Baylor Online Attendance Policy

At Baylor Law, in-person teaching is our primary pedagogical approach. However, despite our collective desire to return to a simple face-to-face model, as we reflect on the past two years and anticipate the uncertainties of the coming year, we cannot presume that our law school community can operate as it did before the pandemic. The virus is still with us and continues to present challenges to the normal operation of our program. While we are returning to our normal practices to the extent possible, we recognize the challenges presented by COVID and its variants and have implemented this policy to specifically address those challenges. This policy addresses the current circumstances; it is subject to revisions as circumstances change.

Guiding Principles

This policy is informed by a number of principles important to the Law School:

First, Baylor Law is committed to its students and their well-being. Many students, staff and faculty members are vaccinated, but some cannot be on the advice of their health care providers. We encourage everyone to act in the interest of the health and safety of all in our community. In addition, even those who are vaccinated may be at risk of illness and could be asymptomatic carriers of a variant. We must do our best to protect all members of our Baylor Law community.

Second, since long before the pandemic, students have unfortunately, and sometimes tragically, experienced circumstances that challenge their ability to complete the rigorous, in-person three-year curriculum. Baylor Law will take a compassionate approach to such scenarios. Baylor Law will continue to work with students to minimize disruptions without sacrificing the core expectations of holding a Baylor Law degree.

Third, our dual student-client focus creates a problem of competing interests. On the one hand, we cannot create standards so rigid that motivated students are incentivized to hide or ignore COVID symptoms so that they can attend in-person where they pose risks to others. On the other hand, Baylor Law faculty expect students to attend classes in person unless that cannot be done safely.

Policy

This policy is created and implemented to incentivize safety for all in our community. Students will be permitted to attend online only in those instances where in-person attendance is not possible or is inadvisable for COVID-related illness.

Procedure for Online Attendance

If a student is experiencing COVID symptoms or tests positive for COVID, she or he should follow these procedures to request to use available Zoom links allowing for online class attendance:

1. Complete and submit the online attendance request form. You will receive an email confirmation that the form has been submitted and will be reviewed by a staff member. Please note that you cannot submit the form unless your reason for requesting online attendance is one of the reasons listed.

2. Your request must be made no later than 90 minutes before the scheduled class time or you may not be able to attend online any class for which the request is untimely.

A list of COVID symptoms is available at the link.
3. Students with any of the following situations may request permission to attend classes online by submitting one notice that states either, 1) that she or he has COVID symptoms or 2) a positive COVID result.

4. Once the form is submitted, a staff member will review the request to determine that it was submitted in a timely manner and will approve or reject the request based on the policy.

5. If the request is approved in accordance with the policy, a staff person will notify you and you will be allowed to access the Zoom link provided in Canvas for each course. The staff person will also notify the professors involved that you are permitted to attend class online.

6. Faculty members will compare the Zoom log to the list of students who were granted permission to attend class online and will additionally determine if the student will be counted as present, based on their being online for the whole class, in an appropriate setting. Reports of unauthorized online attendance will be made to the Associate Dean.

Use of the link without permission will be viewed as a character and fitness certification issue and may also be treated as an Honor Code violation.

7. Permission to attend online is subject to your agreement to the affirmations included on the form used to request online attendance.

Misrepresentations, failure to abide by one’s affirmations, or violation of this policy will be viewed as a character and fitness certification issue and may also be treated as an Honor Code violation.

8. Faculty members do not have discretion to allow online attendance for reasons other than the COVID-related illnesses addressed by this policy. This addresses online attendance only. As always, faculty members have the ability to address other absences and attendance issues as the faculty member sees fit under the circumstances.

9. To be counted as present, you must log on using the Zoom link available in Canvas, keep your camera on during the entire class period, and be at a desk or in another appropriate setting. A car or other casual setting is not acceptable. The log will be checked by a staff member or faculty member each day.

10. Online students may or may not be called on during class at the discretion of the faculty member. To minimize issues with sound, online students will not be able to ask questions during the class, other than through the chat function, which questions may or may not be addressed by the instructor during class time.

11. Students utilizing this process must be prepared to provide documentation (e.g., a physician’s note, a positive COVID test), or documentation comparable to what employers expect of employees who must miss work or seek FMLA leave.
12. To protect the privacy of all students, in-person classes will generally not be recorded by the instructor and recording by students is prohibited.

13. A student who knows or should know that they are contagious with COVID and who exposes other students, staff, or faculty to infection violates the minimum ethical duties expected of law students, lawyers, and officers of the court, and this will be viewed as a character and fitness certification issue and may also be treated as an Honor Code violation.

Baylor Law no longer approves online attendance requests for exposure to COVID. Students exposed to COVID should wear a high-quality mask in accordance with the CDC guidelines.

Baylor Law School continues to monitor advice from the CDC, which revises its advice as new data becomes available. We will revise this policy as appropriate. In the meantime, we urge all who are eligible to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.