



## **Student Chapter Handbook**

**(Last Updated January 26, 2026)**

Thank you for your interest in ACS's Student Chapters. This handbook is intended as a resource for incoming and current student leaders and those interested in organizing new chapters. If you have additional questions or suggestions for future editions, please contact us.

Thank you for your time and enthusiasm for ACS.

Contact the ACS Chapters Team!

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*If you don't know who your ACS National liaison is, please email [Campus@acslaw.org](mailto:Campus@acslaw.org) and we'll connect you.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION: THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION SOCIETY

The American Constitution Society for Law and Policy (ACS) is the nation's foremost progressive legal organization, with a diverse nationwide network that includes nearly 250 student and lawyer chapters, and progressive lawyers, students, judges, scholars, elected officials, and advocates.

**Our Mission.** Our mission is to support and advocate for laws and legal systems that redress the founding failures of our Constitution, strengthen our democratic legitimacy, uphold the rule of law, and realize the promise of equality for all, including people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and other historically excluded communities.

**Vision.** We envision a multi-racial, representative democracy that includes:

- A judiciary that reflects the diversity of the public it serves, vindicates fundamental freedoms, protects democratic guardrails, upholds the rule of law, and interprets the U.S. Constitution through the lens of history and lived experience;
- Democratic institutions that advance equity and justice, uphold the rule of law, and guard against the abuse of power; and
- A robust and diverse legal civil society that actively promotes progressive legal transformation and redress of the founding failures of our Constitution and of our laws and legal systems.

**Shaping Debate.** Through our public programs (over 1,100 debates, conferences and press briefings across America each year), publications, and active on-line presence, ACS generates “intellectual capital” for ready use by progressive allies and shapes debates on key legal and public policy issues.

**Building Networks.** The engine that drives the organization's work is its rapidly growing nationwide network of student and lawyer chapters in 48 states and almost every law school.

**Making a Difference.** The strength of ACS's ideas and the scope of its nationwide network enable it to make a difference in legal and public policy debates and ensure that law is a force to improve the lives of all people.

ACS is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. As a 501(c)(3) organization, ACS and all ACS chapters are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office, party, or other political organization.

ACS chapters also generally do not engage in lobbying. ACS members and event attendees cannot be encouraged to call their representatives to lobby for a specific vote. Attendees also cannot be encouraged to vote a specific way on ballot initiatives.

Views expressed by the speakers and attendees reflect their individual opinions and should not be attributed to ACS. Have speakers complete the [Speaker Release Form](#).

**From ACS President Phil Brest in January 2026:** We are at a critical inflection point in our nation's history. The rule of law is under assault. Democratic principles and democracy itself are attacked daily. Institutions are under immense pressure. Civil society faces new threats.

Now, more than ever, we need organizations like ACS, and we need dedicated, principled people like you. After all, the protections of the Constitution mean little without a collective will to act. And so, it will be my mission to make ACS the forum for the students, lawyers, academics, policymakers, and judges who are ready to accept both the opportunities and the responsibilities of this moment.

. . . [ACS] chapters are not only the lifeblood of ACS, but a tailor-made infrastructure for sharing ideas, testing theories, and gathering diverse inputs. My intent is to learn from our network and shape an ACS that works best for you.

. . . Together, and with your support, we will move ACS forward. We will continue to build a community around a shared identity and values. We will defend democracy and support those who champion the rule of law. And we will transform our system of law and government into a force for good in all our lives.

**From the ACS Chapters Team:** We are excited to work with you. The ACS Chapters Team works with our leaders to get them connected to the ACS network, including lawyers and scholars who are working on the issues that matter most to you. We help you channel your interests and passions into ACS programming. Over the years, we've helped so many of our leaders identify effective ways to channel their energy and make a real positive difference. Please reach out to us. We're happy to jump on the phone with you to brainstorm and talk through ideas, share with you what's happening at other schools, connect you with ACS friends all around the country, and help you organize strategically, effectively, and thoughtfully.

## II. ACS CHAPTERS AND ACS NATIONAL

ACS chapters elect their own boards and operate semi-autonomously under ACS National's guidance set forth in this handbook. They manage their own on-campus programming and events, communications, and other activities, with more substantial ACS staff input provided upon request.

**Student Chapters.** Student chapters are at the heart of the American Constitution Society. We take ideas seriously and are committed to rigorous debate and discussion of legal theory and doctrine. Given their central role in the formation and transmission of legal ideas, and in the shaping of young lawyers, law schools are a natural place for us to start. ACS began with a chapter organized by law students at Georgetown University. We now have approximately 200 student and lawyer chapters in almost every state and law school. A complete list of ACS student chapters can be found [here](#). The latest information about our student chapter resources and activities is located [here](#).

Through our student chapters, law students gain a greater understanding of the legitimacy of a vision of the law that gives human values a central place. As new students begin the process of learning to “think like lawyers,” we believe the activities of these chapters – through speaker programs, debates, symposia, and student meetings – demonstrate to them that rigorous legal thinking does not require the abandonment of such values. Finally, our student chapters create a community for like-minded students, and introduce them to faculty, practitioners, former and current government officials, judges, and public interest advocates who share their values.

