

# ESSAY COMPETITION HANDBOOK

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ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES  
2019/2020



**elsa**

The European Law Students' Association

## FOREWORD

Dear reader,

We are proud to present the Essay Competitions Handbook, a complete guide to organising this amazing project.

Organising an Essay Competition is a great way for your Local or National Group to acquire new partnerships, strengthen the existing one and engage the student body in your country, while being an easy project to organise, which does not put a financial strain on the organising ELSA group. On top of that, organising an Essay Competition is a great way to take part in the ongoing International Focus Programme and contribute to one of the most exciting projects ELSA has.

With this Handbook, we hope to inspire you to organise your own or, even better, cooperate with other ELSA Groups in organising Essay Competitions.

Best wishes,

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## I. What is an Essay Competition?

### 1.1 What is an Essay?

An essay is a short piece of academic writing addressing a defined research question. The structure of an essay consists of an introduction, body and conclusion. Depending on the typing of the essay, its form and style might vary, but the main structure stays the same through these variations.

Generally speaking, there are 4 main types of essays:

1. *Narrative*

In a narrative essay the writer tells a story, usually about a personal, real-life experience. The format in which it is written is usually the main difference between a narrative essay and a short story and it usually builds toward making a statement.

2. *Descriptive*

A descriptive essay aims at giving a description of the characteristics of an object. Essays written in this manner usually communicate a deeper meaning through the description - the author appeals to the reader's emotions by focusing on details.

3. *Expository*

Expository essays compare, explore and discuss the topic on which they are written. Their main purpose is to inform the reader by presenting an analysis of the topic. Expository essays are written in an objective manner and the author restrains from using their personal feelings, while the aim is precisely presenting the facts.

4. *Argumentative*

In an argumentative essay, the writer examines the validity or falsity of the topic on which the essay is written. The author uses evidence, statistics or the opinion of experts to support their claims, while arguing the taken position with data. A well written argumentative essay is written in an analytical manner and its structure is built around a thesis or a statement and its main goal is to, by presenting data and arguments, convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view. This type of essays can differ from the classic structure which was presented earlier by introducing a part which presents opposing arguments and weighing in the favour of stronger arguments.

When conducting legal writing, authors should be writing in the expository or argumentative style.

## 1.2 What is an Essay Competition?

An Essay Competition is a project which, by its nature, falls into the area of Academic Activities, more specifically Legal Writing. Although similar to other forms of legal writing, it is distinguished by certain unique characteristics:

- An Essay Competition has, unlike a Legal Research Group (LRG), a competitive character, with a selected winner. Apart from this, it should be noted that an LRG consists of a compilation of different contributions on different subtopics, while essays are all written on one or more given topics, but can be compiled and published as a compilation of essays.
- An essay is not a regular publication, unlike a law review, but it can be published separately or as a part of another publication.

In essence, the main feature of an Essay Competition is the fact that it is a competition, with the goal to determine which of the received submissions is the best. This is done through a review process, which is conducted by a panel of judges, usually composed of academics and/or legal practitioners. There are three main stages in each Essay Competition - opening the call for submissions, reviewing the submissions and determining the winner, which should be kept in mind while the timeline is being created.

There are many different variants in which you can organise your Essay Competition, each one bringing different benefits for both partners and participants. For example, you can organise it by yourself or with one or more fellow ELSA groups. You can organise it locally, locally, nationally or internationally, in your native language or in the English language.

## II. Why organise an Essay Competition?

An Essay Competition is a very valuable project for a National or Local Group, as it is very flexible, adaptable and open to expansion, while still being very easy to organise, both in terms of human resources and financial matters. As an Essay Competition is a project which can be appealing to law students with various levels of legal education and legal writing skills, your target audience will be very wide, giving you the chance to achieve good engagement with the community of law students in your country.

### 2.1 For the participants

Below you will find points listed which may be used in attracting students' interest in an Essay Competition. It is of high importance to underline the role of ELSA in contributing to the

complementary legal education and the benefits which students will have from taking part in an Essay Competition.

The benefits include:

- Development of legal research and (legal) English skills.
- Researching further on the given topic.
- Associating with partners of the Essay Competition.
- Potentially being published.
- Winning a prize.

