Vice-Rector for Academic and International Affairs

Latest activities of ZILL / ZIH / Information Security on video conferences and virtual classrooms

Dear members of staff,
Dear students,

I am deeply impressed by the tremendous, collective efforts to safeguard teaching and examinations, even in the midst of the current corona pandemic. At the same time, many of you are wondering what tools should be used.

Up to now, most of the requirements for video conferences at TU Dresden have been managed via the DFN science network and were DFN services. However, in the current circumstances, these resources are far too limited to cope with the onslaught of all universities seeking simultaneous, digital communication. The demand will certainly increase even further with the start of teaching in the coming weeks. It is also evident that the transition nodes between the general network to the DFN are bottlenecks and cause a ‘traffic jam’. Therefore, mere in-house solutions will not suffice. The ZIH has promptly developed solutions in order to have our own tools at TU Dresden, once the DFN service is discontinued. The preparations and measures taken are now at a stage where we can see a ‘light at the end of the tunnel’.

In the last few days, we have made significant progress on these issues. Yesterday, we signed contracts with two major cloud providers that will give us access to the VC services "GoToMeeting" and "Zoom" with 1,000 licenses each. We are currently evaluating how we can efficiently and quickly roll out these new services at our university. We hope to have connectivity to our identity management system for at least one of them. It might be the case that the other service will explicitly provide e-mail addresses as unique login identification. We would like to leave it to the Faculties and the Schools to decide who should be granted access to limited resources.

This email is meant to provide you with an overview of the ongoing activities. A separate email will be sent out today to the Faculties and Schools outlining the detailed procedure on how to use these services and who should use them.

We expect these services to be widely available next week.

In parallel, ZIH, ZILL and Information Security have set up two new services, which are hosted by our own data-processing centre. This will allow for video conferences, exams and thesis defences, which are subject to stricter data protection regulations, to be held virtually. The first video conference service - based on BigBlueButton - developed jointly with the Saxony Education Portal - will go into pilot mode on 2 April 2020 (i.e. today) and is to be expanded in the short term to approximately 1,000 active users (max. 50 participants per room with max. 25 active cameras). The pilot phase will show if we can roll out this service on a large scale. The second service is called Jitsi, which is suitable for consultations and meetings in small groups. A maximum of 10
active cameras are expected to be supported. The pilot phase will start on 6 April. Jitsi will also be integrated into our new chat service called Matrix.

An overview of the video conference tools and the current status is provided jointly by ZIH and ZiLL via: https://tu-dresden.de/zih/dienste/videokonferenz. Please pay particular attention to data protection issues when selecting the appropriate service for you.

I would like to cordially thank everyone involved for their commitment and hard work in mastering these unprecedented challenges. It is an extraordinary achievement to enable the entire university to switch to virtual teaching in such a short period of time.

But most importantly - stay healthy!

Best regards

Prof. Dr. rer. nat. habil. Hans Georg Krauthäuser
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Zielgruppe: Alle Studierenden und Mitarbeiter/-innen der TU Dresden