Dear students,

These times are highly challenging. Besides all your personal concerns and uncertainties, you are undoubtedly wondering how you will be able to continue with your studies this semester. You were therefore presumably as keen as we were to listen to the announcements made by the German government on Wednesday, following negotiations with the state premiers.

One thing is certain: The cautious relaxation of the lockdown announced by the government provides us with guidelines – although the devil is in the details. The good news first: Even if the strict measures imposed in recent weeks did not prevent an increase in the number of infections and fatalities, they have managed to slow down rates of infection and break chains of infection, preventing health-care system overload. An important success.

But the battle has not yet been won.

For us at the university, this means: There is hope, but we do not have a carte blanche. What this specifically means for you and your studies I have explained in further detail in an email sent to you today. This was preceded by intensive discussions on possible alternatives and the right way to deal with the new situation. It became clear that there is no silver bullet. Whether it be the examination system or the possible partial reopening of the libraries – we must improvise and respond flexibly. It goes without saying that we will keep you posted on the latest developments. And once again, it simply remains for me to thank you for your patience. I have received numerous emails from students over the last few days, pledging allegiance to “their” university during this time of crisis. Such allegiance cannot be taken for granted and, yet: It fills me with pride!

I hope you enjoy reading our latest newsletter; the short reports we have compiled are, I believe, both informative and entertaining. Take care of yourselves!

Best wishes, Susanne Menzel-Riedl

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What happens next?

... with teaching?

Based on the latest developments, it can be assumed that all further courses, especially lectures and seminars, will be delivered digitally only this summer semester. In addition: Practical courses in special laboratories or work rooms may only be conducted as face-to-face classes in summer semester 2020 if this is an inescapable necessity. The relevant Dean’s Office should apply criteria to decide whether this is the case, and document its decision accordingly. Concerning access to items from the library, an approach will be developed by May 4, enabling you to get hold of the specialist literature you need.

For more information, visit: www.uni-osnabrueck.de/informationen-zum-corona-virus/#c195681

What happens next?

... with examinations?

Face-to-face group examinations are only possible by way of exception and to a limited extent. Face-to-face examinations involving many students are a major security risk, requiring careful consideration. Bearing this in mind, face-to-face examinations will remain the exception in summer semester; all examinations that can be held digitally or without requiring face-to-face contact should be planned and implemented accordingly without fail. Rules regarding possible changes to types of examination are already in place in the form of information/FAQs, and continue to apply. Moreover, all members of the teaching staff are being asked to consider whether module or mid-term examinations can be dropped or replaced by digital examination formats this semester, particularly if such an examination merely serves the purpose of admitting students to another examination.

It is now possible to hold individual oral examinations again, as long as appropriate safety measures are taken. The Dean’s Office and your lecturers will keep you informed about examinations and courses taking place, and the conditions involved. Please wait to be informed – the Dean’s Offices are unable to deal with a sudden deluge of queries. We are doing everything we can to ensure that you can continue to earn credits and complete your studies, despite the exceptional circumstances.

For more information, visit: www.uni-osnabrueck.de/informationen-zum-corona-virus/#c195681
Why do I have to pay the semester fee for summer semester 2020 if there is no classroom teaching and/or face-to-face examinations at present?

Ever since tuition fees were abolished, students have made no financial contribution to the attendance of university and participation in courses and examinations, irrespective of how these are held.
The approx. €350 semester fee comprises the following elements:

- A €75 contribution to administrative costs, which Osnabrück University is legally obliged to charge; the university is unable to refrain from charging these costs autonomously and without a legal basis, as in the case of leave of absence, for example. The services to be provided by the university by charging this fee continue to be provided during the coronavirus pandemic; students currently make intensive use of these services. These services range from the provision of FAQs to solution-focused decisions (on individual cases) in the context of registration, leave of absence, exemption from long-term study fees, internships, etc. Although not all employees are currently on site, mobile working enables them to ensure that issues are dealt with promptly and with any legally feasible solution in mind. It is also ensured that students have access to individual guidance from bodies such as the Admissions Office, the Study Counseling Service, the International Office and on matters relating to examinations.

- A €71 contribution to Osnabrück Student Services (Studentenwerk), a fee that must also be charged, in accordance with Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG) and the Studentenwerk fee statutes – unless there are other (regulated) grounds, such as leave of absence, that may result in the exemption from contribution payments. Osnabrück Student Services charges this fee in order to perform its duties, which undoubtedly also arise – and are being performed – in the course of the coronavirus pandemic.

- A €207.55 student council fee, including €190.04 for the “semester ticket for buses and trains”. As stated in the FAQs, the semester ticket can be used at present.

Student’s question II

What impact will a longer deployment with a recognized organization, due to the coronavirus crisis, have on my studies?

