



Republic of the Philippines LEGAL EDUCATION BOARD

Quezon City

The COVID-19 pandemic is posing unprecedented difficult challenges and hardships to families and communities the world over. The novel realities of this global health situation have profoundly disrupted the dynamics of legal education in the Philippines, upending existing assumptions about teaching and learning law in many ways never before expected.

Given the continuing situational fluidity and uncertainty created by this coronavirus pandemic that demand emergency combative and preventive measures, the Philippine legal education community and its stakeholders are left with no other recourse but to work together in accepting this new normal, and to resolve to make the best out of this difficult situation by formulating and adopting creative and innovative mechanisms to continue to improve and maintain quality legal education in the country.

It is in this regard that the Legal Education Board promulgates this LEB Memorandum Circular for the consideration and guidance of the legal education community.

Legal Education Board Memorandum Circular No. 56, Series of 2020

SUBJECT: COVID-19 PANDEMIC GUIDELINES FOR LAW SCHOOLS

Section 1. Declaration of Policies. — In the exercise of academic freedom, law schools are encouraged to design their respective contingency learning plans to the extent their particular local COVID-19 situation will allow, in accordance with the following general principles:

1. During this extraordinary health crisis, the inherent right to life, health and integrity of the human person takes precedence over academic goals.
2. Any and all academic interventions that will be adopted at this time must be premised on the values of compassion, empathic understanding, and solidarity, with care to mitigate existing technological, gender, and socio-cultural-economic inequalities that may be exacerbated by the crisis.
3. Law schools are encouraged to adopt innovative ways of teaching and delivery of instruction that will enable continued learning without imposing additional hardship or burden on the students, faculty members and administrative officials and personnel during these difficult times.

Section 2. Welfare of Academic Community. —

1. Law schools shall prioritize the holistic health and welfare of student, faculty members, and administrators and staff at all times.
2. Whenever practicable, law schools are encouraged to provide necessary health services, including psychosocial support to its academic members.
3. Similarly, the provision of remote access to library and online learning resources, to the extent possible, by law schools is encouraged.
4. The extension of financial support and social amelioration to teaching and non-teaching personnel shall be explored by law schools, whether through government or corporate programs, or both.

Section 3. Contingency learning plans. — To mitigate the disruptive effects of the public health emergency situation, law schools have the discretion to implement alternative and innovative methods of learning under the following advisement:

1. The contingency learning plans of the law school shall be designed in a manner appropriate to their local situation and capabilities, with an emphasis on continuation of quality learning for students to the extent possible under the circumstances. This may take the form of distance/remote learning, provision of entire course content, problem-based learning, and other creative or innovative methodologies. Student autonomy and self-directed learning must be emphasized.
2. The design of contingency learning plans shall not unduly prejudice students and faculty members who are unable to participate based on environmental, technological and personal limitations.
3. Given the broad disparity in access to technology among law students and faculty, asynchronous remote learning is a recommended system of alternative learning. The asynchronous remote learning system primarily focuses on recorded course content and self-paced study. It involves minimal internet connectivity and live interaction with participants.

Section 4. Academic Calendar. —

1. Notwithstanding Sections 2, 3 and 7 of LEBMO No. 10 (2017), law schools shall maintain their discretion to adjust Academic Year 2019-2020 to end earlier or later than their approved schedule, depending on what is most appropriate to their local situation.
2. For the remainder of Academic Year 2019-2020, the use of alternative modes of learning, including distance/remote learning, and the accomplishment of academic output shall be deemed as equivalent to the contact hours required under Section 4 of LEBMO No. 10.
3. For Academic Year 2020-2021, law schools have the discretion to adjust the beginning of their academic year beyond August 2020 in accordance with the exigencies of their particular situation.

4. The law schools who have decided to adjust their academic calendar due to the pandemic shall inform the LEB of such adjustment within 15 days from their adoption of the same.

Section 5. Assessment and Grading. — In light of the unusual circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, law schools are flexible in adopting a contingent assessment and grading system for the terminal semester of Academic Year 2019-2020 in line with the following policies:

1. The deep reliance of Philippine legal education on physical classroom presence, recitation, and live in-person interaction to manage learning objectives is inconsistent with the methodologies of distance/remote learning. Therefore, the health crisis now obtaining, law schools may explore other effective mechanisms to fairly assess student performance and accurately determine their readiness for higher courses even with remote learning mechanisms.
2. Law schools experiencing midterm disruption due to the pandemic are encouraged to adopt a pass/no-fail policy for the remainder of Academic Year 2019-2020. A no-fail policy shifts the focus of schools from the completion of requirements to one that emphasizes the desired course outcomes. It also prevents students who are already disadvantaged technologically and socio-economically from being further disadvantaged.
3. The no-fail policy if adopted may follow a grading system that uses reasonable criteria to determine whether a student has earned a passing mark for the course. Students who do not meet these criteria shall be allowed any of the following options: “no marks/credit” (or similar nomenclature), “dropped from the course without prejudice”, “incomplete”, or given a longer period, to be determined by the school, to merit a passing mark.
4. If adjustments are made to the assessment and grading system in the middle of the semester, students must be appropriately informed of such changes and given reasonable time to adjust and comply. The basis of the computation of grades shall also be transparently shown to the students before implementation.
5. The policies under this Section may also be availed of by law schools who have already concluded their Academic Year 2019-2020 before the issuance of this Memorandum Circular.

