

SUZETTE M. MELÉNDEZ

smmelend@syr.edu

LEGAL AND ACADEMIC LEADER

Accomplished legal professional and higher education leader advancing academic initiatives, teaching and mentoring students in coursework/litigation while assisting the strategic direction of the university and law school. *Over 20 years of experience advocating for and defending the rights of individuals within communities, particularly marginalized, communicating the value of inclusivity, and educating, as well as mentoring, future lawyers. Collaborate with other community stakeholders in all areas of practice including public interest law, private practice and government as well as other innovative platforms leveraged within the legal profession.*

Recognized as a thought leader and passionate change agent who is a team player, agile negotiator and strategic collaborator. Created, launched, and managed several successful interdisciplinary initiatives to enhance the educational experiences of all students as well as benefit under-served persons in community. *Strong record of achievement using sound judgment, communications skills, and developing best practices while effectively coaching individual development to build cohesive teams.*

Lawyer – Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility Leader
Professor – Collaborator - Adviser

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University

2002 - Present

Co-Director, Syracuse Medical Legal Partnership

(Present; 2005 - 2012)

Co-founder and co-director of collaboration of lawyers and doctors designed to improve health outcomes by addressing intervening legal issues that obstruct health and/or treatment. Currently designing 2.0 partnership that will provide law students the opportunity to work on legal issues and develop policies to improve health experiences and outcomes.

- ◆ Assisted low-income families access to legal services and financial benefits necessary to meet their basic needs through collaborative legal advocacy.
- ◆ Trained medical health providers to identify patients with health-related legal needs for referral to the Children's Rights and Family Law Clinic.
- ◆ Provided patients general legal information as preventative legal care to enable better-informed decisions and improve health outcomes.
- ◆ Assisted in curriculum development of and lectured at Child Health and Policy course taught by a bioethicist at the partnering hospital.
- ◆ Presented at national medical-legal partnership conferences.

College of Law Teaching Professor, Family Law

(Spring 2017 - Present)

- ◆ Teach Family Law
- ◆ Provided in-depth faculty supervision of student scholarship

- ◆ Lecture on Cross Cultural Lawyering seminars
- ◆ Helped develop course syllabi for additional course options made available as part of curriculum

Faculty Fellow – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Academic Affairs (Jan 2023 – June 2024)

Appointed by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Office of Strategic Initiatives in Academic Affairs to strategize and lead several DEIA initiatives across the University and community, as well as advance various aspects of the University's Academic Strategic Plan. Support, develop, and facilitate programs for faculty of color recruitment and retention. Provide leadership and guidance for university-wide strategy for HBCU/MSI collaborations and partnerships. Conduct research, analyze and prepare policy and recommendations on DEIA related priorities, leadership structures, and topics across schools and colleges. Participate in leadership searches across campus.

- ◆ Developed and supported opportunities for faculty and staff development in DEIA.
- ◆ Promoted and supported operational leadership and programming for faculty and staff affinity groups.

***Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
College of Law***

(Aug 2021 - Dec 2022)

Led the creation and implementation of the College of Law's diversity and inclusion initiatives that advance the core values for the college and adjacent community. Served as leader, advisor, and subject matter expert advancing principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility to cultivate an optimal learning environment and where all members also experience belonging thereby contributing to common goals and tracking progress towards success. Provided leadership and mentorship to students, faculty and staff.

Planned initiatives and professional development opportunities for the entire community to promote an inclusive and equitable environment to combat racism and other bias and to elevate legal skills and proficiency. Guided faculty to help create inclusive classrooms recognizing the importance of diversity of thought, culture and learning styles in the classroom.

- ◆ Developed and implemented inaugural diversity pipeline program with 3 HBCU undergraduate institutions designed to recruit under-represented students to the legal field.
- ◆ Developed a summer residency program to expose HBCU undergrads to the rigors and benefits of pursuing legal education at SU and support them in the process.

Assisted in planning and implementation of alumni engagement initiatives that reward the accomplishments of our alumni and enhance ongoing engagement with current students. Represented the law school in state-wide judicial Access to Justice Committee and corresponding subcommittees.

- ◆ Chair, College of Law Inclusion Council designed to advance and promote our DEIA core values.
 - Implemented graduation requirement for each student to satisfy 2-credit DEIA requirement commencing with the Fall 2024 class.
 - Monitored implementation of courses to be designated as satisfying our new cultural competency course requirement for all law students.
 - Provided professional development opportunities for faculty, staff and students.
- ◆ Faculty Affiliate, Intergroup Dialogue for Law Student Bar Association Leaders – Together with Intergroup Dialogue Program collaborators, developed and facilitated transformative dialogue initiative focusing on the law profession, practice preparation, working towards collaborative and meaningful change. Furthered initiative goal to work towards increased understanding of social identities in the context of systems of inequality; explore impact at personal, interpersonal,

community, cultural, institutional, and societal levels; and practice dialogue skills toward identifying leadership actions to address social justice issues.

