

Disability as Diversity: Law School Perspectives

The Law, Health Policy & Disability Center (LHPDC) is proposing to survey all ABA-approved law schools in the U.S. to gather information on law school diversity. The intent of the survey is systematically to gather similar, relevant information for a wide range of interest groups. The information will be used for research on how U.S. law schools are currently addressing diversity in their student populations. Results will be made publicly available for prospective students and others via LHPDC's website (disability.law.uiowa.edu/diversity/). The project is funded, in part, by an Iowa Momentum Plus grant from the University of Iowa.

Although LSAC's Office of Diversity Initiatives provides resources for some applicant groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and international LLM candidates (LSAC, 2009), LSAC does not provide analogous information for prospective law students with disabilities. These resources, such as statistics on minority enrollment, statistics on inclusiveness, frequently asked questions, and even personal experiences, not only provide valuable information to help underrepresented groups assess where they might like to apply, their inclusion on LSAC's website also extends an invitation to these groups to apply.

People with disabilities constitute the largest diversity group, exceeding any other ethnic, racial or cultural minority group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006a & 2006b; U.S. Department of Justice, 2008), but account for less than 7% of law students (US DOE, 2007). Diversity in legal representation is essential to having an inclusive society and protecting the rights of all individuals (U.S. EEOC, 2003). Although "individuals with disabilities have generally not been a part of the discussion about diversity in the legal profession, ... access to the profession is important for people with disabilities for the same reasons it is important to

minorities and women” (U.S. EEOC, 2003). The information from this pilot study will both provide prospective students with disabilities with relevant information to choose a school and highlight the importance of disability as a form of diversity to law schools.

To meet this end, we propose to survey all ABA-approved law schools in the U.S. to gather baseline statistics on law school diversity. The survey will assess whether each law school (1) has a diversity policy that includes gender, race, disability, or sexual orientation, (2) has student organizations specific to gender, race, disability, or sexual orientation populations, (3) the number of law faculty who are female, racial minorities, people with disabilities or self-identify as being gay, lesbian or bisexual, (4) offers courses specific to each of the diversity populations, (5) offers scholarships or fellowships specific to diversity groups, and (6) considers gender, race, disability, or sexual orientation a positive factor in the admission selection process. Schools may complete the survey on paper, by phone or online. Law schools who do not respond within three weeks of survey distribution will be contacted and asked to complete the information over the phone.

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