

Most Diverse Law Schools

CUNY tops this year's list, which sees more schools earning honors. Yet, law schools could face more challenges to diversity, as university admission practices are under attack.

By Mike Stetz

Kevin Johnson knows something about the importance of diversity. A Mexican-American, he grew up in Los Angeles, and his family wasn't exactly wealthy. They needed welfare assistance and received food stamps. Later, his parents divorced and Johnson had to navigate two different, complicated worlds.

It wasn't the kind of childhood you think about when you think Ivy League. But Johnson worked hard and got into University of California, Berkeley as an undergrad, where he worked even harder. That set the path for him to be admitted to Harvard Law School, where he started in 1980.

"That's not a very common story at Harvard," said Johnson, who is now dean of University of California Davis School of Law and was the first Latino dean at a

University of California law school.

It was even more rare when he was in school. Harvard Law had only a handful of Latino students and placed little emphasis on student needs. There was no such thing as academic support counselors. The environment was hardly touchy-feely.

"It was intensely competitive," he said. "I felt different, alienated and lonely."

Johnson hopes today's law students have a very different experience, and he has been at the forefront of an effort to ensure that.

Diversity has increased significantly since the early 1980s, and progress continues. In an effort to track that, The National Jurist has assessed and graded law schools for diversity every other year since 2013.

This year, 60 law schools made our honor roll, which is determined by evaluating the percentage of minority faculty members and the percentage of students in



five racial groups and comparing those to national averages.

This year, 20 law schools received an A+, up from 13 in 2017, 10 in 2015 and 8 in 2013. This growth occurred during a time when most law schools struggled with a declining number of applicants.

Johnson's own school, UC Davis, is one of the schools that has improved in diversity. It jumped to No. 2 on this year's list, up from an A- in 2017. The reason for the rise? The percentage of Hispanic students went from 12 percent to 21 percent.

Like other law schools, UC Davis has worked hard to diversify and bring a more accurate representation of our nation's peoples to the legal profession.

Diversity challenged

But will such progress continue?

Creating diversity is no easy thing and

not without critics, who argue that some of the methods are unfair, such as law school admissions being based partly on race. They argue that admissions should be based on merit.

President Trump is one of those critics, and that's a significant factor, given the power his office holds. Last year, his administration rolled back Obama-era guidelines that encouraged universities to consider race as part of admissions.

Two of Trumps' Supreme Court nominees have been appointed, causing affirmative action supporters to worry that these conservative jurists will not be supportive of such policies in the future.

Other actions are also giving supporters of diversity pause. Harvard Law and New York University's law reviews are being sued for allegedly discriminating against white males in selecting editors and in selecting

KEVIN JOHNSON is a role model for many of the students at UC Davis, where he is dean. He routinely attends minority functions to show support for their causes.

#1 CUNY School of Law



Most Diverse Law Schools A+

		% Hispanic students	% Native American	% Asian	% Black	% White	Faculty minority %
1	CUNY School of Law	22.6%	0.2%	11.0%	15.2%	50.7%	36.0%
2	UC Davis Law	21.0%	0.3%	18.9%	3.8%	55.8%	37.7%
3	University of New Mexico	33.7%	5.9%	3.9%	2.9%	53.3%	36.2%
4	University of Hawaii	11.0%	0.5%	38.2%	3.7%	41.9%	46.3%
5	Univ. of the District of Columbia	12.4%	0.0%	9.0%	52.6%	26.1%	45.1%
6	Barry University	28.4%	2.0%	4.3%	15.6%	48.8%	28.8%
7	Texas Southern University	28.0%	0.8%	2.6%	59.3%	9.2%	81.9%
8	UNT Dallas College of Law	22.2%	1.9%	6.4%	18.7%	50.6%	19.8%
9	Thomas Jefferson School of Law	28.8%	1.8%	11.8%	13.5%	43.1%	18.0%
10	Arizona Summit	14.8%	1.9%	4.9%	11.7%	66.7%	23.5%
11	Whittier Law School	39.6%	1.5%	9.0%	11.9%	37.3%	22.0%
12	Florida A&M University	14.3%	0.0%	3.2%	51.2%	30.8%	71.0%
13	Western State College of Law	32.6%	0.8%	16.8%	7.5%	42.0%	32.4%
14	University of La Verne	40.4%	0.0%	7.3%	12.7%	39.2%	32.0%
15	Golden Gate University	26.7%	0.6%	15.6%	12.5%	42.6%	21.7%
15	University of San Francisco	28.3%	0.2%	16.7%	9.1%	44.6%	30.5%
15	North Carolina Central University	6.5%	2.0%	2.0%	56.4%	33.0%	64.3%
18	California Western School of Law	19.3%	1.3%	8.9%	7.5%	61.0%	15.9%
19	Florida International University	54.5%	0.7%	2.5%	7.1%	35.2%	45.8%
20	Southwestern Law School	27.5%	0.0%	11.1%	7.4%	53.3%	26.3%

