

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA del Sacro Cuore

# WORLDBOUND

N° 6 - 2021

## Cover Story

**THIS IS OUR DETERMINATION.  
OUR GRIT.**

Our community does not plan ideas on paper and through words, we do not wait for the solutions to come and unfold but seek and grasp them to fuel our plans.

## Students

### A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF...

Follow us while we learn about the challenges and achievements of four Cattolica students taking part in virtual international experiences across the globe.

## Research

### ONLINE DOES NOT STOP US, IT REINVENTS US.

How is the psychological impact of the pandemic evolving and what are the drivers of our behaviours?







## MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

A warm welcome to members and friends of the Academic Community.

Up until one year ago, our lecture halls were filled with hundreds of enthusiastic learners and the corridors of our renowned cloisters were bustling with students living remarkable study experiences. Then suddenly, as many other institutions across the globe, we were compelled to remodel our educational environment.

In a short time, COVID-19 radically changed the way students received their education. Physical spaces had to be rethought. This situation revealed existing competencies that until then we had never made the most of. We had been heading in the right direction, but we had to dramatically pick up the pace to deliver a satisfactory e-learning structure. Despite the uncertainties and challenges of this “new normal”, these different methods paved the way for extensive study and new work opportunities.

This edition of Worldbound brings to light the obstacles our University community faced, the determination necessary to overcome them and the results obtained. COVID-19 allowed us to innovate our courses and advocate virtual learning. As a result, we have seen a 27 per cent increase in international student enrolment numbers for the 2020/2021 academic year. We are very pleased with what our students and faculty have achieved during these challenging times.



We look at how COVID-19 revealed mental and physical vulnerabilities. We also bring you stories of students and graduates who did not passively sit back but rather opened new doors. We look at the relevance of research during these times and how the successful development of an MBA program in Africa is bridging the gap between countries. Finally, we speak to higher education experts who showcase institutions that had a seamless transition into online delivery.

I believe that the desire to study and learn new things, to cooperate and engage, should remain the same as in previous years. The knowledge gained will benefit you for a lifetime, so let this “new normal of learning” widen your horizons. Take advantage of all the opportunities available to you.

With “passion and perseverance” Università Cattolica is putting in the effort every day to inspire the members of our University. We are working hard on our goals and can see a brighter future ahead.

This is our resolution. Our Grit.

I wish everyone a healthy, successful, and enriching year.

Professor Franco Anelli



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# This is our determination. Our grit.

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore may be resilient in these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, but its community forages to realise actions. Despite the challenges, we keep running towards our goals.

The act of resilience, the unprecedented times, and the new normal. These phrases have been the manifestation of the pandemic's pinnacle after having been inserted in everyone's day-to-day vocabulary. At Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the new normal means gathering the community to support each other in adapting to the safety measures and regulations including moving classes from in-person to online, assisting the academic staff in hosting and delivering classes through digital technology, contacting students across the globe to update them on the changing situations, and enhancing the online systems and tools of the university to name a few. The unprecedented times signal the shift in the possibilities of internships and abroad opportunities from travelling to staying at home, the office hours of the academic staff from in-person to online invites and conducting more workshops and seminars via a live stream, among the other transitions. Yet the phrase "act of resilience" falls through the mission of the University as it restricts the scope

of its undertakings. At Università Cattolica, the community embodies determination through actions.

Through the pursuit of Università Cattolica in finding a fitting description of its ventures during the ebb and flow of the pandemic, the adjustments and metamorphosis it has undergone from the strike of the global crisis, the search of definition to its pursuits lands on grit. Dr Angela Duckworth, the founder and CEO of Character Lab, becomes the trailblazer of the word grit, defining it as "a combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal and is the hallmark of high achievers in every domain," supported by her research and team. To add its own spin to the term, the community of Università Cattolica echoes the philosophy of grit: acknowledging the highs and lows in responding to the academic, social and personal duties, but facing the challenges and successes head-on without the mindset of giving up.

## Giorgia Spigno

Professor at the Faculty of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences



“

A privileged grit. The first lockdown meant that it was impossible to visit my parents and I had to spend many more hours preparing and changing the management of both teaching and research activities. Since the beginning it has not been possible to stop, my teacher and researcher responsibilities did not allow for it. I have always put on a smile and I have had to be optimist towards the students and co-workers. And I had to do the same with my little girls. It is important to deliver a realistic but not too worrying message to them. Sometimes it was and still is stressing from a psychological point of view but I could not and I cannot fail. As a form of respect towards all the people that were and are more severely affected by the pandemic, I feel a sense of guilt. I feel guilty towards those people because lockdown and the restrictions were a kind of privilege for me. Although I have not stopped working, I could slow down my working rhythm, reducing travelling and hours spent outside home. This has allowed me to spend more time with my husband and little girls. I found positive elements in this awful emergency.

”

"To me and my team grit has meant the need and determination to hit the ground running. Each and every day, ever since the pandemic started. To go ahead, together, and to keep going..." says Flavia Scott of ILAB (Centre for the Innovation and Development of teaching and E-Learning). Tommaso Biglieri (Accounting, Finance and Management Control) mentions how grit powers the capacity to turn complexity into energy to vigorously obtain a result to which Giacomo Maniscalco of Global Engagement and International Education adds, "grit is sticking to your inner nature, to your deepest instincts, even when it seems you are going against them. It is being childlike in the truest sense, not even considering the possibility of impossibility and moving forward no matter what. Grit is what pushes us, what shapes us, what makes us."



## Tommaso Biglieri

Accounting, Finance and Management Control



“

For me grit is the capacity to turn complexity into energy to vigorously obtain a result.

”

In July 2020, Università Cattolica founded the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), a network of a strategic alliance among the eight Catholic universities active in the research sector to strengthen collaboration on a global level between Catholic universities and pursue the aim of education of excellence resulting to an integral formation of students. The universities include The Australian Catholic University in Australia, Boston College in the USA, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Chile, Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Sophia University in Japan, Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Portugal and Universitat Ramon Llull in Spain. “We are working alongside the other seven universities, who are very open to collaborations, including many research proposals, favouring the digital medium. Now, we have the 2021 - 2027 proposal for Horizon Europe, the research and innovation framework programme, a reference point for all European researchers,” adds Professor Zoboli in our interview (page #24).

## Laura Incardona

Communications

“

During these intense months I put into action a Chinese proverb which I saw at the beginning of the pandemic in the background of a lecturer’s recorded lesson: “When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.” According to my experience, grit is the windmill that channels and harnesses the messy and unexpected energy of change, and is characterised by the verb “to build,” because nothing great is ever achieved alone.

”



## Caterina Masseroli

Student



“

For me, a synonym for grit could be “go for it”. Find whatever fulfills you and, with passion and perseverance, go get it, doing the best you can to achieve your goal.

”

The advancement of one’s knowledge through education has always been at the forefront of Università Cattolica’s global initiative and more so during the pandemic as the community continues to bridge the gap of education between Europe and Africa through E4Impact (page #16). In partnership with ALTIS (Alta Scuola di Impresa e Società at Università Cattolica), E4Impact offers MBA programmes and scholarships to fifteen African countries, training entrepreneurs who make an impact in their local communities. “We never stopped working on new programmes and by next year we aim to reach twenty countries. I believe Università Cattolica and E4Impact’s presence in Africa is one unrivalled within Europe,” says Professor Mario Molteni, Rector’s Delegate for Business Relations, and Full Professor of Business Administration and Corporate Strategy at Università Cattolica, Milan.

When Università Cattolica identifies its community, it expands outside the interiors and cloisters of the campus and its students and staff. The society provides its service to fall under the umbrella of its assistance, helping them foster protection and knowledge through the accessibility of information. The Cremona Food Lab of the University has published research on the psychological effects of the pandemic on people (page #30), delivering facts through science to better inform families and members of the community about the pervading crisis. “We have carried out another study recently, which relates to the concerns of the vaccination, as the vaccine is another element that will become a historical turning point for the pandemic,” says Professor Guendalina Graffigna, Psychology Professor and Researcher.

## Valentina Frascchetti

Student Services and Records

“

A lot has been said this year about resilience. Resilience, by definition, is the ability of a substance or object to withstand an impact without breaking. For the individual, it is the ability, mentally and emotionally to resist a traumatic event. This enormous, innate capacity is often not enough to overcome difficulties. When your world is suddenly turned upside, you have to rely on something even stronger: your passion for life and the value of time. When you truly understand these two concepts, you can decide to look at your world from a new perspective, perhaps discovering that you are even more aware of your goals.

”





The University's students and alumni have weathered the waves of the pandemic as they dabble in transitions that have harnessed their multifaceted digital and offline skills. Francesca Sada (page #49) knows she wants to pursue an international career experience through Università Cattolica but has had doubts as to whether she can do so considering the safety restrictions. As she persists in finding out the answers, she discovers the virtual internships that the University offers, jumps at the opportunity, and spends her summer working for a relocation company in Australia through her laptop, online video calls, and a stint in the sunny beachside of Palermo. Caterina Masseroli also snags the opportunity to immerse herself into the English culture and language, packing her bags for Coventry in the United Kingdom to take her course credits for her bachelor's degree in Languages and International Relations at Università Cattolica. After winning the Erasmus scholarship, she clings to the chance to study outside of Italy while respecting the regulations of Coventry and the United Kingdom to ensure her safety and the people around her. While in Coventry, she studies from home and spends her time exploring the community she lives in, revelling in the moment of taking chances for one's growth.

## Donato Villani

Student



“

I believe that the word grit for me sounds like: "pack all of your passions with all of your courage and perseverance and keep pushing on what you care about, keep working for a better future."

”

## Francesca Sada

Student



“

Grit means creating opportunities by ourselves to achieve goals, because everyone writes their own future, even if a bit of luck would not hurt.

”

## Marzia Benelli

Human Resources

“

Everything in life happens for a reason. It is up to us to turn it into an opportunity for growth or an obstacle for personal development. Grit is the mental and physical mechanism that leads us to see only opportunities and to fight with diligence for self-improvement, for our benefit and that of the community, even in the darkest moments.

”

The self-growth and grit have also taken place in Xinyan Wang. Flying back to China due to unforeseen circumstances, she finds herself accepting an internship that challenges and sharpens her communication skills while studying at Università Cattolica for her master's degree in Methods and Topics in Arts Management, sometimes watching recorded lessons and other times attending classes at midnight. Juggling two activities might hinder her progress, but Xinyan faces the activities head-on, seizing the time to learn and apply what she has studied at the same time. In taking on various activities, Donato Villani may champion the art of multitasking. In his summer programme with Stanford University through Università Cattolica, he works with an international team for a final project. Instead of allowing the final project to remain written on paper, they transform the words into a concrete registered business called WeResQ (page #46). Now, Donato studies towards his master's degree at Università Cattolica while spearheading the Feat Food, a food-tech company based in Milan that prepares and delivers custom meals across Italy, as the Chief Operating Officer and WeResQ, an app that helps its users to minimise their food waste at home, overseeing the innovation and business development sector of the company. Donato embraces the foundations of a fighter of the time, warding off excuses not to actualise what he has always wanted to do.

“

Grit is sticking to your inner nature, to your deepest instincts, even when it seems like you are going against them. Grit is being childlike in the truest sense, not even considering the possibility of impossibility and moving forward no matter what. Grit is essential, always. Grit is what pushes us, what shapes us, what makes us.

”

## Giacomo Maniscalco

Global Engagement and International Education





Through Xinyan and Donato, Professor Claudio Gianetti of Physics notes how "grit is being suddenly locked at home in the middle of teaching activities and finding a way to revolutionise the way we lecture. Grit is strongly believing that we will find a way to accompany students during their journey, although we do not know the instruments and tools we will have. Grit is carrying on long-term research projects while the labs are locked. Grit is dreaming and projecting the next-decade courses while rules and conditions are changing day by day. Grit is believing that our students are always there even if we do not meet them."

Like Donato, the spirit of transforming words into actions has resonated well with Sergio Pitrone. The Forbes 30 Under 30 alumnus of Università Cattolica spearheads ICAST, a casting management tool that simplifies the casting system from five days to five seconds, from hundreds of emails to one, and Vertumn, a creative agency supporting brands who intend to develop their own identity and communication to reach important market objectives through communication management, business analysis, design, technology, and marketing and start-up services, two companies he founded through his inability to surrender for every "no" he receives, driven by a dash of the law of attraction (page #54).



**Sergio Pitrone**  
Alumnus

Grit is ... being consistent like waves: never tired, never full, always with a white smile.

”

## Ciro De Florio

Professor of "Logic and Philosophy of Science"

“

There is a particular moment when everything fades around you. You see yourself from the outside and you tell yourself that it is okay. That it can be enough. There is a sharp piercing sensation in your legs. You search for air, your heart bursts. At that moment, your ideas, projects and goals are falling apart. At that moment your future is fleeting. Grit is knowing how to speak to that moment, knowing how to care for it. Grit is recognising that sooner or later it will come. Grit is not listening to what others say. Grit is taking that moment and carrying it on your shoulders. Grit is to keep running.

”



## Flavia Scott

ILAB  
(Centre for the Innovation and Development of teaching and E-Learning)

“

To me and my team grit has meant the need and determination to hit the ground running. Each and every day, ever since the pandemic started. To go ahead, together, and to keep going...

”



## Claudio Giannetti

Professor of Physics



“

Grit is being suddenly locked at home in the middle of teaching activities and finding a way to revolutionise the way we lecture.

