

The following profile appeared in the Daily Journal's "Top Women Lawyers 2018" special issue. May 2, 2018

L. Song Richardson

UC Irvine School of Law



In her first year as dean, Richardson has overseen UC Irvine School of Law's accession to No. 21 in the U.S. News & World Report rankings of top law schools, and she has big plans for the future.

"We want to continue to redefine, reimagine and re-envision legal education for the future and to tackle the big challenges facing our local national and global communities," Richardson said. "Because we're new and we're nimble and we're innovative, we are in the perfect position to do that."

UCI welcomed its largest first-year class this year with 159 students, 52 percent of whom are female and 48 percent who self-identify as a person of color. The school also welcomed its first class of master of laws degree students last August.

"One of the strengths of UCI Law is the support from the broader community," Richardson said. "We really couldn't do what we've been doing without the broader support of the community here, and they have been so welcoming to me, and they have always been so supportive of the law school."

Richardson graduated from Yale Law School interested in race and poverty and public interest and civil rights work. She practiced criminal law at Schroeter Goldmark & Bender in Seattle and also worked as a state and federal public defender before she joined academia. She taught at DePaul University College of Law, American University, Washington College of Law and University of Iowa College of Law before joining UCI in 2014.

She took over as UCI Law School's dean in January after serving as interim dean since July. Richardson is the only woman of color currently serving as dean of a top 25 law school, and she said she feels "so heartened by the incredible reception."

One of her first moves as dean was hosting a teach-in and training that honored Martin Luther King Jr., and was advertised as "a call to action for those concerned about the effects of those current government decisions at local, state, and national levels that impact civil rights; the criminal justice system; immigrants; housing; education; cybersecurity; and the rights of organizers to speak and assemble."

As the school continues to thrive in the public service arena, Richardson is working to develop closer connections with Orange County's private sector.

So far, "the reception in the community and amongst our students has been incredible," she said. The school this year began a new partnership with private companies that places students as externs in a corporate setting, with experience in the counsel's office and with the CEO.

"That's another example of the way we can tie our public service mission with the private sector here in Orange County, which is a priority," Richardson said.

She said the school also plans to be a leader in artificial intelligence and technology, “and we’ve already been successful this year in making inroads in that area, too.”

“It couldn’t be a better time to be a dean at this law school,” Richardson said.

Outside of work, Richardson is an accomplished classical pianist. She’s placed first in nine major competitions, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition.

— Meghann M. Cuniff

Daily Journal
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