

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **UH Law Center Celebrates Seven Years of Pre-Law Pipeline Program and Strengthens Diversity, Racial Justice and Human Rights Initiative**

**HOUSTON, Aug. 12, 2021** - The University of Houston Law Center's Pre-Law Pipeline program has now completed seven years of its multi-faceted approach to diversifying the legal profession. Because of ongoing concerns related to COVID-19, the Summer 2021 class marked the second online-only instruction in the program's history.

Since it began in 2015, the pipeline program has established a strong track record of success. Eighty-one scholars have been accepted to law school and have received \$5,434,229 in scholarship funds. A total of 69 undergraduate schools have also been represented throughout the lifespan of the program.

The program was started by Dean Leonard M. Baynes, the Law Center's first dean of African-American descent, and Program Director Kristen Guiseppi. Professor Meredith J. Duncan, the first assistant dean of diversity, inclusion and metropolitan programs in the school's history, oversees the program. It welcomes students who are first-generation, low-income, or members of groups underrepresented in the legal profession with a genuine interest in attending law school and pursuing a legal career. Students who participate in the program see their LSAT score increase by an average of 11-13 points.

"I'm very proud of the work that the University of Houston Law Center and its faculty, staff, alumni, and students have done to move the ball forward on diversity, equity and inclusion," Baynes said. "The Law Center is blessed with terrific students from diverse and first-generation backgrounds and faculty who care about their success. Together we plan to make a difference in this space."

"For the past few years, the UHLC Pre-Law Pipeline program has nurtured and developed the talent of aspiring lawyers from underserved and underrepresented populations in an effort to create a new generation of diverse legal professionals representative of our communities," Guiseppi said. "It has been an honor and privilege to provide a space where pre-law students can learn more about the law, develop lifelong connections, and grow as young professionals. We are proud of our scholars' accomplishments and very thankful for the continued support of our partners and sponsors."

The program has expanded over the years to include [five tracks](#) that include freshmen and sophomore undergraduate students, upperclassmen undergraduate students, UH students and working professionals.

Numerous organizations and publications have honored the Law Center's Pre-Law Pipeline program including the American Bar Association, the Law School Admission Council and the AccessLex Institute.

“Our pre-law pipeline program helps students who would otherwise not have the understanding or know-how to achieve their dreams of entering the legal profession,” Duncan said. “UHLC’s pipeline program has been very successful in increasing the number of qualified diverse law school applicants. We are changing lives while at the same time diversifying the legal profession, and doing so is very satisfying.”

The program has also played a pivotal role in the Law Center being recognized with Insight Into Diversity Magazine’s Higher Education and Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award for five years in a row from 2015-2020. HEED Award recipients are selected through an extensive application, detailing demographics of the faculty and student body, recruitment practices, mentoring and resource programs, community outreach and other efforts designed to increase diversity.

The Pre-Law Pipeline program is one of numerous initiatives at the Law Center that promotes diversity, civil rights and social justice.

In 2016, the UH Law Center established the [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee](#). The committee is tasked with building on the Law Center’s strengths as a diverse and inclusive environment and educating the UHLC community about diversity and inclusion best practices. The committee is co-chaired by Duncan and Clinical Professor Geoffrey Hoffman, director of the Immigration Clinic. Other Law Center administrators, faculty members and students serve as members on the committee.

“It is important that lawyers reflect and appreciate the wide-ranging diversity of the clients we represent,” Duncan said. “In educating future lawyers, the law faculty and the UHLC community must be deliberate in developing lawyers fully equipped to serve the needs of their varied clientele. The work of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee is geared toward cultivating future lawyers best equipped to represent well a multifaceted community.”

“It has been my distinct honor to be co-chair of this important committee that recognizes and fosters social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion,” Hoffman said. “The dean's initiative shows that this school's energies are focused on changing society for the good. Law schools should not just be about teaching students to represent individual clients, but about how to work for whole communities.”

