

## Statement of the Saarland University Board concerning teaching and study activities in the winter semester of 2020/2021

Please note: This translation is provided for information purposes only. In the event of any discrepancies between the translation and the original German version, the latter shall take precedence.

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### Returning to campus safely and responsibly

Against the background of a continuing global pandemic, Saarland University is currently making preparations to safely and responsibly reopen the campus for in-person teaching and learning activities in the winter semester of 2020/2021.

To achieve this objective, the University Board has set out three key criteria that need to be met:

1. Any in-person (face-to-face) teaching activities at a Saarland University site must always and without exception guarantee compliance with the hygiene rules as formulated in the latest version of the university's pandemic response plan. This applies not just to the individual activities themselves, but particularly to the simultaneous implementation of a large number of on-campus teaching activities. Ensuring hygiene compliance will require changes to semester planning procedures and a high degree of consultation and coordination.
2. The university must be ready to return at any time and at short notice to a temporary campus shutdown without having to suspend teaching and assessment activities.
3. The university's response to the pandemic emergency in summer semester 2020 resulted in numerous technical and educational innovations and improvements. We seek to build on this progress and to use the coronavirus crisis to drive a significant step-up in digital and online teaching activities at Saarland University.

Despite the important technical and educational innovations that have been implemented in our teaching practices, the university does not intend to introduce a purely remote teaching environment for the upcoming winter semester. Our primary goal is to see the return of students and staff to Saarland University sites. However, the University Board believes that there can be no simple 'return to pre-Covid times'. The reality is that we need to establish a new normal for on-campus learning and teaching activities in which every effort is made to comply with the applicable hygiene standards. It remains the case that large events and mass gatherings should be avoided. To provide the best possible chance of tracking and tracing coronavirus infection chains and to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the virus, we strongly recommend the use of the 'Corona-Warn-App' that has been made available by the German government.

It is particularly important that our planning takes into account the needs of new students, international students and those members of university staff and the student population who are classified as vulnerable.

In general, on-site face-to-face teaching activities and digital remote learning solutions will be given equal significance. Our objective in winter semester 2020/2021 is to offer a blended learning experience that combines on-campus learning sessions with online digital learning units. Classes whose purpose is purely to convey knowledge should be conducted online, whereas teaching sessions that aim to encourage understanding, reflection and discussion or are designed to teach practical skills should be carried out with students physically present on campus. Larger teaching sessions



(lectures and instructor-centred problem-solving classes) should continue to be conducted as online events during winter semester 2020/2021. Access to these resources should be flexible and permit asynchronous learning, i.e. allow students to download the content at any time. Online content of this type can be delivered effectively using a combination of the online e-learning platform Moodle and the communication and collaboration platform Microsoft Teams. For small-group teaching sessions, such as seminars, practical skills classes and lab courses, the aim is to return to a predominantly in-person format with students attending on campus where possible.

These in-person classes should, however, be designed as hybrid classes so that students who are unable to attend in person can still access the content and the class experience online. Wherever possible, these classes should be recorded and then made available in the online platforms for asynchronous access. We need to find new, creative and safe ways to welcome students who are just starting out at Saarland University, such as hosting events for small groups and switching to an online mentoring programme. In order to protect vulnerable students and staff members, advisory services, student consultations, etc. will be offered in two equivalent forms: face-to-face consultations and remote, online consultations. Oral examinations and assessments may be conducted in face-to-face format if all parties involved agree, but the Saarland University Board strongly advocates that student consultations, office appointments and examinations should be conducted remotely via MS Teams. Written examinations may be conducted with examinees physically present on campus, provided that the hygiene rules are observed. In the case of exams or assessments that typically involve large numbers of students, faculties and departments should consider developing alternatives to conventional in-person written exams that can be conducted online.

For those teaching and assessment activities where student attendance on campus is essential (e.g. lab courses), appropriate alternatives should be developed so that in the event of another lockdown, at least some of the stipulated student learning objectives can be achieved.

As the university has to remain prepared for a possible (temporary) lockdown in future, the use of digital learning resources will continue to be a core element of curricular planning and delivery for the coming winter semester. Online digital courses and conventional in-person teaching will both receive equal weighting when calculating teaching load. Saarland University aims to build on the digital teaching architecture that has now been established and to develop it further so that it becomes an integral part of the university's future teaching infrastructure. This will necessitate upgrading the relevant IT and educational support services.

It seems likely that we will continue to face significant challenges in the upcoming winter semester of 2020/2021, but we are confident that we will be able to provide a safe and positive learning and working environment for students and staff alike. Summer semester 2020 demonstrated that this can be achieved through the collective effort of all members of the university, particularly the teaching staff and the personnel in the central and departmental examination offices and administrative units. It is important that the coronavirus crisis is also seen as an opportunity to consolidate new forms of teaching, learning and working and to implement innovative ideas and thus permanently advance the quality of the learning and teaching experience at Saarland University.