



**Texas Southern University**  
**THURGOOD MARSHALL SCHOOL OF LAW**

**Strategic Plan**

*Approved by the faculty on February 21, 2008*

**Introduction**

Thurgood Marshall School of Law occupies a storied place in legal education in Houston, Texas and the nation. Named for a groundbreaking civil rights lawyer and the first African-American Supreme Court Justice, the Law School was established as part of Texas Southern University to provide opportunities for African-Americans to become lawyers, since they were denied such opportunities at other public institutions in Texas.

Today, Thurgood Marshall remains a law school of opportunity for students of all races who have a drive to succeed. It continues as one of the nation's most diverse law schools, weaving a tapestry of cultures and attitudes into our legal system. Its graduates have occupied prominent positions in law firms, corporations, government and the judiciary. Its faculty members are not only excellent teachers, but also influential in public policy through their scholarship, their commentary and their testimony.

Despite its notable successes and its national reputation, the Law School faces a challenging future:

- Established in the days of “separate but equal”, state funding for the Law School has never been “equal” to other public law schools in Texas.
- Although great strides have been taken, the Law School graduates do not pass the bar for the first time at rates comparable to the average in Texas.
- A significant number of the Law School's students who perform well in the first year, transfer to other law schools, impacting not only the Law School's bar passage and placement rates, but also its alumni base of potential donors.
- Its parent institution, Texas Southern University, has been engulfed in charges of financial irresponsibility.
- The combination of a comparatively low bar passage rate and problems at Texas Southern University have negatively impacted the Law School's reputation among the Houston Bar, which in turn impacts job opportunities available to graduates.

The Law School began this strategic planning process with not only an understanding of the challenges it faces; but more importantly, with full knowledge of the strengths it possesses, including:

- A faculty that is committed to teaching and seeing its unique student body succeed.
- A broadening of its faculty base, including new hires from some of the nation's most prominent law schools.
- A market position able to meet the increasing demand of leading law firms' needs for highly-qualified minority candidates.
- An avid group of alumni committed to seeing the Law School flourish.
- A significant alumni presence in government and the judiciary in the Rio Grande Valley.
- A strengthened administrative staff with the capacity to provide a wide range of services to the law school community.

This strategic plan is designed to build on the strengths and heritage of the Law School as it meets the challenges of the future. It is the product of a process that involved virtually all members of the Thurgood Marshall community. The Law School retained an experienced consultant who facilitated the process. He interviewed virtually all faculty members and senior staff, as well as student leaders, employers and alumni. Members of the Dean's Blue Ribbon Committee, who participated in the self-study process, also offered input into this strategic plan. The process included a comparison of the Law School against a number of other schools on a wide variety of measures; a series of overarching goals and initiatives developed by the faculty through its self-study process; and, a comprehensive plan approved by the faculty on February 21, 2008.

A significant number of these initiatives are focused on improving the student learning experience, which will translate into greater career success and a higher bar passage rate. While other law schools have addressed a comparatively low bar passage rate by dramatically increasing admissions standards, Thurgood Marshall School of Law strives to address the problem in many ways. The Law School is committed to raising admissions standards, most members of the community believe that Thurgood Marshall must continue to be a school of opportunity, particularly for those who are underrepresented in the practicing bar. This plan calls for a more vigorous and demanding approach to teaching and learning as well as new initiatives, such as a revised legal writing program, targeted to bring about greater student success.

The Law School is also, to some extent, at a disadvantage because it is a school of opportunity. Relying on an applicant's life experience, dedication and motivation, the Law School is willing to admit students that other schools might reject due to comparatively low GPA or LSAT scores. Yet, as these students thrive in the first year at Thurgood Marshall, other schools that once rejected these candidates then aggressively court them to transfer particularly students of color. To the extent that a large number of successful first-year students transfer, it impacts the Law School's bar passage and eventual placement rates. Moreover, in all likelihood, it deprives the Law School not only of potential alumni donors, but also of role models for current students. This plan includes a commitment to reduce the number of transfers where possible.

Some of the initiatives in this plan will require increased or new funding from the state, the University or private donations. In that regard, the Law School is embarking on a plan

to enhance its alumni and development programs in order to help attract and expand financial support.

This is an ambitious, but realistic plan for the Law School's future. It addresses challenges and charts a solid course for the future. We invite and encourage the support of all members of the community as we move forward.

