

**Vermont Law School
Diversity Plan Update (2017-2018)**

Last Updated: September 8, 2017
Author: Dean Shirley Jefferson

Background

Vermont Law School (VLS) aspires to become a more diverse community where individuals of all races, cultures, ethnicities, classes, religions, ages, sexual orientations, abilities and political views live and learn together in an atmosphere of communication, acceptance, and understanding. Two imperatives drive this aspiration:

1. Law schools control access to the legal profession. In this role, Vermont Law School must play its part to assure that members of under-represented groups have the opportunity to enter the profession.
2. The broader American society, and indeed the world, is culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse. We live in a global society in which technology has largely eliminated geographic and cultural barriers to communication and commerce. To live up to the expectations of its motto, *Lex Pro Urbe Et Orbe* – Law for the Community and the World, Vermont Law School must equip its students with the skills, knowledge, and understanding to reside as citizens and leaders in this ever growing but shrinking world.

In order to drive progress towards becoming a more diverse community, Vermont Law School created a Diversity Committee of faculty, staff, and students. The Diversity Committee serves as the primary catalyst for efforts to address diversity within the law school. The VLS Diversity Plan was created in order to inform the Vermont Law School community of the importance, purposes, goals and progress of the law school's diversity efforts and, as periodically amended, is subject to the review and acceptance by the administration and faculty. It is also provided to the Board of Trustees for their consideration.

Diversity Goals

To ensure that the efforts to improve diversity are tangible, measurable, practical, and realistic, the Diversity Committee has identified seven key goals. These goals were selected to provide a framework within which the VLS community continues to move toward a more diverse, welcoming, understanding, and accommodating environment for students, staff, and faculty. The seven goals that have been identified form the backbone of the Diversity Plan and they require VLS to develop strategies to improve:

1. To increase the discussion and understanding of diversity within the law school community.
2. To increase the incorporation of topics pertaining to diversity in the curriculum and classroom.
3. To increase the ability of the administration, faculty, and staff in understanding and addressing in a sensitive and respectful manner the concerns of people of color and other diverse groups.
4. To increase the number of people of color and other diverse groups in the student body.
5. To increase the ability of people of color and other diverse groups to succeed in law school.

6. To increase the number of people of color and other diverse groups on the faculty and in the administration, and staff.
7. To improve the process by which community issues and complaints concerning diversity are recognized and addressed.

Goal 1. To increase the discussion and understanding of diversity within the law school community.

Accomplishments

- **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration** – This year, the school had another inspiring Martin Luther King Day Celebration. Professor Quentin Pair, who served as a senior trial attorney at the Department of Justice and now teaches at Howard University School of Law, spoke about the connection between civil rights and environmental justice. The lively celebration was well-attended and included poetry and song. South Royalton High School students attended the event.
- **Diversity Committee** – The Diversity Committee meets on a monthly basis to discuss progress towards diversity goals as well as current issues and concerns. All recognized student groups, including the Student Bar Association (SBA), are required to send at least one attendee to the monthly meeting.
- **Roll Call for Justice** – Phanelle Duchatelier, a second-year student, sent an email for a “Roll Call for Justice” to the VLS Community. The email encouraged everyone to engage in a conversation and to take action against the continuing pattern of violence against African Americans in the United States. A meeting was held and a plan of action was drafted and sent to the VLS Community. Dean and President Marc Mihaly answered the call and encouraged the VLS community to engage in the conversation. He also stated that he was putting together a working group consisting of student leaders, faculty, staff, and administrators to schedule events throughout this academic year.
- **Indigenous People’s Day** – The Native American Law Students Association (NALSA) championed an effort to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day at the school. The faculty voted to include this new name on the Academic Calendar.
- **Diverse Student Groups** – The school continues to recognize and support a wide range of diverse student groups, including the Native American Law Students Association (NALSA), the Black Law Students Association (BLSA), the Asian Pacific American Law Student Association (APALSA), Latin American Law Student Association, Alliance, the Federalist Society, the International Law Society (ILS), the Women’s Law Group (WLG), Christian Law Fellowship (CLF), and many others.
- **Community Meeting, “A Conversation About Police and Community Relations”** – In light of recent media reports highlighting police violence against African Americans, the school organized a community meeting and discussion that featured an anti-bias educator, a representative of the Vermont State Police, the VLS Dean for Student Affairs and Diversity, and a representative of the South

Royalton Police. The session was well-attended and led to a worthwhile dialogue between the community and students.

