

South Texas College of Law Houston  
Plan for Fall Semester 2020  
July 14, 2020

Dear South Texas Students,

**A Quick Summary:**

For Fall Semester 2020, South Texas plans

1. To protect the health and safety of its community;
2. To adopt a teaching model in which some classes are offered using a hybrid approach (which are in-person classes that simultaneously are streamed online for those who cannot attend in person), and some classes are offered solely online;
3. To allow the building to remain open during normal hours so that students, including students taking only online classes, can use the building;
4. To invest significant time and resources into initiatives and efforts, including through all of our student organizations and alumni networks, to build and enhance our community; and
5. To maintain a level of excellence in education and service, whether we are on campus or not.

Please read this entire document for all of the details. This plan is the product of months of work by faculty, staff, and advisors, and was re-designed over the last week to respond to the input that we have received from students, including through the survey we recently sent, about your preferences for the Fall Semester. It also was designed to be flexible, because the contours of the pandemic are ever-changing. And, as a result of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, we may need to adjust it over time.

And, please know one thing: Every faculty member and every staff member at South Texas stands committed to ensuring that – no matter what – every South Texas student receives an exceptional education that will prepare you for the bar exam and practice.

**Guiding Principles:**

From the beginning, we have used the following three principles to guide all of our decision-making:

1. **Provide for 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.

As I have said many times, the first principle takes priority. Each of us has a responsibility not only to ourselves, but also to each other. Health and safety drove our decision to go online in March, and health and safety will continue to shape our thinking going forward.

### **Preliminary Notes:**

1. This is the current plan for the semester, based on what we know today. It is subject to change.
2. **Every in-person class (called hybrid classes, below) may have to transition to online delivery at any time** – and may stay online for the rest of the semester. Reasons for a transition to online delivery include:
  - a. Federal, state, or local orders that force the college to close.
  - b. A decision by the college to close for health and safety reasons.
  - c. A decision due to issues caused by coronavirus by the faculty member teaching the course to transition to online.
3. Every in-person class (called hybrid classes, below) will also be streamed contemporaneously online for those who can't attend due to coronavirus.
4. The college's goal is to keep the building open so students can study, use resources, etc. At any time, however, access to the building may be limited or precluded (see 2(a) and 2(b), above).
5. At all times, the college will enforce rules designed to promote health and safety. In particular, **the college will require facial coverings and social distancing in all public spaces**, including classrooms during class, and will follow other recommendations from medical and governmental authorities.
6. Anyone who must participate in classes remotely due to issues caused by coronavirus will be permitted to do so. This applies to students (who can attend classes remotely) and faculty (who can teach classes remotely).
7. All classes will be recorded. Policies for attendance will be finalized shortly.
8. Grades will be assigned using the college's normal grading policies.
9. The plan for Spring Semester 2021 will be finalized at a late time and take into consideration the development of the coronavirus pandemic and the experience with the Fall Semester.

### **Additional Background Information:**

1. We surveyed students regarding their preferences for fully online, hybrid, and fully in-person classes.
  - a. 54% of continuing students participated in the survey. Approximately one-half of the respondents preferred a fully online delivery model. Approximately one-third preferred fully in-person, and the remaining one-sixth preferred a hybrid approach.

- b. 64% of new 1L students participated in the survey. Just under one-half preferred fully in-person instruction, more than one-quarter preferred fully online, and about one-fifth preferred a hybrid approach.
  - c. Students provided more than 30 pages of comments, all of which have been read and considered.
2. As of June 30, the ABA reports, 51 law schools have adopted a fully online model; the remaining 148 are planning to have at least some students on campus.
3. At South Texas, a fully in-person model is not feasible, for three reasons:
  - a. The college lacks the classroom space necessary to ensure social distancing and hold all classes in person. For instance, the largest Tower classrooms on the 3d, 4th, and 5th floors now hold approximately 30 students with social distancing protocols in place.
  - b. Many faculty members will not be able to teach in person due to coronavirus.
  - c. Many students will not be able to attend classes in person due to coronavirus.

#### **Preparations Already Made or in Progress:**

1. All faculty have spent the summer preparing their classes for online delivery. When all of higher education transitioned to Zoom in the spring, it was under emergency circumstances and with little advance notice. By contrast, to prepare for the fall, the college retained an expert in online teaching to work with faculty members so that they could be proactive and versant on best practices in online education. Over the summer, all faculty members are redesigning their courses to support online delivery. In other words, online classes in the Fall Semester should be quite different from the emergency transition to Zoom last spring.
2. To accommodate social distancing, the college is building out a new classroom in Emilie Slohm and two new classrooms in the courtrooms on the ninth floor of the Tower building.
3. The college has taken numerous steps to promote health and safety, including
  - a. Limiting the number of students permitted in classrooms to ensure at least six feet of distance between students.
  - b. Installing plexiglass dividers in classrooms, offices, and common areas.
  - c. Increasing cleaning procedures throughout campus.
  - d. Establishing social distancing practices throughout campus.
4. All new and continuing students will receive a Zoom Pro license to use as they require for study groups, student activities, and social connectivity.
5. Student organizations will take on increased importance this year to foster connections among students, faculty, and alumni – and to support the community nature that is a hallmark of South Texas.
6. The college will promote and sponsor numerous activities this year to increase opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and alumni to become increasingly engaged in the South Texas community.

