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Cardozo to Adopt Broader Approach to Teaching About Race, Racism and the Law: Changes Include a Required Upper-level Course and Expanded Curricular Offerings



The faculty of Cardozo Law School has adopted revisions to the curriculum designed to help our students examine and understand racism in the law and throughout the legal system. The changes include an upper-level requirement in race and the law; an expansion of class offerings covering issues related to race and the law; a new emphasis on racial context and impacts in courses not primarily about race; and required training workshops for students and faculty on implicit bias, cultural competency, and leading classroom discussions that involve race and racism.

In addition, Dean Melanie Leslie has appointed Professor Peter Markowitz to the newly created position of Associate Dean of Equity in Curriculum and Teaching. Professor Markowitz will facilitate and oversee these changes to the law school curriculum. Professor Markowitz is the founding faculty member and current co-director of the Kathryn O. Greenberg Immigration Justice Clinic. He is a leading advocate for immigration law reform.

“The history of racism and discrimination in America is intertwined and supported by law and legal structures. As scholars and advocates, it is critical that we do our part at Cardozo to acknowledge

and eradicate systemic racism; as educators, we must ensure that our graduates are culturally competent and well-educated on issues of discrimination,” said Dean Melanie Leslie.

During a year of a national reckoning on race decades in the making, law schools around the country began to make changes to counter systemic racism in the law. In August 2020, the deans of 150 law schools, including Dean Leslie, wrote the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education (the accrediting body for U.S. law schools), urging it to require that schools address bias, cultural awareness, and anti-racism. The letter stated that “such skills are essential parts of professional competence, legal practice, and being a lawyer. We believe that every law school should develop such training and education for its students.”

Subsequently, Dean Leslie charged Cardozo’s Educational Policy Committee (EPC) with developing a plan to address structural racism and implicit bias in the law school’s curriculum and in the legal community at large. “We need to make meaningful changes to expose and end policies, practices and laws that perpetuate racial injustice,” wrote Dean Leslie at the time.

The EPC issued a detailed report to the dean and faculty with recommendations based on a year’s worth of research and investigation, including a broad-ranging survey of Cardozo students about their experiences inside and outside the classroom. “The racist origins or disparate racial impacts, intended or not, of facially neutral legal structures and doctrines often go unexplored,” the report found. Going forward, such exploration will be a critical component of the Cardozo curriculum.

Starting in fall 2021, Cardozo’s new initiatives will include:

- **Graduation requirement:** Beginning with the class of 2024, J.D. students must complete one upper-level course on race and the law. Qualifying courses will include *Race and the Law*, *Critical Race Theory*, *Indigenous Rights in the Americas*, and *Cross-Cultural Negotiation*, as well as clinics and skills-based courses that focus on lawyering within communities whose members have been affected by systemic racism.
- **Student training:** The 1L Professionalism programming will include six sessions devoted to diversity and inclusion, implicit bias, microaggressions, cultural competency, and related issues.
- **Faculty training:** Faculty will be required to attend annual trainings focused on classroom teaching and pedagogical best practices with regard to diversity, inclusion, implicit bias and related issues.
- **Enhancing existing courses:** Cardozo instructors will work to integrate explorations of race and racism throughout the curriculum, including in courses that are not primarily or ostensibly about race.
- **New courses:** The Cardozo catalogue will be expanded to include additional courses exploring the role of race in the law.

Cardozo is committed to training lawyers who can recognize and respond to the ways in which systemic racism impacts our world.