

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA del Sacro Cuore

# WORLDBOUND

N° 5 - 2020  
Special Edition COVID-19

**Everything possible in person,  
everything necessary remotely.**

How Cattolica is setting the rules and designing the academic year ahead.



## MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Readers,

I hope this message finds you and your families in good health.

These last few months during which we faced a global pandemic can be characterised by two key words. The first is 'reflection': we have all been able to reflect on what this global emergency and enforced isolation has taught us. There were many things that we missed and at the same time we discovered we could do without many others. The second word is 'reconstruction': since the beginning of this crisis we have been trying to understand how to afresh by shaping a totally new context compared to what we left behind in February.

Until now we have endeavoured to adapt our teaching rapidly to what is needed to deal with the emergency, and the response from the academic, administrative and technical staff has been outstanding. As Dr. Nusiner, Università Cattolica's General Manager, recounts in his interview, we delivered 37,500 hours of online lessons, and held course exams and final exams. Enormous effort was required to do this but by working together we have reached incredible goals.



However, the effort we put in doesn't finish here. The training and skills that we have developed in recent months will be of fundamental importance for the challenges we will be facing in the future. The cover story reports directly on what the twelve Deans of Faculty have to say about these past months and how determined all the faculties are to ensure that students and academic staff have a wide range of possibilities for delivery and use of class content.

This historic moment has provided us with an opportunity to unite and I thank all those who have worked together and produced results above and beyond our expectations.

I look forward to seeing students back in the lecture halls and corridors very soon and returning to meet each other in a situation of new normality.

Enjoy reading Worldbound,

Professor Franco Anelli

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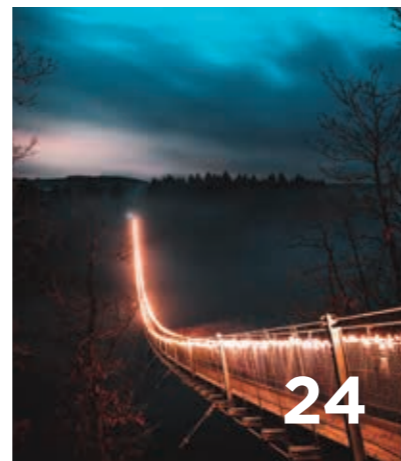
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## MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

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COVER STORY

# 12 Faculties, One University



Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore has 12 Faculties. They are the core of our institution. We have asked the Deans to share their first impressions of this rough period we are starting to leave behind. Each of them has spoken from a personal viewpoint, each experience is different. However, there is one thought that they all have in common: education is a mission that revolves around the development of human beings – no matter the circumstances.

On the university campus, the institutional directors and management discuss re-entry. They have drafted the university guidelines to guarantee their community's safety in the post-lockdown setting. Essential workers plaster sign markers to guide people where to stand or walk while others adjust the bottles of hand sanitizer that stand in almost every corner of the campus. Everyone is involved and works together as one team for the re-opening. Students, academic staff, and university employees will be back again on campus as Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore opens in September.

## The Past

During the first wave of COVID-19, Università Cattolica decided to postpone its in-person didactic activities. It turned to online teaching and advised its students across all campuses to take precautionary measures and stay at home. The weeks that followed encouraged the students, academic staff, and University employees to adapt and adjust to the new system following the unforeseen pandemic that swept the globe.

After the suspension was announced, students were unsure of the next steps. Were the online classes temporary? When would they return on campus? The questions sprouted at a lightning pace. To tackle the queries at once, the Deans of each faculty provided answers, stamping down concerns that popped up on the students' mind.

**Professor Rocco Bellantone**, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Rome, said that faculties and staff members ensured that the students would receive well-rounded support and comprehensive materials during the online lectures. Amidst the ongoing crisis, he asked the students to embrace the time as an opportunity to reflect upon the value of our relationships with our loved ones. **Professor Anna Maria Fellegara**, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Law in Piacenza, also reminded the students not to forget to take care of their loved ones and support them during the tough time.

A few days after, the online lessons began. **Professor Stefano Solimano**, Dean of the Faculty of Law in Milan, said that online teaching would become a norm soon and students' feedback would be a top priority to improve the online system. **Professor Marco Trevisan**, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Science in Piacenza, said that the academic staff had done

their best, considering the limited time given, to adapt the resources and activities for online use. "I am pleased to see that many of our students have promptly and proactively followed the instructions of their professors and are downloading lectures, studying, and carrying out the exercises. Their collaboration is more crucial than ever to ensure the effectiveness of the remote teaching," said Professor Trevisan.

His conclusion tossed out a reminder that the students, academic staff, and University employees would want to hold onto: to see the light at the end of the tunnel. **Professor Luigi Pati**, Dean of the Faculty of Education in Milan, grappled with that undying spark of optimism in the dark times. "I think it is our duty to emphasise that, as scholars of educational issues and as educators, we cannot lose our optimism. We are obliged to cultivate in ourselves and in others the conviction that there's always a solution. In the meantime, let's foster courage to face the difficult situations we're living in," he said.

**Professor Maurizio Paolini**, Dean of the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences in Milan, echoed these thoughts as he shared that looking at the positive aspects in the glum crisis could be our best tool. **Professor Angelo Bianchi**, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Milan, believed that everyone would overcome the situation. "As human beings, we are capable of finding extraordinary resources to react, to keep going, to overcome the fear that we face in very difficult and unexpected situations – which is exactly the moment we are living now," he said.

Students understood that they needed to stay at home during the lockdown period. The time helped them reflect on what their present and future would look like. **Alessandro Longeri**, a student of the double degree course in International Management, was looking forward to studying at ESB Reutlingen, but his plans had been put on hold due to the pandemic. For now, he's doing his internship remotely and focusing on improving his skills. **Sara Bombarlieri**, an undergraduate student, is graduating this year, but the suspension meant that she would not spend the rest of her university months with her friends. Even though it was not her ideal setting, she realized that the situation was grave and protecting the other students by not coming to the University was important.

While in lockdown, students took the Deans' advice and worked on their study habits and personal lives. **Alejandra Vargas**, an undergraduate student, spent her spare time watching online lectures and preparing her notes for the upcoming summer session exams. "By the time April rolled in, I fully emerged in studying for my final exams and writing my research paper. Sometimes, I feel tired from absorbing so much information, but I try to take breaks in between by watching TV shows or movies," she said. She's not alone. **Axel Beugre**, an undergraduate student, kept himself busy, making sure that he was packed with reviewers for his summer session exams. Between reading his materials and jotting down key concepts, he FaceTimed his friends and family and watched TV series and movies to take a breath from the upsetting news about the virus.

*"We are capable of finding extraordinary resources to react, to keep going, to overcome the fear that we face in unexpected situations."*

A few weeks after, **Professor Elena Beccalli**, Dean of the Faculty of Banking, Finance and Insurance Sciences in Milan, said that remote teaching and online graduation sessions had received positive responses from the students, thanks to the collaborative efforts of the University community. The institution also held training for students and academic staff who found difficulties uploading, accessing, and downloading the files and apps online.

Professor Pati said that the professors had adjusted their means of delivering lectures online to better adapt to the students' needs. "The professors adopted methods of synchronous and asynchronous interaction such as webinars, video lessons, forums, and emails, to cater our students' needs. Led by our Rector, the Deans of all faculties are considering the possibility to offer online classes as a substitute to traditional learning once the University opens again," he said.

## The Present

Students have given positive remarks on the online teaching of the University. **Francesca Sardi**, an undergraduate student, says that recorded video lectures make it easier to rewind what the professors discuss in case she misses a certain key concept. "Also, it offers flexibility. Now, I can manage my time on which subject I should watch first unlike when I need to attend a live class," she says. In emergencies such as the pandemic, Sara finds online classes an effective way to catch up with the lectures. Studying online can make up for the loss time of in-person teaching, but she is aware that face-to-face lessons weigh more. "For now, remote classes are beneficial and an efficient way to learn while at home," she says.

Aside from the remote classes, the spare time students have can pave a way to learn new skills and apply what they have learned in the real-life setting. **Professor Guido Merzoni**, Dean of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences in Milan, said that multidisciplinary skills are important now more than ever and everyone is a key figure in the time of the pandemic. "Our students are used to thinking about societal issues. They are used to studying economics, political science, law, history, psychology, etc. This multidisciplinary helps them build a varied toolbox to face the history and outlook of this pandemic. There's a line of cooperation

*"The spare time students have can pave a way to learn new skills and apply what they have learned in the real-life setting."*

***“The essential workers of the institution are preparing the University for its re-opening this coming fall.”***

that has been sparked by the situation and communication plays an important role. As future global citizens, part of our community's duties is to keep it together, to enlighten everyone about the crucial issues, and to build adequate emergency responses to what the society needs. Everyone is affected and this is our time to show a presentation of disciplined social behavior," he says.

**Professor Giovanni Gobber**, *Dean of the Faculty of Linguistic Sciences and Foreign Literatures in Milan*, underlines that the students and academic staff slowly improve their online interaction and the digital amidst the pandemic. "The professors and students slowly become familiar with the online environment and interaction. The students have started to adjust on how to interrupt when they need to ask questions to their professors to prevent talking over them. The professors have developed a time system when to pause to ask questions and clarify concepts. Although students miss the peer interaction, they understand that remote teaching is a feasible tool to keep learning," he says.

**Professor Alessandro Antonietti**, *Dean of the Faculty of Psychology in Milan*, says that the pandemic is an opportunity to acquire or test our capabilities to adapt easily to the crisis and self-regulation. Students are presented with new tools to challenge their different ways of thinking which in turn can benefit them in the future. "The pandemic also provides sufficient information for further research projects that concern the psychology of people. We exemplify the idea of social support and resilience today, two concepts that can benefit the studies of social psychology, health psychology, clinical psychology, and well-being psychology," he says.

**Professor Domenico Bodega**, *Dean of the Faculty of Economics in Milan*, mentions that the pandemic is a way for the faculties to realize projects they have been curating throughout the years such as blended learning. It pays attention to the needs of working students who need to balance their study and work schedule. Blended-learning courses employ professors who are fluent in technology and tutors to assist the students, and are able to evaluate the students' needs based on knowledge, skills and competences, and applying what they have learned in employment. "We've started reviewing the content of various courses. We now have time to redesign them. For the next academic year, we are reviewing and discussing how we plan the overall learning path. We've worked with professors who have already had experiences in blended learning and asked them to help out their co-professors before we can finally re-design as one," he says.

***“We are reviewing and discussing how we plan the overall learning path.”***

There are degree courses that require the use of laboratories to complete a research study and the University faculties have helped create a plan to continue this. For students who need to use the University laboratories, Professor Trevisan assures that it has always been safe even before the pandemic. "The only thing we will not put on the web will be the laboratories. Fortunately, the laboratories are more than spacious, so we can observe social distancing and apply the safety protocols at full-capacity," he says.

For months, the students, academic staff, and University employees have worked together to ensure that quality education will still be provided regardless of the pandemic. While the Università Cattolica community study and work remotely, the essential workers of the institution are preparing the University for its re-opening this coming fall.