## **2.2 For the ELSA group**

There are many reasons to organise an Essay Competition, both as a National or as a Local ELSA Officer:

- A great promotional tool for the organising ELSA Group.
- Ideal tool for partnerships and institutional cooperation.
- A chance to cooperate with other ELSA Groups.
- A possibility to contribute to your national Law Review.

## **III. How to organise an Essay Competition**

Below you can find a detailed manual explaining how to an Essay Competition in practical steps. We are aware that there are more options on how to run an Essay Competition and many different versions thanks to its flexibility, however, this is suggested as a “standard” procedure.

### **3.1 Decide on your goals and discuss the idea with your board.**

Before commencing any project, you need to set the goals for the project; what do you wish to achieve with the Essay Competition and by which time? Set overall goals with several sub-goals. We encourage that you set goals that are realistic and easily measurable so you can follow up on your progress with certainty. Present your idea to your board and discuss the project.

### **3.2 Choose the topic and research question**

When organising an Essay Competition, the organiser first needs to choose the topic of research. While deciding upon the topic, there are a few crucial aspects you should have in mind:

- Consider focusing on currently topical issues of law in order to attract participants and partners.

- Keep in mind the chance to take part in the current ELSA International Focus Programme, by choosing a topic which is related to it.
- If you are organising a bilateral or a multilateral Essay Competition, make sure that the topic will be appealing to potential participants from each side.

Before settling on the topic, it is important that you actually conduct some research of your own to examine whether it is possible to conduct comparative research on the topic.

### **3.3 Structure the project**

Structuring an Essay Competition is a multi-step process which will require making a number of significant decisions which will influence basic elements of the project.

#### ***3.3.1 Assemble a Panel of Judges***

In order to determine the winner, you need to set up a panel of judges, which will be reviewing the submissions. Therefore, we recommend setting a panel of judges composed of academics and practitioners who are experts in the field. While approaching experts you have already worked with on other projects (e.g. moot courts, conferences etc.) and offering this opportunity to your general partners is a way of strengthening an already existing cooperation, organising an Essay Competition is also a great way to establish new partnerships. (see more below under “Partnerships”).

Ideally, you should have at least three judges who are conducting the review. Make sure to approach the academics from your faculty. Apart from academics, we also recommend approaching legal practitioners and members of NGOs who might be interested in participating as judges. They will bring a more practical approach to the review of submissions, and you can offer them an opportunity to reach law students from your country/university.

Keep in mind that having well-known and respectable judges will be a great promotional tool and will add to the legitimacy of your Essay Competition.

#### ***3.3.2 Find a general partner***

While finding partners who will be participating as members of your panel of judges is essential, finding a partner for the project as a whole is a step which we strongly recommend. This could be your faculty or university, an NGO or a law firm. Your partner should provide your ELSA group with a prize for the winner and/or financial support.



There are many interesting opportunities which you can offer to your partners:

- *Marketing*: Offer your partners the possibility to be featured on your website, to distribute their materials to your mailing lists and during your NCM, to promote them on your social media channels and to mention them during your side and follow-up events.
- *Academic Recognition*: Offer a possibility to take part in your side and follow-up events or to host their own side-events, for example host webinars on the topic and a place in the panel of judges for one of their members. You can also offer to have the publication where the winning essay is published sent to your partners after the publication if possible.

### **3.3.3 The review process**

You need to decide if you want to have the submissions reviewed first by your team before they are sent to the panel of judges, or if all the submissions are to be sent to the judges. We highly advise doing a pre-selection, as your panel will be composed of professionals with limited time.

### **3.4 Set the qualitative criteria for submissions**

Setting up the standards which potential authors have to abide by is a very important step which you need to make before actually opening the call for submissions. Make sure to specify which language the submissions should be written in and to provide detailed instructions on formatting and referencing (we suggest OSCOLA). We suggest also asking for a short biography of the author to be included.

### **3.5 Create a Timeline**

It is important to have the entire process planned in advance. Therefore, you should set a timeline for your Essay Competition with the key deadlines. The timeline must be flexible and should be agreed upon with your team and your Academic Partner(s).

