

July 8, 2020

Dear Gould Students,

First and foremost, I hope that you and your loved ones continue to be safe and well. As we all grapple with the challenges of the novel coronavirus pandemic, I hope that you are finding ways to stay positive and spend time with those you care about.

I am writing today to share with you the news that, after careful consideration and broad consultation, the law school will be moving to an online teaching model for the fall semester. In nearly all cases, students will take their classes in an online format with the key exception being considerations for international students, who may be affected by new visa requirements.

For more than two months, numerous departments across the law school have been working to develop a fall 2020 schedule that would balance the critical public health needs presented by the global pandemic and the strong preference students expressed for in-person instruction. Our work has been guided by several central principles. These include: providing a high-quality legal education while taking seriously the public health guidance from experts; ensuring that any student who wants a fully online experience can have that option; and permitting faculty who express health and safety concerns with in-person instruction to teach remotely.

At every point in the process, we have been attentive to the fact that as the circumstances and conditions around us change, we have to adapt appropriately. From the start, we were aware that a multi-modal teaching approach carried with it the risk that it may prove impermissible or impractical. Despite the tremendous progress that we made in crafting an approach that incorporates in-person, online, and hybrid modalities, the time has come for us to change course and move toward online instruction.

In the short time since my last message on July 2, several important factors have changed. Cases of COVID-19 in California and in Los Angeles continue to increase at alarming rates, as reported widely in the news. In reaction to these serious public health developments, additional faculty members have concluded that they do not feel comfortable teaching in person and have requested to do all their teaching remotely. We have seen a similar reaction from students, with a growing number of students informing us that they plan to take all of their courses online.

Over the last few days, the risks of in-person and hybrid formats have all grown, while the benefits have shrunk. These growing risks and stressors include:



- The increasing trend in COVID-19 cases reduces our confidence that Los Angeles County will grant permission to operate with a significant daily presence of students on campus at Gould.
- The benefits of hybrid teaching are reduced because fewer students plan to be present, and more students plan to be online. While hybrid teaching is most valuable for students who participate in some in-person instruction, fully online instruction is a better fit for students who have opted to learn entirely online.
- As more instructors decide to teach solely online, the amount of in-person instruction we can provide is reduced, as is our ability to provide that instruction equitably, by which we mean providing a comparable amount to each student who wants it. These shifts also render our hybrid model less stable and more vulnerable to failure should additional instructors shift to fully online teaching.

Even if we begin the fall in a multi-modal fashion, given the likelihood that we will ultimately have to adopt an online teaching approach, it is wise to do so now rather than wait any longer.

With each passing week the cost of switching from our multi-modal strategy to a fully online approach increases because students have to make plans and commitments based on the model we have. In my July 2 communication, I sought to outline those risks as transparently as possible so that students could make an informed choice. Until this point, the potential benefits of hybrid teaching were worth preserving. Recent developments have, in my judgment, changed that calculus, and it is no longer worth holding on to the prospect of a semester of in-person and hybrid teaching.

Indeed, shifting to online teaching and learning now will increase the quality of instruction that we are able to provide. Moving to fully online teaching now gives our faculty time to focus their energy on ensuring the highest possible quality of teaching in an online format rather than continuing to focus on hybrid or in-person teaching. I am confident that we can provide an excellent and robust educational experience through an online format.

Beyond the classroom, we will similarly shift our energy to creating impactful and meaningful extra-curricular programming to support our students throughout the fall semester. A number of Gould faculty and staff are already working on plans to offer students value-added and community-building opportunities. These are in addition to all of the regularly scheduled programming that will continue to be offered via Student Support, Career Services, Development & Alumni Relations, and other offices. While plans are still being finalized, we hope to offer “Lunch & Learns” with faculty experts and alumni leaders. Additionally, we are exploring options to host interactive virtual activities that allow students to bond outside their classes.

Finally, the move to predominantly online teaching will allow us to make some positive schedule modifications. By changing our approach now, we give ourselves time to create a more suitable schedule that will reduce Zoom fatigue and resolve some of the scheduling

conflicts that were previously unavoidable. While this will not be a complete overhaul of the schedule, courses will be arranged in our traditional teaching blocks to the extent possible. This will eliminate some of the time overlaps and increase class choice. We are also investigating faculty options to see if we can increase the array of class offerings. While we are already at work on this, registration may be delayed for one week. When registration begins, we will follow our traditional registration process. Please direct questions about registration and course availability to registrar@law.usc.edu (JD students) and gipreg@law.usc.edu (G&IP students). As a reminder, incoming 1L students will automatically be registered for courses, so no further action is needed.