Grit is strongly believing that we will find a way to accompany students during their journey, although we don't know the instruments and tools we will have.

Grit is carrying on long-term research projects while the labs are locked.

Grit is supporting and being close to PhD students and young researchers, whose programmes are killed by the emergency condition.

Grit is dreaming and projecting the next-decade courses while rules and conditions are changing day by day.

Grit is believing that our students are always there even if we do not meet them.

”

## Xinyan Wang

Student

“

For me, Grit is not only momentary courage, hard work, and determination when you facing difficulties in a short period, but more importantly the perseverance to resist the erosion of your original intentions by the surrounding environment and the changing world over the long years.

”



Ciro de Florio, Logic and Philosophy of Science Professor, narrates “there is a particular moment when everything fades around you. You see yourself from the outside and you tell yourself that it is okay; that it can be enough. There is a sharp piercing sensation in your legs. You search for air, your heart bursts. At that moment, your ideas, projects and goals are falling apart. At that moment your future is fleeting. Grit is knowing how to speak to that moment, knowing how to care for it. It is recognising that sooner or later it will come. It is not listening to what others say. It is taking that moment and carrying it on your shoulders. It is to keep running.”

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore may be resilient in this unprecedented time, but its community forages to realise actions, the progress of growth flows despite the challenges. While the community believes in optimism, the sole belief in this philosophy reframes its purpose, so they do not plan ideas on paper and through words, but act on them to integrate them into the challenges; they do not wait for the solutions to come and unfold but seek and grasp them to fuel their plans. Determination through actions powers through our community.

***This is our determination. Our grit.***

## Romolo De Angelis

Governing Boards Management

“

Grit is positive thinking, it is acting with determination, it is encouraging each other, it is spurring on situations of adversity, it is being a source of help for those in need.

I remember my arrival at Università Cattolica, in the second half of the 1990s - as well as the friendships, we were advised to put grit into the lessons and exams, to graduate quickly. There was a need for Cattolica graduates and their drive for our society.

Since then, my understanding of grit has not changed and I am confident that even as the years pass, it will not change. Grit grows every day and it strongly roots itself within our values and that of the Cattolica community.

Grit is an important part of our faith, especially in difficult times. In times of health emergency, there is an even greater need for Cattolica graduates to show their grit in order to build tomorrow's society in the best possible way.

”





FACULTY

# CLOSING THE DISTANCE



What if we told you that you could take a successful MBA and make it accessible to young talented professionals across Africa? Professor Mario Molteni recounts the journey that took him to develop an outstanding international MBA programme aimed at training impactful job creators.







## MARIO MOLTENI

Mario Molteni is Full Professor of Corporate Strategy at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan, Italy) and Rector's Delegate for Business Relations.

He is the founder of ALTIS (Graduate School Business & Society) at the same university, an international research and education institution for Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and entrepreneurship, where he has been Director from 2005 to 2015. He also started the CSR Manager Network, the Italian association of professionals who work in the field of sustainability in companies and consulting firms.

He is CEO of E4Impact Foundation, Università Cattolica's spin-off for fostering impact entrepreneurship in Africa, in partnership with local universities, that currently operates in sixteen African countries.

He is the author of numerous books and articles on corporate strategy, entrepreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship.

He has lectured in Corporate Strategy and Corporate Social Responsibility on many master's programmes (Università Cattolica, SDA Bocconi, ENI Corporate University, Publitalia, Angelicum). In 2015 he has been named Senior Ashoka Fellow in Africa for the activities of E4Impact.

He has performed it and plays the role of independent director on the board of Italian listed companies.



### Professor Molteni, could you tell us how Università Cattolica and E4Impact started their experience in Africa?

In 2005 Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe asked Università Cattolica's former Rector, Lorenzo Ornaghi, to help him develop a master's programme at Castel Gandolfo in Rome for a group of African managers. At the time, ALTIS (Alta Scuola di Impresa e Società at Università Cattolica) had just been born and Professor Ornaghi asked us if we were interested in developing the programme, and I agreed.

The first edition of the programme in 2005 had eighteen enrolled students who arrived in Italy thanks to numerous scholarships. The following year we decided to move the programme from Rome to Milan, opening admissions to interested students from Latin America and India.

In 2008, due to the global financial crisis, we explored the possibility of developing a similar programme in Africa. Therefore, the following year I travelled to Kenya and selected the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and the Tangaza University College as the ideal sites for our new pilot programme. We were very happy to receive positive support from our network and we were able to fly the students from all over the African continent. This was our first big leap. We decided to offer a different kind of MBA. We weren't targeting job seekers, we aimed at training job creators instead.

Right after the first edition of the programme in Kenya, we started working on the development of the same master in other African countries. We were planning on delivering the programme at the national level which may sound less prestigious from one point of view but was a more viable option for those young entrepreneurs who didn't have to travel across the continent to attend the programme. We formally adopted a blended teaching method, with face-to-face classes as well as online training. Additionally, we offered counselling through our business coach. Thanks to our African partners we developed a business competition at the beginning of the programme giving students three different possibilities at once: by presenting their entrepreneurial business ideas they were competing for scholarships, getting attention from stakeholders, and attracting new sponsors for the programme. The jury was formed by local experts, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, etc. This helped the programme gain more and more attention from local authorities and businesses. We soon became an example of positive social and environmental impact. We believe that the word impact suits our mission and programme very well. We aim to create a positive change through the training of our African entrepreneurs.

In 2009, we launched the MBA in Ghana and Sierra Leone, while in 2010, we set up in Uganda and Ivory Coast. We successfully reached five countries and our business model always included a local higher education partner and its faculty to whom we would add our own Cattolica Professors. In 2015, while Milan was hosting Expo, we focused on increasing the number of countries involved and created a Foundation, E4Impact, that would offer our MBA programme in fifteen African countries.

We never stopped working on new programmes and by next year we aim to reach twenty countries. I believe Università Cattolica and E4Impact's presence in Africa is one unrivalled within Europe. Despite the rapid growth and the addition of new products (such as certificate programmes), we have never lost track of our primary mission: training entrepreneurs who make an impact in their local communities.



**How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your strategy and teaching efforts?**

The pandemic, of course, affected our work as well as everyone else's, however, we decided to see this as an opportunity and not a crisis. We developed a remote working plan for our Milanese offices that will continue even after the COVID-19 emergency. On top of that, we currently organise global staff meetings every fifteen days which allows us to be constantly updated on local developments.

In 2019, we invited all our university partners to Milan and funded the E4Impact Alliance. Our goal is to be the point of reference in Africa for impact entrepreneurs. As we are unable to meet in person, we launched the monthly Alliance meetings whereby we select a relevant theme accordingly. This was a cultural leap, the attendance is massive, and we are finally able to make decisions and act consequently.

As we had to move all our classes online during the emergency, we have decided to keep some classes online in the future. By doing this we will help to eliminate some costs and time spent travelling to the sites. The same will happen to our teacher training as well as Business Coach Academy.

Furthermore, we are now able to connect our entrepreneurs to international investors. We organise online meetings during which students present their ideas and they may be selected from our investors' network and get funds to develop their project. This is something that would not have been possible two years ago and it is now a big opportunity for our MBA students.

Finally, this year the Gian Marco Moratti Award was given to those companies who developed the best response to the global pandemic effects.

All these initiatives and many more which we are working on are contributing to connecting the African continent and its entrepreneurs to international investors in a "low-cost" way that positively affects the relationship and the perception of potential business opportunities in Africa.

**"WE BECAME AN EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT."**



**"WE AIMED AT TRAINING JOB CREATORS."**

**Considering the above-mentioned experience do you believe that COVID-19 has increased the distance, or has it helped to close the gap between Europe and Africa?**

There's no doubt it has helped close the distance. For instance, a few days ago I presented at an event in Cameroon alongside country Ministers and a representative of the World Bank. I strongly believe that this dramatic situation has also presented us with the opportunity to move closer and develop creative solutions that would have taken years to be implemented under normal circumstances.

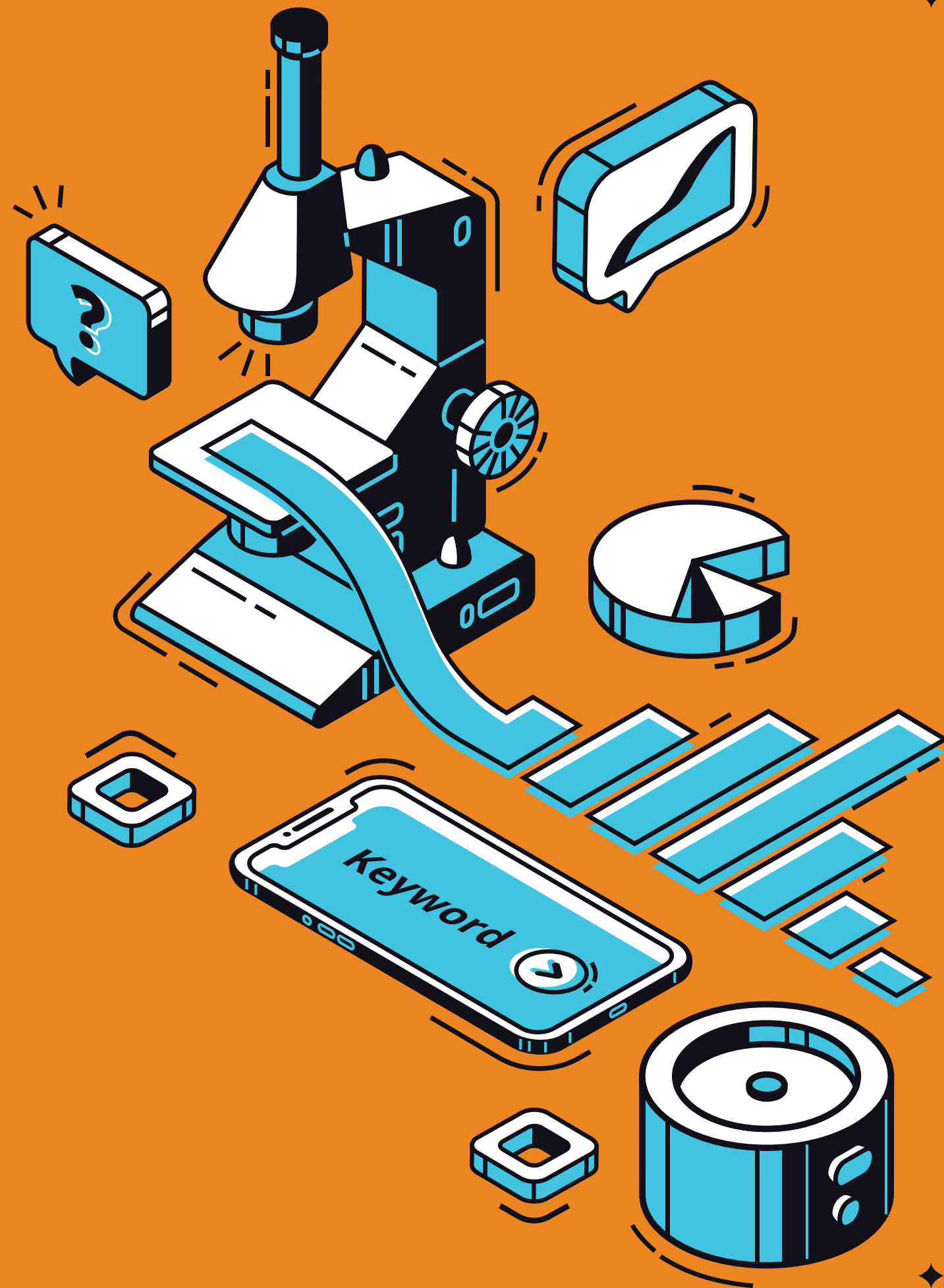
Furthermore, the Alliance allows us to favour new ideas developed locally and to share the best practices with all the partners in our network.



RESEARCH

# A RESEARCH-POWERED FUTURE

Over the past year, scientific research (from clinical trials to mathematical models, from the future of the global economy to social and psychological repercussions) has become a key player. Università Cattolica's researchers have thoroughly contributed to the public debate and continue doing so by helping institutions and communities plan what the world will be like post-COVID-19.





# RETHINKING RESEARCH



## ROBERTO ZOBOLI - - - -

Professor Roberto Zoboli, Rector's Delegate for Scientific Research and Sustainability, evaluates this past year of the pandemic in light of Università Cattolica's achievements in terms of collaborations and papers. While traditional research tools have been less accessible, faculty members and researchers have not stopped looking for creative ways of pushing boundaries.



Roberto Zoboli is a Full professor of Economic Policy in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Since 2015 he is the Rector's Delegate for Scientific Research and Sustainability and, currently, Director of ASA - Graduate School on the Environment at Università Cattolica. His research focuses on the green economy and circular economy. He has established a long-lasting collaboration with the EEA (European Environment Agency) through Seeds, an Inter-University Research centre dedicated to a sustainable economy.



During the COVID-19 emergency, scientific research (from clinical trials to mathematical models, from the future of the global economy to social and psychological repercussions) has become a key player and has taken a primary role in public debates. On the other hand, the pandemic made it more difficult for universities and their researchers to access traditional research tools, such as libraries and laboratories. What are the effects of this radical change on our University's scientific production? How did the faculty react to the emergency?

