

DISTANCE TEACHING OF LEGAL DISCIPLINES AT NON-LEGAL UNIVERSITIES  
 PANDEMIC COVID-19 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR ACADEMICIANS



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Introduction

Legal education and understanding of fundamental principles of the rule of law form the basis of university education in general. Students of all universities get acquainted with the basics of law and ethics needed for their fields. Teaching law at these schools differs significantly from teaching at law faculties. Teachers must introduce students to the essence of public and private law in a much shorter period, without the unacceptable simplification of legal notions. The teacher must also significantly focus on the practical application of law in the field of studies. The SARS- COVID 19 pandemic interrupted personal contact with students and brought the need to modify the usual way of teaching until then.

The paper examines the challenges of complete distance teaching law based on the author's personal experience at two Czech universities.

REMARKS ON LEGAL TEACHING FOR NON-LEGAL STUDENTS

Since the mid of the 20th-century, concerns about the adequacy of the professional equipment in the students' legal knowledge and its interconnection with the public interest form a significant issue of legal education meets the needs of society, as the economy with which it operates should be more efficient.

When teaching digitally, the academicians can use either synchronous or asynchronous methods. Synchronous teaching means that the teacher and students are together in real-time in a digital classroom. Educational institutions prefer to use MS Teams for seminars and workshops, Zoom conference services for extensive lectures and public exams and MS. As the transition to distance digital teaching in many countries was rather unexpected and very quick, students had to start working with the syllabus, books, and pre-recorded lectures at their homes place. This approach forms asynchronous teaching. The mentioned methods are not separated. In both types, students can contact teachers digitally, through chat sessions or by mail.

There were two main challenges and obstacles for teachers when moving to remote online teaching.

First, the teachers had to adapt to the fact that students disappeared in the digital world.

Most students became passive participants who thought they were entitled to be educated without their effort. Discussions or exchanges of views during distance learning almost disappeared.

Second, the academicians had to process their new situation at home, family, and work. Many university teachers could not use the digital connection and the technologies for the daily grind; others needed to help their children with the daily distance education.

Conclusion

The pandemic speeded the demand to move from conventional face-to-face knowledge delivery to global marketized information sharing. The teacher and academic especially become more guides in educational activities than someone who exclusively decides what information students get.

The pandemic opened the world of video lectures, conferences and collaborative learning. New ways of teaching formed the major shift for both parties-students and academicians.

The main lesson resulting from the remote legal teaching for non-lawyers is that quality of education could be preserved just when the student's group are small and enable the discussion. Both academicians and students need to steadily improve their ability to work with new technologies and searching information on the web.

Universities have to prepare both parties to move to a new world of digital communication without losing the humanity and ethical dimension of education.

Results

The academicians preferred a home office. Two female respondents explicitly stated that they saved time and could better organize their family life.

One male respondent appreciated having more time for his family and sparring money, negatives of remote teaching, academicians perceived the lack of personal communication with students. They underlined the reluctance of students to participate in education in larger groups and the flattening of emotions. Three teachers (1 male and two females) also emphasized blurring the boundaries between work and privacy, including interventions in leisure activities. One respondent explicitly stated that the need to prepare for teaching and testing reduced her rest time. Another academician said that if distance learning continued, he would consider changing jobs. In testing, they felt the impossibility of ensuring sufficient control to be negative; asking questions was more complicated due to connection and technology issues.

Positively, academicians perceive that they and the students have become acquainted with the possibilities of using various educational programs. They will use part of their knowledge mainly in storing individual works and in credits. A significant positive was the opportunity to involve academicians from other universities, including foreign ones, in teaching. One respondent explicitly stated that she considers distance learning suitable for the inclusion of disadvantaged students.

Survey

The author conducted a short self-administrated questionnaire survey for gathering information about the impact of distance teaching from a sample of colleagues. Experienced academicians and teachers, assistant and associate professors, professors with more than 14 years of teaching experience responded.

Assumptions:

- A. Academicians prefer contact teaching
- B. Academicians prefer contact exams
- C. Academicians prefer to teach and take exams from the home office
- D. Academicians will not use new methods when contact teaching is allowed
- E. Females' family and private life was more affected by new, unexpected working conditions.

1. Which knowledge and methods from online teaching will you utilize when returning to the contact examination?

11 will use online teaching for credits and written tests; one refuses completely, 11 prefer oral contact exams but can copy with online exams

2. Online teaching and exams took part from  
 When combining both, please give a percentage estimation

Home office	Work
3 - 100%, 7 - 80%,	1 - 100%, 7 - 20%
2 - 50%	2 - 50%

3. Online teaching výuka affected my personal and family life

Yes	No
10	2

4. If the answer to question 8 was "Yes", I would be pleased if you indicated how

3 - positive, seven negative

Source: author