



School of Law

Faculty of St. Thomas University School of Law Statement on Cultural Competency – unanimously adopted August 25, 2020

The Faculty of St. Thomas University School of Law reaffirm our commitment to helping students develop skills and knowledge regarding Cultural Competency, in fulfillment of our values-based education in a Catholic institution dedicated to fostering social justice and human dignity. Consistent with the Encyclical by Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Bishop Fabre, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated: “People of good conscience should never turn a blind eye when citizens are being deprived of their human dignity. Indifference is not an option.”

Even before recent events, developing Cultural Competency has been part of the School of Law's mission and strategic plan as well as its institutional learning outcomes. It is also reflected in our unique LL.M./J.S.D. Program in Intercultural Human Rights. As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states, “Any theory or form whatsoever of racism and racial discrimination is morally unacceptable.” Thus, the question is not whether to incorporate Cultural Competency into the curriculum, but how to best accomplish it. Indeed, recent developments such as the killing of George Floyd, resulting worldwide protests, continuing police brutality, and inadequate governmental responses, have brought attention to long-ignored problems of institutionalized racism.

It is therefore essential that we take immediate steps to integrate Cultural Competency more deeply and broadly into the curriculum and culture of the School of Law. Our immediate goal is to develop additional student-centered Cultural Competency materials. Students will be challenged to engage in candid introspection and to develop deeper knowledge of structural racism, implicit bias, and cultural awareness, thus further developing their lawyering knowledge, skills, and professionalism.

Effective course materials require consideration of learning goals. These goals are not tied to any particular subject, as that would be determined by professors for their own areas of instruction, whether doctrinal, experiential, or both. They may include:

- Cultural sensitivity
- Sensitivity to racism
- Fostering empathy in oneself and others
- Listening skills: talk "with" rather than talk "at"

- Recognizing and overcoming implicit bias and tribalism
- Giving students new perspectives on in- and out-groups, and encouraging human connections with persons outside your in-group
- Placing students outside their comfort zone in order to give them new perspectives on implicit bias, unconscious privilege, and injustice

We therefore commit ourselves to organically integrate the learning of Cultural Competency into broader swaths of the curriculum and the culture of the School of Law. That means developing a variety of methods, and particularly, creating modules for existing courses. Thus, all students should be exposed to Cultural Competency at a multitude of times and in different formats, including:

- Orientation
- Modules in courses of all types, 1L and upper-level
- Professional training presentations
- TED-talk style presentations, created locally, and presented internally, externally, and as components of classes.

We will integrate Cultural Competency throughout the curriculum. In harmony with the Carnegie and MacCrate pedagogical frameworks, Cultural Competency thus implicates knowledge, skills, professionalism, and pertinent values. The modules used may include presentations, assignments, experiential units of instruction, and more. While retaining academic freedom, Faculty are encouraged to develop modules tied to their own courses that explore Cultural Competency, with an eye toward developing skills, knowledge, and professional identities that better serve clients in a diverse society where competency in cultural issues is of paramount importance.