

E-mails received for 'Coronavirus and University Teaching' panel discussion

1) Libraries and deadlines for theses

Space also means libraries. When will the libraries open up more and for longer? What's being done for libraries? The available lecture rooms are poor work spaces. Especially given the building site at the Platz der Weißen Rose the rooms are no use because it's far too loud. We need more library rooms.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: The university library is currently offering 250 places for students in four reading rooms, these can be booked on HISinOne from Monday to Saturday in three blocks of four hours. The plan is to increase the number over the coming two weeks to 300 places per shift. This would make 900 workstations available daily in the reading rooms. It's also planned to make the reading rooms accessible on Sundays too from 9th August. Further expansion of services is planned, but it has to take place gradually in view of how the pandemic develops and applicable hygiene regulations.

I take what you say about building noise very seriously and am now looking for other work spaces. Breisacher Tor are in discussions.

2) About public space

My question is why universities are defined as public spaces and why they weren't redefined sooner to make classroom teaching possible again earlier? Shops, restaurants, etc., have been open again for a long time. After all, the university is able to control access and track contact details. Furthermore we students are capable of following hygiene regulations. I'd like to hear what the argument was for opening the university so late and whether it can be done differently in future.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: It was a decision of the federal state government, which is entitled to decide: unlike schools where stable groups (classes) simplify tracking an infection, thousands meet in constantly changing groups at university.

3) About foreign students

As a foreign student it is important to know whether the 2020-21 winter semester will **officially** take place online.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: The winter semester will not officially take place online. First years in particular will be offered as much classroom teaching as possible. On top of this are practical classes (laboratory course, dissection courses) and excursions, which likewise require attendance in person. It depends on the faculty/subject which other courses will take place digitally and which in the classroom. Since room capacities are limited, each faculty has to decide for itself. Please ask them directly.

4) Representation of sciences on the panel

Why weren't sciences represented on the panel? In my opinion there are some distinct differences between the sciences and the humanities in relation to coronavirus and digital teaching.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: This is certainly true. The panel involved members of the 'Präsenzlehre' [contact/classroom teaching] task force which was deployed by the Senate. The humanities and social sciences especially are advocating classroom teaching.

5) About classroom teaching in the winter semester

There are eleven centrally-managed lecture rooms at the University of Freiburg which according to hygiene regulations can be occupied by more than twenty-five people. You want all the first and second semester students to be able to attend classroom lessons at least twice a week.

Two questions:

- 1) How can room capacities cope with this? Will additional large rooms be rented?
- 2) Is a normal class (which in Political Science regularly has 25-30 participants) in a large lecture theater really a better idea with regard to discursive elements than Zoom meetings (with breakout sessions) for example?

Juliane Besters-Dilger: Good questions! First of all, all faculties have to use their own lecture/seminar rooms for classroom teaching. For example, Biology can carry out all its teaching in its own rooms. Only then can centrally-managed rooms be used. So far we are not planning to rent additional rooms. It will become clear in September whether this is unavoidable.

I don't dispute that many teachers and students believe digital teaching is a better idea than classroom teaching which brings with it many issues (ventilation, cleaning, attendance checks, distances, etc.). At some Baden-Württemberg universities whole faculties have decided to stick with digital teaching.

6) Sciences and work hours

I'm rather disappointed not to see any representatives of the **sciences** among the participants and also feel that we are significantly overlooked in the discussion on how to organize the digital semester (including in the teaching staff survey). Maybe some (humanities) subjects could be studied digitally with comparatively little loss and gaining the skills necessary to graduate is possible. As regards the **practical content** of studies, despite great efforts by the teachers (see below) there are still

massive clashes, especially where **larger groups (>100 students)** are involved. What **prospects** are there (constructive and concrete! Not the vague 'motivation e-mails' calling for creativity) enabling us to meet our 'teaching promise'?

Juliane Besters-Dilger: The teaching staff survey addressed ALL teachers.

For details about practical classes (laboratory practicals, dissection courses) and excursions please check the current hygiene rules of the University of Freiburg. There are no other restrictions.

- In that context: the 'practical' summer semester was very clearly only possible to get through with **immense individual effort** (I personally worked several hundred hours of overtime, and I have heard of many such cases from colleagues; this cannot be remunerated not least in view of the ongoing pressure; because of the time it takes to obtain private investments). What form of **compensation** is being considered/will there be additional **human resources** for the winter semester (even if 'only' temporary student assistant places)?

Juliane Besters-Dilger: Baden-Württemberg universities have applied to the Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts for 35.7 million euros to compensate for the pressures of coronavirus. We don't know if we will receive anything.

