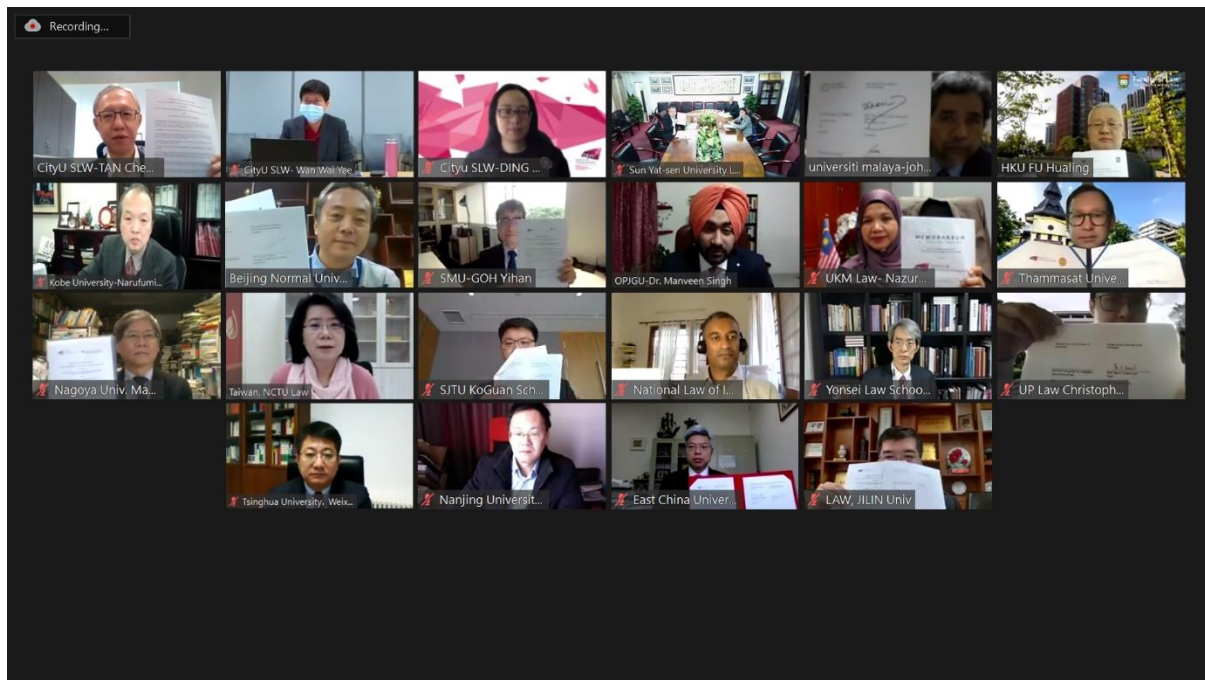


Insights from the inaugural Asian Law Schools Association Deans' Congress on the Future of Law Schools and Legal Education

January 15, 2021



Virtual Signing of the ALSA MOU

The Asian Law Schools Association (ALSA) was formally inaugurated on January 15, 2021 with a Deans' Congress. Deans and academic leaders from the 22 founding institutions participated in a wide-ranging and stimulating discussion on the future of law schools and legal education.

Below are some of the insights from the Deans' Congress.

1. A strong theme was the pace of digitalization brought about by Covid-19. There was a strong consensus that hybrid learning is here to stay and views were also expressed that it should be the norm moving forward. This poses challenges while at the same time creates exciting opportunities for innovation such as the possibility of “global classrooms”. Strong views were expressed about ALSA pioneering the use of global classrooms, which can take a number of forms.
2. One suggestion that was made and supported by several Deans was that the founding members can contribute courses (that are taught either wholly online or hybrid online and face to face classes) into a basket which students from other founding universities can take online. This will enhance the number of offerings that are available to the students and at the same time allow them to obtain the benefits of taking courses taught by renowned faculty members of the other universities without incurring significant costs of travel and accommodation.
3. An interesting insight was made about how the human-technology interface will become more important. This led to a discussion about some of the implications this would have on the legal profession and by extension law schools. One implication is

that much of the tedious and time intensive work done by young associates may no longer be necessary in the medium term. This in turn raises the difficult issue of what law schools can do to ensure that their students continue to have value to law firms and other employers.

4. One theme that was much discussed (and that also may be part of the solution to the preceding issue) is the importance of interdisciplinary education. Law schools should not only be located within their universities but become better integrated with the entire university community. In addition to long-established double degree programs with the humanities, social sciences and business, Asian law schools are starting new double degree programmes in science and technology while increasingly integrating broader perspectives into the law curriculum as a whole. The importance of integration was stressed by many participants so that students do not see interdisciplinary education as separate streams and are able to better integrate the knowledge and perspectives they encounter.
5. In terms of teaching methodology, views were expressed that academic faculty must transform themselves from being “gurus” in the classroom to facilitators to enhance student learning, and in an interconnected world having sufficient courses in the English language is important.
6. A concern shared by some is the impact of Covid-19 on the economy and how this may adversely affect funding for higher education. More efficient cost management could therefore be crucial. The ability to obtain research grants may also assume greater importance. As such grants are competitive in nature, and greater priority may be given to projects focused on health and certain areas in science, to be competitive law-based applications may have to be more interdisciplinary to have greater societal impact.
7. Just as the hybrid mode of learning may become the norm, similar views were expressed about online international conferences and symposia, given also the potentially challenging financial circumstances. A number of participants observed that their experience of such activities has been positive. In addition to financial savings, online conferences and symposia can also be held on a more timely basis and not be limited to windows where there is no teaching.
8. Notwithstanding these advantages, it was observed that time zone differences raised practical problems, and the loss of informal discussion and interaction was a major disadvantage. Such conferences and symposia may therefore have to be held over shorter segments involving more days; greater thought has to be given to using electronic meeting rooms that allow people to spontaneously transition to; and more use be made of pre and post-meets.

About the Asian Law Schools Association

The Asian Law Schools Association is a network of 22 leading Asian law schools dedicated to the development of legal education and scholarship within Asia. It seeks to facilitate collaboration through conferences, symposia, workshops, round tables and other learned activities. More information on ALSA may be found at: <https://www.cityu.edu.hk/slw/ALSA/>.