

**to the
members of
the University of the Arts Bremen**

- per E-Mail -

**15 February 2021
Open Letter: Yet another distance semester?!**

Dear university teachers,
dear spokespersons of the study programs,
dear workshop leaders,

Dear Rectorate, dear Deans, dear Administration,

Dear fellow students,

For almost a year now, we have all been struggling with the Corona pandemic and its effects. The second semester with significant restrictions in the daily study routine will soon come to an end and as it looks now, there will be at least a third and fourth, not to mention the lasting upheavals that have long since taken hold of studying and university operations.

The student body discussed the current situation at a student assembly on February 10:

We say **"No!" to the "digital-only summer semester"** and would like to convey some urgent **wishes and demands** to you and yours in this letter.

As before, many members of the HfK, esp. in the administration, in the university and faculty administration and in the self-organized student body, are working tirelessly to react again and again to the unreliable and difficult conditions and to constantly work on solutions and improvements. For this, they continue to deserve the highest recognition!

Nevertheless, the situation continues to affect most students considerably and in part existentially - not only through restrictions in health and mobility, but also through immediate economic losses and long-term professional consequences, which are becoming ever greater.

Concerts and exhibitions have gone from being commonplace to a rarity for many. Both the more artistic and professional practice as well as most study contents and their teaching have moved more and more into the background in the past year. Many of us nevertheless continue to participate in the limited range of classes and study offers; other students, however, we might have long lost.

Studying ist not an office job!

For us students, studying in the true sense of the word has not been taking place for almost a year now! The work on the material, the spontaneous interaction, joint projects and discussions - all this could only be done very sporadically - although they are essential aspects of a study of art and music. Instead, everyone is confronted with hours of screen time, video conferencing and constant e-mail availability; all in all, an enormously increased administrative and organizational effort.

Finally, the social, artistic and academic exchange is currently so limited that more and more students feel forgotten and left alone; they (have to) think about **a semester off or even dropping out of their studies**. For many, however, a semester off is not easily possible due to financial difficulties or long-term study planning.

After almost a year of "exceptional circumstances", the **stamina of many is exhausted**; also, because, unfortunately, there is **little prospect of improvement**: The state of Bremen currently has the most apparently **uncompromising measures in the university sector** in a national comparison and so far no **phased planning** for reopening. Currently, we only know that we have to expect at least one more semester of distance learning.

We demand that the discussion and evaluation of **study content and its teaching** be given weight again. For example, study plans and examination formats should have been adapted to the situation long ago. In some areas, only a fraction of the scheduled modules is completed; the **mass accumulation of credits and examinations** can no longer be made up for by students and teachers after a certain point.

We therefore call upon the university committees, the Academic Senate, the faculty councils and study commissions, to hold their meetings in public and to make all upcoming dates, agendas, adopted minutes and, last but not least, the access links to the meetings publicly accessible from the start.

Let's (continue) the debates there - not only about organizational issues, but also about courses and formats - and **find clear and binding solutions on how we want to learn and teach at HfK in 2021**. Especially now, we want to encourage students and teachers to bring their concerns and current experiences to the appropriate committees and to

discuss them publicly. Use the contact to the student councils (student representation at program level) in all programs to discuss the next steps with your students.

Corona is no longer an exceptional situation, but everyday student life.

Online offerings, especially video conferencing, are not a sufficient substitute for aesthetic practice and teaching! This was already expressed by the student body a year ago. Many teachers have agreed with this assessment. However, hardly anything has changed. Only a fraction of the actual educational content can be conveyed via digital substitute formats, and first-year students, visiting students and graduate students in particular are faced with enormous challenges. These groups should, according to the announcement of the Senator for Higher Education in the summer of 2020, be given preferential treatment and access to the universities. The opposite is the case: most first-year students have hardly even seen their university from the inside!

We should be prepared for the fact that the summer semester of 2021 will also have to take place under the current conditions and that many restrictions will still have to be accepted.

Therefore, we call on all teachers to **adapt their teaching concepts to the conditions** now at the latest and to make **full use of the limited possibilities for face-to-face teaching or other formats!**

We would like to see sustainable and forward-looking planning of teaching that also takes into account the more long-term effects and restrictions and does not wait "until everything works again". **Our studies are taking place now.** Please also do not wait until the university administration or the dean's offices have "prepared everything", take responsibility yourself for ensuring that your teaching can take place in a meaningful way and that studying with you is possible in a meaningful way!

