Dear Students,

We currently find ourselves in the final stretch of a very unusual lecture period. The coronavirus pandemic forced us to switch our teaching operations to a digital format. This was, and still is, a significant challenge for everyone involved:

- for our teachers, many of whom were not accustomed to preparing and conducting digital teaching and whose teaching formats could not always be transferred directly into digital form;
- for our staff in the faculties, the academic offices, and in service (e-learning offices, the computing center, administration, the libraries), who were tasked with providing support and advice despite their own difficult working situations;
- but first and foremost, for you, the students.

Transitioning to digital teaching, the lack of suitable study areas, libraries that were closed, technical issues, and financial difficulties due to the loss of part-time jobs sometimes amounted to existential challenges for you. Some of these issues could be resolved, at least partly, by efforts from the University and government, but other issues remained. That meant, this semester, you were not able to experience the most important aspects of university life—namely, meaningful contact and exchange with your fellow students, teachers, and colleagues. University is a social space, which is why it needs face-to-face contact to help all its members reach their full potential.

However, thanks to the overwhelming engagement of your teachers, and thanks to your willingness as students to adapt to a digital curriculum, Summer Semester 2020 was not a complete loss. Everyone who experienced it learned a lot about the possibilities and opportunities that exist for online teaching. Those aspects that have proven their worth will certainly continue to be an integral part of teaching in the future, as digital teaching offers us the opportunity to implement innovative teaching and learning concepts and to improve
study potential. But some boundaries were also made clear—for instance, delivering practical courses and internships, conducting examinations (both oral and supervised written examinations), or delivering discourse-based courses.

After experiencing this semester, many University members are longing to return to in-person teaching. However, as things currently stand, this is not fully possible. We are operating under the assumption that the current health protection regulations will continue to apply in the winter semester. That means that the measures adopted to contain the pandemic—in particular, maintaining minimal distances, wearing face masks, and adhering to other hygiene measures—will continue to shape our daily life at the University in the coming months. As this is in all of our interests, I would urge you most explicitly to take the time to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the hygiene measures to be observed. Detailed information is displayed around the University in posters and on infoscreens and is available online in the FAQ at https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/newsroom/intern/2020/0323-auswirkungen-studierende.html#13653361.

Implementing the distancing and hygiene regulations means that the capacity of our rooms has been greatly reduced. This will likely mean that only a selected few courses (and other events that are part of the University’s operations) will take place in person. Digital teaching will therefore continue to be part of the curriculum in the winter semester. This situation affects all major universities in Germany the same way (see, for example, the press release issued by the German Rectors’ Conference on Winter Semester 2020/21 at https://www.hrk.de/press/press-releases/press-release/meldung/hrk-senate-priority-for-health-protection-as-much-face-to-face-teaching-as-possible-4744/).

The faculties are currently planning their syllabi and are making every effort to enable in-person teaching wherever possible even under the current conditions. Emphasis will be given to events for first semester subjects and for practice-oriented and discourse-based lectures. The online course catalog for Winter Semester 2020/21 will be published on STINE on 1 August 2020. As usual, information on the general registration period is available on STINE > Service > Registration periods. Please address any specific questions you have about your degree program to your academic office. General information on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the University is available on the FAQ pages.

I regret that I am unable to give you a clear answer at the current time as to when things can return to normal, but I ask for your understanding and your willingness to help shape the coming semester together and to use our encounters with others, whether digital or face-to-face, to keep the University alive and make it a real and significant experience.

I wish you all the best for the end of the lecture period and the reading period. Stay healthy, stay positive, and come back safe and sound—we look forward to seeing you!

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Susanne Rupp
Vice President for Studies and Teaching

2