

New facts in the area of teaching and learning – Uni-list-e-mail from Prof. Andreas Musil, 11 May 2020

Dear university members,

Flexi semester, corona semester, semester of opportunities. The current semester has been given many names. What matters in the end, however, is what is behind each of these labels. This e-mail is an attempt to clarify the currently arising questions with practical relevance for teaching and studies.

Based on the latest containment ordinance from May 8, 2020, the university has transitioned to “**limited on-site operations**”. This allows for a few more people to be present on campus than with the “emergency on-site operations”, but there are only minor consequences to this in practice. Employees are still supposed to work from home as far as possible and students may only come to the university if absolutely necessary.

Even though § 5(4)(9) of the containment ordinance makes it possible for on-site teaching to resume at a larger scale starting from May 25, I would like to emphasize that **courses that have started online will continue and be concluded online**. The reason being, above all, that regular teaching operations are technically not feasible with regard to the required distance regulations still in place. The exceptions for **laboratory courses** and **excursions** that have already been communicated still apply, of course. For excursions in larger groups, my office can provide you with an approval document issued by the directorate on request, which confirms that the excursion is permissible in accordance with the containment ordinance.

In exceptional cases, other **small group events** that require on-site presence for didactic reasons and have not yet begun can be held in blocks from 25 May onwards, subject to the applicable hygiene and distance requirements. This requires the submission of an application that includes justifications to the Vice President for Teaching and Studies (musil@uni-potsdam.de oder britta.kempen@uni-potsdam.de). The approval is not only subject to the didactic necessity but also to the available room capacities. In any case, carrying out examinations is a priority.

What remains problematic are the courses usually taught in the **sports** department. According to the Ministry for Science, Research and Culture, the ordinance does not provide an easing of regulations for university sports yet. Nevertheless, the possibility of carrying out certain sports courses, in particular with regard to § 6 of the ordinance, does not appear to be ruled out. In order to obtain exceptional approval for such courses, I would ask the department concerned to contact me or my office. As far as the aptitude tests for prospective students are concerned, we intend to conduct them at a later date. We will inform you of the exact dates before the end of June.

Examinations and courses that can only take place with on-site attendance due to, for example, the use of equipment and tools, have been launched. For this purpose rooms have been identified and evaluated so that we can guarantee compliance with hygiene and distance regulations. The [latest updates](#) are available via our Intranet. One person in each faculty has been put in charge of the

coordination of rooms for the duration of the corona crisis; if you need rooms for examinations, please contact the office of the respective Dean of Studies. On-site examinations are still only to take place in exceptional cases and by mutual agreement of all participants. This applies not only to the proctors but also to the students. Oral examinations are to continue in an electronic format. Please bear in mind that your behavior also contributes to whether or not the easing of restrictions can be maintained. Take heed of and follow the directions and displayed notifications! Our goal must be to protect the health of all!

I am particularly pleased with the creation of a [website on digital learning](#) aimed at students which now complements the web offer on **online teaching**. For now, basic tools for online teaching such as moodle and Zoom, but also hints and tips for group work and work in the home office are being presented; we plan to update the offer continuously, also based on the further requirements you communicate to us. Our [knowledge base](#) also provides information tailored to the needs of students with disabilities. On these pages, you will find a lot of information on well-balanced learning, too.

A [code of conduct](#) has now been established for online courses. Recently, there have been many questions on how to handle the challenges of impersonal online teaching. This document now provides guidelines, which I urge you to follow so that teaching and learning based on trust can take place in an environment that many of us are still not used to. I would also like to point out that [declarations of consent](#) have been created relating to the use of Zoom. The discrepancy between data protection on the one hand and the provision of materials or opportunities to catch up on the other hand is a recurring theme. I would like to ask all those involved to weigh up the possibilities in a goal-oriented manner.

Unfortunately, new members of the teaching staff cannot be properly welcomed at the university at the moment. The “Starter Kit Lehre” event for academic staff members also had to be canceled. That is why I appreciate the creation of an [offer for exchange among colleagues](#) aimed at this target group and the challenges of online learning. The Center for Teaching Quality Development also offers specific [online training courses](#) on these topics.

I would also like to remind you of the [FAQ page](#) again. It is being updated continuously to offer you the latest information for matters relating to studies and teaching. This is relevant, for example, for questions about on-site attendance and examination matters.

There are indications of a nationwide agreement to continue counting the current semester in terms of total university semesters and the **standard period of study**. However, the goal of the directorate is to modify regulations that refer to the standard period of study and that the UP can influence in such a way that students will not have any disadvantages in terms of examination regulations due to the pandemic. At the University of Potsdam, for example, the summer semester 2020 will not be counted when calculating the examination deadlines according to BAMA-O/BAMALA-O § 7a (loss of the entitlement to take an examination after twice the standard period of study). However, there are also matters on which the University cannot make decisions, such as BAföG regulations, matters of health insurance or child allowance payments.

With regard to the **application for Master's degrees** in the coming semester, the university's committees are currently working on an amendment to the statutes, which is aimed at postponing the corresponding application deadlines. Please take note of new information on the respective websites in the coming weeks.

Honesty also means that we must all be aware of the fact that this corona semester will not leave us unaffected. Together we do everything we can to find solutions to hardships and adverse circumstances. However, not everyone will be able to finish the semester as they might have planned a few months ago. This is true for students as well as teaching staff. We do not want to and must not lower our quality standards. Where compensations are possible on a small and large scale, I am

committed to ensuring that they be implemented. This also applies to justifiable adaptations of legal provisions that need to be approved in the short term. However, in cases where this could only be achieved at the expense of unacceptable losses of competence, it cannot be allowed. We also cannot override higher level legal requirements. Therefore, I would like to ask for your understanding even for supposedly harsh decisions. In the interest of all graduates, a degree from the University of Potsdam should stand for itself and deliver what it promises, after all.

Kind regards,
Prof. Dr. Andreas Musil
Vice President for Teaching and Studies