

Southwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors



SWAPLA *INSIGHTS*

New Year? Yes, please!

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown many challenges, but also the opportunity to evaluate our lives and focus on what is truly important. After all, life is a lesson, and we learn every day. One day, the pandemic will be over. So, what have we learned from this situation, and how will our return to the “new” normal look?

We want to thank the article writers who have contributed to this newsletter by sharing their experiences and reflections on the impact of the pandemic on job performance and lessons learned from it. You can also participate by writing an article related to or sharing your best practices for prelaw advising. As we want the newsletter to be as significant and useful as possible to you, we look forward to hearing your comments on this issue. Please email us with your thoughts and ideas at ana.alvarez@utsa.edu.

The future is our story to write... Let’s make this New Year the best one yet!

Ana Alvarez, Ed.D.
Editor

Contents

Introduction and Contents	1
Message from the President	2
Best Practices for Prelaw Advising	3
Law Schools Lessons during a Pandemic	6
LSAC Update	8
Message from the PLANC President	9
SWAPLA Board	11

A Message from the President



*Michelle Payne, J.D. and Ph.D.
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SWAPLA INSIGHTS

By Michelle Payne, J.D. and Ph.D.

A LOOK BACK, 2020

What a year... Looking back, I doubt any of us anticipated the uncertain times we would find ourselves in today, -and while this is troubling in the least, it is also testament to the resilience of our students, members, and colleagues. I cannot help but find calm and strength in the fact that despite everything thrown our way, we continue to adapt and push forward with our mission and vision for the future.

Our caravan became virtual, our seminars became webinars, our meetings became Zoom/Collaborate adventures from our back yards to our home offices, our conferences were postponed, rescheduled, and postponed again, and yet, here we are.

I cannot help but find calm and strength in the fact that despite everything thrown our way, we continue to adapt and push forward with our mission and vision for the future.

Our finances are good, our new website is amazing, our law school friends remain our biggest supporters, our Executive Board and members remain committed-just to name a few of the many blessings surrounding us. At the same time, I know many of us have suffered losses and felt uncertainty for many reasons this past year, but it is the former that makes the latter more bearable, and what makes 2021 more hopeful than ever.

A LOOK FORWARD, 2021

What lies ahead: Constitution revision proposals, nomination forms for offices, General Business meeting date and time, SWAPLA conference dates going forward and much more. We have been working hard to ensure that SWAPLA begins the year with optimism and progressive adaptations and are looking forward to introducing actions starting with revisions to our governing documents and then moving into elections and opportunities for all members to “volunteer” their expertise through webinar hosting or other means. So be sure to visit our SWAPLA website (and make sure your new profile is current!) for news on these items.

Until then, and from all of us, have a very hopeful new year!

Best Practices for Prelaw Advising

Prelaw Advising at Tarrant County College Northwest Campus, by Julie Lantrip, Ph.D., J.D.



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*Julie Lantrip, Ph.D. and J.D.
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Outreach to community colleges is challenging, but the pandemic has offered ideas on how to provide more support for their advisors and students. Community college pre-law students often have financial strains and family obligations in greater proportion than university populations and are also more transient. Some stay a semester and transfer, while others stay two years but don't get involved in prelaw until their final semester. Advising and providing resources to them is difficult.

Even before 2020, most students never came to my office in person. I had already moved my resources and our student club mostly online and consolidated multiple pre-law events into one "Pre-Law Day" with the support of area university advisors. The event includes panels of financial aid experts, attorneys, law school admissions directors, and university advisors. Combining multiple events into one trip to campus, one drive across town, and one day of daycare or missing work, allowed more attendance. But Pre-Law Day would be cancelled this year, so I worried my email advising and web resources wouldn't suffice. Then, emails started coming. SWAPLA's caravan, LSAC's forum, and many other events would go online. Suddenly, my students had access to resources and events that would normally require leaving home, family, and work. In the future, I hope to partner with colleagues at universities and law schools to continue recording or being allowed Zoom access to their events.

SWAPLA INSIGHTS

But Pre-Law Day would be cancelled this year, so I worried my email advising and web resources wouldn't suffice. Then, emails started coming.

Not only did going virtual give community college students easy access to pre-law resources, but I was able to attend online PLANC sessions and trainings. Community college advisors, like their students, often wear many hats. Most are not

full-time pre-law advisors, but volunteers without stipends, pre-law budget, or administrative support. 2020 has provided ideas on how to offer more resources and outreach to community college advisors and their students in the future.

Prelaw Advising at Texas State University, by Rene' LeBlanc, M.F.A., and Carol W. Dochen, Ph.D.

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SWAPLA INSIGHTS

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With the COVID-19 pandemic, prelaw advising has changed. If we meet advisees in person, we use distance, masking, and caution. But we mostly meet our advisees remotely. In this new advising normal, here are some ideas to help us keep our heads and hearts going.

