

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **UH Law Center to Launch Course on the Transformation of the Legal Profession**

**HOUSTON - Dec. 21, 2021** - In spring 2021, the University of Houston Law Center will offer its first-ever course on legal innovation, currently a hot topic in legal education. Designed to prepare students for the rapidly evolving legal industry, the course will survey and explore emerging legal business models, the rise of alternative legal service providers, increasing emphasis on legal entrepreneurship, ongoing regulatory reform initiatives, career path alternatives and the role and adoption of new technologies.

The course will be coordinated and taught by Rafael D.B. Figueiredo, general counsel for Santa Fe Gas, a multinational natural gas trading and services company based in Houston. Prior to his current role, Figueiredo worked for over a decade at large law firms in the U.S., Europe, and Latin America, giving him a broad set of experience to draw upon in the classroom.

“Many in the legal industry still cling to a mental model formed in a different time that no longer exists or is quickly fading away,” Figueiredo said. “Just like the analog economic models don’t work anymore in light of widespread digital transformation across sectors, mental models also need to keep pace with new world and business realities.”

Large, high-revenue law firms in major U.S. cities, with their billable hours and entrenched business practices, are increasingly being challenged by an array of upstart competitors—the “Big Four” accounting firms, distributed-model law firms, beefed-up in-house legal departments, and “other types of providers that don’t exist yet and who will innovate largely on entirely new business models,” Figueiredo said.

To survive in this brave new world, young lawyers must be prepared to learn and adapt, according to Figueiredo. “Technical legal expertise is not enough—not anymore. At the enterprise level, which is the world I live in, customers have business problems, not legal problems, and they don’t need 40-page memos; rather, they need five bullet points summarizing critical issues accompanied by practical, hands-on solutions and recommendations.”

The goal of the course is to “future-proof” legal careers by giving students the thinking and tools they need to navigate the coming changes. Given the broad range of topics to be covered, the course will feature a number of guest speakers throughout the semester including Law Center alumna and former in-house counsel at Microsoft, Lucy Bassli (’00).

Figueiredo developed the course with the support of Professor Renee Knake Jefferson, Joanne and Larry Doherty Chair in Legal Ethics, and director of Law Center Outcomes and Assessments.

“Professor Jefferson is a pioneer in academia when it comes to teaching legal innovation-oriented courses and preparing law students for the future; and was instrumental in pitching the course at the University,” he said.

Just as the legal profession is changing, so must legal education, Figueiredo believes.

“I care deeply about transforming and reshaping the legal ecosystem for the better, and for everyone involved or affected by it,” he said. “And I firmly believe that the next generation of legal professionals/leaders will play a key role in a more significant and long-lasting transformation of the legal industry.”

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### **About the University of Houston Law Center**

The [University of Houston Law Center](#) (UHLC) is a dynamic, top tier law school located in the nation’s 4th largest city. UHLC’s Health Law, Intellectual Property Law, and Part-time programs rank in the U.S. News Top 10. It awards Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and Master of Laws (LL.M.) degrees, through its academic branch, the College of Law. The Law Center is more than just a law school. It is a powerful hub of intellectual activity with more than 11 centers and institutes which fuel its educational mission and national reputation. UHLC is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools.

### **About the University of Houston**

The [University of Houston](#) is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter for excellence in undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city and one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the country, UH is a federally designated Hispanic- and Asian-American-Serving institution with enrollment of more than 47,000 students.