We are also hoping for compensation under the *Lehrverpflichtungsverordnung (LVVO)* within a few years.

7) Online teaching

Hello,

I'd like to share my thoughts on the subject of online teaching and would be delighted if you draw on them in the discussion. It's important to me that we think long-term and precisely about what social values and achievements are jeopardized if everything increasingly takes place online.

To begin with the most important aspect for me: studying doesn't just mean learning facts, knowledge and gaining a degree. Studying involves cutting the cord with one's parents, gaining independence, building up your own close social circle, with the very important personal development into a confident adult who can follow their own path.

All these things are completely neglected and impossible if it is unimportant where I log into the class from, if it's unimportant whether I continue to live with my parents and be looked after by them, if it's unimportant whether I ever have personal contact with the teachers and my fellow students or not. An important step in personal development would be completely lost by always studying online at home. That cannot be what is wanted!

Another couple of important points about this:

- naturally praise for how fast the response was to the new situation and switching to online teaching went.

But, besides the fact that extension of the study period was prevented, also:

- practical teaching is completely lost and on degree programs that subsequently rely on having these capabilities, this is fatal (e.g. medicine, teaching, etc.)

- there is no personal exchange with teachers and fellow students and therefore no really long-lasting learning

- the learning effect is far smaller: each subject has to be learned in the same way 'from the screen to the head', without any possibility of establishing links. Anything but lasting!

- essential values such as personal interaction, sympathy and connection, that make this world livable, are completely lost, because they are not needed online or only to a very limited extent. There is no camaraderie and support system, everyone is their own master and instead of developing connections the tendency is the opposite.

I look forward to a critical discussion of the subject. We should reflect with care.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: Very similar to what Prof. Spakowski said. What bothers me here is the sentence, 'That cannot be what is wanted!' NOBODY wants that! This piece sounds as if the university had the choice between classroom and online teaching. That's not true. Classroom teaching has only been possible at all since 1st July. Health has to come first.

8) Questions and impressions of the Coronavirus and University Teaching debate

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A panel debate to weigh up the online semester is a good idea. Thank you for organizing this event. I would like to give my personal impressions and have **marked my questions** to discussion participants **in bold**.

I'd like to begin with the **positives**: Teaching staff have done a good job. Under time pressure and despite problems with Ilias (including pages crashing, uploading videos occasionally not working) they put together an acceptable online semester – for this one semester. I and my fellow students did not at least formally lose a semester. Thank you very much for that! Another positive thing from my point of view were the lectures that were provided for asynchronous learning online.

The summer semester was planned as a stopgap. The lack of direct contact to fellow students and teachers was and is clearly discernible. My impression is that classes via Zoom or suchlike are at best bearable, but do not replace classroom attendance. The time expenditure, both for students and for teaching staff, is far higher with online classes without any added value. Given current coronavirus case numbers, social

and economic life (with the exception of events and clubs) is once again taking place. Introducing the panel debate on the website, you wrote, ‘the corona pandemic is still likely to make a return to classroom teaching largely impossible in the 2020/21 winter semester.’ **Assuming lasting lower case numbers, I do wonder why it is not possible to hold courses with low numbers of participants such as seminars or practical lessons in the classroom as normal (e.g. restaurants are now serving guests inside too)?** I think it is important to hold such classes in the classroom!

Juliane Besters-Dilger: We absolutely do not disagree with you, otherwise I wouldn’t have initiated this panel debate. Small courses of an interactive nature **SHOULD** take place in the classroom. But we are restricted as to space, the distancing rule continues to apply.

About online teaching:

How satisfied are you with the Ilias teaching platform? What feedback is there from students and teachers?

I find the Ilias teaching platform frustrating. The platform is slow and not very intuitive. The layout could be improved too. The Ilias app is of limited use. Generally I believe that an Internet presence is the figurehead of a company or authority and therefore also of the University of Freiburg. A visually consistent and technically mature Internet presence that works on all platforms demands investment, but it is one that pays back.

Juliane Besters-Dilger: I know there was one day (21st April) when Ilias went down and many people told me about it, but this occurred because of incorrect use. As far as I know the problem was fixed, I don’t hear a lot of bad stuff about Ilias.

