

## Diversity Statement Best Practices

1. **Read this article.** [Diversity Personal Statements - What makes for a Compelling Essay?](#)  
[NALP Jan. 2017](#)
2. **Read the eligibility requirements.** Review each employer's definition of diversity to ensure you're eligible.
3. **Research the employer.** Make sure your stated interests and goals are aligned with what the organization does. You should be able to convey why you're interested in the opportunity, what you hope to gain from the experience, and what you bring to the table.
4. **Pay close attention to deadlines and requirements.** Employers' word limits, questions, and descriptions about what to include can vary, so tailor your statement to the specific employer's requirements.
5. **Gather your thoughts (and notes).**
  - Consider how you contribute to and/or show a commitment to diversity. How do diversity and inclusion make the organization and/or legal community more effective? How have you contributed/ will you contribute to these goals?
  - Do you have a previous diversity statement? Is any of it helpful for this opportunity? Remember to consider the context. Often 1Ls and 2Ls are writing diversity statements for large firms, so something written prior to law school may need to be significantly reworked (e.g. if the prior statement shows a dedication to a public interest career.)
6. **Write a story and personal narrative.**
  - Grab the reader's attention and lead with a compelling introduction.
  - Be authentic but only disclose what you feel comfortable sharing.
  - A strong statement has a positive overall tone. Describe personal obstacles, challenges, and life experiences that have shaped your values and professional goals. Show the reader how your diverse experience has had a positive impact on your life despite any challenges.

- You might also be asked to explain how your diversity will be an asset to the organization or the legal community. Share the reasons for your commitment to inclusion and diversity in your community and workplace, along with any steps you have taken to further your commitment.
- End with how your diverse experience and/or what you've learned will make you an asset to the organization.

7. **Show rather than tell.**

- It can be helpful to think about the overall message or theme that you want to communicate and work backwards from there. For example, if you want to discuss how your diverse experience(s) has changed your perspective on work, decide on that and then think about specific situations that illustrate the impact on your work.
- As much as possible, show rather than tell the reader about your experience. Give examples of your commitment to diversity – don't just state that you are committed.

8. **Talk to advanced students who applied.**

- In fall semester OCS sponsors both a student panel ([recording here](#)) as well as a networking fair where upper-class students talk to 1Ls.
- Many students also network through their student organizations.

## **EXAMPLES OF DIVERSITY STATEMENT PROMPTS**

- Personal Statement. This scholarship helps us attract the best and brightest to the firm and supports our evolving diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. How do you envision contributing to firm substantively and culturally if you were to join our firm? Please limit to 500 words.
- (500 words) How do you envision contributing substantively and culturally if you were to join our firm?
- Demonstrate your commitment to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within your local and/or global communities.
- Prompt - a personal statement of 500 words or less addressing the following topics:
  - Your commitment to work in a particular practice area and to the city where the Firm office you are applying to work is located, and
  - How you would contribute to building a diverse work environment if you were to join Firm following graduation from law school.
- A brief (1–2 page) Personal Statement describing how you have advocated for diversity and inclusion and why it matters in the legal industry.
- A personal statement of not more than 500 words that addresses the following prompts:
  - How have your dedication and tenacity helped to bring you to this stage in your legal career?
  - How have your past experiences demonstrated a commitment to [firm]’s values (hard work, mutual respect, cooperation/collaboration, integrity and excellence in service)?
- Essay Question (maximum 500 words) - Our Firm’s core values are woven into the fabric of our culture; Deliver the best advice and client experience; Bring a spirit of partnership to everything we do; Do what is right – always; Be equitable and inclusive; Invest in our people and culture; Give back.
  - Firm’s culture is shaped by attorneys and staff at the firm who share a commitment to providing our clients with the highest-quality legal services in an environment that emphasizes integrity, teamwork, inclusion, collegiality and creativity, consistent with our core values. Describe how your personal values align with our core values, and provide examples of how your life experiences, including but limited to your academic career, would enhance the firm community and culture.



# Joseph F. Rice School of Law

## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

### *Diversity Opportunities*

Multiple organizations and employers offer scholarships and summer legal employment for law students with diverse backgrounds. While the term “diversity” is dynamic, each diversity program has their own meaning with many placing the onus on student applicants to define it.

Diversity programs range from large geographic region focused interview events to recruitment by specific law firms. The following are organizations and employers that frequently invite South Carolina Law students:

- [South Carolina Bar Association 1L Diversity Summer Clerkship Program](#)
- [ABA Business Law 2L Diversity Clerkship Program](#)
- [Leadership Council on Legal Diversity \(LCLD\) 1L Scholars Program](#)
- [Southeastern Minority Job Fair \(SEMJF\) for 2Ls & 3Ls](#)
- [Mecklenburg County Bar 2L Charlotte Legal Diversity Clerkship](#)
- [Baker Donelson 2L Diversity Scholarship](#)
- [Brooks Pierce Chief Justice Frye 1L Diversity Fellowship](#)
- [Burr Forman 1L & 2L Diversity Summer Fellowships](#)
- [Caplin & Drysdale 1L Diversity Fellowship](#)
- [Dorsey & Whitney 1L Diversity Fellowship](#)
- [Finnegan 2L Diversity Scholarship](#)
- [Fish & Richardson 1L Diversity & Inclusion Fellowship Program](#)
- [Kirkland & Ellis 2L Diversity Fellowship Program](#)
- [McAngus Goudelock & Courie Law Student Diversity Scholarship](#)
- [McKool Smith Diversity Scholarship](#)
- [Miller Nash First-Year Law Student Diversity Fellowship](#)
- [Moore & Van Allen 1L & 2L Diversity Scholars Program](#)
- [Nelson Mullins 2L Diversity Scholarship Program](#)
- [MaynardNexsen 1L Diversity Scholarship Program](#)
- [Parker Poe Diversity Program](#)
- [Robinson Bradshaw 1L & 2L Diversity Fellowship](#)
- [Twin Cities Diversity in Practice \(TCDIP\) 1L Clerkship](#)

