



Video message from Prof. Dr. Tobias Engelsleben, President of Hochschule Fresenius / University of Applied Sciences, to students, lecturers and employees, March 20, 2020

Dear students, dear colleagues,

I turn to you in these turbulent times, to inform you about the current situation at Hochschule Fresenius. I have chosen the rather unusual way of sending a video message in order to address you personally to a greater extent than is possible via e-mail.

First of all, I would like to thank you for your great support, helpfulness and willingness to improvise. I have heard a lot that the Corona crisis is bringing the Hochschule closer together and that the cooperative search for solutions is a key factor these days.

I must also ask all members of the university for indulgence in the fact that the diversity of challenges means that things sometimes get jumpy and jammed and that not everything can always run optimally right away.

Of course, the corona virus does not stop at the borders of Hochschule Fresenius. We have so far had two confirmed corona cases at Hochschule Fresenius across all eight locations in Germany, and in both cases the people affected are doing well. Personally, I am very happy about this. This number is still comparatively low at the moment.

So please continue to help us protect the health of all our employees and students and at the same time contain the spread of the virus.

For these reasons, we decided on 13 March to suspend classroom teaching for the time being and to stop public access.

We closed libraries, laboratories, workshops, canteens, cafeterias, cancelled events, sent employees to the home office - in short:

We have shut down the entire social life as we have known it on campus.

We did not make this decision lightly, but it was absolutely necessary and unavoidable.

We are aware that these restrictions can lead to problems or disadvantages in individual cases. But you can be sure that we will do everything in our power to ensure that we all come through this crisis in good shape.

None of us can say at this point when it will all be over and when we can return to normal teaching. We should prepare ourselves for this situation to last for weeks, if not months. Our primary goal is to successfully master this summer semester despite all the adversities.

We are aware that this semester will be different than others. The special circumstances are an immense challenge for all of us and require a lot of flexibility, creativity and improvisation. However, the university has the unconditional will to offer the services to which it is accustomed, albeit in many rather unusual ways.

This week we have set up online-based teaching and learning. The e-learning platform ILIAS, but also other forms of virtual learning are used. All students will be informed about the new formats by their program directors or lecturers. There are also explanatory videos. We can offer a large part of the study contents in digital form. Where this is not yet possible, we work on alternative solutions. You can also be sure that we will find pragmatic ways for this semester's exams and that we will set generous deadlines. We want to help in the best possible way to ensure your study progress!

Please also visit our website to find out about current developments. We have set up an FAQ area there which is constantly updated.

With all the measures we have taken in the past few days, I am very confident that we will be able to conduct the summer semester - albeit with certain unavoidable limitations - in such a way that we will be able to complete the semester successfully.

Of course, not everything is perfect overnight. Moving a complete attendance study program into virtual space within a few days is an immense effort. The change does not run smoothly at all points. Servers in Germany and worldwide are not designed for the rapidly increasing number of users, especially in education, technology providers cannot deliver because the demand is high, employees are faced with the double burden of having to reconcile work and family, even though there are no more childcare facilities.

Overall, however, the process of switching to digital media is going better than we expected in the departments and divisions after such a short time. The students also show a high level of acceptance of this procedure.

This is a time of great challenges. We also need to be lenient with ourselves and others that not everything can run perfectly right away. In this crisis we can learn a lot that will prepare us for the working world of the future.

For us, this crisis is also an opportunity for a sustainable digitalization of university teaching. We are already on a very good path in this respect. We can make use of competences from our onlineplus department and a team around the Vice President for Studies & Teaching, Prof. Dr. Ekkehart Baumgartner, has already worked on the digitalization of teaching last year and now increasingly in the past two weeks. On the one hand, we are very well prepared, on the other hand, the force with which we now have to act within the shortest possible time presents us with great technical challenges.

I know that this situation demands a lot from all employees. None of us have ever worked like this before. Some of our female colleagues are sitting in their home offices with two small children and giving virtual classrooms. Colleagues in IT work night shifts.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you all!

I would like to thank our lecturers: for their great dedication, for their flexibility and for their commitment. It makes me happy to see how you have accepted the digital challenge and are actively implementing it. The Vice President for Studies and Teaching, Prof. Dr. Ekkehart Baumgartner, has reported back to me that online teaching is very well accepted and that many colleagues have worked hard to transfer their study content into digital formats.

I would also like to thank our administrative staff, especially those who have so far held down the fort in the Student Services and Examination Offices and continued to provide advice and assistance. We are deeply indebted to you for your commitment. You will ensure that we can keep our service promise to students even in these difficult times.

I would like to say to our students: Do not stop learning. Take advantage of the digital learning materials, the webinars, all the opportunities for virtual exchange that we provide. If you make use of the variety of courses offered, you will manage to finish this semester successfully despite the difficult conditions. Please have patience and indulgence if everything does not work out perfectly right away. Virtualizing more than 60 courses of study overnight is not something you just do. We are also in a learning process. Sometimes we want more than technology can provide.

My urgent appeal goes out to all of you:  
Take care of yourselves. Follow the recommended precautions and hygiene measures of the Robert Koch Institute.

Avoid all unnecessary social contacts. Meet your friends on Facebook or WhatsApp, and thus give back to social media the special old and new value of being able to maintain relationships over distances. The recklessness with which parts of society are managing their daily lives despite the pandemic is irresponsible and risks requiring even more drastic measures. So please take the guidelines from politics and the health care system seriously - very seriously, to repeat the words of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The responsibility to avert greater harm actually starts with each individual. If we all accept this responsibility, we can - hopefully soon - look forward to a completely normal everyday life at Hochschule Fresenius together with our students.

Please stay safe and healthy!