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JOINING THE NATIONAL LEGAL WRITING COMMUNITY
THROUGH SERVICE

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While teaching and scholarship are paramount to finding a permanent position in the academy, engaging with the national legal writing community, particularly through service, provides invaluable connections with future colleagues and schools that might be hiring. Because finding a toehold in national service organizations can be daunting, this essay provides a primer in how to begin reaping the benefits. The essay begins with an introduction to key legal writing organizations and publications, then explains some approaches for engaging with the national legal writing community, and finally highlights the reasons that engagement in the national legal writing community is crucial to those seeking permanent positions as legal writing professors.

Legal Writing Organizations

The three major organizations of the legal writing community are the Legal Writing Institute (LWI); the Association of Legal Writing Directors (ALWD); and the Section of Legal Writing, Reasoning, and Research of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS). The members of these three organizations are often the same people, and many professors are active in all three simultaneously. Becoming involved in any of these organizations can further a newcomer's professional goals and enhance job satisfaction.

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At its inception and for many years following, LWI focused on pedagogy—developing curriculum and helping new professors become excellent teachers. That focus was essential when most legal writing faculty were offered only short-term contracts before being pushed back into law practice. While LWI focused on pedagogy, ALWD was established primarily to address status issues in legal writing. A major goal was to enhance the job security and status of all legal writing faculty, which benefits not only the legal writing faculty members but also students, the school, and the public. Recently, the missions of ALWD and LWI have converged, as LWI has become more engaged with status issues, and both welcome all legal writing faculty.²

While LWI and ALWD are independent organizations, the AALS legal writing section is part of a larger organization that serves all law faculty and administrators. In addition to sections on constitutional law, contracts, legal writing, and other disciplines, AALS has sections devoted to women faculty, minority faculty, teaching methods, balance in legal education, and more.

Beyond these three are other organizations and groups for legal writing faculty, with targeted goals and less programming. As examples, the Southeast Association of Law Schools (SEALS) hosts a Writing Connections segment in its annual summer conference; Scribes publishes a journal and offers awards for outstanding student writing; and Writing as Resistance (WAR) provides mentorship and scholarship support for legal writing faculty of color.

² For more detail about LWI and ALWD, see Ruth Anne Robbins, Kristen K. Tiscione & Melissa H. Weresh, *Persistent Structural Barriers to Gender Equity in the Legal Academy and the Efforts of Two Legal Writing Organizations to Break Them Down*, 65 Villanova L. Rev. 1155, 1178-83 (2020).

Becoming Involved in Committees

For new legal writing faculty, becoming involved nationally is as easy as joining a committee, attending a conference, or volunteering for the editorial board of a publication. To learn about these opportunities, newcomers should subscribe to the LWI listserv, where notices are frequently circulated.

LWI, ALWD, and AALS all have committees with a broad range of work, which can match any new professor's passions and interests: teaching, scholarship, diversity, connections to the bar, and online learning are just some of the possibilities. Early on, newcomers might want to avoid the more time-intensive committees (e.g., planning a major conference, administering the ALWD/LWI survey) to provide adequate time for teaching. Serving on more than one committee is fine, so long as the time commitments are low.

Being on a committee helps develop a reputation, and that reputation will be stronger the more engaged a newcomer is: attend meetings regularly; listen to the discussions between experienced colleagues; contribute new ideas and perspectives; respond to email messages promptly; and offer to help with the committee work, whether keeping minutes, drafting an email announcement, making a few phone calls, or doing some quick research. The key is to be seen, especially by those members who might serve on hiring committees, as actively engaged.

Becoming Involved through Publication

One of the most visible ways to join the national community of legal writing scholars is to write, and particularly to publish in one of its peer-edited journals or newsletters.

Many legal writing organizations have publications that promote scholarship and share ideas. LWI's journal is called *Legal Writing*, and its mission is to support scholarly articles, essays, and book reviews on any legal writing topic, from teaching and status to

theory and rhetoric. ALWD's journal, *Legal Communication and Rhetoric: JALWD*, publishes scholarly articles, essays, and book reviews that are both theory-driven and relevant to legal practitioners.

For newcomers not quite ready to publish a full law review article, other publications provide an online forum for shorter pieces with few or no footnotes. These are excellent venues for a first piece. For example, LWI's *The Second Draft* publishes pieces that range from 500-word essays to 4000-word articles. You might publish a shorter piece in *The Second Draft* to share a teaching idea, then later develop the idea into a scholarly article.