There has been a rise in research during this phase. As you mentioned, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more difficult to access traditional research tools, but this period has favoured new research ideas and proposals. It has provoked a very strong response: in the first phase of the pandemic until summer 2020, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore presented more than 100 COVID-19 related proposals in national and international tenders, half of which were from medical scientists and the other mainly from sociologists and psychologists. The crisis has stimulated immediate and lasting transformations in the way we relate and live. This has stimulated many ideas outside Medical Sciences. The pandemic crisis has catalysed a strong response from the entire research system, causing a revitalising effect.

Undoubtedly, there is an emerging theme of science vs politics and science vs the person. The University is putting in place a process (which is not yet formal), driven by the Rector himself, which promotes a "trust in science" initiative: reflections and brainstorming ideas on the relationship between scientists and decision-makers on the one hand and people on the other. For the first time, people have come into direct and intense contact with the scientists who we usually do not see in the media. People have discovered the "secrets" of science also in terms of problems and contradictions. Scientists should always specify that everything they say is in the current state of knowledge, which evolves over time, as is the case with COVID-19.

On top of that, there is also the relationship between scientists and policymakers. Università Cattolica has been very active in speaking to policymakers. The dialogue is not always easy, and also involves an issue of responsibility sharing. This permanent problem of the dialogue between science and policy has reemerged with the COVID-19 pandemic.

**"THERE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE PRESENCE OF OUR UNIVERSITY IN THE MEDIA, ESPECIALLY ON THE MEDICAL FRONT."**

**2015-2020**  
**118**  
**FINANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS**



“WORKING ONLINE HAS FAVOURED INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS AND IT HAS ENCOURAGED NETWORK EXPANSIONS.”



Has working online helped international collaborations?

Working online has favoured international collaborations. It is very easy to organise a webinar on any topic with 100/200 people for a few hours. It has encouraged network expansions and actual or potential collaborations with international researchers. We have developed a very large number of projects with international partners. Thirty to forty per cent of our European or international research projects are on an international basis and involve partnerships with researchers from other countries. Almost forty per cent of publications are international co-authorships. A new research website has been developed which will need to be constantly updated. Even if it depends on the subject areas, in general, our degree of internationalisation of research is satisfactory, and it is growing. This way of working also has its limits: when we take part in international conferences, there is an important part of informal

face-to-face interactions which establishes collaborations. Said that, although personal networking opportunities are limited online, there is still a higher chance of building new relationships.

I believe the positive aspects of online and face-to-face teaching and learning methods will be maintained. European universities were already moving in that direction and are continuing to do so. On the other hand, I see little competition with fully online universities which do not carry out research or third mission. As for Università Cattolica, the three missions interact amongst themselves and make us different and much more attractive even online. This year we have increased student enrollments, and other traditional universities have also seen an increase in the number of enrollments since people can work and study at the same time.

2015-2020 15,992 SCIENTIFIC WORKS PUBLISHED BY CATTOLICA RESEARCHERS

How do you envision the future of international research at Università Cattolica?

From an international perspective, we are working on enhancing our commitment, although we have a good degree of internationalisation of research. Now we are looking at Horizon Europe 2021-27, the research and innovation framework programme, a reference point for all European researchers. At the same time, the National Research Programme (NRP) has the same characteristics as Horizon Europe regarding its major topics and 'grand challenges.' Horizon Europe is shaped by the idea of 'Mission-oriented research,' which foresees scientific results as a service for society by being transformative and highly impacting for the common good. We believe in this type of research and we push forward international partnerships that can move together in the same direction. A recent example of international research cooperation is the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), an initiative promoted by the Rector and carried out by Dr Edilio Mazzoleni, Prof. Pier Sandro Cocconcilli and myself. SACRU is a network of universities dedicated to research and teaching excellence, engagement and global collaboration informed by Catholic social teaching.



1000+ WORKS IN INTERNATIONAL CO-AUTHORSHIPS PER YEAR



# ONLINE DOES NOT STOP US, IT REINVENTS US.

Professor Graffigna knows that everything is constantly changing and evolving. Her research tracked those psychological parameters that capture people's changing moods, concerns, and emotions. She believes that behaviours are the tip of the iceberg, its root is deeper and larger, made up of often unconscious and irrational motivations and feelings, and these are the drivers of our behaviour.



Guendalina Graffigna is a Full Professor at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore where she currently teaches "Consumer Food Psychology," "Qualitative Methodology" and "Psychology for Social Marketing." Professor Graffigna is Director of the Research Center "EngageMinds Hub: Consumer & Health Research Center" and is a member of the Coordination Committee of the PhD School in Psychology.

Before her current appointments, Guendalina has been a Post Doc fellow (A.A. 2007-2008) and visiting professor in Qualitative Methods (A.A. 2008-2009) at the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, the University of Alberta, with which she still collaborates for several research and teaching initiatives.

Furthermore, she is currently Director of the Study and Training Centre of ASSIRM (Italian Association of Marketing Research Institutes) and Scientific Director of COPE (Consortium for PATIENT ENGAGEMENT)

Her research and scientific activities are mainly devoted to patient engagement in health and wellbeing, consumer health psychology, healthcare organisation innovation and eHealth. She has spent the last ten years of activity in constructing bridges between scientific/academic knowledge and professional practice. In 2014 she validated the PATIENT HEALTH ENGAGEMENT Scale: the first measure of the patients' psychological experience of engagement in chronic care management, which is now widely adopted by healthcare and research organizations worldwide.

She counts more than one hundred scientific publications and according to the international scientific database Scopus, she is the most productive scholar in the domain of PATIENT ENGAGEMENT.

## CAN YOU PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN CREMONA FOOD LAB, ON PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO HANDLE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON A PSYCHOLOGICAL LEVEL?

The research group started five days after the first patient was identified in Codogno, February 2020. We launched a monitoring programme which is now in its fourth edition: the first began at the start of the pandemic, then there was one at the beginning of phase two just before the reopening of the schools, and the last edition was before the winter holidays, December 2020. We are monitoring people's concerns and sense of vulnerability for the health and economic situation connected to COVID-19 (that is, the repercussions in terms of prevention but also in terms of trust and optimism for the personal and national economic situation). We are evaluating two kinds of repercussions that affect people's behaviour: prevention (how Italians are proactive, active and adhering to safety measures), and food (how and to what extent nutrition is impacted by the pandemic, being the crossroads between personal and economic observation).

We have carried out another study recently, which relates to the concerns of the vaccination, as the vaccine is another element that will become a historical turning point for the pandemic. Below is a summary of some facts:

- Italians continue to be concerned about the health situation and vulnerability to the virus, as well as for the economic condition, regardless of their purchasing power and economic status.
- The level of engagement decreases (that is, the perception of being the key player of prevention), and of self-efficacy in preventing infection (that is, the capacity of being able to change things).
- The general population suffers from pandemic fatigue caused by very strong emotional stressors. There is a general sense of uncertainty that demolishes the traditional anchors that usually help to envision the future and organise behaviours. There is a general frustration due to the lack of control over the situation. From a health point of view, the situation is worrying. We make behavioural insight and intelligence based on the dynamics related to health issues as well as from a nutritional point of view. Seeing this constant state of emotional strain on the one hand, which is leading to psychological symptoms (we already have data on anxious-depressive symptoms and burnout), and on the other hand, the decreased sense of being able to resolve a personal issue, put at stake all the preventive measures. We believe that the only strategy to manage the pandemic is to manage our behaviour, how we decide to react to the situation. As Health Psychologists, we think that there has been little use of behavioural insights by authorities and institutions. There is a need to carry out listening activities to better target the support measures. If people suffer from fatigue, frustration or burnout, there is no need to continuously pinpoint Italians by saying they are irresponsible because they crowd the shops or do not follow the rules, Italians are tired. There should be a better balance between the "carrot and stick."



## HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES SINCE THE FIRST EVALUATION?

Everything is constantly changing and evolving. We have psychological parameters that try to capture people's changing moods, concerns, and emotions. We believe that behaviours are the tip of the iceberg, its root is deeper and larger, made up of often unconscious and irrational motivations and feelings, they are the drivers of our behaviour. It is obvious to psychologists as to why the "Immuni contact-tracing app" has not been popular whilst many more people downloaded the "IO" app. IO has been considered a profit, that is, you receive a certain percentage of your expenses. Immuni on the other hand has been proposed as a tool for tracing the spread of the virus and therefore perceived as a limit of freedom. As psychologists, we know that a loss from the psychological point of view weighs more than a gain, even if it is of an equal amount. We prefer not to lose 100 euros than gain 150. We cannot be surprised by this behaviour, nor can we be satisfied with the reasons people give for privacy. Privacy issues are still there even if I monitor what I spend. Immuni would have worked differently, if only it had been communicated as gaining something (health or freedom), even if it is something you cannot touch, but something that you could evaluate and measure.





**A QUOTE FROM SOLE24ORE READ: “THE YOUNGER AND MORE CULTURALLY EVOLVED GROUPS OF THE POPULATION DO NOT REACT POSITIVELY TO TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION APPROACHES THAT LEVERAGE THE SENSE OF FEAR.” WHAT CHANGES SHOULD WE MAKE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A MORE EXTENSIVE COLLABORATION AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS? WE AS A UNIVERSITY ADDRESS THAT SAME SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION (YOUNG AND CULTURALLY DRIVEN PEOPLE). HOW CAN WE BEST APPROACH THEM?**

Fear works only in the short term. At the beginning of the pandemic, March 2020, the media emphasised fear so everyone was on the balconies singing and saying “everything will be okay,” but it only worked for a very short amount of time. Fear must also be properly weighed up, it must be realistic and manageable. All the studies on fear tell us how people process the emotional messages that are proposed by communication. If the fear is excessive and you do not feel you have the competence to handle it, we deny it or find strategies to protect ourselves. It is like smoking: many people continue to smoke, despite images of tumours on the package. Fear has to be measured, it is okay but just for a little while.

In general, irony and sarcasm work better with young people. However, in the long run, there should be an authentic, engaging, and participatory communication strategy. Largely young people have been on the hunt for the culprits of the spread of the virus. I think that this is evident through the unorthodox behaviour among young people. Our middle-aged adults are responsible for delivering convincing messages and setting examples. We have to stop pinpointing the younger generations who are already under attack: their traditional learning methods have been compromised and their social life has been limited. I think the middle generation is to blame for their reactions, and although as parents this is difficult, we must reassure young people, trust them, and give them a future to look forward to. Young people are more resilient and creative than us, they are more mature than we think so let's treat them like this and value their resources. Let's aim to plan what the world will be like post-COVID-19 rather than linger here with uncertainty and fear.

**THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL AND POSITIVE MESSAGE. NOT ONLY TO FOSSILISE ON WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING BUT TO LOOK TOWARDS THE FUTURE AS SOMETHING WE CAN DESIGN TOGETHER WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS.**

I believe there is an obligation to plan their future differently. Being forced to stop our “normal” lifestyle means using that time to stimulate creativity to invent a better future. Instead, we are only penalising young people and blocking them, but this trust must be instilled by the middle generation.

**“IN GENERAL, IRONY AND SARCASM WORK BETTER WITH YOUNG PEOPLE.”**

**“LET’S AIM TO PLAN WHAT THE WORLD WILL BE LIKE POST-COVID-19.”**

**“THE VALUE OF TEACHING DOES NOT DEPEND ON ONLINE OR OFFLINE.”**



**CAN YOU PLEASE COMMENT ON UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE’S STRATEGY TO KEEP TEACHING FACE-TO-FACE AS LONG AS IT WAS POSSIBLE? HOW CAN WE RECONCILE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING WITH REMOTE WORK/STUDY, BEARING IN MIND THIS RESPONSE FROM CATTOLICA?**


We must stop making comparisons with what the world used to be like and will no longer be because this only limits our ability to make the most of this modality. The way of learning and teaching that we are experimenting and building together is different. It is neither better nor worse, it is just different. From my point of view, these months have been tiring but they have also opened very new and more effective ways to interact with students who have become notably less shy. With online learning, everyone is taking part, whereas in a physical classroom only students in the first two rows were interacting. I think it is different, and it is important to be able to understand what is good in all these elements of diversity without only focusing on what we have lost. What has changed is obvious, so let's think deeper.

We cannot say that everything is bad. I think those who did not approve of online teaching at the beginning of the pandemic have now changed their minds after seeing that some elements have turned out to be surprisingly positive. There is no doubt that the beauty of the campus, the social aspects, etc are lost for now. However, I can pay more attention to students when they are online, they do not have to wait in line outside my office to discuss their projects with me. We will see the effects of this new way of teaching and learning in a few years. What is important for now is to understand how a new medium can enhance the characteristics of teaching.

Young people are digital natives, they live and do everything online. They have several social media accounts and as a result, the education system can learn how to interact with new concepts in innovative ways. We must compensate for the physical and social aspects which are currently missing but they will surely return. Although I am overwhelmed, I must say that I have learnt to teach and create a bond with my students in a very different way. Overall, the students are happy with the quality of teaching in Cattolica. After all, the value of teaching does not depend on online or offline. You can have a humanistic approach even if you do not physically meet up with the students. Additionally, during this period we are even more exhausted because we are working with many international contacts. At Università Cattolica we are one step ahead, both in the scientific and the humanistic areas. Online does not stop us, it reinvents us. We discovered an extra string in our bow. When we come back in presence, we will have acquired this competence too.