**Professor Alessandro Antonietti**  
Dean of the Faculty of Psychology



**Professor Elena Beccalli**  
Dean of the Faculty of Banking, Finance and Insurance Sciences



**Professor Rocco Bellantone**  
Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery



**Professor Angelo Bianchi**  
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities



**Professor Domenico Bodega**  
Dean of the Faculty of Economics



**Professor Anna Maria Fellegara**  
Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Law



**Professor Giovanni Gobber**  
Dean of the Faculty of Linguistic Sciences and Foreign Literatures



**Professor Guido Merzoni**  
Dean of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences



**Professor Maurizio Paolini**  
Dean of the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences



**Professor Luigi Pati**  
Dean of the Faculty of Education



**Professor Stefano Solimano**  
Dean of the Faculty of Law



**Professor Marco Trevisan**  
Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Science

## **The Future**

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore will open its doors to new and returning students, academic staff, and employees this September. Everyone will observe the safety measures and protocols as stated in the 17-page University Guidelines drafted and agreed upon by the Rector, Executive Board Members, and Deans of Faculties across the campuses. The health safety of every member of the Cattolica community is the top priority for the institution's management.

Professor Roberto Cauda (page 20), the Infectious Disease Unit Director of Policlinico Gemelli in Rome and an Infectious Disease Professor of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, assures the Cattolica community that the re-entry adheres to safety guidelines and everyone will be strongly encouraged to follow the University's directions. "From today, we will live with the virus, but not in fear. We will observe social distancing, wear masks and gloves, and make sure that everyone follows the protocols. It's impossible to reach a zero-case situation, but it shouldn't stop us from a well-guided re-entry. This will end soon. In the meantime, we need to be committed to the rules and regulations to ensure safety and public well-being," says Professor Cauda.

Didactic activities will undergo changes as the University re-opens. Students can reserve their place on campus if they want to attend classes or simultaneously watch the lecture's live stream online. The students watching from home will be able to ask questions to the professors during the lectures.

***"Going online for lectures in the future is a way to stay out of the comfort zone and embrace changes."***

Professor Antonietti says that the re-entry provides an opportunity for the faculties to determine which methods are effective in delivering lessons based on the academic staff's experience in remote teaching. "We started from a situation of adaptation, but then it turned out that we could do many things that were effective, even more effective than those initially proposed. The results have been noteworthy. This experience has allowed us to develop new ideas for which we have developed an offer that uses different and innovative tools and methods," he says.

***"The pandemic has highlighted how necessary it is to adapt to digital technologies."***

Professor Bodega shares that going online for lectures in the future is a way to stay out of the comfort zone and embrace changes. The pandemic has highlighted how necessary it is to adapt to digital technologies. "On top of that, the focus our Faculties places on learning social competence and social intelligence is fundamental and varies in complexity," he says. He also mentions how faculties will start adapting to the new norm of reduced classes, but maintain the quality of lectures and interactions for students who will be watching from home. "Also, the Faculties have decided to meet up with students who have any questions about our lessons in person. We will accommodate them in small numbers to ensure everyone's safety. We believe that direct interaction forms better academic relationships and we strive to deliver that," he says.

Students look forward to going back to the University regardless of the restrictive health measures. Axel might be worried about being on campus, but he believes that following the health guidelines of the University means that he is protecting himself and everyone from getting infected. "I can't wait to attend the classes again at the University! I believe that our Institution has prepared for the re-entry and we just need to be careful and mindful of our surroundings," he says.

***"This experience has allowed us to develop new ideas."***

Alejandra has embraced the news with open arms, knowing that she now has the chance to graduate on campus. "It may seem mundane, but I care about ceremonies, especially my graduation. It gives me a sense of closure as a student. It's also a chance for my family to see their hard work pay off," says Alejandra. Sara says that other students will benefit from going back on campus. She believes that studying can be done online, but doing so on campus is a stage in life that is impossible to live in virtually.

Francesca reminds her co-students not to get carried away with the excitement. "I'm sure there are students who will be happy with the news, but we should always be aware of our actions since the virus hasn't gone yet. I understand that it's exciting to live the University life, but at this stage we need to prioritize our health too," she says.

While there are students who cannot wait to go back, others are hopeful that Cattolica will continue its online lectures. Alessandro says that the pandemic is a signal to modernize the University's approach to lectures. "It'll be great for teachers to set up their course programs online to accompany the standard lectures after the University re-opens. It would be hard work at first, but it would provide such a powerful

teaching tool for everybody, and it would reduce the stress and volume of questions for teachers as well as provide valuable support for the working students," he says. **Emilie Brøndum-Jensen**, an undergraduate student, says that the online lectures have been more than helpful in her learning. "It's a great idea to continue it. One positive point that I can share is how I can pause the video if I don't understand a key concept, do a quick research on that term, take down notes, then play the video again. It's also a way to help the students who want to check whether they've written the correct key terms," she says.

There might be a sense of reluctance in the gradual re-opening of the University, but the institutional directors and management stand still to assure their students, academic staff, and University employees that observing the health guidelines is the best prevention measure to remember. Every day after the first week of the pandemic, the University hums in silence, waiting for the chatter of the students and the booming voices of the professors. This coming September, it will wake up again to the sound of normalcy in the time of the pandemic.

***"We believe that direct interaction forms better academic relationships."***

***"The University will wake up again to the sound of normalcy in the time of the pandemic."***

VIEWS FROM THE INSIDE

# We Won't Let it Tear Us Apart

The COVID-19 pandemic has obliged everyone to change the way things were usually done until March 2020. Adapting is never as easy as it seems, especially when the future is uncertain and actions have to be taken so rapidly. Speaking of universities and higher education, what's missing and what students miss the most is the sense of community that one could find there – but we are working to get it back as soon as possible.



## Dr. Paolo Nusiner



Paolo Nusiner is currently the General Manager of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. He graduated in 1988 in Economics at this University with a thesis in Industrial Technique. In 1991 he started working for Italcementi SpA, a multinational company operating on the construction products market, as a direct collaborator of the general manager. He took part in important M&A operations.

Since 2002 and for almost 20 years, he was General Manager of the newspaper *Avvenire*. Among his tasks he managed the newspaper digital transformation process and in 2018 the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the newspaper's foundation.

On June 27th 2015, he was appointed by Pope Francis as Director for General Affairs of the newly born Communication Department, established to unite, revamp and reorganize the nine institutions that deal with communication for the Holy See. On January 1st 2018, he joined the Board of Directors of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and of the University Executive Committee. On 19 December 2018 he was appointed Chairman of the Board of Directors of the ADS (Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa Srl). He has been a member of the General Council of the Italian Federation of Newspaper Publishers, Fieg, since 2004.

**The reorganisation of the University and teaching activities was unexpected but necessary. Since the situation was unprecedented and there were no previous action plans to start from, what were the guiding principles for the process of adaptation?**

Nobody was ready to tackle a situation such as this, but it was absolutely essential for us to act quickly, particularly at the beginning. I think that the principles we worked from were that we should react soundly to the situation, be imaginative in seeking solutions and be on top of setting up and operating the new teaching model. We had to base our actions primarily on the regulations as they were gradually issued by the government and health authorities. We kept to these regulations and within ten days we managed to transform all teaching from traditional approaches in lecture rooms to a completely remote system. Taking into account the complex structure of the university - 12 faculties, 100 degree courses and 40,000 students - this transformation entailed a great effort with regard to organisation, ideas and planning. I must say, though, that our organisation reacted in double quick time and displayed an immense ability to adapt to change.

***"All academic activity will also be delivered remotely."***

**The Università Cattolica community - made up of students, professors/instructors and technical/administrative staff - is living through an extraordinary, unprecedented historical period. One of the founding values of our University is based on the importance of relations between all those who are part of the university. How can we transform this emergency into an opportunity for growth for our community?**

This new adaptation does not call into question the idea of universities that we have, that of the relationship between the individuals that make up the university. What is essential for us is that we look to the future and bring the students back to campus through values linked to the relationship between students and professors/instructors. University is where important relationships are established, which may also be a result of taking part in the educational and cultural activities offered by the campus. For several weeks we have been planning activities for the next academic year, which as far as possible will involve a return to campus, but this will depend on many factors - on how the requirement for health and safety measures will evolve in the next weeks and months. We will resume on-campus activities while ensuring throughout the academic year that all academic activity will also be delivered remotely. We are equipping all lecture rooms with an advanced video recording system which will film professors/instructors as they teach and allow some students to be in the lecture room, while those not present can follow classes as they are live-streamed. Recorded classes will be accessible on the support platform to be viewed at any time.

***"University is where important relationships are established."***

**What measures have been taken to ensure health and safety at the University?**

First of all, I have to say that health and safety is something that we have always paid great attention to right from the beginning, and we will continue to do so. In particular, the General Safety Council - a Università Cattolica body already in existence before the health emergency - has been assigned the task of drafting and updating the protocol for University health and safety with regard to circumstances brought about by the Coronavirus. We have widened this Council to include student and employee representatives and a protocol has been issued which lays down rules to be followed by anyone accessing the University premises. The second version of this protocol is now ready. There is a process of continuous review: the rules are not set in stone since the situation can change quickly and we cannot exclude that further restrictions may have to be put in place. We are always prepared to intervene. This committee also bases its work on the advice provided by two professors who are supporting us on points dealing specifically with health and safety - Prof. Cauda and Prof. Sanguinetti.

**During the lockdown, the acute phase of the coronavirus emergency, what was the moment of greatest difficulty and how did the University's senior management deal with the obstacles they found themselves having to deal with?**

Right at the beginning, when there was so much uncertainty about the real extent of the situation we were experiencing, as was the case for the public authorities as they issued guidelines, we were all asking ourselves what we were having to deal with. Situations of uncertainty are the most difficult to read. The decision we made was to use criteria based on maximum precautions to protect the health of both employees and students. The situation is now an orderly emergency: we are working at 100% because the University's activity is functioning at 100%, even though this is happening remotely, and the response from all parts of the University has been exceptional. To date we have ensured

delivery of 37,500 hours of online lessons, starting from no hours at all. We have held course exams, vivas... University activities have all been delivered over these months, and just think that during the critical moments of the pandemic in Milan there were only twelve people physically on campus. We have shown great ability to adapt and I believe this might be important to pass on to our students.

**Università Cattolica is looking to the future and is preparing for the next academic year at full capacity from all points of view - academic, administrative, health and safety etc... What do you promise students, in particular those who will be just beginning their studies with us?**

In addition to protecting the safety and health of students, which remains the priority, and guaranteeing continuity of teaching, which we have already mentioned, our promise is also to keep the quality and style of our University's educational offer intact: nothing will change negatively. We have seen this work (it is one of our strengths), and we will certainly be able to maintain these levels of quality even as the emergency continues.

**How would you describe Università Cattolica to an international student? What sets the university apart?**

The style of Cattolica that I like to talk about is that of being a community - so the sharing of the University experience, including the experience of our masters and specializing programs. Università Cattolica has always seen this relationship as a central driving force. The University community is a wonderful concept which involves everyone and is not limited just to teaching. It means taking part in an all-round experience regarding our students living their time of education. Cultural activities, the third mission and so on are all part of our overall offer and this certainly sets our University apart from others.

***"We promise to keep the quality and style of our University's educational offer intact."***

FACULTY

# LET'S TALK ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

We have had a chat with prof. Roberto Cauda, Director of the Clinical Institute of Infectious Diseases at the Policlinico Gemelli. He has clarified some doubts, we have talked about the security measures that will be put in place from September, and we have shared the hopes for the next phase for the Cattolica community.



