MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Judith Areen, Executive Director, Association of American Law Schools

SUBJECT: AALS Activities Report

Thank you to the Council and your Chair, Diane Bosse, Chair-elect, The Hon. Scott Bales, and Managing Director of Accreditation and Legal Education, Bill Adams, for your willingness to work with AALS on issues of importance to our organizations and shared constituencies.

This report summarizes the major activities of the AALS from May to July 2020.

AALS Annual Meeting

Given the risks posed by COVID-19, and considering feedback gathered from faculty and deans across the country, AALS has decided to hold the 2021 AALS Annual Meeting in a virtual format rather than in person. While we are disappointed that we will not be able to meet in San Francisco, we are excited about the opportunities for innovation that a virtual format provides without the need for travel or hotel arrangements.

In pursuit of greater accessibility for more diverse groups within legal academia, we are offering a school registration rate in addition to an individual registration for the 2021 meeting. This one-time fee structure will enable all faculty and administrators from participating schools to attend any of the meeting’s sessions.

The 2021 Annual Meeting will be held on the same dates previously scheduled under AALS President Darby Dickerson’s theme, “The Power of Words.”
Law Deans Antiracist Clearinghouse Project

In June, AALS launched the Law Deans Antiracist Clearinghouse Project, a new webpage for law deans, faculty, and the public that contains resources and information related to addressing racism and police reform to help develop remedies to these complex issues. The webpage is curated by five Black women law deans: Danielle M. Conway (Penn State Dickinson Law), Danielle Holley-Walker (Howard Law), Kimberly Mutcherson (Rutgers Law), Angela Onwuachi-Willig (Boston University Law), and Carla D. Pratt (Washburn University Law).

The website also serves as a collective voice from the leadership of the legal academy in condemning racism. Statements that law school deans have sent to their communities after the death of George Floyd and the following protests have been archived as part of the website and continue to be added to the website.

Support for Law Schools During the Pandemic

AALS has been working hard to support law schools in new ways given the challenges that legal education is facing during the pandemic.

AALS and LSAC have been holding a weekly video conference for law school deans, called the “Deans Dialogue,” to keep them connected and current on developments during the pandemic. Bill Adams has presented each week, providing important updates from the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Leaders from AccessLex, NALP, and NCBE have also presented and provided timely updates. The deans have also heard from university presidents and provosts who previously served as law school deans to provide the perspective of college leadership. Each week, three different law school deans also share their experiences and perspectives. In July, the video conference changed to a bi-weekly schedule.

AALS has maintained a section on how the pandemic is affecting law schools for its weekly legal education news and blogs digests. The digests also include advice and resources for online teaching, which can also be found on a new section of the AALS website at www.aals.org/news/remote-instruction.

AALS also added a new page to its website titled “Legal Education in the Time of COVID-19” at www.aals.org/covid19. The page contains documents, resources, and information related to legal education and the legal profession to help law faculty, students, and staff plan for classes and operations through the pandemic. The page also contains reports from legal education related organizations including the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The page is regularly maintained and updated.
Many of the Association’s 103 sections have been actively sharing ideas on their listservs and holding webinars for their membership. Leaders of the sections now have more control over the materials they can post, and their members have easier access to materials without the need to log in thanks to AALS technology upgrades. AALS also created a new page that hosts previous and upcoming webinars and programming from sections on its website at www.aals.org/sections/events.

AALS Meetings

As with many large spring events across the country, AALS has canceled the 2020 Conference on Clinical Legal Education, the Workshop for New Law School Teachers, and the Faculty Recruitment Conference. However, other AALS services in these areas continue.

The pandemic has affected the normal rhythms of the legal academy in ways that can be particularly disruptive for early career faculty. With this in mind, AALS launched a series of weekly webinars organized around the issues that are particularly important to tenure-track, clinical, and legal writing faculty. This “Faculty Focus” series was hosted each Tuesday afternoon by Darby Dickerson, AALS President and Dean, UIC John Marshall Law School and Vince Rougeau, AALS President-elect and Dean, Boston College Law School. The series consisted of live hour-long conversations featuring advice from law school and university leaders followed by shared experiences from early career law faculty. The sessions were structured to encourage conversation and connection, with opportunities for participants to discuss solutions and common issues across schools and teaching areas. The first series of videoconferences ran seven weeks, from June 9 until July 21, and is scheduled to resume in the fall. Topics in the first series included: work-life balance and the demands of scholarship; meeting the needs of students online; excellence in online instruction; racism, justice, and fall classes; and perspectives from the dean’s office. The videos have been archived on the AALS website for on-demand viewing.

Study of the American Law School Dean

AALS has begun work on a Study of the American Law School Dean that will include how law school deans are recruited and selected, career paths to the deanship and after, and the most pressing issues deans currently face. The study was inspired by the American College President Study prepared by the American Council on Education (ACE), now in its eighth edition.

A survey of all law school deans will be the cornerstone of the new report. The goal of the study is to make the process of becoming and serving as a law dean more transparent to the benefit of legal education and higher education.
Grants in support of the project have been awarded by AccessLex, ETS, and LSAC and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC) has been selected to conduct the survey on behalf of AALS.

In light of the demands being placed on deans this spring, AALS has delayed implementation of the survey until spring of 2021. In the meantime, work on the project has continued, including meetings with law school deans and NORC.

Faculty Recruitment Services and Conference

AALS provides four services to law schools to support the recruitment and hiring of law faculty: a Becoming a Law Teacher website, the AALS Placement Bulletin, the Faculty Appointments Register (FAR), and a Faculty Recruitment Conference.

Becoming a Law Teacher, is an online resource on our website for prospective faculty candidates that was first posted in 2019. The goal is to level the playing field for faculty candidates of all backgrounds by ensuring that they have a clear understanding of the requirements of different faculty jobs and by making the hiring process more transparent. It has multi-media components including a mock job talk, interviews with recent faculty hires, and discussions with director of VAP and fellowship program.

The second AALS hiring service the Placement Bulletin. AALS member and fee-paid schools may post an unlimited number of positions without charge.

The third service, the Faculty Appointments Register or FAR, is a searchable online database of candidate applications that schools can use to identify faculty candidates of interest. In 2019, AALS selected a new platform run by Interfolio that should make searching the database easier this year and uploading files such as job talks or research agendas easier for candidates.

The fourth service is the Fall Faculty Recruitment Conference which for more than 45 years has brought together candidates and faculty appointment committees. After consulting with law school deans and weighing the risks posed by COVID-19, AALS has decided to cancel the 2020 Faculty Recruitment Conference that was scheduled to be held in October in Washington, DC. Even with this cancellation, AALS will continue to support faculty hiring with the Association’s three other services.