

**Call for Participation in a Discussion Group on**  
***The Ethics and Practice of Community Engagement***

**Due: August 24, 2015**

The Annual Meeting Program Committee introduced a new program format to facilitate scholarly discussion and engagement at the 2016 Annual Meeting. Discussion Groups will provide a small group of faculty an opportunity to engage in a sustained conversation about a topic of interest. The Discussion Groups session do not feature formal presentations. The objective is to facilitate a lively and engaging real-time discussion among participants. The following is a Call for Participation in a Discussion Group on *The Ethics and Practice of Community Engagement*, to be held at the AALS Annual Meeting, January Thursday, January 7, 2016, from 3:30 – 4:45 pm in New York City.

**Description**

Legal academics possess a formidable, if not wholly documented, tradition of community engagement. Some law professors come to community engagement from a background of teaching and practice. Others first found their bearings in careers like community organizing before they came to law teaching and scholarship. Whatever the journey, the active presence of law professors in communities carries tremendous power.

Although law professors are ensconced in the “ivory tower,” they also function as part of the larger community. Law professors are civilians, but their legal training and knowledge provides them with both perceived and real power. For centuries, law professors have engaged the community by exercising their power in a variety of ways. For instance, law professors have contributed to the community by running legal clinics since perhaps the early 1900’s. By the 1960’s, such contributions were widespread because law clinics rapidly emerged at law schools nationwide and were regularly taking up the issues of their communities. Today, law professors engage with communities for manifold purposes, such as fostering participatory democracy, engaging in community lawyering, making film documentaries, continuing the tradition of developing legal clinics, participating in local politics and philanthropy, organizing community conferences, and conducting empirical research.

This discussion group will address the ethics, practice, and challenges of law professors’ community engagement in light of their role as civilians and their power as lawyers. These dual roles and dynamics raise questions of class, power, and voice in community engagement. They also raise questions regarding the impact of race, gender, ability, sexuality, and other identity characteristics and experiences on individual law professors’ efforts to engage the communities

they struggle for and serve. In essence, this discussion group asks: How does the law professor's liminal status influence her community engagement, and how should it?

The specific questions that this discussion group will address include:

- What is "the community," and how do law professors find it?
- What are the building blocks of an ethics of community engagement? What sources can law professors draw from in engaging their communities?
- What is the role of law professors engaging with community--participant or observer, conduit for community voice and facilitator, or organizer and activist--and how might they tackle the tensions between these roles?
- How do law schools recognize the community engagement of law professors? Is it considered part of their teaching, service, or scholarship? Do law professors enhance or jeopardize their careers by engaging with the community?

### **Call for Abstracts**

The Annual Meeting Program Committee invites faculty and administrators who would like to join this discussion group to submit a five page abstract that addresses the ethics, practice, and challenges of law professors' community engagement **by August 24**. Current organizers and discussion participants include Yxta Maya Murray, Loyola Law School; Kathryn Sabbeth, the University of North Carolina School of Law; Deborah Weissman, the University of North Carolina School of Law; Sameer Ashar, University of California at Irvine School of Law; Scott Cummings, UCLA Law School; Donna Coker, University of Miami School of Law; Daniel Kiel, University of Memphis Law School; Kathleen Kim, Loyola Law School; Elizabeth L. MacDowell, William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada Las Vegas; and Christine Zuni Cruz, University of New Mexico School of Law.

Space in this discussion group is limited; the Committee, along with the faculty who proposed this discussion, will select the remaining discussion participants from the abstracts submitted. At the AALS Conference in January, selected participants will make a five-minute presentation during the Discussion Group. The remaining time will be devoted to group discussion. Participants are strongly encouraged to commit to publication of the papers summarized at the Meeting. The organizers of the Discussion Group are currently seeking publication opportunities in appropriate journals.

Each submission for this discussion group should include:

- The title of the submitted presentation/paper;

- The names and contact information of the applying participant;
- A detailed five-page, double-spaced abstract that addresses the ethics, practice, and challenges of law professors' community engagement; and
- The curriculum vitae of the applying participant.

In reviewing the submitted abstracts, the selection committee will consider the following:

- The fit and overall quality of the program for the Discussion Group;
- The diversity that the applying participant may bring in terms of a variety of factors, including factors such as institutional affiliation and status (tenure-track, non-tenure track, tenured); and
- The applying participant's willingness to publish his or her paper along with other Discussion Group papers.

Abstracts are due by **August 24, 2015** and should be submitted using the online submission form [here](#).