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Law School News: FAQ For 1Ls 04-16-2020

Roger Williams University School of Law

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April 16, 2020

Law School News

FAQ For 1Ls

Updates for all, but with a focus on 1L concerns, including exams, rankings, summer classes, academic planning, registration, financial aid, plans for the fall semester, and more.

April 16, 2020



INTRODUCTION

Hi everyone, we hope you're all doing well – or at least as well as can be expected under these circumstances. We're all thinking about you. If you're facing any special challenges or anything you think we could help you with, please get in touch with [Dean Goldstein](#) or [Dean Lalli](#). We have a lot of resources that we can offer. There's an emergency fund for students. We have mental health resources available. Even if you just want to talk, please get in touch with us. We'd love to hear from you and hear how things are going.

Those of you who are 1Ls are now within two weeks of finishing your classes, and, once you get through exams, will in fact have completed your first year of law school – and it's been a year like no other in the history of education, there's no doubt about that. Today, we wanted to address some of the issues that are of unique concern to you.

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What's the latest on Commencement?

Although this doesn't directly impact 1Ls, it does affect May: the in-person commencement on May 15 has been postponed. We're going to reschedule it to a later date when it is safe for us and for you all to be together, and we will be together, and we look forward to that. In the interim, on the originally scheduled Commencement date of May 15 at 12:30 p.m., we are going to have a virtual ceremony to celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2020. More on that soon.

What's the latest on summer classes?

Summer and fall registration have both begun. Get in touch with [Student Finance and Records](#) if you need any help with registration. Normal grading policies will apply in the summer. We've also added some new courses to the summer schedule.

As you know, we have made the decision to go exclusively online for our summer courses. We've also decided that, even if the campus were to be open during the summer session, that those courses will remain online. That decision was motivated by a desire to make it easier for you to plan. So, you do not have to be in Rhode Island this summer to complete summer courses.

Will tuition in the summer be reduced if the campus is closed?

There will be no change in the tuition rate for the summer.

Will things be back to normal by this fall?

We have made no decisions about doing anything other than what we'd ordinarily do, which is to gather in August, here in Bristol and at One Empire in Providence, for the inaptly named Fall Semester. Hopefully that's what we will do again this year, but we **are** doing contingency planning in case circumstances still don't permit this to be done safely.

When will you know for sure?

We have no target date for making that decision, but please be assured that it's on our minds – and we know that it is on yours. In the meantime, we're hoping and planning for a normal academic year ahead – which includes [a terrific new Dean](#) who will be joining the team effective July 1.

Who should we speak with about academic planning?

There are [many resources](#) available online. You should also be in touch with your faculty advisor, who will be able to help you and talk to you individually about your plans. [Dean Goldstein](#) or [Dean Lalli](#) are also available. Students who are on academic probation should talk to [Kathy Thompson](#) or [Brittany Raposa](#) about their plans.

And you should not feel limited to your faculty advisor or folks in academic support or in administrative positions. If there is any member of the faculty – or among your 2L and 3L classmates – whom you are comfortable asking for advice, you should absolutely not hesitate to do so. Everybody is prepared to help you make decisions about your course selections.

How does the wait list work?

Students will automatically get put into a course they're on the wait list for if a seat opens up, unless there's a conflict with their schedule.

When will we know the spring exam schedule?

That should be announced next week. All exams will be take-home and open book. If you need to reschedule any exams due conflicts with other exams or with other things happening in your life, such requests will be handled through the usual process for reschedules. Reschedule requests should be directed to [Dean Goldstein](#). If you have a request for special exam accommodations, you should send them to [Dean Lalli](#). Every exam will be timed, but you'll have at least a 24-hour window to take a timed exam. So, say it's a five-hour exam: the window may start at 9:00 a.m. and go to the following 9:00 a.m. But you can find whatever five-hour period within that 24-hour period works best for you – and that's the window in which you'll download the questions and then upload the answers.

How do we take the exams?

Technical explanations will be released with the exam schedule. And just a reminder of what you already know: all grades this semester are Pass/Fail. One positive way to view this is as a rare chance to find out how well you understand the course material without the stress and punishment of a graded exam. In addition, our faculty will all be available to answer any questions, go over your exams, and talk about your performance. You should take advantage of that; that's what we're all here for.

How will final exams work for accommodated students?

These students should get in touch with [Dean Lalli](#) about how exactly their individual accommodations are going to work.

What do we need to know about academic standing?

Under our normal rules, students who end their first year with a cumulative GPA below 2.0 are academically dismissed – that's automatic, as a matter of course. However, we have revised the rule for this semester. We are delaying any decisions about academic dismissal until after the fall

semester. So, students will need to have a 2.0 GPA at the end of that semester. Current 1L students who do not meet that threshold will be academically dismissed at that time – but the GPA will include *all* courses completed up to that point, including summer and fall courses.

Students who are on academic probation or supervision should soon be getting an email from Dean Goldstein and Dean Lalli about how this program will work and what requirements you'll need to complete in your 2L year. The scholarship committee will be meeting soon to determine how to evaluate students for membership in the Honors Program and for retaining scholarships.

How will 1L class ranks be determined?

Class ranking will be based on the GPA that the student has at the end of the 1L year; in other words, just Fall 2019 grades. What that will mean in terms of scholarships is yet to be determined.

