MEMORANDUM

TO: Council of the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar

FROM: Judith Areen, Executive Director

SUBJECT: AALS Activities Report

This report summarizes the major activities of the AALS through July 2017.

We extend our thanks to the Council and your Chair, Gregory Murphy, Chair-elect, Dean Maureen A. O’Rourke, and Managing Director of Accreditation and Legal Education, Barry Currier, for your willingness to work with the AALS on issues of common concern to our organizations and constituencies.

Administration and Organization

AALS Immediate-Past President Kellye Y. Testy has started her new position as President and CEO of LSAC and has transitioned off of the AALS Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee has issued a new Statement of Good Practices on Gender Identity and Expression in July as part of a review of all of the Statements of Good Practice. The Statements are designed to assist member schools in complying with the AALS Bylaws and Executive Committee Regulations.

Before the JD Project

AALS is working with Gallup, Inc. to conduct “Before the JD,” a national study intended to identify factors contributing to the decision to apply to law school, or not. The centerpiece of “Before the JD” will be a national survey, which will be fielded this fall to approximately 3,000 undergraduate students who are likely to consider graduate and professional school as well as roughly 1,000 first-year law students. The project will also include a small number of focus groups, two of which have already been conducted to help inform the
survey questionnaire design. Other focus groups will be conducted after the survey is complete in order to explore a few particular questions in depth.

The survey questionnaire, which is being tested, has been designed in collaboration with representatives from study sponsors American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, American Bar Foundation, AccessLex Institute, National Association of Law Placement, and Law School Admissions Council. An advisors group composed of individuals who have expertise on this topic also met in April and provided feedback on the survey. Members of the group include Bryant Garth, Ronit Denovitzer, Debra Hensler, Ajay Mehrotra and Jerome Organ. Throughout the summer, the Gallup team will be recruiting institutions and law schools to participate in this study and many have signed up already.

Communications

The AALS Communications Department has created an email subscription for the public to receive a weekly news compilation that contains articles about legal education, the legal profession, and other issues related to higher education. The service is available at https://www.aals.org/news/legal-education/. You can sign up for emails on the right-hand side of the page.

The association is working on the second survey of pro bono hours contributed by law students and expects to have the results sometime in fall 2017. The survey will primarily report on the hours contributed by the Class of 2017 and all JD students enrolled during the 2016-17 school year. The Communications Department also continues to find examples of innovative programs and outstanding teaching for the website and share the many dynamic activities of our member schools, students and faculty on our news archive and on social media.

Connecting with the Bar and Bench

At the 2016 and 2017 Annual Meetings, a coffee event was held for leaders from the New York and Bay Area bar and bench. They were also invited to attend any other meeting sessions held that day without charge.

The association is in the process of organizing the 3rd bar and bench reception at the 2018 Annual Meeting in San Diego. We have had discussions with several San Diego bar associations as well as the local chapter of Association of Corporate Counsel to solicit their suggestions on the best way to engage the legal community. Members of the bar and bench will be invited again to attend one day of the Annual Meeting. Through these ongoing efforts, we hope to build better bridges between the academy and the bar and bench.

Development

Twelve major firms (Arnold & Porter, Covington & Burling, Cravath, K&L Gates, Proskauer, O’Melveny & Myers, Paul Weiss, Sidley Austin, Sullivan & Cromwell, Wachtell, Williams & Connolly, and WilmerHale) and three corporate counsel offices (Clorox, Microsoft,
and Starbucks) have provided support thus far to AALS as part of the AALS Project in Support of Legal Education, launched in 2014.

Meetings

The last three months have been quite active for AALS Meetings. We hosted the Conference on Clinical Legal Education in Denver in May and the New Law Teachers Workshop in Washington, D.C. in June. In addition, a Midyear Meeting, sponsored by the Section on Criminal Justice, was held in June at American University Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C. This was the first meeting held under a new format where a Section that wants to hold a Midyear Meeting can partner with an AALS Member School to host the meeting. The new model seeks to reduce costs, as well as the length of time it typically takes to organize the meeting.

AALS has made the decision to relocate the 2018 Conference on Clinical Legal Education from Austin, Texas, to Chicago, Illinois. It will be held there on April 29 to May 2, 2018. AALS has decided to make the move, and will not hold any other meetings in Texas because of actions by the legislature (SB-4 and the proposed SB-6) to discriminate against individuals seeking to immigrate to the United States and against members of the LGBTQ community.

Our decisions were not made lightly, and withdrawing from the clinical conference in Texas comes at a substantial financial cost to the association. Many of our member law schools have clinical programs that serve individuals seeking to immigrate to the United States or members of the LGBTQ community. AALS is concerned about the impact these laws will have on the non-discrimination and due process rights of individuals in violation of the association’s core values. AALS Bylaws specifically prohibit “discrimination or segregation on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender (including identity and expression), sexual orientation, age, or disability.”

The 2018 AALS Annual Meeting will be held in San Diego, California, from January 3 to January 6, 2018. AALS President Paul Marcus has chosen “Access to Justice” as the theme of his presidency and of the 2018 Annual Meeting. According to Professor Marcus, the theme serves as a way for AALS to “share the stories of the dedicated students and faculty members across the United States who diligently pursue the goal of equal justice for all by providing sorely needed legal representation.”

AALS continues to work on keeping costs down for Annual Meeting attendees, and on improving the experience of those attending the Annual Meeting. As with the 2016 and 2017 meetings, AALS will provide a 50 percent discount on the meeting fee at the 2018 AALS Annual Meeting for new faculty (those in their first three years of teaching) and for retired faculty.

The next meeting on the association’s calendar is the AALS Faculty Recruitment Conference, November 2-4, in Washington, D.C.
Sections

The Association continues to improve services to our sections, including website support, and encouraging activities throughout the year. The Executive Committee just approved the 102nd section, the AALS Section on Empirical Study of Legal Education and the Legal Profession, at their July meeting. The section will bring together faculty interested in engaging in the empirical study of legal education and provide a forum for communication, programing, scholarship, and other activities on the issue.

The association has also launched a “Section of the Year” award to recognize excellence in member support and other activities that promote AALS Core Values. The inaugural award will be given at the 2018 AALS Annual Meeting in San Diego.