



July 1, 2020

To the UConn Law School Community,

After a great deal of deliberation and exploration of alternatives, the UConn School of Law COVID-19 Leadership Planning Team has decided that the law school will conduct Fall 2020 classes entirely online. The only possible exception will be for very limited clinical work. We reached this decision after a thorough evaluation of the capacities of our campus and classrooms, the public health and safety criteria articulated by the governor and University, and the practical and pedagogical impacts of teaching under the unique circumstances that confront us. We could only conclude regretfully that as much as we wish to bring our students, faculty and staff back to campus this fall, we must wait longer. I am grateful for the contributions and insights of the leadership team—Associate Deans Darcy Kirk, Leslie Levin and Paul Chill; Dean Designate Eboni Nelson; Library Director Jessica de Perio Wittman; Assistant Deans Karen DeMeola and Jennifer Cerny; and Registrar Lisa Rodino—in reaching a consensus on this very important issue.

Our plan differs from the University's plan to reopen the main campus in Storrs because we are in a different situation. The overriding factor in our decision is the nature of our buildings, which pose significant obstacles to in-person instruction with the necessary social distancing and other health precautions in place. Few of our classrooms are large enough to accommodate a class with students spaced at least six feet apart. The two largest, Chase 110 and 210, would fit no more than 24 students each. Both lack ventilation to the outdoors, meaning we would have to keep windows open with high-speed fans running in all weather. Those conditions, along with additional complications stemming from the mandatory use of masks, would make communication extremely challenging. Students in the classroom, as well as those trying to learn remotely, would struggle to hear and understand the instructor and to participate in classroom discussion. In addition, our buildings lack sufficient bathrooms to meet the health standards without cleaning them between each individual use.

These restrictions would permit us to hold only a small number of courses on campus, and by necessity all students would take all or most of their classes online. Students attending an on-campus class might have as little as 15 minutes to travel home to access Wifi and attend their next class. We would not be able to operate the café safely and could not offer safe access to the library building.

While we are convinced that online instruction is the only feasible option in these circumstances, we share your disappointment that we will not be together on campus this fall.

Our task now is to move ahead, and our first priority is to enable our faculty and students to plan appropriately for the coming semester. Our faculty is already working on ways to enhance their online teaching methods. We are determined to give students the best experience we can in this tremendously challenging time. As we work out details, some questions are not yet resolved. But we want to share as much information as we can at this time. Here are some of the issues we can address:

First, we don't know when we will be able to return to campus, but it is a goal we all share. If conditions have improved sufficiently, we will resume in-person classes in the Spring 2021 semester, but that decision has not and cannot be made at this time. We recognize that many students must decide when to move or return to the Hartford area, and we will provide as much information as we can as soon as we can. At this time, we can only advise that no student will be required to be on campus or in Connecticut this fall, although it's possible that students who elect to participate in certain clinics may need to be present, at least occasionally. No decision has been made regarding the Semester in DC and NYC programs that are typically offered in the spring.

Online classes complicate requirements for classroom participation in a number of ways, particularly for those living in a different time zone or working with limited technology. Policies around attendance, participation and grading will be developed while taking these challenges into account. Almost all classes will be live and synchronous. Law school examinations will be administered online, and faculty will develop the exam content and format appropriate for their individual courses. Wherever possible, we will accommodate students living in distant time zones with the morning, afternoon or evening classes that best suit their locations. Students who need help with technical solutions are urged to discuss their needs with the Student Affairs Office.

Most clinical work will continue. We are developing plans for clinics to function primarily online this fall, with limited in-person components where feasible and necessary to serve clients. Clinics will reach out to enrolled students about in-person requirements. These plans are subject to conditions that have been changing rapidly, and we will provide more details as soon as we know them.

Library services will continue, emphasizing digital services and support. The library building will not reopen for gatherings or study until we can safely meet the university's health and safety standards. When services can't be provided online, we are committed to providing them in person, in a low-contact manner, to the extent possible. This plan will develop as conditions change.

Our staff will continue to support students and faculty online in every way possible. The Student Affairs Office, which provided crucial assistance to our students during the pivot to online classes in March, will continue to offer all its services online. The Center for Career Development staff is providing online counseling, support and programming this summer and will continue in the fall. We are consulting with faculty and staff who have been working

remotely to determine, case by case, what level of on-campus presence will be appropriate for them.

The leadership team will continue to issue guidance as circumstances change and the details of our plans solidify. We are grateful to our students, faculty and staff for your flexibility and grace. We are determined, with your help, to have a successful semester and to emerge a stronger community for having met the challenges facing us together.

Yours, Tim

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