**Ethically Sourced Laurels**

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In many circles, it is considered gauche to be seen as actively pursuing a peerage, but understanding the paths available and some of the common pitfalls can help set expectations and create a more meaningful and satisfying journey. This class will touch on many important aspects of this adventure but there is no way to be comprehensive or to provide insights universally applicable to all Kingdoms and Orders. This is an introductory discussion of the pursuit of peerage, specifically relating to the Laurel but with parts applicable to other peerages, in a way that supports the health and growth of the Artisan, the Order, and the Society.

**What it is to be a peer:**

* Doing the work should be what makes it rewarding. Start from a place of excitement and joy.
* If you are doing it for the *POWER* and the *GLORY*… I have some very sad news for you…
* It is a JOB, not a cookie. The pursuit is only the beginning and often not the hardest part.
* You will be an ambassador of your community and the SCA, even on hard days.
* Peerage oaths – read your local oath and really think about what the words mean.
* **Corpora: Peerage:** Candidates for any order conferring a Patent of Arms must meet the following minimum criteria. Additional requirements may be set by law and custom of the kingdoms as deemed appropriate and necessary by the Crown.
  1. They shall have been obedient to the governing documents of the Society and the laws of the kingdom.
  2. They shall have consistently shown respect for the Crown of the kingdom.
  3. They shall have set an example of **courteous and noble behavior** suitable to a peer of the realm.
  4. They shall have demonstrated support for the aims and ideals of the Society by being as **authentic in dress, equipment and behavior as is within their power**.
  5. They shall have **shared their knowledge and skills** with others.
  6. They shall have **practiced hospitality** according to their means and as appropriate to the circumstances.
  7. They shall have made every effort to learn and practice those skills desirable at and worthy of a civilized court. To this end they should have **some knowledge of a wide range of period forms**, including but not limited to literature, dancing, music, heraldry, and chess, and they should have some familiarity with combat as practiced in the Society.
  8. They should participate in Society recreations of **several aspects** of the culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.
* **Corpora: The Order of the Laurel:** (i) Members of the Order of the Laurel may choose to swear fealty, but are not required to do so. The candidate must have attained the standard of **excellence in skill and/or knowledge** equal to that of his or her prospective peers in some area of the Arts or Sciences. The candidate must have **applied this skill and/or knowledge for the** **instruction of members and service to the kingdom** to an extent above and beyond that normally expected of members of the Society. (ii) The duties of the members of the order are as follows: (a) To set an example of courtesy and chivalrous conduct. (b) To respect the Crown of the kingdom; to support and uphold the laws of the kingdom and Corpora. (c) If in fealty, to support and uphold the Crown of his or her kingdom. **(d) To enrich the kingdom by sharing his or her knowledge and skills.** (e) To advise the Crown on the advancement of candidates for the Laurel.

**Important Caveats:**

* Norms vary from kingdom to kingdom, YMMV on this adventure.
* Peerages are bestowed at the pleasure of the **Crown**, sometimes with input from the Order.
* Criteria differ between peerages – this class is based on the Laurels but will have elements applicable to the others.
* It is OK to set goals, but do not attempt to create a “roadmap” to ensure elevation. It is not a checklist where you can complete ticky boxes and ensure a Peerage will result.

**The Bucket Theory:**

The Bucket Theory holds that when evaluating a candidate, there are four buckets into which their efforts are “sorted” – the Arts, Service, Martial activities, and Peer Like Qualities (PLQs)/Kingdom Clue. Any candidate for a peerage must have excellence in their chosen field, but NONE of the buckets can be empty to ensure a well-rounded peer. (See Corpora’s mentions of “several aspects” and “wide range of period forms.”)

**Martial Activities** – Even for a non-martial peer, the martial bucket cannot be empty. You need not actively participate in martial activities but should at least strive to understand their mechanics and be able to make sense of what is happening on the field. Respect for the martial participants is required and some support of martial activities in your area is desirable. (See Corpora G and H.)

**Service** – Ideally, service should be more than to just the activity and local community you belong to but can include offices like MOAS. It is important that you support all of the Society, don’t just be an arts-jock. Service should be meaningful and helpful – always remember Mistress Rosamund’s Equation: Services rendered minus Chaos engendered. Your service should meet a real need without creating more work for others.

