MEMORANDUM

November 20, 2019

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FROM: Kristina M. Johnson, Chancellor
SUBJECT: Degree Authorization for the State University of New York at Buffalo

Action Requested

The proposed resolution authorizes the State University of New York at Buffalo to offer the Doctor of the Science of Law degree, subject to approval by the New York State Board of Regents.

Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Resolved that the Chancellor be, and hereby is, directed to seek the authorization of the New York State Board of Regents for the State University of New York at Buffalo to confer the Doctor of the Science of Law degree.

Background

Approval of this resolution will authorize the State University of New York at Buffalo (UB) to confer the Doctor of the Science of Law (J.S.D.) degree, subject to approval by the New York State Board of Regents. Degree authorization is necessary as the award represents UB’s and SUNY’s first research doctorate in law.

The proposed J.S.D. degree will build upon existing programs in UB’s School of Law, including the Doctor of Law (J.D., 1887), the Master of Laws (LL.M., 2003), and the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B., 2018). The proposed program will also leverage the resources of UB’s Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, the Criminal Law Center, the Human Rights Center, the Cross-Border Legal Studies Center, and the Jaeckle Center for Law, Democracy and Governance. UB would be the first public institution in NYS to offer the J.S.D. to students.

The J.S.D. degree is the doctoral-level degree for practice in legal research. The proposed J.S.D. degree will prepare students who have already earned an LL.M. degree as well as either a J.D. or an LL.B. degree to conduct substantial legal scholarship. Students will address legal issues from theoretical, comparative, topical and interdisciplinary policy perspectives. Students will
explore law in its social context from a comparative perspective, understand the different schools of prominent legal theory, apply these theoretical approaches to the analysis of legal problems and institutions; understand and critically assess the full range of modern research methods used in legal scholarship, and identify and master those methods. After graduation, students will be prepared to fill positions at international law schools and on the staff of global organizations such as the United Nations.

The proposed J.S.D. program builds on the strengths of UB’s highly interdisciplinary faculty known for their comparative study of civil litigation, criminal law and regulation, as well as international human rights, trade, and environmental laws. UB faculty are experienced in explicating legal doctrine, theory, process, and institutions and in applying interdisciplinary research approaches to law, including anthropological, historical, literary, philosophical, political and sociological approaches. Approximately one-half of the UB faculty have significant experience and research engagement in international and transnational law and institutions.

The UB Law School plans for an international recruitment program with growth to a steady state of 12 students by year five. The J.S.D. will be attractive to international students, many of whom cannot acquire the training and credentials required for academic appointment in their own countries. In this sense, the program’s success will help diversify the global legal academy. The proposed program will give students the deep domain knowledge skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex global environment.

Once operational, the proposed program will be reviewed by the American Bar Association, as per its Standards for Approval of Law School. External evaluators celebrated the proposed program for its rigorous and high-quality academic experience and its “highly regarded faculty.” Evaluators praised the proposed curriculum saying “the proposed program is of extremely high quality and rigor and will offer an excellent program of study for its intended student base.”

Offering a J.S.D. program fits well with the mission and strategic priorities of the University at Buffalo and SUNY to raise the academic profile of graduate students, while strengthening its international presence. The development of a J.S.D. program will provide students and faculty with additional opportunities to engage with international and national communities through legal scholarship.

The program has been carefully reviewed and found to be sound, both academically and financially.