

Roadmap for Racial Justice at University of Florida Levin College of Law
plan as of June 17, 2020

The University of Florida Levin College of Law is committed to anti-racist action and to supporting the anti-racist initiatives of our community members. Anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and other forms of racism have deep roots in our society, including within the legal system, the legal profession, and law schools. We are committed to fighting this systemic and structural racism. Below is our current roadmap for action.

Work Directed Outward

Virgil D. Hawkins Civil Clinic. In 1989, UF Law's civil legal clinic serving indigent local clients was named in honor of Virgil D. Hawkins, who long fought for the racial desegregation of Florida's public law schools and universities. In 1958, Hawkins withdrew his application to UF Law in exchange for a Florida Supreme Court order desegregating UF's graduate and professional schools. Hawkins subsequently received his law degree from New England Law School and, after successfully fighting to be admitted to The Florida Bar, dedicated his legal career to serving poor and indigent clients. The civil clinic named in his honor has grown to offer legal services to indigent local clients in three discrete areas, all operating under the Virgil D. Hawkins Civil Clinic umbrella: our Gator TeamChild Juvenile Law Clinic, our Immigration Clinic, and our Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Clinic. Clients in all three areas have suffered harm because of systemic racism and other societal inequalities, and students learn how direct legal services may address some of those harms. The College of Law remains committed to supporting the Virgil D. Hawkins Civil Clinic and to ensuring more students have the opportunity to engage in this important work in our local community. Over the next year, clinical faculty will develop new projects related to the intersection of mental health, policing, and race. We will also ensure that Virgil Hawkins is appropriately honored in our renovated experiential learning space, in addition to the display in his honor in our Legal Information Center.

Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations. Since its founding in 1998, UF Law's Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations has worked to foster communities of dialogue focused on racial justice. The center supports empirical and theoretical scholarship and other forms of intellectual discourse designed to spark change in the state of Florida and in communities throughout the nation. Earlier this spring, the Director of the center, Professor Katheryn Russell-Brown, appointed ten Associate Directors: Professors Stephanie Bornstein, Nancy Dowd, Berta Hernández-Truyol, Darren Hutchinson, Michelle Jacobs, Maryam Jamshidi, Shani King, Pedro Malavet, Jason Nance, and Kenneth Nunn. With this additional support, the center decided in April, 2020, to focus on four new projects during the 2020-2021 academic year: (1) the Race and Law Curriculum Roadmap, which will provide law schools nationwide with guidance on how to effectively incorporate race into the law school curriculum; (2) the Emerging Race Scholars Program, which will provide mentorship to promising race scholars with five or fewer years of experiences teaching in law schools and others who are seeking their first law school teaching positions; (3) the Policy Project, which will select a topic of legislative import (such as the intersection of race and artificial intelligence), research and analyze the topic, and develop research-based policy conclusions; and (4) Pressing Matters of Race and Social Justice, designed to address the racial and social justice impact of pressing contemporary issues. This last project originally planned to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, but is now expanding its scope to also focus on police brutality and related matters. The center will also create a new student advisory group to ensure that student voices shape all of the projects listed above.

Newly Targeted Pro Bono Projects. Many of our faculty and staff have long worked on pro bono matters, and the College of Law will continue to support those efforts. We will also partner with existing law firm pro bono programs to connect faculty, staff, and student research assistants with new projects related to racial

justice. This pro bono work will be valued during the annual review process, with faculty members asked to delineate the effect of their work in their annual activities reports.

New Virtual Institute for Racial Justice. UF Law has joined Stetson Law in proposing that all 12 law schools in Florida form a virtual institute focused on racial justice. Although the exact contours of the proposal will be shaped by all law schools in the state, the primary goal of the institute will be to work with existing advocacy groups in Florida who have long fought for racial justice in the state. In other words, the institute will be an alliance in support of existing organizations, signaling that law schools are committed to joining the cause. We hope that each school will designate at least one “student fellow” to work with the institute every year on discrete racial justice initiatives, with the goal of fellows working with existing organizations to push long-standing initiatives “across the line.” The student fellows will help with legal research, strategic advocacy, and the leveraging of law school resources – including our alumni and legislative networks – to support the initiatives. Examples of such initiatives might include changes to the process by which juveniles are charged as adults; attempts to end disparate criminal sentences on the basis of race; better regulation of public school resource officers; attempts to equalize funding across public school districts; disruption of the school to prison pipeline; ensuring Black-owned businesses have access to loans and state contracts; and the passage of local and state ordinances designed to achieve equal pay for equal work, among many other possibilities. By picking a few initiatives each year, the institute will be able to evolve with the changing legal landscape in Florida.