- **Environmental Justice Solutions Conference** – On March 24, 2017 the school hosted a day-long Solutions Conference on Environmental Justice. The goal of this conference was to provide a common understanding of existing Environmental Justice issues and to provide a forum for attendees to discuss and create meaningful solutions. Environmental Justice describes the need to address the challenges faced by low-income and communities of color that are often disproportionately adversely impacted by the burdens and hazards associated with facilities such as coal-fired power plants, hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facilities, refineries and other locally undesirable land uses that can lead to inadequate housing, food deserts, depressed real estate values, along with a multitude of adverse health consequences, including lead poisoning, asthma and other respiratory diseases, heart disease, and cancer clusters.
- **Cold Case Justice Initiative** – The Cold Case Justice Initiative from Syracuse University introduced faculty, staff, and students to the work being done to solve Civil Rights murders.
- **Diversity Day** – Diversity Day involved vendors from the local community (church groups, food vendors, etc.) and various students who sang and performed. Student groups were instrumental with face painting, nail painting, and supervising diversity posters.
- **Safe Art** – The Women’s Law Group welcomed SafeArt, an organization committed to raising domestic violence violence, to campus.
- **Vagina Monologues** – The Vagina Monologues, featuring student, staff, and faculty performances, was performed again this year in the Chase Community Center.
- **Diversity Month Panel** – During Diversity Month, a panel composed of a Hispanic professor, the Dean for Student Affairs and Diversity, who is a black woman, a student who is wheelchair-bound, a Chinese professor, and a gay professor discussed their thoughts concerning diversity and the associated challenges they often confront.
- **Flag Policy** – In response to an SBA-approved request to raise the “Black Lives Matter” flag on campus, the school crafted and approved a policy that provides a formal process for requests to fly flags on campus. The process will allow for a structured means to handle requests to promote diverse causes. In February 2017, the “Black Lives Matter” flag was flown at VLS for two weeks.
- **Microaggression Training** – During 2016 orientation for first-year students, a mandatory session was provided for all new students, staff, and faculty and focused on identifying and addressing microaggressions.
- **Unconscious Bias Training** – The school additionally provided a training session on unconscious bias which included skits conducted by student ambassadors to demonstrate biases that students may not even be aware they are communicating.
- **Chase Center Murals** – After significant student concerns were raised that the mural in the Chase Center loft was insensitive; plaques were installed to provide descriptions for each panel and provide a more sensitive and informative experience.

- **Alliance Student Group** – Vermont Law School always attracted a large percentage of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. The Alliance Group has really enlightened and enhanced our campus with their many events and conferences, annual Gayla, Stonewall Rebellion Celebration, Transgender Remembrance Day and many more activities.
- **Gender Inclusiveness Initiative** – VLS has initiated an effort to improve gender inclusiveness at the school. This initiative seeks to increase the usage of preferred pronouns and gender, and to ensure that gender neutral bathrooms are available.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Preferred Gender and Pronouns** – Over the past several years, the Diversity Committee has discussed allowing students to choose their preferred gender and pronoun. This way, students do not have to approach every Professor every semester with their choice. There are challenges to adding a preferred gender and pronoun option to the VLS information system. Faculty and staff have been working with the Information Technology (IT) department to address these challenges in hopes of moving forward with this new initiative.
- **Inclusiveness of Other Diverse Groups** – While the school supports many diverse groups, there are some groups that are less active and could be further supported and encouraged to ensure all diverse groups feel included. Groups such as the Christian Law Fellowship (CLF) and the Jewish Law Students Association (JLSA) may benefit from more administrative support to insure comprehensive inclusiveness.
- **Political Differences** – Over the past several years, students with conservative political leanings have lodged numerous complaints that they felt less included or that their opinions were not welcomed on campus. This has been a recurring issue, particularly in light of the November 2016 presidential election. This issue has been the focus of a SBA Town Hall meeting and periodically at faculty meetings. Concerted efforts could be made to identify the roots of these concerns and find ways to ensure all student voices, regardless of political ideology, feel welcomed.
- **More Funding** – As a general matter, more funding specifically allocated to diversity activities is required, but given the budget, not likely.
- **Student Group Faculty Advisors** – Some effort has been made, and more should be made, to pair diverse student groups with faculty advisors from a different race, background, gender, and with different political views.

