

Information on Studies in the 2020/21 Winter Semester

Bamberg, 22 January 2021

Dear students,

In recent days, I have received a number of emails from members of the student body. I would first like to thank you for this. Because I cannot respond to every individual message, I would like to take this opportunity to address you collectively. I would also like to emphasise that your comments and questions have been received and that your suggestions and concerns are being taken seriously. Furthermore, I would like to report on some new developments.

Decisions concerning examinations:

There was a great deal of feedback from you regarding the decision to temporarily suspend all centrally organised examinations as well as decentralised examinations in which more than 30 candidates are in one room at the same time. They reflect a wide range of views, as is also true of the broader societal debate on how to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. To help you better understand the decision, I would like to take a closer look at some background information and offer a bit of perspective.

Both the WS 20/21 taskforce and the university executive board have been engaged in the complex topic of examinations for quite some time. The fact that the task force comprises representatives from all sectors of the university and, above all, the student body, means that the many different perspectives that need to be taken into account are always in view. Unfortunately, it has become clear that there are no simple solutions.

On both the political and broader societal levels, we are all experiencing how assessments can change with great frequency, and are seeing that those in power are constantly discussing and establishing new measures for combating the coronavirus pandemic. It is, so to speak, like driving in a dense fog. Consequently, universities are also constantly faced with having to react to shifting parameters. When the government has to readjust its course through this pandemic so often, it is hardly possible for the universities to make decisions with any substantial lead time. This means that such decisions can only be made on short notice.

Examinations are decisive milestones in a person's educational biography, and it is important to provide the best possible conditions. This includes examinations being offered in the intended manner - and until today, this generally meant conducting them in person. We must not lose sight of this even during the coronavirus pandemic. Accordingly, the currently applicable version of the Bavarian state government's regulation on infection prevention and control measures (*Bayerische Infektionsschutzmaßnahmenverordnung*) still permits in-person examinations, despite far-reaching restrictions elsewhere. It goes without saying that the health of all those involved is the

top priority and that relevant protective measures must be strictly observed. Reducing the number of examination participants can also be an important measure in this regard.

Nevertheless, in the current situation, the option of online examinations should of course also be strongly considered. However, for various reasons, it is not possible to simply convert all examinations to online formats across the board. Examination formats should be aligned with particular level of competence and expertise required by individual modules and their corresponding courses. Taking this principle into account, changes to examination modalities can only be made individually by those responsible for the examination and not simply imposed centrally, as some of you demand.

Our university is very open to the option of conducting oral examinations and presentations via video conferencing, and these solutions are already being used in a variety of ways. The situation is different with regard to traditional written examinations. The situation is different with regard to traditional written examinations. A properly manageable implementation of written remote examinations on a large scale is currently not a realistic option due to a multitude of problems. Among others, these include issues pertaining to equal opportunities, feasibility, authenticity and identity verification, supervision, equipment and technical issues as well as legal aspects. Not only that, Bavarian regulations pertaining to distance learning and testing (*Bayerische Fernprüfungserprobungsverordnung*) also cause difficulties. One such is the obligation to offer an alternative examination on the university's premises for online examinations if this is requested. Incidentally, this critical assessment is shared equally by all Bavarian universities. Naturally, the University of Bamberg is interested in the further development of written examination formats, regardless of location. However, positive results cannot be expected in the short term. So for the time being, written distance examinations can certainly only be an option in very specific circumstances. A manual for the implementation of online examinations based on the Bavarian distance examining regulations (*Bayerische Fernprüfungserprobungsverordnung*) is currently being prepared.

Retroactive option to choose alternative examination formats:

The University of Bamberg's Corona Statutes (*Corona-Satzung*) provide the option to choose alternative examination formats in certain circumstances. Any deviations from the original format must be announced in writing no later than four weeks after the start of the lecture period. In well justified exceptional cases, deviations may also be permitted at a later date, provided that the competence-oriented teaching and examination concept can be ensured. In individual cases, this option can still be used at short notice if instructors deem it appropriate. However, the choice of suitable examination formats and a good exchange of information with the students are of the utmost importance.

Deadline extensions for bachelor's and master's theses:

Due to the currently very difficult conditions for writing final theses, many students have requested that I extend the deadline for submitting these theses. The examining boards

shall comply with this request in such a way that, in addition to the extension options already provided for in the examination regulations, an additional four-week deadline extension due to coronavirus-related difficulties is granted until the end of the current winter semester. All that is required for this is an informal request submitted to the responsible examining board.

Adherence to course times with digital teaching:

I have urged lecturers to adhere to the specified course times for online courses and to communicate relevant information within this framework.

Appeal for intensified communication between the lecturers and the students:

Especially in these difficult times, good communication is of crucial importance. I have made it clear to our university's lecturers how important it is for the students to have reliable information and sympathetic support from their instructors. I would also like to encourage you to talk to your lecturers about any concerns you may have.

Library use:

I'm pleased to close with some very good news: Following the Bavarian State Government's decision of 20 January 2021, contactless checkout of media is possible again. Current opening hours for the branch libraries can be found on the University Library website. All holdings can be ordered and checked out in the Online Catalogue. Wearing an FFP2 mask is required when checking out books and other media. Overdue reminders and fees will be issued again beginning 8 February 2021. Unfortunately, reading rooms and study areas must remain closed. In urgent cases, the University Library will continue to provide a digitalisation service and postal mailing services to addresses outside of Bamberg.

I very much hope that my statements have contributed to a better understanding of the university management's coronavirus-related decisions and that I have been able to provide you with important information on the current circumstances of your studies. I also hope to be able to provide more detailed information concerning examinations by the end of January/beginning of February at the latest. We are currently making every effort to implement the present examination schedule beginning on 15 February 2021 and to reschedule the currently suspended examinations in a timely manner.

Best wishes and warm regards.

Sincerely,

Stefan Hörmann