



Lewis & Clark Law School

Dear Law School Community,

We are at a crossroads. The senseless death of George Floyd, yet another unarmed Black American killed at the hands of a police officer, on top of countless senseless killings of black people in our nation, has again catalyzed our anger and outrage. At the same time, a different virus, COVID 19, has further exposed the health and economic impacts of many decades of racial discrimination. People are rising up to demand systemic changes that address our too long history of racial injustice.

As a law school, we stand in a unique position to be a part of that change. Lewis & Clark has always been engaged in making the world a better place. Our clinics serve under-resourced populations, our students volunteer countless pro bono hours and our alumni serve the public interest both in their careers and in their work as volunteers. Our faculty research, teach and share their knowledge, helping us all understand the laws and the history and context of those laws. We have a common goal to protect the rights of all citizens and ensure the rule of law is enforced equally.

But at this crossroads, we are called upon to reach further. As attorneys, we swear to uphold the constitution and equal protection of the laws. The ABA professional conduct rules describe lawyers as “*a public citizen having special responsibility for the quality of justice.*” As educators, we are committed to empowering students with a depth of understanding about the history of laws as well as how laws are strengthened or created to address past wrongs. Both of these commitments demand that we engage in more dialogue about difficult issues, including the racism that is interwoven into so many of our laws and into the criminal justice system itself.

At home in our school, we must reexamine our own practices and policies to ensure that we are actually the inclusive community that we claim to be. Our Student Bar Association recently sent a poignant message and Call to Action to Lewis & Clark Law students. Here is a part of that SBA Call:

- **We call upon the faculty and administration in our community to incorporate this history into the classroom curriculum and dedicate time to the role that racism has perpetually played in our legal system.** As future lawyers and current students of the law, we are uniquely positioned to reshape oppressive policies, to amplify voices against injustice, and to address inequalities. However, we must understand our past to enact meaningful change now and in the future.

As one small step in this journey, the faculty are developing a series of forums to discuss our justice system – both its successes and failures – and to strategize on how we can further justice reforms both in our wider community and in our school. The first Forum hosted by members of our faculty: John Parry, Aliza Kaplan, Janet Steverson and Tung Yin, will be held at noon, next Thursday, June 11. A zoom invite will be forthcoming soon. We plan to have more discussions this summer and look forward to working with our students and the greater law school community during the coming school year to organize more opportunities for dialogue and meaningful action. As soon as we have more details on future summer forums, I will be sharing those with you.

Let us support one another as we address this trauma. The Lewis & Clark community is strong; we call on that strength now to forge new pathways for justice. Take care of yourself and your families. Stay well!

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