articles to publish. A Texas-based group is charging that the law reviews use gender and racial preferences.

Harvard University is facing charges that it discriminates against Asian-Americans, a fight led by a conservative activist who wants an end to affirmative action policies. The Trump administration endorsed the suit, and the U.S. Justice Department is investigating Harvard's practices.

A ruling in that case, which went to

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trial in the fall, is expected in the coming months. Harvard is facing allegations that it puts limits on the number of Asian students it admits. They have a tendency to score higher on standardized tests, crowding out other racial groups. Harvard denied the practice.

The U.S. Justice Department is investigating Yale University's admissions practices after receiving a complaint from the Asian American Coalition for Education charging that it too discriminates against Asian-Americans.

So, yes, these are uncertain times for diversity.

Supporters argue that a diverse student body and faculty enhance the law school experience. They help prepare students for the real world because the real world is hardly like a 1950s sitcom. Even "The Jeffersons" would look out of date, given the absence of Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders in the show. Demographic trends show that the nation is becoming much more diverse all the time.



“Our legal system should represent all of the people, to give them all a voice. If you don’t have this diversity, you create an illegitimate system.”

—Ann Cammett, senior associate dean of academic affairs,
City University of New York School of Law

A large advertisement for Western New England University School of Law. The background is a library with bookshelves. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair is sitting at a desk, smiling, with a red laptop open in front of her. The text is overlaid on the image.

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Jessica Martinez (third from left) walks with fellow students at UC Davis, which has become increasingly diverse.

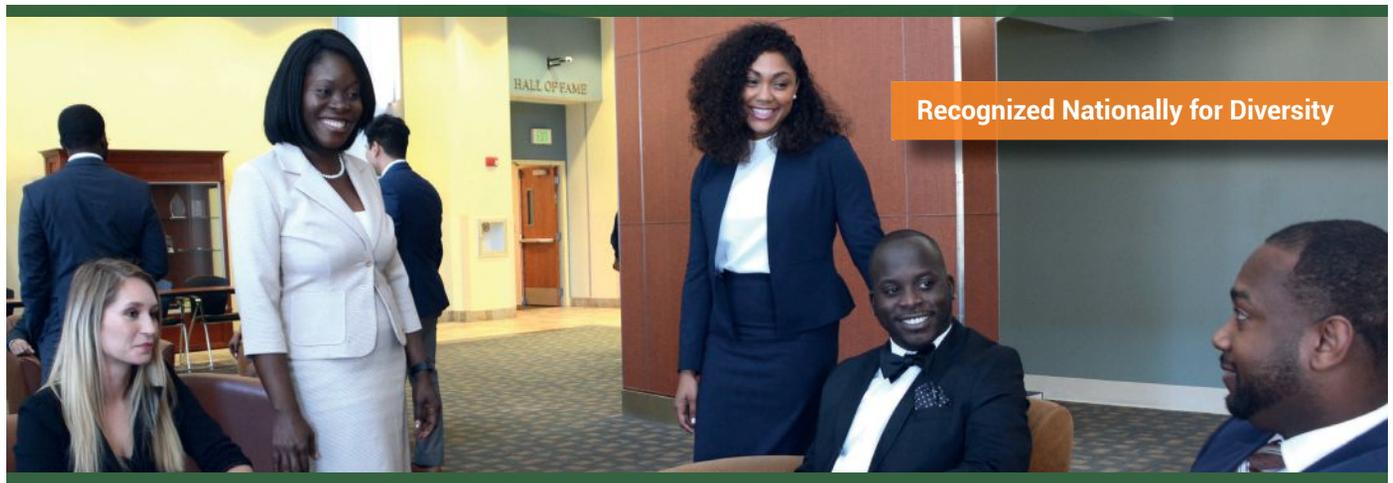
This year's ranking shows that schools are indeed working to make progress. A number of schools are new to the list, such as Loyola University New Orleans School of Law, which enters the ranking with an A. More than 20 percent of its faculty is diverse, which helped its climb. Nearly 17 percent of its students are African-American, which is a high percentage for a law school that's not historically black.

