To the
Colleagues and Students
of the Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg

Sankt Augustin, 27 March 2020

Dear colleagues,
Dear students!

There is a strange silence when I walk across the campus of our university these days. The corridors, the dining hall, the library, the seminar rooms, the offices – almost everything is deserted. Usually March is full of pleasant anticipation, as we look forward to the first rays of spring sunshine and the beginning of the summer semester. This year, a special occasion has come along, which offers cause for joy and celebration: Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

But now: silence, emptiness. It is a strange, sometimes oppressive situation in which we live. The corona crisis is leading to massive cutbacks in public life. We are affected by restrictions in all facets of our everyday life, which take away our freedom, but which above all serve to protect our health and our lives.

We must do everything in our power to slow down the spread of the corona virus. Everyone is needed: state, society and every individual. We of the Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg are also contributing. We have been working intensively on this topic since February. The President’s Office has repeatedly held special meetings in an extended circle to deal with the corona crisis. Every decision is taken on the basis of political guidelines and colleagues’ assessments.

The corona work group includes all university organisations that are involved in the issue. It serves as a forum for exchange and has an advisory function. The President’s Office is also in constant contact with other universities, the Landesrektorenkonferenz (NRW’s university association), the state government and regional politicians.

We are observing an extremely dynamic development, which we have to reassess again and again. Some of the decisions taken in recent weeks concerning the corona virus have had to be extended just one or two days later, always bearing in mind that the risk of infection has to be kept as low as possible.
Initially, the aim was to draw attention to hygiene rules and to prevent business trips to China - the country of the virus’s origin. Then we cancelled events and exams, formulated strict rules for access to our facilities, and finally postponed the start of face-to-face lectures until 20 April this year - a regulation that applies nationwide according to a decree of the Ministry of Culture and Science. We have closed all of the audience-intensive places at the university, including the open learning zones of which we are so proud. Teaching must now be organised under more difficult conditions. The majority of our employees now work from home, which would not be possible without the great commitment of the Institute for IT Services. Coping with all this within a few weeks has required and continues to require enormous efforts.

I would like to thank all of you wholeheartedly for maintaining the operational capability of the university, whether you work in administration or technology, in research or teaching, in service units or committees. At the same time, I would ask you to reduce your face-to-face business conversations to what is absolutely necessary. Hold your meetings via telephone and video conferences. Use the possibilities of mobile work. Take advantage of the digital resources for further education offered by our university library.

We don’t know what the next weeks and months are going to hold in store for us - especially in a time when the certainties and routines that have shaped our society for decades no longer seem to function and are being called into question. The medial maelstrom of opinions on the subject of the corona crisis is causing uncertainty among many. But we remain confident. Let us continue to trust in the power of science. It may not be immune to error, but its analyses are at the highest level of knowledge we have ever had.

Let’s make the best of the situation. Let us break new ground. The corona crisis also offers opportunities, for example in the digitalisation of teaching. We are working to provide students with digital learning resources before 20 April, which will be available throughout the semester and will provide helpful support for the success of their studies this semester. We will keep you informed about further developments. You will receive information via newsletters, intranet and our website, where the most frequent concerns are compiled in FAQs.

We will all tackle and master the many challenges together. I look forward to the day when we meet again in person, on a lively campus, in an open, happy and inspiring atmosphere. Stay healthy!

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Hartmut Ihne