Make sure to leave enough time for your judges to review the submissions and make sure to take their calendars in account. Faculty professors for instance are less likely to have free time during the exam periods, meaning that they probably will be unavailable for scoring during that period.

### **3.6 Secure a prize for the winner**

Securing a prize for the winner will add one more reason for law students to participate. While you can provide a prize as an organiser, you can also discuss this idea with your partners, as they might be interested in offering a traineeship, a book from their library etc.

### **3.7 Try to ensure that the winning essay will be published**

Publishing the winning essay is another great way to incentivise your target audience to submit their work. Ideally, the essay would be published in a publication with an ISSN – an International Standard Serial Number, which is used to uniquely identify a period publication. The winning essay can be published in, for example, your own law review or you can have one of your partners publish it.

### **3.8 Market your competition and open the call for submissions**

Approach your university, partners, other student organisations and ask them to help by promoting the project. You can also create PowerPoint presentations and ask your professors to let you present the competition after their lectures.

### **3.9 Collect the submissions and conduct the review**

As mentioned earlier, we highly suggest conducting a pre-selection of the submissions before sending them to your panel of judges.

#### ***3.9.1 Blinding the submissions***

In order to eliminate potential biases, it is very important to anonymise the submissions through the process of double-blinding, thus making sure that your reviewers do not know the identity of the authors, while the authors do not know which reviewer was conducting the review of their submission.

Blinding is an easy process in practice which can be done by removing the name and biography of the author before sending the submissions to be reviewed.

#### ***3.9.2 Shortlisting the submissions***

Once the deadline of the call for submissions has elapsed, the editors should go through all received submissions and conclude which of them should be sent to the panel of judges. The reviewers should be checking the quality of the arguments presented, structure, referencing and other qualitative criteria that were set when the call for submissions was announced.

### **3.10 Announce the winner and make the winning essay publicly accessible if possible**

The review conducted by your judges is not an advisory process, it is an essential element in the production of scholarly legal publication. Therefore, the verdict of the peer-review is to be followed by the organisers which should not override the decisions of the experts who have performed the review.

Make sure to adequately market the winning essay. If possible, upload it to your website and ask your Faculty and other partners to do the same if possible.

### **3.11 Follow up on your competition**

An Essay Competition can be easily followed up on. You can offer the author a chance to present their essay during one of your events, such as a conference or an NCM. This means that your competition will continue gaining visibility even after it is officially over and the author will have the chance to engage the community and present their conclusions.

## **IV. Partnerships**

Although the only partners which you need are the members of your panel of judges, there is no need to stop here. While keeping in mind that conducting an Essay Competition is a great way to achieve new partnerships, we also recommend approaching the experts you have already worked with on other projects as well as offering this opportunity to your general partners. Remember that having acclaimed partners will be very important for the marketing of your competition, as law students and young lawyers will be more interested in participating in a project which is supported by well-known lawyers or legal entities. Please find assistance on how to approach new external relations in the [BEE section of the Officers Portal](#).

### **4.1 Universities**

In setting your panel of judges, you will be looking at including one or more academics, and therefore, your universities are an obvious place to start. You may also consider having the universities as a general partner of your competition, or you can negotiate to have a possibility for the participants to gain ECTS points for their participation and/or a certificate of participation with the logo of the university. Another great way to establish a partnership with your university is to have them publish the winning essay, as most faculties and universities have their own publication centres or magazines.

### **4.2 Law firms**

Having legal practitioners as judges adds a more practical dimension to the review process. You can furthermore organise side and follow-up events with the law firm, and the partnership may include a financial aspect. Apart from the fact that having a partnership with a law firm can be lucrative for the organising ELSA group, you can negotiate having them offer a traineeship for the winner.

### **4.3 NGOs and institutions**

NGOs and institutions are often interested in partnering up with organisers of essay competitions, as this provides them with the opportunity to reach their target audience and promote issues which they

are interested in. NGOs and institutions might also be interested in providing their publications as prizes for the winner.

Remember to seek the approval of ELSA International before contacting international institutional relations.

## V. Contact Data

For more guidance on how to organise an Essay Competition, please do not hesitate to contact ELSA International at [academicactivities@elsa.org](mailto:academicactivities@elsa.org).