

Dear Students:

We are looking forward to welcoming everyone back to South Texas this fall! I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on our fall semester planning.

I apologize that this message has been long in coming. These are extraordinary times, and there is no modern precedent for the decisions we are making. We want to be thoughtful about gathering the best information available, as well as about thinking through the consequences of our decisions. I greatly appreciate your patience and understanding.

I also apologize that this is a long message; I ask that you read it, however, so that all of us have the same information. Moreover, **we would like you to have a voice in how we move forward, and your input right now is crucial to our fall planning.**

As I write this, I am aware of four things:

- The coronavirus has had a more profound effect on our nation than any of us could have imagined. Without question, the coming year will be different than any of us would have planned just a few months ago.
- Law schools across the country are wrestling with the decision about how to conduct classes this fall. Some schools – from Harvard to Golden Gate, Berkeley to Ave Maria – have announced that they will be fully online. Others are planning on blending online and in-person classes.
- There is no perfect solution. Many of you have written me requesting that we conduct all classes online this fall, as you or family members are at particular risk due to COVID-19. Others have requested that we conduct in-person classes.
- The situation remains fluid. The stability that seemed to exist a few weeks ago has been replaced with a recent spike in coronavirus cases, and just this morning Texas began pulling back on its reopening plans.

Since the pandemic hit our shores in March, our South Texas community has responded to the challenge with innovation, resiliency, and a continued commitment to providing you an exceptional legal education.

I have shared with you previously the three bedrock principles that guide all our actions. From the beginning of this crisis, I and the entire South Texas leadership team have held true to three principles:

1. **Protect the health and safety** of our South Texas community and their loved ones.
2. **Maintain excellence** in our educational mission.
3. **Preserve and foster the unique community** that makes South Texas special.

Let me stop for a moment on these:

- First, in all of our decisions, we will put health and safety first. Classes can be made up; lives lost to the coronavirus cannot be reclaimed. The death toll in Texas is 2,312 as of this morning, and many in our community are at higher risk. Health and safety come first.
- Second, you will receive an excellent education. No matter how the education is delivered, you will learn the law, the skills, and the professionalism that you need to succeed in law school, on

the bar exam, and in practice. Whether classes are online or in person, if you dedicate yourself to your education, you will excel. South Texas is known for exceptional teaching and exceptional learning – and that doesn't change.

- **Third, community matters.** We will pull out the stops to ensure that – whether actually or virtually – our community is engaged and supportive. Through student organizations, extracurricular programming, and other events, community building will be a constant focus this fall. While some aspects of campus life will feel different, the strong connections between students, faculty, and staff that are the hallmark of South Texas will continue.

Nonstop since March, our faculty and staff have put in countless hours to ensure we carry out our commitment to these three principles at the highest standards possible. Here are a few examples of that effort:

- **The Registrar's Office has reconfigured the course schedules to maximize student and faculty safety as well as the availability of course offerings.**
We have developed an entirely different course schedule (all class times have been changed, for instance) to allow for more time between classes. We also have reconfigured the schedule to accommodate various scenarios, enabling us to maximize the number of classes available to you. That course schedule encompasses both Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, plus intersession courses. **That course schedule will come via separate email later today.**
- **Faculty members are going the extra mile to provide you with the best possible learning experience.**
Over the summer, our faculty is undertaking intensive training by an outside expert on the best practices in online teaching. The faculty are eager to implement the techniques and methods they have been honing to maximize their effectiveness and continually improve the classroom experience.
- **We have reconfigured classrooms and public spaces to ensure the health and safety of our community.**
With social distancing in classrooms, the Tower classrooms that normally hold 104 students now hold fewer than 30. Garrett Townes usually holds 202; now only 55 can fit. Elevators can fit no more than four passengers at a time. As a result, in addition to reconfiguring our existing classrooms, we are planning on adapting spaces across campus into provisional classrooms to accommodate classes and adhere to social distancing guidelines.
- **Our Emergency Management Team continues to monitor the situation and respond quickly and prudently.**
One of my first responses to the novel coronavirus situation was to establish an Emergency Management Team, including members of the faculty, staff, and students. This team meets regularly, and I will continue to rely on their guidance as we move through the phases of our building reopening.