## GOALS AND INITIATIVES

### **Goal 1:**

**We will substantially enhance the student learning experience and better prepare our students for success in the profession and on the bar exam.**

We have always prided ourselves on offering a demanding, yet personalized learning experience and environment for our students. Many of our former students have gone on to great success and have become leaders in the bar, on the bench and within their communities.

Yet some have not fared as well, either in terms of first-time bar passage or as practice-ready new attorneys. This plan sets forth a series of initiatives designed to improve the learning experience and ultimate success of our graduates.

Of particular significance are the changes we are making in our legal writing and skills development programs. Because many of our graduates will join small firms or perhaps start out on their own, enhanced practical training will allow them to be successful from the start.

### ***Initiatives:***

- a. We will be more demanding in the performance we expect from our students, especially in the first year by:
  - i. maintaining the recent reduction in the size of our first-year classes so students receive greater personal attention and opportunities to interact with their professors in smaller class settings.
  - ii. continuing to provide a strong Academic Support program to help all of our students succeed in law school, on the bar exam and in their careers. In particular, we will increase use of writing workshops that provide guidance to students on proficiently answering bar exam questions.
- b. We will tailor the Law School curriculum to meet the needs of the Houston and Texas communities, as well as the nation in general,

focusing on Intellectual Property, Environmental Law and Civil Rights-Civil Liberties. In addition, we will place a greater emphasis on the transactional law areas just as we do in the litigation areas.

- c. We will revise the curriculum to emphasize writing, specialties, and Texas law.
- d. We will substantially enhance our legal writing program by:
  - i. hiring a full time director and staff; and make the necessary changes to assure their successes.
  - ii. improving students' basic writing skills, including clarity, coherence, organization and style.
  - iii. providing a unified curriculum for the three semester in legal writing, legal analysis and appellate litigation courses.
  - iv. addressing weaknesses in students' reading comprehension, writing, test-taking and analytical skills application.
  - v. teaching issue and rule identification, explanation, fact application, case analysis and statutory interpretation.
  - vi. administering and evaluating writing skills diagnostic examinations during the enrichment and orientation programs to identify at risk students who need extensive instruction on grammar and mechanics during their first-year of classes.
  - vii. incorporating reading comprehension and adult learning strategies into the unified curriculum.
  - viii. maintaining the reduced size in first-year classes and providing a unified curriculum among the various sections.
- e. We will work with the Center for Legal Pedagogy and other consultants to improve teaching, and better identify and teach to specific learning styles of students.
- f. We will develop and implement a plan to reduce the transfer of students ranking in the top 10% of the first year class from 80% to less than 50% by:
  - i. increasing financial incentives to the top 10% of students.
  - ii. working with faculty to identify potential transferees

- g. We will place a greater emphasis on skills development and in the government law area by:
- i. increasing the trial advocacy component of the curriculum to prepare students for the “real world” of lawyering.
  - ii. enhancing our clinical program, and
    - providing law students with both substantive and skills knowledge in preparing them for a potential career in public interest law.
    - providing law students with the practical opportunity to work with actual clients who are unemployed, homeless, retired, handicapped, crime victims, women with abusive domestic issues, foreigners, and/or refugees as they develop into skilled, ethical and reform-minded professionals.
    - teaching law students how to think independently, by synthesizing facts and legal principles, and by planning litigation strategies.
    - continuing to expand our clinic offerings.
- h. We will offer a pre-qualification summer-long program for at-risk entrants.
- i. We will enhance faculty involvement in bar preparation to incorporate bar strategies into classroom discussion, exercise and testing throughout the three-year law study program and
- i. having Law School academic support personnel work closely with faculty to achieve this goal
  - ii. encouraging sections of courses, particularly in the first year, to share information and tutorial sessions
- j. We will improve our tracking systems so we can better identify the successful student profile both in law school and in bar passage and evaluate the success of our programs. This tracking information would also be used in the admissions process and would assess (among other things) whether:
- i. Students were more successful at passing the bar after participating in particular programs

- ii. Bar preparatory courses both at the law school and offered by independent vendors improve bar passage
  - iii. Texas students perform better or worse on the bar exam than out-of-state takers
  - iv. Older students (or those with work experience) are more successful than younger students
- k. In order to continually improve our programs, we will debrief all bar takers (both successful and unsuccessful takers).

