

Southwest  
Association of  
Prelaw  
Advisors



# SWAPLA *INSIGHTS*

## Welcome to another issue of SWAPLA *Insights!*

As we enter a new year full of hope and promise, we would like to take stock of how far we have come and lay out what is coming in 2022. We hope you enjoy this issue!

We want to extend our thanks to all the contributors for this newsletter. If you wish to share your pre-law advising and professional experiences, send your article to [Ana Alvarez](mailto:ana.alvarez@utsa.edu), at [ana.alvarez@utsa.edu](mailto:ana.alvarez@utsa.edu). We will love to have your words of wisdom published in SWAPLA *Insights*, and please, don't forget to send your feedback on this issue!

Ana Alvarez, Ed.D.  
Editor

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## A Message from the President



*Michelle Payne, J.D. and Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Political  
Science  
SWAPLA President  
Texas Wesleyan University*

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

Greetings!

In the 2021 message from the President, I said, “our caravan became virtual, our seminars became webinars, our meetings and hand-shaking bound by ZOOM and collaborate, our back yards/living rooms our offices- conferences were postponed, rescheduled & postponed again...and yet here we are.”

And so, I repeat. Here we are. I have spoken with many of you over the last months, and the common hope is that we get together, in person, and soon. In that common hope I found energy and direction often- even when I thought otherwise.

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***It is time for new plans, new faces, new and old sharing and renewing resources to best help our students and our profession.***

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Time has moved on, and in the ups and downs of our current worlds, we are yet again constrained by factors beyond our control. But yet, “here we are,” and we too will move on. It is time to re-group. It is time for new plans, new faces, new and old sharing and renewing resources to best help our students and our profession. Our goal of revising and updating old documents was realized this past year- our seminars and PLA events were polished and well-attended- we had a good year, and now we can have an even better year with those goals met.

With that being said, this is my last message as SWAPLA’s President- and while I will still be around as a past-president, I want to take this opportunity to personally thank each of you for your never-ending kindness, insight, patience, knowledge, willingness to share, teach, learn; your wit and most of all, for not leaving me behind every time I got lost in Oklahoma or Chicago or anywhere we conferenced- no matter how tempting it was!! So, thank you all from the bottom of my heart, and let’s do this!!

## Best Practices for Prelaw Advising

Prelaw Advising at Texas Christian University, by Ralph Carter, Ph.D., J.D.



### *SWAPLA INSIGHTS*

*Ralph Carter, Ph.D.  
Piper Professor, Pre-Law Advisor  
Political Science  
Texas Christian University*

### Having the (Money) Talk

At Texas Christian University, the cost of law school is *not* among the early questions my students ask, but if they don't bring up the issue of law school debt, I do.

In 2021, the ABA surveyed its members 36 years of age or younger. About 90 percent said they financed their legal education with student loans, and the average reported law school debt was \$108,000, and the total amount of debt reported was \$130,000. These totals were even higher for Black respondents in the survey.

I ask my students, how comfortable are you with debt? They could be paying the equivalent of a home mortgage without owning the house! While students often want to go to the highest ranked law school possible or the best one in the state in which they hope to live, I encourage them to apply to law schools in a lower tier of rankings as well. I want them to have choices between better ranked law schools – typically with no financial aid provided – and lesser ranked law schools with scholarship funds as part of the offer.

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***I ask my students, how comfortable are you with debt? They could be paying the equivalent of a home mortgage without owning the house!***

I tell the story of our student who turned down Harvard for a full-ride scholarship at SMU or the one who turned down the University of Texas for a full-ride scholarship at Pepperdine. I also point them toward the AccessLex.org website for guidance.

The bottom line is students must consider the total cost of law school and how those costs impact their lives for years – or decades – thereafter.

Prelaw Advising at Texas A&M, by Brie M. Garcia, M.S.

