What Does the AALS Executive Committee Do, Anyway and Why Should I Care?

Taunya L. Banks

Few law faculty pay much attention to the list of persons nominated for the Executive Committee of the Association of American Law Schools. Nevertheless, in the minds of many, this elected position carries significant prestige. To me, it simply means that almost daily I receive mountains of paper and faxes on a wide range of topics from accreditation issues to copyright infringement concerns.

I am proud to be the first member of the Maryland law faculty to be elected to the Executive Committee of the association. The committee is composed of nine people, six regular members elected to three-year staggered terms, a president who serves a one-year term, the president-elect and the immediate past president. The committee is served by a staff of 22 based at the national office in Washington, D.C.

The Association of American Law Schools was formed by 32 law schools in 1900 for “the improvement of the legal profession through legal education.” Today, of the 176 ABA-approved law schools, 159 are AALS members. The University of Maryland School of Law became a member of the AALS in 1930. AALS is one of two national accrediting agencies for law schools, the other being the Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association. However, accreditation concerns are not the primary focus of the AALS.

In addition to accreditation matters, the committee oversees planning of the annual meeting, professional development programs, an annual faculty recruitment conference, the Journal of Legal Education, academic freedom and tenure issues as well as generally trying to further the association’s function as a learned society. The committee passes on policy recommendations coming from various standing and ad hoc committees of the association, making recommendations to the House of Representatives, the plenary legislative body of the organization. This body is composed of one representative from each member school.

The focus of the committee often changes from president to president. This year the current president, Rennard Strickland (Oklahoma) has chosen to focus on the role of the AALS as a learned society. This is also the theme of the annual meeting to be held in New Orleans in 1995. The concern about the learned society function of the AALS stems in part from the tendency of some people to lump the ABA and AALS together without paying sufficient attention to their differences. It will be interesting to see whether the association will be able to reach any consensus about what constitutes a learned society given the diversity in the AALS membership.

Taunya Lovell Banks is Jacob A. France Professor of Equality Jurisprudence.