Teaching Professor & Director of Children's Rights and Family Law Clinic (2003 - 2022)

Led and managed the year-round clinic representing children and families at the federal, state and administrative agency levels. Represent clients together with student teams as primary case handlers providing high-level supervision in matters of custody, private adoption, child support, domestic violence, divorce, and issues affecting marginalized communities of limited financial means. Taught student attorneys litigation skills including client interviewing, discovery methods, case strategy, trial preparation and ethical considerations in the quality representation of clients as well as how systems can affect those with lesser privilege and resources.

- ◆ Created intake and case review procedures to effectively manage cases and provide high-quality representation to clients.
- ◆ Developed case management procedures for review and guidance of student case work such as letter drafts, court documents, file memos, and memoranda of law.
- ◆ Supervised Immigration Fellow pursuant to Americorps/Equal Justice Works Grant aimed at enlarging immigration legal representation in the Central New York region.
- ◆ Infused mediation practice into clinic offerings to provide parties with access to alternative dispute resolution model and provide additional professional experience to student attorneys.

Latin American Law Student Association (LALSA) - Faculty Advisor (2004 - Present)

- ◆ Co-Coach, Hispanic National Bar Association Uvaldo Herrera Moot Court Competition
- ◆ Support Alumni Panel of LALSA/BLSA alum
- ◆ Support of Diversity Week Events led by student organization leaders.
- ◆ Counsel student leaders on their effectiveness within student organization; cultivate professionalism and communication with faculty, senior staff, alumni and other professionals.
- ◆ Provide academic counseling and advise students on career paths and pro bono activities.

College of Law Family Law Society – Faculty Advisor (2010 - Present)

- ◆ Provide guidance to the Executive Board and rest of membership regarding activities within the law school and greater community both in private and public sector to highlight importance of and interest in family law issues and in family law as a profession.

University Senator (2016 –2024)

- ◆ Chair, Committee on Race, Ethnicity, Equity and Inclusion.
- ◆ Member of University Senate which is the governing body of administration, faculty, staff and graduate students for Syracuse University.
- ◆ Member of University Senate Diversity Committee to review, make recommendations, provide support, leadership and advocacy for University policies, practices and programs regarding diversity. Committee consults on matters relating to traditionally under-represented groups in enrollment, staffing, equal opportunity and access, and grievance procedures.

Academic Leadership for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (2021 – present)

- ◆ Co-chaired university-wide group comprising of 17 diversity leads across campus to drive university-wide DEIA efforts during 2021-2022 academic year.
 - Revised the mission and vision statement of this resource group highlighting ongoing work and accomplishments. Original member of group started in 2018 under different name.
 - Implemented process to establish common core roles of university DEIA leaders and to develop dashboard model for proper evaluation and assessment of academic DEIA efforts.

Syracuse University Task Force on Sexual and Relationship Violence (Present; 2015 - 2018)

Council on Diversity and Inclusion (Present)

Women in Leadership Initiative (2023-2024)

College of Law Faculty Director on Inclusion Initiatives (2018 - 2021)

- ◆ Chair, Committee on Inclusion Initiatives. Developed new committee. Prioritized professional development opportunities for faculty, staff and students
- ◆ Drove implementation and debrief of Diversity & Inclusion Faculty Workshop
- ◆ Supported Inclusion Network of Law Alumni of Color
- ◆ Member, Syracuse University Inclusive Leadership Assembly led by Chief Diversity Officer
- ◆ Facilitated group for campus-wide implementation of Diversity & Inclusion Workshop
- ◆ Member, SU Disability-Academic Accessibility Faculty Diversity Workshop
- ◆ Member, New York State Judiciary Permanent Commission on Access to Justice
- ◆ Member, New York State Judiciary Diversity Pipeline Initiative
- ◆ Syracuse University College of Law Annual Diversity Law Day involving area high schools

Syracuse Public Interest Network, Member of Selection Committee (2010 - 2019)

- ◆ Actively supported and advised student-led initiative designed to promote public interest summer employment opportunities for students pursuing public interest career path or active pro bono roles. Engaged in award determinations for applicants seeking fellowships toward summer experiences.

