

# The **EQUALIZER** **SALT**

Volume 1999, Issue 3

Society of American Law Teachers

August 1999

## PRESIDENTS' COLUMN



– Stephanie M. Wildman  
*University of San Francisco  
School of Law*

– Phoebe A. Haddon  
*Temple University  
School of Law*

Although you read this *Equalizer* at the beginning of a new academic year, we write during the summer, following a productive May Board meeting. The SALT Board has begun to engage in long-range planning for the organization and to support the Action Campaign. In preparation for that work, we spent some time at the May meeting discussing what "action" means for SALT and what an "activist" is. We take this opportunity to share with you some of the responses and our thoughts on the Board of Governors' discussion.

SALT has always been committed to equality in the academy and the legal profession. That commitment has meant support for integrating the profession, so that it is not all white and male, and making sure our classroom conversations include consideration of how race, gender, sexual orientation, wealth, physical ability and other identity categories affect legal decision-making and impact on our efforts to create an inclusive classroom environment.

With the Action Campaign symbolically kicked off by active participation in the CARE March at the AALS annual meeting in January 1998, SALT initiated a new phase, making proactive work, not just reaction, a central part of our organizational goals. For some of us, activism has always been an essential part of our life's work,

though often thought of as "extracurricular," not part of our "day job." For many of us, participating in the March and the Action Campaign has been energizing -- even transformative -- opening new avenues for translating our progressive values into concrete practices. For others it has meant redoubling efforts to ensure that the important teaching and social equality work of SALT is carried forth in visible and engaging ways.

Do you regard yourself as an activist? Is "academic activist" an oxymoron? Professor **Gerald Lopez**, speaking several years ago to those attending the Latino Critical Scholars Conference in San Diego, observed that law school academicians are notorious for becoming paralyzed at the thinking stage of their activist work. In his inimitable, eloquent way, he challenged us to avoid that paralysis by not getting stuck on words as we serve communities that are disenfranchised and marginalized.

SALT has encouraged law professors to challenge our students to move beyond the classroom and to move ourselves from behind the podium. (See, for example, the report of SALT's Teaching Conference at Loyola-LA in the *Equalizer* volume 1999, issue 1; and the report of SALT's co-sponsorship of the New Orleans march to protest Louisiana Supreme Court student practice rules in the *Equalizer* volume 1999, issue 2). We believe that there are myriad ways of being active and that finding your own way is important. Activism means making a commitment to and taking steps toward changing the status quo of exclusion and disenfranchisement. These steps toward change might sometimes be very tiny, but every step counts. Baby steps may be all that some of us can muster if only because of the thousand directions

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in which we are pulled. Just taking each step is critical.

For some SALT members, encouraging participation in our Action Campaign has meant "coming out" to colleagues as activists. In some respects, just "being" – i.e., accepting the mantle and being identified as someone promoting change for our students and colleagues – is activism.

For some, the label activist can only be *earned* by being heroic and brave, like **Rosa Parks** or **Emma Goldman**. For others, the definition is more functional. The work of **Mari Matsuda** comes to mind: she tells us to think about the working, single mother with two young children living in a cold water, fourth floor walk-up, and asks: "What are you doing to help her?" An activist is someone trying to make a difference in her life.

Ironically, the political resistance to affirmative action and use of colorblindness rhetoric may have contributed to confusion about what it means to be an activist. In this environment, courts have found action culpable that is aimed at promoting equality and have found no legal responsibility where government is indifferent to the consequences which perpetuate inequality, even if there are reasonable means to address it.

By some definitions, academic activist may be an oxymoron. Yet if we believe in the power of ideas, then the articulation of new ways to think about the world, working in coalition across identity lines and raising these ideas in unreceptive institutions, is surely not compliance with the status quo. If we are careful to heed Professor Lopez' warning not to get stuck at the thinking stage and remember to take baby steps, isn't that activism? The controversy about how others define the term is not important if each of us believes he or she is engaging in the process of social change promoting equality.

We do believe that movement is a critical component of activism. We hope that you will continue to help us to move the academy and the legal profession to another place -- promoting social change in and out of the classroom.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the comments people often make about SALT is how connected they feel to others at SALT conferences and events. Many members feel isolated in institutions that feel so unlike home. Although we have an annual or bi-annual teaching conference and host various events at the annual AALS meeting, it remains difficult for members to gather and talk on a regular basis. The Board is

exploring how SALT can do more for its members and engage that sense of wanting to connect that many members share.

One idea calls for a system of regional vice presidents who would plan a SALT event in their geographic region each semester. Are members interested in such an idea? You can email the Board through our web page at [www.scu.edu/law/salt](http://www.scu.edu/law/salt) or send your comments to us individually: to Pheobe at [phaddon@vn.temple.edu](mailto:phaddon@vn.temple.edu) and to Stephanie at [swildman@law.berkeley.edu](mailto:swildman@law.berkeley.edu). Let us hear from you. ■



## SALT's **MEMBERSHIP** **CONTINUES TO GROW**

– Joyce Saltamachia  
*New York Law School*

The beginning of the fall semester also marks the start of SALT's annual membership drive. During this time, we remind continuing members to renew their memberships, but we also seek to publicize SALT in all the law schools in an effort to increase our new member rolls. New members not only serve to provide SALT with fresh energy, ideas and talents, but also help give the vital financial support we need in order to fund our many projects.

Currently SALT's membership is at an all-time high. We have 581 paid members, an increase of more than 200 from 1998. Our successful teaching conferences over the past few years, as well as the CARE March and other AALS activities, have increased SALT's visibility and brought in many new members. Last year, SALT members at each school were asked to distribute membership information to their colleagues, an effort which also helped to attract new members. However, there are still a number of schools without a single SALT member. The Membership Committee will seek to identify potential members at these schools and then enlist their aid in distributing membership forms. If you are contacted by the Membership Committee to assist in our annual membership drive, please help.

This is a productive and exciting time in SALT's history. The best advertisement for SALT is its members, and we need the help of everyone to make sure that SALT continues to be the dynamic organization that it is. ■

The Society of American Law Teachers (SALT)  
and  
Golden Gate University School of Law  
present a one-day conference ...

### Re-Examining the Bar Exam

How are bar exams shaping legal education? • How do bar exams shape the legal profession?  
Who is passing and who is not? • Why do racial disparities in bar passage persist?  
What is being done to improve the bar exams? • What should be done?  
What can *you* do?

**Saturday, September 25th, 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.**  
Golden Gate University School of Law  
536 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94105

**Confirmed Speakers include:** Alex Johnson (University of Virginia); Beverly Moran (University of Wisconsin); Larry Grosberg (New York Law School); Dean Barbara Aldave (St. Mary's University); David White (Testing for the Public); Lisa Iglesias (University of Miami)

**Who Should Attend?** Legal educators ready to engage bar exam issues. Bar leaders frustrated by disparate bar passage rates. The conference will be interactive, with time to assimilate new information and time to put it to use.

For more information about registration, speakers and schedules, see the SALT website at [www.scu.edu/law/salt](http://www.scu.edu/law/salt) or contact Professor Joan Howarth at [jhowarth@ggu.edu](mailto:jhowarth@ggu.edu) or (415) 442-6645.

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- Enroll/renew me as a Regular Member. I enclose \$50.00 (\$35.00 for those earning less than \$30,000 per year).
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### *The SALT Equalizer*

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