Teaching in HS21 and the August-September 2021 exams period.

It is our great hope that the current developments of the pandemic and progress with the vaccination campaign will again allow for a broad return to in-person classes in the fall semester (HS21). At the very least, we will work to ensure that more in-person classes can be held compared to those in recent semesters, obviously without putting the health of students or faculty at risk.

We therefore assume that the very restrictive scenarios of recent semesters, in which practically all teaching had to be replaced by distance learning solutions, will no longer be applicable to this extent in HS21.

On the other hand, it is also unclear whether widespread "normal" in-person teaching will be possible on a practical level. We very much hope so, but no one can guarantee this at the moment. That is why it is important to think about other selective approaches to teaching. Depending on the situation, these will allow us to offer as much in-person instruction as possible with as little risk as possible.

Consequently, the University of Bern expects students and lecturers to be able to attend and hold classes in Bern on a regular basis - within the same framework and according to the same rules as was usual before the coronavirus crisis.

The University of Bern is strongly aware of the particular value of in-person teaching, and it sees the best possible solution for high-quality teaching in a sophisticated combination of in-person and distance learning.

Criteria for the possible definition of selective approaches to teaching

The following parameters and criteria may be relevant for the definition of selective approaches to teaching, if necessary:

- The number of students enrolled in a course. The larger the number, the greater the risk of contagion. Meanwhile, in the case of very large classes, there is also less active interaction and for this reason it is easier to convert to distance learning solutions.
- The stage to which a course belongs in the students’ studies. Especially the new cohort of first-year students should get the chance to enjoy in-person classes as much as possible. Second year students were only able to attend a few weeks of in-person classes in HS20. They should be prioritized after the first-year students if possible.
- The degree of interactivity of a course, or in a narrower sense, how closely it is tied to location and infrastructure. Seminars, colloquia, etc. work better when participants are present. Moreover, interactive courses usually take place in smaller groups. Teaching of this kind is more common in later years of study and thus it is possible to offer forms of in-person teaching to higher-level students as well.

In all these solutions, a maximum number of participants could also be defined (at the moment the limit is set at 50 people). The other measures, such as wearing masks, minimum distancing, etc., will of course also be reviewed and communicated.

If the number of participants has to be limited, there must also be solutions (podcast, audio recording, etc.) for students who are not allowed to be present.
Due to uncertainties in how the situation will evolve, all lecturers are asked to prepare back-up plans with online solutions for their courses. The experience of the last three semesters will be very useful in this regard.

It is not possible to decide now which option will apply in practice. This information is intended to show which priorities could be set.

Of course, the solution will also depend on the measures decided by the federal government and the canton. The crisis management team will communicate after each change of measures whether and in which form the changes effect possible approaches to teaching. The next federal government announcement has been announced for the end of May.

All stakeholders - students, faculty and other staff - are recommended to register for the vaccination.

The crisis management team is also looking at the question of the extent to which vaccination certificates can be used to arrange these selective approaches to teaching. Of course, this is only possible within the framework of generally applicable legal principles. The selective systematic use of testing is also under review. Currently, the following strategy is still valid:

https://www.unibe.ch/coronavirus/testing_and_vaccinations/index_eng.html

The August-September 2021 exams period

We assume that exams can be conducted in person, but an online alternative must be available - based on the experience of past exam sessions.

So, depending on the development of the epidemiological situation and the federal and cantonal measures, the following solutions are available for conducting exams:

1. **Exams conducted in person.** If the situation and the required measures allow it, it will be possible to plan with the usual spacing (one empty seat between each student). If the distance has to be larger, the room capacities of the University of Bern are too limited. All usual protective measures (masks, hand hygiene, ventilation of the rooms, etc.) must be implemented.

2. **Exams conducted online.** A limited number of justified exceptions will be identified by the faculties together with the University Executive Board.

Which solution is to be applied or is possible and where the limits are that regulate the exceptions in variant 2 will be decided and communicated by the crisis management team, probably at the end of June, after analyzing the situation. The situation will of course continue to be monitored thereafter.

The necessary room reservations for the exams in August and September have been made and will be kept. Rescheduling is not possible.