

La Pietra Conference

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La Pietra Conference¹

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I have previously written about the AALS' role in fostering more cooperation among legal educators throughout the world. (See AAALS International Outreach, August 1999 AALS Newsletter). The emerging AALS' role in international outreach began after the results of the 1995 self-study questionnaire of faculty at member schools indicated that faculty believed more international cooperation should be a high priority for the AALS.

In its most ambitious undertaking to date, the AALS recently sponsored the Conference « International Legal Educators », the « La Pietra Conference », held May 24-28 in Florence, Italy. The committee was truly international in scope, with one member from five continents and four U.S. legal educators. The committee was chaired by past AALS President and Dean of New York University School of Law, John Sexton.

The AALS Executive Committee and the Planning Committee concluded that this should be a small conference that would focus on the structure of legal education and legal systems in different parts of the world and how that structure might affect the nature and shape of future cooperative ventures. The AALS Executive Committee also decided that, in order to assure a truly global conference, the AALS would finance participation of all foreign invitees. A grant from an anonymous donor defrayed a part of those expenses. U.S. participants paid their own expenses, and were selected both

1. Texte du compte-rendu de la *Conference of International Legal Educators* publié dans le AALS Newsletter d'août 2000, reproduit avec l'autorisation de l'auteur.

through nominations and appointments to assure adequate representation of institutions whose participation would be important in carrying out any new plans that might be developed at the Conference.

About fifty leading legal educators attended the conference, with about 30 from countries other than the United States. The planning committee first discussed the types of legal systems represented by different countries and decided which countries should be represented. Individual participants were then selected based on their experience and the likelihood that they could assist with any future cooperative ventures. We were fortunate to have leading legal educators from the countries selected; in the few instances in which we were unable to obtain a representative we will be expanding the founding group to assist with future plans.

All participants were required to complete a paper in advance of the Conference. Foreign participants were asked to write about a legal system and legal education system in their region of the world, while U.S. participants were asked to write about a significant aspect of legal education in the U.S. The papers were assembled in a Conference booklet that was distributed to all participants for advanced background reading. These papers provide a rich resource for anyone interested in comparative legal systems and comparative legal education. Many requests for the materials have already been received; they will be published and available to all legal educators by the middle of September. Revised and updated versions of most of the papers will also be published in *The Journal of Legal Education*.

In establishing the format for presentations at the Conference, the planning committee recognized that all participants would have important contributions to make in discussing each of the primary topics. Thus, at each plenary session there was a panel of seven to nine participants who «kicked-off» the discussion with very brief remarks followed by an opportunity for plenary session comments from all participants. That was then followed by small group discussions. All conference proceedings and written materials were in English and Spanish, with simultaneous translation provided.

Plenary session topics focused first on how to achieve cooperation with different systems of law and legal education, and then on specific aspects of legal education; faculty exchange and cooperation; student exchange and cooperation; enrichment of the curriculum through international cooperation; and a « global curriculum » and educational outcomes. The Conference concluded with a discussion of possible future institutional moves. Discussions were candid and thoughtful and contributed to the development of a strong consensus that we must all do more to help our students and faculty understand different cultures and legal systems.

New York University's Villa La Pietra provided a superb setting for the Conference, and Dean John Sexton and New York University's staff in Florence made excellent arrangements for an opening and closing dinner and a reception at the home of the American Consulate General. These social opportunities contributed to a strong sense of *camaraderie* among participants and helped forge a strong commitment to move forward after the Conference.

At the conclusion of the Conference, participants unanimously adopted a resolution asking the AALS to appoint working groups to carry on the important work of the Conference. In addition to a coordinating working group there will be three other groups focusing on resource issues; exchange of information; and possible future programs. Broad representation of continents and legal systems will be critical to composition of these working groups. Among the topics to be discussed by the working groups will be how to finance any future cooperative initiatives, possible topics for future conferences and programs, and what forms of cooperation are possible among existing, or new associations of law schools or faculty members in different parts of the world.

Postscriptum: The working groups have now completed their deliberations and the AALS Executive Committee has approved a second international conference to be held in 2004, the tentative working title for which is "Legal Education for a Transnational Law Practice". The planning committee and an advisory group for the 2004

conference has been appointed and are beginning their work. The planning committee will meet in early June.

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