**“I HAVE LEARNT TO TEACH AND CREATE A BOND WITH MY STUDENTS IN A VERY DIFFERENT WAY.”**





MEET THE EXPERTS

# BRING ON THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION!

Long before the COVID-19 outbreak, many Higher Education Institutions had ventured into the rising phenomenon of virtual learning. The pandemic caused an accelerated global shift to online education at an unprecedented rate, creating challenges and unforeseen opportunities. What are the common trends and impacts? Which inspiring institutions are setting the pace for a digitalised form of education?





# Lynnae Venaruzzo

**As Western Sydney University continues to implement its carefully managed four-stage return to campus plan, what course of actions have the professors taken to engage the students in online learning?**

Our experiences in 2020 with the rapid pivot to online delivery for courses that had previously had significant on-campus engagement have been valuable in shaping our future. At the heart of these plans is a curriculum that leverages technology to engage students in asynchronous and synchronous learning. A flipped learning strategy that promotes student-centred learning is the norm. We have student curriculum partners who have been instrumental in helping inform the design of Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate sessions to optimise student engagement in online learning modes. We are continuously expanding our provision of integrated data sets to inform learning design approaches, teaching practices and creating dashboards to help professors make data-informed decisions and plans. Our digital transformation has been further extended to include accessibility indicators of digital content and alternative assessments in place of traditional invigilated on-campus exams. Additionally, piloting new technologies to support students studying in practical based disciplines have also been put in place.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for higher education institutions. In fact, the 2021 timetable will provide dual delivery (a mix of face-to-face and digital learning). What has the reception of the academic staff been in delivering online classes at Western Sydney University?**

Western Sydney University's approach has truly been a partnership effort. From our student curriculum partners to our tutors, professors and senior academic leaders and the crucial professional staff in the curriculum, professional development, and IT; our successes and lessons learnt have been experienced together. There has been incredible professionalism, collegiality and an openness to share ideas, lessons learnt and experiences.

**How does Western Sydney University support the academic staff in their online classrooms?**

Western Sydney University offers a diverse programme of support for academics teaching online. There is professional development with online learning modules for self-paced education, workshop and seminar sessions that are faculty-based or open more broadly to the academic community. Our focus has also been on developing mechanisms for institutional conversations about teaching and learning, and involving more professors and teaching staff in the conversation with academic leaders, policymakers and technology and pedagogy specialists. We have created resources to support the varied skill base of professors to assist them in responding to their priorities and plans. One resource is the Online Engagement and Teaching Hub (available at: [lf.westernsydney.edu.au/engage/](https://lf.westernsydney.edu.au/engage/)). Another resource that supports academic staff in their classrooms is an interactive resource to increase student literacy in academic referencing. This is available at: [efquest.westernsydney.edu.au/](https://efquest.westernsydney.edu.au/)







# Keri Ramirez

**What global impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the number of international students wishing to enroll in Higher Education Institutions for the academic year 2020/2021? How have these numbers changed compared to the previous academic year?**

Like other countries, the Australian higher education sector is dealing with a period of uncertainty, complexity, and confusion unlike anything we have known before and one of the areas which have been seriously affected is the recruitment of international students.

After years of success in attracting international students, during 2020, the Australian university sector experienced its first drop in new enrolments in seven years. Preliminary figures from the Department of Education show that in 2020, the sector experienced a 23% decrease in new enrolments in comparison to 2019.

Some of the key markets such as China and India experienced the most significant decrease in new enrolments with a decline of 14% and 45% respectively.

Fortunately, the success from previous years in attracting international students provides an exceptionally larger number of international students who initially started their programme in 2018 or 2019 and continued their studies in 2020 helping to reduce the impact of COVID-19.

As a result, the total number of international total enrolments (new and continuing) decreased by only 4% in comparison to 2019.

**What standards did international students consider when enrolling for the 2020/2021 academic year?**

The story of 2020 for the Australian international education sector was quite different from other countries in the northern hemisphere. In Australia, the majority of international students started their programme in February 2020 just before the disruption of COVID-19. So for a large number of students starting their programme at an Australian university, their decision was based on pre-COVID-19.

However, we should note that there was a second group of students representing more than 52,000 international students who were affected by COVID-19 and started their programme after March 2020. For this second group of international students, the decision-making process was quite different and there were some factors which they considered in choosing Australia under the new environment created by the pandemic.

## a. A successful transfer to online education

Although the process managed by universities in order to pivot from face-to-face education to online was not perfect, there is now evidence which shows that student satisfaction remained high after universities transfer their programmes to an online mode. This gave reassurance to international applicants that the study experience via online channels was a good temporary measure considering the challenging time that the world is facing.

## b. Flexibility

The higher education sector offered flexible study options to support the experience of international students. For example, students were allowed to take a lower study load if necessary and many universities created a more flexible academic year with different entry points for international students.

The Australian Government also implemented a more flexible approach and offered international students (located either within or outside of Australia) access to Post Study Work rights after completing their programme.

**The COVID-19 pandemic made it challenging for international students to complete the administrative procedures necessary to enrol in a Higher Education Institution. How did some countries modify or adapt their enrolment and admission procedures?**

Interestingly, the overall admission process within the higher education sector did not change significantly and this created a favourable level of certainty for applicants, their families and education agents. Australia has a great tradition of utilising online channels to facilitate the admission and enrolment process for international students and this assisted universities to face the challenges experienced in 2020.





# Dr Luz M. Longsworth

## How did The University of the West Indies advocate online learning before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The University of the West Indies is a federal University, so it serves seventeen different nations in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The University has always done distance education because of our geographic spread. The traditional form of distance education started out of necessity because we are all separated by water.

When the University was first founded in Jamaica, in 1948, there were already small nodes of the University in different countries of the contributing countries in the English-speaking Caribbean. The University always had the mission of serving all the people in the Caribbean, so we started with the Extra-Mural Department, which taught short courses focused on adult learning, and through that, we have developed physical locations in sixteen of the seventeen countries.

In the late 1970s/early 80s we started to experiment with technologically enhanced distance learning using a teleconferencing system, whereby each island had a teleconference room and lectures were synchronously broadcast through telephone lines.

In the early 90s, we started experimenting with online learning. We began a project called The UWI Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE), which was then transformed into the University of the West Indies Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC) and from these we started with two blended degrees. Those projects merged into what is now known as the Open Campus which started in 2008 but has a legacy since 1948. We now offer 100 degrees online. We have over 8,000 students per semester who study fully online. We have had thousands of graduates who have never been to a physical campus.

Long before COVID-19, we recognised inequities that existed in the region in terms of not all people having access to the Internet. We have a model of sites in place – what I call “the social justice model,” with about forty-four sites across the region that provide internet access, study space, staffing, as well as library space to our students in the region.

## How did the Institution manage the transition and deal with any challenges to online learning since the COVID-19 outbreak?

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the degrees offered through the Open Campus were already fully online, requiring very little physical teaching, whereas 90% of the degrees at the other four campuses had a face-to-face presence. The Open Campus has the task of developing online degrees for our colleague campuses.

The physical campuses, which account for about 40,000 students across four campuses had to go into rapid online emergency remote teaching. In the case of our University, the Open Campus was able to support the physical campuses in that move.

As the Open Campus, we also led the way in developing new assessment methodologies. Students were unable to take physical examinations, so we had to develop assessments that could be done online.

We had an amazing response. The Open Campus, being online, had no disruption. The benefit of having those years of experience in teaching remotely was that we were able to pivot our whole University very quickly into this remote teaching modality, which many of the professors in the physical campuses were quite alien to. In three weeks, we helped train over 1,000 faculty members, which meant that we were able to reopen within two to three weeks of the closure, and we did not lose any students, and most of the faculty were quite amazed at how interactive their classes were.

Those staff members who had never really taught in this way before had to learn how to navigate this modality very quickly. Of course, some of the faculty had instant resistance to this way of teaching, and indeed some things were difficult to put online, for example for our clinical medical students.

We are now getting some concerns about staff exhaustion and the challenges of working from home. Questions are arising about what the University should provide in order to make this space conducive to a productive teaching and learning environment.

In the Open Campus we had to do quite a lot of student engagement to hear what their difficulties were, much of which were not with the learning and teaching environment, as their classes were not disrupted, but with what was happening in their own countries, including the loss of jobs by many of our working students, and because of this, we opened an online counselling service.

With all this, our student retention has been higher, we have had a 9% increase in applications for the online programmes.

## Students have been forced to adjust to these changes. How has online learning bridged the digital divide?

We have students who don't have easy access to the internet, or a suitable device and we had to find a way to deal with that.

Most of the student issues were economic. Firstly, access to the Internet at a reasonable rate, and secondly, whether you had a device. We did a region-wide audit to see which students needed devices and which ones needed internet access and we got funding from the Caribbean Development Bank to provide those. We also worked with the telecommunications providers to zero-rate our IP addresses. This was part of the Telecommunications and the Ministries of Education's contribution to the crisis. We've gotten better packages for our students and the governments of the region have also ramped up their public access to Wi-Fi in community centres.

Initially, there were also concerns about not doing the traditional sit-down examinations, but the students have taken quite well to the online assessment process because they find it less stressful.

Another major issue with the students attending the physical campuses and the Open Campus students who were used to meeting at the sites is that lack of community. To respond to this, we did a lot of online engagement with the students. The

Student Associations put together study sessions, concerts, and webinars, to keep the students talking to each other online.

## COVID-19 pandemic changed the value of online learning compared to face-to-face learning. How has The University of the West Indies maintained the same quality of teaching since the beginning of the pandemic?

Given that we were an official Open Campus, one of the things that we had established was a framework of policies that guide online and distance teaching. The same processes used for quality assurance for our physical Campus programmes are the same that we use for our online programmes. The only thing that's different is the modality, the lecturers must be trained, they can't just jump in front of a camera and start teaching. Now we have been moving into phase two of training because most of the faculty now recognise that they must do some amount of asynchronous engagement with the students through different methodologies. All changes had to be centrally approved by our Academic Boards. If changes had to be made, they were piloted, usually by the Open Campus and then rolled out in the other campuses.

We developed a coordinating team that had representations from every campus which was headed by our central office of online learning. They were the ones that did all the surveys to see how students were responding and giving feedback to our various boards and faculties.

There was this perception which the Open Campus had to fight that because you were online, you were inferior. During the summer months, the physical campus students did their courses with the Open Campus. So, there was no summer school at the physical campuses because of COVID-19 and the feedback was that they have found it to be much more rigorous. The myth that doing a programme online was easier and somehow less rigorous than a physical campus has been very quickly dispelled, even among our own faculty, because they now understand the rigour of developing an online programme, you must be so much more rigorous than when you are teaching face-to-face. They are just now understanding the real quality that must go into an online programme that's done well from the faculty than the face-to-face environment.

A University like The University of the West Indies spared no effort to make sure that we moved forward because it was one way of bridging the economic divide with those students who could travel to a University versus those who couldn't, hence we developed a strength which was the way of the future, and in fact, our campus tagline formed in 2008 was “A campus for the times, a campus for the future,” because we who are in education and looking at the future could see the importance of this. This is still relevant even more so now, because we still don't know what's going to happen. Universities may never go back to being fully physical. We must look at how we use the technology now to make it more engaging and to make it an experience that really delivers the purpose of higher education, for example, through artificial intelligence and augmented reality, all those tools are now very important looking down the road for the new University.



# A Week in the Life of...

Caterina Masseroli

Donato Villani

Francesca Sada

Xinyan Wang

Take a sneak peek at the life of four students at the time of virtual learning and remote working. From Milan to China, from Coventry to California, follow us while we learn about their challenges and achievements.



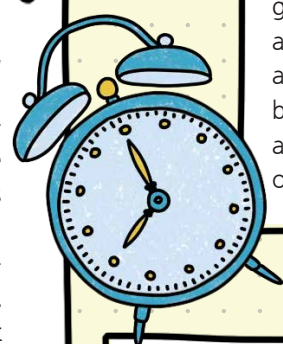
# Caterina Masseroli

"The journey of learning a language lies in its application."



In Caterina Masseroli's belief, the journey of learning a language lies in its application, the way one fluently and accurately speaks it, noticeable confidence in their self-expression through the syntax, vocabulary and nuances. When she won the Erasmus scholarship from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, she found herself immersed in her philosophy as she travelled to Coventry in the United Kingdom to study for a semester at **Coventry University**. Caterina, now in the third year of a bachelor's degree in Languages and International Relations at Università Cattolica, has not only opted to study the course credits, but also to prioritise her penchant for languages, international studies, and cross-cultural experiences.

From September to December 2020, the first leg of her scholarship and study, she moved to Coventry, a metropolitan borough of West Midlands in England, with the hopes of attending the classes on-campus. Drawn from the safety measures declared by the state, her classes had been streamed online and recorded. She lived in the University's accommodation along with two Spanish housemates. As a morning person, she would wake up at eight to make the most out of her Coventry excursion and study. Although going on-campus refrained her from attending the classes, she was free to roam around the picturesque streets of Coventry, the fuel that boosted her morale with online learning.



In the morning, she and her housemates would gather in the dining room, bringing over their laptops and books to study together. While they often huddled in peace, other times they interrupted the silence to ask questions, hoping some of them knew the answer and allowed others to pitch in their insights. In the afternoon, in dire need of refreshments and fresh air, she would go out with her newfound friends, stroll around the neighbourhood, share stories over cups of coffee whenever the shops opened, and spend the rest of the day outside, basking under the snow or the occasional glint of the sun. In the evening, to recharge after a long walk while retaining the frenzy of fun among them, she would play console games or binge over TV shows, throwing in their comments as the game failed or the plot unravelled and lazing on the sofa in their shared living room.



