Universität Hamburg
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Online courses with students in special circumstances: Handout for teachers
[Version 2, last updated: 30 April 2020]

1. Students in special circumstances during the coronavirus pandemic

The current, highly unusual situation poses great challenges to university teachers. The focus is to ensure that as many courses and examinations as possible take place. Despite the enormous additional effort required to teach online, we are asking you not to lose sight of students in special circumstances.

The negative consequences of the current crisis affect everyone, including students in special circumstances. At the same time, the University is obligated to enable all students to attend classes and take exams under comparable conditions—even in the current situation. Due to the tight schedule for preparing and teaching Summer Semester 2020 courses, we would like to help teachers and examiners to the best of our ability.

Students in various circumstances may benefit from online courses that can be accessed at any time and thus have greater scope. Online courses also make it easier for you to plan, for example, with regard to any arrangements you may need to make.

2. What kinds of hurdles might online courses pose for students in special circumstances?

Digital courses can create new and, in some cases, almost insurmountable hurdles for students in special circumstances. This not only hinders them from participating but also endangers their chances of successfully completing their coursework and exams. Hurdles arise primarily from technical and organizational conditions as well as from the methods used to present material.

Therefore, we will be delighted if you take the following recommendations into account to the best of your ability when preparing your courses.

In the table below, we list **typical** hurdles for students in special circumstances as well as the options available to teachers.

Typical hurdles for students	Examples of especially affected students	Examples of possible measures
Synchronous online lecture or seminar	Students with ▪ supervisory duties ▪ therapeutic obligations ▪ hearing impairments or deafness ▪ visual impairments or blindness ▪ speech impediments ▪ specific psychological impairments ▪ autism spectrum disorders ▪ professional obligations and ▪ international students	▪ Have a group of students create a transcript for all participants (if applicable, to be credited as coursework) ▪ Provide a reference to summary of textual material for the course (optionally, abridged content to facilitate follow-up work) ▪ Record course and, if permissible, make recording available ▪ Verbalize illustrations and photos (alternatively, create another text version and read aloud) ▪ Subtitle ▪ Translate into sign language ▪ Offer alternative assignment in case participation is not possible ▪ Ask in your seminar about suitable tools for synchronous communication (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams, Messenger, etc.)
Inaccessible documents (e.g., presentations, transcriptions)	Students with ▪ visual impairments or blindness ▪ dyslexia or other reading impairments	▪ Documents must be as accessible as possible; if necessary, make alternative, accessible documents with comparable content available (e.g., photographic PDF documents with a compilation of scans are not usable).
Completing coursework in virtual teams	Students with ▪ supervisory duties ▪ therapeutic obligations ▪ hearing impairments or deafness ▪ speech impediments ▪ specific psychological impairments ▪ autism spectrum disorders	▪ Clear and mandatory duties for the teams (e.g., for reaching agreements, for the number and duration of online meetings) ▪ Replace team assignments with individual assignments ▪ Reassign oral contributions (e.g., replace a required podcast with an essay)
Learning videos / film	Students with ▪ hearing impairments or deafness ▪ visual impairments or blindness	▪ Subtitle ▪ Translate into sign language ▪ Verbalize illustrations and photos (alternatively, create another text version) ▪ Audio description
Podcast	Students with hearing impairments or deafness	▪ Provide transcriptions of audio material ▪ Literature to supplement audio material can be obtained

3. How can teachers best avoid hurdles?

Potential hurdles for students in special circumstances should be precluded where possible. However, teachers must use the available digital infrastructure such as <u>learning management system platforms</u> (e.g., Open OLAT, Moodle, CommSy) and the available tools for online communication (e.g., MS Teams, Zoom, Adobe Connect). Please remember that, in many cases, students cannot use all functions in these digital learning platforms or tools (e.g., to complete quizzes or add information to calendars). You will not be able to alter this in the short term. However, you can always subsequently address these and other difficulties by making individual adjustments or offering compensation for disadvantages pursuant to Section 11 of the exam regulations.