Goal 2. To increase the incorporation of topics pertaining to diversity in the curriculum and classroom.

Accomplishments

- **Course Offerings Focused on Diversity** – The school has divided course offerings into three categories based on diversity content offered. The numbers below reflect the number of classes offered by category in 2016 compared to number of classes by category from 2011. See attached Diversity Curriculum Inventory.

- Courses with a Main Focus on Diversity – 8 classes for 2016 (down from 13 in 2011; 38% decrease)
 - Courses with a Significant Focus on Diversity – 21 classes for 2016 (up from 13 in 2011; 61% increase)
 - Courses Raising Diversity Issues - 54 classes for 2016 (up from 34 for 2011; 59% increase)
- **Clinic/Externship Diversity Efforts** – The SBA met with the Senior Leadership and Curriculum Committee Chair for an update on the diversity efforts within our clinics and externship programs. The following update was provided:
 - Semester in Practice (SiP) Program – The Director of the Semester in Practice Program has encouraged students to seek externships that address diversity concerns. The Director has, in the past, matched students with mentors of diverse backgrounds.
 - Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic (ENRLC) – The Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic provides representation for clients who are underrepresented in the legal system. This frequently includes individuals, communities, and groups who are economically disadvantaged and thus impacted by environmental justice concerns. The ENRLC has recently received a grant and has hired an environmental justice attorney.
 - South Royalton Legal Clinic (SRLC) – The South Royalton Legal Clinic’s Vermont Immigrant Assistance Project represents clients from around the world who seek asylum and who are in need of other immigration law services. The SRLC not only represents clients in asylum cases, but in matters involving disability benefits including veterans benefits, social security disability benefits as well as family and juvenile work. The family/juvenile cases (General Program and Children First! Legal Advocates Project) involves working with clients having a variety of diversity characteristics such as extreme poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and differences within the same family in national origins and cultures.
 - **Restorative Justice Clinic** – Professor Robert Sand is currently working on establishing a Restorative Justice Clinic, as part of the newly established Center for Justice Reform, which will serve diverse populations in local areas.
 - **Criminal Law Clinic** – The Criminal Law Clinic is a unique opportunity for students who seek to practice criminal law. The clinic is taught by prosecutors and defense attorneys, all of whom are leading practitioners in the Vermont criminal law section and members of the VLS criminal law faculty. The clinic, particularly through its work with public defenders and prosecutors, provides legal services to a diverse group of communities in our local area.
 - **Food and Agriculture Clinic** – The Center Agriculture and Food Systems is working with migrant workers to develop educational outreach materials to assist in providing knowledge of legal rights.

- **International and Comparative Law Program (ICLP)** –The ICLP offers semester exchanges and degrees that bring international students to campus and send our students to learn and live cross-culturally in Montreal, Paris, Seville, and Trento. The law school’s Applied Human Rights course enables students to advocate for diversity by doing research for international organizations working on human rights issues, like penal reform and the treatment of female asylum seekers. Our International Climate Change course takes students to the Annual Conference of Parties held around the world (e.g. Warsaw, Lima, Paris, Marrakesh, etc.) to work in a service learning partnership to help a lesser developed country participate in climate change negotiations.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Internships and Externships** – The continuation and expansion of internships, externships, clinics, the General Practice Program (GPP), and the Semester in Practice (SIP) Program are crucial for students to have the opportunity to work and interact with diverse people and/or diverse community issues.
- **Courses with a Primary Focus on Diversity Issues** – While the total number of courses with a diversity focus has increased, courses with a main focus on diversity have decreased substantially. The faculty and administration should continue to evaluate course offerings to ensure that a robust number of courses focus on diversity exist in the curriculum.

Goal 3. To increase the ability of administration, faculty, and staff to understand and address, in a sensitive manner, the concerns of people of color and other diverse groups.

Accomplishments

- **Course Surveys** – At the end of each course, students are required to complete course evaluations that include numerous questions on how the faculty managed diversity and sensitive topics in the classroom. Feedback from these surveys is provided to faculty to address any issues that may arise based on student comments.
- **Faculty/Staff inclusion in Presentations** – Faculty and staff are regularly included in presentations on diversity-related topics. One example being, the Unconscious Bias and Microaggression training provided during the 2016 Orientation, all faculty and staff were required to attend and they participated in break-out groups with students.
- **Photo Project** – The school continued a photo project that was enacted in years past. The project aimed to highlight diversity among the faculty that students may not be aware of in their regular interactions. The display included photos with descriptions (from each person photographed), about what makes them diverse. It included faculty and staff. Pictures were posted around school including the Chase Community Center.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Ongoing Training** – Sustainable, ongoing diversity and sensitivity training for faculty and staff is needed.

