



8-25-2021

Good-Better-Best Practices

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Good-Better-Best Practices

At our last faculty meeting, Dean Rutledge suggested developing a set of “best practices” to handle some of the challenges posed by the current public-health crisis. In discussing this idea, we felt that it might be worthwhile thinking of them as “good-better-best practices,” recognizing that varying approaches will inevitably make sense for different instructional styles and priorities.

Although there are public-health measures that we believe should be mandated across the board, the reality is that instructors will rightly maintain plenty of discretion in many areas of class management. We offer these ideas not to suggest that they’re the *best* practices, but rather in the hope that they’ll be useful as you adapt to this new and challenging pedagogical environment.

Seating

Consider making a seating chart for where your students are currently sitting, and encourage students to sit near the same students across classes where possible. Please provide a copy of any seating chart to Dean Barnett so it can be shared with GDPH to assist with contact tracing.

Should you decide to tell the class your reason for implementing a seating chart, explain that, based on seating and proximity, a single positive case could mean that 10-15 students should quarantine at home because those students would be considered in close contact under CDC guidelines with whoever tests positive. The more students sit with different groups across classes, the more students are potentially exposed to a positive case and will need to quarantine.

Sitting near the same students can both reduce community spread and also assist with contact tracing in the event of a positive case. Further, you can also encourage any potentially affected students to follow the CDC’s current guidance on exposure and to contact Dr. Casey Graham who will walk them through the Law School’s protocols in cases of a positive test or exposure.

Masks, Vaccinations, and Messaging

First and foremost, whenever talking about COVID-19 with our students and each other, we should avoid passing judgment on anyone who tests positive. We should be diligent to remove any element of shame on those who become ill from our conversations. Adding stigma to an already-stressful diagnosis will help no one, and humiliation might make other students less likely to get tested or disclose exposures and symptoms.

Wearing a mask while teaching: From what we’ve seen and heard, students are more likely to wear masks in the classroom if their instructors do too. We acknowledge there are valid health-related and pedagogical reasons why instructors feel it’s worth removing their own masks while teaching even though students are encouraged to remain masked during class. Vaccinated instructors might feel it’s both safe and more effective to teach without masks, but it seems that students feel less inclined to wear masks if their instructor doesn’t.

Talking about vaccines and masking: If you feel comfortable, disclose your own vaccination status and explain why you’re vaccinated and wearing a mask, and continue vaccination and masking messaging throughout the semester to prevent slippage. Appeal to students’ self-interest in getting vaccinated and wearing a mask because this will increase the odds of staying in the

classroom and off Zoom. You might also note the continued risk to them, you, your families, and people in our community who can't get vaccinated. Highlight the increased threat posed by the Delta variant and higher likelihood of further variants if the virus is able to spread more freely. Finally, tying safety measures to the students' sense of professionalism seems to resonate with some of them; even if they aren't personally worried about their own health, they're in the process of joining a professional community that thrives when its members show compassion for others like clients, counsel, and courtroom personnel. Remind them that some third-party entities like employers or courts may require proof of vaccine or regular proof of a negative test as a condition of participation and that they are bound to follow those third-party mandates.

Specific ways to communicate with students:

1. Feature the vaccinated and masked bulldog in your email signature, along with information about how to sign up for a free vaccine. Feel free to adapt this email signature to your own details:

[Name]
[Title]
University of Georgia School of Law
[Pronouns]
[Email Address] | [SSRN/Bio Link]



Click [here](#) to sign up for a free vaccine appointment at UGA UHC.

Click [here](#) to sign up for free COVID-19 testing at UGA UHC.

2. Begin every class with a pro-vaccine/masking message as your first slide or celebrate if you have another day of 100% mask wearing in your class:



(Let us know if you want a template for these slides!)

- 3.** Follow up each week of class with an email encouraging safety measures. The message could be as long or short as you prefer; something as simple as, “I appreciate the class demonstrating your embrace of our culture of shared responsibility at the law school.” One colleague shared [this email](#) sent by a professor at another school to his students; you might consider communicating similarly with your class by email.
- 4.** Provide links to the Law School and University COVID-19 resources pages on eLC or your course website. A list of gathered resources and links you can directly copy and paste are included in the footnote below.¹
- 5.** When something relevant appears in the news, such as COVID-19-related school closures elsewhere in Georgia or booster shots becoming available, use this as an opportunity to reinforce your messaging,
- 6.** Remind students to (1) monitor themselves for symptoms regularly; (2) stay home if they’re feeling unwell; (3) report positive tests on DawgCheck immediately; and (4) keep in mind who they’ve been around to assist with contact tracing.
- 7.** Remember that you can shift some of this responsibility to your students! Encourage them to support classmates by, for example, forming cohorts that will take and share good notes if a student has to miss class for a COVID-19-related reason. As their instructor, you can reinforce that it’s generally good to work together in law school, and that, especially in these difficult times, being an active part of the community is what will get us through this.
- 8.** Consider encouraging your students to voluntarily share health information among themselves if they want—their vaccination status, as well as any exposure, symptoms, or positive/negative tests. They might already have a class GroupMe (this messaging app seems quite common here), and we’ve heard that many students shared this kind of information quite freely last year as a way of keeping our community safe.
- 9.** Coordinate pro-vaccine/masking messaging with groups of your colleagues. In recent weeks, the Law Library’s Faculty and Library Staff announced publicly that 100% of them are vaccinated against COVID-19, as did the entirety of UGA’s academic leadership. Suggest similar efforts to your colleagues—perhaps among the instructors teaching 1L sections, or among faculty and staff affiliated with one of our centers or clinics.
- 10.** Tell your students if you’re routinely participating in surveillance testing and encourage them to do the same. You can sign up [here](#) for a free test at the University Health Center.