Other good venues for an early piece include *Perspectives*, an online publication by Thomson Reuters, that publishes short articles on teaching legal research and writing; the semi-annual AALS newsletter for the legal writing section; and *Proceedings*, which publishes essays from legal writing conferences and workshops. These are all peer-edited publications. A state's bar journal is yet another option for practice-based pieces.

Some newcomers are reluctant to write out of fear they don't have anything original to say. Instead of trying to invent the wheel or discover fire, just join a conversation and add your thoughts. New professors often have keen insights about practice that experienced academics need to stay connected to and that help prepare students effectively.

Whether the writing is a full-length article, a short essay, or a book review, try to dedicate time each week to researching, outlining, and writing. Just a few hours each Friday can produce solid results by the end of a semester, and school breaks provide excellent opportunities for intensive writing.

Another way to become involved in publication is to join an editorial board. Initial assignments might be less glamorous, such as checking citations, but that work brings exposure to current scholarship and active scholars. An early contribution can be

invaluable for later gaining a position editing articles or moving up on the editorial board.

Becoming Involved at Conferences

Attending a national or regional legal writing conference is an excellent way to become involved. The programming ranges from theoretical scholarship to fundamentals of teaching. Moreover, conferences include time to meet national colleagues at receptions, over meals, and during informal hallway conversations, providing important networking possibilities for those seeking permanent positions.

LWI holds the biggest national conference of legal writing faculty, biennially in even-numbered years. ALWD's biennial conference is held in odd-numbered years. The AALS conference is held annually in January; the SEALS conference occurs in late summer at a beach resort in the southeast; and each region of the country hosts a conference annually or biennially. The Applied Legal Storytelling Conference takes place biennially. Finally, LWI hosts One-Day Workshops at locations around the country in early December.

The size of the conference can affect networking possibilities and cost. The LWI conference regularly attracts over 500 attendees. The ALWD, Storytelling, and some larger regional conferences are medium sized, with between 100 and 200 participants. Other regional conferences are smaller, and the LWI One-Day Workshops can be intimate, with fifteen to fifty people.

Schools should provide visiting assistant professors with funding for conference registration, travel, hotels, and meals. If not, it's appropriate to request funding for a particular conference as part of professional development. When budgets are tight, a school might only pay conference expenses for those who are presenting as part of the program. The programs for LWI, ALWD, and AALS are quite competitive, but regional conferences and workshops

frequently accept most proposals. Newcomers might join together for a group presentation or moderate a panel of experts who write in an area of interest. Alternatively, SEALS provides a “discussion group” approach, which can be ideal for newcomers; each person contributes ideas for three to five minutes and then the group discusses them.

Attending a conference in person, especially one of the larger ones, can be overwhelming at first. Newcomers should try to connect with a friend or mentor for navigating the sea of faces as a team. But reaching beyond the comfort zone of known colleagues is crucial for the networking that jumpstarts careers. After a presentation, you might speak to the presenter with praise, to ask a question, or to share an idea.⁵ The legal writing community enjoys welcoming newcomers.

Time Crunches

Searching for a full-time, permanent job in legal writing is almost a full-time job itself. Simultaneously learning to teach, supporting first-year law students, meeting colleagues, applying for jobs, preparing for interviews, and interviewing take enormous amounts of time. Along with the demands of marking papers and meeting individually with students, new faculty are often surprised at the time it takes to support the intellectual and emotional needs of students; supporting students tends to fall disproportionately on women, people of color, LGBTQ+, and first-generation faculty.

Another time crunch is a faculty committee appointment, a law school initiative, or a special project. New faculty should be wary of taking on leadership roles on these committees, which could

⁵ Another networking tip is to send a short thank you email to the presenters who most impressed you. A few sentences naming the presentation and complimenting the ideas will be appreciated, especially if you copy the person’s dean.

require extensive time.⁴ Being a bit selfish in terms of protecting one's time may be necessary to secure a long-term position in academia.

The Benefits of Service

The extent to which service matters to professional development in academia depends on the school and the position. A tenure-track position is likely to weigh scholarship very heavily, with some attention paid to teaching, and just a glance at service. Other positions require no scholarship but expect extensive service.

Regardless of the requirement of service, a new professor has compelling reasons for engaging: learning about legal writing and the academy; sparking ideas for scholarship; finding mentors; and connecting with a cohort of colleagues at the same professional level. Each of these can assist in the job search and enhance professional satisfaction. The discipline will benefit from contributions only you can make, and the relationships you build will pay dividends throughout your career in academia.

⁴ Becoming engaged can lead to too many opportunities. Here's a tested approach for declining some: "Thanks for thinking of me. I'm not able to take on new obligations right now, especially in my first year of teaching. I hope you'll think of me in the future."