

Guidelines of the Hesse State Ministry for Higher Education, Research and the Arts for the summer semester 2020:

Joint letter of
the Minister and the Presidents of the Universities

Dear students,
Dear teachers,
Dear university employees,

The exceptional circumstances in which we currently find ourselves due to the spread of the corona virus face our universities with very special challenges. The members of the universities are tackling these challenges with extraordinary commitment. On the one hand, there is science and university medicine, which is making an invaluable contribution to the health of all of us. The volunteers in medical care, public authorities and social initiatives are holding our society together during these difficult days.

On the other hand, it is also about coping with this crisis on a day-to-day basis at all levels of the universities and the willingness to look for new solutions and to help tackle it. Our respect goes out to the commitment of students, teachers, administrative and technical staff, artists and scientists. We thank you for the mutual trust, of which so much is needed especially in these times.

It is our task to create reliable framework conditions that provide security for all parties involved, but also allow sufficient freedom to react to individual particularities locally.

That is why we are announcing guidelines that mark our common path for the upcoming summer semester today. We want to create clarity, but at the same time we must remain flexible in order to be able to respond quickly to current developments.

We are aware that there are many open questions that cannot be answered at present. Together with the federal government and other federal states, we are making every effort to work out solutions as quickly as possible and will communicate them transparently.

1. We take new paths

Higher education thrives on the exchange between people. Since the current situation affects this very core, the upcoming summer semester will not be an ordinary one. Together we are focusing on flexibility in the organization of teaching, studies and examinations. Teaching and research will take place in forms that meet epidemiological requirements. This means above all: with provisionally limited attendance and new formats. Our common goal is that as far as possible all those who want to complete the semester should be able to do so.

2. We get started together

On April 20, teaching at the universities of the state of Hesse will start with digital services. This also applies in many other federal states. We are thrilled to see how many new digital offerings and additional solutions have already been developed within the universities during the last weeks. Depending on official orders, attendance events might take place again during the semester. In Hesse, we have jointly decided to flexibly postpone the end of

the lecture period of the summer semester. We will also take into account a recovery period and the family situation during school summer holidays in Hesse. We are going to decide on specific dates soon, depending on individual circumstances.

3. No one should be left behind

Students who are unable to accomplish any or all of the planned courses due to the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic should not suffer any disadvantages. This applies for example with regard to regulations that require a normal programme length. The Science Ministers of the federal states will lobby the federal government to ensure that flexible regulations are found for BAföG, child benefit, health insurance, etc. which take into account the realities of student life in times of the Covid 19 pandemic.

4. We make an effort

Together we want to make as many and as high quality offers as possible despite the restrictions. The unusual formats demand great adaptation efforts from everyone. Teachers in particular, but also administrative and technical staff are challenged to make their contribution to these new formats. It also requires students to be willing to engage in these new formats with confidence and commitment. We are very grateful for the efforts that have already been made. We will continue to support you. There are also changes beyond teaching: Regarding the libraries, adjustments are to be made to ensure lending operations and digital services are expanded. Since there are more free rooms in the universities, some of the examinations that were cancelled in recent weeks can now be held in a larger area with the necessary physical distance during the summer semester. Research will also be continued with all possible efforts. In particular, we support young academics and artists and are committed to ensuring that this group also does not suffer any disadvantages from the current situation. Accordingly, we are lobbying at the federal level for an amendment to the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz (German law governing the duration of research contracts) and for appropriate exemptions for third-party funding.

5. We keep an eye on the next step

The postponement of the summer semester and the Abitur examinations in several federal states will also have an impact on the winter semester 2020/2021. We have agreed at federal level that we will find consistent solutions. They are intended to meet the needs of students who need lecture-free periods for recreation, work or practical work, as well as those of new freshmen who expect a reliable admission procedure and aptitude tests at the art academies and a smooth start of their studies. We currently assume that the lectures of the winter semester will start on November 1st.