

## Delivering courses in the 2020/2021 winter semester

With an eye on the summer semester that had to be switched rather abruptly to a digital format, we would like to solidify planning for the upcoming winter semester early on. As the development of the CoViD-19 pandemic is still unpredictable, which will be particularly true for the cold months of the winter semester, we see no realistic possibility to deliver traditional on-site teaching. In the 2020/21 winter semester, all courses at TU Darmstadt that can be delivered on-line will therefore continue to be taught using digital formats. If unavoidable, traditional on-site teaching will be possible as in the 2020 summer semester, such as laboratory work or excursions, provided they are compatible with the hygiene and infection control concept of TU Darmstadt in its then valid version.

Reasons for delivering the 2020/21 winter semester in digital form are listed below:

- TU Darmstadt is aware of its responsibility for the health of its members and for our community. Although the number of coronavirus infections is currently decreasing, there are still new outbreaks here and there of very dynamic local spreads of infection that result in considerable restrictions regarding freedom of movement and public life at these locations. Because of that, TU Darmstadt strives to limit the number of personal face-to-face encounters and contacts at the university and while commuting to and from the university as much as possible.
- Our experience with approved face-to-face courses and the backlog of exams for the 2019/20 winter semester has shown that conducting such courses and events in times of corona requires a much higher number of rooms and personnel. As the general conditions, particularly the hygiene and infection control concept, will most likely still be in place during the 2020/21 winter semester, we would require additional space to conduct split courses in multiple rooms at the same time. We will not be able to provide the additional space required for teaching all courses on site during the 2020/21 winter semester while maintaining the required minimum distance between people.
- For members of TU Darmstadt, managing the 2020 summer semester has been a particularly challenging experience. On the one hand, they have been concerned about their own health and the health of family and friends in view of the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, everyday operations at the university have become exceedingly challenging because of constantly changing conditions resulting in a lack of predictability: Instructors had to switch from regular teaching to digital formats within a few weeks. Students had been informed about changed examination schedules and new examination formats on short notice. Employees working at the offices for student affairs and in the university administration had to rearrange and reschedule exams and courses multiple times on short notice. By deciding early on to deliver another digital semester, we wish to give all members of the university the opportunity to better prepare and plan the upcoming semester. Instructors will be able to reflect on their experiences from on-line teaching in the 2020 summer semester and to refine their teaching (e.g. by making use of the support provided by the HDA). By specifying course and examination schedules early on, students will be provided enough time to plan their semester and to prepare for their coursework and exams. A definite planning horizon for the 2020/21 winter semester will improve the quality of digital teaching and will increase academic success.
- Although we currently assume the winter semester to be a digital one in most cases, this strategy enables us to respond flexibly to changes in the pandemic situation and in case of a

positive development to reopen courses on site step by step. TU Darmstadt is a traditional on-site university. Moving the majority of our teaching to digital formats is the exception of the rule because health protection is our priority at the moment. As soon as reasonably justifiable, all teaching formats will return to their traditional face-to-face formats.

We are well aware of the implications of this decision and would like to thank all instructors for your ongoing commitment and openness to exploring new paths.

The President and the Vice President, Academic Affairs and Diversity

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