## **Goal 2:**

**We will build and maintain a faculty of both superior teachers who meet the demands of a learning-intensive student body and scholars with local, regional, and national reputations with special emphasis on areas of specialization of the faculty, as well as the mission, heritage and tradition of the Law School and University.**

The Law School has built a faculty of scholars and teachers who are dedicated to serving the Law School's mission and the needs of our unique student body. We need to continue to support these faculty members and seek new professors who have established reputations or are promising scholars.

All of our faculty members must be excellent teachers. We need to continually improve our teaching by sharing ideas and best practices, both within our law school and from outside resources. We must also regularly examine ways in which we can change our teaching methods to help improve first-time bar passage rate.

We are a research institution, whose faculty scholarship regularly influences legal and public policy issues. Because of the teaching and time demands due to the needs of our student body, our faculty cannot as easily engage in scholarship as at other schools. Going forward, we seek to reduce these barriers to scholarly productivity so that our faculty can continue to contribute to the discussion of leading issues of the day, thus enhancing the Law School's reputation.

### ***Initiatives:***

#### **Teaching**

- a. We will collaborate with one another, utilizing best practices, and seeking innovative ways to most effectively prepare our relatively unique student body for success in passing the bar and practicing law.
- b. We will thoroughly explore options to improve faculty teaching in order to improve first-time bar passage rates.

- c. We will continue our internal and external efforts, including the involvement of experts from the profession and other disciplines, to enhance faculty teaching.

### **Hiring**

- a. We will seek to hire faculty of the highest caliber from a national pool. Candidates for our faculty must have a record or promise of scholarly productivity and a commitment to excellence in teaching in our unique learning environment.
- b. We will seek to hire a senior professor from another law school or a senior outstanding lawyer or jurist to serve as the Law School's Distinguished Professor.
- c. We will seek to raise funds to create additional chaired professorships in order to attract and retain faculty that will advance our goals and reputation. We will fill open positions that have been funded.

### **Scholarly Productivity and Promotion**

- a. We will significantly increase the quantity and quality of faculty scholarship generally, but especially in specialized areas by:
  - i. reducing the barriers to productivity, by granting greater stipends and faculty releases;
  - ii. increasing the level of support for scholarly initiatives, including travel, salary incentives, research assistance, and technical and staff support;
  - iii. working together as colleagues to mutually support each other's scholarly initiatives; and,
  - iv. improving faculty professional camaraderie and sense of collective identity and investment in the Law School by holding a faculty retreat or similar activity at least once every three years.
- b. We will more effectively promote the scholarship and activities of the faculty in order to enhance our influence and build our reputation by:
  - i. significantly increasing faculty involvement as resources for local, state, and national bar associations, academic organizations, councils, non-profit community, organizations (profit and non-profit); and,

- ii. significantly increasing our activities to publicize faculty scholarship and accomplishments through an active communications program, including an enhanced website; informative brochures; and, outreach to local, regional and national media.
- c. We will continue to support institutes and centers, which serve not only to influence law and public policy, but also to enhance the Law School's reputation, including:
  - i. the Earl Carl Institute for Legal and Social Policy, Inc. which serves to address legal and social problems facing the community through scholarship and advocacy;
  - ii. the Institute for International and Immigration Law, which encourages scholarly research, conducts academic conferences and grants students a certificate in International and Immigration Law following completion of a specified series of courses;
  - iii. the Center for Government Law (part of the Earl Carl Institute) which provides a comprehensive continuum of course work externships, fellowship opportunities, and seminars in government law and administration to prepare students for successful careers in the public sector and which grants students a certificate in Government Law following completion of a series of courses; and
  - iv. the Center for Legal Pedagogy, which is a research institute dedicated to the study of instructional design for legal education.

### **Goal 3:**

**We will maintain our historic mission and our reputation as one of the country's most diverse law schools while at the same time we will more aggressively solicit highly-motivated applicants who we believe will thrive in our community.**

We are very proud of our reputation as one of the country's most diverse law schools; and vow to always remember our heritage as one of the few law schools that are a part of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States.

We have always been a school of opportunity as we have admitted students who were rejected by other schools primarily because we believed they had the life experience, dedication and maturity to succeed, despite one of their indicators being irregular. In many cases these students have succeeded so well in our environment that, after the first year, they have opportunities to transfer to more highly-ranked institutions that may have rejected them in the first place.

Our goal is to continue our tradition as a school of opportunity, but at the same time to be more effective in identifying students of promise. To the extent we are more successful in this regard; our students will be more successful in law school, in passing the bar and in their chosen careers.