ACS supports its chapters' right to sponsor, promote, or participate in demonstrations, counterprogramming, boycotts, and other events protesting policies and events with which they disagree. ACS expects its chapters to remain peaceful and to undertake protests constructively and respectfully, while not diminishing their ability to speak out and draw attention to policies and events with which they disagree.

**Lawyer Chapters.** In addition to student chapters, ACS has chapters for practicing lawyers in major legal markets around the country. These chapters provide speaker programs and a forum for discussion and debate of legal ideas outside the law school context, as well as an opportunity for recent law graduates and more senior lawyers to meet and work together. Our lawyer chapters often work with and support local student chapters. Our lawyer chapter leaders speak at student events, attend networking programs, and collaborate on cosponsored events. See our list of lawyer chapters [here](#). If there is no lawyer chapter in your post-graduation area, we invite you to join our At-Large Chapter (learn more [here](#)). If you'd like to start a lawyer chapter in your region, email us at [LCEmails@acslaw.org](mailto:LCEmails@acslaw.org).

**ACS National Programs.** ACS sponsors national conferences, events, and briefings that bring together ACS members for sustained discussion of particular legal topics. Student chapters play an important role in the planning of these events when they take place on law school

campuses. ACS also records a podcast, which is available [here](#). Recordings of these events are also published and made available as academic resources for students.

**Working with the ACS Chapters Team.** ACS student chapter leaders should routinely check-in with the ACS Chapters Team at ACS National. Student leaders are expected to:

- Send updated board information to their ACS National liaison;
- Attend the Fall Student Orientation;
- Attend at least one chapter check-in per semester with their ACS National liaison;
- Post all of their events to the ACS Calendar ([here](#));
- Communicate promptly to inquiries from ACS National; and
- Adhere to all rules and policies as directed in the Student Chapter Handbook and as advised by ACS National.

**Membership.** Become an ACS National member [here](#). Current law students who become a member today (\$25) will have their membership extended until December 31 of their graduation year.

ACS National members will receive special invitations; scholarships and other discounts to national and lawyer chapter events; the opportunity to apply for and participate in ACS workshops, trainings, and mentorship opportunities; regular updates on our activities; and access to our job bank and our weekly bulletin. While becoming an ACS National Member is not a prerequisite to attend most ACS events (national, student, or lawyer chapter events), we strongly encourage students to become an ACS National member as a first step in a career-long engagement in the ACS network. We expect each student chapter to host bi-annual national membership drives.

We do expect all chapter leaders to be ACS National Members. If you have a financial hardship that prevents you from becoming an ACS National Member, please email [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org) with a brief description of your financial hardship. Please note that your law school *may* have funding to help pay for your membership.

### III. ORGANIZING YOUR ACS CHAPTER

**Starting or Reviving an ACS Student Chapter.** If your school currently does not have an active ACS student chapter and you are interested in growing or reviving a chapter, reach out to the ACS Chapters Team by emailing [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org). We are here to support you and provide guidance as you work to grow your chapter.

In building a new ACS student chapter, you will need to:

1. Get connected with ACS National (email [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org)).
2. Recruit other students to join your steering committee/executive board.
3. Get connected with your law school dean or student services (whoever oversees student

organizations).

- a. Each school has its own policies with respect to student groups, and you need to know what your school's policies are at the outset. Find out exactly what you need to do to formally register a new student organization at your school. Be sure to ask about procedures for booking rooms and accessing funding for events (speaker travel and food), promotional items, attending Convention, etc.
  - b. Many schools require that student organizations submit formal constitutions. Even if yours does not, the ACS National office asks that you prepare a constitution for your chapter. It should contain a mission statement that is consistent with the mission and goals of ACS. See this [template constitution](#) for guidance.
4. Identify faculty members who can serve as your chapter's Faculty Advisor(s). All chapters are required to have at least one faculty advisor.
  5. Send your Chapter Constitution and updated board to ACS National (email [campus@acs law.org](mailto:campus@acs law.org)).

**Chapter Constitution.** Many schools require that student organizations submit formal constitutions. Even if yours does not, the ACS National office asks that you prepare a constitution for your chapter. It should contain a mission statement that is consistent with the mission and goals of ACS. See this [template constitution](#) for guidance.

**Leadership Positions.** The way you organize your chapter and define leadership roles is up to you. However, we strongly recommend these formal leadership positions:

- a. **President (or Co-Presidents)**
- b. **Vice President**
- c. **Treasurer:** This person is responsible for managing funds obtained from your school and/or approved by ACS.
- d. **Secretary:** This person is responsible for keeping records of all meetings and activities, and posting events to the ACS National calendar.
- e. **Career Chair:** Host state court and federal judges to discuss their path to the bench, obtaining clerkships, and the importance of the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Also host career programs on different ways to utilize your JD, including working in nonprofits, government, civil justice (plaintiff side lawyering), big law, in-house, academia, etc.
- f. **Historian:** This person is responsible for maintaining an institutional memory in the face of constant membership turnover. The historian will update and track current and past student chapter leaders, current and past speakers and events, etc. Keeping good records will allow you to pass on the contacts and expertise you accumulate so that each year's chapter does not have to start from scratch. Check with your ACS National liaison for your chapter's Historian Document.
- g. **Liaison to Lawyer Chapter**
- h. **Liaison to Other Student Chapters**

