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# Letter outlining new selection process for law review staff members

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# BOSTON COLLEGE

LAW SCHOOL  
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

To: Law School Community

From: John Garvey 

Date: March 12, 2008

As you may know, the Law School has undertaken an examination of how the law reviews select their membership. The question initially arose last year when a number of minority students brought attention to the fact that the current policy significantly underselects students of color for the reviews in general and for the *Boston College Law Review* in particular. I thought that this was a significantly important issue to warrant an in-depth investigation by the Publications Committee. The committee, chaired by Professor Frank Garcia, and made up of members who represented a wide range of viewpoints, worked for about a year examining our selection policy.

The committee's first step was to gather information. In the process of evaluating our selection policy it spent considerable time researching the selection processes of other law reviews. It quickly became apparent to the committee that our policy was markedly out of step with the policies maintained by almost all other law schools, both with respect to its virtually exclusive reliance on grades for membership on the *Boston College Law Review*, and its actual exclusion of grades for membership on the specialty reviews. In addition, most of these other schools had in place a structural method through which to address issues of diversity among the reviews' membership. With this in mind, the committee broadened the initial inquiry (which had been catalyzed solely by the diversity question) into a full-scale review of the school's journal selection policy, with the goal of crafting a policy that selected students who possessed the qualities most needed for the successful operation of academic journals, and one that imposed no institutional barriers to anyone in the student body.

The committee then undertook an evaluation of what qualities the journals required of their members. By consulting with the current editors in chief, the committee identified a number of desirable staff attributes: analytical acuity, willingness to work well with deadlines, strong writing ability, a capacity to master the technical aspects of producing publishable footnotes, and an aptitude for hard work. It quickly became clear

to the committee that no single evaluative method selected for all of those traits, which likely accounted for the fact that most other schools had moved away from a policy that relied on isolated factors such as GPA, on the one hand, or a score on a writing competition, on the other. Finally, the committee also concluded that the editorial process that takes place on a journal is a collaborative one, and one that is informed by those who are selected to participate in it. To that end, the committee felt that the journals would benefit from students of diverse life experiences and interests who contribute their perspectives to all aspects of the journals' operation—from article selection, to content shaping, to editorial direction. In sum, the committee determined that in order to capture the broadest range of skills and proficiency, the best practice was to select students in a variety of ways.

The committee recommended a new selection process, which was approved by the faculty at a meeting on March 10, 2008. The students achieving the 5 highest GPAs in each section will be invited to join the review of their choice. That same invitation will be extended to the students who achieve the 5 highest scores on the writing competition (based on a memo and a *Bluebook* exercise). The remaining slots on the reviews will be filled by students who attain the highest scores derived from an equation that takes into account GPA, writing competition score, and the score on a personal statement that the editors in chief can use, for example, to match up students who express a compelling interest in a specific journal's subject matter or who present a perspective that the editors feel will bring a distinctive voice to the membership. The committee also recommended a fourth avenue for membership. Any student who is not selected for a review staff at the end of first year may write a note of publishable quality under the guidance of a faculty member, either as an independent study or in conjunction with a seminar. If that note is selected for publication by one of the reviews, its writer will become a member of the review's editorial board in his or her third year.

The new law review selection policy goes into effect in May, 2008, and applies to the Class of 2010 and subsequent classes. The details of this policy will be explained with more specificity at a meeting the law reviews will hold with interested 1Ls on April 8, 2008.

I would like to thank the following members of the committee for their hard work in this study and proposal: Buzzy Baron, Sharon Beckman, Mark Brodin, Mary Ann Chirba-Martin, Frank Garcia, John Gordon, Tom Kohler, Zyg Plater and Joan Shear. The committee and the faculty as a whole recognize that this is a major departure from the procedure that had been in place previously at Boston College Law School. But because making journal membership available to a wide range of students is a vital goal, the faculty voted to institute the change as quickly as possible. The committee is also mindful of the fact that the question is a complex one, and one that requires the balancing of many competing interests. As a result the faculty agreed that the committee should monitor the process over the course of the next three years in order to insure that the new policy meets the goals that it was created to achieve.