

Position paper of the Senate on the future of in-person teaching (26 July 2022)

After the experiences gained during the coronavirus pandemic, the question of what the future of good teaching should look like arises at the University. The pandemic has posed enormous challenges to university teaching, which we have been able to successfully address through the use of digital teaching. With the return to in-person teaching, it is necessary to consciously reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of digital teaching. This paper argues for university teaching in physical (co-) presence and the use of digital formats where appropriate. The central objective is to use the experiences of the past two years for an exemplary further development of academic teaching.

In-person teaching is indispensable for the University of Freiburg.

Personal exchange creates places of encounter, communication, and networking, which are indispensable for the dialogical acquisition of knowledge and form the basis of social learning and cultural participation. On the other hand, access to knowledge and participation in teaching are increasing through the use of digital tools such as lecture recordings and through digital communication channels between teachers and students. As long as this does not result in a loss of commitment, students who are temporarily unable to attend in-person classes will benefit in particular. Newly acquired skills in dealing with digital teaching are to be used to support in-person classes, not to replace them.

However, it shows that some important legal issues, e.g. regarding teaching loads and online examinations, have not been sufficiently clarified, yet. In principle, teaching to fulfill the teaching load requirements in accordance with the Regulations on Teaching Workloads (LVVO) must be done in presence. This does not exclude the use of digital elements, such as teaching videos. However, they must be embedded in an in-person teaching format. The legal framework may need to be readjusted to ensure the binding nature of in-person teaching; equal opportunities, security, data protection and didactic quality in online examinations are to be improved and, at the same time, greater use is to be made of the opportunities offered by interactive digital in-person examinations.

For internationalization in teaching, digitalization represents both an opportunity and a limit: Important social and intercultural aspects of stays abroad cannot be reproduced online.

The Senate identifies the following **fields of action** in which the challenges must be concretely addressed:

- Clarifying which digital formats are to be used on a permanent basis to improve teaching
 - with regard to concrete elements such as class forms, examinations, internationalization,
 - taking into account the diversity of specific subject cultures;
- Answering open legal questions (including questions concerning public service law);
- Technical equipment and development of innovative learning architectures;
- Planning and prioritization of digitalization, taking into account financial needs.

The Senate calls on the Rectorate and also on the teaching staff and students to take a more proactive role in shaping teaching and its framework than during the pandemic. University autonomy lost through emergency situations and external regulations must be actively regained. Otherwise, there is the risk that digitalization will not lead to improved teaching, but will be regarded as a means to cut costs.