- i. **Programming Chair**
- j. **Membership Chair**
- k. **Social Media & Publicity Chair**
- l. **1L Representative(s), 2L Representative(s), and 3L Representative(s)**
- m. **Diversity and Inclusion Chair:** This person helps to ensure that programming is inclusive and holistic, that programming includes diverse speakers, that membership is diverse, and that your chapter regularly collaborates, communicates, and partners with diverse bar associations and other organizations.
- n. **Community Engagement Chair:** This position will broaden ACS's base and name recognition, and promote a progressive vision of the Constitution outside of the law school. The Community Engagement Chair will connect with pre-law student groups, identify and develop community contacts for collaboration and outreach, and connect with students at the undergrad campus or other graduate school programs.

Think seriously about creating an executive board with positions tailored to your needs as an ACS chapter. We strongly urge you to find formal leadership positions for any student who wants or is being asked to do significant work (planning a formal speaker's program, taking charge of the brown bag lunch series, etc.). Whatever the title, students are more likely to commit substantial time to a project if they are formally identified with it – and once they do commit substantial time and effort, they deserve the recognition that a formal title brings. Your goal should be to keep anyone who is interested in being involved active in the work of the group.

In filling your positions, try to avoid relying exclusively on third-year students. It is important to have students rising through the ranks who will be ready to assume key leadership roles when the current leaders graduate. The best way to nurture a second line of leaders – and to give them the institutional knowledge they will need – is to involve first- and second-year students as board members and as planners of key events and activities.

Once your board has been determined, please update ACS National by sending your board update to [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org). Please utilize this template here:

Board Position	First	Last	Graduation Year (20__)	Phone	Email Address
Faculty Advisor (1)					



Faculty Advisor (2)				
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**Connecting with the National Organization.** All ACS student chapters **MUST** be in contact with the ACS National office (submit a board update, attend orientation, attend at least one chapter check-in per semester, etc.). ACS National will provide information regarding ACS's policies, legal obligations, and the terms under which student chapters may use the "American Constitution Society for Law and Policy." To register your new chapter or connect your new board to ACS National, email [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org).

**Faculty Advisor.** ACS requires that each chapter have at least one faculty advisor. Faculty Advisors are key to our chapters' presence, strength, and influence. They help in identifying, guiding, and supporting student leaders. They also provide consistency for our chapters after student leaders graduate.

Your faculty advisor can provide ideas for program topics, introductions to potential speakers, and suggestions on chapter activities more generally. In the unlikely event that you have any difficulty in dealing with your school's administration, your faculty advisor can help you navigate the bureaucracy. Even at the earliest stage, it will be valuable to have their guidance as you determine what you need to do to become an official student organization and as you seek to qualify for resources and assistance from your school. Our ACS faculty advisors around the country do important work to advance the goals of ACS; by regularly involving a faculty member at your school in your chapter's work, you will be aiding the work of the national organization in building an active and vital network of faculty leaders.

As a rule, you should look for faculty advisors who share the principles of ACS, who are well respected among students, and who seem to have the energy and practical skills to make a real contribution to your chapter. Don't overlook newer members of the faculty who may be as or more helpful than their more established counterparts. Newer professors may have more recent government, public interest, or private practice experience, which can be very helpful. Additionally, your chapter is not limited to one faculty advisor; many chapters have found it helpful to have at least two Co-Faculty Advisors. Many faculty advisors are also members of your local lawyer chapter!

**Relationship with Other Chapters.** We strongly encourage all chapters to build a strong relationship with other student and lawyer chapters in their area. This is beneficial from a networking and programming perspective. For example, if your chapter is planning an event and is inviting a speaker from out-of-town, send an email to other ACS leaders in your area advising them of the same. Perhaps you can co-sponsor the event, or the other chapter can invite that speaker to participate at another event at its school. ACS National will connect you with your local ACS leaders each fall. Please also utilize the following positions on your board: Liaison to Lawyer Chapter and Liaison to Other Student Chapters.



#### IV. OFFICER TRANSITION

**Elections.** Consider holding elections at the beginning of the spring semester so that the new board can learn from the outgoing board members and be prepared to take over at the end of the spring semester. Make sure the incoming officers have the following items:

- A copy of the ACS Student Chapter Handbook
- The chapter's constitution
- The chapter's ACS Banner
- Access to the chapter's locker storage, if applicable
- Member and officer contact information
- Instructions on how to post events to the ACS national calendar
- Instructions on how to request funding from ACS national and the law school
- Financial records
- Records from the outgoing Historian
- Past meeting minutes, agendas, and event calendars
- An email connecting the new officers with your ACS National liaison

In addition, the new officers should meet individually with their predecessors to discuss the responsibilities of the position, identify key resources and contacts, and field questions. The outgoing board should also be sure to review the following topics with the incoming board:

- ACS's mission
- Prohibition on Partisan Activity
- Membership and attendance goals
- Event ideas and/or ongoing programming for the upcoming semester
- Advertising strategies
- Timely communication with ACS National

## V. STUDENT CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

While ACS gives broad discretion to its chapters, all activities must be consistent with ACS's mission, policies, and legal obligations. What chapters choose to do within these constraints is a function of student ingenuity, energy, and interest. The best way to see the diversity of programming offered by student chapters is to view the ACS [online calendar](#), where all chapters **MUST** post their events.

