



Education

# Minority law students to get leg up at UW, with help from ex-Gov. Gregoire



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*Corrected*

A vertical advertisement for Seattle Sounders FC. At the top, a shield-shaped logo contains the text "SOUNDERS FC" in white, "PRIORITY" in dark blue, and "LIST" in large white letters. Below the shield is the Seattle Sounders FC crest, which features a stylized soccer ball and the text "SEATTLE SOUNDERS FC". The background of the ad is a dark green with a subtle grid pattern. In the upper right corner, there is a small, semi-transparent image of a player in a grey jersey with "XBOX" visible. Below the logo, the text "SECURE YOUR SPOT TODAY!" is written in white, followed by "\$100 DEPOSIT WITH EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS" in white. At the bottom, there is a blue rounded rectangular button with the text "MORE INFO" in white.

**A new program offered by the University of Washington’s School of Law will help more minority students finish their law degrees and study for the bar exam.**

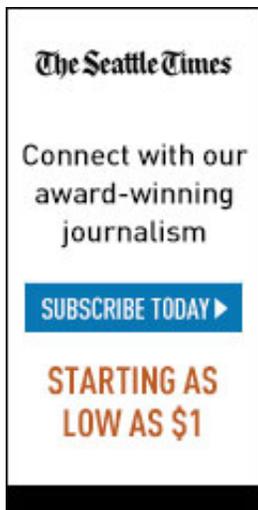
By [Katherine Long](#) 

*Seattle Times higher education reporter*

When she was Washington’s attorney general and wanted to diversify her office,

Chris Gregoire struggled to find minority lawyers to hire. Later, as governor, she faced the same problem when trying to appoint minorities to vacant judicial seats.

That's because law is one of the least diverse professions in the country.



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Only about 7.5 percent of the nation's lawyers are African-American or Hispanic/Latino, according to a recent study. Minorities are better represented in medicine, computer science and engineering — even though all those fields have been criticized for not being more diverse.

## Gregoire Fellows

**Who:** A new program that will support nine minority law students each year

**What:** Guarantees students summer fellowships at local law firms, a mentoring relationship with Chris Gregoire and help studying for the bar exam. They'll also receive UW scholarships

**When:** Begins this fall

**Why:** Aims to increase diversity in the judicial system

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To help change that, the UW is establishing the Gregoire Fellows, a new program to support nine minority law students each year, guaranteeing them summer fellowships at local law firms, and giving them a mentoring relationship with Gregoire and help studying for the bar exam. They'll also receive UW scholarships to help defray tuition costs.

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The program, which starts this fall, is a novel way to tackle the diversity problem. “There’s no program I’m aware of that connects these pieces,” said Brad Smith, Microsoft’s general counsel and executive vice president of the company’s legal and corporate affairs. Smith and UW School of Law Dean Kellye Testy designed the program.

“We’re excited about doing something that has not been done,” Smith said.

The UW law school routinely admits many minority students who don’t enroll, Testy said. Some change their minds about going into law, while others are snatched away by top schools like Stanford or Harvard. The Gregoire Fellows, she said, will help make the UW law program more appealing.

The law school is prohibited, under a voter-approved initiative, I-200, from using race or gender to grant preferential treatment. And Testy said that has hampered the UW’s efforts to attract minority candidates — in part, she said, because it sends a message that Washington does not welcome diversity.

The UW’s law school is the only public law school in Washington and has an enrollment of about 750, including students in graduate programs and specialized areas of law. About 28 percent of those students are minorities. But most of those minority students are Asian, Testy said, and there’s a dearth of African-American, Latino and American Indian students.

Minorities made up only 12 percent of the Washington State Bar Association’s

membership in 2012.



The diversity gap in the legal profession has worsened in recent years, according to a [study](#) commissioned by Microsoft. And that’s an issue because “lawyers have a unique role in democracy — to make sure people’s rights are protected,” Smith said.

Smith, who is white, is the chair of the [Leadership Council on Legal Diversity](#), an organization of 220 of the nation’s corporate chief legal officers and law-firm partners.

Gregoire said the small numbers of minority lawyers not only made it difficult to appoint minority judges but affects society in other ways, too.

“You don’t have to be a lawyer to be a governor — but, boy, it came in handy,” Gregoire said. “It’s one of those kinds of degrees that can be used in a wide range of professions.”

Gregoire taught a class this past fall while serving as a fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and enjoyed the work. When Smith and Testy asked her to be a mentor, she thought it would be a perfect fit and said she’s “unbelievably humbled” that the fellowship program was named after her.

Smith noted that earning a license to practice law can be tough because the bar exam

requires months of concentrated study; most successful applicants take a bar-preparation course, which runs about \$5,000, an expense the Gregoire Fellows program will pay for. And the summer fellowships will help students make connections with local legal firms, as well as earn good pay.



The program is supported by a who's who of Seattle companies and law firms: contributors include Microsoft, Amazon, Nintendo, Starbucks, Vulcan, Weyerhaeuser and Seattle Genetics, and the law firms Davis Wright Tremaine, Foster Pepper, K & L Gates and Perkins Coie, among others.

In recent years, some studies have questioned whether it's a good idea to even go to law school. It's an expensive career path, and many newly graduated students have had trouble finding jobs.

"You can always debate whether the country needs more lawyers," Smith acknowledged, but added, "The country always needs more great lawyers, and the country definitely needs more diverse lawyers. Hopefully this program will help us educate great, diverse lawyers who will serve the country and profession well."

#### *Corrections:*

*Information in this article, originally published April 15, 2015, was corrected April 15, 2015. A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that the Gregoire fellows program was open only to black and Latino students. It is open to all unrepresented*

*minorities.*

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