

May 7, 2015

Letter for First-Time Attendees to the Law and Society Association Conference

Welcome to all first-time attendees to the annual meetings of the Law and Society Association! The Law and Society Association's International Activities and Diversity Committees have put together this letter to reach as many different scholars as possible, both graduate students and senior scholars who are new to LSA. We offer practical suggestions about how to navigate this conference and hope that you might find this helpful.

Sessions, Roundtables, and Plenaries

Last year the Law and Society Association celebrated its 50th anniversary, and the LSA has grown tremendously over those decades. For first-time attendees (who now constitute one-quarter of the meeting), the Program can be overwhelming. The first LSA conference programs were like dinner menus or brochures, but now the Program looks like a book – albeit now online. The array of topics can be mind-boggling—everything from intellectual property to regulations in Latin America, lawyers in China, deportation, immigration, prisons, and even torture. To facilitate exploration of these topics, the LSA created “Collaborative Research Networks” (CRNs) to group scholars with similar interests and methodological approaches. We urge you to look at the list at www.lawandsociety.org/crn.html, and reach out to those that interest you. The CRNs help to organize and sponsor many of the panel submissions, and so if you truly are a Citizenship and Immigration person, you can attend panels that feature that theme during your time at the conference. Just as often, however, some of the most compelling work in citizenship and immigration might be sponsored by the Law and History CRN or by the Law and Social Movements CRN. Therefore, it's a good idea to look through the Preliminary Program well before the conference to map the panels and sessions that will be of most interest to you. The Event Grid shows session titles

(<https://ww2.aievolution.com/lisa1501/index.cfm?do=ev.pubEventGridByTime&style=0&showByDay=05/29/2015>), and a PDF shows individual participation as well

http://www.lawandsociety.org/Seattle2015/docs/2015_Program.pdf).

If a panel chair is good about keeping everyone on track, there should be ample time for discussion. Some of the best insights from a panel come when members of the audience and the panelists work together—exploring ideas, outlining further areas for research, or offering a tweak to a methodological approach. The best panels consist of researchers presenting preliminary work, including questions that need further thought and analysis, and so a receptive audience and a group of collegial panelists can make a huge difference in shaping a scholar's paper. Don't be shy about offering your own thoughts, especially those that draw on your own research or perhaps different legal culture. So please consider participating in the interactive portions of the sessions.

If you're the one presenting, try to arrive at your panel a few minutes early, to introduce yourself and arrange any A-V equipment you might be using. Also, pay attention to the other presentations; craft your own presentation in an engaging way; and stay within your allotted time. Perhaps a humble attitude is best—a presentation should be tight and confident, but open-ended enough to stimulate conversation and suggestions for improvement. It should show expertise and invite expertise.

The best parts of the panels are the after-panels, when the stress of presenting is over and fellow panelists and members of the audience can hang out over coffee or a meal. Since 105 minutes isn't long enough to discuss everything that came up during the panel, take the initiative and ask others if they are free for a coffee or drink during the conference. When the LSA works well, it provides the space for scholars to support one another through a range of professional challenges, including publishing opportunities, starting new collaborations (such as across countries), landing one's first academic job, and navigating tenure and promotion.

This atmosphere of mutual support and collegiality should be most obvious in the Plenary Sessions, Service Panels, Roundtable Sessions, and Public Outreach Sessions. These portions of the meeting usually feature senior scholars in the field, gathered to reflect on important professional and intellectual developments in law and society. What does it feel like, for example, to teach law and society at a liberal arts college, and what does the job market look like at those institutions? What are some of the emerging challenges in graduate education in law and society, both in law and

society doctoral programs and in the traditional disciplines? How is publishing in socio-legal studies changing, especially in light of the significant growth of scholarly journals outside of the United States and Europe? And how can we bring our research to a broader public, to shape and to inform public opinion, perhaps even to change law and social policy? These kinds of presentations would be of interest to a wide range of scholars, so please consider attending one or more of these special sessions. They would be particularly useful for graduate students, as they feature senior scholars who've also developed an excellent reputation for mentoring and for service.

Other Conference Events and Activities

In the Book Exhibit area, which in some ways is the heart of the conference, leading academic and trade publishers display the most recent books and journals. It's also a wonderful place to browse and see the latest socio-legal journals and books and perhaps run into other attendees. The most prestigious university presses send representatives to the LSA, and so this is an excellent opportunity to meet influential editors in the field. For these representatives, the conference is an occasion to promote their authors, but it's also an occasion to learn more about new work and to meet new authors whose projects are near completion. If this is you, please make an appointment before the meeting to talk with a publisher or an editor or a series editor, who is a senior scholar commissioned by a press to identify and to shepherd several inter-related titles, all sharing a common theme.

Other exciting group events include the Welcome Reception Thursday night, other evening receptions, the luncheon and Presidential Address on Saturday, and the Saturday morning Fun Run. At all of these events, attendees can meet others with similar intellectual interests and learn about law and society work going on in other countries or at other universities. These occasions are wonderful places to network and enjoy the serendipity of meeting a friend or a newcomer who might have just the right idea or citation to help you in your work. They are also just plain fun.

One often hears terms like "networking," as in "you should network," or "you should develop those ties to peers and professors who might help you land that first job or help you cultivate a new business." We've often found the term distasteful; we

should treat one another as ends, not as resources, and anyone who “networks” with us expecting some payoff later might not get that. Yet at the same time, having met many peers and senior scholars and graduate students whose work overlapped with our own, people who’ve provided critical insights into our own work, and whose projects we’ve also helped (in some small way) to shape in one direction or another, we’ve been more than happy to lend a hand, and we’ve been so pleased to acknowledge the many hands who’ve helped improve our own work.

The LSA should be a place where one can be receptive to help; the LSA should be a place where one should want to provide help. LSA recognizes the role of its many members who come from outside the U.S. – about one-third of the attendees at its annual meetings – who help make the field less U.S.-centric. LSA welcomes scholars of every conceivable background—men and women, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled, people of color and those who need more SPF, and people from the U.S. and those from South Korea, France, Argentina, Italy, United Kingdom, Japan, and anywhere else in the world. We embrace the diversity of scholars in LSA and the large contingent of those from outside the U.S.

We hope that you’ll have an enjoyable time here, that you’ll take advantage of the many opportunities to meet and to learn about new people and new projects. We hope that you’ll benefit from and add to the cooperative, nurturing atmosphere that we’ve tried to cultivate at the LSA.