### A. Programming Policies

**Prohibition on Partisan Activity.** ACS is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. As a 501(c)(3) organization, ACS and all ACS chapters are **prohibited** from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office, party, or other political organization. This is an absolute prohibition. Under the federal tax code, participation in a political campaign is grounds for revocation of an organization's tax exemption even if it does not form a substantial part of the organization's activities.

While speakers at ACS-sponsored events are free to promote or criticize ideas or policies, we cannot permit statements or activities that constitute endorsements of candidates or political parties. These restrictions apply to all events or publications hosted, sponsored, or co-sponsored by ACS. Thus, chapters sponsoring events must ensure that speakers do not express any views that could be reasonably interpreted as endorsing any candidate or party in an election.

ACS chapters can and should host discussions, debates, and forums on a wide variety of topics, including those that touch on current legal and public policy controversies and the political process. However, it is imperative that your ACS chapter **does not** engage in or appear to engage in political activity, and that your chapter **does not** endorse or appear to endorse candidates for public office at any level.

ACS chapters also generally **do not engage in lobbying**. ACS members and event attendees cannot be encouraged to call their representatives to lobby for a specific vote. Attendees also cannot be encouraged to vote a specific way on ballot initiatives.

### Dos and Don'ts for On-Campus Activity

- *When planning an event or activity for your ACS chapter:*
  - **DO post all of your events** to the ACS website using the instructions [here](#).
  - **DO reach out to your ACS liaison** if you need guidance or support with your programs, want feedback on events you may want to cosponsor or support as an ally organization, or plan on engaging in peaceful protest or responsive programming.
  - **DO** organize creative programs featuring persuasive and inspiring speakers.
  - **DO** provide all speakers, especially those speaking on topics that might raise issues under this policy, a copy of our [speaker release form](#) for their signature in advance of

their respective program. This form reminds speakers of ACS's policy and the applicable legal requirements, and requests their permission to record and distribute footage and/or transcripts of the program (if applicable). The form is available in the "Event Logistics" section of the [Student Resources Page](#).

- **DO** check in regarding recording. If you would like to record your in-person or virtual programs, please get approval from your venue (school, law firm, etc.) and your speaker(s). If you, your venue, or your speakers do not want the event recorded by attendees, please make that preference known to your attendees. As a chapter, you can decide how to store and share your recordings. Some chapters upload their recordings to YouTube or social media.
- *When considering a request from another organization on campus or in your community to co-sponsor, co-host, publicize, or otherwise support an activity or event:*
  - **DO** be a good ally to other organizations and affiliations that share ACS's values.
  - **DO** be thoughtful regarding the events/activities in which you might consider participating, cosponsoring, or otherwise engaging. It is okay to decline an invitation to cosponsor an event or host a speaker.
  - **DO** partner with diverse organizations to facilitate discussions, debates, and forums.
  - **DO NOT** co-sponsor rallies, demonstrations, or fundraisers for individuals or groups engaged in promoting or opposing candidates or political parties.
  - **DO NOT** make or solicit, as a chapter or in your capacity as an ACS leader or member, a contribution to the political campaign of a candidate, party, or other political organization.
  - **DO NOT**, as a chapter, lend employees and/or persons in their official capacity as ACS members to work on a candidate's or party's political campaign.
  - **DO NOT**, as a chapter or in your capacity as an ACS leader or member, email, publish, or distribute written or printed statements or make oral statements, on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate, party or political organization.
  - **DO NOT**, as a chapter, formally endorse a political candidate.
  - **DO NOT**, as a chapter, sponsor or organize voter registration drives, unless the effort is being led and organized by a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan organization trained to conduct such drives, such as Election Protection, League of Women Voters, and Rock the Vote.
  - ACS members and event attendees **CANNOT** be encouraged to call their representatives to lobby for a specific vote. Attendees also **CANNOT** be encouraged to vote a specific way on ballot initiatives.
- *If you identify a troubling situation, speaker, or program happening on campus or in your community:*
  - **DO** engage the ACS faculty advisor and/or university administration (including meeting in-person with your Dean of Students) to raise concerns in advance and reach out to your ACS National liaison.

- **DO** consider your options as a chapter, which could include counter programming, silent protests, and peacefully discouraging ACS members and allies from attending the event. Reach out to your ACS National liaison or [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org) for guidance and support—we are happy to share experiences we’ve seen from other chapters facing similar situations and can connect you directly to others in the network where appropriate.
- **DO NOT** engage in heckling.
- **DO NOT** directly or physically interfere with a speaker or prevent them from speaking.
- *If there is an incident on campus that involves an ACS chapter or its allies:*
  - **DO** immediately contact your ACS Chapter liaison and Faculty Advisor to inform them of the situation.

If you have any questions regarding this or any other matter, please contact Student Chapters at [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org).

## **B. Media Engagement**

When an event draws press attention:

- Consult with ACS National before providing comments, open letters, or other written or verbal communication to the press.
- ACS is happy to provide you with guidance if you anticipate press attending your program.
- While you may be asked to provide commentary, remember that not all press coverage is good and that not all media outlets are alike. Your comments can be taken out of context and result in feeding a negative storyline.
- Any public comments that you make as an ACS Chapter Leader not only reflect on your ACS chapter but on ACS as a national organization.