When will 1Ls find out about ranks?

Ranking is usually done early in the summer.

Will 1Ls be eligible for acceptance into the Honors Program based on fall GPA alone?

We don't know yet. The Scholarship Committee, along with the director of the Honors Program, is going to meet to work through that and other related questions.

Will CALI Awards be issued for the semester for any class year?

No. After discussion among the faculty, we decided that it would be inconsistent with the Pass/Fail grading system that we adopted for this semester to award CALI Awards this semester. That will apply to all courses this semester, except for those that were completed before the crisis occurred; that is, in which the class was completed, or work done before we went online.

By the way, we are planning to do something virtually to recognize those who received CALIs in their fall classes.

What financial aid is available for this summer?

If you are registered for at least five credits, which is half-time for the summer, you'll be eligible for federal loans that will cover the tuition and some living expenses. Basically, it's living expenses for two months. The applications are available on the RWU Law website right now in [Financing Your Legal Education](#) under [Forms and Resources](#). Submit your forms (and/or any questions you may have) to the [Financial Aid Office](#) by email or telephone.

Also, in preparing for 2021, please complete your FASFA. The sooner the better – that way we can get you your financial aid package as soon as possible. That way you'll have time to receive your package, sign your award letter and send it back to us. And yes, you can virtually sign – that

also applies to the summer application. We can accept virtual signatures due to our being off campus for now, and in the summer.

Will academic scholarships extend through to the summer?

No. Our usual rule that academic scholarships don't apply to summer semester continues this summer. The only exceptions would be for students who are part time and students in an approved accelerated program, where they're graduating in December; that they can apply their scholarship to the second summer.

How many credits does a student need to be considered for full-time in the summer?

The standard is five credits to get financial aid. Students can register for up to six credits without Dean Goldstein's approval, but above six they need his approval. That said, he has generally been granting them up to a maximum of 10 credits.

How do we get our books for summer courses for books if we can't come on campus to pick them up the bookstore?

That's a really good question. We'll give that some thought.

Can we pay for books for the summer classes via financial aid?

Yes, absolutely, as long as it's going through the bookstore and you've done your summer application. That includes signing your award letter before we post your pending aid on your account. Once that's done, you can use your pending aid or your living expenses to pay for those books.

For students who have not yet explored summer internships, employment, etc., what do you recommend that we do?

Contact the [Career Development Office](#) and ask specifically about possibilities depending on where you are, what you've done in the past, how far away you are, and on so. That office is, while remote, fully staffed and ready to help with any questions you have about summer or fall employment. They are still posting job opportunities on Simplicity.

What support resources are available to me right now?

The university as a whole has shared resources through the [Counseling Center](#). They're updating this website pretty regularly with different topics like humor and resiliency, switching to remote learning and a lot of other things. Make sure you check on it every now and then, especially in the moments where you're feeling down or alone or isolated. RWU Law student groups are already planning fall events – Moot Court, Law Review and others. We're going to keep moving, and it's important that you keep moving, too.

A lot of us right now are working remotely, studying remotely and we just need to see some faces Consider creating study groups with your peers. There are many different crisis centers that are ready and willing and prepared to help students and others who are suffering right now. There are people who will catch you and make sure that you are okay. Please contact [Ralph Tavares](#) if you'd like to talk, or need help connecting to the right people.

Can you tell us about the emergency fund?

RWU Law has established the COVID-19 Emergency Fund to help students facing unexpected emergencies due to the pandemic. The law school is committed to helping students facing food Insecurity, loss of income due to the pandemic, emergency travel needs, and other challenges that could impact academic success. If you are facing financial difficulties due to the pandemic, please fill out the emergency fund application [by clicking here](#) and we will do our best to assist you during this time.

We are grateful for the generous contributions of SBA, faculty, staff, and administrators to help members of our community succeed during this difficult time. If you would like to donate to the RWU Law COVID-19 Emergency Fund, please contact [Kathy Massa](#), Assistant Dean of Business Affairs.

When will the emergency funds will be dispersed?

The emergency fund committee met for the first time on Wednesday, April 8, and we discussed quite a few applications. As of the morning of Thursday, April 9, the queue was already full again. Our goal is to meet weekly to make sure that we are evaluating each request, each student, each financial aid package, etc., to make sure that we are getting awards out as quickly as possible.

Just so that you're aware, there are a lot of wonderful people at this law school who are donating their own funds to this emergency fund. So, a big thank you to Student Bar Association, as well as a number of faculty, staff and administrators, for helping to make sure that everybody finds success for the rest of the semester. Anyone interested in contributing should contact [Kathy Massa](#).

Who do we contact about parking and print refunds?

They're still being processed by the university. Their records are very good in terms of who, for example, was on a meal plan and how much money is left on their cards. But unfortunately – and we're sorry about this; we've been saying this for a couple of weeks – the details just haven't been worked out. But they're working on it.

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CONCLUSION: Dean Michael J. Yelnosky

Thank you for your questions. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your hard work. And congratulations – you are getting really close. We will continue to communicate via Town Hall Meetings, FAQs, and email. Once again, we miss you, we want to hear from you, and we join you in really looking forward to being on the other side of this, which is a place where we will all definitely be at some point. So hang in there. Thanks for everything and talk to you soon.