Caterina had abundant spare time in the first three months of her studies as she had two subjects to attend or stream online. On Mondays, her class on **Writing with Style** started at four in the afternoon and lasted for an hour and a half, while on Fridays, she joined the online calls for **Advanced Writing Skills** at noon for an hour and a half. "I have always loved writing. These courses improved my skills in writing, taught me what I needed to know about prose, and reviews about the grammar used in writing. I had to use English at all times in speaking my thoughts, writing about a given topic, listening to the lessons and clips, and answering the questions. Sometimes, the professor would divide us into groups before putting us in separate virtual rooms. We would have to talk with our groupmates and brainstorm on what to present and our answers before the timer stopped. Other times, we had to analyse the chapters of the book we were reading at the time, decoding the whats, whys, and hows of the story."



During the **winter break**, Caterina flew back to Italy to spend her holidays with her loved ones. After a restful break, she was back on track with her studies, but not in Coventry as the lockdown in the United Kingdom prevented her from going back. She welcomed the entrance of a new semester via online classes from her home in Milan, Italy, coinciding with her **Spanish class** at Università Cattolica. "My lessons have been recorded and uploaded online, and this method offers flexibility for me since I can play and pause the videos in case I have missed a theory or two. Last year, at the onset of the pandemic and moving classes online, the new way of teaching was quite challenging to follow. The professors could not see you, depending on the bandwidth, and some of us felt more pressured to turn on our microphone and camera to answer the question. With the option of recorded lessons, the pressure lightens and it gives us more time on how to approach our studies."



A clutter-free study space soothes her mind when she studies. Her desk consists of books and a few framed photos of her friends and family, the orderliness of her space reflects that of her mind. One of those pictures is a group shot with her friends in Milan which they had taken the summer before she left for Coventry, the background entails a landscape in Tuscany. Her tidy study space and the collection of photographs become her source of motivation to continue studying online with Università Cattolica and Coventry University. Caterina looks on the bright side whenever she encounters technical difficulties or a drop in motivation, turning to engaging topics in what she reads and, as much as possible, studying with her friends as her source of recharging her batteries. "When I do not like what I am doing, I try to do it with someone who does, allowing them to influence my drive positively. At the same time, when I find the energy in what I do, I love to share it with other people. During the lockdown, I try not to study alone but with friends, both in Milan and Coventry where I am lucky enough to know people who have the same perception."

"When I find the energy in what I do, I love to share it with other people."



Università Cattolica offers a range of choices for students who seek international experiences in study, internship, volunteering and work. For Caterina, it is an opportunity not to be missed. "It has been a great experience not only in improving my language command in English but stepping out of my comfort zone as I live far from my family and within an international group. I have met a lot of people undergoing the same programme or experience and we are sharing tons of stories about our best and worst moments, creating memories far more meaningful than studying alone." In her words, if such an opportunity presents itself at the doorstep, there is no other option but to say "yes."

For the second semester, Caterina Masseroli pores over **Language and Globalization, Economics, and Humanitarian Intervention and Peacekeeping** with Coventry University while continuing her studies in Spanish with Università Cattolica. Although the classes in Coventry are still online, she hopes for the glint of the possibility that they will be delivered on-campus, as planned before she had gone to the borough in the first semester. While waiting for the official announcement of the University, she readies herself for the waves of upcoming exams. In the meantime, she opens the front door of the apartment she shares with two Spanish ladies in Coventry, her luggage in tow, ruminating with excitement over which stories about Milan and her holidays she will tell.





# Donato Villani



The moka pot on the stovetop churns out black coffee until it brims out of the lid. He turns the fire off and pours the black liquid into his mug. In bare feet, he strolls to his workspace set up in the living room and sits on his cushioned chair. On his two-monitor screen, his Zoom loads up as the professor lets him in the meeting. "Please turn on your cameras," the professor says. He sees his eighty classmates in jackets, suits, and pyjamas and against a morning, afternoon, evening, and midnight backdrop. He sips from his cup, welcoming the bitter flavour that wakes him up from his stupor. Dressed in his pyjamas, Donato Villani plugs his earphones in and attends his class at ten-thirty in the evening.

Donato studies his master's degree in **Direction and Corporate Consultancy in Economics** at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. The blended-learning course offers him leeway to work on weekdays and he attends his classes on weekends. His face-to-face classes turned online following COVID-19 safety regulations in Italy. While online classes appear daunting to many, Donato enjoys the flexibility it affords his schedule.



Through Università Cattolica, Donato enrolled in the eight-week summer programme with **Stanford University** to earn his course credits in **Technology Entrepreneurship**. Since the acclaimed University in the United States positions in the Pacific Standard Time (PST) zone, this equates to classes starting at ten in the evening in Donato's Central European Time (CET). "When I thought of taking up the programme, I wondered if I would have enough time to attend the classes since I had been working nine or ten hours per day. But I asked myself if I would not enrol at that time, then when?" he shares. During the course, he worked on a team, developed business ideas and projects, presented them before a pool of investors, and helped transform their master plans into a company. With the varying time zones, his team was in, they drafted an agenda for everyone to follow. Ever since he enrolled in the summer programme, his weekly schedule had changed.

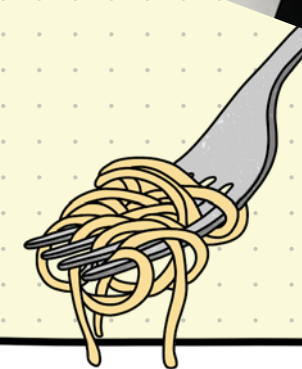


On Mondays and Wednesdays, he would wake up at six in the morning to hit the gym. The damp air colluded with the treadmills, bench presses, and weight lifts. As he moved from one station to another, he burned his calories and upped his energy intake through exercise. A quick shower and a shot of protein shake later, he was back at home by eight in the morning to work. He fired at making and answering calls, hopping on video meetings, checking up on his team, and keeping tabs on the incoming and outgoing orders of custom meals. The flash of time struck and the sunset dawned. At seven in the evening, he hibernated his computer and cooked his dinner. "No carbohydrates in the evening, so I opt for protein. Either chicken or meat," he says. With three hours to kill, Donato and his partner shared how their days went, scrolled his screen up and down to check the recent news on social media, and browsed movies and TV shows to watch on the television screen. He stayed awake, dismissing the option of a nap time. A few minutes before his evening class started, he brewed his coffee. "It keeps me awake," he says. Sometimes he sipped it slowly, sometimes he downed it, and both times its bitter bite charged his body and mind. The lesson commenced. He was ready.

While studying for the master's degree and summer programme, Donato also works as the **Chief Operating Officer at Feat Food**, a food-tech company based in Milan that prepares and delivers custom meals across Italy, where he supervises a team of nine, and guarantees received and delivered orders, high customer satisfaction rates, and transparent communication among them to name a few. He juggles various activities for these three sections of his lifestyle plus his newfound penchant for baking and cooking and his habit of going to the gym or running as an exercise. Regardless of what seems a loaded schedule, Donato breezes through each task, taking concrete actions to see through every activity.



He went to bed at one in the morning and woke up past his usual work hour. **Tuesdays and Thursdays** differed from Mondays and Wednesdays. No gym or jog in the morning. A serving of fruit jump-started his breakfast. He ruffled his hair, zipped his jacket, rubbed his eyes, suppressed a yawn, and turned on his computer. His workday began at nine. A load of tasks popped up on his phone, apps, and on his desk. Incessant mouse-clicking, browser tab surfing, quick eye movements, scanning and skimming, huffs, and occasional scrunched eyebrows. At lunchtime, Donato ate at his desk, chewing on his pasta as he reviewed orders. After twenty minutes of eating, he was back to making calls. At seven in the evening, he stretched his arms and shoulders. He logged off from his computer and walked to his kitchen to cook dinner. No need to rush for evenings free from classes. At eleven, he turned off the bedroom light and went to bed.





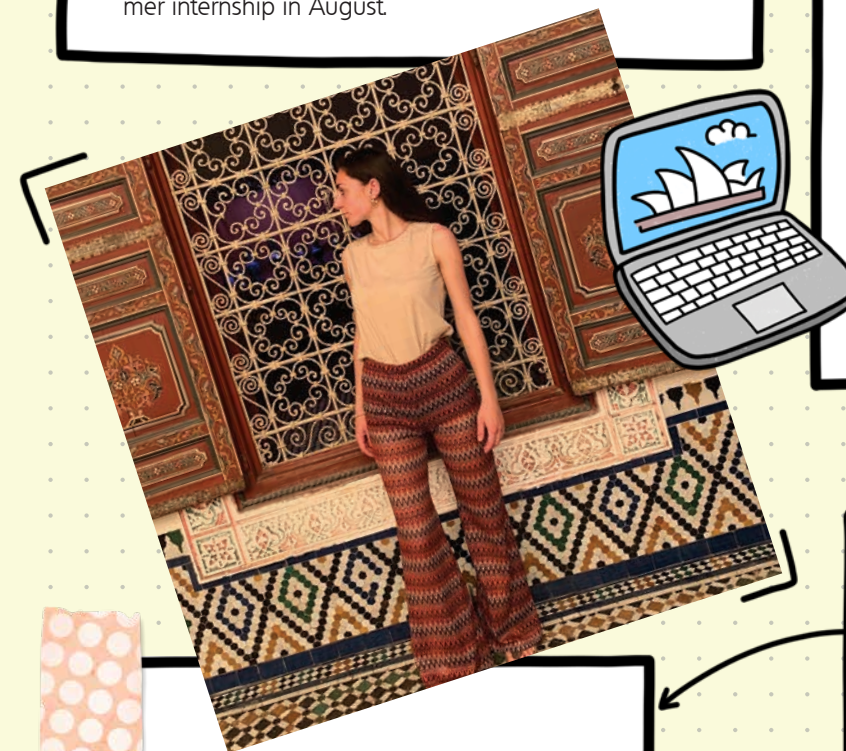
# Francesca Sada



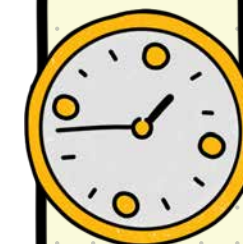
In May 2020, halfway through the overhaul of lectures online and workspaces at home, Francesca Sada toyed with the idea of gaining work experience abroad. Instead of opting for an Erasmus study programme where she could have experienced the international nuances of her studies, she went for an internship where she harnessed her work and professional skills before she could even graduate. When she discovered the offer of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore amidst the pandemic, she jumped at it, registered her interest for the December internship intake, and waited. A few weeks later, she envisioned a summer vacation at home, locked up with her parents and Scottish Terrier, and grabbed the opportunity to set aside her studies and focus on professional growth. Francesca tipped Università Cattolica that she would enlist for the summer internship in August.



Università Cattolica supported her decision and guided her internship selection that would best fit her career development and goals. Francesca secured a position at **Elite Woodhams Relocation**, Australia's leading corporate relocation services provider with consultants in the United Kingdom. It is a company that supports organisations in delivering relocation services to their employees to guarantee seamless work and personal environment transitions. While the internship was supposed to be in-person, the safety policies surrounding COVID-19 meant Francesca would go to work in Sydney, Australia via her laptop. She soaked in Università Cattolica's reminder and dove right at the opportunity without missing a beat.



The presence alone of Francesca's supervisor calmed her nerves, and she was even more sure that her tenure as a **Virtual Digital Intern** would experience a seamless flow when she guided her over the responsibilities and tasks she would require to carry out. Her supervisor acknowledged their distance in time and geography and put no pressure on Francesca when to turn in her assignments, a remark on quality versus quantity morals at play.



Having been her first work experience, the induction phase combined with a **virtual environment** was Francesca's learning curve. She could not shake their hands, chat about their day-to-day happenstances and mishaps over cups of coffee beside the vending machine or in the office kitchenette, or ask for help and collaborate over presentations and research real-time. She would be setting alarms on her asynchronous submission deadlines, calendar pings to remind her of meetings in two time zones, and relying on her resourcefulness to navigate through the daily grind she would receive. While her mind pondered on a million what-ifs in the next weeks, her assigned supervisor reassured her worries.



The alarm rang at six in the morning. After a good night's sleep, Donato pulled down the covers, walked to the kitchen, a lag in his steps, and debated over coffee or tea. He opted for the former. As he waited for the black liquid to emerge from the narrow nozzle in the moka pot, he skimmed through his schedule in his mind. **Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays** were dedicated to the last day at work and leisure activities at home. The moka pot whistled. He poured coffee in the mug and finished it off within a few minutes. On his desktop screen, placed orders arrived. He checked up on his team to ensure that the couriers would deliver the custom meals on time. He monitored the changes in system markers from in process to delivered and received. Since Fridays closed the work-week off, the underlying pressure over the five-in-the-afternoon deadline loomed, but Donato brushed it off as he worked seamlessly with his team.



After Donato wrapped up his summer programme with Stanford University, one might think he ticked off a goal on his list and continued studying for his master's degree and working for Feat Food, but he proved this hypothesis wrong. Instead, he co-founded **WeResQ**, an app that helps its users to minimise their food waste at home with his groupmates in the summer programme, establishing their final project into a full-time business. Acting as his second company, Donato oversees the Innovation and Business Development section, unleashing his future - and innovation-oriented vocation to grow the business through research and solutions to power-up food management. **On Wednesdays and Sundays** at seven in the evening, he virtually meets up with his team of six, who comes from various parts of the world including Mauritius, China, and Switzerland, to delegate tasks to fulfil within the week and discuss updates on their internal and external operations. The London-based company foresees an expansion in the future, and Donato eyes Italy as one of its upcoming global hubs.