## **C. Funding**

Be sure to apply to your campus’ student organizations office to request funds for your activities. Executive board members (especially the Treasurer) should become familiar with your school’s budget process. In addition to funding from your schools, the ACS National office directs a portion of our national budget to help pay for student chapter events. These funds may cover event costs (such as food, drinks, etc.) or speaker travel costs (such as coach airfare, taxi, mileage, or one night’s hotel stay). **Please note that the ACS National office and its affiliates, including student and lawyer chapters, are prohibited from paying honoraria or fees to any speaker.**

**Requesting Funds.** To access ACS National funds, you must request and receive approval for funding BEFORE your event. Requests for funding should be received two weeks before the event. Funding and reimbursement instructions can be found [here](#). The national office will notify your chapter of what amount it has been approved to spend.

ACS asks that you take a reasonable approach to your event planning. ACS cannot approve unnecessarily expensive funding requests.

Reimbursable expenses include:

- Reasonable event catering
- Up to 15% tip
- Airfare (Coach (Coach/Economy/Wanna Get Away - When possible, please purchase at least twenty-one days in advance.)
- Rail fare (Coach)
- Mileage based on the IRS rate (when seeking reimbursement, please also include a google map printout of the mileage)
- Car rental
- One night hotel stay (\$200 or less)
- Reasonable speaker expenses, such as meals and cab rides (including Lyft, Uber X, etc.)

Items that are not reimbursable include:

- Honorariums (ACS chapters are not permitted to pay honorariums by or with any means.) or Speaker's fees
- Gifts
- Venue costs (We expect our student chapters to use their free school space.)
- Screening fees for films. If you are interested in screening a particular film that requires a screening fee, please contact your university's library, which can usually pay a discounted rate.

**Reimbursement Policies.** Please review all of the [Funding Steps](#) regarding funding and reimbursement from ACS National. In order to receive reimbursement for an event, the student chapter must have [posted](#) the event to ACS 's online events calendar. Please read the [reimbursement policy](#) and submit your receipts with the online reimbursement form. Expenditures that are not pre-approved are **not** eligible for reimbursement.

**Fundraising.** Please note that money from the national ACS office and your student organizations office should be sufficient to cover all of your chapter activities. **Your chapter may not engage in traditional fundraising nor solicit donations from sources other than your student organizational office and the national ACS office. Additionally, you may not solicit “chapter dues” from your members** (these dues are not the same as the \$25 donation for ACS National membership). Should you find that your student organizations office and the ACS National office do not sufficiently meet your chapter’s needs, please contact the ACS Chapters team to discuss the situation and your options. Also, if you become aware of a development

opportunity, let us know by reaching out to [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org).

**Checking Accounts.** As a result of IRS regulations, ACS chapters **may not** have accounts of any kind bearing the name of the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy or otherwise on behalf of the American Constitution Society at any banking institution. This includes banking accounts for your [School] Chapter of the American Constitution Society. However, this does not include student organization accounts held at and through your law school.

#### **D. Programs**

The ACS National Office will assist your chapter's efforts by providing substantive, financial, and administrative support whenever possible. We encourage chapters to host at least one event per month and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in both chapter programming, speakers, co-sponsorships, and membership. If you need assistance, please connect with us at [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org). Utilize ACS's [Model Calendar](#) and [Program Guides](#) as you coordinate your programs.

**Student Chapters Must Sponsor or Co-Sponsor At Least Five Substantive Programs Each Academic Year.** Substantive programs include any events that address a legal or public policy issue or provide professional development. Social events, such as stand-alone happy hours, while allowed, are not considered substantive events.

**Speakers.** Due to their breadth of experience and prestige, federal and state judges from your area should be at the top of your list of ideal speakers. Also high on the list should be government officials, both elected – such as a member of Congress or state legislative leader – and appointed – such as a current or former division head from the Department of Justice. Don't overlook state and local officials! Depending on your location, a state attorney general may be a star attraction and state or city solicitors, district attorneys, public defenders, and others like them may be excellent speakers. Other possibilities include scholars, especially those with special expertise in a topic of interest, members of advocacy groups or think tanks, and prominent local practitioners, especially those involved in public policy or impact litigation. Your chapter should consult with your faculty advisor, other faculty members, members of local lawyer chapters, and the ACS staff regarding possible speakers.

Speaker invitations are extended by student chapters directly without involvement of the national office. Student chapters should contact these people on their own through writing or calling – a letter or email followed by a call is usually a good approach – to invite them to speak. The letter and phone call are critical: You want to be professional, knowledgeable, and respectful. A sample invitation letter is [here](#). ACS is also happy to provide guidance and feedback on your invitation letter. Where appropriate, ACS may be able to help you elevate your invitation.

**Topics.** In some cases, choosing a speaker will make it unnecessary to choose a topic. Some

speakers may be invited to speak on the topic of their choice and will have their own ideas about what they would like to say. It is especially important in these cases to describe for the speaker both the general principles of ACS and any goals you have for the event so that your speaker can plan remarks accordingly. In other cases, the chapter will have a topic in mind and, accordingly, invite speakers who have expertise in that practice area.