Here are some things to expect when we return in the fall, which are consistent with what other law schools that plan to reopen will be doing, as well:

- **We will maintain best practices regarding health and safety. Please anticipate the following:**

- Face coverings will be required in any public area – including during classes.
 - Social distancing (minimum of 6 feet) will be required at all times.
 - Those who need the elevator for mobility reasons will have priority; most individuals will need to use the stairs.
 - There will be plexiglass partitions placed throughout the school, including around podiums in classrooms.
 - Sanitation and cleaning protocols have been increased.
- **Some classes will be taught in-person, while others will be taught partially or fully online. This is for three reasons:**
 - First, some faculty members are unable to teach in-person because they or their family members are at heightened risk due to the coronavirus. Those faculty members will teach their classes online.
 - Second, due to space limitations, even after we construct temporary classrooms, there may be insufficient classroom space to hold every class on campus.
 - Third, if a class is too large, it may be split so that two sections of the class alternate between being in-person and online.
- **Individuals who are unable to attend classes in-person due to the coronavirus will be permitted to attend classes online.**
 - Students will be able to certify that they cannot attend classes due to issues related to the coronavirus.
 - The American Bar Association has mandated that a student who elects to attend classes online may do so because of issues related to coronavirus, but not for other reasons (for instance, mere convenience).
- **We will need to continue to be flexible.**
 - We can't predict what will happen over the course of the next six or twelve months (after all, it has been just over three months since the pandemic hit).
 - The pandemic continues to evolve, and we will adapt accordingly.
- **We all must be responsible to each other.**
 - Because the most significant risk is that asymptomatic individuals can spread coronavirus, each of us will have to be prudent to ensure that we are not infecting others.
 - The well-being of all members of our campus community depend on us each being vigilant.
 - **If it becomes apparent that there is community spread of coronavirus on campus, closing campus becomes a realistic option.**
- **At some point in time, we may be forced to move to an all-online format, just as we did in the spring.**
 - We are subject to national, state, and local regulation. If the County Judge closes down schools and businesses, we will have to close.
 - **If there is any evidence of community spread of coronavirus in our community, we may have to close the school.** That is why the last bullet (“We all will be responsible to each other.”) is so vital.

OK. I told you this email was long. Here's where you come in.

The schedule that you will receive today does not indicate which classes might be online and which in person. **To help us plan, we want to hear from you.**

We will soon send you a survey to assess your preferred course-delivery formats — whether in person, online, or hybrid.

- The first question will be very simple: To determine whether you would prefer in-person or online classes. In other words, should we decide right now to go to an all-online format? In answering this question, please remember that in-person classes will look very different this fall than usual (fewer people in each class; social distancing in class and throughout the building; facial coverings at all times, etc.).
- The second set of questions will ask for your preferences by type of class. Do you feel differently about an upper-level seminar than you do about a bar course? Would you answer differently for a skills course or a clinical program?
- Finally, there will be a section for a few additional questions and for comments.

Although we fully understand there are some aspects of the COVID-19 situation that are beyond our control, our goal is to deliver instruction in a way that best matches our students' preferences and needs. **Watch for this survey coming to your inbox, and please respond quickly.**

In the end, we expect that we will be offering some courses in-person, others online, and others using a combination of both. This will allow us to be flexible to adapt the delivery of courses according to potential changes in the circumstances surrounding COVID-19.

In the ideal world, we would not have to worry about these issues, and we would quickly return to normal operations. The challenges of coronavirus, however, force us to make some difficult decisions, and we will have to create for ourselves a new normal.

I have said previously that, when faced with adversity, we can elect to be overwhelmed, or we can elect to overcome. I am proud of the way our community consistently has elected to overcome this situation, finding innovative ways to deliver curriculum while prioritizing health and safety – and preserving the unique community that makes South Texas special.

We remain committed to you and to providing you with an exceptional legal education. Please fill out the survey. And, if I can be of assistance to you, please reach out.

In the meantime, be well and be safe!

All the best,

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