

Harvard Law Will Only Hold Online Classes This Fall



photo by [Chensiyuan](#).

Harvard Law School will not hold in-person classes for the fall term—making it the first top law school to confirm that it won't be returning to campus next semester.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Harvard University has announced that six of its graduate schools will entirely go online for the upcoming fall semester and probably through the entire academic year, out of fear that social distancing requirements would be too difficult to meet.

"This is not the announcement we'd hoped to make." Dean John F. Manning wrote in a [message](#) to students. In announcing that Harvard Law School programming will be online this fall, "But our first priority is and must continue to be, the health and safety of our community, and we cannot reliably conclude at this time that we can safely provide an effective on-campus program with this fall."

Manning said while the public health situation could improve until the fall to allow for more face to face interaction next semester, the school had to reach a decision so that students and incoming students can plan accordingly. With classes held remotely, some students are forced to relocate, and only a limited number of dorm rooms will be available for students who cannot proceed online learning at home. Harvard Law will allow current students to take a leave of absence, and admitted students to defer their start date, in light of the change.

The Dean promises its students the best, most robust, highest-quality online academic, clinical, and extracurricular programming for the upcoming term.

"We very much hope that you choose to remain in what we expect to be an exciting and enriching online academic and social program. But we want to be sure that you have a fair opportunity to make a decision that is right for you based on the best information we can provide you at this time."

In addition, Harvard Law posted a list of **frequently asked questions** and confirmed that it has set aside up to \$1 million to assist students who may have technical problems that could be an obstacle to online learning.

Harvard Law is the first prominent law school to confirm that it won't be returning to campus next semester.

Other top tier law schools are still developing plans for the fall semester. Yale Law School will announce more details about the fall 2020 term in early July. The University of Chicago Law School will announce its decision by the end of June.

Stanford Law School plans a mix of on-campus and remote classes for the fall, according to a statement the school made to the ABA Journal. The school also announced that 2L and 3L classes would start Sept. 14.

[Earlier this spring, many deans expressed concerns about switching to](#) online learning in the upcoming semester, as under the ABA accreditation standards schools can only provide up to one-third of their credits online, 10 of which can be for first-year classes.

In response, the council of the ABA's Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar announced [a plan](#) to add rule language giving the group more authority for enacting short-term, emergency policies and procedures.

Many experts see a trend of graduate programs continuing with remote classes.

"I expect more colleges to put graduate programs online in the fall due to on-campus space limitations," said Dr. Robert Kelchen, Associate Professor of higher education at Seton Hall University. "With social distancing requirements, large classrooms will be at a premium and most colleges will place a priority at getting undergraduates on campus since those students are more at risk of going elsewhere."

Some experts fear this trend will lead to a law school meltdown. According to a recent survey, many law students are questioning their decision to continue legal education under these circumstances.

When asked if they are planning to reconsider continuing your legal education in an era of social distancing and remote learning, more than 30% of students answered yes, and nearly 40% more said, "no, but I may take a hiatus until things return to normal." [More than 20% said they are](#) reconsidering their career path. Some 87% said they thought their education would be overpriced if they had to continue it remotely.

Harvard Law is [looking for avenues to foster student connections](#) and keep extracurricular activities going while remote, Manning said. According to the message, incoming foreign students will meet in small groups before the start of classes. And, most of the clinics will be able to operate in a remote capacity.

"I am grateful to everyone – our students, faculty, and staff – for all they did to create an effective and enriching learning experience in challenging circumstances. This coming semester, though, asks something different of us – to use technology to design even more creative, exciting, and excellent experiences in support of learning, building community, and engaging in the service that helps those most in need and that is fundamental to the work lawyers do," Manning wrote.

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