We envision programs on a diverse range of timely issues with real practical importance. The underlying theme of most topics should always be constitutional interpretation. A few general topics that a chapter should cover during an academic year include constitutional interpretation, and the subject area in the most recent ACS [Program Guide](#), ACS [podcast](#), or ACS [blog](#). Other topics for chapters to consider include but are not limited to federalism and the nature of state sovereignty, methods of constitutional interpretation, rule of law, racial justice, income inequality, voting rights, criminal justice, immigration, privacy, the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, reproductive rights and women's equality, labor and workers' rights, and environmental and consumer protection. Apart from consistency with the broad mission and policies of ACS, the interest and imagination of student chapters are the only limits on potential topics.

**Format.** An event with a single speaker has the virtue of being relatively easy to plan and may be a very successful format when you have an especially high-profile speaker. Make every effort to include a question-and-answer session at the end of the speaker's presentation. Our mission is to engage students in a real discussion of legal ideas, and the give-and-take of such sessions is most likely to stimulate the participants. Consider allowing students to submit questions to a moderator in writing as an alternative or supplement to asking questions from the floor; students who would not be comfortable speaking in front of a large group may be happy to participate if given this option. Unless the speaker prefers to keep this role for themselves, which is something you should work out in advance, one student should take the lead in moderating the question-and-answer period by calling on questioners and then, at the appropriate moment, announcing when the next question will be the last one.

Though they take a little more planning, panel presentations with a group of speakers can be incredibly engaging and allow for multiple perspectives on a topic.

**Co-Sponsorships.** We encourage our ACS chapters to co-sponsor programs with other student groups on your campus. You may also want to co-sponsor programs with ACS chapters at other local law schools or with lawyer chapters in your area. This kind of joint program will allow you to pool resources, pool speaker contacts, increase camaraderie, increase attendance, and strengthen your legal network. The result can be an especially successful and high-profile event, attractive to the most prominent speakers.

**Administrative Details.** Many students already are well versed in the details that go into planning a campus event. Since some of those details vary from school to school, we cannot set out full particulars here, but we do have an [Event Checklist](#) and provide some of the basics of



planning a speaker program below.

- Plan ahead. Many speakers – especially those most in demand – will need a few months’ notice to clear their calendars and prepare a talk. Give yourself more than three months to plan if possible.
- Planning Team. Develop a team of students to coordinate programs. Ideally, leaders should engage in a process for identifying core teams of students to work together on each program that the chapter agrees to sponsor.
- Pick a date carefully. To some extent, speaker availability will guide your selection of a date. Additionally, plan around student availability – the weeks before exams and other times when students are heavily committed should be avoided.
- Pick a room carefully. You can never be sure exactly how many people will attend your event. Err on the low side in picking a room. It usually is better to have too many people in a small room than too few people in a big room: both speakers and audience members should feel that they have been part of a popular and well-attended event. Reserve your room well in advance.
- Advertise extensively.
  - **Post the event onto both your school calendar and the [ACS calendar](#).**
  - Make extensive use of fliers to promote your event. All approved student chapters may use the official ACS logo in conjunction with the words (Name of Law School) Student Chapter. Chapter leaders may email us at [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org) to request the logo.
  - Reach out to your faculty. The kind of event ACS chapters sponsor—an academically serious discussion of important legal ideas—should be of interest to many professors at your school. Provide all professors with invitations and include brief biographies of your speakers well in advance and follow up with personal visits to professors you know. Ask professors who teach relevant classes to allow a student to announce the event in class a few days beforehand. It is particularly important that you announce your events in the first-year students’ classes. Make sure to do it in each section if your school has more than one. First-year students are likely to be very enthusiastic, and it is important to get them involved in ACS from the outset of law school.
  - Reach out to other student groups whose members might be interested in your program. Ask leaders of those groups to announce your event at their meetings or allow one of your members to attend to make a brief announcement of the program.
  - Advertise through your school calendar, on social media, and through student listservs and other student-related outlets (GroupMe, WhatsApp group, etc.) Use email, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and/or Twitter to advertise the event and to remind people about it a day or two beforehand. See the [Student Resources webpage](#) for social media best practices. Providing information about an event through email is one

good way of keeping in touch with everyone who has put his or her name on a signup sheet at any of your events. Publicizing an event is the most important key to making it a success. While it may be a lot of work, the result will be a successful, well-attended event.

- Put notices in law school and university newspapers.
- Don't underestimate the effectiveness of word-of-mouth: if you can get students talking about your event, you can fill your room.
- Consider providing food. For many students, a big draw to an extracurricular event will be food. Obviously, you don't need to provide a full meal at your program; however, some snacks advertised on the flyer may draw a large crowd.
- Be sure to take good care of your speakers. Stay in touch with your speakers as you plan your event. Keep them posted on the details of the event, send them calendar invites, and check on travel arrangements. Offer to pick them up and drop them off at airports or train stations. If they are arriving early at your campus, see if you can offer them an office in case they want to get some work done. Get a parking permit for them. Additionally, don't forget to follow up with thank you notes. **If they are entitled to a reimbursement, make sure to send their reimbursement to ACS immediately via the reimbursement form [here](#).**
- Take Pictures. Please take pictures and share them with us at [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org).

