

Dear Clinicians –

We are thrilled to welcome you to New Orleans and the 2007 AALS Workshop on Clinical Legal Education! We chose the theme of this Workshop – Challenging Assumptions – very deliberately, as will be using our time together to challenge every aspect of clinical teaching and clinical education.

Perhaps ironically, we spend a great deal of time encouraging our students to challenge assumptions – about clients, courts, justice – but we often forget to challenge our own assumptions. We neglect to re-think our judgments about and expectations of our students and ourselves; we stop questioning how – or even what – we teach; and we stop thinking about ways in which clinical legal education can be made even more vibrant.

We designed each plenary to raise and start to address each of these concerns. We also made special efforts to ensure that the concurrent sessions are interactive and engaging, not time for “talking heads” to take up valuable space. For the second year, the Clinical Section is having a poster session and we encourage everyone to spend some time learning from the innovations depicted there; those presenting posters will be available for discussion when their posters are up, during the opening reception on Thursday evening. Finally, although it sometimes is tempting to leave a conference early (especially with JazzFest beckoning), we strongly encourage everyone to stay for the Town Hall meeting during Sunday’s lunch. This meeting is guaranteed to be successful and challenging, and indeed, is becoming an important and regular part of our annual gatherings.

There is no better place for us to engage in this endeavor of Challenging Assumptions than in New Orleans. We are grateful that parts of the city have recovered sufficiently to host us and that we have this opportunity to boost the local economy. This is a place, though, that has challenged many assumptions we might have made about our country and its response to a city in crisis before Katrina made landing more than a year-and-a-half ago. There are individuals still in desperate need of assistance and neighborhoods that have not been supported in their efforts to recover. The need touches on every segment of life – from food, shelter and jobs to basic medical and legal assistance. We encourage each of you to do what you can to support the local community during your time in this jewel of a city – and to take home the scenes and stories to which you have borne witness to motivate others to give in ways they can.

We hope that the challenges you open yourselves to New Orleans will be a great capstone to your academic year. And we hope the Workshop will provide you with the energy and creativity to sustain yourselves until we have the pleasure of gathering together again next year.

Elizabeth B. Cooper, Fordham University, **Chair**
Thomas F. Geraghty, Northwestern University
Katherine R. Kruse, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Ann C. Shalleck, American University
Hans P. Sinha, University of Mississippi