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*Brie M. Garcia, M.S.  
Assistant Director-Pre-Law, Pre-OT, and Pre-Pharmacy  
Professional School Advising, Career Center  
Texas A&M University*



I work in the Texas A&M University Career Center where I am one of six advisors who work with health professions, and I also have the privilege of advising pre-law.

While we have been encouraged to look not only at our handwashing practices, we have also been looking into our advising practices. For instance, Zoom has allowed me to reach students who weren't comfortable coming into the office or who couldn't/wouldn't make an appointment because it wasn't convenient at a 65,000+ university.

Here are some things I've tried:

- Required sign-up for small law or pre-health group advising (1st and 2nd year, general, or applicant) to keep the numbers under 10.
  - Originally, called it group advising, but it became more popular when I marketed it as *small group*. FYI, it had not been larger than 10 before I changed my marketing strategy. 😊
  - Now they have the option of meeting not with only me but with other students. They can listen to questions and get confirmation they are not alone.
  - One of the best comments I heard from a student was, “group advising was exactly what I didn't know I needed!”

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***I encourage students to take advantage of the Aggie Network and reach out to our alumni to discuss their path to law but also to be pandemic patient.***

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- I also hold all application and personal statement workshops through Zoom and highly encourage all classifications to attend during late spring-early fall.
  - In-person workshops had low freshman and sophomore students' attendance, but participation numbers for all classifications have increased with virtual workshops.
- I encourage students to take advantage of the Aggie Network and reach out to our alumni to discuss their path to law but also to be *pandemic patient*.
- I also review their essays through Google Docs and ask students to give me editing privileges. This allows me to edit through email, or we can schedule an appointment, which can take a few weeks during the busy times. I require a resume' and personal statement if they want me to review the personal statement, so these documents sound cohesive.
- Most of our individual appointments are still being held virtually.

If you have feedback on any of the above, or I you would like to collaborate on a Zoom workshop, then let me know!

Prelaw Advising at The University of Texas at Dallas, by Barbara E. Kirby, J.D., Ph.D.



### *SWAPLA INSIGHTS*

*Barbara E. Kirby, J.D., Ph. D.*  
*Director, Prelaw Advising Center*  
*Coach, Moot Court*  
*The University of Texas at Dallas*

As we come up to the two-year anniversary of the pandemic, I have reflected on how it changed me as a pre-Law advisor. First and foremost, I spend much time now connecting with my students through my computer, from the comfort of my home office.

Very early on, I was on a virtual panel with other advisors, and one of the participants talked about her concern with the well-being of the students during this difficult adjustment. She said that she began every conversation by asking, "How are you? How have you been?" That made a profound impact on me, and I immediately shifted my talk track so that I was always checking on my students, and sharing some tidbit about my life, so that we could be connected as human beings first. In some

ways, my relationships are stronger – it’s not the rushing people in and out of my office that occurred long, long ago – in 2019!

### ***SWAPLA INSIGHTS***

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Speaking of 2019, it has been a very long time since our SWAPLA family has been together, and it has been difficult to keep the type of connection and involvement that once united us as pre-law professionals. So please, try to attend the Member’s Meeting on Tuesday February 1st at 3:00 pm. And after that, strongly consider running for one of the many offices that will be open.

It has been rewarding and engaging to serve as SWAPLA treasurer since 2017, but I look forward to passing the torch to one of you. And don’t worry – former officers will be there, virtually now and hopefully soon in-person, to advise the new officers and maintain our very important personal connections.

Financial Aid Advising at AccessLex Institute, by Teria M. Thornton, J.D., AFC., CDP



### ***SWAPLA INSIGHTS***

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*Teria M. Thornton, J.D., AFC., CDP  
Manager, Education Services, and Diversity Initiatives  
AccessLex Institute*

## **Financial Aid *FUN*amentals**

First, let’s admit that many wouldn’t say Financial Aid is their favorite topic. However, we must also acknowledge how integral it is to the law school journey. Therefore, to change our experience, let’s change our perspective! Below we will use the acronym *FUN* to provide some basic information to help you work with applicants.