First, try to take some joy in the different windows we now have into advisees' lives. Next, learn and laugh at our own flub ups as we navigate the online environment. Here are some challenges and laughable moments in the virtual environment:

- Children appearing from virtual backgrounds to help advisee parents with their computers
- Husbands walking into space to empty trash
- Ambient noise coming from children on video games
- Dogs howling in the background or begging for advisees' attention by pulling on their clothes or bringing them toys

- Cats crossing the advisee's (or your) computer keyboard
- Advisees' screens shaking like the camera used to film *The Blair Witch Project* while their friend drives the truck down a dirt road
- Worse, advisees' screens shaking because they're on Zoom or Skyping you while driving

Patience is also more necessary now. Waiting when an advisee's Zoom session ends prematurely, keeping the phone on, and email going are often ways one hears from a vanished and panicked advisee.

We should look at online platforms to connect with advisees as tools for positive interaction to continue using. Pluses for the virtual normal include:

- Attending virtual admissions webinars with minimal costs and more interaction opportunities for advisees
- Going to LSAC forums with no road trips or renting pricy hotel rooms
- Accessing energetic conferences like the National Black Pre-Law Conference Experience
- Attaining increased attendance at student organization meetings and a variety of guest speakers because of virtual platforms

So instead of cursing the online world for minor disasters, remember to look at the side that's not just bright but *glowing with possibilities*.

Prelaw Advising at Hendrix College, by Amanda Moore, D. Min.

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*Amanda Moore, D. Min.
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Hendrix College*



Encouraging a Growth Mindset during a Global Pandemic

Many prelaw students now assume they cannot adequately prepare for law school. How do we move our students beyond “paralysis” to “growth?” I ask my pre-laws: “How do I broaden my vision from ‘ideal pre-law experience’ to ‘growth as a pre-law during the pandemic?’” A few possibilities follow.

1. Connect with law schools, legal practitioners, and scholars. Our students now have unprecedented virtual access to experts and can more easily learn about legal practice, specialties, philosophies, and scholarship. We pre-law advisors are sharing news of digital forums, law panels, and lectures almost daily. My students are also now connecting with seasoned legal professionals nationwide through our pre-law mentoring program.

Our students now have unprecedented virtual access to experts and can more easily learn about legal practice, specialties, philosophies, and scholarship.

2. Use the present moment to plan future internships. While getting internships is difficult, students are presently perusing the College's pre-law internship sites, exploring opportunities our constituencies share, and networking with attorneys. Likewise, Indeed.com posts pre-law internships, in-person and remote. Students have even found internships via LinkedIn, a reminder that a strong LinkedIn profile creates new possibilities. Hofstra has [list](#) that encourages students to think big.

3. Read and learn. Baylor offers a useful "[Pre-Law Reading List](#)." As for news, the ABA offers "[Legal News Websites](#)." For those of us without legal studies programs, learning about legal research and legal writing is productive, and good reads might include "The Elements of Legal Style" and "Legal Research in a Nutshell."

4. Plan a virtual legal conference. My students are currently planning an elder justice conference featuring expert speakers. Students will train in elder law, collaborate with expert speakers, and work with community partners to engage the target audience. Our students will gain professional knowledge and capably serve the public.

Let's encourage our students to move toward growth! Through a growth mindset, new possibilities arise.

Law Admissions Lessons during a Pandemic

By Jill Nikirk, J.D.



SWAPLA INSIGHTS

*Jill Nikirk, J.D.
Assistant Dean for Admissions
SMU Dedman School of Law*

In late-February, my Dean asked about my plan if the pandemic shut us down. I thought she was nuts. But she's the boss, so we whipped up a virtual admitted student day, learned to Zoom like pros, and hosted virtual events. Positive: yoga pants. Negative: everything else. But things didn't return to normal, and I wondered why we hadn't ALWAYS had robust virtual offerings. That's lesson #1. Even when we can do in-person events, we will keep and be better for virtual programming.

Fast forward to September. We figured out online recruitment. I was skeptical but wrong again. Applications were WAY up. Thus, lesson #2 is basically lesson #1. We should have ALWAYS recruited virtually, so we'll keep it in our toolbox because, *duhhhh*.

Fast forward to today. We've changed how we admit too. I've admitted nearly triple the number of students this year versus last. Here's that lesson again. Why haven't we ALWAYS admitted faster? We NEED to continue this trend.

We should have ALWAYS recruited virtually, so we'll keep it in our toolbox because, duhhhh.

I don't know how this pace will continue when in-person recruiting is back, but if we can convince people to douse themselves in basically rubbing alcohol, surely this task isn't insurmountable.

Now, I'll play ghost of Christmas future and predict what will happen next (but note my predicting abilities back in February).

Law schools WILL NOT:

1. Decrease class size. With money being tighter than ever, we'll need to maintain enrollment.
2. Award smaller scholarships. Given the strong link between scholarship money and recruiting top students, there will be money to award (fingers crossed).

Applicants WILL:

1. Use their inability to visit to their advantage. Although deferral requests didn't flood in last spring, we can expect an increase this cycle.
2. Have more choices. Applications are up and with scholarships staying Static, the competition for students is fierce.
3. Want more freedom to pursue legal education online. Law students, like everyone, prefer to laze about in yoga pants. But, there's a reason the legal education is delivered the way it has been for so long -pandemic notwithstanding.