**Peer Like Qualities (PLQs)/Kingdom Clue** –The “soft skills” that are often hard to qualify and quantify.

* Kingdom Clue: A suitable candidate should have sufficient time and milage under their belt to understand how their current kingdom works, administratively and socially. This can be hard for transplants since culture shock between kingdoms is a real thing – many years of experience in Kingdom A will not always result in an immediate recognition of your time, talents, and abilities in Kingdom B.
* Behavior should be “courteous and noble” and the candidate should know enough people to adequately advise the crown. Remember – behavior on and off “the field” will count – if you are a star presenter and hard worker at a Kingdom A&S but are disparaging of “stick jocks” and “wire weenies” and can’t be bothered to help out at the newcomers’ moot, people will notice and remember. Be as courteous online as in person – screen shots are a thing even in conversations you believe to be private.
* Personal presentation: your garb does not need to be perfect, but it does need to be reasonable and non-offensive. Think both about your kit (a T-tunic over jeans and sneakers isn’t going to cut it) but also about your personal grooming (no one wants to spend a long class with someone with a bad body odor or terrible halitosis). Be thoughtful with your words and consider if you have a “loud face” even if you do not say it out loud.

Often, when someone appears to “have all the skills” and to be “overlooked” by the Order, it is some of these soft skills that are missing. It is worthwhile to find peers you trust and do a check on how you are perceived and if there are skills that can be worked on. Common things to consider:

* Communication Skills – we all have slightly different ways of communicating, but understanding how your tone or process of communication is perceived can help you be better heard. Ask if you come off too passive? Too pompous? Is the way you interact with people seen as being kind and welcoming or do you do things that are perceived as pushy or creepy? Do you struggle in person or online?
* Bitterness/poor sportsmanship – it is HARD to feel that you are not adequately recognized for excellent work or that others are getting ahead faster. However, it can be easy for frustrations to be expressed in ways that are unflattering. If you need to vent, have trusted people you can talk to and do so in person and in private.
* Leadership – Peers are expected to teach and provide “service to the kingdom to an extent above and beyond that normally expected of members of the Society.” Are you a leader/instigator in your area or do you just go with the flow? Are you a resource to your community or an obstacle/gatekeeper?
* Over-eager/cookie seeking – As mentioned at the beginning of the class, it is often perceived as inappropriate to be actively seeking a peerage. Do a temperature check on your local area and Kingdom and see if you are exceeding the culturally acceptable level of aspiration.

**Arts and Sciences –** As this class is Laurel-focused, we will spend sadditional time looking at the Arts and Sciences bucket, however much of this is applicable to the other peerages, with the appropriate substitutions. The Arts and Sciences beautify our Society and make our experience of history more meaningful. Pursuing your Art and/or Science (hereafter “Art” for easy of discussion) helps all those you share it with better understand and appreciate our chosen world.

**Learning Your Art**

An important part of your journey is finding a focus for your study. This can either be a time/place (Elizabethan), a material (pottery), or even a specific function (armoring). While it is not strictly necessary to select a specialty, specialization allows you to more meaningfully develop depth in a field. It’s not impossible to be a general “material culture” Laurel, but that is rarer now because of the improved quality of scholarship that is available. Consider the pros and cons of certain topic choices.

* Rarer topics can feel “easier” since you don’t get lost in a crowd and there are fewer established Laurels in the field, but can be harder to research, show your knowledge, or build community.
* Consider if your kingdom has a bias for or against certain periods or topics.
* Do the background work to see what has already been accomplished – either in the SCA or in academia. What will you add to the field? Why?

However – first, foremost, and forever – choose something that sparks your interest and feeds your soul! **It is OK for this to evolve or change over time** – enjoy the process and follow your bliss.

**Sharing Your Art**

Corpora and Peerage oaths repeat it over and over: Peers are expected not only to attain excellence, but to share their skills and knowledge with others. How will you leak your geek? Canonically, this is done through formal classes, but many more options exist instead of or in addition to the classroom.

* Static Online – digital teaching has the capacity to be far-reaching and have an impact outside of the SCA. Consider blogs, webpages, and recorded classes. These are flexible, available anytime to students anywhere and can grow your reputation in places not physically accessible to you.
* Interactive Online – with online Universities and Zoom meetings, there are ever-expanding options to create a hybrid between the online and live experiences.
* In-person classes – live experiences are ephemeral but grow personal connections. Consider:
  + Group vs. one-on-one – private classes can be harder to see but may be necessary for a specific art or more comfortable for specific teachers and students.
  + Large event vs. small event – not everyone is cut out for a giant Pennsic class or perhaps you would rather debut a class at a smaller event to beta test it first.
  + Specialty events vs General events – a class that may get lost in a generalist event may be received with glee in a specialty event populated with like-minded nerds.