LAVARE SPESSE  
E IGIENIZZARLE PRIMA  
DI RAGGIUNGERE  
LA PROPRIA POSTAZIONE



Fotografo: Nanni Fontana

# PROFESSOR ROBERTO CAUDA



He holds a Medicine & Surgery degree from the University of Genoa. He specialized in Hematology at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and in Infectious Diseases and Viral Immunology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He holds an honorary PhD in Public Health from Trnava University (Slovakia). Currently, he is Professor of Infectious Diseases at Università Cattolica and Director of the Clinical Institute of Infectious Diseases as well as Director of the Specialization School in Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine. During his career he undertook research projects at a variety of institutions, such as the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research San Antonio, NIAID/NIH Bethesda, Trnava University, Postgraduate Medical School Bratislava.

## “HOW PHASE TWO WILL EVOLVE IN THE COMING DAYS LIES IN THE HANDS OF THE PUBLIC.”

**AN** upbeat greeting rings out as Professor Roberto Cauda enters the online conference room, followed by “just give me a second while I turn on the camera.” With his video on, he waves a friendly hello, plugs his earphones in to minimize the echo and makes himself comfortable. He then moves on right away to discuss how Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore has geared up to face the post-lockdown re-entry with all the safety measure that this entails.

Professor Cauda has been at the forefront nationwide of the fight against the spread of COVID-19 since the outbreak of the emergency. In his call-to-action video at the beginning of the lockdown, the Director of the Infectious Diseases Unit at the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome and Professor of Infectious Diseases at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore was firm in his advice to students, academic staff, and university workers to stay at home and play their crucial role by self-isolating. He was sure that everyone in the community would be responsible enough to follow the rules and help protect the public well-being. He said the period of self-isolation would not go on forever and that **we would “bounce back soon and be better than before”**.

Three months on and we are bouncing back. In the light of how the pandemic has evolved, the country is now seeing a substantial wide-scale reopening: the country has bid farewell to the nationwide closures, and social gatherings and activities are now paving the way back to a more normal life. Many cafes, shops, and restaurants are up and running again, albeit limited by strict health and safety measures. Residents don face masks as they stroll around parks, and make sure to observe social distancing. Although not yet at the zero-case scenario, Professor Cauda has high hopes that the main regions in Italy will soon be in a position to

re-open to visitors. How Phase Two will evolve in the coming days lies in the hands of the public. People will embrace their new freedom after being stuck at home for months, but should still be mindful of the basic safety measures that have been promoted since the early days of the pandemic. The goal is still to have zero new cases, not to induce a sudden spike in the spread of the virus.

**This fall the Università Cattolica campuses will be welcoming back students, academic staff and administrative staff.** Everyone will be charged with renewed vigor, ready to get down to work and study, whether it be to attend lectures in person, engage in interaction about lectures, or rework course programs and modes of delivery.

Amidst the on-going buzz around the comeback, there's still a sense of wariness in the air, and this is evident from the 17-page university guidelines and safety measures in place for re-entry to the campus. The guidelines were drafted by Professor Cauda, along with the university executive, with the students and staff in mind. **He is hopeful that the Cattolica community on campus will observe all the safety measures that have been laid down.** The aim of this new set of rules and regulations is to allow for the smooth, safe operation of the University, and avoid any spread of the virus that would produce a spike in numbers. Professor Cauda points out that this is crucial: “the virus we're facing is an airborne, transmittable, droplet-based disease. **We must mitigate the rate of infection, and one way to do so is to be responsible enough to respect the new rules and regulations”**.

The professor emphasizes the three key points that students,



academic staff and other staff need to keep in mind: wear a **face mask** and **gloves, wash your hands** frequently, and observe **one-meter social distancing**. Despite recent debate on how effective wearing a face mask is in protecting the wearer, Professor Cauda is clear on what the science says: **“Wearing a mask is an efficient way not to let the virus out.** If we're showing symptoms, it prevents us from transmitting it to other people.



Even if the mask doesn't protect us 100% from being infected, it's a surefire way to contain and not allow the virus to multiply”. Wearing gloves can also be useful in containing the virus but it is always essential to wash your hands frequently and

not to touch your face since the virus can enter the body via the eyes, nose and mouth. Finally one-meter social distancing is important for the safety measures to be of use.”



This set of rules and regulations reaches beyond the university grounds. **The Cattolica community plays a pivotal role of being responsible citizens** outside the university too as they observe the safety measures. Family members, friends or even the person standing in the supermarket queue may carry the disease without showing symptoms: the virus is hidden so it is essential to take as many precautions as possible to inhibit transmission.

It is unclear what will happen in the summer. Studies have been conducted to determine whether the combined effects of high humidity, high temperatures and UV rays might reduce the survival rate of the virus on surfaces and in transmittable droplets. **The US Department of Homeland Security** studies suggest that there is a 50% probability of the virus becoming inactive in about two minutes if exposed to direct sunlight



## “WE ARE MORE SUITED TO FACE THE CHALLENGES OF THE SECOND WAVE, SHOULD THERE BE ONE.”

and high humidity at room temperature. Under conditions away from heat exposure, the virus might survive for as long as 18 hours. This research is in line with the findings of a group of Spanish researchers, soon to be published, which report that clinical trials show that high temperatures and humidity reduce the spread of the virus.

A summer with reduced infection rates might be on the horizon, but Professor Cauda is cautious about supporting the claim that we will see a dramatic decrease of COVID-19 cases during the hot season. He reminds us that we all need to be properly informed and well prepared: **“a zero-risk case does not exist in any type of disease, especially in airborne and transmittable ones. Our situation will depend on us and how effective our safety measures are,** but no one can tell what will happen. In the meantime, we need to accept the idea that we are going to live with the virus”.

The cliché that “age is just a number” falls short in the context of the virus. Younger people may be able to fend off the virus more easily while the over 65s are more susceptible and succumb to many more symptoms. Furthermore, occur-

rence of asymptomatic cases is high so there can be a silent spread of the virus without any outward signs of contagion. This is another reason why it is important to observe all the published precautionary measures.

Turning to the Cattolica community, everyone who falls under the umbrella of the University is expected to take the precautionary measures seriously, and be flexible enough to adapt to any future changes. Professor Cauda says that **the rules and regulations will be updated from time to time** to be in line with any new scientific findings that involve the virus.

The University is gearing up for an influx of new students on campus this fall. To keep to the safety priority and avoid overcrowding in specific spaces, **teams are working on an app so that students and staff can book their spot on campus.** When places are taken up, other staff will continue to work from home and students will be able to see lectures live streamed on their devices. **Cameras and specially developed software will be installed on campus** so that lectures can be broadcast online with a feature that allows professors and instructors to respond to questions from students watching from home.

In order to help students and staff maintain social distancing, **signage is being installed to control movement around the campuses** and **hand sanitizer posts** will be positioned around the university. **Student dorms** will be monitored for compliance with safety measures and students visiting the **campus libraries and cafeterias** will be prompted to maintain social distancing. The overall objective of all these measures is obviously to ensure that the risk of the virus spreading inside the institution is reduced to a

minimum. However, the **university medical services** are well-equipped to respond immediately should this prove necessary.

Professor Cauda points out that “Italy was one of the first countries to experience a high number of COVID-19 cases and from the experimental stage we were at, we have come to realize the basic dos and don'ts. This incident has brought the nation to a sense of preparedness and I think we are more suited to face the challenges of the second wave, should there be one”. Referring to the South Korean test and trace model to contain the spread of the virus, the professor emphasizes the importance of reducing the risk of spreading the virus to an “acceptable level.” **A test and trace system heads off the potential spread of the virus** by tracing anyone who has been in contact with those testing positive and requiring them to self-quarantine.



With the guidelines he has been holding now placed back on his desk, the professor untangles the cord of his earphones, pauses for a second before offering the advice that we should not be afraid. “As long as you know the enemy,

“WE SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID.  
AS LONG AS YOU KNOW THE ENEMY, YOU CAN  
THINK ABOUT YOUR STRATEGY IN ADVANCE.”

you can think about your strategy in advance: how to tackle the enemy, what weapons to use, and where to start. Since we have the necessary information now to keep the virus at bay, we are well informed so that we know how to act. We know our way in this still-unsolved maze. It's impossible to reach a zero-case situation, but it shouldn't stop us from a well-guided re-entry to campus. **This will end soon.** In the meantime, we need to be committed to following the rules and regulations to ensure safety and public well-being.”

He glances towards his phone as it signals an incoming call. It is a local journalist keen to ask him for a follow-up interview. He mutes the call, positions his elbows on the arms of his chair, and locks his hands together. He makes mention of an earlier interview with a local TV station in Myanmar that led to broadcasting a message encouraging people to keep to the safety measures. **Professor Cauda finishes on an optimistic note, leaving us feeling safe about the next phase for the Cattolica community.**

“WE KNOW OUR  
WAY IN THIS STILL  
UNSOLVED MAZE.”

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**Everything  
possible  
in person**

**Everything  
necessary  
remotely**

Managing communications during an emergency requires clarity, speed and experience. Doctor Daniele Bellasio, Head of Communication at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, and Professor Fausto Colombo, Full Professor of Theory and Techniques of Media of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, shared with us what they have experienced in these months, the difficult moments and the lessons learned.

# Doctor Daniele Bellasio



Doctor Daniele Bellasio holds a degree in Law and a master in Business Intelligence and Big Data Analytics. Since May 2019, he is Head of Communication at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. He worked for several prestigious Italian newspapers such as Il Foglio, Il Sole 24 Ore and La Repubblica. He was Professor at the School of Journalism of LUISS in Rome and at the moment he teaches Corporate Communication at the School of Journalism of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. He is founder and superintendent of the Premio Subito – Nuovo Giornalismo (Subito Prize – New Journalism).



**Online activities and initiatives have been used to compensate for the fact that it has been impossible to be physically present on campus during phase 2. These have ranged from webinars to live streaming to online initiatives to present the university's educational offer. Which have been most successful, and could they be incorporated into future communications plans?**

What lies behind our presence on digital media is a wish to continue our relationship with current and prospective students. We called the first week of undergraduate course presentations "Unicatt Festival" and although we did wonder whether it was right to use the term 'festival' to describe an online event, and one happening at such a difficult time, we wanted to make it clear right from the choice of the name that we were going digital not simply out of necessity but also because we wanted to maintain a strong relationship with our students, their families and professors/instructors.

This was why we also used specific words, formats and titles normally associated with live experiences. The same idea was behind the choice of name for the two weeks of undergraduate programme presentations. The byline was "Heart is reason": the basic idea was to reiterate the main value of our University – the individual is at the centre of everything.

The most successful formats were those talks which communicated our educational offer by positioning it at the heart of reality, as Father Agostino Gemelli would say, and at the heart of a reality that at that stage was, and still is, complicated. Putting themes of current affairs together with our knowledge and our degree courses makes it clear that

the strength of a university like Cattolica, which is multidisciplinary and with a humanistic edge even in the hard sciences, lies precisely in the ability of knowing how to deal with the complexity of reality. Live streaming on Instagram was also very successful, where people could comment and ask questions in real time for input from, for example, teaching colleagues and orientation colleagues. Direct links on LinkedIn were also of interest since this is a tool that students start using quite early on.

What can be replicated in the future? I am convinced that some events that once involved experts or professors travelling from abroad will certainly be done via webinars, which will increasingly be a hybrid model. Not only what we have done so far will remain, but much of what we have done so far will be incorporated into planning for communications, events and teaching.

