

## Students communication

### Questions and Answers

**Question 1: What happens if students cannot afford the payments to Danube University Krems due to effects the COVID-19 crisis caused? How are hardship cases dealt with?**

**Answer 1:** If any cases of hardship occur (such as unemployment, loss of business for self-employed persons, caring responsibilities, etc.), then (as before) the registration can continue by deferring the payment of installments in whole or in part or by setting the payment deadline to a later date. The course and department management makes a request to the Rectorate who then always decides on the cases individually. A general applicable guideline as to when a "hardship case" does not exist to be able to deal with various cases individually. For this reason a decision will be made on a case-by-case basis, whereby Donau-Universität Krems will always address to the students' needs - if justified accordingly (see also A 2).

**Question 2: How is teaching continued? Referring to course fees/continuation fees despite postponement of courses/non-completion due to COVID-19: How is this dealt with?**

**Answer 2:** Continuing study programs: In accordance with the requirements of the COVID-19 laws, only the physical presence phases are currently suspended; if reasonable and possible, classroom teaching has been or will be switched to online formats (mostly lectures held live online, enriched through blended learning). These face-to-face courses correspond to the study law, why a large part of the teaching has taken place since 12 March. Where online teaching does not appear reasonable or is impossible, cancelled courses are made up for as soon as possible. When these courses will be made up for depends on the government's stipulations. As soon as a decision has been made the affected students will be notified.

Concerning fees: The potential waiver of tuition fees according to § 92 UG 2002, which has been discussed in the media, is only applicable to regular studies (€ 363,36 or € 726,72 if the planned study duration exceeds 2 semesters) and of no relevance for Danube University Krems.



- In the case of university courses, two different types of payment obligation for the continuation registration are distinguished:

- 1.) **Open course fees:** Here, the regulation on legal conditions for the registration and implementation of university courses at Danube University Krems (Mitteilungsblatt No. 95/2019) item 2 applies: *"The Rectorate is responsible for determining the course fees, the payment modalities as well as the collection. Generally, the participation fee is due as a total amount before the course begins. The Rectorate approves deviating (individual) payment modalities"*. Here - apart from the usual model of partial payments - in special cases of hardship (see A 1 above), the registration continues without payment or with a reduced partial payment; the installment is deferred in whole or in part or the payment deadline is set to a later date. In these cases the Rector always decides individually and follows the request of the course and department management.
- 2.) **Continuation registration fees when exceeding the duration of studies as provided for in the curriculum:** According to the regulation on fees when exceeding the studies' duration as provided for in the curriculum (Mitteilungsblatt No. 6/2015), € 125 have to be paid for the first two semesters of the excess, thereafter € 250. In § 2 paragraph 3 of the regulation a clause determinates the provision for socially needy persons: *" The minimum administrative contribution for socially needy persons is set with € 50,00. After presentation of proof of social indigence to the departmental management it decides on the approval of the reduction to the minimum contribution."* This provision can be used as a legal basis for the reduction of the continuation notification fee in hardship cases additionally caused by the COVID 19 crisis.

Furthermore, according to § 67 UG an application for **leave of absence** from studies is possible until the deadline for continued registration on 30 April 2020 (to extend this deadline to 30 June 2020 is currently being examined based on the 3rd COVID-19 law). Here, COVID-19 is a as a reason for leave of absence. In this case no semester rate or continuation registration fee has to be paid during the leave of absence, since naturally the study pauses at the same time.



- Since the study courses continue anyway or either the courses are postponed due to the COVID 19 laws, a waiver or deferral of tuition fees - apart from cases of hardship (A 1 above) - is not possible by sole reasons that some part of the teaching has been postponed to date or classroom teaching has switched to online teaching. Danube University Krems has reserved the right to make organizational changes in point 5 of the "Regulation on legal conditions for the registration and implementation of university courses" (Mitteilungsblatt 95/2019): *"Danube University Krems reserves the right to change study program partially at short notice as well as to change the course locations and to conduct other necessary organizational changes. These deviations do not entitle the participants to cancel or reduce the fees or to claim for damages etc."*

**Question 3:** A course has switched to distance learning, but the necessary technical prerequisites are not available for the student.