In addition to classes, A&S displays and competitions can be a fantastic way to spread your wordfame and introduce your nerd to a new audience. While some people are hesitant about competitions, judged entries can be a wonderful way to get structured feedback on your work that you can use to improve and advance your work. When entering displays and competitions, consider:

* Remember to photograph your display so you can later use it for classes, blogs, etc.
* Have copies of documentation or contact information available to share with interested gentles.
* Have pens and paper so you can take notes on your own observations (What went well with the display? What can be improved?) and information provided by others.
* Try to remain open to feedback and new information or sources. Getting critiques can be hard, but judging should be critical, constructive feedback that fuels growth.
* Revise after every experience. Just as your topic and goals can change, your research should also evolve as you hone your craft and focus your attention.
* Spend time on both sides of the table and learn how to be a good judge. Judging and giving feedback with fairness and kindness is a critical skill. No one likes a sore loser, and no one likes the Russian judge.

Accessibility is important – try to make yourself and your materials available and usable by all. Consider posting class notes and including QR codes to your materials on displays and business cards. Check the accessibility of text, images, links, etc. whenever possible.

***Always remember – your goal is to share not only your knowledge, but your JOY.***

**Research and Documentation**

Often maligned as “term paper writing” or similar, research and documentation are usually important components of becoming renowned in your field and are critical if you are trying to break new ground in a field. To most effectively be able to teach and share your knowledge, you should be able to not only tell what you know but to show how you know it, whether that is from deep dives into academic literature or from detailed records of practical experiments and their outcomes.

* Figure out a research/documentation system and stick to it. There are a lot of systems out there and you will likely be using them for a long time. Being able to access your notes and sources quickly and reliably will be invaluable. It does not need to make sense to anyone else but should be easy for you to use and maintain. Consider using a citation manager to make bibliographies less painful.
* Know the current experts and the critical sources in your field, both in academia and in the living history community. They will be able to guide you about what has already been done, what current problems and opportunities exist, and often provide feedback.
* What is the (intended) impact of your work? Are you looking to improve understanding of a topic in your field? Or are you focused on creating near-perfect replicas? The goal of your work will help guide what sorts of research you do.
* Why do (should) people care? The outcome of your endeavors can impact the best way to document and display your work. Think about what you most want people to understand and appreciate about it. If it’s a paradigm-shaking research project, think about how to draw people into EAGERLY reading the whole, perhaps through intro classes, visually interesting poster presentations, summary tables and graphs to make the information accessible, etc. If the end product is an item of exceptional workmanship, perhaps you spend additional time on the display, considering staging, lighting, signage, QR codes to the full documentation, samples of the product or the process (everyone loves step-by-step pictures!), etc. Engage your audience!
* Show your progress. People love to see how skills and knowledge build over time, so periodically showcase “how it started/how it’s going” type progress reports. For physical arts, document exactly how you perform each step, how long each step takes you to complete, and take pictures of the process. PUT THESE PICTURES IN YOUR DOCUMENTATION.

**Your Body of Work**

Think critically about your body of work because the Order certainly does. Do you have multiple completed pieces or just a few? How recent are they? Has your work evolved/improved? How accurate is your research? How do you support it? How do you share your work and your resources, both as a teacher and as a way to increase your wordfame? Are you known as a resource on the topic in the SCA? Reenactment? Academia? Where are your weaknesses and where can you improve your quality of work and/or exposure?

**On Being an Apprentice**

It is common for people who are interested in pursuing a Peerage to enter into (or at least consider) a dependent relationship. While such a relationship can be useful in that it can offer resources, shortcuts, feedback, and a voice in the Peerage circle, it is not strictly necessary and, in rare cases, can be harmful. It can be hard to tell whether someone will make a good Peer-Apprentice partner, so it is prudent to be cautious and get to know the person well before committing and risking hurt feelings. In many places, being a student first, having a year-and-a-day (or similar) trial period, or even having a defined contract period is common.

