’s campuses. The working group brings together students, faculty, administrators, and leadership of the University’s Office of Public Safety to examine existing training and practices and to recommend concrete strategies for reform. The working group intends

to meet on a biweekly basis and to issue a public report to President Lee Bollinger by the end of the semester, while providing more frequent community updates about its activities.

The Law School is represented on this working group by Rawda Fawaz (Class of 2022), Dean of Students and Steering Committee member Yadira Ramos-Herbert, and Professor Susan Sturm. In addition, Professor Suzanne Goldberg is a co-facilitator of the working group. The Steering Committee believes that the Law School delegation will play an instrumental role in promoting the development and implementation of inclusive public safety policies that are responsive to the concerns raised by BLSA and affirmed by other law students, and the Steering Committee will follow the efforts of the working group to ensure that this is the case.

### **5. Promoting racial justice work in Harlem and strengthening the Law School's relationships with the Harlem community and surrounding neighborhoods**

In recent years, the Law School's engagement with the Harlem community has included (1) a wide range of pro bono undertakings, such as the Harlem Tutorial Project, the Paralegal Pathways Initiative, and the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program; (2) clinics and externships with a significant number of clients based in Harlem, such as the Community Advocacy Lab, the Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic, the Immigrants' Rights Clinic, the Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, and the newly launched Racial Justice Externship with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; (3) a variety of initiatives led by Law School centers such as the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies; (4) summer and postgraduate employment at organizations that are located in or work to benefit residents of Harlem; (5) Law School contracting with Harlem businesses to provide services; and (6) student volunteer opportunities at Harlem schools, charities, and other organizations during orientation and throughout the academic year. (An extensive list of these activities is available upon request.) In addition, aided by a new gift from Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, the Law School will support a staff attorney to assist in the Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic, thereby making more opportunities available for student enrollment and community impact.

The Steering Committee seeks to strengthen these existing relationships while also identifying new opportunities for the Law School to partner with Harlem organizations in furtherance of building community and promoting racial justice. To this end, the Steering Committee intends to work with relevant Law School and University bodies, including the Office of Social Justice Initiatives (SJI), the Office of Student Services, the Director of Externships, and the Columbia University Office of Community Affairs, to:

- Expand pro bono and externship opportunities in Harlem, especially ones focused on racial justice;
- Increase student engagement activities in Harlem during orientation and more broadly;
- Strengthen relationships with public interest legal organizations that are based in Harlem or serve Harlem residents;

- Ensure regular and proactive Law School patronage of Black- and minority-owned business in Harlem;
- Identify ways in which Law School alumni can continue to participate in and promote racial justice initiatives in the Harlem community after graduation;
- Investigate and recommend new ways to raise awareness about Harlem’s history and the Law School’s relationship to Harlem, possibly including an introduction to this history offered during students’ first year; and
- Investigate and recommend new ways to deepen the Law School’s outreach to and engagement with Harlem, possibly including creating an annual event inviting representatives of Harlem-based organizations to the Law School.

## **6. Expanding professional pathways for students from underrepresented minority groups**

The Steering Committee has identified a number of professional areas in which students of color are currently underrepresented, relative to their numbers in the general population and to apparent student interest, or otherwise face distinctive barriers to professional advancement. In these areas, the Steering Committee will work with relevant bodies at the Law School to enhance opportunities and strengthen supports. These professional pathways include, in no particular order:

- **Judicial clerkships.** Under the leadership of Dean Andrea Saavedra, the Office of Judicial Clerkships (OJC) is focused on widening the circle of students who apply for and obtain clerkships. The Steering Committee fully supports OJC’s goal of creating a more inclusive clerkships culture at the Law School, and it will work with OJC in particular on enhancing faculty mentoring of and advocacy for interested students of color.
- **Legal academia.** The Law School currently has two committees, Careers in Law Teaching and Columbians in Law Teaching, dedicated to helping students, affiliates, and alumni who might wish to become law professors. As part of this larger effort, the Steering Committee will work with these committees to design an infrastructure that will enable the Law School to identify and support current and prospective students of color with substantial potential to succeed in academia.
- **Corporate law and governance.** The Steering Committee will work with the Law School’s Millstein Center on its ongoing effort to sponsor a conference on racial equality in corporate governance along with a faculty-facilitated discussion group on diversity, equity, and inclusion in corporate and business law.
- **Public interest law.** Under the leadership of Dean Erica Smock, SJI has been working to address barriers to students of color seeking public interest and public service careers. The Steering Committee fully supports this goal and will work with SJI to continue to identify and address financial and non-financial barriers that limit the ability of students of color to pursue such careers, and that limit the ability of all interested students to pursue careers dedicated to racial justice.