If you are unable to successfully continue your studies following such a (documented) deployment with an organization, you could request leave of absence for other reasons (a) even if you have already used up the four semesters of leave to which you are entitled (b) up to a period of two months after the start of the semester. However, this also means that you would not be permitted to follow courses or complete coursework and examinations during the leave of absence. But this would normally be difficult in the event of an extended deployment to be completed with an organization, due to COVID-19. Information on leave of absence and an application form for download are available at: www.uni-osnabrueck.de/studium/organisatorisches/beurlaubung You will need to tick No. 10 when filling in the form. Documentary evidence must be provided accordingly.

With regard to any options related to examination rules and regulations or organizational aspects, please also refer to the relevant school’s regulations and/or request information from the examiners.
Important information

International students are hit particularly hard by measures to contain Covid-19. With a lower average disposable income and no family network in the vicinity to fall back on, e.g. losing a part-time job can have serious consequences. Therefore, we’ve recently compiled options on how to finance your studies in these trying times on our central info site on coronavirus:

www.uni-osnabrueck.de/en/information-about-corona-virus/#c195202

Financial aid for students? Still unclear

A question that is presumably of vital importance to most students: What assistance is available if I experience financial problems due to the coronavirus pandemic? In a letter to the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) dated Friday, April 17, Federal Minister of Education and Research Anja Karliczek stated: She is “confident that a viable solution will enter into force soon in the interests of students.” So far it is still unclear what the solution might look like and what it would mean in particular for the students concerned.

Dining halls and cafeterias remain closed

The dining halls and cafeterias operated by Osnabrück Student Services at the Schlossgarten, Haste, Caprivi and Lingen sites will remain closed until May 3, for the time being. The Westerberg dining hall and cafeteria will remain closed until May 10, for the time being. And the dining hall and cafeteria in Vechta will remain closed until May 31, for the time being. For more information on the impact of the coronavirus crisis on Osnabrück Student Services, visit: www.studentenwerk-osnabrueck.de/de/nachrichten/artikel-details/news/detail/News/newssticker-des-studentenwerks-osnabrueck-zum-coronavirus.html
Medical Officer apl. Professor Dr. Henning Allmers in response to the question: How long can the virus survive in the air, and what risk does it then pose?

The coronavirus is mainly transmitted via droplet infection. Until now, it was assumed that the pathogens are contained in the large droplets that people expel when they cough or sneeze. These droplets, up to one millimeter in size, fall to the ground at a distance of one to two meters due to gravity. If they land on surfaces, the viruses can also be transmitted by smear infection if somebody touches a contaminated object and the viruses pass to mucous membranes by touching the mouth, nose or eyes. Now new research shows that the pathogens move through the air with the fine mist of moisture that each person emits into the environment when exhaling.

According to this finding, the viruses are transported by aerosol droplets, smaller than five micrometers, in the air we breathe. These droplets can float through the air for up to three hours; it is not yet known whether the pathogens remain infectious during that time. The test methods available are as yet unable to establish whether the amount of virus transmitted is sufficient to infect recipients, because so far only viral genetic material (RNA) has been detected in aerosols, not the whole virus.

A US-American research team from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) determined that a distance of 1.5 meters may not be enough, due to airborne transmission. Instead, they estimate that the virus could spread a distance of up to eight meters. They found that viral droplets can travel in a moist, warm atmosphere at speeds of between ten and 30 meters per second. They are expelled into the air by coughs and sneezes, which, according to the researchers, creates a cloud that can span up to eight meters.

Charité virologist Christian Drosten, however, is skeptical about this study. In the NDR podcast, for example, he explained: “The virus is in the air for a short time. It is coughed up and is in the air as a coarse to medium-sized droplet aerosol. And that falls relatively quickly to the ground. It is not that such a virus is in the air as a cloud and stays for hours and also spreads into the neighboring room.” The World Health Organization (WHO) stressed in a statement it gave at the end of March that this mode of transmission “may be possible in specific circumstances and settings in which aerosols are generated” – such as when seriously ill patients require intubation for oxygen supply.

An analysis of more than 75,000 cases of Covid-19 in China did not report having found airborne transmission. Moreover, viral RNs in environmental samples do not prove that they contain complete infectious viruses that could be transmitted.
Dr. Jost Hindersmann, subject specialist for English at the University Library, and avid crime reader:

I am currently reading Leif GW Persson’s “Wer zweimal stirbt” (Can One Die Twice?), BTB, paperback, 576 pages, €16

A boy scout comes across a skull with a bullet in it while camping on a Swedish skerry island. He takes it straight to his neighbor, Police Detective Evert Bäckström, who is the exact opposite of how you imagine the ideal detective to be: short, fat, lazy, racist and homophobic. But Bäckström has his own way of solving even the most difficult cases. The Bäckström character created by Leif GW Persson, Sweden’s most well-known criminologist, is a completely politically incorrect investigator. Which is exactly why he is so popular.