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The Association of American Law Schools is undergoing substantial change just as our member schools are changing in meaningful ways. These two developments are deeply related, of course. Law schools face external pressures to change, pressures which are ever growing. Some of these pressures reflect adaptations to a marketplace in which current business models – and, in particular, the size and shape of entering classes – exist uneasily with the applicant pool and opportunities for law school graduates. And some of these pressures grow out of an appeal, sometimes nuanced, other times less so, by the profession to provide more “practice ready” graduates, an appeal that pushes law schools toward curricular and programmatic reform. These and other external pressures are best viewed, in the aggregate, as shocks to the system, as disruptions which drive change and innovation.

At the same time, we should not minimize changes that are more internally directed and often emerge organically from the good works of law faculty, students and alumni. Necessity is the mother of invention to be sure, but it also bears mentioning that AALS member schools are hard at work in thinking creatively and strategically about how best to serve the bold objectives of top-quality legal education and to do so in ways efficacious and efficient. (Indeed, this new website will collect many examples of such creative innovations). In short, most of our member schools aspire to adapt not only because the marketplace realities bear down on them with growing force, but also because thoughtful educators are relentlessly engaged in the worthy

project of improving our educational practices and programs because, well, it is the right thing to do.

For its part, the AALS is undergoing the same kind of self-scrutiny and creative change. This, too, reflects an admixture of external pressure and internal self-reflection. Law schools rightly insist that the Association provide value and warrant the financial commitment these schools make in an era of tough budgets. Under the leadership of the Executive Committee of the AALS, its staff and its many volunteers, the AALS has refocused its role on three essential objectives: (1) a **revised approach to membership review**, one that concentrates to a greater extent on peer advice and acknowledgment of the myriad constructive steps law schools are taking to meet the Association's important core values, while meeting the hard challenges that current circumstances yield; (2) a **focus on service** to our member schools, service which includes greater communication and sharing of information and best practices; and (3) **advocacy** on behalf of legal education and what our member schools are doing – boldly, strategically, ably – to advance the high values and responsibilities of our great profession.

So, what are the character and the shape of these parallel changes? What can the Association learn from strategic choices and creative action within our member schools? And what can our law schools learn from the good work underway at AALS? These are questions whose answers unfold from what cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, aptly label “local knowledge,” that is, the cumulative bodies of knowledge and practices that are borne of experience and tested over time in specific situations, including those which are novel and dynamic.

Improved communication with and on behalf of AALS schools is key. This new website will be enormously helpful in disseminating knowledge not only to our member schools, but to the public generally. Too, the efforts at outreach by volunteer leaders will help facilitate dialogue and constructive engagement among stakeholders. Law schools are often in a competitive business – for students, for faculty, for fundraising dollars, for acclaim – and, as lawyers, we have reasonably competitive temperaments after all! But our road to significant improvement and success in adapting our educational programs to a new professional environment lies in our ability and interest in collaborating and sharing, talking and engaging.

Beyond these cooperative endeavors around practical issues of the day, we must also think creatively about a new narrative. As shepherds of legal education, we are responsible for, and best situated to, developing and articulating a narrative of legal education which focuses squarely and persuasively on the value of what we do for the well-being of our graduates and of our profession. However often we as legal educators and as an Association fret that we are misunderstood, it is clear that we have not yet developed an explanation that captures our essential goals and mission, and that articulates measures of success and metrics of failure. Without such an explanation, we will always be responding, usually in a piecemeal way, to particular, provocative questions such as “is law school worth it” or “what is the case for scholarship” or, worse yet, “why aren’t law schools more ashamed of themselves?” The new narrative will not unfold by writing a terse description of the aims and ambitions of the legal academy. Rather, it will emerge from the serious, self-reflective, data-rich analysis of a large number of folks within and outside the legal academy. It is a long-term venture, but one that has a short-term urgency borne of important changes and disruptions happening in our member schools and all around us.

Having had the privilege to serve as a member of the Executive Committee, president-elect, and now president of the Association, I am excited about the direction of the AALS and very optimistic about the direction of contemporary legal education. We are, yes, at a crossroads, but the enormous energy and resilience of our colleagues suggests that the journey ahead will be a fruitful one. And legal education will be stronger for it.