Work Directed Inward

Office of the Assistant Dean for Inclusion. In November, 2018, Michelle Smith became the College of Law’s first Assistant Dean for Inclusion. In this role, Dean Smith has worked with students, staff, and faculty to help us better understand the diversity of experiences that people bring to the law school, the diverse ways they experience the law school once here, and how the law school could become more welcoming and inclusive for all members of our community. To help achieve this latter goal, Dean Smith has conducted multiple trainings for faculty and staff. She has worked with our student organizations to develop programming, and she provides coaching and mentoring to individual students and small groups of students. Dean Smith also has been actively involved in the initiatives described below. Dean Smith welcomes ideas about other initiatives designed to highlight and challenge systemic racism on our campus. For now, Dean Smith will be establishing a new monthly check-in process with the student leaders of all affinity groups in order to ensure that student concerns are promptly identified and addressed.

Diversity and Community Relations Committee. The faculty has long convened a Diversity and Community Relations Committee that seeks to foster discussions of diversity within the law school community and to better connect the law school with the broader Gainesville community. Dean Smith has worked with the committee to incorporate more staff and student participation, and the committee stands ready to consider and implement new initiatives, including the one described next.

New Racial Justice Research Assistant Corps. Dean Smith and the Diversity and Community Relations Committee will recruit and oversee a new group of student research assistants dedicated to racial justice research. These research assistants will be available on a short-term or long-term basis to help professors integrate discussions of race into their existing courses or to assist with scholarship analyzing racial justice issues.

Celebrating Black Alumni. We will make the achievements of Black alumni more visible throughout our campus. A university task force will establish values, principles, and reasons for honorary namings, both historic and current, throughout the university. We will ask the university to consider Black UF Law alumni

for future honorary namings in accordance with current values and principles. We will also work with students, staff, and faculty at the College of Law to otherwise develop ways to honor the contributions of our Black alumni.

Training and Accountability. The university will soon announce required anti-racism and anti-bias training for all faculty, staff, and students. The College of Law will actively support this training and will seek to augment it with law-school-specific training and dialogue geared toward the concerns many of you have raised. Some of this training will begin at the orientations for new 1L students, transfer students, and LLM students, and training will continue for all students throughout the year. We will also continue to follow up on all student concerns regarding faculty, classroom behavior, and incidents in classes, and we will develop better ways of holding faculty, staff, and students accountable for problematic behavior.

Curriculum. We have heard many calls for a required class on race and racial justice. The faculty Curriculum Committee is already considering proposals to change our required curriculum. The committee will bring these proposals before the entire faculty for discussion and approval this fall, as any changes to our required curriculum must be approved by a majority vote of the entire faculty. In the meantime, we are seeking out alumni and others to teach additional electives related to race and racial justice, including in the form of compressed courses. We welcome ideas for who might effectively teach such elective courses.

Faculty and Staff Hiring. The College of Law has implemented new hiring protocols for all full-time, permanent hires of new staff and faculty. Diverse hiring committees are now formed to oversee the interview process for new positions, and those hiring committees have a mandate to produce diverse pools of applicants, including with respect to race. Dean Smith has worked with the hiring committees to adopt best practices and to document those practices for future searches. We have achieved some success, particularly with respect to hiring Black professional staff. We also recently hired one Hispanic legal skills professor and one Black legal skills professor. We still have much work to do, however, particularly with respect to tenure-track hires. Although we have extended offers to three Black tenure-track candidates over the last three years, none of those candidates accepted our offers. We remain committed to doing better so that the racial composition of our faculty better reflects the diversity of the state of Florida. Our tenured faculty is 14% Black, whereas the state population is 17% Black. Our tenured faculty is 7% Hispanic, whereas the state population is 26% Hispanic. We will also focus on recruiting faculty who examine the intersections of race and various substantive legal fields.

Admissions. The College of Law has long been committed to attracting the most promising students to our programs. Our processes for reviewing both JD and LLM applicants emphasize a holistic approach, with a particular focus on how applicants will diversify the law school community. In fact, our JD application offers all applicants the option of writing a diversity statement, which we robustly take into account when reviewing applications. At the same time, we must do more to attract Black applicants in particular. Dean Smith has been working with the Admissions Office on various outreach efforts, and we welcome your ideas about how we might more successfully recruit Black applicants for our JD and LLM programs. Once Black students are admitted, we also welcome your ideas about how to better encourage them to choose UF Law. Thanks to generous scholarship support provided by our alumni and extensive outreach by the Admissions Office, BLSA, Dean Smith, and faculty and staff, we continue to improve our recruitment efforts for competitive applicants across racial groups, including Black applicants. We must do even better as we strive to have a student population that better reflects the diversity of our state.

Continuous Review. We are committed to making UF Law an inclusive and welcoming environment for every single member of our community. We will review all aspects of the College of Law in order to identify and fight systemic racism on our own campus. This roadmap for racial justice will expand as we continuously conduct this review.