

Call for Participation in a Discussion Group on
Tightrope: Teaching Criminal Law to First-year Students in a Polarized Moment
Abstracts due: Wednesday, August 28, 2024

Introduction

This is a Call for Participation in Discussion Group to be held during the in-person AALS Annual Meeting from January 7-11, 2025, in San Francisco.

Discussion groups allow a small group of faculty to engage in a sustained conversation about a topic of interest. This discussion group's participants are expected to write and share a short abstract (3 pages, double-spaced) to begin their participation in the discussion. The rest of the session will feature a lively and engaging discussion among the small group of participants. The participants in this discussion group will be the individuals identified in the original proposal submitted to the Program Committee, plus additional individuals selected from this "call for participation." There will be limited audience seating for those not selected in advance to be discussion participants.

Description

Many students' perceptions of criminal law have evolved over the past five years, as awareness of disparities along lines of race and class at all stages of the criminal legal system has increased. This is in part because of the increasing attention to police killings of unarmed Black men as well as political attacks on Critical Race Theory and "wokeness." The potential ideological divide in the classroom is wide, and instructors consequently must present material that was already inherently controversial and disturbing to a divided and skeptical audience. Further, the intensity of the material, involving graphic descriptions of crimes of extreme violence and what are often deeply disturbing statements by judges about involved parties' identities, makes classroom discussion fraught.

Challenges to the instructor may also relate to the instructor's own identity and perceived legitimacy in the eyes of students, the students' identities and the extent to which they may relate to material covered in class, and the specific subject matter. This panel will provide a forum to discuss each of those three issues through examination of the following questions:

- How can instructor's credential themselves (or be credentialed by others) when they may face identity-based negative assumptions?
- How can we help students navigate sensitivities to topics based on their identities?
- How can we create a classroom where students can talk across identity differences and ideological divides?
- What are the core topics the class should address? How can failure to address specific crimes or inclusion of specific crimes, such as sexual assault, provoke criticism from either end of the student ideological continuum?
- How should the class be organized, and how does the answer to that question relate to the question of course goals and casebook selection?

- How can instructors deploy experiential teaching methods, involving students in group work on exercises or simulations, when students vehemently disagree with either each other or with the premise of the exercise? For example, some students may refuse to make arguments that favor the prosecution in a hypothetical case, and others (or the same students) may refuse to make arguments that favor defendants accused of particular, hypothetical crimes.
- How can we forge community, and perhaps even consensus, about the proper approach among the faculty who teach first-year criminal law?

Call for Abstracts

The Annual Meeting Program Committee invites faculty and administrators who would like to join this Discussion Group to submit a three-page abstract that addresses the complexity of teaching a first-year class on Criminal Law and their approach(es) to the challenge **by Wednesday, August 28, 2024**. The organizers and confirmed discussion participants include:

Frank Rudy Cooper
William S. Boyd Professor of Law and
Director of the Program on Race, Gender,
and Policing
William S. Boyd School of Law
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jonathan Glater
Associate Dean and Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley

Aya Gruber
Harold Medill Heimbaugh Professor of Law
USC Gould School of Law

Karen Pita Loor
Clinical Professor of Law
Boston University School of Law

Jamelia Morgan
Professor of Law and Director, Center for
Racial and Disability Justice
Northwestern University Pritzker School of
Law

Ngozi Okidegbe
Moorman-Simon Interdisciplinary Career
Development Associate Professor of Law
and Assistant Professor of Computing &
Data Sciences
Boston University School of Law

Alice Ristroph
Dean's Research Scholar and
Professor of Law
Brooklyn Law School

Space in this Discussion Group is limited; the Committee, along with the faculty organizers who proposed this discussion, will select the remaining discussion participants from the abstracts submitted. At the AALS Annual Meeting in January, selected participants will make a one- to two-minute presentation during the Discussion Group. The remaining time will be devoted to a moderated, roundtable group discussion.

Each submission for this Discussion Group should include:

- The title of the submitted presentation/paper;

- The name, school and email of the applying participant;
- A three-page, double-spaced abstract that addresses the particular complexity of teaching a first-year class on Criminal Law and their approach(es) to the challenge; and
- The curriculum vitae of the applying participant.

In reviewing the submitted abstracts, the discussion group organizer and selection committee will consider the following:

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

Abstracts are due by **Wednesday, August 28, 2024**, and should be submitted using the online submission form <https://aalsweb.wufoo.com/forms/wb2dffk1xw6pbv/>