Goal 4. To increase the numbers of people of color and other diverse groups in the student body.

Accomplishments

- **CLEO Program** – Vermont Law School is one of four law schools to partner with the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) on a pilot program to enhance diversity in legal education by increasing opportunity for underrepresented people of color, low income individuals, and other historically disadvantaged students. As a CLEO Legal Inspired Cohort (CLIC) partner, VLS enrolled four students who have completed CLEO’s Pre-Law Summer Institute and supported these students through scholarships, faculty mentors, clinical training opportunities, and additional academic and support services to ensure success at law school.
- **HBCU Partnerships** – VLS has several partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the ultimate goal of which is to expand racial and ethnic diversity in the legal profession.
- **Summer Enrichment Program with Historically Black Colleges and Universities** – Vermont Law School has partnered with Spelman College, Morehouse College, Central State University, and Cheney University in Pennsylvania all of which are partners with HBCU. Each partnership is tailored to the needs of that particular HBCU. As part of this program, four students from the participating HBCUs attended our Summer Enrichment Program for oneweek. As part of the Summer Enrichment Program, they attended the Jump Start Program along with the first-year entering class, attended social gatherings, and received advice about the law school admissions process for members of our Admissions Office. This program helps us to expand our efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the legal profession. Two of the four students who participated in the program applied to VLS and were accepted. If the program is to continue, more funding is needed.
- **Student Ambassadors** – There has been a concerted effort to increase diversity among the Student Ambassadors to help make incoming students of diverse backgrounds more welcome and comfortable on campus and in the local community. Student Ambassadors have been instrumental in helping new students, particularly international students, in becoming acclimated to the area and feeling welcome.
- **Students of Color Recruitment Efforts** – Current students of color assist the Admissions Office in the law school’s recruitment efforts in a variety of ways: they reached out to admitted students of color, answer questions, encourage them to visit the campus, and host them in their homes when they do visit. Our students of color are particularly instrumental in the transition of admitted students to life

at Vermont Law School and in the local community, given the absence of a substantial population of color both locally and throughout the state.

- **Campus Accessibility Survey and Upgrades** – The SBA initiated and completed a campus accessibility survey to determine what upgrades were required around campus to allow better access for disabled students. The survey identified numerous areas of concern and recommendations, including issues with accessibility to the Chase Computer Lab, the Jacobs House building, the Café and other areas on campus. The school has identified a number of these issues that can be remedied in the near term.
- **External Reputation** – VLS has not only made efforts internally to promote diversity, but we have extended our reach beyond the school both to recruit new students as well as to assume a leadership position with other educational institutions. The VLS Dean of Student Affairs and Diversity regularly visits and speaks at various institutions and programs across the country on a range of diversity topics. The institutions include the University of Alabama, Syracuse University, Keene State in New Hampshire, Tougaloo College in Mississippi and others. Additionally, the Dean has spoken to local school students in South Royalton, Sharon, Tunbridge, Marion Cross, Thetford and other nearby communities. VLS has been a regular attendee at numerous other summits on diversity, including the annual HBCU Pre-Law Summit, the National Hispanic Pre-Law Conference, the annual National Black Pre-Law Conference and the National Black and Hispanic Pre-Law Conference. The Associate Dean participates in the Atlanta University Center Consortium Graduate and Professional Recruitment Fair, Tuskegee University in Alabama, Savannah State Graduate Recruitment Fair, and Spelman College have resulted in an increased number of Africa American applicants and the presence of graduates from several of these institutions in recent entering classes. VLS earned an award from the National Black Pre-Law Conference for sustainable commitment to furthering legal education for black students and in recognition of her commitment to diversity the Dean of Student Affairs and Diversity received an award for her leadership and efforts to the same cause. VLS is the only school to have ever received two awards at the conference. Additionally, VLS sent representatives to a diversity roundtable hosted by Western New England Law School and provided invaluable support to other schools struggling with diversity issues.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Grants and Scholarships** – More funding needs to be allocated to attract students of color and other diverse groups. Need-based grants, scholarships, and loans should be increased to encourage individuals who do not have the financial wherewithal themselves to attend VLS.
- **Affirmative Action Plan** – In the past, it was suggested that an Affirmative Action Plan is necessary as certain federal monies, such as grants, financial aid, etc. may be contingent upon VLS's development of this plan. The Affirmative Action Plan is separate and distinct from the law school's Diversity Plan; however, there are many similarities. However, at this time we do not have an Affirmative Plan and perhaps the administration can pursue such a need further.

