

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 162, No. 171

Serving Chicago's legal community for 161 years

John Marshall addresses diversity with new posts

Faculty additions attest to increase of minority students at law school

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It's no accident that The John Marshall Law School's newest class of students is composed of aspiring lawyers from many different walks of life.

Rather, it's the result of an effort to make the school more attractive to the next generation of legal professionals while also responding to the need to recruit more students during a time of declining applications.

This month, the school reported its most diverse class ever — nearly half of its 255 entering students identify as minorities and more than 60 percent of its new, full-time students are women.

In response to its diverse student makeup, the school has established new faculty positions to match the change in the student body.

The school this month named professor Arthur Acevedo, who teaches courses on income tax, contracts, corporations and constitutional law, as the new director of diversity and inclusion for faculty. Acevedo's appointment comes just three months after the school named Troy Riddle as its new chief diversity and inclusion officer.

Acevedo said his new position was created as part of the school's leaders closely examining its needs in recruiting minority students and accommodating them.

"Minority classes across the board, across the nation, I think are surging upwards, and there's both a positive aspect and a realistic aspect to that. The positive aspect is that a lot of law schools are responding to interest by minority students and allowing them to access the law school," he said.

The realistic component as to why schools are becoming more

diversity focused, Acevedo said, is because "some law schools are also financially dependent on this new stream of revenue."

While he noted there has been a lot of criticism about law schools recruiting minority students to boost enrollment, Acevedo said part of John Marshall's goal in reaching out to diverse populations of prospective students is to respond to the changing market.

"The way I look at it, 'survival of the fittest' means the person who can respond to changing conditions sooner," he said. "I think that our school has poised itself to respond in a quick fashion."

Acevedo noted the school has been proactive in adding the new faculty position he now fills, which includes the goal of increasing the diversity of faculty at both adjunct and full-time, tenured levels. A long-term goal of his, he said, is to see a greater focus on a more diverse administration at the school.

One reason the school desires a more diverse faculty is to reflect its student population, of which this fall's entering class is 18 to 19 percent black, 14 to 15 percent Hispanic, 12 to 13 percent Asian and 1 to 2 percent Native American, Acevedo said.

Students in recent years have voiced a desire to see a more diverse faculty at the school, he added.

"It makes sense because our workplace is diverse and we have to have our schools to reflect our workplace in the surrounding community," he said.

"My job is to find all (faculty) candidates, but I'm also going to reach out to groups that have been historically disadvantaged. That's a wide group of people and I hope to bring in faculty members who represent each of these different groups to the school."

Acevedo believes there was a commitment to diversity at the school long before market challenges surfaced but, in recent years, he thinks there has been an internal "catalyst to make change."

Despite continued challenges in recruiting law students, a more



Arthur Acevedo

diverse makeup of law school enrollment is a good sign for the legal community as a whole, he said.

"I think if there's a silver lining in the declining enrollment and applications across the nation, it's that minority students will be a permanent part of the legal profession moving forward. And, as they filter through their careers, they will become a permanent part of the legal academy."

While Acevedo's role is focused on faculty recruitment, Riddle's job is to address diversity-related issues on student, faculty and staff levels.

Riddle was previously the director for diversity, student development and outreach before being appointed to his new position in May. He said he and Acevedo will be working as partners to tackle the school's diversity goals.

"[Acevedo] was hands down an easy choice, because he is thoughtful in dealing with these issues. He understands the sensitivity related to diversity initiatives and that everybody is not a believer. You encounter a lot of skeptics and people who don't think that it's important; and so, he understands that that's out there but also has the skill set to work with his colleagues on the faculty to get them to at least try it on," he said.

In addition to appointing Acevedo to work directly with faculty recruitment, the school has a few other initiatives in the works



Troy Riddle

to respond to its changing population. Riddle said he'll be launching a "campus climate survey" this fall to hear from students about issues they've experienced or what they think the school can improve upon.

The school is also working to develop a "quiet space," aimed in part at responding to a growing number of Muslim students who have to leave campus to pray, Riddle said. The space will be open for other uses, he said, such as meditation and yoga, to anyone who wants to use it.

Last semester, Riddle said the school held a presentation and discussion on "unconscious bias" for faculty, which will take place again this fall.

"It was controversial in many ways because of the subject matter, but the thing is [the faculty] all showed up and they all participated," Riddle said.

He also thinks there are people who are in denial about the country's changing population. Riddle noted one of the greatest challenges of his job is trying to convince some individuals that there is "validity to this work, that it's not just 'pie in the sky' thinking"

But with more diverse cohorts of students entering the school, he expects that to change.

"I do think that with the younger generation, they're not wound as tightly as some previous generations. So, I'm hopeful that as time goes on, it will be less of a chore to get people to view things differently," he said.