

Diversity: New ways to solve old problems

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Harvard University law professor Lani Guinier, the first African American woman to be appointed to a tenured professorship at that law school, speaks in the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall on the uptown campus. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

The goal of diversity is coming up with new ways to solve old problems, civil rights attorney and Harvard law professor Lani Guinier told an audience at Tulane University on Wednesday (Oct. 1).

At a lecture commemorating the 50th anniversary of the university's desegregation, [Guinier](#) underscored the relevance of diversity in higher education and the systemic barriers that must be broken down to achieve greater diversity. She is the Bennett

Boskey Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and is the first African American woman to be appointed to a tenured professorship at that school.

“Higher education must emphasize teaching people with different experiences and backgrounds how they can work together to solve difficult problems,” Guinier said, adding that too often in the U.S., individual freedoms are more important than collective freedoms and capabilities.

Before Guinier taught at Harvard, she was a tenured professor at the University of Pennsylvania, where she had a student who wanted to explore why female law students who had similar LSAT scores to their male counterparts did not perform as well in school.

Under Guinier's mentorship, the law student created a seminar with a student-led curriculum, empowering them to collaborate and invest in the course material. She said this was an example of the effectiveness of student collaboration, and how this could have a broader impact outside the classroom.

Guinier also discussed how SAT scores are utilized as a measure of individual merit and, consequently, of future success. She noted the large sums parents sometimes spend trying to get their children into college, and that a highly competitive admission system inherently limits college access for specific groups of students.

“Competition to be the best is not necessarily the most effective problem-solving method,” she said.

Her talk, entitled “Wealth, Merit, Class, Race and Higher Education,” was hosted by a group of Tulane organizations including the Office for Multicultural Affairs, African and African Diaspora Studies, and the Newcomb College Institute.

Hannah Dean is a sophomore majoring in Latin American studies and political science at Tulane University.

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