To compensate for the weekday workload, Saturdays ushered in a drop-by at the supermarket to fill in his pantry with boxes of pasta, paper-based containers of flour, sugar, and salt, styrofoams of beef, chicken, pork, and turkey, trays of eggs, cans of tomatoes, tubs of mozzarella cheese, and herbs and spices that covered basil leaves, oregano, and thyme. "I allow myself for a serving of carbohydrates **on Saturday** evenings. Since the lockdown, I have been making my own pizza instead of the store-bought frozen ones or ordering out," says Donato. **On Sundays**, he spent his time reviewing the notes taken during his classes, re-watching the recorded videos of the lessons, and, as expected as it seemed, planning his schedule for the following week. By the time he hit the pillow, Donato had already broken down how much time he would spend and spare to work, study, cook, and go grocery shopping in the upcoming days.



Since his master's degree abided by a blended-learning format, Donato attended his synchronous and asynchronous classes on Fridays and Saturdays, granting him a feasible all-day work schedule for Feat Food and WeResQ during the other days. "It may also change depending on whether or not Università Cattolica would host a webinar, which happened every other Monday or Tuesday," he says. With the setting he finds himself in, he dedicates his Sundays to a full-immersion study. "And on Saturdays, my partner and I enjoy our own Saturday Pizza Night, so we make pizza from scratch," he adds. In the morning during his work week, he still wakes up at six, but not to hop on the treadmill. Since the closure of gyms, Donato turns to jogging and running as substitutes. At first, he could not complete a five-, ten-, or fifteen-kilometre run, but his dedication to upscale his speed, stamina, and strength has awarded him the ability to finish the five-kilometre distance. In his words, **"one step at a time."** The frenzy of bread-making has also invaded his kitchen. "We try new recipes every time like burger buns and wheat. Sometimes the bread comes out well, other times it lacks flavour or should have been kneaded more. We experiment until we get it right," he says.



The rhythmic taps on the keyboard echoes in his workspace. It might be for an assignment at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, an order for Feat Food, or a business update for WeResQ. Behind him, the door opens as his soon-to-be wife pokes her head in. "What are we eating for lunch?" No longer startled by the habit, he swivels away from the logged data of orders, rows of browser tabs, and piled-up emails in his inbox. He strolls into the kitchen with her in tow. The debate over pasta or pizza dies down as he snatches the box of *Penne* from the pantry while she takes out the chopping board and knife from the drawer. The water boils in the pot, the garlic and onion aroma drifts in the room, the lid of canned tomatoes is off, and the chopped basil leaves rest on a saucer plate. In time for his schedule break, Donato Villani cooks their custom meal.







"What I value the most are the insights and hands-on involvement in my tasks and duties."

"The time difference was challenging at first, but as I woke up at around seven-thirty during the week, I adapted to the changes. When I started the virtual internship, my supervisor and I found an appropriate time, around **seven to eight in the evening** her time (Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)) while around **eight to nine in the morning** my time (Central European Time (CET)), to meet via an online call for the weekly tasks. I would be given a workload that could last for a couple of days and if I had problems, I could just reach out to her messaging apps. This saved us time as I worked more on my assignments." During her days of meetings, Francesca would wear a blouse under a suit, her background displayed the wooden roof of her parent's bedroom in the attic, while she wears a plain shirt or a flowy top during update calls, the culture of working from home while retaining professionalism.

During her tenure, Francesca worked in two departments. In the **Marketing department**, she worked with the Branch Manager in London to curate the content for the website and blog. They brainstormed which information to include or deemed necessary that the transfers should know before turning them into texts and infographics. Part of her writing process was to study London and its facet, allowing herself to be more familiar with the space before collecting data that would support her content endeavours. One of the outputs foresaw a blog post about the top ten pubs in London, Francesca's in-depth research on the backstories of the bars to feed the transferees from other cities with guidance on how to navigate the city's nightlife.

After her stint in the Marketing department, Francesca moved into the **Business Development department**, testing her analytical, research and statistical skills, a core of her master's degree in Market and Business Strategies at Università Cattolica. She had to search the companies across the globe that were thinking of relocating or expanding their services and branches abroad, a task that took up over a month of her working hours. "For example, if an American company thought about expanding in Australia, I had to look into the information this company might want to know about Australia and whether Australia could cater to the business needs of this company. In my excel sheet, I had the name of the companies, where they are located in the present, where they wanted to relocate, and the name of the Human Resource contact of the company which would be used for inquiries and clarifications."

"When people relocate, they have to know the place rather than just being familiar with its surface. Some might also need to relocate their families, causing a total shift in the lifestyles. One of my responsibilities was to describe the nitty-gritty details that they had to know before they moved from the permits, currency rates and exchanges and airfares to apartment leases and rates, neighbourhood and checklists at the time of arrival. For example, the education system in London differs from other countries. The person relocating to the city might study or be with someone who will study, so to understand how the system works becomes a priority. I researched the steps in submitting an application, tuition fees to pay and courses offered to name a few. Since we live in the social media era, others might not have enough time to read the article. I created infographics based on the findings, writing captions to accompany the images making sure that each photo fits for a specific social media platform." She placed her **cross-cultural communication asset** into use as she conversed with both her supervisors in Australia and London, wrapping up the ticked-off activities from the list during their weekly meeting.



While the workload sounds daunting, Francesca savoured the learning curves, absorbed the knowledge she accumulated that she would not have learnt in class and produced outputs that echoed the theories and texts she had learnt in her course. Throughout her virtual internship, Università Cattolica checked in with Francesca to provide support and guidance in her endeavour, making sure that she was maximising her time and effort in the work experience she had set her eyes on. Her flexible schedule - she had to work for four hours per day and could spread out the working hours within the week - afforded her to stay in **Palermo** during the summer, at that time the lockdown restrictions had eased as declared by the national government, after she had informed her supervisors, bringing her laptop and duties with her while enjoying the bask of the sun and the sight of the seaside across her open window.

Without the virtual experience, she would not have discovered the potentials she had been nursing.

While the internship was not a requirement but an **extracurricular programme**, Francesca did not hesitate in deciding to do it virtually. Through the experience, she understood not only how the relocation services function but the operation of the business world far from the theories instilled in her mind by the textbooks she read in class. She acknowledged that had she had been in Sydney for the internship, her experience would have been the same aside from other features. "I think my supervisors would have understood my personality better and I could have grown my network as I would have been there in person, but learning how the market and business of relocation enterprises work would have been the same. What I value the most are the insights and hands-on involvement in my tasks and duties."

Taking a break from her summer, extracurricular internship, Francesca spent her free time collecting notes from what she had learnt during her time at her virtual internship with the relocation services company. She digested the experience, absorbing the newfound skills she harnessed and reflecting on how much she had changed as a student and as a professional. Yet during this period, Francesca knew she could not allow herself to stop. She had to move forward and put her experiences and skills back into use. To fulfil this mission, Francesca has been working as a **Sales Intern at Traditional Trade of Perfetti Van Melle** in Milan since mid-February, back in front of her laptop but also revelling the chance of going to the company's office on other days. It may be as part of her curricular internship, but she believes this venture goes beyond the continuation of learning and applying her skills as she puts herself out there, persisting against the boundaries of the pandemic while respecting the safety measures and powering her will to pursue a professional adventure.

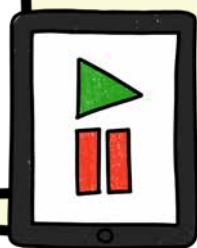
Francesca, a second-year student of the master's degree in **Market and Business Strategies**, focuses on her studies to wrap up her graduate programme. At times where she finds herself taking a short break from the online lessons, she and her supervisor in Australia exchange messages to check up on each other, talking about their work, lessons, family, vacation, the landscape before them during the conversation, whales in the sea, or about Charlie, Francesca's black Scottish Terrier. Università Cattolica had been a part of her journey through its offer of support and guidance to Francesca, and without the virtual experience, she would not have discovered the potentials she had been nursing.





# Xinyan Wang

Her shoulders sag for a moment before she breathes in and out, her eyelids shutting off. Spine straight, she greets her parents in the living room. She proceeds to her bedroom, drops her bag on her bed, changes her work clothes to pyjamas, and plays **the recorded lessons on her tablet**. She rests her head on the pillow with her tablet in hand. Before the video reaches halfway, Xinyan Wang dozes off.



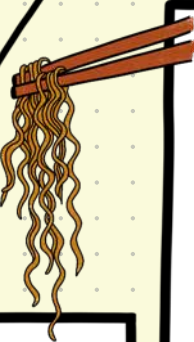
Xinyan studies **Methods and Topics in Arts Management (MaTAM)** at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. The two-year master's degree in English harnesses her international perspective on visual arts and performance management by fostering her abilities to analyse and curate an entrepreneurial mindset in the fields of arts, design, and management. "Arts management is a fairly new discipline in China," says Xinyan. "In China, although all public museums are funded by the government, small museums in small and medium-sized cities generally cannot obtain enough support to develop. After this course titled **Accounting and Fundraising in the Arts**, it piqued my interest in helping under-supported museums in China raise funds to continue their art curations, programmes, and endeavours, and to preserve the facets of China's history through art."



She developed her penchant for art management during the course, an in-person class in her first year of studies. She started at Università Cattolica in 2019, the unheard pandemic allowed the students to study on campus, before the online shift in early 2020. She attended her live and recorded lessons in her apartment, coming to terms with being locked under the safety regulations in Italy. Just when she thought she would wait for Milan to slowly return to normal, she received news that forced her to go **back to China** and leave the city she had grown to love.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Xinyan had to return to China in **July 2020**. She stayed with her parents for two months and prepared herself to fly back to Milan before the virtual lessons commenced again, but the news about the flight restrictions came in and she was barred from entering Italy. Not being in Milan for her live online lessons meant she had to adjust her body clock to suit the timetable, attending some of the courses from midnight to half-past two in the morning in her time zone. Apart from that, she took up an internship position at one of China's media giants as a **Junior Promotion Agent**, a role that shared a place in her daily schedule. While her new routine sounded daunting, Università Cattolica's virtual lessons allowed Xinyan to study in chunks and hours that suited her timetable.

On **Monday**, Xinyan welcomed the sunshine that filtered through the curtains of her bedroom windows with a warm smile amidst waking up at nine, changed her pyjamas into a flowy white top and black pants, greeted her parents on her way to the kitchen, and turned her gaze at her phone to read messages from her co-workers. She would take on the responsibilities of an actor's agent after an accident: drafting weekly schedules of the actors, contacting the press and media for conferences, and designing graphics for social media content to name a few. Packed with learning curves, she busied herself and looked up at the office clock. Six o'clock. Her workday was supposed to be over, but Xinyan had to cover for the agent's duties. She also had to attend the live lesson at Università Cattolica, so at nine pm, her energy flickering, but never dwindling, she prepared herself for her virtual live lesson. Before she entered the online room, her co-worker reminded her of a business presentation she had to present the following day. The initial panic set in, her energy experienced a caffeine spike, then she asked her co-worker to take on the research while she watched her virtual lesson on **Social Networks Theory and Analysis for the Cultural Sector**. Two hours after, she had taken notes and rushed to switch tabs to design the presentation.



On **Tuesday**, she postponed listening to the recorded lessons to finish off her workload in the office and went home at midnight. On **Wednesday** morning, her mind swam from lack of sleep, but it did not stop her from stretching her stiff muscles with a positive outlook for the day and trying to cure it with stir fry noodles for breakfast and gulps of water. In the office, good news came in. Her efforts afforded her menial tasks. Her eyes lit up as her supervisor broke the news. She watched her close the door, looked around the empty office, swivelled her chair to face her computer, and started watching her recorded lessons on **Urban Culture Studies and Social Networks**. Four hours later and with a mountain of coloured inks on her notebook, she stopped the video to clock out of the office after a day's work, right on time, for the first time.

Xinyan still had two more video lessons to watch. When her stomach grumbled on her way home, her face lit up as she craved garlic pork ribs from Miss Si's, a restaurant in her neighbourhood. The cashier recognised her right off the bat as soon as she glided inside. As a regular customer, the cashier only clarified if she would take home her favourite food. She nodded, grabbed the takeout bag, and strolled home. Her insides bubbled in excitement whilst she continued watching the video lessons while savouring the flavour of her garlic pork ribs. On **Thursday** morning, her workload piled up as she prepared graphics to post on a variety of social media platforms for a fan's meeting with one of the actors the company was managing, redesigning the size and look of each graphic to fit the platform's requirements and audience. She spent her night in the office, drinking cups of coffee while watching the city lights come alive outside of the office window. She missed her lessons on **Digital in the Art and Social Network Theory** and drafted her schedule to watch the recorded lessons on the weekend.



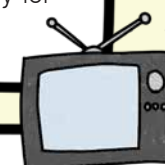
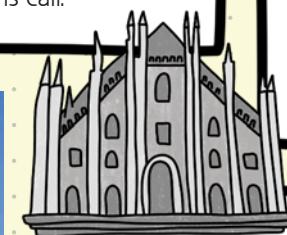
**January 2021** comes, the month of the exams. Xinyan is still in China, reviewing her notes for her virtual exams at Università Cattolica. "The exams are in oral and written forms. Last semester, the test setting for Law in Arts changed since our Professor had to adapt the questions to online formats. The system would have failed if each of us had turned on our camera, so she had told us to submit a research paper and answer the multiple-choice questions of the exam in twenty minutes," says Xinyan, her sunshine personality shears through the Teams call.



