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Winter semester 2020/2021

Mix of digital courses and in-presence teaching

It is important to the Berlin universities to enable in-presence teaching operations and a return in certain areas to Berlin as an experienceable center of higher education.

Press release of the State Conference of the Rectors and Presidents of the Higher Education Institutions in Berlin (LKR) and the Senate Chancellery for Higher Education and Research

The universities see themselves as institutions of in-presence learning and they should remain places of physical encounter and discourse. Tried and tested digital teaching and learning formats will continue to be used as far as these contribute to better studying and teaching.

The Berlin universities are aiming to provide a mix of digital courses and in-presence teaching so as to offer students, teachers and staff sufficient certainty regarding planning as well as a dependable framework both now and in the future. It is assumed that a significant number of courses will also be offered digitally in winter semester 2020/2021. The Berlin universities are seeking to offer a mix of digital courses and in-presence classes, as far as the pandemic permits.

The extent of in-presence teaching offered at universities will vary according to the range of disciplines taught. In principle, digital and alternative teaching formats are necessary to enable teachers and students to plan effectively, provide reliable procedures and help contain the coronavirus pandemic. The universities are planning a combination of different formats taking account of their various situations regarding available rooms as well as study and teaching requirements. Members will be informed of decisions in good time.

- **In-presence formats**

Practical teaching formats will continue to be offered in presence. These include formats for which digital options are unsuitable, such as labs or workshops at science universities or practical artistic instruction at art and music institutions. Courses will be organized taking account of the number of persons present and available room sizes.

- **Examinations**

In some cases, it will be possible to conduct examinations digitally or as distance examinations. For certain situations, however, in-presence examinations remain the only option. Given the current circumstances, room capacities are required to conduct in-presence examinations which are not consistently available at the universities. As such, some universities will again be required to rent external larger halls or event spaces.

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- **International students and exchange students**

Berlin is proud of its global reputation as a center of learning and the high number of international students it attracts. We want this to continue to be the case. International students are currently unable to say whether it will be possible to leave their home countries or enter Germany in winter semester 2020/2021. In addition, it is more difficult to study from a foreign location under crisis-affected circumstances. This is why it is so important to provide reliable information as to whether and to what extent digital learning options will be made available. This includes statements regarding the option to take practical courses and examinations in later semesters, which examinations can be taken online and whether it is possible to travel from abroad to take examinations.

- **Beginning students**

A greater number of students will be coming to Berlin due to the fact that many programs only start in the winter semester. These students will be unfamiliar with how their university and their degree programs operate and reduced in-presence classes will give them scant opportunity to get to know their fellow students. This could lead to an increase in the loneliness and anonymity felt by some students and the universities will be striving to minimize their effects.

In the current circumstances, all Berlin universities wish to provide particular support for those students commencing their studies in Berlin and those coming from abroad to study.

The decision to offer a hybrid winter semester consisting of a mix of digital courses and selected in-presence classes provides students with the certainty they need to plan and enables teachers sufficient time to prepare thoroughly and effectively organize the start of the winter semester (organization of courses, orientation events). It will be possible to draw upon the experiences of the summer semester to improve the organization of the winter semester.

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Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht (HWR) Berlin

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initiative of the German Rectors' conference: "Cosmopolitan Universities - Against Xenophobia".

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