7. Large full-time first-year sections (both first semester and second semester) are being divided into two sections:
  - a. Each professor teaching a first-year course will teach the same material twice – once to each half of the section.
  - b. This approach ensures that students have a more personalized experience and a greater opportunity for social distancing.

### **Approach for Fall Semester 2020:**

1. All classes will be delivered via either an “online” approach (all students participate remotely via Zoom) or a “hybrid” approach (a faculty member and some students are in person while the other students participate in real-time remotely via Zoom). The updated Class Schedule identifies which courses are hybrid (a room is listed) and which are online.
2. **Upper-level courses:**
  - a. Upper-level courses with an enrollment of 25 or fewer students may be delivered using either the online or the hybrid approach.
    - i. The enrollment cap is determined as the lower of (1) an enrollment cap of 25 or fewer students or (2) an actual enrollment of 25 or fewer students as of July 11, 2020.
    - ii. The decision of how to deliver the course is up to the professor, who may elect to teach online due to issues caused by coronavirus. Because many professors or their family members fall into high-risk categories, many professors have made this election.
    - iii. The professor may change from a hybrid approach to an online approach at any time due to issues caused by coronavirus. Thus, a course that is currently listed as hybrid may not offer in-person teaching throughout the entire semester.
    - iv. The professor may not change from an online approach to a hybrid approach.
    - v. **Every hybrid class may have to transition to online at any time.** See Note 2 to “Preliminary Notes” (above).
  - b. Those upper-level courses with an actual enrollment as of July 11, 2020, of more than 25 students will be delivered using the online approach.
3. **First-year, first-semester courses:**
  - a. Incoming students will be asked to indicate their preference for online or hybrid delivery. To the extent possible, students will be assigned to a section based on that preference, although such assignment cannot be guaranteed.
  - b. In the full-time program, at least one section will be designated as delivered exclusively via online delivery.
  - c. The remaining full-time section(s) and the part-time section may be delivered using either the online or the hybrid approach.

- i. The decision of how to deliver the course is up to the professor, who may elect to teach online due to issues caused by coronavirus. Because many professors or their family members fall into high-risk categories, many professors have made this election.
      - ii. The professor may change from a hybrid approach to an online approach at any time due to issues caused by coronavirus. Thus, a course that is currently listed as hybrid may not offer in-person teaching throughout the entire semester.
      - iii. The professor may not change from an online approach to a hybrid approach.
      - iv. **Every hybrid class may transition may have to online at any time.** See Note 2 to “Preliminary Notes” (above).
    - d. Students who attend in person will be assigned to a single classroom for their larger, doctrinal classes and will not switch classrooms; rather, the professors will switch between classrooms.
- 4. First-year, second-semester courses:**
  - a. Courses may be delivered using either the online or the hybrid approach.
    - i. The decision of how to deliver the course is up to the professor, who may elect to teach online due to issues caused by coronavirus. Because many professors or their family members fall into high-risk categories, many professors have made this election.
    - ii. The professor may change from a hybrid approach to an online approach at any time due to issues caused by coronavirus. Thus, a course that is currently listed as hybrid may not offer in-person teaching throughout the entire semester.
    - iii. The professor may not change from an online approach to a hybrid approach.
    - iv. **Every hybrid class may transition may have to online at any time.** See Note 2 to “Preliminary Notes” (above).
  - b. Students who attend in person will be assigned to a single classroom for their larger, doctrinal classes and will not switch classrooms; rather, the professors will switch between classrooms. (This approach is a recommended best practice for several reasons, including reducing congestion in hallways.)
- 5. Students will be expected to attend classes at the time the classes are offered – whether in hybrid or online.
  - a. The college will establish a method by which students who are not able to attend classes in person due to the coronavirus can notify their professors that they will be attending online.
  - b. Students who do not meet the health and safety requirements for admission into the building must not come to class in-person and must attend the class online.
  - c. Policies for attendance, including for make-up classes for students who miss a class due to the coronavirus, will be finalized shortly.

There will continue to be details finalized in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, please send any questions you may have to [questions@stcl.edu](mailto:questions@stcl.edu).

We look forward to welcoming students back to campus this Fall Semester. Everything this semester will be new. I thank you in advance for your patience, your flexibility, and your support. I am confident that this will be a great (if unusual) semester – because I have confidence in our faculty, our staff, and our students to make it so.

Until I see you (in person or virtually), be safe!