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events

AALS 2009 Annual Meeting San Diego, California

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Statement Adopted by AALS Executive Committee August 15, 2008

The AALS 2009 Annual Meeting will take place January 6-10, 2009, in San Diego, California. Several years ago the Association booked rooms at the San Diego Marriott and the Manchester Grand Hyatt. In the last few weeks there have been suggestions that the Association should boycott the Hyatt because its owner has contributed money to a ballot initiative designed to overturn the California Supreme Court's May decision in favor of same-sex marriage. In addressing this issue, the Executive Committee has sought to ensure that the Annual Meeting serves the needs of all participants to the maximum extent possible given our contractual obligations to the hotels.

Our contracts with the hotels provide that each hotel reserve a block of guest rooms, and leave to the AALS the choice of where to locate the AALS Registration, Exhibit Hall, Section Programs, Presidential Programs, and House of Representatives meetings. We will honor our contracts with both

hotels, and we have exercised our option to hold all AALS events at the Marriott to ensure the maximum participation by our members.

Law schools and other organizations hosting meetings and receptions will be contacted soon by an AALS meetings manager regarding the location of their events. Faculty and staff at law schools will soon receive housing information and you will be able to choose your individual hotel room on a first-come, first-served basis in accordance with the usual housing procedures.

Institutional Pluralism

The AALS is an association of self-governing intellectual communities. Member schools are expected to adhere to our core values of teaching, scholarship, academic freedom, and diversity. But within the wide space bounded by those values our members are very different kinds of institutions. There are 72 state schools that play special roles in the legal communities of their sponsoring states. There are 49 religiously affiliated law schools whose missions are defined or influenced by particular faiths. There are law schools at historically black colleges and universities that have their own special commitments; and schools whose intellectual efforts are governed by a particular point of view (like law and economics) or directed at a particular subject matter (environmental law, or intellectual property). This year's theme focuses on the value of our institutional differences.

Institutional pluralism is a good thing for our students in the same way choices are good for consumers in other fields. It may also contribute in an important way to a healthy intellectual life. Progress in the life of the mind is a cultural achievement. A community of scholars working on the same problem, or in the same idiom, may accomplish things a group of disconnected individuals could not. (Think of the Manhattan Project, or fin de siècle Vienna .) The Association should cherish the interests of its members in pursuing these ends.

At the same time there are powerful market and regulatory norms that push

law schools toward uniformity. The ABA accreditation process uses one set of standards that it asks all institutions to conform to. The *U.S. News* ranking system uses another linear measure. Law firms who hire our graduates rely on simple tools like rankings as an index of quality. These forces may impede, or even frustrate, schools' efforts to cultivate their own distinctive identities.

The AALS might also want to reflect on the issue of institutional variety in its own affairs. We now see, around AALS annual meetings, a number of parallel organizations concerned with particular points of view. The Federalist Society and the Society of American Law Teachers are just two examples. Should the Association (like some of its members) cultivate a particular set of interests or values, and leave it to other organizations to develop opposing points of view? Or is the proper analogy something more like Congress – a single body comprising different members but representing all possible approaches?

John Garvey
AALS President and
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