L. Song Richardson named dean of UC Irvine law school

By Lyle Moran
Daily Journal Staff Writer

L. Song Richardson, a criminal law and procedure scholar, has been named the permanent dean of UC Irvine School of Law. She has served as interim dean since shortly after Erwin Chemerinsky, the school’s founding dean, departed earlier this year to lead UC Berkeley School of law.
The school said Richardson will be the only woman of color working as a dean at one of the top-30 law schools.
“I’m thrilled to continue to work with my fabulous colleagues here at UCI Law and to continue to be involved in the community here,” Richardson said in an interview Thursday. “I’m excited to continue to work with our students who are brilliant and amazing.”
The dean said a top priority is maintaining the school’s innovative culture, as well as carrying out its mission focused on social justice and public service. The law school is well positioned to help students grapple with technological advances in the legal industry and society, Richardson said, and poised to confront access to justice challenges.
“Our plan is to continue to redefine, reinvent and reimagine the future of legal education,” she said.
Richardson has been a member of the law school’s faculty since 2014 and was senior associate dean for academic affairs from 2016 to 2017. She will officially start a five-year term in her new post on Jan. 1. The school said Richardson was selected after a nationwide search.
UC Irvine law professor Richard L. Hasen wrote on his blog Thursday that since Chemerinsky left, the primary question about the school was, “Who can follow Erwin?”
Hasen, who was on the dean search committee, said the process revealed that Richardson was the ideal person to take the reins.
“She embodies so much of the spirit of the law school — its history of innovation, entrepreneurship, commitment to social justice, and marriage of deep scholarship and real world skills training,” Hasen wrote.
Richardson said she hopes to continue the school’s consistent enrollment growth since its inaugural class in 2009.
This fall’s first-year class was 159 students, up nearly 14 percent from the 140 matriculants a year ago, according to data UC Irvine provided to the American Bar Association.
The law school still plans to pursue its original goal of 180 first-year students, Richardson said.

UC Irvine’s bar exam performance also has been strong. The school’s first-time taker passage rate on the July 2017 California bar exam was 83 percent, the fifth best performance among the 21 American Bar Association-accredited institutions in the state.

UC Irvine School of Law is ranked 28th by U.S. News & World Report. Richardson said she has been inspired by other women in the legal profession and hopes to do the same for those rising in the ranks.

“I hope this helps them to realize that if you work hard and you dream big, wonderful things can happen,” she said.

Richardson previously was an assistant counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. The Yale Law School graduate held law professorships at DePaul University, American University, and the University of Iowa.

“Song Richardson is a brilliant scholar and inspirational leader, and we are excited that she will become the second dean of UCI Law,” UC Irvine Chancellor Howard Gillman said in a statement.

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