**Answer 3:** In order to attend online courses, a computer with a microphone and loudspeaker (mostly standard devices are equipped with) as well as an Internet connection are the technical requirements. Generally, these requirements are available for all our students, especially since the communication between the university and students takes place electronically (edu-mail addresses, use of Moodle) and a course attendance without electronic the relevant devices was impossible before. Yet, should cases occur (e.g. students are stuck abroad, students are or have been in quarantine away from their usual place of residence), these students can contact the course director, who will endeavor to find appropriate solutions regarding individual cases (e.g. making up for lost time in form of blended learning or making up for the affected course in the following academic year).

**Question 4:** The course director does not want to offer distance learning referring to the freedom of teaching.

**Answer 4:** The freedom of teaching refers to the content of the teaching and not to the setting: the setting (online/presence, lecture, exercise, workshop) is part of the agreement with the teachers. The university seeks agreement with the lecturers in this regard beforehand.



**Question 5:** Has online teaching been implemented for all courses of Danube University Krems?

**Answer 5:** Online teaching is used intensively wherever possible and reasonable; currently this applies to about 2 or 3 courses. "Zoom", the software is particularly well suited for online courses, and therefore has been implemented alongside with a comprehensive training of the staff, as well in didactic setting, which has taken place. An additional staff member is at hand as moderator in almost all online courses when technical support is necessary. The students' feedback on the online teaching is so far positive, many value them as additional learning effects.

**Question 6:** Is it feasible to conduct exams/defensios via video transmission? Is this applicable for all courses?

**Answer 6:** Yes. Only the proof of identity needs to be ensured online (by pointing an ID card into the camera), a possible handling throughout Zoom, the program the university uses. If a webcam is not available for the student, individual case solutions are offered (e.g. homework, exams taken by telephone with prior verification of identity). Concerning online exams (eAssessment), the Vice-Rectorate for Educational Affairs / Academic Continuing Education has sent the course directors a recommendation how to handle online exams consistently at Danube University Krems.

**Question 7:** Is it necessary to make up for lost time during periods in which course are not being held?

**Answer 7:** The time frame for catching up with on-campus lectures will be announced as soon as legally sound basis for admissibility is obtained. In this respect, we must wait for the legislator's specifications (see also A 2). However, there is generally no time off for courses at Danube University Krems (Mitteilungsblatt no. 106/2018 and Mitteilungsblatt no. 90/2019 concerning the allocation of the academic year 2019/20 and 2020/21). Therefore, missed attendance units can be made up any time the legal restrictions cease to apply. The basis for this is noted in point 5 of the regulation on legal conditions of registration and implementation of university courses at Danube University Krems: *"Danube University Krems reserves the right to make changes to the study program at short notice as well as to change the course locations and other necessary organizational deviations."* As far as possible, it will be avoided to catch up on courses at the end of July or in August.

**Question 8:** Do cancelled lectures with compulsory attendance have to be made up for?

**Answer 8:** Courses with compulsory attendance (i.e. those that have not switched to online teaching) are generally made up in the same form. Deviations might occur in individual cases (e.g. through supplemented blended learning).

**Question 9:** Are the deadlines to submit written papers (seminar papers, master's theses, etc.) extended? How will Danube University Krems deal with this issue? Will Danube University Krems' (teaching) staff meet the university deadlines?

**Answer 9:** The respective course director can and should extend deadlines for seminar papers and master's theses if they cannot be completed on time due to the COVID 19 crisis. Possible cases of conflict should be noted in concrete terms and sent to the Vice-Rector for Educational Affairs / Academic Continuing Education (VizerektoratLehre@donau-uni.ac.at), who will follow up and find solutions in each case.

Even if the institution has switched to teleworking, the university law deadlines further apply to Danube University Krems, unless amendments are needed in the context of the COVID 19 legislation.

**Question 10:** Is it possible to complete the study program? Curriculum expires, due to the restrictions of COVID-19 a completion in time is not possible?

**Answer 10:** The study program can be completed, only graduation ceremonies cannot be held at the moment. Danube University Krems' Senate will find appropriate solutions concerning expiring curricula (e.g: postpone the curriculum's date of expiry). Currently, it is verified whether and how many courses and students in the summer semester 2020 and if necessary in the winter semester 2020/21 are affected or not.

**Question 11:** Is the library open?

**Answer 11:** No, the university complies with the current legal requirements therefore the library remains closed. Here, reference is made to the online databases, which are to a large extent available the students working from. On request, the library staff can scan parts of publications that are online not available and subsequently send by email. Furthermore, it is planned to resume interlibrary loan services in April.



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