Here is a (non-comprehensive) list of things to consider in Peer/Dependent relationships:

* Proximity/face time
* Interest match
* Communication style and preference
* Art form/materials
* Time and place focus
* Activity level
* Goals and Expectations
* Family/Friends/Household associations
* Contracts/terms of service
* Peer’s reputation

While each Peer/Dependent relationship is unique, here are a few general archetypes to give you a starting point in thinking about what you would like in a Peer or possibly how you would want to structure student/dependent relationships in the future.

* **Ronin** – a lone student without a dedicated Peer. Pros: you can pivot easily to new interests as needed; many Peers are generous with their knowledge, even outside a formal relationship. Can be good, especially before you lock down your choice of topic. Cons: no sustained feedback from a single source, no dedicated voice in the local peerage council. (If you choose to go it alone, either temporarily or permanently, it is still probably worthwhile to ask a local peer to be your voice in the council and to hold your “In Case of Peerage” document. See below.)
* **Graduate student** – What some people consider the standard relationship – a Peer serves as instructor, then guide, to someone pursuing a similar specialty, often with clearly defined expectations and regular review of progress. Often includes an emphasis on written documentation and/or entering A&S competitions. Pros: Very systematic progress and defined periods of review. Cons: can feel very formal and may not work for people who are not interested in being documentation or competition focused.
* **Adoption into the Family** – Some Peer/dependent relationships are more like joining the family, especially if the Peer is the head of a large household. There may be duties related to the association that support the larger group more than the student’s personal goals. Pros: lots of people to provide support and friendship, often with similar interests and goals. Cons: time spent on others’ projects or on group infrastructure; more people provide more opportunities for personality conflict.
* **Hey, Neighbor!** – If you live in an isolated place with few local Peers and regular face time is important to you, you may end up with someone simply because of location. This is less common as virtual connections become more common and more acceptable to people. Pros: In-person assistance and feedback. Cons: lack of specificity to your field/period, personality conflicts.
* **Topic Twin** – If your field is particularly sparse, you may have few options of Peers who have expertise on your chosen art/period. Pros: access to someone with an understanding of your field and the available resources. Cons: mismatches of communication styles, goals, personality, and proximity preferences.
* **Co-conspirator** – Other relationships are primarily based on enjoying one another’s company. Learning and achievement can still be important aspects to the relationship, but there is a strong component of building a network of people who willingly participate in each other’s schemes. AKA Hold My Beer Peers. Pros: Variety! Excitement! Enthusiasm! Cons: mismatch in periods of interest or a lack of formal review.
* **Anti-Peer** – In select cases, an artisan may, for whatever reason, NOT be interested in being elevated (either at this time or ever) and having an anti-peer who can speak for you in the council can be useful.

**On taking Students**

Taking formal students as a non-Peer can be particularly fraught. In some places, it is accepted and encouraged; in others it is seen as unforgivably presumptuous. This can vary kingdom to kingdom and even Order to Order. Talk with local trusted Peers to judge the local sensibilities before jumping in and then apply some of the same principles of being an apprentice to having a dependent.

**In Case of Peerage Document**

People who are seriously pursuing a peerage should have a, ICoP on file with their Peer or a trusted Peer in the relevant Order. This is a document that lays out some of your preferences in case a Crown wishes to offer you entry into the Order. While not all preferences can be accommodated and there is no guarantee that a Crown will respect *any* of them, it is an effective way to at least let your wishes be known. There are several versions and formats, but the broad questions include:

* Do you prefer the elevation to be a surprise (instabonk) or planned (writ)?
* Would you like the offer to be made in public or in private?
* Anyone who could be helpful in planning the vigil and elevation, especially if it is a surprise.
* Food, drink, garb, and setting preferences for a vigil?
* People (including non-SCA family/friends) you would find meaningful to be present, speak for you, produce your scroll, and/or produce your regalia. Who are the best backups? How do we contact them?
* Any theme or persona details you would like incorporated, including garb and preferred title?
* Any time of year or event preferred/prefer to avoid?
* Ideal lead time between vigil/writ and elevation?

Mistress Lanea inghean Uí Chiaragáin of Atlantia’s in Case of Peerage Worksheet:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XhU-5Pd7iwAQak-TaLI9GVCpzXvp7p7NC4YpboF7J9k/htmlview?mibextid=Zxz2cZ>

Eithni’s Planning an Elevation guide: <https://eithni.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PlanningAnElevation.pdf>