#### E. Volunteer Engagement

Through ACS's volunteer efforts, we connect lawyers and law students across the country to opportunities tailored to their interests, skills, and schedule. We are constantly looking for volunteers for ongoing research and pro bono projects. Information on some of our current projects can be found [here](#). Please sign up on our volunteer survey or email us at [LCEmails@acslaw.org](mailto:LCEmails@acslaw.org) if you'd like to help or if you know of any volunteer opportunities or trainings where our members could be helpful.

- **Notice and Comment.** Submitting a comment for a federal or state notice of proposed rulemaking is one of the simplest and essential ways for the public to participate in the rulemaking process. ACS's Notice and Comment initiative identifies opportunities to comment on key regulations put forth by federal and state agencies. ACS monitors the federal register for notices of proposed regulatory changes and highlights select opportunities that may be of interest to our members. ACS encourages our members to write and submit comments. For more information, check out our [Notice and Comment Webinar](#). Please email [LCEmails@acslaw.org](mailto:LCEmails@acslaw.org) with the subject line "Notice and Comment" for more information. Learn more [here](#).
- **Run. Vote. Work.** ACS is committed to protecting the integrity of our elections and the legitimacy of our democracy through our Run.Vote.Work. campaign, which focuses on advocating for voting rights and non-partisan redistricting; mobilizing and educating voters about their rights; raising awareness and increasing engagement on down ballot races (many of which play a role in ensuring election integrity); and connecting our

members with opportunities to support voting rights and election integrity (including serving as poll workers and election judges). Learn more [here](#).

- **Constitution in the Classroom** gives lawyers and law students the opportunity to teach lessons on various constitutional topics to elementary, middle, and high school students. ACS encourages members to get involved around Constitution Day (September 17) and Law Day (May 1), but you can organize a Constitution in the Classroom event in your community year-round! Learn more and see our lesson plans [here](#).
- **Election Day Class Cancellation.** Democracy does not exist unless we vote, it's that simple. For most of American history, voting was a segregated act. Ensuring that all eligible voters are able to cast their ballot is vital to our country's pursuit of a multiracial democracy. In this vein, Election Day should be a national holiday. In the absence of a holiday, ACS encourages law schools to cancel classes and to encourage students to vote and volunteer at the polls. In recent years, several law schools have either canceled classes or allowed for class accommodations on Election Day to encourage law students to engage in the election process. [This page](#) provides information and resources on how more schools can join in canceling classes on Election Day to encourage voting and civic activism. To learn more about how your school can engage in our Class Cancellation initiative, email [Campus@acslaw.org](mailto:Campus@acslaw.org).

#### F. Informal Speaker Meetings

Student chapters should plan to sponsor several smaller and less formal discussion meetings during the year. Informal brown bag lunches with professors and local lawyers create a relaxed atmosphere in which students feel comfortable engaging in a real discussion with the speaker.

Faculty members make excellent speakers for informal meetings, as do local practitioners involved in work that is of interest to your chapter. Don't overlook adjunct faculty, who are usually practicing in the community; they may be both interesting speakers in their own right and a good source of referrals to outside speakers. Finally, if there is a lawyer chapter in your area, take advantage of it. Lawyer chapter members are often eager to help—they can speak at your events or help you identify local speakers.

Speaker choice will often dictate the topic for these informal meetings. A faculty member may speak about a current work in progress or a particular area of interest while a practitioner may wish to speak about a line of work they are involved in or a case they have litigated. Recent Supreme Court decisions also make good topics for informal discussions and require little advance planning. Within a week or two after a Supreme Court decision, your chapter can host a brown bag lunch for a faculty member or a local practitioner who has worked in the area, or any lawyer with Supreme Court experience.

#### G. Career Events

Consider hosting career orientated programs including,

- The nuts and bolts of clerkship applications, including selecting courts and judges, cover letters, resumes, and recommendations.
- A Path to the Bench event with local, state court, and federal judges.
- A panel on Careers in Appellate Advocacy.
- A panel on Civil Rights Careers.
- Progressive Careers in Local Government.
- Plaintiff-Side Career Panel.
- Progressive Lawyering in Big Law.
- Careers in Academia.

## **H. Social Events**

Student chapters should consider sponsoring an introductory or open social event for all interested students at the beginning of the academic year. In addition, each chapter should host one or two smaller social events for chapter members over the course of the year. Part of our mission on campus is to give like-minded students a sense of community and to help them grow their progressive legal network. Informal gatherings will give students a chance to turn colleagues into friends.

## **I. Additional Programming Ideas**

**Faculty Lunches with 1Ls.** Organize brown-bag lunches with 5 first-year students and a progressive professor who isn't teaching 1Ls that semester. It's a way for 1Ls to meet faculty they wouldn't otherwise—especially clinical faculty.

**Faculty Dinners.** Organize potluck dinners with 6-8 students of any year and a progressive professor. Students can volunteer to host and ask student guests to each bring a dish. Have students RSVP for the dinner (and note their dishes) via a Google spreadsheet.