Spring 2021: Teaching online in the fall raises the question of how we will operate in the spring of 2021. We have already submitted a variance application to the ABA that will allow us to offer courses remotely in the spring. What we cannot control, unfortunately, are the requirements of the state bar examiners. Neither New York nor California, for example, have offered clarity about how they will view remote learning in the spring of 2021. We cannot develop any policy regarding remote learning for the spring until those state bars communicate their positions. What I can say is that if the state bars offer flexibility, as I hope they will, Gould will certainly not stand in the way of a student who decides to learn remotely in the spring of 2021.

International Students: We are aware that our international students have particular needs, including coursework, associated with ensuring that they remain in compliance with the requirements of their visas. Updated regulations on this subject emerged two days ago, and we are actively studying the issue. We are reviewing the options to develop programming to ensure that international students are able to continue their studies at USC Gould and comply with their visa requirements. More details will be shared directly with our impacted international students as clarity on new regulations is received and solutions are solidified. International students who are concerned about their individual situation should reach out to Associate Dean Debbie Call, dcall@law.usc.edu.

Orientation: For our incoming 1L students, we plan to welcome this newest JD class with a fully remote orientation to ensure they are prepared for the fall semester. This will include all of the traditional welcome activities, as well as an extra focus on the 'nuts & bolts' to help students thrive in an online setting. There will also be opportunities for incoming students to engage in much smaller breakout groups and get to know one another better. Incoming JD students can expect to receive communication from the Admissions Office very shortly to address many of the questions we expect you may have.

Fall Grading Policy: Although it has been said before, I want to reiterate that fall 2020 exams will be delivered remotely. As has been announced previously, we will be applying our normal grading policy for fall classes. The strong sense of the faculty is that our students would be at a disadvantage in the job market if we were to use a CR/NC grading system for the fall. Based on the information I have, the vast majority of law schools, including our

July 8, 2020

Page 4

closest peers, are returning to their normal grading systems. Our students would be less competitively positioned if we did not do the same.

I do recognize that a move to online learning creates difficulties for some students. If you feel that you have special challenges related to technology or space, please reach out to Senior Law Librarian Paul Moorman (pmoorman@law.usc.edu) to discuss your situation so that we can see if there is a way we can be of assistance. The same applies to students with disabilities who need accommodation. JD students, please reach out to Dean Yasmine McMorrin ([ymcmorrin@law.usc.edu](mailto:y McMorrin@law.usc.edu)) so that we can help; G&IP students, please reach out to gipreg@law.usc.edu.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to work hard to ensure a successful fall semester for our students. This includes identifying ways to make productive use of our building, consistent with all public health and campus protocols. This may include access for student groups, use of the space for studying, in-person interactions between faculty and students, and so on. Should you already live in Los Angeles or decide to be here for the semester, this is one additional way we will work to enrich your experience. Recognizing that some students will not be here, we will of course encourage all sponsoring groups to find ways to include remote students or offer remote students other opportunities.

We are all watching as the entire globe grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes I am announcing today are yet another reminder that, unfortunately, we are not exempt from its reach. However, I am proud to be part of a community that is so deeply supportive and caring. We are resolute in our focus on our central mission of research, teaching, and learning — and doing so at the highest level. We are moving to a different format, and a great deal will change, but that will not stop us from providing superb legal training and sustaining our strong sense of community, which is the envy of law schools across the country.

While the fall of 2020 will certainly be unique, the entire Gould faculty and staff are committed to answering the call and ensuring its success. We look forward to doing everything we can, with your help, to make that goal a reality.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few of the many people at Gould who have invested enormous time and talent into our planning, and who will continue to be vital contributors as we prepare for the fall semester. These include Steven Benson, Anitha Cadambi, Debbie Call, Lybby Carroll, Amy Cheung, Judy Davis, Ben Dimapindan, Dave Dinh, Ray Flores, Diana Jaque, David Kirschner, Alex Marasovich, Sydnee Mulligan, Donna Pavlick, Donald Scotten, Misa Shimotsu, and Franita Tolson. I am enormously grateful to each of these individuals, in addition to so many others, for making it possible for us to achieve so much progress so quickly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'AJ', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.