Final thoughts: This year has made us all better professionals for having to think innovatively and make sweeping changes on the fly.

Here's to us, and here's hoping to see you all at next PLANC!

LSAC UPDATE

Digital Forums Are Exciting Venue for Connecting; Ambassador Program Evolves with New Staff

By Gisele Joachim, Director of LSAC Ambassadors and Education Program Development, Schools & Institutions



SWAPLA INSIGHTS

*Gisele Joachim
Director of Ambassadors and Education Program Development,
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At LSAC, we know it's important to stay connected, even if we can't get together in person. Meeting the challenge of COVID-19, LSAC launched a series of [Digital Law School Forums](#), which provide an exciting venue for students to connect with representatives from more than 200 law schools as they gather information and inspiration for their law school journeys.

More JD and LLM candidates attended the first two forums alone than attended all ten national forums last year.

With an online venue that allows for broad access, candidate participation has been strong. More JD and LLM candidates attended the first two forums alone than attended all ten national forums last year. Almost 7,000 JD candidates attended the first forum in September, almost 4,000 in October and 3,664 in November. A final 2020 LSAC Forum is scheduled for December 12. For the November and December forums, we added expanded hours so that international students can more conveniently attend.

LSAC Welcomes Two New Ambassadors



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Jennifer O'Connor, left, and Katya Valasek, right, two new ambassadors at LSAC.

Jennifer O'Connor and Katya Valasek not only bring direct experience working in law school admissions, but both are law school graduates, so they understand the process from the candidate side as well.

Jennifer comes to LSAC from Vermont Law School in South Royalton, where she served as Admissions Counselor and earned her law degree. In her role at VLS, Jennifer organized and participated in educational events, law school fairs and recruitment activities across the U.S., helping to build a diverse community of students.

Katya has nearly a decade of admissions experience in various roles at Seton Hall University Law School in Newark, N.J. She was most recently Director of Admissions and worked with students throughout the admission process.

Jennifer and Katya are looking forward to meeting you and your students in person when it's safe to do so. Until then, they are available for webinars, chats, and other virtual presentations [on a variety of topics](#). Here's where to [request a virtual Ambassador visit](#).

A Message from the PLANC President

The Eagle or the Hippopotamus? By Sandy Self, J.D.



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*Sandy Self, J.D.
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SWAPLA Past President
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When I think back to our very successful and enjoyable PLANC Spring Board Meeting -in person, not via zoom- hosted by the LSAC in Philadelphia in early March, it feels like it was years ago -instead of roughly 10 months ago. In fact, I just caught myself double checking my calendar to confirm that it was March of 2020 as opposed to March of 2019. We were just beginning to hear about some alleged “bat soup” pandemic originating in China which was supposedly arriving in the United States as we were all finalizing our travel plans to Philly. A few board members chose not to travel, but I was naively holding onto my belief that this was just another over-hyped-media-driven hysteria. Wow. To say I was wrong is an understatement, not to mention

the fact that I was totally clueless as to what the rest of 2020 would have in store for us.

I am going to fall on my sword and admit to you that this has been an extremely difficult article for me to write. I have tried and failed and tried again and failed again. And frankly, I have no excuse for my failures other than I just can't find the words to express my thoughts to you. 2020 took its toll on all of us, in one way or the other. Some of us have lost loved ones to this dreadful pandemic. Others have lost valuable time and holidays spent with loved ones. Some have lost their jobs and livelihood and along with it their sense of self and security. I could go on and on with the list of suffering that I have witnessed these past months. But I won't, so please don't stop reading here.

"There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud," Carl Sandburg. I choose to be Carl Sandburg's eagle. It is a conscious choice that I make every day, and sometimes multiple times in one day. I may be an eagle with a broken wing, but dang it, I'm not going to be a hippopotamus. And as such, that brings me to my most important topic in this stream-of-consciousness soliloquy. The PLANC 2020 -previously postponed to 2021-conference in New Orleans.

I'm sure that most of you have heard the sad news by now. There won't be a PLANC 2021 Conference in New Orleans (as per the hippopotamus). However, there will be a PLANC 2024 Conference in New Orleans -as per the eagle. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the decision-making process that resulted in this conclusion. There is no need to go into the details here. Suffice it to say, I feel blessed to have had the benefit of the guidance and support of our incredible PLANC Executive Team and the PLANC Board Members throughout this trying process. Thank you, my esteemed colleagues and friends for helping us steer our ship through this fog. I also want to express my gratitude and appreciation to Mary Nadarski and Kevin Freeman, the PLANC Conference Co-Chairs, as well as to those of you who have spent countless hours of time and energy serving as committee chairs and members in preparation for our 2020/2021 conferences. Your time has not been wasted. It will serve as the foundation of our 2024 Conference, which as per the eagle, I am convinced will be bigger and better than ever.

In the interim, I wish you all the best in 2021 -as per the eagle.

Health and happiness,

Sandy

Southwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors (SWAPLA) Board



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