For some of us, half a master's program has already passed and it is foreseeable that a large part of the current students will have spent a considerable part of their "art studies" at home.

We need clear, consistent communication and feedback opportunities.

In dealing with the pandemic and its effects, a certain normality - in both a good and a bad sense - has set in: routines and everyday life have developed; where a few months ago crisis mode prevailed, communication is now more well-rehearsed, even if it is still laborious and exhausting.

We urge all faculty to take the initiative to **seek direct interaction with their students** to allow opportunities for honest feedback. The fundamental relationship of dependency between teachers and students, e.g. through the evaluation of exams, makes it difficult for many students to express criticism to their teachers.

We encourage students to take advantage of the information offered by the university administration, the dean's offices or we as AStA, as well as the opportunity to give **critical, constructive feedback at any time.**

Similarly, in the interest of the student body, we also demand early and consistent communication from the university management and deaneries, which not only makes **current restrictions and measures known at regular intervals** (e.g. every two weeks), but also makes the **background to decisions and areas of responsibility** more comprehensible.

Students are increasingly facing disadvantages that have long-term consequences. In order to create a minimum of equal opportunities within the university and in a nationwide comparison, we demand...

- restricted **access for all HfK students** to the HfK buildings for practicing and/or practical work under strict adherence to hygiene measures,
- however, from now on, especially on the part of the dean's offices and program spokespersons, **fair and transparent communication** for all students regarding possible access to practice or practical work at the HfK (especially with regard to special permits and "hardship cases"), especially for those students who are not familiar with the structures of the HfK,
 - who are not very familiar with the structures of the HfK,
 - who additionally have to struggle with language barriers,
 - who are less informed by their teachers than others,
- the **increase of the number of persons for simultaneous room use** from 3 to 5 persons,
- the **non-credit of the summer semester 2021** to the individual standard period of study (individuelle Regelstudienzeit) and consequently an option to extend the main subject teaching,
- the possibility to prepare and take **all obligatory** practical exams (access to rooms/workshops and corresponding teaching),

- **full crediting** of examinations/modules (ungraded test), which could not be offered by the university, but are considered **compulsory** in the study plan,
- the **consideration of additional work loads** of students in the awarding of CP, as well as the generous crediting of **extracurricular achievements**,
- **generally valid measures** and less individual case regulations and exceptions (these lead to a large communication and administrative effort and disadvantage students who can make use of these regulations too late or not at all!)
- The development of a **step-by-step plan** for the reopening of university operations,
- as well as **long-term planning** on how to deal with **postponed courses, events and capacities**, especially when new freshmen arrive at the school again in the winter semester, who are also entitled to classes and exams.



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On the part of the teaching staff and faculty...

- a **sustainable, forward-looking planning of the next semesters** and the timely information of the students about it,
- **the offer of face-to-face teaching where face-to-face teaching is possible:** please continue to accept the effort for travel and stays in Bremen,
- **reliable and binding information** on all courses in the summer semester 2021 (including course description, participation requirements, format, assessment, dates) and timely submission to the campus offices,
- Please **do not rely solely on video conferencing** for distance learning! Make asynchronous offerings and use media-appropriate methods and formats, of which there are now many good examples. Take advantage of training opportunities and targeted methods.
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- Please continue **to offer one-on-one training and office hours**.
- **Organize your events**, venues and formats early and **on your own**. Please do not wait until the dean's offices and departmental administrations, working at their absolute capacity limit, have "prepared everything for you"!

- **Contact your students directly.** If necessary, use the student representatives at the degree program level (**student councils**) to coordinate and communicate the next steps.

We wish you and you, despite many hardships and strains, **courage and strength for the coming summer semester**, which will hopefully slowly approach a regular study at an art and music university again and the **social** togetherness, as well as **artistic and academic exchange** to the greatest possible extent specifically promotes.

In this context, we would like to express our gratitude for the efforts and extra work of many teachers, the additional work of the committee members, the dean's offices and the university management, and the enormous additional workload for the employees of the university's administration.

Thanks to all those who are working to cope with and shape the situation.

AStA of the University of the Arts Bremen