Hello you lucky POSC 386 people! Welcome to The U.S. Judiciary 2.0!

I wanted to take a few minutes to provide you with some updates about our class. Mostly good news: I think we are in good shape to move our class online, and I think you’ll find the experience enjoyable and educational. And in case you’re worried: We will hold this class in an asynchronous manner, which means that you do not all have to connect to WebEx at the same time. But my student hours will be as usual, except they’ll be online. More about this later.

I’d like to thank you for your patience and understanding with the changed plan for the semester. I hope that you take the advice of JMU’s Student Government Association and stay home. If you take a look at what has happened in other countries hit by COVID-19, you’ll see that the situation is in fact serious. Check out the news from Italy if you haven’t done so. While this COVID infection tends to be harmless for younger people, you can transmit the virus to others who can get seriously ill EVEN IF YOU DO NOT HAVE SYMPTOMS. If you go out partying, or even just hanging out with friends, you’ll make it more likely that the illness spreads through the Harrisonburg and the Shenandoah Valley communities, the local hospital will be overwhelmed, and people will die. If COVID-19 spreads unchecked, we can be pretty certain that some JMU faculty and staff will die. Even some of you may die if your immune system is compromised or if you have illnesses for which you need treatment while the hospitals are overrun with COVID cases.

So, thank you for social distancing. You’re doing it for all of us. You can connect with people (and even party!) through social media, WhatsApp, and whatnot, and not in person. It’ll be only a few weeks, and when this ends, the weather will be much better for having a good time.

I know these are scary times—scarier for some of us than for others. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you just want to connect, I invite you to talk to me. I will keep my student hours as usual, though only remotely, from my home office. I will have WebEx available for voice and video chat, but I will also email you a phone number that you can call or text to. That phone number is open outside of student hours, and you are welcome to call or text. If I don’t respond immediately, I’ll promise that I get back to you reasonably quickly.

Monday’s (March 16th) student hours will be from 2 to 3 PM, as an exception, since I’ll be in a meeting until 2 about ways to help other faculty get their online learning off the ground. For the rest of the semester, my student hour times will be the same as usual, except that you can reach me only through WebEx, by phone, or by email.

I think for our class, we are in pretty good shape: We’re done with our major assignment (and I’ll send feedback and grades over the next week). Don’t worry about the remaining exams for now—we’ll figure out whether we should move those online as well, whether we should replace them with other graded activities, or what. I am committed to making sure that you make it through this semester with new knowledge, new skills, and with a grade that is not affected by the distractions caused by the COVID-19 virus.

Basically, the one big topic that’s left for us is Supreme Court decision-making. I think that’s probably the most fun topic of the whole course, which is good. Also, I’ve taught this topic online before, so there are even some video lectures whose dorkiness may or may not amuse you.

The most important thing for now is to respond to a survey that I am emailing you. Please do respond! I will use the survey to figure out what technologies you have available to participate in online learning right now. Please respond by Tuesday afternoon (say 5 pm) to the survey, so that I can provide you with more information Wednesday on how we’ll run the course.

Hang in there!