- **Native American Colleges Recruiting** – We have made a concerted effort to market and recruit students at Native American colleges. Presently, there are over 100 Native American colleges in the United States, many on reservations. Similar to partnerships with the HBCUs, the school could market, recruit, and partner with these schools to help support the access to legal education and the profession for Native American students. This summer admissions recruiters have attended several of these college’s law fairs.
- **Ongoing Recruiting** - VLS needs to continue attracting African Americans and other students of color. However, because of our rural location and the lack of diversity in the region, this is a very difficult task. The Dean of Student Affairs and Diversity and the Vice President of Enrollment Management, Marketing & Communications spend a great deal of time on the road, however, talking to prospective students of color and pre-law advisors.
- **Distance Learning Expansion** – More students of color are enrolling in our distance learning courses. Increasing the offerings through distance learning programs and options allows those with current full-time employment to attend the school. These programs can be particularly useful to other diverse groups such as older students or single parents.
- **NCCU Partnership** – In the past, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and VLS have teamed together to allow students from North Carolina Central University (NCCU), an HBCU, to take seminars and classes at VLS while working for the EPA during the summer. Additional funds are needed for this program to continue.

Goal 5. To increase the ability for people of color and other diverse groups to succeed in law school.

Accomplishments

- **Academic Success Program (ASP)** – The Academic Success Program empowers students to become more effective learners and ultimately accomplished professionals. This program is individualized and available to every student throughout the course of his or her degree program. ASP offers skill building through workshops and one-on-one consultation; mentoring by upper-level students who provide guidance in basic skill areas, including time management, briefing cases, outlining, and exam-taking; resources including access to the ASP TWEN site, which contains an exam bank, bar preparation materials, CALI lessons, and program updates; Pathway to Bar Passage program, which helps students manage their stress and increase their productivity during bar exam preparation.
- **Academic Success Program (ASP) Peer Mentor Program** – Successful second-year and third-year students are hired and trained by ASP to meet with first-year JD, LLM, and master’s degree students. ASP Peer Mentors offer advice on study skills and similar issues required to succeed in the study of law and policy. Since fall 2015, some mentors also serve as teacher assistants in first-year courses and provide substantive tutoring.

- **Ad Hoc Committee on Student Success** – This committee convened for one year to focus on ensuring the academic success for all of our students and propose ways to enhance the law school’s bar passage rate.
- **Legal Methods and Bar Exam Skills and Tactics** – These are two specialized courses for credit designed to improve academic performance and bar passage. Legal Methods is a skills course required for all first-year JD students who are placed on academic probation after the fall semester. This course focuses primarily on studying, writing, outlining, and exam taking skills. The Bar Exam Skills and Tactics course is offered to upper division students in the spring semester before they take the bar exam. This course focuses on writing and structuring bar essays and reviews some of the substantive areas that are typically tested on the bar exam.
- **Bar Information sessions** – These sessions are presented to third-year students in the fall and spring semester. These sessions provide an overview of the structure of the bar exam, subjects tested on the bar, the commitment required to prepare for the bar, and the bar exam application process.
- **Preliminary Bar Exam** – A new effort aimed at first-year students’ bar exam experience. The results indicate what skills, as well as knowledge, may be needed for students to succeed on the bar exam. The law school is hopeful that this new program will identify weaknesses and help students plan their studies more effectively to enhance bar passage.
- **FirstYear Pilot Program** - The purpose of the Pilot Program is to provide high-risk students with academic support, guidance, and mentoring from the moment they set foot on campus to begin their law school career. Our experience suggests that a reduced course load and faculty mentoring are two important factors for student success. Work is underway to offer a Foundations of Legal Analysis course for students included in the Pilot Program. This course would formalize some of the components of individual mentoring into a course to accommodate the expected growth in students participating in the pilot program. The course would assist students with creating calendars, briefing cases, exam taking tips, outlining, and other fundamental skills necessary to succeed in law school.
- **Jump Start** – The Jump Start Program is designed for students who have been identified or self-identified as needing an extra introduction to the rigors of law school. These students receive instruction from faculty members(led by the Academic Success Program) , on the U.S. court system and federalism, on the origins of law, on how to read and brief a case, on introductory material about legal research and writing, and they participate in mock civil procedure and tort law classes.
- **Faculty as Academic Mentors** – The school thanks the members of the faculty who volunteered to serve as academic mentors for our students on academic probation. These mentors are also assisting a few other students who are not on probation but could benefit from a faculty mentor. After evaluating the first-year fall grades, it is determined that some students’ academic performances, while above the academic probation GPA level, have substantive issues that need to be addressed, such as a lack of organization, time management, or exam writing