The University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law in Tucson, another newcomer, got an A-. No other school comes close to its percentage of Native American students enrolled, at nearly 9 percent.

Topping our list is City University of New York School of Law. Nearly half of its students are minorities. More than one-third



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Most Diverse Law Schools A

	% Hispanic students	% Native American	% Asian	% Black	% White	Faculty minority %
American University	19.8%	0.1%	9.0%	9.7%	61.3%	20.7%
Atlanta's John Marshall	9.7%	1.9%	1.4%	49.0%	31.6%	22.2%
Cornell Law School	15.0%	1.1%	13.9%	8.6%	60.8%	15.5%
Florida Coastal School of Law	13.7%	1.4%	4.2%	21.3%	59.4%	19.5%
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles	22.2%	0.1%	12.8%	4.3%	60.5%	19.9%
Loyola University New Orleans	13.3%	2.6%	3.3%	16.7%	64.1%	20.1%
Northeastern University	14.3%	0.2%	10.1%	8.5%	66.5%	19.7%
Seattle University	11.8%	0.6%	12.6%	4.6%	69.7%	21.3%
South Texas College of Law	27.3%	0.5%	7.5%	10.2%	54.5%	17.4%
The John Marshall	16.2%	0.4%	7.3%	16.4%	59.7%	14.1%
UC Hastings	18.5%	1.9%	17.9%	2.8%	58.8%	20.7%
University of Houston	21.7%	1.2%	8.9%	5.5%	62.4%	16.4%

of its faculty is diverse. Part of CUNY Law's mission is to help diversify the legal profession, said Ann Cammett, senior associate dean of academic affairs for the Long Island City school, which is known for its commitment to public interest.

"Our legal system should represent all of the people, to give them all a voice,"

Cammett said. "If you don't have this diversity, you create an illegitimate system."

Why diversity matters

UC Davis' Johnson also believes that diversity matters, and he has been heartened by the change in American law schools.

"I think it's wonderful," he said of the

METHODOLOGY

Our grades are based on how well each school matches with the U.S. average for each minority population. For students, we looked at Asian, black, Hispanic, Caucasian and American Indian populations. For faculty, we compared overall U.S. minority percentage with the percentage of minority faculty. We've used this methodology three previous times, beginning in 2013. Since then, a number of schools have made consistent strides in diversification. Below, we compare 2013's scores to today's.

DePaul University: C+ to A-

University of Baltimore:

C+ to A-

Loyola University-New Orleans:

B to A

Georgia State University:

B- to A-

Barry University: B+ to A+

The John Marshall: B- to A



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way law schools are evolving.

Having peers you can relate to is a tremendous boost, he said. Having professors who look like you is too.

UC Davis has increased its diversity by doing more outreach, Johnson said. Under California law, the school can't use race as part of its admission criteria. By referendum in 1988, voters banned such action. But schools can and do look at socioeconomic conditions. Many minorities come from

more challenging backgrounds.

The school's King Hall Outreach Program has been lauded for its success in reaching students from under-represented communities. The number of alumni from the program now totals more than 300.

"We take a holistic approach," Johnson said, noting the importance of this mission, given that UC Davis is a public school in a very diverse state.

When it comes to choosing faculty,

Johnson makes sure minorities are represented in the applicant pool.

"You can't hire someone who's diverse if they're not included," he said.

However, it's the faculty that votes on new hires, so they've been actively diversifying the school's teaching ranks, Johnson notes. He's hardly alone in seeking to create a more diverse environment. Indeed, the faculty is now a minority majority.

Diversifying does not mean sacrificing, Johnson said.

"Diversity and excellence go hand in hand," he said. "It's not a zero-sum game."

Jessica Martinez is a product of the school's outreach program, having learned about it as an undergrad at UC Berkeley, where she majored in political science. UC Davis' commitment to diversity was a key selling point, she said.

"It felt really comfortable," Martinez said. "And a big part of that is how diverse and inclusive the environment is."