Search Committee Experience

- ◆ Lender Center Director Search Committee (Present)
- ◆ Judicial Screening Coalition for Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, NY (April 2023)
- ◆ University Exec Director of Intercultural Engagement (Nov 2022)
- ◆ University Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion (Aug 2021)
- ◆ University Chief Diversity Officer (Aug 2018 - Dec 2018)

Chancellor's Work Group on Diversity and Inclusion (Summer 2015 - Spring 2016)

**Academic Strategic Plan Implementation Oversight Committee
Subcommittee Co-Chair** (2015 - 2016)

Adjunct Professor (Fall 2002)

Taught domestic violence applied learning course which analyzed case law and other materials applicable to the representation of these cases. Conducted simulated exercises designed to develop skills for proper representation of domestic violence victims. Led class discussions relating to child protection issues and women and the law.

Legal Services of New Jersey 1999 - 2000

Supervisor

Established and led a cohesive team of three representing domestic violence victims in all stages of family law. Maintained and litigated own caseload. Managed and restructured project's operations including intake, case acceptance, community outreach and pro se assignment of counsel. Increased the project's visibility as a statewide resource engaged in state-wide domestic violence policy work with other organizations and service providers including police departments in best practices. Conducted training sessions for attorneys regarding key legislation, caselaw and trial strategy.

Essex-Newark Legal Services**1993 - 1999****Staff Attorney**

Serviced indigent of Essex County, NJ in all areas of family law. Represented clients in domestic violence, matrimonial proceedings and parental rights matters in all aspects of litigation. Participated in educational outreach to court personnel, community organizations and local police. Engaged in policy work on issues affecting Legal Services clientele at various levels including county domestic violence working groups, local bar associations, New Jersey State Bar Association and Essex Vicinage Committee on Minority Concerns.

The Legal Aid Society - Civil Division**1989 - 1993****Staff Attorney**

Represented low-income clients in landlord/tenant proceedings and in public benefit entitlements. Wrote and argued motions and conducted trials in Civil Court and perfected appeals to Appellate Term. Affirmative litigation included Article 78 proceedings commenced in State Supreme Court. Represented clients on issues involving education, student loans and utilities.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

- ◆ Connecticut Attorney General's Office – Division of Education, Handicapped, and Youth - Researched and wrote legal briefs
- ◆ U.S. Federal District Court, Second Circuit - Federal Magistrate Thomas P. Smith – Clerk

EDUCATION

J.D. University of Connecticut School of Law

B.A. Binghamton University - State University of New York

BAR ADMISSION

New York and New Jersey

AFFILIATIONS/MEMBERSHIPS

National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

2021- Present

New York State Indigent Legal Services Board, Member

2018 - Present

Appointed by New York State governor to oversee operations of the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services established to address profound service gaps in the quality of legal representation afforded to indigent persons primarily in criminal matters and parental representation matters in Family Court. Oversee the distribution of State funds targeted at counties for criminal defense representation pursuant to Hurrell-Harring Settlement which include counsel at arraignment, caseload relief, quality training and support for 18-B attorneys. Board is also responsible to review data regarding the criteria and procedures used to determine eligibility for free legal representation.

Arriba Committee of the Puerto Rican Bar Association **2021 - Present**
Vice-Chair **2023 - Present**

Committee formed to support the Latine legal community, to identify and promote opportunities for placement and advancement of Latine attorneys within all arenas of the legal profession, promote diversity through community support, professional development, lectures and continuing legal education programs. Designed to build and sustain a community of Latine legal professionals through community programs to educate, support, and recruit young professionals, college and law students to opportunities in Central New York.

Central New York Women's Bar Association, Syracuse NY **2023 - Present**
Board Member **2015 - Present**
Member

Onondaga County Bar Association **2010 - Present**
 Active member of the Diversity & Inclusion Subcommittee involved in programming as well as developing internship opportunities for diverse law students in summer and academic year internships. Hosted programs to expand the DEIA focus across the Onondaga County legal community.

Friends of the Central Library, Board Member **2023 - Present**

Onondaga County Human Rights Commission, Commissioner. **2016 - 2019**
 Commissioner serves as part of the County's coordination for its non-discrimination policies under Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Focus on identifying and addressing prejudice and discrimination on the basis of color, creed, sex, age, religion, nationality/national origin, language used for communication, disability, gender issues, and sexual orientation. Provide information, education and referral about the county's policies and complaint procedures when someone has been wrongly denied access to the county's programs/services or discriminated against by a county employee.

Nosotros Radio, Inc (Our Latino Voice)
 2011 Community Excellence Award

Manlius Pebble Hill School Board of Trustees – VP / Secretary **2010 - 2016**
 Helped to restore independent, private school to financial viability during crucial period in the school's history as well as conducted search of and appoint new head of school

Boys and Girls Club of Syracuse Board **2010 - 2014**

Interests

Reading, Music, Scuba Diving, Physical Fitness, Dance