

June 23, 2020

Dear Students,

**Now is a more important time than ever to be a law student.** The world needs you. It needs lawyers dedicated to racial justice, a diverse and inclusive legal profession, and the public interest. It needs lawyers ready to ensure equal access to legal representation and to help communities and businesses rebuild as we emerge from the global pandemic. We're committed to equipping you to meet these important legal needs, preparing you to be leaders for systemic improvement of our justice system, and giving you the foundations for launching successful careers as lawyers. We can't wait to get started in the fall.

We hope you're as eager for the fall semester as we are. We understand, however, that not knowing exactly what the fall semester will look like can cause anxiety. We're so appreciative of your patience and understanding as UCI Law's faculty and administration work to navigate the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and frequently changing public health directives to plan the best legal education possible for you. Although these unprecedented circumstances mean we can't offer definitive answers to all of your questions, we'd like to give you this further update on UCI Law's planning for the fall semester.

**Law school orientation and fall classes will begin on schedule.** We look forward to welcoming you and to the amazing things we'll all do together, inside and outside of class, in the fall and beyond.

**All UCI Law students who need or want to take their fall classes online will be able to do so.** We know that while many of you will be on campus, some of you might not be ready to return due to the public health situation. You will be able to pursue your UCI Law education on schedule whether or not you are physically present.

**UCI Law's commitment to teaching distinguishes us from other top law schools—and that commitment extends to our online courses.** What law students across the country experienced last spring was emergency remote instruction implemented on only a few days' notice. Now, some law schools are proposing to offer an online option to students who cannot be physically present by allowing them to "Zoom in" to ordinary in-person class sessions—an approach that, in our view, does not treat those students equitably.

**Our fall online courses will be different.** Some of you may know that [UCI's School of Education](#) and its [Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation](#) are national leaders in research on online education. Drawing on their expertise, UCI Law's Teaching and Learning Committee, chaired by Professor Jane Stoeber, has developed an intensive series of workshops for UCI Law faculty to train them on research-based best practices for online teaching and learning and give them the technological skills needed for effective online courses. Since May, our faculty has been regularly attending the workshops and refining their already excellent courses for an online environment. **We're also implementing a plan to rigorously support our students' learning by equipping them with strategies that are known to improve student success in online courses.**

**Law schools across the country are planning for online courses to be part of the fall semester—but we’re not aware of any law school that is devoting more time and effort than UCI Law to help ensure the highest quality online learning experience for its students.**

We also want you to have the option to attend in-person activities at UCI Law this fall to the extent the public health situation allows, with an emphasis on opportunities for first-year students. We’re working intensely both internally and with various other campus units to determine what might be possible.

Although some law schools continue to make bold promises about in-person courses in the fall semester, we think we owe it to our students to take a candid and realistic approach—one that makes the health of our community the highest priority—and that is the spirit in which we offer this update. We need to be clear that all of our plans, including those presented in this update, are subject to change based on the public health situation and government and university public health guidance.

**We’re currently hopeful that first-year students will have an option to take one or two of their fall courses with an in-person component.** Under this plan, a class would be split into two smaller groups. Each group would have one in-person class session each week, and the other class sessions would be online with the entire class meeting together. Limiting the number of students present in a classroom at one time is intended to enable physical distancing, in accordance with public health guidance. Other first-year courses would be fully online, and we do not expect any courses to be held completely in person.

**We expect all upper division class sessions to be online.** UCI Law has assured all students that they may take their courses online. Because almost all upper division courses have only one section, those courses will be offered online to meet that promise.

We know some of you would like more options for in-person courses this fall. We share with you a strong longing for law school to be back in person as soon as possible. However, the health of the UCI Law community is the top priority, and the capacity of our classrooms, with physical distancing, limits what can be done consistently with public health guidance.

**Beyond class sessions, the outside-of-class activities that are such an important part of the UCI Law experience will be as robust as ever.** We currently expect that some of these activities will be able to take place partly in person, such as faculty office hours, faculty-led discussion groups, student organization meetings, community-building activities (such as Community Fellow meetings with first-year students), and student study groups. Any such in-person activities would be limited to enable physical distancing and follow public health guidance. The same range of activities will also be available online.

**The health of the UCI Law community continues to be our highest priority.** Any in-person activities must be conducted in accordance with government and campus public health guidance, which will likely include not only physical distancing, but also face coverings, use of a daily symptom self-check app, completion of an online COVID-19 training module, acknowledgement of a campus code of conduct, and possibly temperature checks upon entry to campus buildings. This means that it will not be “law school

as usual”—but as caring and responsible members of the UCI Law community, we owe it to each other to take those measures seriously.

**Already, UCI Law has demonstrated that we will not—and we have not—let the challenges of the day keep us from doing all that we do so well.** Our commitment to teaching is stronger than ever. Our students continue to offer extensive [pro bono legal services](#) to those in need, and our [legal clinics](#) are as busy as ever [helping their clients](#) and giving our students the unparalleled practical training that UCI Law is known for. We are providing some of the nation’s leading programming on the legal aspects of the pandemic, including a [COVID and the Law lecture series](#). Through UCI Law’s centers of excellence such as our [Center on Law, Equality and Race](#) and our [Center for Biotechnology and Global Health Policy](#), our students, faculty, and community grapple with critical topics at the intersection of law and society. Working together, our students and faculty continue to have an [important impact on law and policy](#).

**In addition, the supportive community that is a signature of the UCI Law experience continues to thrive.** Over the summer, we’ve been engaging with our admitted students through continuous online programming including Town Halls with the Dean, Law Talks by UCI Law faculty, and meetings with the Career Development Office, the Externship Office, the Public Interest Office, and other student facing departments. We’ve held virtual Happy Hours hosted by the Student Bar Association (SBA) and other student organizations. We’ll continue our wonderful Community Fellows Program, which pairs second-year and third-year students with first-year students for mentoring and social activities, as well as our Family and Friends Day that gives you an opportunity to invite your friends and loved ones to participate in a day of your life as a UCI Law student. Fun social events brought to you by SBA, student organizations, and the Student Affairs Office are also on the agenda.

**We want to hear from you about your current plans for participating in the fall semester.** We ask you to complete this brief survey by Monday, June 29: []

Your responses will help us as we continue our planning and move closer to the start of classes. We will also schedule a town hall to hear more from you about the fall semester. As always, if you have questions, you may contact Dr. Jennah Jones, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Inclusive Excellence ([jjones@law.uci.edu](mailto:jjones@law.uci.edu)) if you are a current student, or Cristina Gapasin Tortal, Assistant Dean for Admissions & Student Financial Services ([cgapasin@law.uci.edu](mailto:cgapasin@law.uci.edu)) if you are a new UCI Law student.

All our best,

L. Song Richardson, Dean

Christopher A. Whytock, Vice Dean