



**ELON**  
UNIVERSITY

School  
of Law

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### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Elon University School of Law**

Elon University School of Law (“Elon Law”) has started its 5-year strategic planning process. Our first survey results make it overwhelmingly clear that the faculty and staff are committed to do even more to promote diversity, equity and inclusion at Elon Law.

Elon Law understands that a diverse law school is necessary to increase diversity in the profession. According to the United States Census Bureau, almost 40 percent of the population identify as people of color. The ABA National Lawyer Population Survey shows, however, that people of color account for only about 15 percent of the estimated 1.2 million lawyers in the U.S. Broken down further, the population survey shows that from 2008 to 2018, the number of African-American lawyers rose from 4% to 5% (the increase occurred in 2009 and has remained stable at 5% ever since); Asian from 2% to 3%, Hispanic from 3% to 5%, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, and Native American people, when combined, comprise fewer than 3% of lawyers. Caucasians/Whites make up 85% of the lawyer population.

Legal education is similarly deficient in its representation of people of color. According to Access Lex, in 2017 “students of color made up 30 percent of law school enrollments. However, if you remove Asian and Asian American students (who are statistically overrepresented among law students) from the totals, the proportion of students of color falls to 20 percent, when they compose about one-third of the population.” (AccessLex Institute, *Roadmap to Enrolling Diverse Law School Classes*, Volume 1, September 2018).

Elon Law recognizes that a meaningful response is needed to address the challenges in the legal profession and legal education as documented by the ABA and Access Lex. We continue to move in a direction that will significantly improve participation, advancement and leadership by underrepresented groups. As a young and innovative school, Elon Law has an opportunity to develop a culture and practices in the areas of admissions, curriculum, student life, staff and faculty composition that will model best practices for achieving a more equitable experience in law school and a more inclusive profession to serve an increasingly diverse population.

#### Admissions

Recognizing that barriers are many to improving our profession’s approach to diversity, equity and inclusion, Elon Law has taken steps to position itself as a model for better approaches in the admissions process by:

1. redesigning its admissions program to emphasize personal interaction. Elon Law recognizes that standardized tests tell us only part of an applicant’s story. Therefore, our Admissions Committee takes a holistic approach employing interviews as an integral part of the applicant review;
2. entering into Articulation Agreements with North Carolina A&T University, the largest HBCU, and other minority serving institutions;
3. sponsoring and participating in pipeline to law school programs to promote greater diversity among and ease transition for underrepresented students interested in law school; and
4. developing retention strategies to insure that admission to law school leads to graduation and bar passage.

#### Student Life

Affinity-based student organizations enrich the life of Elon Law and offer opportunities to connect with alumni and educate the larger community about the importance of diversity in the legal profession. Student groups such as the Black Law Students Association, Hispanic and Latinx Law Students Association, OutLaw, Women’s Law Association also create a

sense of belonging and contribute to student well-being. In addition, the Student Bar Association has created a Diversity Committee to develop programming around issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. The faculty, staff and students meet regularly as the Community Culture Council to address climate issues that arise in a culturally diverse community and design educational programs to promote equity and inclusion. The faculty and staff also collaborate on the Inclusive Community Workgroup to guide curricular and programmatic initiatives, such as speakers, common readings, and trainings. And students founded the First Generation Legal Professionals & Allies to ease the transition to law school for students who do not have family, or other experiences with law school or the legal profession.

### Curriculum

Elon Law's distinctive curriculum, integrating traditional classroom instruction with a unique residency in practice that requires each law student to work full time for a full term for academic credit, also provides opportunities for students to succeed through many different pedagogies. That the JD is earned in 2.5 years rather than the traditional three-year program also promotes value in the degree by reducing tuition and lowering debt, thereby diminishing a key barrier to entry for the profession. Each of these aspects of the academic program is designed to minimize barriers to entry to law school and the profession.

Elon Law is pleased that since adopting this innovative curriculum, the diversity of the student body has increased as students seem to be self-selecting into the Elon Law holistic application process and innovative curriculum with improvement in retention. Indeed, we have noted that the proportion of students of color has trended toward increase during the life of the law school, with particular improvement in diversity at graduation compared to at matriculation becoming more apparent in recent graduating classes, indicating improvement in recruitment, retention and performance among students of color over time.

### Staff and Faculty

The faculty has actively recruited to hire and retain a diverse and culturally competent faculty and professional staff. Recent hiring that includes women faculty and faculty of color certainly are positive trends.

### Going Forward

While programming at Elon Law around diversity, equity and inclusion has increased over time, our goal is to ensure that the law school embeds the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion into the culture of this young institution. The Law School will adopt best practices in admissions designed to increase and retain underrepresented students. We will include instruction on cultural competency in our professional development programs to mirror the profession's growing expectation of cultural competence in the practice of law. We will continue to enrich our curriculum to include courses on the role of race, gender identity and religion in shaping our legal system to embed issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in the curriculum. And we will continue to support student efforts to understand and appreciate the importance and value of diversity in the profession and society.

Elon Law actively is seeking funding to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Law School's approach to diversity, equity and inclusion with the goal of preparing a long term, strategic plan that will embed programmatic activities and curricular initiatives to these issues in many aspects of the law school experience. In this way, the current cultural, academic, extracurricular and other components of the law school experience can be assessed, a community-wide planning process can be undertaken, a plan can be implemented and a comprehensive approach that is iterative, immersive and integrated can be developed. A funding proposal for this work is pending and we anticipate a six-month assessment period, followed by a six-month planning period, all of which will include the primary constituencies of Elon Law, such as students, alumni, Advisory Board, administration, faculty, staff, and university and community partners.

Elon Law's effort to study itself and then to develop new models and new approaches to incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion into the full gamut of the law school experience can offer fresh perspective and contribute to improvement of the profession and the academy.