

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA del Sacro Cuore

WORLDBOUND

Cover Story

N° 4 - 2020
Special Edition COVID-19

AND THE WORLD STOOD STILL

How Università Cattolica faced the COVID-19 emergency while safeguarding the health of its students and staff.



Domestic Students

STUDENT MOBILITY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

COVID-19 has created a "new normal" for international mobility, transforming the landscape of the sector, and reshaping our students' experiences.

Community Engagement

APART BUT NOT ALONE

Università Cattolica is finding ways to be proactive and to contribute to the society and the community.



MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Colleagues, Students and Friends,

As has been the case for so many of the challenging circumstances and things that have happened in recent time, this special issue of Worldbound is not what had been programmed. However, we have decided to recount how our daily lives have been changed, how we have reacted to the current emergency and how, even in the most critical, difficult and painful of situations, it has been so important to respond immediately and with courage.



We would like this period to be remembered not just as a complex moment for Italy and the world but also as a moment that has seen human solidarity, mutual respect and cooperation come to the forefront in the name of the well-being of individuals and the community.

We are all apprehensive about the moment when we will be able to return to normal, and this special issue is our way of reminding everyone - ourselves above all - that although it is important to react to the emergency it is equally important for us to focus on what is to come. We might have had to re-imagine the present, but we are even more determined to dream of and create a new future.

No one will leave their home the same way they entered it: we are certain that the picture of the future we are painting now will be made up of services, professionals and people all better than before.

We are not just describing how Università Cattolica has responded operationally to the emergency in order to ensure that classes, exams and graduation sessions are held for our students. We are also talking about the actions taken at the service of the community, gathering together the opinions of experts and giving voice to the young people who found themselves as protagonists in an unprecedented era.

From now on, the paradigms that we have been living our lives by will change, habits will change, and our way of relating to others and to nature will change. This natural process of transformation, which in the normal run of things would take years, is happening in a very brief lapse of time and we are convinced that it will benefit our new generations. They will carry the signs of a very delicate moment in the world, but they will also bear witness to a period of recovery and rebirth, which they will be able to transmit to those who come later.

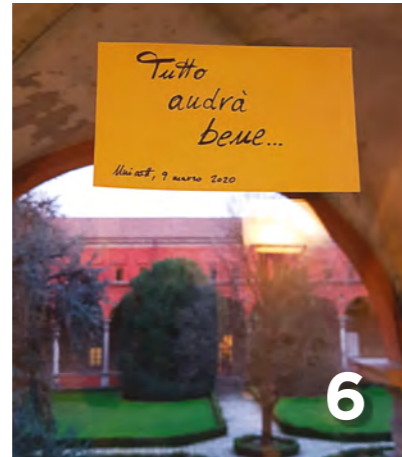
It is our responsibility to teach them by example, now more than ever, and with facts rather than words: how to start again, what it means to rebuild and to understand together the profound meaning of all this, to bring human relationships back to the centre of our lives and to choose to be the best we can be at all times.

Professor Franco Anelli

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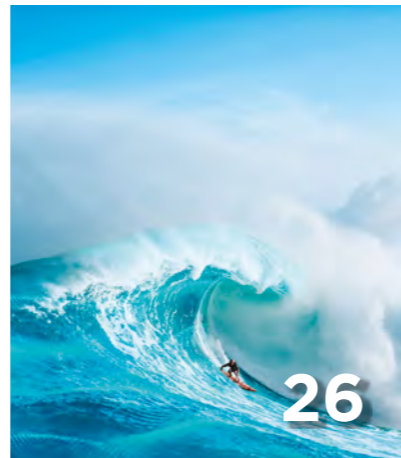
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Student Voices from the Lockdown

We asked some of Cattolica's international students who decided to both stay in Italy or go back to their countries to recount their experience so far and tell us what they'll do when the lockdown will end.

AND THE WORLD STOOD STILL

The news of the COVID-19 outbreak in China had been circulating for weeks when the first cases were discovered in the Lombardy region at the end of February. Life for millions of people changed overnight and Università Cattolica, together with the other Italian higher education institutions, had to promptly react to the emergency, safeguarding the health of its students and staff.



On February 20, the bars opened at the break of dawn. Saucer plates clunk against the tazze as the bartenders pressed the coffee machines, whirling them to life. Residents flocked in the streets with their agenda in mind. The public and private transports crowded the roads with impatient horns and rewing engines. The metros hustled, the neighbors interacted, the employees worked, the schools taught, the restaurants fed, and the shops remained open.

At Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the campus flourished. The students sauntered to their classrooms. The professors set up their materials before classes began. The staff started working on their respective tasks.

A few days later, the news about COVID-19 took off.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THE NEWS ABOUT COVID-19 TOOK OFF.

As a higher education institution, Università Cattolica suspended its in-person academic activities starting from February 24, following the news about the gradual spread of COVID-19 in Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna. Its foremost intention was, and still is, to safeguard the health of its students and staff.

Sara Bombardieri, an undergraduate student of the University, flicked her television on and came across the news update on COVID-19 in Italy. Since the reports talked about the preventive measures of the country, she checked whether Università Cattolica had already released details about what would happen with the classes at the University. There, on the university app, the message popped up from the Rector, suspending in-person academic activities of the students following the news stories around COVID-19.