- If possible, inform participants about your courses via STiNE beforehand (e.g., about the approaches and expected coursework). Furthermore, if possible, provide a link to your course video and material. This will give students the opportunity to make any necessary arrangements to enable or facilitate their participation as well as to inform you of their own needs as early as possible.

- Let students in special circumstances know that you are sympathetic to any justified concerns. This will make students feel acknowledged and may inspire them to find or suggest their own solutions. Teaching and examination conditions may be adjusted individually to compensate for disadvantages, for example.

- You may already know students from previous courses who were able to take part with the aid of a (student) assistant or interpreter. In the current situation, these helpers may not always be available for various reasons. The students affected by this will face significantly worse conditions than they did during earlier attendance-only courses. Thus, please find individual solutions in these few cases, as it is precisely these students who are obligated to continue their studies due to the rules established by the financial providers.

- It is preferable to offer asynchronous courses. These have the advantage of enabling students to do their coursework at any time despite family or treatment and therapy-related obligations. If you still wish to offer live lectures, web conferences, and other synchronous formats, please offer additional alternatives for taking part and completing coursework.

  Some students use sign language interpreters or depend on personal assistance. To ensure the necessary support and the necessary quality, assistants will need your presentations—either directly from you or from the student in question—in order to prepare properly. This is essential not just for synchronous formats. An audio or video recording of your courses also makes it possible for helpers to interpret later or provide other support services such as creating course minutes.

- When you record courses, make sure that the sound and image quality are good and that you use a neutral background (e.g., monochrome). Find 2 descriptions of how to create accessible videos here: <u>Making audio and video media accessible</u> and <u>Creating accessible videos</u>.

- If possible, check beforehand whether and to what extent your methods and classroom formats are suitable for all attendees. For example, group work may pose organizational and communication challenges, while courses requiring textual work may be difficult if the texts are not accessible.

- If possible, provide written documents in addition to recorded courses—for example, your presentation, a transcript, or notes from one or several other attendees (if applicable, this can be credited as coursework). Written materials should be as accessible as possible.

  ### Creating accessible documents

  - Make sure your document has a clear and easy-to-read structure.
  - Use style sheets in documents, especially for titles and headings.
  - Titles and headings should be short.
  - Set the document language and/or the output language for excerpts.
  - Create an alternative text for any images or objects that you use.
  - Provide column headers in tables.
  - Use simple, clear tables.
  - Check links and cross-references, and make sure these are clearly labeled.
  - Do not use floating objects.
  - Avoid digital watermarks.
  - Add subtitles to audio material.

  Consult the Internet for a host of instructions on creating accessible Word and PowerPoint documents, such as the University of Rostock's online self-learning continuing education course on accessible teaching (only in German language available) and TU Dresden's instructions on creating accessible PDFs (only in German language available). The University of Washington provides guidance on creating accessible documents in Microsoft Word or as PDF.

- Offer students flexible opportunities to ask about your courses and material (e.g., via video chat or email). Ideally, offer 2 alternatives so that students who are blind, deaf, or have impaired vision, hearing, or speech can use a suitable communication path.

- Please take into account that not all students have the same (modern) technical resources (Internet access, a modern PC, printer, scanner, etc.) at home. Work with them to find alternative ways for them to participate.

- Do not take any online services down until the first and second examination dates are online.

4. Whom can teachers and students contact if they have questions?

This handout was created and is updated by the Family Office (Svenja Saure), the student disability coordinators (Dr. Maike Gattermann-Kasper, Prof. Dr. Sven Degenhardt), and the Center for Inclusive and Barrier-Free Schools (Dr. Marie-Luise Schütt).

Teachers and students can direct their questions to the

- Office for Students with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses (beeintraechtigt-studieren@uni-hamburg.de) or the
- Family Office (familienbuero@uni-hamburg.de).

For the Faculty of Education, Prof. Dr. Sven Degenhardt (sven.degenhardt@uni-hamburg.de) and Dr. Marie-Luise Schütt (inklusob.ew@uni-hamburg.de) can also be contacted.