9) Classroom teaching

In my opinion a clear position **IN FAVOR** of class attendance was and is necessary, precisely because the situation is confusing and constantly changing and causing massive constraints. To be **FOR** something doesn’t mean denying difficulties – but it does mean setting the direction for thoughts and actions. I’d find it important to see precisely that at the university as well. If you want classroom teaching you have to do something for it. It would be possible to **rent large rooms**. It would be possible to reallocate libraries and also to hold classes there at certain times. It would be possible to **arrange a timetable for all available rooms so that they are used to maximum capacity from 8 in the morning to 10 at night** – if there are few rooms and high demand, you have to change to unusual times. This timetable would have to be available to the institutes in good time, in order for it to be at all possible for them to make internal arrangements for the timetable. If you want classroom teaching, you also don’t turn the university into a fortress but wedge the doors open (so you don’t have to touch them) and provide disinfectant – like all those with financial interests do in public. If you want classroom teaching, you have to act very pragmatically and maybe also unconventionally to make it possible. Is this really being done??

Can I see the panel debate from the start when my class in the lecture theater is over – or do I have to simply join in without knowing what’s already been discussed?

Juliane Besters-Dilger: The event was held as an argument for classroom teaching. All participants on the panel are members of the 'Präsenzlehre' task force, which prepared a resolution for the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts that was passed by the Senate on Wednesday (29th July).

I've been pursuing the idea of renting large rooms for a long time now, especially in connection with written examinations. We've succeeded in finding sufficient large rooms for the written examinations in August and September. However in the winter semester we face competition from other universities. Messe Freiburg demands 4,200 euros 'mate's rates' a day for a hall, and less than a day isn't possible. All the rooms in schools are needed by them. And another important point is that I wouldn't have to book rooms just once but every week at the same time.

Given the lack of libraries, we won't be pursuing the idea of taking over libraries.

10) Coronavirus and University Teaching digital panel debate

Dear Colleagues,

I'd like to take this opportunity offered in the announcement of the event to submit the following question(s) in advance of the panel debate:

How has the pandemic affected international teaching and study cooperations with partner universities? What opportunities do teachers and students see to use digital teaching even more in this context?

- Will the winter semester also mainly take place online?

Juliane Besters-Dilger: I'll answer the questions individually.

Yes, the winter semester will mainly have to take place online. This is especially the case for lectures which are particularly easy to offer digitally. Classes for first years should at least in part take place in the classroom, like laboratory practicals, dissection courses, excursions already do. The faculties decide which classes will take place in the classroom, taking into account the rooms available.

- So how can new students make contacts?

See above.

- Are the limits of digital teaching and equipment passed on to the ministry so that there are political consequences? More investments, etc.

The Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts has been very well informed by video conference since April 2020. A relatively small amount was awarded for 'Digitization of teaching in the summer semester 2020' (purchase of technical equipment and so on). The money still isn't there, even though the summer semester is over. The universities also made a far larger application for 35.7 million

euros for compensation for the pressures of coronavirus a good while ago, but it is extremely doubtful that it will be approved.

- How does the university exert pressure on political decision-makers and demand improvements?

Amongst other things with its resolution that classroom teaching is indispensable, which was passed by the Senate on 29th July, and by the Baden-Württemberg Rectors' Conference exerting pressure on the ministries.

- Will online written examinations be permitted next semester?

As things stand no, as they are not secure against fraud. We're still looking for solutions. One possibility is written assignments, which are similar to open-book examinations.

- What will the university do about international students being unable to enter the country?

We've introduced 'off-campus students'. This means they can matriculate and study with us, without having to enter the country, apply for a visa and pay health insurance. Re-registration is also possible without entering Germany. Otherwise, it has been agreed that international students who wish to take part in classroom lessons in Germany do not have to go into quarantine. Teachers have to issue confirmation that their presence in Freiburg is necessary because of classroom teaching (see the university's coronavirus website for the form).

- Consultations and small classes (there are classes with 4-6 participants) can easily also be done online in future.

Interesting, most people are demanding that this takes place in the classroom.

- A blend of classroom and online teaching would cause different problems. Not everyone is able to get from home to the uni for a classroom lesson within 30 minutes of an online class and vice versa. Sufficient opportunities must be created for everyone at the uni to be able to take part in online teaching undisturbed there, or else the different formats can't be timed to follow one another.

I don't understand why online seminars have to be followed from home? The university has of course been largely open since 1st July.

- Another important point is managing the workload for online teaching. Teachers shouldn't be allowed to set delivery dates, new videos and tasks online at any hour and even on public holidays simply because they can. Everyone deserves a break, even students.

I've heard this complaint from a lot of students, I will be passing it on to the offices of the deans of studies.

- I think it would be great to expand postgraduate education services and degree programs. As a professional alumnus this would mean I could take part in courses remotely, and would only have to take holiday or time off for a few periods of classroom learning and possibly examinations.

Postgraduate education services generally rely on online offerings. They often have only 1-2 classroom sessions throughout the entire program. See the FRAUW (Freiburg Academy of Continuing Education) syllabus.