**"We were going digital because we wanted to maintain a strong relationship with our students, their families and professors."**

**"If the intention is to maintain relations based on understanding and dialogue between people, then this can also be done via technological means."**

**What messages is the University sending to students enrolling for the next academic year? What criteria do you use in your choice of one message over another?**

A good communications plan always starts from what you are going to say and not what you are going to do. First you need to know what story you want to tell, and be sure that it is in line with your identity, your mission, the reason behind the institution, and the terminology that can be used when talking about higher education. Then you decide how to communicate the message according to the means you have. In light of this, we want to say that Cattolica is a multi-disciplinary university and hosts knowledge of all kinds. We also want to tell next year students: "Everything possible in person, everything necessary remotely". In other words, we don't want anyone to discard the idea of enrolling at Cattolica because of what the Coronavirus has caused, and we are saying to new students: we want you on campus but should conditions not allow this for the first year you can attend remotely and you will be provided with everything you need. Then, when the crisis is over, we will go back to the physical lecture room more and more, and it will gradually be more possible to choose between the two options of online and being physically in the lecture room.

**"A good communications plan always starts from what you are going to say and not what you are going to do."**

**Looking at the next academic year and the uncertainty we still have to deal with today, how is Università Cattolica communicating with its students to reassure them about their academic future, keep them engaged and allow them to see things in the medium-long term?**

We need to maintain the dialogue with our students with

regular communications. We did this as soon as the Coronavirus emergency began, setting up a dedicated email address ([infocoronavirus@unicatt.it](mailto:infocoronavirus@unicatt.it)) and answering over 4000 questions from students, questions that continue to this day.

We have also done this from the beginning on social networks, where we respond individually to all queries with the support of the University offices. Then we have newsletters and the website — where during the lockdown we published letters from the deans to students in two languages.

The basic idea is therefore to be there for the students all the time, telling them exactly what is happening. There have been occasions when we haven't been sure of the situation but we have replied saying for example "At the moment we cannot tell you how many of you can be in the lecture room at one time, but as soon as we have more information we will be sure to let you know via the app, the site, email or on social networks".

To make sure that they have a medium-long term view there are two things we communicate to students. The first is that we are investing appropriately so that lecture rooms are fully equipped for remote teaching, and that everywhere is totally safe – and this has been possible with the support of the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome. The second point is that we explain to our students that the sacrifice they are making at this stage, e.g. not accessing the cloisters and so on, will be rewarded when they finish their student pathway with a qualification that is worth more and that will help them move better and sooner into the working world. Our communication strategy in the last few months has been based on three pillars: apart from health and safety measures and the hashtag #ecatt linking to the message "Everything possible with physical attendance, everything necessary remotely", the third pillar is employability, since this will be more difficult in the post-Covid future. Having doubts now or deferring courses might lead to personal and professional difficulties in the future. But however uncomfortable this phase proves to be, it is important to get through it with the idea that in the medium or long term after finishing their studies at Cattolica, students will find themselves with something extra, not just from a personal point of view but also as far as their professional career is concerned. In any case, I feel very positive for our young people: I have seen them being wise, respectful of the rules

and aware that all this will end at some point: it has been a tragedy, which has led to thousands of deaths, but the students once again has shown that their "desire for the future is stronger than fear", a quote that I cite from a presentation by Professor Triani.

**“The sacrifice they are making at this stage will be rewarded with a qualification that will help them move better and sooner into the working world.”**

**What was the University’s communications strategy for responding promptly to queries from students during the various phases of the COVID-19 emergency?**

In a matter of hours, a team of almost 28 people reorganized to work remotely and we immediately set up the info-coronavirus@unicatt.it email address. I mention this again not so much because I consider it to be something original, but because it explains what our principle was right from the start: to communicate almost in real time with our students - sometimes replying to more than 200 emails a day, often saying we couldn't give further information right away because we were still waiting for the government to publish new guidance. Basically, there was continuous con-

tact, answering students and letting them know what we were working on. It would have been a mistake to wait until decisions had been made by the upper echelons, during which time the students would have felt they had been left unsupported. Our students always feel that we are with them on their journey and our goal was to make them feel that we were with them even when distant, by using all the tools we have, even Tik Tok. Then as soon as we had concrete decisions, they were communicated via the University website. The deans of the 12 faculties wrote to the students and their communications were sent via the Cattolica app and published online.

On a practical level, we reassigned a number of colleagues from our office to take care of communications with students and greatly expanded our staff working on social networks, institutional communications, and communications from the deans. We have used video widely, producing hundreds of institutional information videos and more than 60 hours of live social media to respond directly to students. Compared to other universities, our health and safety guidance has been published very clearly on the website. All without ever forgetting to be polite. I believe there is no better communications plan than being polite. Even if the students are agitated and want specific answers, for example about exam dates during the lockdown, the first rule is to give a polite answer immediately, explaining the real situation. In the end the exams were held, final exams for graduation were held and there were some beautiful scenes. As a student received her graduation pass during a final examination session, she was emotional, almost in tears, and a boy came into her room, gave her a kiss in front of the examination panel, and then left the room. It was a wonderful moment. What I mean is that if the intention is to maintain relations based on understanding and dialogue between people, then this can also be done via technological means.



**“After finishing their studies at Cattolica, students will find themselves with something extra.”**



# Professor Fausto Colombo



Professor Fausto Colombo is Full Professor of Theory and Techniques of Media of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences. He is Head of Department of Communication and Performing Arts, and Member of Academia Europaea

## What rules does an institution like a university have to follow when dealing with communications during a crisis?

There are three important factors:

1) A crisis must be seen as dynamic. There are standard phases to a period of crisis which are studied as part of crisis management, but even before that, a crisis is a paradigm change which takes place over a period of time which is not fixed, so reading it as dynamic allows for an understanding of exactly where you stand when it unfolds.

2) The exact nature of a crisis must be understood, by asking questions such as whether it has been triggered by something specific - in this case COVID-19 - or by the system displaying a lack of adequate preparation. Is the system ready to react, meaning that I just have to manage what is happening, or do I have to come up with a solution in several stages to deal with what might impact the system?

3) The identity of the institution must be managed. Crises do not transform identity - they do not change it. The university can't stop teaching, it can't stop being international, it can't stop focusing on the education of the younger generations. These are still its identity and its mandate. However, identity has to undergo a process of adaptation and re-invention during a period of crisis. This is perhaps what is nearest the university and companies that have been affected by the pandemic. It is about understanding how much my identity can adapt and rediscover any of its component parts or invent new ones while remaining true to itself.

## What messages and content has Cattolica decided to focus on during the various stages of the COVID-19 emergency?

During the first phase, it was essential to inform people, one reason being that the pandemic arose at a crucial moment in the academic year: classes had just started up again for some faculties and there were graduation exams. It was a matter of getting information out about what was happening as quickly and clearly as possible and also getting information out about what was going to happen from the point of view of health measures and continuation of studies.

The second phase was that of understanding: we began using university resources to try to understand what was happening. We collocated the crisis in a narrative that allowed us to understand it. I saw a quote recently that said: "In the face of great pain, the only thing we can do is recount stories to try to understand it". And it was like this, that in the face of this crisis, Cattolica put its knowledge and technical resources to use - the Faculty of Medicine was heavily involved - so that the emergency could be managed and understood. The Faculty of Medicine played its role, and other theorists and scholars took part in the debate on what exactly the crisis was.

The third phase is where we find ourselves now - the planning phase. It is a question of thinking about the future, which is unclear and still uncertain. Uncertainty is a way of living that societies in the world are less and less accustomed to, and so we have had to plan differently, not knowing how things will evolve. It is a type of planning and communication which requires you to show your plans while still in the planning process, thus offering them as hypothetical.

**"I as a professor can educate my student if I let my student educate me."**

## How do you speak to students, and so to Gen-Z, during a crisis like the one we are experiencing?

When dealing with how we talk to people and especially to young people, a lot of emphasis is put on the technical aspects and the language used because each generation uses different techniques and languages. I think it's more a question of communication style. Talking to students involves interacting with them, and not only does this mean talking to them, it also means listening to them. In my experience this is a great moment for listening. I have received so many more messages from students than I ever received before. I would even say that remote studying has encouraged students to get in touch more, on the one hand, because we were all in isolation, and on the other because students feel less inhibited by the respect they show to the professors, thereby making discussion easier. This often happens in a teaching model such as the Mediterranean European model where lecture style instruction is common, often as a reflection of the large numbers and questions of costs. In the current situation, though, one-to-one attention has become very important and this is also part of the 'house style' - Università Cattolica's approach entails education which takes great account of the person and so it is important to listen and respond rather than communicate in a way which is rather heavy and aimed at a mass audience.

**"Technology is at the service of our ability to imagine teaching, learning and interacting with students."**

This crisis has made us rediscover this idea of education as looking after the person, every single person, and it is a reciprocal education; that is, I as a professor can educate my student if I let my student educate me by, for example, letting me see a different point of view or by showing me tools that are very different from those that I have always used. This idea of an educational relationship is obviously very old: in ancient Greece you only have to think of Socrates'

dialogues, which were based on the relationship between teacher and pupil and their continuous interaction. Moreover, it is not always the case that students know how to use IT tools better than we do, and this is interesting because it forced us to find common languages, to learn to use these tools together, as interlocutors. Forms of collective discussion among us professors and instructors are also growing. One example is Fishbowl, with virtual rooms of four people. One person 'gets up and leaves his/her place' for another person. These are things invented online but which actually offer a very old model of discussion. Anything can be invented; it is not a question of technology. Technology is at the service of our ability to imagine teaching/learning and interact with students.

**"Education means establishing a personal relationship between professor and learner."**

## Finally, looking at the months of the pandemic that we have just been through, what has Università Cattolica done that has been the most successful, that has really hit the target?

Cattolica's great intuition was that of never betraying its identity, that is, the attention to the person and the personal relationship with students: we don't want to become an online university. We want to maintain this model of personal relationship at all costs, even by changing if this proves necessary. Technology changes? Well, we adapt by being flexible, by implementing different technologies. We are in the process of planning next year and there is no clear decision in favor of recorded classes or online classes: no, we will follow the wave. What is certain is that we will remain faithful to the three great ideas which our university is built on: first, education means establishing a personal relationship between professor and learner; second, not only must research be done according to the canons of good scientific research, it must also be to the collective good; third, a university must work for the good of the area in which it finds itself as well as for the good of society as a whole. Technologies are tools to be employed to achieve these goals and they cannot justify and determine their own existence.



MEET THE EXPERTS

# Higher Ed Through the Pandemic:

## What Have We Learned So Far?

Higher education has faced (and it is partly still facing) a very hard moment. We have asked some HE experts their opinion about the new paradigm we are living, creating and observing at the same time. What will the next academic year be like? How can we still consider internationalization a priority?

# Patrick Colabucci



**PATRICK COLABUCCI** is currently Director of International Programs at UCLA Extension, a partner institution with Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Originally from Washington DC, Pat earned his BA at the University of Maryland before moving to Taiwan to study Chinese. After a few years, he moved to Japan, where he earned his M.A. at Temple University's Tokyo campus. He earned his Ed.D. from Northeastern University in Organizational Leadership. Pat's interests include the transformational power of the study abroad experience and leadership in international higher education.

**DUETO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY, MANY UNIVERSITIES HAD TO CONVERT THEIR FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES TO ONLINE TEACHING. AS THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IS STILL ADAPTING TO THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, HOW CAN AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BODY AND ITS PERCEIVED ADDED VALUE TO A CLASS TRANSLATE TO A VIRTUAL CLASS ENVIRONMENT?**

Great question. Let's remember that virtual learning and instruction are not new. Delivering quality education in the online environment is something some educational institutions and private companies have been doing for many years. UCLA Extension has been delivering courses and certificates fully online, and in hybrid format, for nearly two decades.