The committee keeps a pulse on the needs of the community through the combined contributions of its faculty, staff, and student committee members. As part of its engagement and educational programming, the committee offers a diversity and inclusion-focused speaker series, a book club, and other resources and support systems to further dialogue on related issues. Some of the events hosted by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee include:

- [Discussion on anti-Semitism](#) (Sept. 2019)
- [Discussion on implicit bias](#) (Oct. 2019)
- [Discussion on gender equality and sexism](#) (Nov. 2019)
- [Discussion on Trump administration immigration policies](#) (April 2020)

- [Juneteenth Virtual Town Hall: Racism and What to do About it](#) (June 2020)
- [One Book, One Community: Discussion of “Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption”](#) (March 2021)
- [Discussion Combating Anti-Asian Violence](#) (April 2021)

Additionally, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee has hosted various trainings on allyship to the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2018, the Law Center established its [Diversity, Racial Justice and Human Rights Initiative](#), which serves as a platform encompassing the various institutes, programs, centers, clinics, and courses at the Law Center that relate to race, social justice, immigration, diversity, inclusion, equality, and related issues. This initiative has, as one goal, facilitating the connection of its affiliates with other UH-wide programs; community, local, and statewide organizations; and other nationwide and international outreaches sharing a similar focus.

In August of 2020, faculty and staff [unanimously endorsed](#) a plan to rename Calhoun Rd. that traverses the UH campus to Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., in an official petition and request to the city of Houston that was authored by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. Part of the request stated, "renaming the referenced portion of Calhoun Rd. to 'Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.' would allow the University of Houston community to honor the legacy of Dr. King, who fought to end racial inequality and systematic oppression in our country." The plan is under consideration by the City of Houston.

After Houston native George Floyd's tragic death in Minneapolis in May 2020, the Law Center's faculty and staff unanimously approved a resolution committing to fight racism and to be antiracist, and [adopted a statement](#) on the Black Lives Matter movement. In January, Law Center faculty members collaborated on an [intersession course](#) that examined societal circumstances that led to Floyd's death.

In October 2020, the UH Law Center led the historic day-long conference: [“Black Lawyers Matter, Strategies to Enhance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,”](#) with the SMU Dedman School of Law serving as a co-convenor. More than 1,000 people attended the virtual event which featured elected officials, judges, law professors and attorneys across a wide spectrum of practice areas. Along with the LSAC, the Law Center will co-convene the second-annual Black Lawyers Matter Conference on Oct. 15, 2021.

Earlier this year, Professor Dave Fagundes and Professor Lonny Hoffman arranged the UHLC Spring Workshop Series: [“Race, Social Change, and the Law.”](#) The colloquium creates a cooperative scholarly enterprise in which students and visiting faculty from 10 other law schools work collaboratively.

In June, the dean's office and Associate Professor Tony Chase hosted a [Diversity Equity and Inclusion Leadership Forum & Conversation](#) that highlighted the impact scholarships have had on students from underrepresented backgrounds, and the need for a diverse legal profession.

Continuing its commitment to racial justice and human rights, on Feb. 25, 2022, the Law Center will co-host a virtual colloquium on [Race, Racism and American Media](#) with the Georgetown University Law Center. Applications are now being accepted for participants.

Since joining the Law Center, Baynes has been recognized with numerous accolades centered on equality. In 2019 he accepted the American Bar Association Alexander Award on behalf of the Pre-Law Pipeline program, was the recipient of the Council on Legal Education Opportunity, Inc.'s (CLEO) EDGE Award, the John Mercer Legal Education Leadership Award from the National Black Pre-Law Conference and Law Fair and was named a Diversity Champion by the National Diversity Council. In 2020, Baynes was named to the Lawyers of Color Power List by the Lawyers of Color Foundation. During his deanship, he was named one of the nation's top 100 most influential lawyers of color, and he was awarded the Houston Lawyer Association's Robert L. King Excellence in Education Award.

In 2018, CLEO awarded then-Associate Dean for Student Affairs Sondra Tennessee with a CLEO Edge award, acknowledging a commitment to education, diversity and greater equality throughout the legal community.

In February, the Law Center's Institute for Intellectual Property & Information Law (IPIIL) was the recipient of the inaugural [2021 Houston Intellectual Property Law Association's Excellence in Diversity Award](#). HIPLA created two inaugural awards, one for institutional efforts towards diversity and inclusion, and another to recognize an individual for their efforts in these areas. The institutional award was presented virtually to Associate Dean Greg Vetter, the HIPLA College Professor of Law.

The UHLC provides several courses of instruction on diversity, race, and social justice including Race and the Law, Gender, Power, Law & Leadership, Sexual Orientation & the Law, Immigration Law, Employment Law, and Antidiscrimination, Juvenile Law, and Juvenile Representation.

