



University Council

September 15, 2023

UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE – 2023-2024

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Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal from the School of Law to offer the existing Master in the Study of Law (M.S.L.) online will be an agenda item for the September 22, 2023, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

Susan Sanchez, Chair

cc: Provost S. Jack Hu

Dr. Marisa Pagnattaro

PROPOSAL FOR AN ONLINE PROGRAM

Date: August 23, 2023

College/School: School of Law

Department/Division: School of Law

Program (Major and Degree): Master in the Study of Law (M.S.L.)

Will any approved areas of emphasis be offered under this major? No

Proposed Effective Date: Spring 2024

Introduction:

In 2014, the Law School began offering the Master in the Study of Law (M.S.L.) degree in Athens. This is a program for individuals who do not seek to become attorneys but who are interested in developing an understanding of the legal system or are interested in a particular field that intersects with other professional or academic interests. In 2019, the Law School also began offering the M.S.L. degree in Atlanta, operating out of the Terry Executive Education Center. The M.S.L. degree is a 30-credit program that can be completed on a full-time basis in one year or on a part-time basis in up to three years. All but three of the 30 credits are earned by taking classes side-by-side with the Law School's J.D. students. The three credit hours unique to M.S.L. students are offered in a mandatory class that introduces these students to the American legal system. The Law School offers a handful of other M.S.L.-only courses, largely those that provide a survey of content from the first-year J.D. curriculum.

Over the past three years, there have been between 7 and 11 students matriculating into the M.S.L. program, and between 3 to 14 graduating, with the variability arising from the students' ability to complete the degree from one to three years. Some years, students primarily rely upon courses taught online or in person in Atlanta; other years, they rely primarily upon courses in Athens.

The Law School now proposes to offer the M.S.L. degree online. Because of the nature of the program and the sufficient number of courses the Law School already offers online, this entails no substantive changes to the program and adds no additional costs to the Law School. Indeed, the ability to offer only one section of the mandatory course for M.S.L. students (instead of one section each for Athens and Atlanta) will preserve faculty resources and allow for more consistent enrollment because a student's location will not affect that student's course selection.

Based on the Law School's experience, inquiries from potential M.S.L. students, and national trends, the Law School assesses that there is a market of potential students who are interested in pursuing the M.S.L. degree online. In addition, the Law School already offers enough online classes to allow a student to complete the M.S.L. degree online, if the degree is approved. Students participating in the online degree program will also have the option to take some of their classes in Athens and/or Atlanta. The Law School anticipates that the flexibility of the online format will appeal to working students for whom in-person study, whether in Athens or Atlanta, is not feasible. In all respects other than the modality of instruction, the online-degree program will be identical to the Athens- and Atlanta-based degree programs.

1. Assessment

The Law School seeks to offer the M.S.L. degree online for the following reasons:

- Over the past several years, the Law School has received an increase in inquiries from potential M.S.L. degree applicants concerning the opportunity to pursue the degree through online study.
- M.S.L. participation in online classes has increased in recent years, supporting the assessment that M.S.L. students welcome the opportunity to earn credits through online classes. Indeed, 88% of UGA's M.S.L. matriculated students from 2016 through the summer of 2023 have enrolled in at least one online course. In a survey of current M.S.L. students, 92% indicated their interest in enrolling in online courses, and 85% indicated that they would be interested or might be interested in an online degree.
- Many M.S.L. students and potential M.S.L. students are working professionals. Whether they live in Athens, Atlanta, or elsewhere, traveling to in-person classes represents a challenge. The flexibility of online classes is therefore appealing to them.
- The Law School has already increased its online course offerings for all of its students (J.D. and M.S.L.) to the point that it can immediately meet the demand among M.S.L. students to complete the program online if this proposal is approved.
- Offering the M.S.L. program online will incur no additional costs for the Law School. In fact, it is likely to represent a cost savings. As noted, the Law School already offers enough online classes such that a student may complete the degree online. Offering the degree online may also allow the Law School to reduce redundancy in its offerings and increase capacity by replacing some of its Atlanta-based classes with online classes, which can serve a greater number of students.
- Nationally, M.S.L. programs and equivalents (sometimes styled J.M. or M.L.S. degree programs) have moved online, further supporting the Law School's assessment that demand exists for online programs of this kind. For instance, Emory University, Vanderbilt University, Washington University, Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, Wake Forest University, and George Washington University—among numerous others—have created online versions of their M.S.L. programs or equivalents.

In sum, demand for online courses has grown among current and potential M.S.L. students. This is also reflected in national trends. By allowing students to complete the M.S.L. degree program online, the Law School may reduce the number of courses offered in Atlanta while simultaneously offering more total courses to M.S.L. students, wherever they reside and whatever their preferred schedule. It is expected that an online program will lead to higher enrollment from both in and out of state, allowing students with a broad variety of professional and personal experiences to matriculate.

2. Admission Requirements

All requirements for admission to the online M.S.L. degree program will be the same as those for the in-person M.S.L. program.

3. Program Content

The curriculum of the online M.S.L. degree program will be identical to the in-person M.S.L. program.

The curriculum consists of one 3-credit required introductory course and 27 credits from elective courses. The Law School offers enough online classes and credits for students to complete the program online. The Law School anticipates that as demand for online courses grows among all students (M.S.L. and J.D.), it may further increase the number and range of courses offered online.

4. Student Support Services

Online M.S.L. students will be supported by the same academic advisement team and have access to the same student-support resources as in-person students.

5. Resident Requirements

Resident requirements for the online M.S.L. will be identical to the on-campus M.S.L.

6. Program Management

The online M.S.L. degree program will be managed by the faculty and staff who currently manage the Athens and Atlanta in-person programs. Professor Allison Hale, the advisor for the in-person program, and Shannon Hinson, admissions, will perform those roles for the online program and will be primary contacts. Professor Hillel Levin is and will continue to be the Director of Atlanta programming. As demand shifts from Atlanta-based courses to online courses, some of his responsibilities will be reallocated to online advising and programming.

M.S.L. students may take one to three years to complete the degree, depending on the number of credits earned each semester. Online students will have the same options. In all other respects, the M.S.L. program courses, program, matriculation, and timetable will be identical for students in the already-approved in-person M.S.L. programs.

No University in the USG offers this or an equivalent degree, whether in person or online.

7. Library and Laboratory Resources

The program includes no laboratory requirements.

With respect to library resources, online students will have access to all of the extensive resources available through the law library's online presence and to library staff via phone and email. Note that students who have participated in the program in Atlanta have successfully used these resources to complete the program without the need for physical access to the law library in Athens. Of course, online students will be welcome to make use of the physical library and its resources.

8. Budget

Because the Law School already offers sufficient online classes with excess capacity, it is anticipated that the program will add no new costs for additional personnel or courses. In addition, offering the program online may allow the Law School to reallocate some resources currently invested in Atlanta programming, including facilities and personnel, toward online programming.

9. Program Costs Assessed to Students

None.

10. E-Rate

The Law School will seek approval for \$710/credit e-rate.

Documentation of Approval and Notification

Proposal: Offer the existing Master in the Study of Law (M.S.L.) online

College: School of Law

Department: School of Law

Proposed Effective Term: Spring 2024

School/College:

- School of Law Dean, Bo Rutledge, 8/23/2023