Also, many of today's digital natives, people brought up during the age of digital technology and familiar with computers and the Internet from an early age, feel comfortable, even natural, in the online environment. In fact, it can be argued that these digital natives have been learning online, though maybe not in the classroom environment, for many years.

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly forced many educational institutions into the online space more quickly than they had planned.

From a student perspective, the online environment is quite different from the traditional in-class environment. There are a few core issues when looking at the differences and the value added. One of the biggest of these issues is the traditional role of the professor and the role of the student. The student, in many ways, owns their learning, their progress, their path. The professor's role in the online environment is no longer the 'sage on stage but is the guide on the side.' Many universities around the world see value in this type of evolution from a teacher-centered pedagogy to a learner-centered pedagogy.

The student can drive the learning pace and path (within the bounds of the syllabus, of course) as the professor provides guidance, direction, and resources. Courses still have learning objectives, of course. Yet, the students navigate their ways through the course. Students who prefer visual learning may use different approaches and resources than students preferring a kinesthetic or aural approach.

The online environment adds tremendous value by providing students with an opportunity to build, to structure, their learning. Students can build their skills, direct their learning towards their career choice, and take a path that is customized for them.

**MANY UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE WORLD HAVE HAD TO REFORMAT THEIR PROGRAMS AND COURSES, CONVERTING INSTRUCTION TO AN ONLINE DELIVERY SYSTEM. IN NORMAL TIMES THIS PROCESS WOULD HAVE TAKEN YEARS. IN THIS SUDDENLY IMMOBILE WORLD WE ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING, DOES PROMOTING AN INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE MAKE ANY SENSE?**

Yes, in fact, I think the virtual learning experience makes a lot of sense as part of a holistic international experience. Being online, whether surfing the web, being an active or passive player on Instagram, Twitter, or other social media outlets, chatting on Facetime, or taking online courses, online is global in its reach. International virtual learning is an opportunity to learn with students and professors from around the world. Opinions, ideas, friendships, and problem solving are enriched by the diversity of thought, experiences, identities, and personalities that a classroom of students from around the world can contribute.

There were slightly more than five million students studying abroad, outside their own country. Studying abroad is a fabulously rich, rewarding, and often transformational experience for students. It's also expensive. It requires plane tickets, accommodation costs, health insurance, and many more costs. In a sense, being able to afford the study abroad experience is a type of privilege for those who can afford it.

In 2018, the number of internet users in the world exceeded four billion for the first time ever. More than a billion of these internet users were in either China or India, countries in which a relatively small percentage of people can afford to study abroad. Imagine a virtual experience with students and professors from around the world, including those who might not be able to afford plane tickets, accommodation, and affiliated costs. The diversity of thought, of nationality, of ethnic groups, of nationality could reflect such a broader audience. Imagine having a class discussion about sustainability with students from 10 or 15 or 20 countries contributing ideas and experiences.

The virtual world is a reality and here to stay. Certainly, it will evolve. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered rapid and massive changes to how education institutions deliver courses and serve students. Changes to the virtual environment will continue. And international virtual experiences will, at least in my humble opinion, become an integral part of the virtual education experience.

In a very real sense, the virtual world opens windows into countries, cultures, people, and ideas that would not even be accessible throughout the traditional study abroad experience.

**“International virtual learning is an opportunity to learn with students and professors from around the world.”**

# Stephen Connelly



**STEPHEN CONNELLY** is Director of i-graduate Australia, managing that company's activities in Australia through his independent consulting firm, GlobalEd Services, which specialises in international education. He has worked in international education for 30 years, including at La Trobe, Swinburne and RMIT universities in senior and executive roles. He studied in Germany in the 1980s and worked in Malaysia in the 1990s. Stephen was President of IEAA for four years and is Chair of the Finance Committee of the ISEP board of directors, based in Arlington, Virginia. He received the IEAA Distinguished Contribution Award at the 2016 Australian International Education Conference.

**MANY UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE WORLD HAVE HAD TO REFORMAT THEIR PROGRAMS AND COURSES, CONVERTING INSTRUCTION TO AN ONLINE DELIVERY SYSTEM. IN NORMAL TIMES THIS PROCESS WOULD HAVE TAKEN YEARS. IN THIS SUDDENLY IMMOBILE WORLD WE ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING, DOES PROMOTING AN INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE MAKE ANY SENSE?**

Students around the world pursuing international exchange, study abroad and study tour programs when the pandemic struck faced difficult decisions about whether or not to

continue with their experiences, or abort and return home. For some, the decision was made for them by either governments or institutions, but even in the face of border closures many students wanted to finish what they had started and stayed where they were. Others returned home but agreed to complete online studies with their host institutions, given they had a current enrolment and no real alternate study option. Either way, whether they stayed overseas or returned home but continued to study online with their host institution, as a general rule, students were not being offered specialist or custom-designed virtual international mobility experiences as such. They were simply being offered what every student around the world was being offered in lockdown – an enforced pivot from on-campus face-to-face teaching to online teaching mode with little preparation, regardless of content, method or learning objectives. Educators had to do the best they could with little notice, so my comments are in no way a criticism of their efforts, which in the instances I have observed at universities here in Australia have been heroic. What it has done, however, is start institutions thinking about continuing international virtual learning offerings in the second half of 2020, more as a temporary or stop gap measure while the world waits for life to return to some semblance of normality. The advantage of this is the time frame universities have to prepare those virtual offerings, in contrast to the sudden flip from on-campus to online earlier this year. More time means more opportunity to incorporate meaningful content, interactions and objectives into virtual offerings, so there is scope to improve the experience for students who choose to undertake their international study virtually. Of course, international virtual learning experiences are not new. Primary and secondary schools in Australia have for many years actively engaged in international classroom collaborations, connecting with school students in other parts of the world. Research at universities has always involved collaboration across borders, and HDR students the world over engage in virtual and physical international experiences as a matter of course. And virtual internships are becoming more widely available. But international student mobility is fundamentally an undergraduate activity, and for that global cohort the virtual mobility experience appears at the margins at best. COVID-19 gives pause to consider how this might change, but are we simply replacing physical with virtual experiences, or adding to our traditional mobility offerings? In Australia, almost a quarter of domestic undergraduate students participate in an outbound learning mobility experience, improving their intercultural skills, foreign language proficiency, as well as growing personally and enhancing their employability. But 75% of Australia's domestic undergraduate students do not participate in any kind of mobility experience. That's the obvious target cohort for virtual mobility, if programs can offer similar outcomes for participants. Can virtual mobility become a centre-piece of internationalisation at home strategies?

**WHAT WOULD YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS BE TO STUDENTS FORCED TO COMPLETE THEIR DEGREE ONLINE ON HOW TO INTERNATIONALIZE THEIR CURRICULUM?**

If students are forced to complete their degrees online then I assume they are already at the end of their study program. They have a semester at best in which to incorporate some aspect of internationalisation, so their options will be limited. Universities around the world are already planning for some return to normality on campus in the second half of this year (mainly northern hemisphere institutions) or the first half of next year (southern hemisphere) so online options may start to take a back seat in terms of university planning and priorities. But for the sake of the exercise, let's consider a student with one semester left, and confirmed to be studying remotely for that semester. Some universities in Australia have already confirmed they will teach online for the rest of the year, so there are students for whom this scenario is a reality. My response could therefore be construed as advice to a student in that predicament, and reflects my opinion, based on observation only, not on robust research. I'd therefore also suggest the student get advice from more informed sources!

Depending on their subject options, anything with international content or an international comparative component should be considered, and anything that can be studied directly with a partner institution of their home university could be an option if they can earn credits. If the student has enough general electives left in their study program, they should consider a virtual internship for credit. Given the

whole world is now expert in working-from-home (WFH) there's a good chance that a virtual internship next semester would be of better quality than the same option just a few short months ago. Tools such as Slack, Zoom and Teams to name a few have enhanced WFH norms considerably, so connection with colleagues, guidance from supervisors and collaboration with team-members is much more effective and less daunting or unusual than might previously have been the case. I'd be more confident of having a positive and enriching virtual internship experience right now than I would of a virtual study or mobility experience, notwithstanding the usual issues with internships (company preparedness, project appropriateness etc.).

Finally, any student completing their studies need to think about how they differentiate themselves in their transition to the employment market, regardless of whether they do that immediately upon graduation or take a break between studies and work. If all else fails, and if incorporating meaningful virtual internationalisation experiences into their final semester of studies is not possible, I would consider post-study experiences that extend learning from the classroom to the real world, such as volunteering, or the international internship that wasn't possible in 2020 but might be in 2021 if travel restrictions ease. Employers value problem-solving, communication and team-work skills in graduates. Any student who approaches the final stage of their studies in these challenging times as a problem to solve and can communicate outcomes to audiences such as potential employers will fare well in the next stage of their life, whatever that brings.

**“Any student completing their studies need to think about how they differentiate themselves in their transition to the employment market.”**

# John Hudzik



## THE POST-COVID WORLD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION - John K. Hudzik

As we struggle through an unprecedented global disruption of just about everything—e.g., lives, jobs, health, economies—we witness once again the powerful influences of globalization. I am also reminded of Winston Churchill who said, “If going through hell, keep going!”

It was a “Pre-Covid” world when I first wrote for this Newsletter six months ago. I noted that, “Globalization is not going away, although morphing and maturing and that the need for higher education international engagement to benefit all students, staff and communities will increase, not decrease.” Both statements remain true today in a Covid and a Post-Covid world—perhaps more so.

While predictors of challenge to internationalization were detectable well prior to COVID-19, they are now magnified many folds by it. For example: decades of public disinvestment in higher education is exacerbated by the COVID-19 economic fallout. Funding for international activities will not return to Pre-Covid levels for several years, if then. The global spread of access to education and research capacity closer to home is expanding regional competition for the best students and scholars. Mobility routes are changing. More cost effective, eco-friendly, and flexible models of mobility (short, long, internships, and not-for-credit) have been on demand for many years and will be pulled forward by Post-Covid global conditions.

Digital meetings and learning are proving to be workable alternatives to physical models—if not ideal in all circumstances, or in the eyes of purists. The hybridization of virtual and physical models into mutually-reinforcing pedagogies will rapidly develop in higher education generally, and pressure internationalization to do the same. Internationalizing curricula at home will require pedagogies that blend active learning, innovative use of technology, and the artful blending of at-home and physical mobility in teaching/learning and research/scholarship for international engagement. E-Science collaborative models diversify modes of international engagement to meet the emerging new normal.

**JOHN HUDZIK** is a Professor, Michigan State University and NAFSA Senior Scholar for Internationalization. He was MSU Dean and Vice President of International Programs and Global Engagement 1995 to 2010, and Acting University Provost in 2005. He is a past President and Board Chair of NAFSA as well as past President of the Association of International Education Administrators, and a Fulbright Senior Scholar to Australia. He serves on numerous policy boards and publishes frequently on an array of internationalization topics, including Comprehensive Internationalization. He is a frequent speaker at global conferences and a consultant on strategic institutional planning for internationalization. He is recipient of several national and international awards for his work in internationalization, including from EAIE, AIEA, and IEAA, and also recipient of awards for his research on judicial systems. He is Chair of the Academic Board, at Università Cattolica, Milan. He is also a member of the strategic internationalization grants review committee for STINT in Sweden.