## Diversity Statements

If you are applying for a diversity scholarship or opportunity, you may be required to submit a diversity statement, or what is often called a diversity cover letter. These terms often refer to the same document. First, carefully review the application requirements to determine what is needed and if any instructions about the diversity statement are provided. If direction is provided, make sure your diversity statement abides by the established parameters.

If no direction is provided, consider answering the following questions:

- How have you been affected by diversity?
- How have you contributed to diversity?
- How do you hope to contribute to diversity in the future?
- How has your commitment to diversity influenced your decision to attend law school, and how do you think this commitment may influence your career as an attorney?
- What is unique, special, distinctive and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details in your life (personal, family, people, or events) have shaped you or influenced your goals?

Be mindful of word/page limits, and make sure your diversity statement addresses the question(s) that are presented. Although diversity statements are meant to be more personal than other legal application materials, they are still used by employers as another example to assess your writing.

While diversity statements are often limited to one paragraph, unless prompted by the application requirements, your diversity statement should not exceed one page. Your diversity statement should be personal to you and connect the details from your life experiences to your unique perspectives and motivations.

### Sample Diversity Statement #1

I have always been an inbetweenener. I am a first-generation American of Indian descent whose parents were born in Africa. I was born in Chicago but grew up in rural South Carolina. I am a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community. I am also one of the oldest members of my class at age 34. I have gone through life never feeling like I squarely fit into any one community. I have learned to be a productive member of an array of communities that I am not fully a part of, bringing with me the perspective of the various other communities with which I engage. I enjoy connecting over similarities while learning about and celebrating differences, allowing me to be a positive, productive, collaborative member of any workspace. My host of experiences navigating various communities, often at odds with each other, allows me to always think about creative solutions to problems and identify often overlooked issues. For example, as manager of the Village Bakery and Café, I served as the mediator between the owner, baker, and cook, each from different cultural backgrounds, to produce a unique dining experience for guests. I have been humbled by the rich diversity of the human experience, incorporated the wisdom of others into my own worldview, and remain open and curious to the unknown. I now value my ability to find what I have in common

with people beyond the exterior or a label in order to build meaningful human connections that are often unlikely.

## **Sample Diversity Statement #2**

Since I was a little girl, my parents rarely discussed what made me different from my peers. Even though my parents often ignored my warm brown skin and Mexican heritage, their unspoken recognition of my identity influenced their parenting. Not wanting to disappoint me, I was never encouraged to dream big or told that I could grow up to be anything I wanted, certainly being a lawyer was out of the question. How could my parents imagine me being a lawyer when we didn't know a single lawyer who looked like me? Despite growing up without a strong self-image as a woman of color, my recent experiences have led me to understand that my own power to bring positive change by embracing differences, rather than ignoring them. Coming from a family and community that rarely discussed race or inequalities, I eagerly jumped into discussions about systemic racism, generational inequalities, and the importance of representation while in college. After countless hours discussing diversity and inclusion, I decided to put my knowledge into action through advocacy. In my senior year, I completed a primary research project to understand how students of color on campus perceived the university. To my surprise, my research actually impacted the campus. Through this experience, I understood for the first time how discussing differences, rather than ignoring them, can bring positive change for underrepresented groups. Being a woman of color in South Carolina can be tough. Like my parents, many people are reluctant to engage in honest and vulnerable conversations about our differences, but I've learned that ignoring reality cannot bring positive change, and I will always carry this understanding with me as a lawyer. Even though I grew up without knowing a lawyer who looked like me, I hope young girls can look to me, and many other women of color, to believe in their dreams and be proud of their identity. As a member of the legal community, I will always reach behind me, with both arms wide-open, and bring others along with me.

## **Sample Diversity Statement #3**

My parents taught my siblings and I that we had to work for what we wanted. Growing up with spinal muscular atrophy, a neuromuscular disease that affected my arms and legs, I felt like this was impossible and all I would be was a burden to my family. Fortunately, my parents also stressed the value of an education and frequently reminded me that I have value. I have a voice and right to speak up for myself. Although this took many years of reflection, often filled with bitterness, it was also a time of resilience. Rather than seeing my limitations, I focused on how it could serve as an asset. I learned how to be innovative and creative because the world is not always accessible to me. I chose to study genetics as an undergraduate in part to gain insights into my health issues. I decided to pursue a law degree to blend my skills from genetics with legal and social issues. To learn how to advocate not only for me, but more importantly, to step up for others with both seen and unseen disabilities.