At the crack of dawn on **Friday**, Xinyan waited for her supervisor to come to the office after pulling an all-nighter, monitoring the global feedback of the audience over the fan's meeting posts on social media platforms. After a thumbs-up, her supervisor told her she could go home at noon, but tasks from other departments flocked her way. After five cups of coffee, she finished them all until six in the evening. At home, she tried to finish the recorded lessons on Digital Art and Social Network, but her eyelids shut midway and fell asleep. She started her weekend with stir-fry noodles for breakfast on **Saturday**, her fuel to get her going for the rest of the period. She jumped at watching the remaining minutes and videos of Visual Art and Social Networks, spending two hours per each subject to afford spare time in the evening. On **Sunday**, she lazed about at home, free from social media posts and recorded and live lessons at Università Cattolica, just recharging after a burnout week.



To absorb the keynotes for the exams, Xinyan dedicates seven to **ten days of review per subject**. When she is uncertain of the information she has in her notes, she turns to the recorded lessons to cross-check the explanations and details of the theories and terminologies. "For example, I have ten lessons in Digital Art. I study two lessons each day and cross-check the notes in the next three days before skimming through the overall notes for one or two days," she says. She reviews in the morning and afternoon while taking short breaks after a couple of hours to refresh, and she spends her evenings with her family, watching movies or TV shows to relax her strained mind. "I always start studying at half-past nine and set the alarm every forty-five minutes to pause," she adds.



When Xinyan Wang studies, she positions herself at her desk in her bedroom, her unmatched place of comfort at home. On her desk, her laptop is pushed against the wall to provide a space for her notebooks, coloured pens and pencils and neon highlighters to echo her merry persona. To accompany her studies, a basket of snacks, a circle-shaped mirror, a bag of make-up, and a pile of books pepper across her table. One day while reviewing, a Moka designed with the Italian flag in the corner caught her attention while watching the videos. She had forgotten to bring it back to the kitchen but left it there as she reviewed it. It reminded her of Milan, the city she had grown fond of. While she waits for the next possible flight **from Zhengzhou to Milan**, she reminisces about her remarkable time in Milan and on the campus of Università Cattolica. In the meantime, her virtual classes with Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, seamless and flexible to her needs, escort her sigh of nostalgia along with her perseverance to bridge the distance in learning.



ALUMNI

# ARE YOU BRAVE ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO?

Determination. Passion. Action. Creativity. Empathy. How Sergio Pitrone turned a goal written on a random Post-it Note in two start-up businesses that challenge the status quo.



# ICAST

ICAST is the first online B2B platform dedicated to streamlining the recruiting process of models in the fashion market. It is a new tool that allows fashion professionals and creative industries to select the perfect model to represent their brands while simplifying the casting system from five days to five seconds, from hundreds of emails to one. In just over a year more than a hundred organisations and 55% of the Milanese modelling agencies took part in what they call the Casting Revolution. > [icastingmodeling.com](http://icastingmodeling.com)



## VERTUMN

Vertumn is a young Communication Consultancy Agency based in Milan with a network of global clients. Vertumn's staff includes analysts, marketers, photographers, Instagram growth hackers and content creators. Vertumn's Mission is to provide companies with consulting services and integrated solutions for the management of Digital Marketing and Statistical Data Analysis.

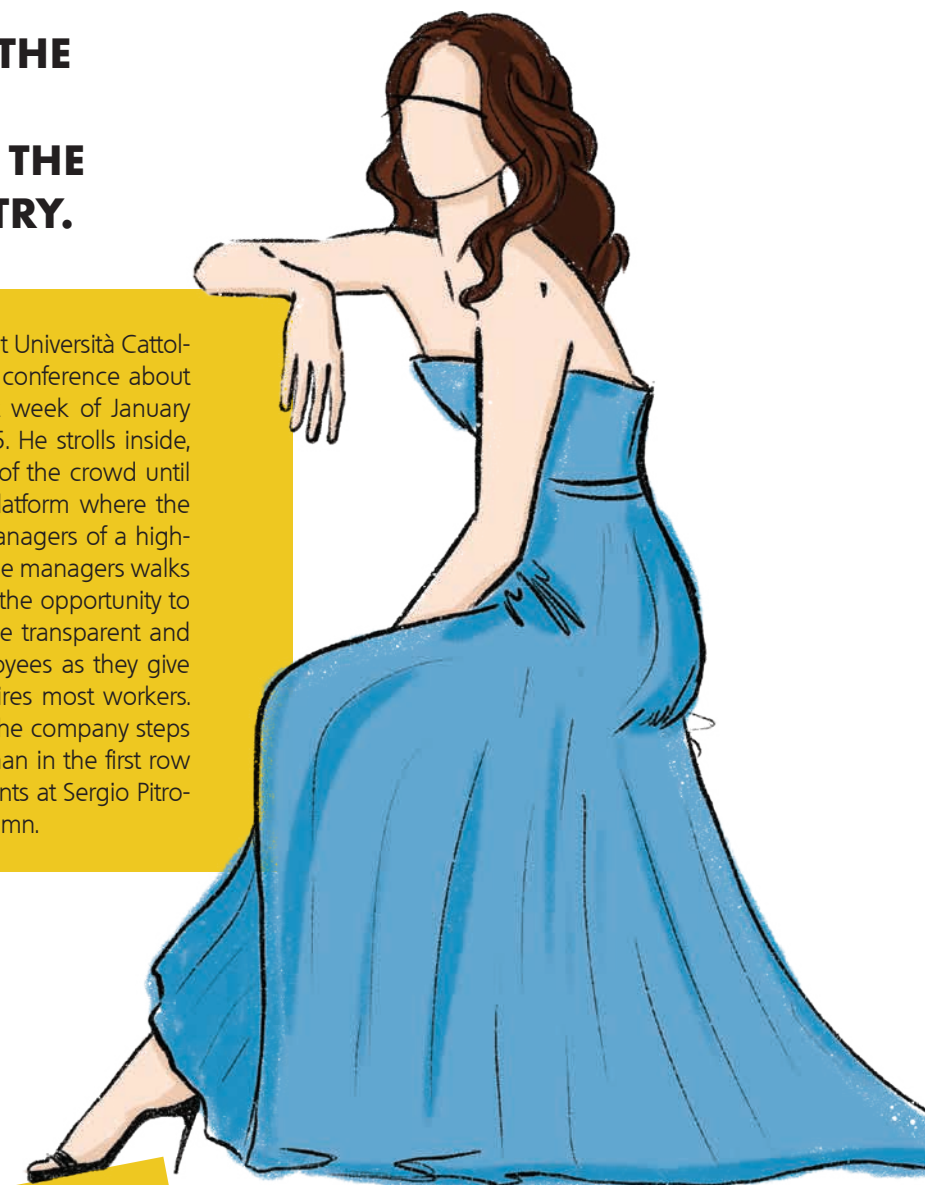


## HE RECOGNISED THE OLD-FASHIONED APPROACHES OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY.

Small talk and white noise fill the room at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the space for the conference about the fashion industry between the last week of January and the first week of February in 2015. He strolls inside, excusing himself to shear through the bustle of the crowd until he finds himself in the first row, across the platform where the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Executive Managers of a high-end fashion company position. When one of the managers walks down from the platform, his candid self-grabs the opportunity to tell the manager that their company fails to be transparent and clear in giving the "right rights" to their employees as they give most of the incentives to the manager who fires most workers. After the initial welcome remarks, the CEO of the company steps onto the podium and says, "I hope that this man in the first row would be more polite and nice to us." She points at Sergio Pitro, the student turned CEO of ICAST and Vertumn.

## "I STEPPED INTO THE GAME."

After his remarks and the conference, the CEO invites Sergio to her fashion company to work for the Events Management and Public Relations department. Sergio, who at the time was in his final year of the bachelor's degree in Management at Cattolica and searching for an internship, accepts the invitation and attends his first and last job interview. He patterns his thesis on the company's innovation programmes, the antithesis to his first insight. While doing his internship, he recognised the old-fashioned approaches of the fashion industry. The casting process has left an imprint on his memory. "The casting process allows you to select the 'right' person to endorse your company, the method campaigns use to employ a personality. It may last between five to fifteen days, or even more, for around 5,000 to 10,000 euros. Aside from the amount of time and money spent to select a few models, the people in line, hoping the company would choose them, have to wait for hours, days and weeks just to either receive a rejection or an offer. The humanness in the process and the dignity of the hopefuls decline, so I stepped into the game."



## THE CASTING PROCESS HAS LEFT AN IMPRINT ON HIS MEMORY.

The roots of his desire to tip the balance and be a trail-blazer pivot back in the school year 2010/2011 at Liceo Scientifico Giuseppe Seguenza in Messina, Italy. As a sixteen-year-old high school student, Sergio ran for the student council and found himself head-to-head with the other candidates. He devised his game plan, targeting the student voters as his market and involving the school staff to pursue his endeavour, and founded Seguenta, an academic agenda especially made for students, the first of its kind in Italy. Not only did the course of action carve a landslide win for Sergio, but he also discovered his penchant for originating projects that support communities instead of profiting from a business model and dismissing the workforce.



## HIS TIME, PASSION AND ENERGY EXPERIENCED RESTLESS DAYS.



After graduating from his bachelor's degree and a year of working as a staff member of the communications, public relations and events management department of the fashion company, Sergio left with brewed innovations in mind. As he walked outside of the office, a light hop in his steps, his forehead scrunched as he patched the overflowing ideas he had learnt during his tenure in the fashion company. He quizzed himself: how could he shorten the casting time, creating an efficient system and bond between the fashion company and the models? Sergio kept pondering, sometimes over a platter of lasagne, until he brought the idea into its foundation as he titled his master's degree thesis at Università Cattolica: "ICAST: From Idea to Business Plan."

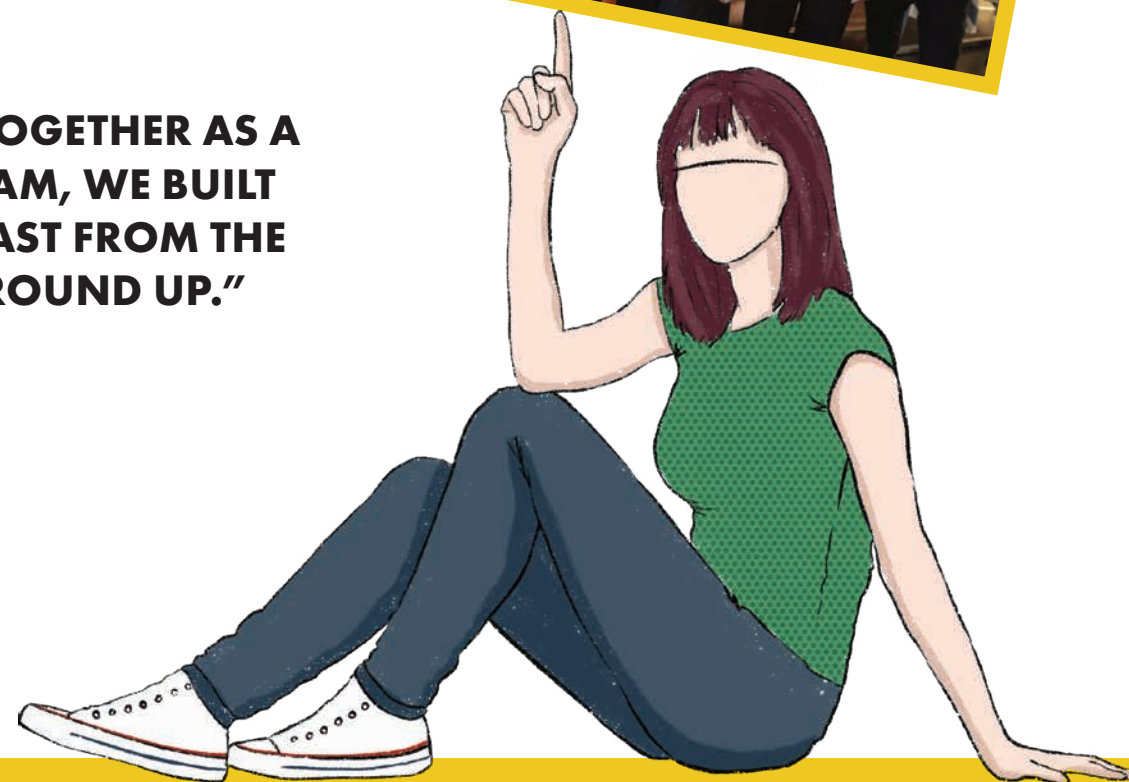
During and after graduating from his master's degree, Sergio poured himself over the creation of ICAST. His time, passion and energy experienced restless days from buzzing energy and almost sleepless nights from capturing the feasibility of fresh ideas. To test his drafts, he joined a start-up competition, battling against 77 projects and business models for funding and support to the winner. Murmurs clamoured over the thrumming energy in the room. Teams of aspiring entrepreneurs and founders rehashed summaries of the business models and solidified game plans in the presentation. At the far end of the room, Marco Pino, Sergio's co-creator of the academic planner *Seguenda* in high school, placed his hands in his pockets and stood in support of his long-time friend, a grin on his lips as the excitement poured out of him.