## A Road for Change and Innovation.

Mark Twain reminds us that, “the secret to getting ahead is getting started.” Disruptions like Covid “birth opportunity.” Our opportunities are not in defending the status quo and the way we do it now, nor in hoping for a return to normal. The status quo was supported by an environment that is gone and will not return. The big question for internationalists: Do we aim to change and innovate to meet a new reality, or do we choose to defend the status quo and likely begin to wither?

The reality is that change will drive our futures whether we participate or not. It is better to be proactive change agents, rather than waiting to be run over. Genuine openness to new ideas and ways of engaging internationalization is required, as is involving student, community and institutional clientele in setting and implementing priorities for change.

**A Paradigm Shift** is needed to address the “new normal” by refocusing on internationalization’s goals and outcomes as drivers. Existing large infrastructures of current practices and vested interests inherently are change resistant. For example: Prioritize enhancing options for cross-cultural learning, experience and its attendant outcomes, rather than focusing on the movement of bodies across borders as an end in itself or the only means. Blend physical and virtual cross-border mobility; and blend-in the use of cross cultural opportunities at home.

Our biggest challenge may be us. Innovation involves personal risk and giving up the comfort of the familiar. A challenge such as COVID-19 can appear so daunting in its scale and scope that we atrophy in searching for responses. The challenge for the future is to “get started.” Self-examination, change, innovation, open-mindedness, and drive are qualities that we need now more than ever.

**“Do we aim to change and innovate to meet a new reality, or do we choose to defend the status quo and likely begin to wither?”**

# Richard Russo



## **DUETO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY, MANY UNIVERSITIES HAD TO CONVERT THEIR FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES TO ONLINE TEACHING. AS THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IS STILL ADAPTING TO THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, HOW CAN AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BODY AND ITS PERCEIVED ADDED VALUE TO A CLASS TRANSLATE TO A VIRTUAL CLASS ENVIRONMENT?**

Before COVID-19 colleges and universities were offering many online courses. Yet now what we are experiencing as a result of the shelter-in-place orders, is what I refer to as the “remote revolution”. I am certain that historians will mark the almost overnight shift from office jobs, long commutes, and in-person meetings, classes, and doctor appointments to virtual meetings, classrooms, working from home, and telemedicine. For nearly twenty years, it’s been an uphill battle for me to advance the concept of remote instruction among academics, to shift the delivery of content from in-person to remote formats. Now, in a matter of days, all instruction at my home university has moved to remote formats and our entire summer school will be delivered either through remote means or through already fully developed asynchronous online courses. Because the shift has been so abrupt, the remote revolution has not yet fully considered how the added value of an international student body translates into the virtual class environment. Surely it can be done with thoughtful design - but only to a degree, for nothing can really replicate an immersive, in-person study-abroad experience.

Yes, these new realities have posed many challenges, but we must not ignore the tremendous opportunities that have emerged as a result. To bring home our students from all around the world and to return our international visiting students to their home countries was an emotionally trying experience for everyone involved. I have listened to international education colleagues opine about the future and the possibility of impending doom to international education. However, I truly believe that the shift toward and acceptance of remote means of education as an effective and quality experience for undergraduates will help fuel the re-launch of study abroad. For decades, my international education colleagues have struggled with enabling STEM majors to study abroad. If we no longer need to worry about interrupting the carousel of courses that engineers or accountants must take in sequence and we can rely on remote delivery of instruction to keep them on track, why could they not do that while they also study French or Mandarin at the world’s best universities thousands of miles away?

While I am excited and embrace the opportunities that online and remote instruction presents to our profession, we must not lose sight of the non-technical education that occurs when a student is physically in another place; talking and eating with people from a far away land, speaking and learning a language in an immersive environment and challenging his or her views of the world through new ex-

periences. Just as it will still be an important developmental step for students to go away to college, live in residence halls, join a club, and become an adult, it will still be just as important for our youth to study abroad. Although we have experienced a terrible setback, I am confident that study abroad will emerge stronger than ever.

When speaking with alumni and students who have participated in study abroad, the most common phrase I hear is “study abroad changed my life.” The connotation of those changes is always as a positive transformation in their attitudes and values around the world and life in general. I, for one, plan to keep changing lives. In the words of Michelle Obama: “The fact is, with every friendship you make, and every bond of trust you establish, you are shaping the image of America projected to the rest of the world. That is so important. So when you study abroad, you’re actually helping make America stronger.” The only change I would make to First Lady Obama’s statement, would be to replace “America” with “the world”.

## **WHAT COULD BE THE ADVANTAGES TO AN ONLINE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, AND HOW CAN THESE ADVANTAGES BE MARKETED TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?**

I am absolutely sure that there isn’t a college or university on the planet that isn’t thinking about the expansion of their digital footprint in the online education market. Fully online degrees offered by colleges and universities over the last two decades have provided valuable education to students who could not physically participate in our face-to-face programs. We know these barriers include the inability to move from a home location to the location of the institution, the need to care for children or other family members, the need to work during the hours when live instruction is delivered,

and a myriad of financial and affordability barriers. The ability to serve many more students than has traditionally been possible in classrooms has added efficiency in some disciplines that will help break down time, place and financial barriers. With these realities, we know there are some students that will never study abroad or perhaps even travel abroad. If we can curate virtual educational experiences that approximate the human interaction and transformative experiences of study abroad, we enrich the lives and intellect of those who participate. We have already seen some providers pivot very rapidly to remote internships when all in-person internships ended abruptly. As we now work in this remote world, our future colleagues need experience on how to be successful and make valuable contributions in these new electronic environments.

Working in a university that is part of the very large and robust University of California system, we have already begun to see the advantages of access among our 10 campuses. Students participating in academic courses across the system has significant value and opportunity. In the same vein, many of our institutions are part of multi-national university and research partnerships. If those networks of institutions could take advantage of their valuable instructional content that could be leveraged across the world, they could open fields of study and perspectives to our many students who would have been required to relocate previously.

When talking about marketing to international students, I have found that credentialing the educational experience is critical. In a world where nearly every experience comes with some sort of badge or certificate, international education cannot be without. Expanding the ways that students earn certificates, minors, dual degrees, and other credentials will be crucial to a program’s success.

**“The shift toward remote means of education as a quality experience will help fuel the re-launch of study abroad.”**

DOMESTIC STUDENTS

# Milano-Boston: one click away

Laura and Cecilia have earned a double degree from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (MSc in Management) and from Boston University (MSc in International Marketing Management). Since its start, the program was conceived as partly online and partly on campus in Boston. The two students have shared their experience and have told us why online education is more than we can imagine.

**“If you’re thinking of doing an online program or a remote internship, jump at it.”**



**Cecilia**

Laura Papasergio and Cecilia De Martino both got comfortable in the separate homes and went through the process of joining the online video conference. These conference calls had been a part of Laura and Cecilia’s routine even before the pandemic broke out and meeting up online as a virtual group has been the only means of communication with their fellow students on the double degree program at Boston University. They have been able to work together on their projects, and it has been a real boon to be able to exchange suggestions on how to approach given problems and keep each other in good spirits. Amidst the pressure of the upcoming deadlines, Laura and Cecilia enjoyed these moments as distance-learning students of Boston University.

Both embarked on their Masters in Management at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in 2018 and after attending courses on campus for some time, they were looking forward to an immersive experience beyond lectures and textbooks. Undecided as to whether to look for an internship in Italy or travel as international students, they undertook some research. They came across Cattolica’s offer of a study-abroad program at Boston University which piqued their interests, but there was a catch which made them think twice: the program would be taught entirely online. They asked all their friends what they knew about studying online and it came out that it was fairly common in the US, either for personal reasons or when students needed to work in order to pay their university fees.

daunting. Then, it might take a toll on our parents’ too since we would need their full support through the transition, both emotionally and financially. After a lot of reflecting on the pros and cons, and advice from our parents, we decided to enroll.”

One thing that held Laura and Cecilia back at first was the question of the value of online education in the Italian job market. Employers tend to believe that learning from online materials and watching videos by teaching staff, however renowned, are not as effective as face-to-face teaching and learning which allows for interaction with peers and professors. “I think the value of online education to companies who are not yet ready to adapt to the new system is important to talk about,” says Cecilia. “From my online experience, hiring directors don’t mind if a student studies online or on-campus. Most of the universities in the US, and maybe even abroad, offer online degrees as a substitute to the traditional classes. Laura and I were lucky since we were giv-

“We were skeptical at first,” says Laura. “It was a huge risk for both of us. Imagine paying so much for courses that you can’t even attend. Moving from on-campus teaching to reading PDFs and answering quizzes online can be quite



**Cecilia and Laura**

**“Choose a university that cares about you and thinks of your professional career.”**

Cecilia



**“We didn’t even know we were doing the course online. Everything felt synchronous.”**

en tons of useful resources throughout the program. They weren’t just to read the materials and answer the quizzes. We had group activities where we needed to talk to other students who were also from different parts of the world. Halfway through the course, we didn’t even know that we were doing the course online. Everything felt synchronous.”

The reputation of a university also tipped the balance. Cattolica has long proven its position as a well-known name to domestic and international students and employers. Its partnership with Boston University means that Laura and Cecilia have been taught by two institutions whose guiding principles are student-centered. “You need to choose a university that cares about you and thinks of your professional career after you receive the diploma,” says Cecilia. “If your learning environment is not responsive to your needs, I don’t think you’ll have a fulfilling experience later on.”

Laura jumps in to echo Cecilia’s thoughts. “Reputation precedes your job search. I’d considered this idea before I enrolled in Cattolica. It’s receptive to what the students need and not in a way where they take actions based on what they think the students need, but they talk to the students, they hear them out, they compile their answers, and they work on solutions to solve the problems.”

Yet both students hope that Italy will widen the range of hiring criteria, not limiting the talent acquisition process to just the name of the university where a student has studied. “The name of the university instantly sparks a certain perspective to some employers in Italy. This can be limiting and at one point, it creates a sort of prejudice. We should steer clear of that norm. Other countries value the experiences and skills of the students. They consider profiles of diverse backgrounds regardless of the institution and whether the student studied online or offline,” says Cecilia.

Speaking of experiences and skills, Laura and Cecilia have accumulated international competences that can catapult

their profiles to success. Not only did they need to get to know the ins and outs of apps and online tools that they weren’t familiar with, they also had to communicate with international people in different situations and settings. They had to keep close contact with the other students on the course through voice and video calls, text messages and emails and considering that this involved dealing with different time zones it involved mastering time management skills.

Reading textbooks or journals and taking down notes to prepare for the exams is only part of the overall work done during their online course. Aside from the group projects and individual quizzes, Laura and Cecilia had weekly assignments and deadlines that dovetailed with their study timetables and presentations on business cases. In a nutshell, the distance-learning experience meant they had no option but to sharpen their business-driven mindset in a learning environment which was similar to that of the actual workplace. They played roles that would gear them up to become capable and well-prepared once they move into the workplace in companies.

Working with international groups online had raised the bar of their work ethic, which continued right to the end of the program. They have developed new attitudes towards studying and have become more professional in their approach. They are working well within deadlines, they are contacting and working with other people, they are more confident in speaking up in meetings, they are working faster, and they have become effective communicators.

The online program with Boston University came to a close in March 2020 and Laura and Cecilia are extremely happy that they chose this option. Their experience and the skills that they gained will certainly have a positive effect on the final year of their double degree studies at Cattolica. They are now highly skilled at organizing all aspects of online study, so they are super prepared for the new norm at Cattolica.