***Initiatives:***

- a. We will consider the rigor of the applicant's undergraduate curriculum and institution instead of solely relying on the Undergraduate Grade Point Average.
- b. We will consider reducing the weight we currently give to Undergraduate Grade Point Averages as compared to the Law School Aptitude Tests.
- c. We will vigorously recruit top performing students by providing additional scholarship funds to attract them.
- d. We will broaden our admissions criteria to consider factors that portend success such as employment history and other life experiences.
- e. We will consider seeking out more mature students with work experience.

**Goal 4:**

**We will expand career opportunities for our graduates and create national recognition of our institution as a preferred hiring resource for all employers, especially for those committed to enhancing diversity in the legal profession.**

All law students should expect their legal education to prepare them to pass the bar and provide opportunities for meaningful employment. Obviously, students must have the ability, motivation and passion to do their best work in law school, and we must supply those students with a wide range of career opportunities upon graduation.

Thurgood Marshall is positioned to provide such opportunities. From the nation's largest and most prestigious law firms to corporations to government agencies, employers are aggressively seeking a diverse group of employees now more than ever before. Employers at the nation's most highly-regarded law firms have confided to us that our top graduates perform as well, and often better than graduates from other law schools in America. We must provide additional opportunities for our students, as well as convince employers to recruit deeper into our class where top talent also abides.

We have not been as effective as we should in measuring our placement progress or the success of our career development initiatives. Following this plan, we will track our students and graduates more efficiently.

***Initiatives:*** In fulfilling this goal:

- a. We will expand our current national employer base of traditional law firms and their corporate, government, and similarly nontraditional alternatives.
- b. We will maintain electronic records of on-campus employer recruiter activity, to identify areas of improvement for students and recognize hiring patterns and histories of employers. In particular, we will:
  - i. develop a survey system for determining which employers recruit on campus, which collect resumes and, of both categories, which do and do not subsequently follow through with offers;
  - ii. record reasons employers give for hiring or not hiring our students and graduates; and,
  - iii. maintain electronic profiles of employers who have ongoing relationships with the Law School and a history of interacting with and hiring our students.
- c. We will continue to cultivate relationships with employer hiring managers and diversity coordinators and; in fact, explore possibly establishing an advisory group of law firm recruiters to mentor students and inform the Career Services Office of current hiring practices and priorities.
- d. We will develop the total of currently offered employment resources for graduates (e.g., counseling, electronic job postings and career advice) as an alumni career support program.
- e. We will ensure continuing access by alumni to career opportunities that include law alternatives.
- f. We will increase the involvement of the Dean in helping to attract new employers and in reinforcing the commitment of those who already recruit or participate in career programs on campus.
- g. We will maximize on-campus opportunities for legal employers to network with and informally mentor students as guest speakers, event sponsors and participants in similar career-related activities.
- h. We will expand opportunities for practicing lawyers to visit campus to meet and interact with students through events like speaking programs, mentoring, tutoring and moot court judging.

- i. We will link our alumni at firms with graduates who seek employment at the same firm.

### **Goal 5:**

#### **We will build a community in which students, faculty and staff respect and support one another and the mission of the Law School.**

Our Law School has a unique mission and a unique group of faculty, students and staff have come together to build our community. As we move forward, we need to energize our community in support of that mission. We need to have a common understanding of our heritage and the role that this Law School plays in the heritage of Houston, Texas and the nation.

At the same time, we need to cultivate working relationships among ourselves. At times, in the heat of argument or out of frustration, we may say or do things that show a lack of respect for others in the community. Debate and argument are the lifeblood of any law school, we must engage in the debate with professionalism and mutual respect for friends and adversaries alike.

We must also do a better job of being student focused in the services we provide to them. In effect, students are our “customers” and the way they are treated and the quality of support they receive from faculty and staff will determine the level of future involvement with the law school. In short, we must treat our students as “future alumni.”

#### ***Initiatives:***

- a. We will more effectively and more often celebrate our successes and accomplishment.
- b. We will develop and train our faculty and staff to be focused on providing excellent service to our students.
- c. We will improve our student service by focusing on convenience.
- d. We will develop and implement a policy of “no-tolerance” of disrespect between and among students, faculty and staff.
- e. We will increase the activity of our Special Programs Division which sponsors programs and learning activities for faculty and students in areas of law that epitomize the special mission of this Law School as a Historically Black College and that commemorates Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and his advocacy on behalf of Blacks and other minorities and disadvantaged peoples. The Special Programs include the Center for Legal Pedagogy, the Earl Carl Institute, the Institute for International and Immigration Law, and the Center for Government Law.