But the excitement died down during the announcement of the winner. After years of curating his plan to shorten the casting time, mastering his business model, writing a whole thesis as proof, and preparing for his presentation, Sergio came in at second place out of the 77 competitors. "I would rather come in last place than a runner-up. The panel told me that while my ideas had potential, I did not have a team to back me up in my endeavours. I was upset and it was one of the worst days of my life, if not the year. I went to a Sicilian pastry bar after the competition to console myself. I needed some time alone to reflect. There in that bar, I met Giulio Francesco Aiello."

Sergio told Giulio about the start-up competition. The moment he heard the catchphrase, Giulio's ears perked up and his joy and passion bubbled up. "Giulio had also established his own start-up company in London after creating and studying his plans for years. He told me that if I needed help, I could just ask him and he would be willing to offer advice and lend a hand." Then, Sergio talked about his thesis on ICAST Giulio paused for a while, the silence afforded some time to hear the chatter of the regulars in the bar and the honks of the cars passing by outside the shop, and he looked at Sergio. He encouraged him not to let his ideas remain on sheets of paper, as a thesis to present and nothing else. If Sergio needed a team, then he should build one. Sergio pursed his lips, a fleeting moment of pondering ensued, then he realised he was right. From then on, the birth of ICAST as a company commenced.



## "TOGETHER AS A TEAM, WE BUILT ICAST FROM THE GROUND UP."



From the comment of the panel, he should have his own team. Sergio asked Giulio to be his Chief Operating Officer (COO) for ICAST. When he agreed, Giulio asked Sergio to consider asking his long-time friend Marco to build the company. Sergio had revered Marco as a moral and business compass throughout his life, but he had second thoughts asking him to join ICAST for the thought his team perceived his decision as less meritocratic due to their decades of friendship. When Giulio opened up the topic, Sergio was on cloud nine, humbled by the question and drenched in excitement. Giulio became the link in forming the trinity of ICAST with Marco as its Chief Financial Officer. To complete the team, Sergio took in Giorgia Bravi to man the communications and public relations area of the business after her talent caught the team's attention while giving lectures in a class among the 140 students in the room. "She stood out as if there had not been anyone else in the room."

While the foundation had been grounded, Sergio faced another pitfall in his first phase of the business. Since the team did not have enough funding to pursue ICAST as a full-time company, they had to turn first to other resources and call upon their other skills to reap the rewards of ICAST. Marco was working at Deloitte at the time, saving up to throw in his fair share, while Sergio and Giulio founded another company under their belt:

Vertumn. In Greek Mythology, *Vertumnus* is the god of metamorphoses, seasons and changes, and growth. In Giulio and Sergio's business, such prospects reflect the philosophy of their communications and media agency, evoking their prowess in employing creativity and efficient management in communication and its industry.

Vertumn relies on the ethics "analysis meets creativity" as the group comprises analysts, marketers, designers, and content creators, supporting brands who intend to develop their own identity and communication to reach important market objectives through communication management, business analysis, design, technology, and marketing and startup services. Sergio and Giulio turn to Vertumn, their established company where they exude their skills in business, marketing and communications, to fuel the premises of ICAST. After accumulating enough funds, Sergio and Giulio prowled over the business and legal documents, signed and rifled sheets of documents, placed their holy grail, the thesis of ICAST, between them, and established ICAST in 2018, the fruition from brewed ideas into a concrete company.

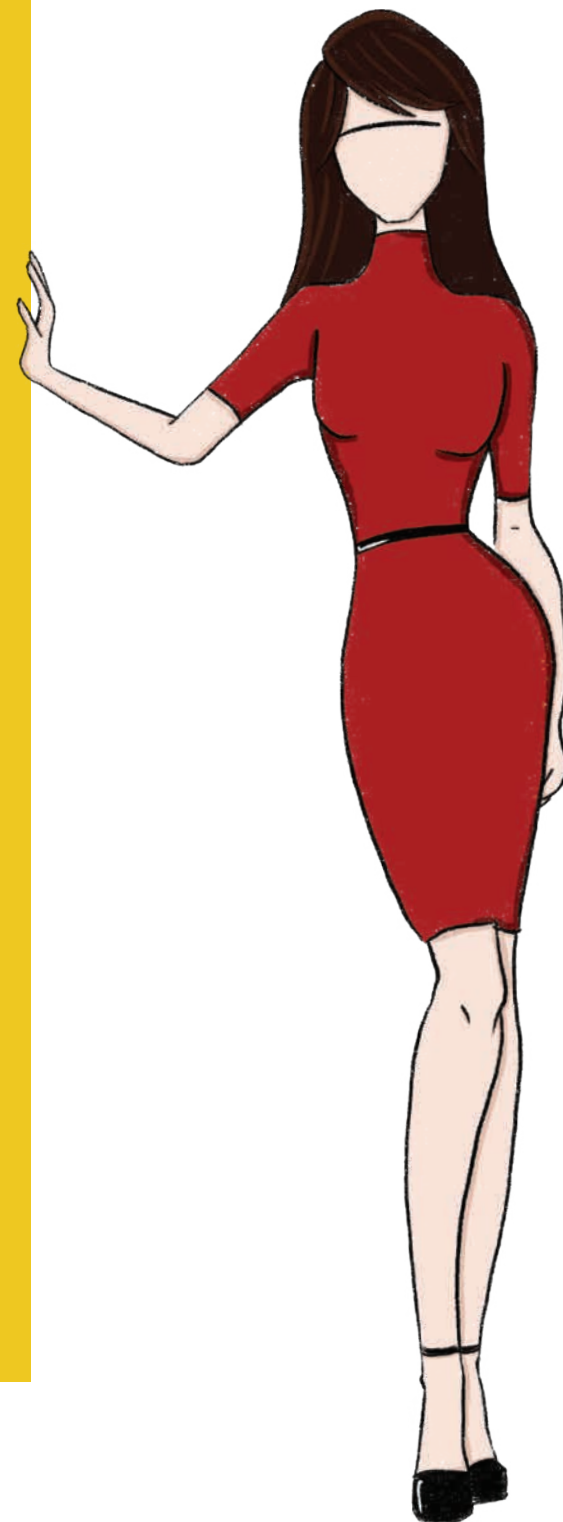
## ICAST: THE FRUITION FROM BREWED IDEAS INTO A CONCRETE COMPANY.



In Sergio's words, "ICAST is a casting management tool that simplifies the casting system from five days to five seconds, from hundreds of emails to one." It collaborates with modelling agencies, their bookers and over 5,000 talents and organises castings in a simple, fast and sustainable way to revolutionise the innovative and contemporary fashion world. "Our technology handles tons of casting systems as we collect all the offers and match the right talent for the representative looking for a model. What we envision is more time to live and less time to spend in the casting system since we are more worthy than waiting for days and weeks. At first, people told me ICAST would never work since we were about to destroy a tradition in the fashion industry, the old practice of casting systems. Now, we are working to bridge that fallacy and drive fashion communication to its best method."

**"OUR PERCEPTION LIES IN THE REFLECTION OF BEING HUMAN."**

To foster the founding philosophy he has been nursing in him, Sergio focuses on four missions to be of service to his audience: performance, agency, people and sustainability. "Our perception lies in the reflection of being a human. We strive to cut 75 per cent of your time, 50 per cent of your budget and improve 25 per cent of your well-being. The sum weighs to zero per cent paper resources, our value for performance. Agents are important figures in the fashion industry. I asked myself: is the fashion industry choosing freelance models because they are cheaper or because they are simpler in terms of contracts and obligations? For us, having agency-represented models on the platform is a source of trust, respect and protection towards young women and men who work as role models and who we believe need protection and support from their agents and agencies. We want to simplify the process to respect the people of this project including the agents, agencies and models. With that, we are a people-first company. You have to respect the people who are part of this technology and who back it up. Apart from that, we value the well-being of the individuals, eliciting smiles and positive energy as they tackle tasks. To complete our cycle, we focus on sustainability as well. It is no longer the future, but the present. I think everyone today can be smart enough to know that we have to respect the world we live in. We have finite sources, technology - and people's energy-wise, and we acknowledge their boundaries." To uphold the promise, Sergio and Giulio offered ICAST as pro bono during the first waves of the pandemic in 2020, embracing change as a process and progress. As a payback, ICAST collected 55 per cent of casting agencies across Italy six months after its launch.



**"WE ARE A PEOPLE-FIRST COMPANY."**

**"ONE OF THE MANY LESSONS I HAVE LEARNT AT UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA IS FINDING BEAUTY IN DIVERSITY."**

Throughout his endeavour of building ICAST from the ground up, Università Cattolica has covered his bases through ConLab, the coworking space of the University, a place dedicated exclusively to self-entrepreneurial activities, the project born within the University Innovation Center (ILAB) which aims to promote the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, exploiting new learning models and stimulating an interdisciplinary approach. Sergio owes his source of acceleration and inspiration to ConLab. If before he had had his meetings and meet-ups in bars and restaurants, jumping from drinking cups of espresso in one café to discussing new plans over plates of Sicilian pastries in another shop, ICAST and Vertumn now have a home that nestles in the University he studied at.

**"IF EVERYONE WOULD JUST LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT, THEY WOULD BE OPEN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES."**

"I never link Università Cattolica to skills as it is beyond this term. For example, ConLab is not a validation, but an opportunity to explore the depths and breadths of our abilities. Then, judgment in life hinders ambition. The absence of judgment should be a part of our culture. If everyone would just listen without judgment, they would be open to express themselves. From our standpoint, Università Cattolica has been the medium to express ourselves freely. At University, I lived in the space and present instead of learning, harnessing the absence of judgment and the ability to search and improve the traits people may find different. One of the many lessons I have learnt at Università Cattolica is finding beauty in diversity."



**"CATTOLICA HAS BEEN THE MEDIUM TO EXPRESS OURSELVES FREELY."**

The gloom of the grey clouds outside filters through his windows, illuminating the white, minimalistic design of his apartment. Four frames hang behind him, photographs of the artists he listens to and follow, while tools and equipment of technology scatter across the space, meshing with his private space. His peach jacket stands out against the modernist background as he narrates how in 2010, he wrote a phrase on a random Post-it Note that materialised: I will own two companies in ten years. The law of attraction manifested, allowing him to found two companies with ICAST catapulting his name in Forbes 30 Under 30 2020: Art & Style, that speak of his philosophies to humanise humans, and embarked him on a journey of research, process, trials and errors. In refusing to surrender his determination, Sergio Pitrone summoned the prowess of grit, carrying out his ideas on paper into concrete actions.



## ACHIEVEMENTS

# INSIDER NEWS

QS World University Rankings by Subject, a new European Project and Mario Draghi's appointment as Italian Prime Minister are some of the latest news.



### UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021 was published on March 3, 2021. Università Cattolica placed 14 subjects among the top 300 in the world or higher: Communication & Media Studies, Philosophy, Nursing, Modern Languages, Medicine, Psychology, and Law (101-150); Agriculture & Forestry, Accounting & Finance, and Economics & Econometrics (151-200); Linguistics, Sociology (201-250); Business & Management Studies, Education (251-300).

### MARIO DRAGHI NEWLY APPOINTED ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER

Mario Draghi, who as the head of the European Central Bank did "whatever it takes" to preserve the eurozone, accepted the post of Italian Prime Minister in early February 2021. In October 2019 he was awarded an honorary degree in Economics by Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. In his acceptance speech, he pointed out that knowledge, courage, and humility are the key factors, which make the choices and decisions of a good policymaker.



### THE GEMELLI HOSPITAL RANKED #1 IN ITALY

Università Cattolica Agostino Gemelli University Hospital is the best hospital in Italy and the top 50 worldwide based on the World's Best Hospital 2021 Ranking by Newsweek. The renowned magazine publishes the ranking each year in collaboration with Statista Inc.. The ranking analyses 2,000 hospitals across 25 countries and it takes into consideration the excellence for patient treatments, the number of well-known doctors, the quality of its nursing staff and the availability of innovative technologies.

### TOWARDS A EUROPEAN SPORTS DIPLOMACY (TES-D)

On January 27, 2021, Università Cattolica together with IRIS (France), which serves as the coordinating organisation, and ISCA (Denmark), Edge Hill University (United Kingdom), the National University of Physical Education of Sports (Romania), SOAS University of London (United Kingdom), UC Louvain, (Belgium), and the University Carlos III of Madrid (Spain) launched a new Erasmus+ Sports Project for the Development of a Sports Diplomacy for the European Union (EU). As the nexus between sport and diplomacy has gained strategic significance with the EU, TES-D aims to develop a set of policy recommendations for the establishment of a common sports diplomacy at the EU-level by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach and building upon existing foundations. It intends to create a network of relevant stakeholders while developing pilot actions in order to assess the feasibility and sustainability of an EU sports diplomacy policy, in addition to conducting empirical research on the very concept of sports diplomacy and existing sports diplomacies within all 27 members of the EU.



# WORLD BOUND



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No. 6

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MyCattolica



# A Journey of 100 Years.

1921 — 2021  
UN SECOLO  
DI STORIA  
D'AVANTI A NOI



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The 100<sup>th</sup> Academic Year at Università Cattolica officially began on November 1, 2020. This unique anniversary presents an opportunity to reflect on our history while planning and building the future. Our Centenary is a special time to commemorate the academic success and proud achievements of Cattolica's current and former staff, our students, and alumni.