“If you’re thinking of doing an online program with the university partners of Cattolica or even remote internships, I’d say jump at it,” says Laura. “You might not be sure at first, but I don’t think you should drop the idea all together. It’s worth trying since it’s not only going to teach you tech skills, but you’ll find yourself in the position where you’ll learn the ropes by asking your teammates and relying on your own skills. It’ll put your knowledge to test and that’s going to toughen you up.”

“That’s true,” says Cecilia as she adjusts her earphones. “Laura and I were not sure at first too, but thanks to our supportive parents and the extra mile of asking around about

other people’s experiences, we made a decision that had a lasting impact on us. I’d say do your research, ask anyone who can help you, and just go for it”

Although they had doubts before they signed up for the online program with Boston University, any uncertainties that Laura and Cecilia felt diminished as they got into the swing of things. The program proved to be a surefire way of acquiring work-centered transferrable skills away from traditional lectures textbook-based cases. They both know that they made a great decision in choosing this experience with Boston University, Cattolica’s partner in the double degree program.

Laura





ALUMNI

# CONNECTING, ADAPTING, DEVELOPING

What's the opinion of an HR director on the transformations of the job market after the pandemic? We've interviewed Sonia Malaspina, HR Director for Southern Europe at Danone Specialized Nutrition, about the new challenges students and workers are facing now and will face in the future. Agility, trust, and meritocracy are the keywords upon which we can re-build the new normalcy.

# SONIA MALASPINA

“The university is a place where students discover who they are.”



Sonia Malaspina holds a Degree in Languages with honors from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy. Since 2011 she has been working in Danone where she currently holds the role of HR Director for Southern Europe at Danone Specialized Nutrition. She is a strong supporter of the engagement of people and the creation of inclusive workplaces as the main lever for implementing business strategies. Under her lead Danone's 3 companies in Italy

have been awarded the GEEIS (Gender Equality European International Standard) certification – the first European standard for gender equality within the workplace. In 2019, she won the AIDP (Italian Association for HR management – Associazione Italiana per la Direzione del Personale) award. In 2020, she has introduced in Danone an innovative assistance policy that supports employees in the care of elderly and vulnerable family members.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has raised new topics concerning new employment skills such as remote working, work-life balance, and digital and management skills. What would be the future work setting for employees when the situation goes back to normal?**

The pandemic has made an impact, and continues to do so, on our society, especially in the workforce. Companies are reviewing their business models to cope with the change the crisis has brought forward. I would say that it has further revolutionized the digital trends available in Italy. Now it is pivotal to understand the in-person and digital experiences – the phygital experience – that all the company stakeholders are living: employees, consumers, and partners. It's necessary to know and understand how to connect effectively in the time of crisis and to what extent do we set boundaries between the online and offline world. Let's take, for example, buying a product online which drives up the sales and then helps us invent new ways to approach our sales strategies. This requires the process of re-learning technical skills and having widespread leadership at all levels of the organization.

To work in changing and uncertain situations, agility and adaptability are fundamental on the part of the employees too. On their end, companies must not only promote working to achieve the objectives and building relationships based on trust and meritocracy, but also having a social duty by considering the welfare of their own people beyond their workplace and inclusive of their psychosocial and family-based needs.

**How did Danone face the pandemic crisis and what new values or skills did its employees acquire?**

In Danone Company, which has two enterprises in Italy (Danone and Mellin Nutricia), we've fostered putting our people first, working for our objectives, and trust in people. Such values have allowed us to continuously operate amidst the time of the pandemic and are carried out in a way that each one of us has had valuable contributions in this tough period. As a company objective, we've enhanced our capabilities to listen and communicate in a reliable way to support continuous communication with 600 people. We've listened to our employees and their families and have evaluated what is essential for them, ensuring that they are given their organizational and personal needs. For example, we hand out surveys every three weeks to all our employees on how we can improve our service to our workforce, and we share results and next steps. Also, we organize webinars on how families can listen to their own needs especially in taking care of their children. We have improved the education aspect at every level of our company, and this is very satisfactory in terms of employee engagement.

“Remote internship still connects the students with the companies in a way that helps them learn more about the processes and develop their skills.”

**How can the students prepare themselves for the job market after the pandemic? What support should they receive from their University?**

The University is a hub where students can enhance and practice their capabilities to be agile and adaptable in the workforce which is characterized as a constantly changing environment and a source of continuous learning. The University is also a place where students discover who they are, what they can and can't do, and their strengths and limitations. This is crucial since in the context of employment, it's important to know yourself and your abilities. They need to know how to manage their time and energy, and when to take a break to bounce back.

**To adapt to the demands of the pandemic, various universities have turned to remote learning. What value does online education entail in the job market and what new skill sets do companies eye in our post-pandemic setting?**

Online education will always be valuable and essential if it focuses on the student, and their ability to interact and be engaged with other people. I believe that education cannot rely solely on artificial intelligence as it is already happening with technical education. Education is a lifetime experience and a channel to allow a person to continuously learn. It's crucial then to have media of two-way communication between the professors and the students, paying attention to feedback and working on their needs.

**Since health and safety measures are to be respected, companies have started to offer remote internships. How do you value this new opportunity to the students and newly graduates?**

It's highly valuable. It still connects the students with the companies in a way that helps them learn more about the processes and develop their skills. We've adopted this setting with our interns during the pandemic, hosting online trainings and coachings from our seniors. To be more inclusive, we've extended such corporate welfare since 2019 to all our interns since they're our first channel in recruitment.

RESEARCH

# SHARING IS CARING

**HOW A MEDICAL INTUITION  
IN TIMES OF COVID-19 IN ITALY  
CAN BE OF SERVICE IN AFRICA**

"Fast lung ultrasound teaching program beyond Europe during COVID-19 pandemic: Africa's reality" is the distance-learning project carried out by CESI (University Center for International Solidarity of Università Cattolica) and Fondazione Policlinico A. Gemelli, IRCCS during the COVID-19 emergency. Ten doctors from Policlinico, together with physicists and engineers from the University of Trento, have prepared a training protocol to support doctors and health care workers in Africa in the use of the ultrasound in order to verify the condition of patients' lungs. This tool, in many cases available in African hospitals to monitor pregnant women, can be converted into a COVID-19 detector. Read about the power of knowledge sharing and international collaboration.

## PROFESSOR MARCO CASELLI

Full Professor of General Sociology and Sociology of Cooperation in the faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, where he has also been leading the University Center for International Solidarity (CESI) since 2019. He is also the Coordinator of the Doctoral Programme of "Sociology, organizations, and cultures" at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

### CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY (CESI)?

CESI was founded as a means of expressing the importance of people and solidarity that lies at the heart of the Università Cattolica study experience. The intention was not to organize projects independently of the University, but to provide a link and a catalyst, and to coordinate the experiences and competencies present in our University, which can be made available to the people and the nations in the southern hemisphere.

### HOW DID CESI, THE POLICLINICO GEMELLI AND UNIVERSITÀ DI TRENTO BEGIN WORKING TOGETHER ON THIS PROJECT?

The project was set up by doctors at the Policlinico, in particular Professor Antonia Testa, and the University of Trento got involved thanks to her contacts there. Professor Testa sits on the CESI Management Board and involved Università Cattolica in the project for the significant role that can play as a strong institutional partner in the field of international cooperation. More than eighty professionals are now engaged in the venture.

### AID PROJECTS ARE OFTEN NEGLECTED IN TIMES OF CRISIS WHILE HELP IS OFFERED AT HOME. HOWEVER, THIS PROJECT HAS CONTINUED TO HELP OTHER COUNTRIES DESPITE THE PANDEMIC WE ARE EXPERIENCING IN ITALY.

I teach a course entitled Sociology of Cooperation for Development and, before the pandemic, during the first lesson I often asked my students, "With all the problems of unemployment and poverty that we have in Italy, why should we continue to help poorer countries?" Answers to this question are many: because people are certainly cynical, but only to a small degree. Because we are aware that, despite all the Italian problems, there are people who are worse off than we are'. Because the spread of the Covid virus in sub-Saharan African countries would have even more devastating effects than it has had in Italy. Because helping is an ethical response present in all cultures, 'when someone is in need, you offer help'. Finally, there is the idea that it is in our interest to help: the pandemic will only be over when it has been overcome everywhere. Sometimes we can do important and useful things without the need to do anything extraordinary: this project has a very low budget and we have simply made use of the commitment and the time generously offered by our medical colleagues. At times we have wonderful ideas and we say, 'if only we had the money to put that into action!' when in fact, the only resources necessary are our skills and intelligence. Behind this project there is a good idea and, fortunately, good ideas are free.



**"THE PANDEMIC WILL ONLY BE OVER WHEN IT HAS BEEN OVERCOME EVERYWHERE."**

### ONLINE COMMUNICATION HAS ALLOWED US TO BE 'CLOSE WHILE AT A DISTANCE'. COULD THIS BE THE START OF A NEW TYPE OF VOLUNTARY WORK THAT ACCOMPANIES IN LOCO PROJECTS?

Clearly, we could not have done this without the technology: getting eighty or ninety people from fifteen to twenty different countries together in the same place would be an organizational and financial nightmare. The technology overcomes these barriers and should be exploited in emergency situations. Of course, communication through the Internet is extraordinary, but has its limits: in some areas of the world, connection is patchy and unreliable. Then there is the question of physical contact, which is still essential to us as human beings. Solidarity is a human practice and cannot be reduced to the mere use of technological tools: we still need to look into each other's eyes, shake hands and pat each other on the back. Reciprocal trust is built through daily physical interaction. The project has worked through technology which was made possible because of a network that had been created over the years through personal meetings and contacts.



**"WHEN SOMEONE IS IN NEED, YOU OFFER HELP."**

## PROFESSOR ANTONIA TESTA

Scientific Director of the Center for Ultrasound in Gynecological Oncology "Class Ultrasound" of the Agostino Gemelli University Hospital Foundation. Since its inception, the Center has trained more than 3,000 Italian and European physicians and health professionals; it provides patients with the highest professional service and plays a key role in multicenter scientific studies.

Professor Testa is also Associate Professor of the Institute of Obstetric and Gynaecological Clinics at the Università Cattolica. She has been member of the Board of the International Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology ISUOG (International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology) for 8 years, and she has been Vice-President of the SIEOG (Italian Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology) for two years. She became member of The International Ovarian Tumor Analysis (IOTA) in the year 2000. She has conducted more than fifty research projects on gynaecological cancer and chemotherapy protocols, and her studies have enabled leading companies in the construction of ultrasound equipment to improve their ability to diagnose and recognize tumor masses.



the world and already experts in the use of ultrasound scanning: perhaps it would have been possible to teach a person already experienced in the technique to evaluate another organ. In just 24 hours we prepared a four-minute video tutorial which was published in the International Journal, Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

A task force was immediately set up, which included Dr Bonsenso and two doctors Smargiassi and Inchignolo who, in cooperation with the University of Trento, had developed an Artificial Intelligence software and a platform capable of receiving the clips of ultrasound scans from various parts of the lung with the possibility to automatically detect any abnormalities.

We developed a fast teaching program to verify whether this technique could be easily learned, and it was found to be possible and effective. Then someone mentioned Africa. Thinking of the African nations who, fortunately, were not yet affected by this storm but were preparing to face an emergency, we realized that there are many places such as hospitals or missionary centres which are unlikely to have a CT scanner, but might well have an ultrasound scanner. Speaking to the task force, I suggested that we shared the idea with our African colleagues. CESI played an important role in making it possible for us to organize the project. We contacted English-speaking African nations in various ways and within ten days we had set up two webinar appointments. Our main intention was not to contact our colleagues in Africa with the attitude of those who want to teach, but to set up a cooperative project involving genuine sharing.

