Statement on the current situation and the upcoming #digitalonly semester

In this statement, the General Students' Committee (AStA) addresses all members of the HCU in order to address potentially arising problems in the context of the #digitalonly Summer Semester 2020 at the HCU and calls for joint work on their solution. In the current situation these problems can certainly not all be solved conclusively, but in any case it should be ensured that students are not disadvantaged in any way.

The corona pandemic means a time of great uncertainty for all of us, which particularly affects those who have to fear for their health or their economic existence due to the spread of the virus.

The latter in particular affects more and more students who are predominantly in precarious employment: Many have lost their jobs in recent days or will soon lose them.

The universities therefore have a great responsibility, because a lot also depends on the organisation of the semester for the students. We therefore very much welcome the efforts of the HCU to date to let the summer semester 2020 take place without major restrictions if possible. We would like to thank the HCU for working hard to find solutions and for communicating decisions quickly and openly.

It is self-explanatory that the priority these days is to find solutions so that teaching can be resumed at all. Nevertheless, as student representatives, we would like to appeal for measures and decisions to be taken with understanding and consideration for the different conditions of the various student body at HCU. This also includes recognizing that under the current circumstances a normal state - even if it is digital - cannot be achieved.

Not all students can be expected to have the necessary flexibility for a #digitalonly semester. Students with children or other obligations in their everyday life are particularly dependent on reliable information and regulated, clearly communicated procedures.

Information basis for the choice of courses

Currently, HCU students do not know whether or in what form the courses can take place in the summer semester 2020. Although the course catalogue contains some adapted dates, the descriptions of the courses have not yet been adapted according to the notes and do not contain any information about formats, requirements regarding digital devices, software and other materials.

Under these conditions, no student of the HCU can judge which courses he/she should choose from Monday 30.03.2020.

Due to the legally binding nature of module and course registrations via ahoi, it seems hardly feasible to start the general registration phase on 30.03. and end it on 13.04. On the basis of the information that "content should be offered by 4 May at the latest", the registration phase should be extended accordingly. Before students finally decide for or against the choice of a course, they must have complete knowledge of the course structure as well as of the examination procedure. This is the only way to ensure that students do not suffer any disadvantages when choosing courses. A well-founded decision is the basis for the selection of the courses to be taken and only then can the semester be successfully completed.

Suitability of digital teaching-learning formats for HCU teaching

The study programs of the HCU differ significantly from many classic teaching-learning formats in the way they work. Working in project groups, in design teams, with special equipment and in laboratories forms the basis for successful training in many areas of the HCU's range of subjects. To what extent these can be implemented or replaced in digital formats is still unclear to the student body. It is essential to avoid negative effects of this circumstance.

Availability of digital end devices and essential software

Certainly, the majority of HCU students have digital devices. They are also quite suitable for many of the services required during the course of study. However, we are more than irritated by the request to buy a tablet for reading and marking texts. Also the hint that the literature costs in turn are omitted causes incomprehension. Thus, the literature costs, which are usually low at the HCU, may even increase in case of doubt, since literature that is not available via the online functions of the library, will be charged separately.

Especially for students working on their theses, no teacher can ensure that all necessary literature is digitally available.

Added to this are the costs caused by the expensive software that students can no longer access on the HCU's own PCs due to the closure of the HCU. Apart from the lack of student licenses, there is also the problem that not all students of the HCU have

computers with the appropriate performance. This means that many of the students will not be able to attend lectures or seminars using the appropriate software. An adequately conducted "digital" summer semester is therefore not possible.

The necessary purchase of adequate end devices as well as the necessary software causes massive additional financial burdens. Especially against the background that many students face an unsecured financial situation, this is unacceptable. For the majority of students it is already hardly possible to make major purchases under normal circumstances.

Finally, communication between the university and students plays a more than decisive role in the success of the summer semester. In view of this, it should be pointed out here that relevant information must still be passed on to the student body via email as a first step. In the next step, the HCU website and its social media channels can of course be used to disseminate the information. However, sharing advance information through these channels proves to be counterproductive, creates confusion and raises new questions rather than making the situation easier.