

DEI Idea Incubator Lunch Series

Faculty Communities for Inclusive Teaching, 2019



PROJECT OVERVIEW

We established an Idea Incubator Lunch Series. This series was part of a broader, iterative process for improving the Law School's educational environment. Three members of the Law School faculty and administration spearheaded the process. During the 2018-19 academic year, these three people:

- met regularly with students who were concerned about issues relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Law School to understand their perspectives;
- shared the student perspectives in the idea incubator, with the goals of alerting other faculty to the students' views and brainstorming possible reforms;
- refined the ideas that were circulated in the idea incubator by working amongst themselves and in small formations with other students and faculty
- built on this process to design a new framework for improving the Law School's educational environment.

PARTICIPANTS

The three "team leaders" of the process were:



Gil Seinfeld
Associate Dean for Academic Programming
Robert A. Sullivan Professor of Law



Monica Hakimi
James V. Campbell Professor of Law
Chair, Law School's Educational
Environment Committee



Bayrex Marti
Assistant Dean for Student Life

The Idea Incubator Lunch Series was for untenured members of the Law School research faculty, on the theory that these faculty were relatively new to the enterprise and might have fresh insights to bring to bear on the issues. Seinfeld and Hakimi led the Idea Incubator discussions, which were attended by the following then-Assistant Professors of Law:



Maureen Carroll



Nicholas Cornell



Edward Fox



Nicholson Price



Gabriel Tauterberg

INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

The process of which the Ideas Incubator Lunch Series was part led to the creation of a new Educational Environment Committee (EEC) at the Law School.

- **Basic Mission:** The basic mission of the EEC is to increase the the degree to which students experience the Law School as an equitable and inclusive environment, and to ensure that students—who bring different backgrounds, identities, and perspectives—have equal opportunities to thrive. It is an institutionalized mechanism for gathering information about and proposing actionable change on structural issues affecting students' learning experience. Beyond that, the specific actions that the EEC will take this year are not yet determined because students last year expressed an interest in participating in the process for determining what the EEC will do.
- **Composition:** Because students expressed an interest in having more control over the EEC's agenda, this year's EEC is majority student-based. There are eight students and seven faculty or administrators on the EEC. The student members were selected through a process that the Law School Student Senate (a student-run organization) designed, advertised, and executed.

ACTIONS & RESOURCES

The process also contributed to a number of concrete actions and changes at the Law School. Examples include the following:

- Several students expressed frustration and even hurt over the manner in which certain discussions around gender-based violence played out in Criminal Law classes, especially because those discussions overlapped with the resurgence of Tarana Burke's "#MeToo" movement and then-Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings. To address some of these issues, Gil Seinfeld has convened a lunch talk this fall with all 1L Criminal Law professors to share reading materials and possible strategies for creating a more inclusive and supportive classroom dynamic.
- A faculty retreat on September 15, 2019 focused on discussions of stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, and unconscious bias as they manifest in the Law School's classrooms and hallways. This effort was designed to generate honest dialogue among faculty and administrators on how to create a sense of belonging for all students, given implicit prejudices and habits that might manifest in the classroom.
- In response to student feedback, the Law School has taken steps to demystify the classroom experience. For instance, this year's 1L Orientation incorporated themes of faculty-student classroom dynamics and more comprehensive peer-mentor training sessions, with the goal of defusing the unnecessary confusion that students sometimes experience in law school.