**Coffee Chats.** Organize informal coffee chats with 6-8 students and a professor or a local lawyer chapter leader. The chapter can purchase coffee and light snacks for the event.

## VI. DIVERSITY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES FOR STUDENT CHAPTERS

As new people enter law school and join the law student community, many will decide within the first few days or weeks where to put their extracurricular energies. To assist you in recruiting and maintaining a chapter membership rich in diversity, we want to suggest some practices that you may find helpful. Some of these suggestions may seem obvious but taken together, they constitute an approach that can make group experiences more welcoming.

### A. Aspects of Diversity

Diversity means understanding and valuing the characteristics and beliefs of and ensuring the participation of people from a wide range of communities, including people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socio-economic status, religious and spiritual values, and national origin.

**Recruiting.** Take the time to focus on each person who seems interested in ACS, in what ACS does, and in what ACS has to offer them. Make your ACS chapter a home for any law student who shares a commitment to progressive values.

**Planning and Programming.** The first program or two that the ACS chapter sponsors during the year will tell new students a great deal about what the chapter is all about. You may want to be more deliberate about producing the first one or two programs on a subject that holds appeal for a diverse audience. You should always strive for speaker diversity.

Similarly, the program materials should describe the program in a way that appeals to a broad audience.

**Advertising.** Develop materials with an eye toward diversity. Consider what the materials say about ACS, what ACS does, and who is, and should be a member of ACS. We welcome a diverse membership into our network. The materials used to advertise chapter events should convey that message through the images and language used.

**Meetings.** Two things can often be a problem in the dynamics of group meetings. First, certain people appear to be more welcomed. Second, the ideas and opinions of some students may inadvertently be valued more than others. In order to avoid these issues:

- Hold meetings at different times than other student groups so students are not forced by logistics to choose between groups.
- As the meeting starts, chapter leaders should greet each person who is there, using the informal gathering time to make connections with students that are new or that the leaders do not know well. Although chapter leaders always have a great deal to discuss with each other, be aware that meetings that appear to others to be a “private club” are not as welcoming as those meetings genuinely

designed to engage each person.

- Plan the meeting in a way that genuinely includes everyone and solicits input; strike a balance between ongoing work and new ideas.
- Solicit program ideas or input, being careful not to be dismissive during this time period. Actively listen and solicit more information about why a student believes their program idea would appeal to other students. In making plans to go forward, try to make certain that each person has a role of their own choosing.

## **B. Leadership**

As ACS chapter leaders, you are the ones that set the tone for the chapter; others will look to you to get their cues about ACS's commitment to diversity in its work. Good leaders are also visionary "succession planners," meaning that from the beginning of their role as leaders, they try to identify the next generation of leaders. What works well is for those leaders to identify a diverse range of potential leaders, and nurture them throughout the process, letting their work within the group over time speak for itself as the group moves to select new leaders. In other words, it is helpful to avoid early conclusions about who the next leader(s) should be.

## **VII. ACS NATIONAL CONVENTION**

ACS hosts a National Convention in the summer. Learn more [here](#). To help students attend Convention, ACS will award scholarships to selected applicants. Stay tuned for more details on Convention and Convention scholarships!

## **VIII. KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE NATIONAL OFFICE**

An open line of communication between your chapter and the national office is very important. We regularly send emails with ACS updates and opportunities, coordinate a fall orientation, coordinate once-a-semester conference calls, and host weekly office hours (reach out to your ACS National liaison or [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org) for more information on weekly office hours). As directed in Section III above, you MUST provide ACS National with your board update (see the board update format above). We also require that your chapter update our office on your chapter's activities by [posting](#) your events to the online ACS calendar.

Also reach out to your ACS National liaison for instructions on joining the ACS Student Leader GroupMe.

## **IX. YOUR CHAPTER ON ACSLAW.ORG**

Each chapter has its own webpage on the ACS website. Your chapter page provides updates on your chapter's board and recent/past events. Please note that it is a requirement for your chapter to post your events. To post your events to the ACS National calendar, see instructions

[here.](#)

## **X. FREE RESOURCES TO MANAGE YOUR CHAPTER**

- a. [Mailchimp](#) is an email–marketing service that makes it easy to design exceptional email campaigns, share them on social networks, integrate with web services you already use, manage subscribers, and track your results. It’s free for the chapter size that you would serve.
- b. [Google Groups](#) supports discussion groups.
- c. Use [Dropbox](#) or [Google Drive](#) to store and share files and folders with others online.
- d. Host calls, meetings, or webinars using [Zoom](#).
- e. Use social media to advertise events and communicate with your chapter members. And don’t forget to follow ACS on Social Media.

**Follow us on Twitter:**  
**@ACSLaw**

**Follow us on Instagram:**  
**@americanconstitutionsociety**

**Follow us on YouTube:**  
**@ACSLawOrg**

**Like us on Facebook:**  
**[www.facebook.com/ACSLaw](http://www.facebook.com/ACSLaw)**

**Join our LinkedIn group:**  
**American Constitution Society**

**Follow us on Bluesky:**  
**@acslaw.bsky.social**

Remember, the national office is here to help in any way we can.  
For further information, visit our website at [www.acslaw.org](http://www.acslaw.org) or email [campus@acslaw.org](mailto:campus@acslaw.org).