Message from the Dean

Dear ASU Law Community:

Yesterday, President Michael Crow sent a letter to the ASU community challenging our deans, faculty, and students to outline new concepts and strategies for protecting and defending the rights of our fellow citizens. At the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, an institution dedicated to advancing the rule of law and public service, we have, and will continue, to rise to the call to make good on the law’s promise of equality and justice.

Institutions like ASU Law are powerful agents for change in our society. But it’s not by a Dean’s words or promises that we find meaningful change. It is the people who make this institution what it is – our faculty, staff, students, and alumni. We keep our institutional promise every day by educating future lawyers and leaders in the principles of this great nation and the laws that make it so. Our faculty produce extraordinary research that, literally, changes the world. Our staff work tirelessly to support our law school and broader communities in hundreds of little ways every single day. Our alumni who every day, not just now in these raw moments, strive to protect the values and rights we all hold dear. And, of course, our students who donate hundreds of thousands of hours every year in public service to make their communities stronger and more just.

As an institution, ASU Law has always been there for our community and will continue to do so now and into the future. We will continue to innovate to find new solutions for new problems, but I could not be prouder of our law school than by noting how many projects, centers, and initiatives are already in place to serve many of the needs arising out the current crisis.

We do this through the Arizona Legal Center, a free, volunteer, legal aid center that opens its doors to Arizonans in need including many directly affected by current circumstances. Our Public Health Law and Policy Center is at the forefront of developing strong public health responses for crisis like coronavirus, and has been doing so for years. Our Indian Legal Program has been at the forefront working with the Navajo Nation on Covid-19 issues and has, for decades, been a national leader on legal issues in native nations. Years ago, we established the Academy for
Justice, an important project for advancing criminal justice reform here in Arizona and across the nation. And, our First Amendment Clinic has already become one of the strongest advocates for freedom of the press and access to information in the country.

If I were designing a law school during these times, I would create these exact programs to address the kinds of issues we are facing. Being part of an institution that has already served thousands of our fellow citizens on these issues over the past few years, and to be able to lead one that will continue to educate tomorrow’s leaders by giving them direct experience in making a difference in their communities, makes me extraordinarily proud.

We will innovate. We will establish new programs, centers, research, and other initiatives to further advance the goals outlined in President Crow’s letter. But it is wonderful to know that for those currently affected you don’t need to wait for help. We don’t need to start at the ground floor.

I am proud to be part of this institution and community that have and continue to rally together – students, staff, faculty, alumni, donors, friends and family of the ASU Law community – to ensure that we help and support each other during these unprecedented times. From our amazing community that quickly mobilized to financially support our students to our faculty that ensured that all displaced students had paid externships this summer.

On behalf of the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, we thank you for everything you have done and continue to do. We are always committed to doing more, to make the education we provide our students impactful beyond the walls of our classrooms. The strength of ASU Law is in its ongoing desire to create more for our students and community, to foster an environment in which we can harness the law’s power to right society’s most serious wrongs. We have always done this. We always will.

Please stay safe and take care of yourselves and each other.

Dean Douglas Sylvester