Charter for Cultivating a Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Educational Environment
University of Michigan Law School
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MISSION STATEMENT

We aim to increase the degree to which students experience the Law School as an equitable and inclusive environment, and to ensure that they have equal opportunities to thrive. Students with diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives inevitably think differently from each other. The Law School must be a space in which different views are expressed; the ability to advance, consider, challenge, and address competing points of view is at the heart of good lawyering. We strongly believe that we can help students develop these skills, without losing our long-standing tradition of civility and respectfulness as a community, and while still creating an environment in which all students feel a sense of belonging.

FRAMEWORK FOR OVERSEEING THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

To implement that mission, the Law School needs a pragmatic framework that is substantial enough to institute real change and flexible enough to respond to new information and student needs over time.

a. Educational Environment Committee

Beginning with the 2019–2020 academic year, the Law School’s Educational Environment Committee (EEC) will have a new structure and mission. It will consist of: (1) a tenured research faculty member, (2) an experiential faculty member, (3) the Associate Dean for Academic Programming [Gil Seinfeld], (4) the Assistant Dean for Student Life [Bayrex Martí], (5) the Chief Operating Officer [Michele Frasier Wing], and (6) eight students.

The student members of the EEC will be selected through a process that is administered by the Law School Student Senate (LSSS). In particular, LSSS will consult with the student body to develop a plan for selecting the student members and then will implement that plan. The student members will be identified by the first week of the Fall 2019 semester. In selecting them, considerable attention should be given to making the committee as diverse and representative of the entire student body as possible. Students who wish to serve on the EEC must commit to making themselves available at the designated meeting time, which the EEC chair will set before the Fall 2019 semester begins.

The EEC’s core responsibilities are to:

• Propose ways to implement the Law School’s goals relating to the educational environment.
• Periodically review and assess the Law School’s activities in this area and propose ways to reform both the concrete goals that are identified in this Charter and the programs that the Law School has developed to implement those goals.
• Periodically review and assess the EEC’s own composition and activities on the educational environment, and propose reforms for improving the EEC.
Serve as a forum for students, faculty, and administrators to communicate with one another about and work together on issues relating to the educational environment.

b. Raising Concerns about our Educational Environment

Students who have complaints or concerns about the environment in a particular course or courses should discuss them with the Assistant Dean for Student Life or the Associate Director of Student Services. Students who have complaints or concerns about the Law School administration’s work relating to the educational environment should communicate their views either to members of the EEC or (anonymously or not) through the Law School’s online portal for issues on diversity, equity, and inclusion: https://www.law.umich.edu/special/divsurvey/Pages/default.aspx

The Law School’s responses are likely to vary depending on the particular circumstances at issue, the seriousness of the alleged incident or problem, and any countervailing considerations (e.g., protecting the privacy of other students or the professor). In many cases, the first step will be a conversation between the relevant faculty member and either the Associate Dean for Academic Programming or the Assistant Dean for Student Life, with the goals of helping the faculty member understand and remedy problems that have been reported and prevent their recurrence. In some circumstances, the faculty member will be directed to additional inclusive teaching resources and presented with specific strategies for assuring the inclusivity of the classroom. Whether any further action is appropriate will be heavily context-dependent.

The Office of Student Life will remain in ongoing contact with students who raise complaints or concerns relating to the inclusivity of our educational environment and will apprise them of developments, where appropriate.

**SUBSTANTIVE GOALS AND REFORMS: 2019-2020**

a. Administrator-Student Interactions

The Law School administration must provide students with the resources they need to thrive. Students arrive at the Law School with different backgrounds, understandings of the legal enterprise, and kinds of social capital. The administration must take steps to ensure that, once they are here, they are able to participate on equal terms. Toward these ends, the Law School administration will, with guidance from the EEC:

- Revise 1L Orientation programming so that it better prepares students for the law school classroom and introduces them to law as a discipline (e.g., by teaching that law is both a function of and a mechanism for changing the social structure in which it operates).
- Provide programming during the school year to explain different pedagogic methods and help “demystify” what is happening in the classroom.
- Disseminate in more comprehensive and readily accessible ways information about the resources and policies that are relevant to students with particular needs (e.g., resources for students with disabilities, students with mental health needs, and students who are affected by sexual assault), with the goal of being as transparent as possible.
• Help students address issues relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion as they arise, including by giving them the tools, models, and resources to respond in productive ways, and informing them of the mechanisms that exist in the Law School for addressing their concerns.

b. Faculty-Student Interactions

The classroom must be an equitable and inclusive learning space in which students are challenged to think about law from various angles, including in terms of its impact on particular segments of society. In addition, faculty must be prepared to provide mentorship and training that is responsive to the different ways that students learn and sensitive to the different identities they bring to the classroom. Toward these ends, the Law School faculty will:

• Attend sessions that train them to create an equitable, inclusive, and intellectually invigorating learning environment, and to provide mentorship to all students outside the classroom.
• Meet periodically, in various formations (e.g., faculty for each 1L section, clinical faculty, untenured research faculty), to discuss methods for improving the classroom environment.
• Share resources among themselves for increasing the coverage in the classroom of material relating to racial, gender, and other social disparities in the law.
• For each big 1L Section, host conversations outside ordinary classroom hours on issues relating to racial, gender, or other social disparities in the course material.

In addition, the EEC will suggest ways to improve faculty-student interactions on issues relating to the educational environment.

c. Student-Student Interactions

The Law School must cultivate a community in which students with diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives learn to disagree with and challenge one another, without becoming or causing others to become isolated or unwelcome. Toward this end, the Law School will, with guidance from the EEC:

• Revise Orientation programming so that it provides an initial foundation for cross-cultural lawyering and communicating respectfully across differences, and for appreciating how people with diverse backgrounds or perspectives might respond differently to the same stimuli.
• Work collaboratively with students to create spaces in which students, administrators, and recent alumni discuss issues relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Law School and in the legal profession.
• Provide ongoing support to students and student organizations who advance such peer-to-peer engagement.