Section 6. Prerequisites and Bridging Programs. —

1. To afford law schools and law students maximum ability to catch up with learning objectives, the application of the Table of Prerequisites provided for under LEBMO No. 5 (2016), as amended, and Section 4 of LEBMO No. 2 (2013) shall be suspended for Academic Year 2020-2021.
2. To help students acquire the minimum competencies needed to advance to the next level of law studies, law schools are encouraged to implement bridging programs on an audit basis. Law schools can also offer such bridging programs on a shared basis in consortium with other law schools.

Section 7. Graduation. —

1. The completion of the law degree program is made upon the certification of completion by the higher education institution and the issuance of a LEB Certificate of Graduation (LEB-C). Applications for LEB-C shall be expedited through online processing, with physical copies of the original LEB-C to be sent by mail as soon as conditions permit.
2. Law schools have the discretion to adjust their graduation traditions in the manner appropriate to their local situation. Physical graduation ceremonies are highly discouraged at this time in accordance with the prohibition on mass gatherings and the social-distancing directive of the government.
3. Law schools offering the Juris Doctor (J.D.) thesis curriculum may waive the thesis requirement in light of the prevailing circumstances, provided that they duly notify the LEB of such action in a timely manner. The degree to be granted shall still be J.D. under the same curriculum, but the waiver shall be notated on the applicable student Transcript of Records.
4. Students who wish to appeal their right to graduate shall be given the opportunity to do so in their law school beyond the normally established period if there are reasonable circumstances for extension.

Section 8. Summer Classes. —

1. Notwithstanding LEBMO No. 13 (2018), law schools authorized to conduct classes during the summer term of their law program shall be allowed to adjust their schedule consistent with their adjustments of the academic calendar as provided in Section 4 of this Memorandum Circular.
2. Sections 4, 5, and 6 of LEBMO No. 13 on the duration, maximum academic load, and number of class hours shall be temporarily suspended to allow schools to adjust in the manner appropriate to their local situation.
3. The application period provided under LEBMO No. 13 shall be relaxed to allow for applications of emergency summer classes.

Section 9. Apprenticeship. — In the interest of the welfare of students and instructors, apprenticeships that are part of the law curriculum and which require physical on-site presence and participation of students is highly discouraged for the duration of Academic Year 2019-2020, including the summer term. Apprenticeships may be allowed on a per-school basis when the law school is able to show that local public health policies allow it, or the working arrangements for the apprenticeship do not place the students at risk.

Section 10. Resumption of Classes. —

1. If physical classes are resumed at any point during the COVID-19 public health emergency period, law students shall be given the option to refuse physical participation based on valid health concerns. In this regard, the law schools concerned shall determine, in accordance with academic freedom, how the student may earn credits for such physical absence from their classes. Law

schools may observe maximum flexibility in formulating policies to allow leniency in residency or academic leaves.

2. Law schools are encouraged to explore blended learning methodologies which integrate physical classroom interaction and remote learning platforms.

Section 11. Report of pandemic response. To record all changes, provide important data for policy making, and highlight successful and best practices among academic institutions, the actions of law schools made pursuant to this Memorandum Circular shall be reported to the LEB as follows:

1. Law schools shall report to the LEB all its relevant actions in response to the pandemic situation. Such report of pandemic response shall include, whenever applicable:
 - a. Health and welfare policies adopted by the school;
 - b. Contingency learning plans;
 - c. Changes made to the:
 - i. Academic Calendar;
 - ii. Summer Classes,
 - iii. Assessment and Grading System,
 - iv. Course Prerequisites,
 - v. Graduation Policies,
 - vi. and Apprenticeship; and,
 - d. Other relevant information.
2. The report of pandemic response shall cover both Academic Years (AY) 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, and shall be submitted within one (1) month from the beginning of AY 2020-2021.
3. Notwithstanding the reportorial requirement under this Memorandum Circular, law schools shall immediately notify the LEB if it decides to shorten or extend the academic calendar for AY 2019-2020, and/or waive the thesis requirement for its students under the J.D. thesis curriculum. This immediate notification shall be made within 15 days after the action has been adopted.

Issued under the seal of the Legal Education Board this 23rd day of April 2020 in Quezon City.

For the Board:


ZENAIDA N. ELEPAÑO
OIC, Commissioner