She's the first in her family to gradu-



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**"It felt really comfortable.
And a big part of that is
how diverse and inclusive
the environment is."**

—Jessica Martinez, law student,
UC Davis

Most Diverse Law Schools A-

ate from college. Her parents, who run a housekeeping service, came to the U.S. from Mexico as teens without any resources. Martinez was raised in Yuba City, Calif., which is nearly 30 percent Hispanic. Going to a law school where Hispanics were not represented in significant numbers would have been difficult, she said. "It can be intimidating," Martinez said of being in an academic environment that is not diverse. "You feel less free to speak out, to be yourself."

At UC Davis, many of her professors are either minorities or first-generation lawyers or both. That's important, she said. She feels she can reach out to them and they'll be able to relate to her.

Martinez is very active in Latino causes. A third-year student, she's a former co-chair of La Raza Students Association. Her goal is to be an immigration lawyer and return to her community to help those in need.

That's one of the major benefits of diversity, experts say. It helps bring representation to those who lack it. "I definitely want to

	% Hispanic students	% Native American	% Asian	% Black	% White	Faculty minority %
DePaul University	9.3%	0.0%	8.8%	9.5%	72.4%	20.0%
Georgia State University	8.3%	0.5%	10.1%	12.2%	68.8%	16.4%
Harvard Law School	12.4%	0.1%	15.5%	9.0%	62.8%	18.2%
Lewis & Clark College	10.0%	1.8%	8.6%	2.5%	76.7%	14.0%
NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center	40.2%	0.5%	3.6%	9.7%	45.6%	24.7%
Oklahoma City University	11.5%	8.1%	5.6%	7.8%	66.8%	15.7%
Pacific McGeorge School of Law	18.0%	1.2%	13.5%	4.0%	63.1%	14.6%
Pepperdine University	17.4%	0.7%	10.8%	4.9%	66.2%	14.1%
Rutgers University	13.3%	0.5%	7.7%	9.1%	69.5%	19.6%
Santa Clara University	20.9%	0.2%	23.3%	4.6%	50.9%	18.1%
Southern University	2.0%	0.2%	1.3%	61.6%	34.9%	71.2%
Stanford Law School	14.0%	0.4%	12.4%	5.8%	67.4%	19.8%
Temple University	10.9%	0.3%	7.7%	9.7%	71.4%	19.0%
UC - Irvine	17.4%	0.3%	25.1%	5.1%	52.0%	24.0%
UC Berkeley School of Law	16.0%	0.2%	20.9%	4.6%	58.3%	20.5%
University of Arizona	17.3%	8.7%	5.3%	3.7%	64.3%	15.7%
University of Baltimore	5.7%	0.5%	5.8%	20.1%	67.9%	15.7%
University of Florida	19.0%	0.8%	4.9%	9.0%	66.2%	21.7%
University of Maryland	7.3%	0.3%	10.9%	11.7%	69.4%	15.1%
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	20.9%	0.0%	5.2%	7.7%	66.0%	20.3%
University of Pennsylvania	8.2%	0.3%	13.4%	8.4%	69.7%	18.8%
University of San Diego	15.6%	2.2%	14.2%	4.6%	63.0%	9.5%

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give back,” Martinez said.

The push for diversity is important for a host of reasons. For one, the law profession remains one of the least diverse. Only about 15 percent of lawyers are minorities, one estimate showed.

When it comes to law firms, the diversity figures are also worrisome. Fewer than 9 percent of partners in major firms are minorities, according to National Association of Law Placement (NALP). Fewer than 2 percent are African-American.

And when it comes to prosecutors, the numbers are downright alarming. A 2014 study found that 95 percent of elected state and local prosecutors were white.

And now come yet more attacks on affirmative action. While it has withstood challenges before, things could change if another suit against affirmative action reaches the highest court.

“Some schools may pull back, given Trump’s actions,” said Johnson, an expert in immigration law and civil rights. “Everyone

“Some schools may pull back, given Trump’s actions. Everyone has to keep watching.”

— Kevin Johnson, dean, University of California Davis School of Law

has to keep watching.”

As noted, California has banned race-based admission to public universities. It’s one of eight states to do so. In California, the ban initially caused a disruption in schools’ diversity numbers. For instance, the number of African-American students at UCLA fell by nearly half in the first year following the ban.