skills. Faculty mentors meet with their mentees to devise an academic plan that will not only enhance their test-taking skills, but their academic studies as well.

- **Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition** – The law school sent two students to the Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition hosted by the National Black Law Students Association. This competition provides an additional appellate advocacy opportunity for diverse students who may not have scored high enough to participate in Advanced Appellate Advocacy. Further, cases argued during this moot court competition raise issues that are relevant to students of color, thus providing an experience to engage competitively in a case of interest.
- **Native American Law Students Association (NALSA) Moot Court Competition** – The law school sent two students to this moot court competition hosted by the National Native American Law Students Association. This competition also provides an additional appellate advocacy opportunity for diverse students who may not have scored high enough to participate in Advanced Appellate Advocacy. Further, cases argued during this moot court involve issues that are relevant to Native American students, thus providing an experience to engage competitively on a case of interest.
- **Mental Health Program** – The program increased the understanding of the complexity of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and mental illness. This program also informed the community of the many mental health resources available. One of the program’s panels consisted of professors who spoke about their own personal mental health challenges, along with a clinician from the Clara Martin Center who spoke about issues surrounding mental health and the resources available. The Veterans Law Students Association president spoke about how combat-related PTSD plays a role in return to society, and finally the Academic Success Program director spoke about the Character and Fitness section of various state bar applications as they relate to reporting substance abuse and mental health treatment.
- **First Aid for Mental Health Crisis Training** – This two-day training for students and “front line” staff included procedures for helping people with suicidal thoughts, depression, crisis, panic attacks, self-injury, alcohol abuse, and aggressive behavior.
- **SBA Mental Health Committee** – The SBA created a Mental Health Committee specifically focused on improving the campuses mental health dialogue. For their first event, the Committee welcomed former Charlotte Law School professor Brian Clarke. He spoke about his struggles with depression and thoughts of suicide. The session was well-attended and many professors provided extra credit for attending. The Committee additionally organized a Character and Fitness Panel that included Michael Kennedy of the Vermont Bar Counsel, Vermont Law School Professor Joe Brennan, and law school alumnus Timothy Fair ’12.
- **Mental Health Survey** – The SBA Mental Health Committee is working on a survey for students to obtain opinions on various mental health issues including, depression, substance abuse, etc. The Committee is working with the Clara Martin to fine tune the survey to better ascertain information on the current mood of the student population.

- **Campus Accessibility** – The law school has increased accessibility within the school for individuals with disabilities. VLS has upgraded a number of main campus buildings to improve wheelchair accessibility. Automatic door openers and a ramp have been installed to the main entrance of the Cornell Library.

Ongoing Challenges

- **Campus Accessibility** – Although access has been improved to the main campus buildings, wheelchair-bound individuals cannot easily access the Cafeteria and the Information Technology offices. Other buildings with accessibility needs include, Abbott House, the upper portion of Chase Community Center, Davis House, Dearing House, Jacobs House, and Eaton House. The Diversity Committee is continuing to work on these accessibility issues.
- **Community Accessibility** – VLS is also working with the local community to facilitate disability accessibility to sidewalks, restaurants, and other retail establishments. The town has received a grant to enhance handicapped accessibility. The school should continue to work with the town to enable these accessibility enhancements.
- **Debt Reduction** – Student debt is one of the most significant concerns at VLS, particularly among diverse students. Even though tuition has not increased for several years, still each year the average debt load that VLS students carry continues to rise. Student debt now stands at an average of \$160,000 for a JD student who graduated in 2016. This figure only reflects part of the difficult debt situation that our students face upon graduating. The overall debt for many students is even direr, since the \$160,000 doesn't reflect undergraduate debt that students may have accumulated. Merit-based scholarships also exacerbate the debt loads of students of color, in particular, since more likely than not these students qualify for much less in scholarships than their white counterparts. Moreover, the recently publicized reports of the turmoil and uncertainty regarding the scope of the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program elevates student debt to one of the most important challenges confronting the school and its students. Many students, if not most, plan to rely on the PSLF program as part of their long-term strategy to manage their high debt loads following graduation. If the PSLF program is curtailed or eliminated that will make the level of debt loads that our students carry extraordinarily difficult to manage. In any event, the continued rise in debt students carry is not sustainable. Moreover, it raises basic questions of fundamental fairness to have a substantial number of students, many of whom are students of color, shoulder the financial burden of the current merit based scholarship system. It is imperative that VLS develop strategies and plans to help reduce student debt to enable success once students enter the workplace.
- **Commencement** – Commencement is held on Saturdays, which shows a lack of understanding and sensitivity to students who observe their Sabbath on a Saturday. VLS should continue discussing this topic further with students and continue to look into what other accommodations the school can provide. In previous years, discussions about other days of the week with respect to religion, particularly a