1. **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)** – The FAFSA is often a first step when preparing for the financial realities of law school. Even if the applicant is not looking to borrow, many schools will use the application to determine need-based aid eligibility. Fortunately, applicants don't have to wait until they are accepted to complete it.
2. **Useful Resources** – You and your applicants don't have to do this work alone. We're here to help! Free resources within Ask EDNA! can provide information and insight. And don't forget, we have our team of Accredited Financial Counselors (AFC®) to assist as well.
3. **Net Cost** – The term Net Cost refers to the amount of direct and indirect costs after scholarships and grants are subtracted. Applicants should think about all the "costs" beyond tuition. There are also "opportunity costs" and "future costs" to consider.

## A message from the Vice President

By Ana Alvarez, Ed.D., The University of Texas at San Antonio



*Ana Alvarez Ed.D.  
Assistant Director and University Prelaw Advisor  
Institute for Law and Public Affairs  
The University of Texas at San Antonio*

When I reflect on what we all have come thorough during these pandemic times, I cannot help but to feel optimistic. We have learned to adapt, think outside the box, re-assess our priorities, befriend technology – and we are not going back! It is certain we have so much of which to be proud.

We also know that live events are coming back, but we also know that we will gather carefully. We have come a long way! As we continue making our way through this pandemic, let me take this opportunity to share with you a few SWAPLA updates as most will be discussed in our General Business meeting on February 1.

*SWAPLA Bylaws.* The SWAPLA Bylaws Committee/Executive Board has been working on several amendments to our bylaws as there is the need to bring the articles up to date. We have had numerous meetings reviewing and discussing the amendments,

and we finally got to a consensus. The full Board also approved, and the membership will vote on them during our General Business Meeting on February 1. After voting, we will open the nominations for elections. There will be many openings for new positions that will assist SWAPLA evolve and better serve its members. Please do consider serving as a board or committee member!

*SWAPLA Membership Update.* During 2021, several of our SWAPLA members and board members have retired or took another position, e.g. Karen Severn (Chair of Constitution and Bylaws Committee) retired. Adria Kimbrough (Chair of Diversity Committee) took another position. And Matthew Kerns (Webmaster) moved to another APLA. Hong Escobar (Caravan Coordinator) moved to another university position. Sandy Self, our SWAPLA past president, also returned to the courtroom and practice of law. We certainly miss them all! Alternatively, Michelle Payne, our current president, has taken the position of Chair of Constitution and Bylaws Committee. We are thrilled to have Wendy Watson with us as interim webmaster, updating our website and managing social media, and I am also serving as the Chair of Diversity Committee.

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*SWAPLA Conference.* We also plan to have our conference in person in spring 2023 as travel restrictions may continue at our universities. We will, however, have virtual events during summer and fall 2022.

*PLANC.* Barbara Kirby and I also had the privilege to attend and represent SWAPLA at the PLANC Fall meeting in San Antonio, TX, on October 23, 2021. There were several topics discussed, and amongst them was the PLANC 2024 Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. Programming will be entirely different from the 2020 Conference. The programming committee is chaired by Rita Halston. The 2024 conference will be in-person, with no intention to be virtually offered.

*Retirement of Dean Gerald L. Wilson, Ph.D.* At the PLANC meeting, there was a discussion on ways to honor Dr. Gerald Wilson, and among them was a suggestion by Brother Glenn, PCAPLA Representative, to name the PLANC 2024 Conference Gerald Wilson.



I truly hope we can meet on February 1. I know that the pandemic has been challenging, but I continue being optimistic and focus on what lies ahead, the opportunity to strengthen our SWAPLA organization on its continued effort to serve and support its membership and our students while evolving into a more robust professional association.

## **Southwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors (SWAPLA) Board**



Michelle Payne  
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Sandy Self  
SWAPLA Past President



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Lori Williams-DeKalb  
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