Those numbers slowly inched back up, in part because of more aggressive and costly outreach. The UC system also enacted a program that guarantees acceptance to the top 9 percent of the state’s high school graduates. That helps bring in students from schools in diverse communities.

Experts have made compelling arguments both in favor of and against these bans. Some say that the current outreach efforts have failed to keep pace with changing demographics and that Latino and African-American students have suffered the most.

Others say California’s educational system has been forced to improve minority-dominated schools, so their graduates are now better able to compete.

For now, the vast majority of states can use race as part of admission criteria, and they do so. And some have noted their commitment to the process. For instance New York Governor Andrew Cuomo wrote a letter to the leaders of both SUNY and CUNY’s board of trustees not to waver in the face of Trump’s actions. He wrote:

“In this state, we embrace diversity and we encourage it. I am directing you to continue your existing diversity and inclusion plans. The new federal action should have no bearing on admission policies and should not interfere with SUNY’s and CUNY’s commitment to a diverse and inclusive student body.”

CUNY Law is devoted to its mission of diversity regardless of the current environment, Cammett said. The school has a

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Most Diverse Law Schools B+

number of progressive programs, including its Pipeline to Justice initiative. In that, the school takes under-represented students who have been denied admission and prepares them to reapply to law school with a much greater chance of getting in and excelling. Indeed, 83 percent of these students graduate.

CUNY's success in diversification is also due to its commitment to public service, Cammett said. Students are drawn to that mission and want to tackle injustices.

"It's not that hard to find [diverse students]," she said. "They find us."

The school's admissions policy is fair and all-encompassing, she said. CUNY seeks students from all backgrounds and races, and merit is key, she added.

"We seek people who can complete our program successfully," Cammett said.

And she noted that there's no reason the pool can't be wide and diverse.

"It's unfortunate that diversity is seen as a problem to some," Cammett said. "For us, it's just the opposite. We see it as a strength."

	% Hispanic students	% Native American	% Asian	% Black	% White	Faculty minority %
Arizona State University	14.9%	2.0%	4.6%	3.0%	75.1%	15.4%
Brooklyn Law School	12.9%	0.0%	11.0%	6.7%	69.3%	13.1%
Chapman University	24.5%	0.0%	16.3%	1.4%	57.7%	10.1%
Chicago-Ketn College of Law	15.7%	0.0%	7.9%	8.2%	68.1%	12.8%
Columbia University	9.3%	0.7%	15.1%	11.3%	63.6%	13.8%
Elon University	3.6%	1.2%	4.2%	17.3%	73.5%	15.7%
Emory University	11.3%	0.0%	12.6%	10.1%	66.0%	15.0%
Fordham University	12.0%	0.3%	11.0%	5.4%	71.2%	14.6%
George Washington University	2.0%	0.9%	15.6%	11.8%	69.3%	12.5%
Georgetown University	9.0%	0.4%	8.1%	12.1%	70.1%	7.6%
Howard University School of Law	4.3%	0.3%	1.6%	91.7%	2.1%	80.2%
New York Law School	19.2%	0.1%	7.9%	6.5%	66.1%	12.1%
Northwestern University	14.5%	0.2%	11.8%	6.1%	67.4%	10.3%
Ohio State University	7.5%	2.0%	4.7%	7.3%	78.5%	13.6%
Touro Law Center	12.8%	0.0%	11.4%	12.8%	63.0%	8.3%
UCLA	12.1%	0.5%	16.8%	4.2%	66.2%	20.5%
University of Chicago	12.5%	0.2%	9.9%	6.3%	71.1%	15.1%
University of Memphis	2.9%	1.6%	1.6%	19.2%	74.7%	16.8%
University of Miami	38.2%	0.3%	2.9%	7.3%	51.2%	23.2%
University of Texas	15.8%	0.6%	6.5%	5.9%	71.1%	9.7%
University of Washington	8.1%	0.7%	11.7%	3.8%	75.4%	13.8%
Valparaiso University	12.9%	0.9%	2.7%	10.7%	71.9%	22.1%
Washington University	8.0%	0.5%	7.3%	13.0%	71.2%	11.6%
Western New England University	10.3%	0.9%	5.2%	13.8%	69.8%	10.6%
WMU-Cooley	5.0%	0.5%	4.3%	29.8%	60.2%	13.1%
Yale University	11.9%	0.6%	14.7%	8.0%	64.9%	13.7%

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