Sunday Commencement took place. Hosting Commencement on a week day presents challenges to those families with economic issues.

- **Learning Style Accommodations** – The way students learn differently is constantly evolving. Understanding and making accommodations for different learning styles is a component of diversity, and VLS needs to continue to move forward in making these types of accommodations. More focus is needed in the areas of audio and visual accommodations.
- **Diversity in Law Journals and Advanced Appellate Advocacy/Moot Court Teams and Boards** – VLS should seek to explore opportunities to promote diversity within the membership of the two law journals and the Advanced Appellate Advocacy and Moot Court teams and boards operated by the school. Currently there are few students of color who are selected for these extracurricular activities.
- **Funding for Bar Expenses** – VLS should seek opportunities to support funding for diverse students who cannot afford to pay for the bar exam and extended time in South Royalton to study, including scholarship opportunities.
- **Jump Start for the Entire 1L Class** – The law school should explore conducting Jump Start for the entire first-year class. For the incoming 2017 class, two sessions of Jump Start will be held; however, funds are needed to assist students with transportation, housing, and books to provide Jump Start for the entire class..

Goal 6. To increase the number of people of color and other diverse groups within the faculty, administration, and staff.

Accomplishments

- **Current State** – VLS has a fairly diverse faculty, administration, and staff as it relates to gender and sexual orientations. The number of senior administrators of color has decreased from three to one within the last year. One staff person of color has left VLS within the last nine months.
- **Diversity Hiring Actions** – The hiring process incorporates a number of steps intended to communicate the school's pledge and focus on diversity. Several years ago, faculty formally approved making diversity a top priority in hiring tenure track professors.
- Hiring ads include a statement about how VLS values diversity and encourages unrepresented groups to apply.
- VLS looks for opportunities to advertise on job boards that cater to under-represented groups.
- Faculty groups and listservs are used to help spread the word about employment opportunities at the law school.
- The Diversity Committee created sub-committees; one sub-committee researched hiring data and set hiring goals.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Diversity Chair** – VLS should seek funding in the form of an endowment to hire a Diversity Chair, who will function as a visiting professor of law and diversity. Funding this role will support attracting diverse faculty to the school.
- **Faculty Departures** – While VLS still employs a diverse workforce, the school has lost several diverse faculty members in recent years. Some of these losses were due to the school’s rural location or other employment opportunities found elsewhere. VLS should actively seek to improve hiring faculty of diverse groups, including being sensitive to diversity credentials in the hiring process.
- **Comparison to Other Schools** – An assessment could be conducted to determine how the school’s diversity program compares to other neighboring schools such as, Norwich University, Bennington College, Marlborough College and Colby-Sawyer College. The assessment could examine percentages of students, faculty, and staff of diverse groupings at these institutions and identify areas of opportunity compared to other institutions.
- **Disabled Faculty** – Disabled individuals are not tracked at the law school, so it is unknown as to how many disabled people are employed at VLS.
- **Board of Trustees** – In the past, the board of trustees of the school was primarily made up of white males. In the last few years, the board has made some progress on the gender front and more than half of the board is now made up of women. However, the number of people of color has decreased. The board must continue to strive to become more diversified.
- **Diversity Hiring Budget** – The school should allocate a specific budget towards diversity hiring to be used for advertising and attracting employees of diverse backgrounds. A recent suggestion was made to collaborate with other graduate institutes in Vermont, i.e. hiring an adjunct who might teach at both Champlain College and Vermont Law School – in order to attract more diverse candidates and provide opportunities for trailing spouses and partners.
- **Diversity Hiring Goals** – The school consider establishing hiring goals across all categories of diversity. The establishment of tangible goals for hiring will allow the school to assess progress and opportunities.

