



Association of American Law Schools

January 23, 2018

MEMORANDUM

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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 mid-January 2018.

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

Overview

Over the last few years, AALS staff have worked to improve the quality of services we provide to section chairs and members because sections are central to improving both teaching and scholarship in the legal academy. They are also the primary contact most faculty have with the Association. Our 103 sections have more than 9,000 law school faculty and professional staff as members.

In November, the Executive Committee approved the establishment of a new Section on Leadership. The goals of the section are to promote scholarship, teaching and related activities to help lawyers and law students serve in leadership roles. Deborah Rhode (Stanford), a former president of AALS, will serve as the first chair of the section.

In addition, the sections page on the AALS website now includes an on-line library of member resources that is easily accessible by section officers and members. The goal of all these changes has been to minimize paperwork for section chairs, and to encourage them to develop programs that will increase the quality of scholarship and teaching in their field—or fields—of interest.

The Association continues to showcase the innovations and accomplishments of member law schools through expanded content on our website, in our quarterly newsletter, and on social media. The goal is to inform policymakers, leaders of the bar and bench, the media, prospective law students, and the general public about the state of modern legal education and the value of a law degree.

New Executive Committee Members

Wendy Collins Perdue, Dean at University of Richmond School of Law, began serving as president of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) after delivering her inaugural address at the final meeting of the AALS House of Representatives at the AALS Annual Meeting in San Diego.

Dean Perdue takes over from 2017 AALS President Paul Marcus, Haynes Professor of Law at William & Mary Law School, who has transitioned to Immediate Past President on the AALS Executive Committee.

At the same meeting, the AALS House of Representatives confirmed three new members of the AALS Executive Committee for three year terms starting in 2018. Vicki Jackson, the Thurgood Marshall Professor of Constitutional Law at Harvard Law School was elected to be President-elect. Jackson recently completed a three-year term on the Executive Committee and is well-prepared to serve as an officer during these challenging times for legal education. Mark C. Alexander, Dean and Professor of Law at Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law, and Gillian Lester, Dean and Lucy G. Moses Professor of Law at Columbia Law School, were elected to be new members of the Executive Committee.

Darby Dickerson, Dean and Professor of Law at The John Marshall Law School and Avi Soifer, Dean, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law, have now completed their three-year terms on the AALS Executive Committee.

The Before the JD (BJD) Project

Much progress has been made in the Before the JD project over the last few months. Through a national survey and focus groups, the goal of the Project is to understand why interest in legal education has been declining despite steady or increasing interest in medicine, engineering, and other professions. We will also study what are the primary sources of information and advice about law and legal education used by college students.

The survey was designed by AALS, Gallup, sponsoring organizations including the ABA Section, AccessLex, LSAC, and NALP, and a panel of academics with expertise in empirical studies. The goal of the survey is to tell us when and how undergraduates decide on whether to go to graduate or professional school, as well as what sources of information and advice are most important to them.

Gallup was selected as the firm to conduct the research survey and focus groups associated with the project. In October, Gallup sent the on-line survey to thousands of students at schools that were selected to constitute a representative national survey, and that agreed to participate in the survey. Our target was to have at least 3,000 undergraduates, and 1,000 first year law students respond. We received responses from more than 20,000 undergraduates, and from 2,500 law students. The number of participating schools and students has exceeded expectations, which will make the data more useful.

Gallup completed the survey in December. Staff at AALS and Gallup are in the process of sorting through the data to determine follow-up activities and identifying key results.

AALS Annual Meeting

The 112th Annual Meeting was held in San Diego January 3-6, 2018, at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina. AALS President Paul Marcus selected “Access to Justice” as the theme of his Presidency and the meeting and several sessions focused on various aspects of the theme including the opening plenary session.

A coffee event was held for leaders from the local bar and bench to meet with law school deans and to help to build better bridges with the academy. Many members of the bar also attended meeting sessions held that day per our invitation. Planning has already started to hold a similar event with the local bar and bench at the 2019 Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

AALS also held a full day of programming for deans only on Friday, January 5 with the theme of “Effective Deaning.” More than 140 law school deans were in attendance for the program.

AALS Pro Bono Survey

AALS in 2017 conducted its second annual survey to report how much law schools collectively contribute to the delivery of much-needed legal services through clinics, other experiential courses, and pro bono activities of law students. Ninety-four law schools reported that 18,411 law students in the graduating class of 2017 contributed more than 3.39 million hours in legal services as part of their legal education—an average of about 184 hours per student. Independent Sector, a nonprofit organization coalition, estimates the value of this volunteer time to be \$24.14 an hour. Using this number, the total value of the students’ time is estimated to be in excess of \$81.8 million. A comprehensive report on the survey is available on the AALS website.

Projects with LSAC

In January, the Law School Admission Council and AALS announced a new partnership on several projects of benefit to prospective law students, to law schools, and to the rule of law that will launch in the coming year. One is a new joint effort will be an integrated digital strategy for better communicating with prospective law students before and during college, when they may first be considering pursuing an advanced degree. The project will include the development of multiple web-based and social media initiatives to leverage both organizations' substantial platforms to reach a wider audience of prospective students and others interested in law. The two organizations will also work together to enhance support for prelaw advisors at colleges and universities around the United States as part of a project aimed at improving available resources for prelaw advisors and their students.