- Organizational leadership more generally. The Davis Polk Leadership Initiative (DPLI), currently led by Professors Elizabeth Emens and James Liebman and Associate Dean Petal Modeste, includes cultural competency among the core leadership skills it seeks to instill in students. Through its Fellowships, Innovation Grants, leadership coaching, faculty mentorship, and workshops, DPLI has begun and will continue identifying and facilitating leadership opportunities for students of color.

## **7. Enhancing financial support for students pursuing racial justice work and for students of color pursuing social justice work**

The Law School currently maintains a range of targeted financial assistance programs for students who wish to pursue social justice and racial justice work, including scholarships such as the Greene Public Service Scholars Program, summer funding such as the Guaranteed Summer Funding Program and the Human Rights Internship Program, postgraduate fellowships such as the David W. Leebron Human Rights Fellowship and the Global Public Service Fellowship, and one of the most generous loan repayment programs of any top school. The Law School also has dedicated programs to support students interested in public interest and public service work, such as SJI's Public Interest/Public Service Fellows Program. Even with these programs, however, students who wish to pursue careers dedicated to social justice and racial justice—particularly students from traditionally underrepresented groups—may be deterred from doing so for financial reasons.

The Steering Committee will partner with the Office of the Dean and the Office of Development and Alumni Relations to increase financial assistance for students who wish to engage in racial justice work and for students of color who wish to pursue social justice work. In particular, the Steering Committee will:

- Support Dean Lester in an effort to raise funding for five new scholarships that would make it easier for students who have demonstrated commitment to pursue social justice work in aid of historically underserved or underprivileged populations; and
- Work closely with SJI to develop recommendations for Dean Lester and Associate Dean for Development and Alumni Relations Ryan Cairns for further fundraising that will enable additional forms of financial support in this area.

## **8. Supporting ongoing anti-racist initiatives at the Law School**

In its information-gathering and outreach efforts to date, the Steering Committee has learned of numerous anti-racist projects at the Law School that have already been launched but that have not yet been completed or that require ongoing support. The Steering Committee will work to ensure that these projects continue and flourish, in some cases by supplying guidance and in other cases by offering material aid or other resources. These projects include:

- CLS and Slavery. Led by Professor Katherine Franke and supported by an initial research grant from the Office of the Dean, a team of faculty and students has begun to investigate

the Law School's historical connections to slavery as part of a project of memory, documentation, and repair.

- Portraits and visibility. A working group of faculty and staff has developed a preliminary plan for increasing the diversity and representativeness of the portraits and images that appear throughout Jerome Greene Hall.
- SJI initiatives. In recent months, SJI has established a racial justice subcommittee and has worked with BLSA to strengthen and expand SJI's racial justice programming and resources, and to strengthen and expand pro bono opportunities for Law School students with racial justice organizations and with organizations based in Harlem.
- Student Services initiatives. In recent years, the Office of Student Services has developed a series of student-focused programs aimed at promoting inclusiveness and cultural competency, such as the Connecting Columbia pre-orientation event, the Creating an Inclusive Community training during orientation, and the Navigating Difficult Conversations training during January of 1L year.

The Steering Committee will, in addition, seek to develop stronger modes of communication and engagement between the Law School and other departments, centers, and offices throughout the University that are working on anti-racism issues.

## **9. Supporting future anti-racist initiatives at the Law School**

As past experience makes clear, Law School students, staff, and faculty will continue to develop anti-racist projects in ways that cannot currently be predicted. While there is a need for high-level leadership and coordination on certain issues, as reflected in the priorities identified above, the Steering Committee also believes that it would be valuable to create a structure that encourages broad engagement and facilitates new and ongoing efforts to combat racism by members of the Law School community. To this end, the Steering Committee will work with SJI to establish and fund a structure that will:

- Identify and publish information about anti-racist projects at the Law School and about available formal supports that the Law School provides to students, staff, and faculty that could be applied to anti-racist projects;
- Identify and publish information about Law School faculty, graduates, and centers interested in mentoring or otherwise assisting anti-racist projects;
- Invite students, staff, and faculty to apply for support for anti-racist projects, whether in the form of monetary funds, mentorship and training, connections to internal or external experts, or anything else the Law School might be able to provide; and
- Enable SJI or another appropriate entity to provide programming on this resource, facilitate student connections and collaborations through and around it, review proposals, and make anti-racism grants.

To build capacity in this area and to enable these grants, Dean Lester has pledged to fundraise to make five grants available each year over the next four years.

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This Agenda aims to explain the Steering Committee's goals and plans to date, as well as to outline the enhanced fundraising pledged to support the Agenda. In total, the Law School will commit an additional \$2,000,000 over the next four years to support scholarships, expanded community programming, new grant initiatives, and other projects. The Steering Committee recognizes that sustained leadership and commitment will be required to make enduring change. As its efforts progress, and as other initiatives within the Law School community are launched, the Steering Committee will provide further updates. On all of these issues, the Steering Committee welcomes the continuing input of all members of the Law School community, including by using [this feedback form](#).