Goal 7. To improve the process by which community issues and complaints concerning diversity are addressed.

Accomplishments

- **Risk Management, Title IX, and Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA)** – The law school’s Title IX Coordinators (Dean Shirley Jefferson and Human Resources Manager Chantelle Brackett) work with members of LawRoom, a training platform, and its service Campus Clarity to develop an online training course to comply with the education and prevention program requirements relating to sexual misconduct under Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act Section 304(9) (5) of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, known as the “Campus Save Act”. As of July 1, 2015, all colleges and universities that receive federal financial aid were required to provide training to

incoming students, faculty, and staff on prevention and awareness of rape, acquaintance rape, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

- **Title IX Training** – Each year we are mandated by the Department of Education’s Civil Rights Division to ensure that all employees and students have proper training in reporting and addressing sexual misconduct. To comply with this federal mandate, we have elected to provide online training to all students, faculty, and staff via a training course titled “Think About It”. The training course is two hours long and addresses important information about sexual misconduct and its various forms. It provides information about campus officials who have responsibilities in connection with Title IX and, in particular, incidents of sexual misconduct. The course focuses on the special responsibilities faculty, staff, and students have in helping their school maintain a respectful environment.
- **VITA Tax Clinic** – The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program at VLS prepares income tax returns for qualifying tax clients (income under \$54,000 in the previous year) for free. Residents from neighboring towns utilized the program and last year over 90 returned were processed.
- **Community Relations** – Professor Robert Sand has planned a monthly series of “Town Gown” conversations to improve dialogue and relations between the school and the South Royalton Community. The first gathering was held on January 11, 2017. Participants included students, faculty, staff, and the South Royalton High School Principal. Future meetings will hopefully include local business owners, other South Royalton residents, and South Royalton High School students.
- **Title IX Training** – Dean Shirley Jefferson and Human Resources Manager Chantelle Brackett attend Title IX trainings annually. This last year’s training focused on how to investigate complaints.
- **Policy Against Harassment, Sexual Assault, Discrimination and Retaliation** – The law school’s internal website outlines the policies concerning discrimination, sexual assault and harassment as well as incident reporting. The law school’s annual Clery Act report is also posted on the VLS website.
- **Sexual Misconduct Review Panel Improvements** – The students engaged with the SBA Sexual Misconduct Review Panel are working on two improvements. First, the group is drafting a Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Manual to be used in Orientation and for training the Sexual Misconduct Review Panel. Second, the group is drafting a guidebook to set forth best practices for the Sexual Misconduct Board that clarify the role of the board, the board’s responsibilities during Orientation and the school year, and general compliance.

Ongoing Opportunities

- **Board Hearings** – VLS needs to continue to review hearing procedures under the Code of Conduct versus whether to create specialized Title IX review boards. Assessments for the Code of Conduct Board and the Sexual Misconduct Board should occur regularly to ensure that they are properly trained and receiving the right cases and support.

- **SBA Code of Conduct Committee** – While the Code of Conduct Committee exists, they can be better supported. Dean Shirley Jefferson can meet annually with the Committee to ensure their time is utilized appropriately and effectively.
- **Clery Act Changes** – The Clery Act, which requires colleges and universities receiving federal financial aid, to report crime on or near their respective campuses, is being amended in light of the scandal at Penn State and the school needs to ensure compliance. Concerted efforts will need to be made to ensure the school reports as required under this Act.

Conclusion

Overall, Vermont Law School is overcoming many obstacles concerning diversity, but more steps are needed to accomplish its goals. VLS needs to continue striving to promote itself as a leader in educational diversity, and it needs to continue attracting students of color and other diverse groups as well as employing more people of color as well as other diverse groups. Additionally, VLS needs to make significant efforts to reduce debt and associated obstacles for diverse students. While the law school, is on the right track with targeted efforts in a number of key areas including: hiring, accessibility updates, and recruiting VLS can better position itself as a leader in law school diversity.

Diversity Plan approved by the Vermont Law School Faculty on September 14, 2017

© No reproduction of the Diversity Plan is permitted without the express permission of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Diversity at Vermont Law School.