

DER REKTOR



UNIVERSITÄT
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To all members
of Heidelberg University

Heidelberg, 7 April 2020

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Dear Colleagues,
Dear Students,
Dear Members of Staff,

Life and activities at our university have been greatly restricted for several weeks now. That is a new experience for all of us, which is why I am writing this letter to the whole academic community of teachers and students, and to all members of staff.

Research operations have had to be considerably scaled down, all teaching requiring attendance on campus – if it was planned at all – has not been able to take place, public events have had to be cancelled, and suddenly the focus is on working from home via the phone and internet. While some of us cannot work at all, many members of the university have given special support in tackling the issues. Here I would like to particularly mention the staff in the University Library, in the University Computing Centre and all those who have kept up the infrastructures in technology, communications and administration, and continue to do so. Fighting in the front line at present are our allies – commilitones (comrades) in the best sense – in the two Medical Faculties and the University Hospitals.

After weeks of partial closure we are looking ahead and preparing to reactivate research and teaching with responsibility and by stages. I greatly appreciate the special efforts made by all the university to plan for the coming summer semester and ensure that teaching goes forward. To put it simply: the summer semester will take place. All actors at the federal and state level have meanwhile agreed on this.

Lectures and classes will resume on 20 April 2020. However, other than possibly to a very small extent, we will not be able to hold them in the usual way with on-campus

attendance. This hits a university of our type particularly hard since, in our special field of competence in research-led teaching, the students are our partners in the scientific and scholarly process, which is characterised by personal encounter and by discourse and dialogue. In the current situation it would, however, be irresponsible to bring dozens or even hundreds of students together in lecture halls. So, dear colleagues, I must appeal to you again to prepare and conduct your teaching in digital formats, wherever that is possible and useful, particularly for the large-scale lectures.

It will, however, not be possible to hold all classwork digitally. Research-led practical courses using equipment or in the field, laboratory work and classes with special samples or study materials, specific seminar formats – all these classes call for personal attendance and cannot be usefully held without it. Since this teaching generally takes place in small groups we hope that it can be carried out with special precautions. The same rules will apply as for research. They include, above all, compliance with the imperative rules for hygiene. In addition, depending on the demand, classes will have to be assigned larger lecture halls than usual, or reformatted and broken down into several small groups. Where this is not possible, block courses are to take place towards the middle or end of the summer semester, if necessary also afterwards. All this poses a great organisational challenge to the deans' offices and degree programme coordinators, who are very aware of their task.

Please keep a special eye on the difficulties of our international students. If they are not able to arrive in time to begin their studies please find supportive solutions for this group as well.

At the same time, I know that many decisions cannot always be made without conflict. For this reason I call upon you all: work together in a constructive way. For example, when it comes to deviating from the usual lecture hall allocation or sharing experience in online teaching, look for creative solutions and support each other mutually in the interest of our students. We will take advantage of all the latitude allowed by our regulatory framework.

Dear students, we know about the uncertainties and the many, often very specific challenges that are bothering you at the moment. Examinations still remaining from the winter semester will be rescheduled, as far as possible. Please consult the university website for information or address your specific questions to the Student Affairs and Teaching Division in the university administration, to the deans of studies, or your departmental academic advisor.

At present, no approvals are being granted yet for business trips abroad, or for travel for research purposes or to attend conferences. The same applies to excursions with students lasting several days. There are compelling reasons for this, also in view of developments beyond our national borders. The University Library will remain closed to

visitors for the time being but is maintaining its online services with additional postal deliveries of books. The same arrangements basically apply to research and the administrations as for teaching. Please continue to ensure compliance with the general rules for hygiene. The persons responsible for the university facilities will decide in their context whether and how this can be guaranteed.

Heidelberg University is a vibrant, creative community. Together we face up to the challenges and carry out our mission to drive forward research and teaching for society. We are all stretched by the present situation. In mid-March, gradually scaling down university operations, and even suspending them at some points, was the necessary decision. From 20 April we will have the more demanding task of reactivating the university, focusing on the health of our members and motivated by our responsibility to society as a whole. I appeal to you all to play your part in making this happen.

The festival of Easter is coming up. Many of us have worries about the future, particularly students who, for example, fear the loss of funds to finance their studies and the necessary jobs they do on the side. We have friends and partners all over the world who report to us on their problems, fears and difficulties. Yet the Easter season also offers an opportunity for reflection and, despite all the restrictions and burdens, to be grateful – to the state of Baden-Württemberg for its care, since in many other occupations people fear for their livelihoods, grateful for our health system, which despite all difficulties still provides safe care, and grateful to all members of the university with whom we – as in the past – can continue to share our concerns, hopes and ideas in the future.

In this spirit I wish you all a happy Easter break and then a good start to a successful 2020 summer semester.

With warm regards,



Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Bernhard Eitel