- f. We will provide more effective communication between student service providers including the law school administration and the students.

## **Goal 6:**

### **We will develop infrastructure and support systems to assist in fulfilling the initiatives in this plan.**

We must build and rely on a variety of support services and systems in order to carry out this ambitious strategic plan. In particular, we must more effectively reach out and communicate with our alumni and other donors because we will be seeking their financial support for many of these initiatives.

We must also market the Law School more effectively, its achievements and successes to alumni, other academics and the legal community in Houston, Texas and around the country. Our goal is to build the reputation of our Law School in order to attract the faculty, students, staff and financial resources we need to succeed.

We must also have the physical facilities, library and technology necessary for the needs of how law is taught and learned today. We have made substantial progress in serving the technology needs of students, faculty and staff.

We need to improve our physical facilities. Like many law schools, we do not have sufficient small classroom space or offices for the demands of a law school today. As a long-term solution, we have developed plans for a new facility and will be in the process of seeking University approval and financial support for the project. In the interim, we will make improvements as needed.

### ***Initiatives:***

- a. We will have leading edge technology to assist in our teaching and research missions. We will:
  - i. enhance the use of technology in the classroom;
  - ii. improve the technological services of the Law School while working within a centralized university IT infrastructure;
  - iii. increase the amounts and types of technology training provided to faculty, staff and students; and
  - iv. reorganize the technology staff into more specialized areas to improve the services provided.
- b. We will more effectively market the Law School and its plans, programs and accomplishments to prospective applicants and

faculty, as well as current faculty, students and staff, alumni, employers and the wider world. We will:

- i. enhance our website to more effectively reach these audiences;
  - ii. publicize the scholarship of our faculty and the achievements of our graduates;
  - iii. create better understanding of our mission;
  - iv. create better understanding of the value of a legal education at our Law School;
  - v. expand the involvement of the dean and faculty in the Houston community; and,
  - vi. celebrate and publicize the success of our graduates in the community in part by creating a tracking system that monitors the progress of our graduates, where they practice and who they serve.
- c. We will create a vibrant alumni and development program that connects our graduates with our community and with each other and that provides ongoing financial support for the Law School by:
- i. establishing a goal to raise \$250,000 which will be reached by:
    - developing more convenient payment plans for donors; and,
    - expanding our sources of donations and donors by more aggressively reaching out to Board members and donors; Hispanic alumni; Hispanic National Bar Associations, Texas Minority Attorneys and Houston Bar Association; law firms and corporations for sponsorship of law school events; and faculty; and,
  - ii. improving our recordkeeping and follow up with alumni and donors.
- d. We will continue to develop and maintain a library collection and provide library services to support the Law School curriculum, programs and research, as well as the research and teaching needs of its faculty, students and staff. In particular, we will:

- i. continue to increase the library's budget;
  - ii. improve access to the library's electronic resources;
  - iii. enhance the law library's service and staff quality;
  - iv. continue the establishment of a "Special Collection" and the archiving of the Carl Walker papers;
  - v. optimize access to the Law School's history by completing the digitizing of the library's clippings file and the faculty publications file; and,
  - vi. create a faculty publications database to ensure the broadest dissemination of the law faculty's scholarship.
- e. We will have an attractive and functional facility that will meet the needs of our educational and scholarly missions, and will accommodate future growth by:
- i. presenting plans to the University for the construction of a new facility to meet our needs; and
  - ii. making incremental improvements to our current facility in order to better serve our current needs, until such time as a new facility is built.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY AND NEXT STEPS**

This Plan was approved by the faculty on February 21, 2008. The Law School is in the process of developing a plan to implement these and other initiatives.

A critical step in ensuring the implementation of this plan will be the development of standards to measure the progress. Some measures are obvious and objective, such as improvements in bar passage rates, placement success, and GPA and LSAT scores. Others, such as improvements in student satisfaction, faculty scholarly productivity and overall reputation, are more subjective.

We are committed to reporting regularly to our community on our progress in implementing the plan, as measured by the standards described above. By holding ourselves and our community accountable, we will all have the incentives necessary to move forward.

This plan sets forth an exciting future. We welcome the input, comments and support of all.