

Press release

Autumn semester 2020

“As personal as possible”, despite coronavirus

Zurich, 10 September 2020

On 14 September, the autumn semester at ETH Zurich will commence for some 4,700 new Bachelor's and Master's students. Despite considerable uncertainties due to the Covid 19 pandemic, they are to be offered the most authentic ETH experience possible.

With around 22,900 Master's, Bachelor's and doctoral students, there has again been a clear rise in the number of ETH students in 2020. This is evident particularly at Bachelor's level, where there has been an increase of more than 7.4 percent. A total of 3,396 people will start a Bachelor's degree programme at ETH Zurich in 2020, compared to 3,162 in the previous year. “The interest in studying at ETH continues to grow, even in times of Corona,” says ETH Rector Sarah Springman.

Interest in Mechanical Engineering continues to increase

Mechanical Engineering is still by far the most popular Bachelor's degree programme, with 506 new admissions (+10.2%). This figure is closely followed by the degree programmes Computer Science with 411 (+5.9%), Architecture with 330 (+19.6%), Health Sciences and Technology with 279 (-7.0%) and Physics with 266 admissions (+8.0%). There was also a very positive increase in admissions to degree programmes in the field of system-oriented natural sciences (e.g. Earth and Climate Sciences or Environmental Sciences).

The proportion of foreign students – i.e. those who completed secondary school outside of Switzerland – fell from 14.5 to 13.3 percent. At 34.3 percent, the proportion of women remained stable.

Number of Master's students stable

As in previous years, the exact number of admissions to the Master's programmes will not be known until after the semester has commenced, as the matriculation process has not yet been completed. “There is a larger proportion of international students on our Master's degree programmes. The current uncertainty is causing many students to postpone their studies,” explains Hermann Lehner, Head

of Academic Services at ETH. Due to the pandemic, confirmation of enrolment is now valid for two years. This means that students can commence their studies in 2021 without having to re-apply. Despite a higher number of applications and admissions, Academic Services is therefore predicting that the number of Master's students in the first semester will stay roughly the same. There were 2,927 in the previous year.

As much classroom teaching as possible

The challenge is now to ensure that, despite the restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, all students – particularly new students – can attend as much classroom teaching as possible and optimally supplement these lessons with comprehensive digital services. “For a successful learning outcome, it is important that students can spontaneously interact with lecturers and with one another, especially on practice-oriented degree programmes,” explains Sarah Springman. [In addition, studies by ETH have shown that the social networks of students also play a significant role in their success.](#)

To facilitate this interaction among new ETH students, they are assigned to so-called “bubbles”. In these fixed groups of 25 people each, they can participate in exercises and practicals together. This allows direct contacts to be tracked and minimises the risk of spreading infection. The plan is also for students to be able to attend as many lessons as possible in person. If there is a shortage of space, almost all lessons are also available online – especially for students in a high-risk group.

Non-European exchanges put on hold

In addition to these new entrants who aspire to complete a full degree at ETH Zurich, some 270 exchange students and visiting students will visit ETH Zurich in the autumn for one or two semesters. Germany, Sweden and Italy are among the most frequent countries of origin this year besides Switzerland. Due to the pandemic, exchanges with universities outside of Europe have been put on hold for the autumn semester.

[Teaching in Autumn Semester 2020: Safety concept](#) →

[Up-to-date information about how ETH Zurich is dealing with coronavirus](#) →

Further information

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