The Law Center also provides legal representation to diverse and vulnerable communities through numerous clinical programs which include:

- **Civil Practice Clinic** - Representing low-income families in areas of law such as bankruptcy, guardianships, divorce, child custody, probate/ wills and estate administration.
- **Consumer Law Clinic** - One of the few of its kind in the country, law students learn the law by a mixture of theory and hands-on experience representing low-income clients in justice court, county court, and district court. Cases include claims under the Deceptive Trade Practices Act, as well as credit and debt collection problems, landlord/tenant complaints, and natural disaster issues.
- **Criminal Defense Clinic** – Working on misdemeanor cases with a high probability of going to trial, such as assaults, thefts, driving while intoxicated and drug possession.

- **Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic** - Students assist small businesses and non-profit corporations with legal matters encountered daily, including negotiating lease agreements, selecting proper organizational structure, and developing employment policies. The Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic has worked in conjunction with the C.T. Bauer College of Business' SURE Program (Stimulating Urban Renewal through Entrepreneurship) to help revitalize the historic Third Ward neighborhood. The program is designed to support efforts in education, arts, health and economic development with the purpose of empowering the community to transform itself.
- **Immigration Clinic** - Specializing in representing adult and juvenile immigrants from all parts of the world; asylum, human trafficking, SIJ/Unaccompanied Minors, victims of crimes and domestic violence victims.
- **Mediation Clinic** - Provides trained student mediators to the civil justice courts in Harris County, the BBB, the Harris County Dispute Resolution Center, and the EEOC. Students mediate consumer issues, landlord/tenant disputes, breach of contract cases, and Hague Convention (International Kidnapping) cases.
- **Military Justice Clinic** – Students are assigned to defense teams in military criminal justice cases pending adverse administrative board hearings and felony-level courts-martial. Student involvement, once assigned to a defense team, will begin with client intake and end upon adjudication of the case at administrative board, trial, or agreed upon alternate disposition with the government.

Other practical opportunities for students include the Juvenile and Children's Advocacy Project (JCAP), the Texas Innocence Network (TIN) and the Street Law Program.

JCAP's mission is to reduce juvenile crime and delinquency and improve the long-term educational success rates and life outcomes for socially and economically disadvantaged juveniles. One of JCAP's components is its Record-Sealing and Expunction program, which is the only program in Texas providing sealing of juvenile delinquency records at no cost. Law students learn to practice in three different court systems—juvenile, criminal and civil—and receive training in three different procedures: juvenile records sealing, expunctions of adult criminal records, and nondisclosure orders for adult criminal records.

The Texas Innocence Network, established in 2000, is the oldest innocence program in Texas. The Texas Innocence Network has two divisions - the Capital Division, which represented death-sentenced inmates at every stage of their state and federal habeas appeals, and the Non-Capital Division which works to exonerate inmates who were wrongfully convicted.

The Street Law Program, established in 2016, allows Law Center students to gain teaching experience, while also working on their lawyering skills. Each Law Center student in the course is assigned to a high school class and responsible for developing and administering tests for a semester. They also are tasked with teaching high school students the skills to participate in a

mock trial. The program was started by the Law Center's Center for Children, Law & Policy which focuses on youth of color in the school system.

The Law Center's Career Development Office participates in [Diversity & Inclusion Recruiting](#), and encourages all students to apply to legal recruiting programs focusing on diversity and inclusion.

For more information on UH Law Center's diversity, racial justice and human rights efforts, please visit <https://www.law.uh.edu/rjhr/>.

**UHLC media contacts:** Carrie Anna Criado, UH Law Center Assistant Dean of Communications and Marketing, 713-743-2184, [cacriado@central.uh.edu](mailto:cacriado@central.uh.edu); Elena Hawthorne, Assistant Director of Communications and Marketing, 713-743-1125, [ehawthor@central.uh.edu](mailto:ehawthor@central.uh.edu); and John Brannen, Media Relations Rep, 713-743-3055, [jtbranne@central.uh.edu](mailto:jtbranne@central.uh.edu).

### **About the University of Houston Law Center**

The University of Houston Law Center (UHLC) is a dynamic, top tier law school located in the nation's 4th largest city. UHLC's Health Law, Intellectual Property Law rank in the U.S. News Top 10. It awards Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and Master of Laws (LL.M.) degrees, through its academic branch, the College of Law. The Law Center is more than just a law school. It is a powerful hub of intellectual activity with more than 11 centers and institutes which fuel its educational mission and national reputation. UHLC is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools.

### **About the University of Houston**

The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter for excellence in undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city and one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the country, UH is a federally designated Hispanic- and Asian-American-Serving institution with enrollment of more than 47,000 students.