



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

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To all Universität Hamburg employees

—via email—

24 March 2020

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Corona crisis—instructions (No. 4)

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you again today in light of new developments in the ongoing corona crisis. I do this in the hope that you are still in good health. I base this hope on the extraordinarily low rate of infections at the University (to our knowledge, only two people) and only a few colleagues in quarantine. That means that Universität Hamburg is, with just a few restrictions, completely functional. And the most important thing is that you are doing well.

Thus, we can confidently say: **Universität Hamburg is not closed.**

There are, however, restrictions.

The Executive University Board—also following the first law-force involvement in this matter—has decided to close all buildings. The closure applies to the general public, not to staff who wish to or must work in University buildings. Buildings remain open to staff. However, lists are being kept at every main entrance (which will moreover be the only access route) so that, in case of an emergency evacuation, we know who is in any given building. Please do not fail to sign in or—also very important—out again when you leave the building.

Another restriction involves research: experiments in labs or similar facilities as well as research in the form of interviews with test subjects or patients outside the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf (UKE) may not take place until further notice. These areas must shut down their equipment accordingly so that it does not pose any danger. Operations can resume only upon the express instructions of the president.

With regard to teaching, the start of Summer Semester 2020 is still set for 20 April 2020. However, we must anticipate a further postponement or even the cancellation of the entire summer semester. As only 30 percent of all courses can proceed digitally (for either technical or curricular reasons), digital teaching cannot be offered for the entire semester course spectrum. Nevertheless, we are all working diligently to provide as many courses as possible online

so that, should the summer semester be canceled, students can already prepare for the winter semester. We will provide staff and, above all, students with more details in due time.

A significant number of administrative staff is working from home. Until further notice, working from home is an option that staff members can choose in agreement with their supervisors. As my recent comments regarding working from home inspired approval but also some criticism—prompting the Technical, Library and Administrative Staff Council (TVPR) to issue a circular—I would like to take this opportunity to clarify my message: the large majority of staff who work at home in agreement with their supervisors are working intensively and ensuring that the University continues to operate and grow. The Executive University Board emphatically thanks all of you, especially in light of the fact that working conditions at home are by no means congenial for everyone. Naturally, those staff members who cannot work at home, either because conditions or lack of resources prevent them from doing so, are not required to work from home—unless they belong to a high-risk group.

When I noted that home office should not be treated as legally equivalent to special leave, I did so because it had come to our attention that, regrettably, an entire faculty and a department had of their own accord shut down and sent all staff home. Furthermore, there were several reports—especially from colleagues still working on site—that entire units or certain people could not be reached during working hours. There was and is no reason for puzzlement or consternation among anyone conscientiously doing their work from home. The Executive University Board would like to assume that, in the future, the necessary information will be sought directly if an explanation is required with regard to the Executive University Board's decisions. In this context, we have set up a new section entitled “Lagebericht” (“Status Reports”, <https://www.uni-hamburg.de/corona-faq>; English Translation in preparation). This will supplement the existing FAQ.

In our opinion, we also need to explain once again the necessity of working from home for staff members with childcare obligations. In contrast to other German states (e.g., Berlin), the human resources department of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg (not University management!) decided that these staff members would not be granted special leave. I disapprove of this decision. Thus, we will find ways for these mothers and fathers to be able to declare that, for work purposes, they must work from home. This will allow us to find a solution for staff in precarious situations to work from home in accordance with the law.

In the current situation, the University must speak and act as one and use all available resources. This is something I implore you to do, for example, in light of the fact that the Executive University Board is intensively trying to rescue colleagues and students in the Himalayas and from war zones in Cameroon—to name only two examples. We also have to set priorities.

One more note on committee activities: as long as it is officially prohibited for (more than two) people to congregate in public spaces, we will not invite members to attend committee sessions. Once committee sessions are possible without risk, activities can resume. This means that the appointment of new committee members, etc. (e.g., by-elections for the University Council, selection of members of the Executive University Board, election of deans, among many other things) cannot proceed at present. The current incumbents must remain in office until further notice.

The crisis management team of Hamburg university presidents has set forth the above-mentioned rules in consultation with the senator and state secretary. As an attachment, you will receive separate instructions for a selection of the rules; these instructions are required as a clarification for statutory reasons.

And finally, a word about the style of my communication with staff: you know me as someone who always tries to mediate between conflicting parties and in difficult situations. The current situation leaves little room for compromise. Please understand that the Executive University Board is trying in every conceivable way to achieve the best for our employees and to effectively regulate activities and support you. However, we also have our limits. For example, I reached mine yesterday after 10 uninterrupted hours of telephone conferencing. Many others have no doubt reached their limits as well and I expressly thank you for your efforts.

Together, we will "keep the show on the road" as long as possible. The City, scientific community, and we ourselves deserve this much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a cursive 'L' and a long horizontal stroke.

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Dieter Lenzen