¹ Vaccine Appointment at UGA UHC: https://patientportal.uhs.uga.edu/login_dualauthentication.aspx

COVID-19 Testing at UGA UHC: <https://clia.vetview.vet.uga.edu>

Dawgcheck to Report Positive COVID-19 Test: <https://dawgcheck.uga.edu>

UGA UHC COVID-19 Health and Exposure Updates: <https://healthcenter.uga.edu/covid-19-health-and-exposure-updates>

Wastewater Surveillance for Athens, Georgia: <https://www.covid19.uga.edu/wastewater-athens.html>

CDC COVID-19 County Data Tracker: https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/?utm_term=The%20Atlantic%20Daily#county-view

CDC Quarantine and Isolation Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

COVID-19-Related Absences

When a student needs to miss class: First, develop a plan to accommodate students who must miss class for a COVID-19-related reason so you don't have to scramble when you get that email notification. Consideration should be given to symptomatic cases, direct exposures, exposures of cohabitants, positive tests, and childcare and other responsibilities caused by these other reasons. Granting an excused absence to those who miss for COVID-19-related reasons can alleviate issues later in the semester concerning compliance with the school's attendance policy.

Second, decide what resources or help you'll provide to those students who choose to do the safe thing and stay at home while their health could put others at risk. The answers to these questions might depend on your teaching style and assessment metrics, so there's no single approach we'd recommend. Will you allow students to attend synchronously by Zoom? Will you record your class and share the recording? Do you want a student to notify you prior to missing class before you record, or will you make it a practice to record all of your classes just in case? Will you assist the absent student in connecting with a peer to get notes for the days they miss? Will you schedule a time with the student to catch them up on the material they missed? Could you suggest any podcasts or other outside resources the students could study?

Below are two approaches to consider. See how you react when you read them; each is tailored specifically to meet the instructor's preferences and comfort level of involvement, though there are plenty of other approaches you might take.

One option, especially for instructors who teach more lecture-based or Socratic-style classes, is to allow absent students to attend class in a Zoom room, which you could have open on your laptop/tablet/phone at the podium or on the classroom computer. You needn't have video turned on, but at least this approach allows the student to attend class and follow along live (if their symptoms permit), which might make it more likely that they'll keep up with their classwork. To maintain the students' privacy, you needn't call on them or even disclose their presence on Zoom to the entire class. And if there are multiple students using the Zoom option, you can emphasize that students might be attending by Zoom for any number of COVID-19-related reasons (i.e., their presence on Zoom doesn't necessarily signal that they've tested positive). Plus, this option is always voluntary—if students don't wish to attend by Zoom for any reason, including a desire to keep health information private, they needn't do so and can instead get notes from a classmate. This option might be particularly appealing for instructors who prefer not to record their classes. It also seems unlikely that the system will be abused, at least on any significant scale, because it's obviously better educationally for students to attend in the classroom.

Another option is to encourage students to let you know in advance if they'll be missing class and to decide, based on what you're covering in class during the timeframe the student will be absent, what the best way is to keep the student on track. For instance, in skills classes, not all classes would be beneficial for a student who watches a recording later. If class consists of group work, case rounds, individual work time, or discussion, a recording might not produce the sought-after learning outcomes. Instead, assign the student asynchronous work and schedule a time to review it and answer any questions. This approach takes some work, but it enables the instructor to ensure the student stays caught up with the skills being learned in a particular progression.

Whichever approach you take, reassure students that their absence from class for COVID-19-related reason won't count against them in any way and that you're available to meet with them

separately on Zoom to make sure they don't fall behind. Remember, our goal is to make sure students don't feel penalized for making the safe choice of staying home.

When you need to miss class: Develop a plan for what happens if you need to miss class for a COVID-19-related reason. That might include a positive test or, in some cases, exposure. The Law School has developed protocols to counsel you through these matters, and you should reach out to Dean Rutledge if you need that counsel.

When developing your plan, consider both how you plan to modify class and also how you plan to communicate those changes to the students. If you plan to shift online and teach synchronously, then provide a Zoom link now for students to use. Also consider having a couple of “canned lessons” that can be used at any point during the semester in the event you are too sick to teaching. These could be practice problems, videos you recorded last year, a podcast with reflection questions, or a documentary with guided questions. Communicate your plan to your administrative assistant, and tell them what their role will be in implementing your plan. Also consider telling the students what your plan will be prior to needing to implement; this could reduce their anxiety over the uncertainty and could mean far fewer questions and mix-ups if you do test positive.

Once you find out you need to isolate or quarantine, if you are going to move online, notify Dean Barnett so he can get the modality of your class switched through the appropriate administrative channels.

Office Hours

For those of you who are concerned about meeting unvaccinated or unmasked students in your offices, hold office hours outside (such as in the courtyard), on Zoom (regularly or by appointment, and for individuals or groups), or a combination. You could even schedule “walk and talks” around North Campus. Meeting outside will allow students to gather with you in person in a safer environment whether they're vaccinated or masked, and it avoids concerns about discriminating against students based on vaccination status or mask-wearing because the rule is the same for all. As long as you're offering some in-person option, you're all set! At the same time, it's important to give students private spaces to approach you with questions or concerns—an option afforded by Zoom sessions. Explaining your reasons for holding office hours in safer environments provides another opportunity to reinforce good messaging about vaccinations and masking.