### WHERE DID THE IDEA THAT AN ULTRASOUND SCAN COULD DETECT COVID-19 PNEUMONIA COME FROM?

I have been carrying out research into the use of ultrasound examinations for the assessment of gynaecological tumours for many years and a few months ago I invited a colleague, the paediatrician Dr Danilo Bonsenso, to explain to my residents how he uses ultrasound scans of the lungs in the paediatric field. When the pandemic was announced, one young doctor asked me if I had ever heard of ultrasound scans of the lungs and I immediately thought of Dr Bonsenso. I realized that lung ultrasound examination was an accurate imaging method to diagnose COVID-19 pneumonia.

My first thoughts went to pregnant women, for whom it is not easy to undergo one or more Computed Tomography examinations. Then I thought of the many gynaecologists working around

**"WHEN YOU GIVE, YOU ALWAYS RECEIVE."**



**DR. ASHA OMAR AHMED  
FROM SOMALIA  
PARTICIPANT IN THE PROJECT**

### HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO SET UP THE PROJECT?

It took less than two months and the teamwork was extremely important, in particular the work with my closest colleague, Dr Moro. The work was relentless but thrilling. The best thing is that we have involved young people in the project and this group of residents who welcomed my proposal played a key role in the two days of the project. Once we realized that twelve nations would have been involved, we thought there might have been problems with the Internet connection, so in advance of the meeting, we set up WhatsApp chats for each resident with a specific nation so that they could have been in personal contact. We wanted the explanatory part to be as long as needed, practical and interactive, with a self-evaluation quiz. Then we invited our African colleagues – doctors, nurses, midwives and sonographers – to provide feedback in a session, called Voices from Africa. At first, the connection was problematic, but once the first colleague appeared on the screen and told us how they were coping with the situation, there was a welcoming round of applause and that was our reward for the effort of the past weeks.



**DR. KIBROM GEBREELIASIE  
FROM ETIOPIA  
PARTICIPANT IN THE PROJECT**

### HOW REWARDING WAS THIS EXPERIENCE FOR YOU, AS DOCTORS?

As everyone struck by of this crisis initially we felt quite impotent and this opportunity to act certainly energised us and allowed us to say, 'we don't know if it work but let's try'. Working directly and interactively with the young residents meant that we felt their enthusiasm and we were able to engage them in the project and the opportunity to help other colleagues and ourselves to explore areas outside our specific microcosms. Knowing that we were helping a colleague on the other side of the world made our work and our skills more valuable. We often use the expression "if we all pull together..." and we were able to involve others in this adventure, giving them tasks to do, stimulating their creativity, and when a colleague in the intensive-care ward needed an ultrasound scan of a lung, we could make ourselves useful; we could use our specific skills to soothe a pregnant woman about the health of her lungs. Finally, the link with Africa was really special for me.



**“KNOWING THAT WE WERE HELPING A COLLEAGUE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD MADE OUR WORK AND OUR SKILLS MORE VALUABLE.”**



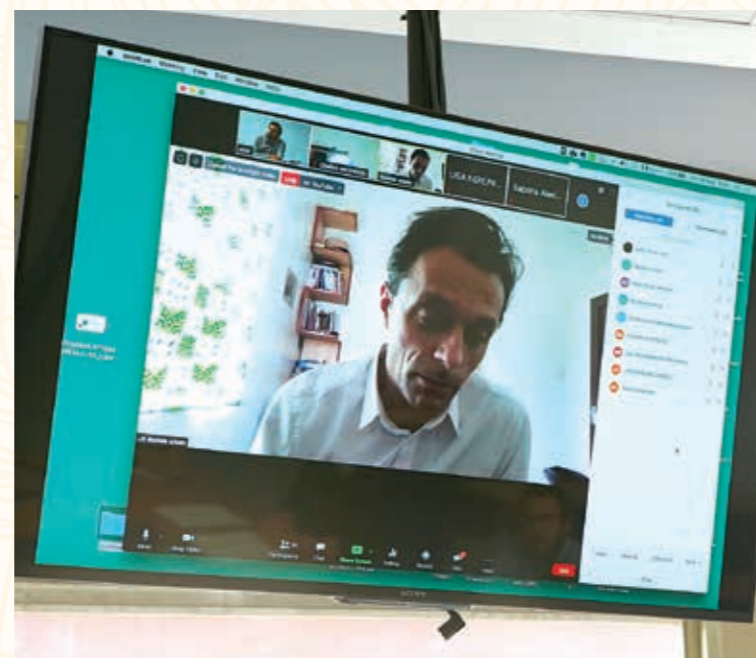
**“CESI PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO ORGANIZE THE PROJECT.”**

**YOU GAVE YOUR KNOW-HOW, WHAT DID YOU RECEIVE IN RETURN?**

When you give, you always receive: we are a multidisciplinary group and we were provided with a tool that will be very useful for our cancer patients. We made a number of contacts with staff in Africa, which will certainly continue. We felt that we were involved in our mission: we talk a lot about the third mission of Università Cattolica and so we are very much aware that clinical medicine comes first, but it is also our duty to carry out research, exactly because we are a university. Moreover, it is equally important to educate our young people and to offer the knowledge and results generated in our laboratories not only to the outside community here in Italy, but also to those who live overseas.

**WHAT ADDITIONAL SKILLS ARE NEEDED WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP IS MEDIATED BY TECHNOLOGY?**

We were all a little hampered by the lack of physical presence and closeness at the beginning. However, I saw that these instruments are amazing when they are used correctly. If a colleague has difficulty with the Internet connection, you wait, you watch, you listen. Although you are not present to take their hand and guide them in using the probe, you can demonstrate and you can get them to repeat the operation. I found that - like so many things - if technologies are used correctly, they have enormous potential. The work we did with Africa was important. I had known little about that world and this reciprocal learning situation was marvellous: getting ready to understand their situation, especially listening to their experiences, and giving them back our suggestions with a sense of humility and collaboration.



**“WE DON'T KNOW IF IT WILL WORK BUT LET'S TRY.”**



**“A COOPERATIVE PROJECT INVOLVING GENUINE SHARING.”**

## DR. ANDREA SMARGIASSI

Pneumologist and supervisor of the project. Medical director at UOC Pneumologia Policlinico Universitario Agostino Gemelli IRCCS.



### WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN THIS PROJECT?

We are both pneumologists and have been working in the field of thoracic ultrasound scanning since 2007. Because of our long experience, we decided during the COVID-19 emergency to organize training events at the Policlinico for colleagues specialising in pneumology, infectology, gynaecology, internal medicine and emergency medicine. These lessons took the form of short lessons that explained key concepts of thoracic ultrasound scanning and patterns that indicated pneumonia in COVID-19 patients. The aim was to allow colleagues to integrate their medical examination with a tool that could widen diagnostic capacity, was easily sterilized and could be used at the bedside. As a result of this positive experience, we decided to take part in the Africa project, making our expertise in thoracic ultrasound scanning available to colleagues, providing a training course and answering any queries.

### WHERE DID THE IDEA OF CONVERTING AN ULTRASOUND SCAN INTO A COVID-19 DETECTOR COME FROM?

One of the aims of thoracic ultrasound scanning is to provide information relating to the histopathologic changes involving the periphery of lungs and emerging to the pleural surface. COVID-19 pneumonia is typically extended to the pulmonary periphery, with prevalent distribution in the mid-basal posterolateral regions. Finding these histopathologic changes using ultrasound scans can show a particular pattern related to Covid pneumonia. As the COVID-19 emergency developed, our team, which includes Dr Gino Soldati and the engineer Professor Libertario Demi, published articles on the physical origin of vertical artifacts, the

## DR. RICCARDO INCHINGOLO

Pneumologist and supervisor of the project. Medical director at UOC Pneumologia Policlinico Universitario Agostino Gemelli IRCCS.



standardization of thoracic ultrasound scanning techniques, the protocol for the acquisition of the images of patients affected by Sars-Cov-2 pneumonia and indicative pathological ultrasound patterns.

### HOW IS A TRAINING PROTOCOL SET UP IN THESE CASES AND WHO IS INVOLVED?

It is very important to try to imagine the everyday needs of our colleagues in this specific period and to transmit the key concepts clearly and as quickly as possible, taking into account the physical distances. This becomes particularly complex when you have to include practical demonstrations to support the theoretical lessons. We wanted to carry out and demonstrate actual scans that, despite the distance, allowed our colleagues to learn how to set up the ultrasound scan machine and how to follow the protocol for acquisition of the images. We also presented a test that would make it possible to detect and recognize the ultrasound scan patterns indicative of compatible symptoms.

### DURING THE PROJECT YOU MADE YOUR KNOW-HOW AVAILABLE. WHAT DID YOU RECEIVE IN RETURN?

Certainly, the satisfaction of having presented a practical and economical tool that will extend and increase the diagnostic capacity of a standard clinical test. During a pandemic this could be extremely useful in countries where the availability of second-level diagnostic equipment is very limited. We particularly appreciated the enthusiasm, interest and participation of the colleagues working in the African countries.

## DR. EDOARDO COLA

He is resident in gynaecology



### WHAT MADE YOU TAKE PART IN THE PROJECT?

I believe in international cooperation, especially during difficult times such as the present crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all deeply, forcing us to face up to our fragility; it has shaken our belief that we can control everything, or almost everything. In countries with few economic resources, this is daily life. By making us face up to our weaknesses and our fears, this pandemic has drawn out surprising resources in each and every one of us, reawakening feelings of sharing and international solidarity. Health is an absolute good, wherever we are in the world.

### WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN THE PROJECT?

I was responsible for coordinating the twelve colleagues from Eritrea who accepted our proposal. As the coordinator of the group, I organized the distribution of teaching material and logistic information and I gathered and answered any doubts and queries relating to the project.

### THIS PROJECT WAS ORGANIZED ENTIRELY IN DISTANCE MODE: HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THIS METHOD AND WHAT ADVANTAGES DID YOU FIND?

The distance mode allowed us to involve African nations, working with colleagues scattered throughout these countries. The quality of the images and the materials and the skill of the lecturers made it possible to hold interactive workshops of a very high standard, in which all the participants felt involved and could intervene directly. I believe this has shown the efficacy of the method, particularly when working with countries with low economic resources.

### HAS THIS EXPERIENCE INSPIRED YOUR PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTION IN ANY WAY?

It has strengthened my belief that an exchange of information, and sharing of problems, ideas and techniques with poorer countries can enrich all of us. I am certain that these projects should be encouraged and I will undoubtedly be committed to seeing that they are.

**“HEALTH IS AN ABSOLUTE GOOD, WHEREVER WE ARE IN THE WORLD.”**



**Never give up in front  
of difficult moments.  
Face them step by step  
drawing your future.**

# WORLD BOUND



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No. 5

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# Agostino Gemelli EMERGENCY FUND

In these unprecedented times of crisis, Università Cattolica created the Agostino Gemelli\* Fund in order to financially support students whose families have been most impacted by the COVID-19 emergency in Italy.

Università Cattolica provided an initial sum of 1 million Euros to establish the Fund, with additional sources originating from other fundraising activities.

Since we need to rethink the present, we shall also re-imagine the future and create new opportunities. To do this we believe that supporting current and future students is crucial.

**Support students impacted by  
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