"I had kept tabs on the progress of the news about the virus. I wasn't surprised when the University had to close and suspend the face-to-face lessons. It is a reasonable decision to make since the University is a place where a lot of people interact. But I was quite sure I would be back the week after," Sara says, bringing up the extended suspension of teaching at the University after a series of alarming increases of COVID-19 cases in Italy.

The University has split up into several working teams who have been at the helm of informing the students and staff through email messages, university app and website, as well as social media platforms. It has created a dedicated email address and points of contact to reach for queries and information requests about COVID-19.

After the suspension of face-to-face didactic activities, the University has worked with its academic staff on how they could carry on with teaching through the resources they have on hand. They have enhanced their online teaching platform to better cater to webinars, interactive presentations, lecture notes, and even online discussion boards. Although the University did not foresee a pandemic situation such as COVID-19, it has prioritized its students in its

decision-making for the academic activities, choosing what they believe would fit and be best for the students' needs.

"WHAT I APPRECIATE IS THE CONSTANT ATTENTION PAID TO STUDENTS WHO ARE ASKED TO RESPECT THE MEASURES AND PROTECT THEMSELVES."

The information the University sends per week opens up to include preventive measures the students and staff need to comply with, hotline numbers to call and email addresses to message in case of questions, and constant updates from the Rector and Faculty Deans about the exams, thesis presentations, graduations, and remote classes.

"What I appreciate from the messages and updates I receive from the University is the constant attention paid to students who are asked to respect the measures and protect themselves. As I stay home, I can catch up on the lessons through the video classes online and to reflect on what I will do once I am back at the university," Sara says.

Not far from the domestic level, a concern blooms in the midst of the dilemma: how about those who are abroad, pursuing their international programs and studies?

The international branch of the University, led by Dr. Edilio Mazzoleni, Director of Global Engagement and International Education, has ensured that the students abroad and international students who decided to stay in Italy are well-informed about the crisis. The international team follows the rules by the book, acting on the emergency policies laid out by the University and assessing which ones can be implemented for the unexpected case of COVID-19.

WHEN THE BREAKOUT FLARED UP, THE INTERNATIONAL TEAM REACHED OUT TO THEIR STUDENTS ABROAD.

When the breakout flared up, the international team reached out to their students abroad. They informed them and did not assume those who were abroad had already known, or at least not in its depth, about the epidemic. They verified students' queries since some information that had circulated a few days before was inaccurate.

There are countries where various messaging apps are blocked or do not function properly. To resolve this, the international team has used an in-house built app that

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geolocalizes students and has a direct messaging function embedded in it. This is called the Safety App. It fires notifications to the students abroad and opens the line of communication between them and the international team.

There are students and parents who worry about their health situation in the country where they are staying. The international team has found and resorted to special health insurance that covers COVID-19 and invited the students to sign up for their welfare. They coordinated with Università Cattolica's partner universities and health clinics to tend to the students in need abroad as part of their insurance coverage.

The international team has set up contact points between the University and Italian consulates and embassies across the globe. Such action guarantees access to communications and responses for the students in case of emergencies. "Once we learn about an urgent situation from any of our students abroad, we assess it first. Then, we find solutions for it and keep in touch with our embassies or consulates. It is not the International Office that can act on the solutions or decisions. Our authority is to make sure that students know what is going on and how long it will take to find a solution. What is important is to be able to communicate with those who are abroad or in Italy, stay in contact with them, and explain the situation," Dr. Mazzoleni says.

“WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THOSE WHO ARE ABROAD OR IN ITALY.”

When the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the students abroad were even more encouraged to use the Safety Package that they had received from the International Office before their departure, to reach out to the University. The package contains the above mentioned ready-to-install messaging app with GPS (Safety App), a list of emergency hotline numbers that are open 24/7, and the health insurance that covers cases such as COVID-19. On top of that, students have access to medical centers in the country where they are staying which answers the call in 13 different languages.

Amidst the situation, the parents of students, who are still abroad or, being international, decided to stay in Italy, have expressed their strong concerns to the University. Bearing in mind that all students are of age, the international team informs the parents about the situation and gives fact-checks to the reports they have on hand. They share their sentiments and assure them by firing responses that are factual, firm, and still full of understanding.

There are in-person academic activities that have been suspended as well for the international students in Italy and domestic students abroad of the University. The goal of the international team is to be able to work with their partner institutions abroad and the resources they have on hand.

"When several countries banned entry to and from Italy, our international students were invited by their home institutions to go back as part of their emergency plans. On the same night, our team decided to offer the majority of our courses for mobility programs online, which was approved the day after by the Rector, Professor Franco Anelli. Since most of the students had been far away for too long since the beginning of the semester in their home country, we decided to offer them the opportunity of not missing their semester credits.

As for our domestic students abroad, we got in contact with our partner universities and asked them if it would be possible for our students to take their subjects remotely. Most of them are able to provide the courses online," Dr. Mazzoleni says.

The switch from in-person teaching to remote classes has taken manpower and prompt responses. While the emergency response and plan of Università Cattolica have been in place for a long time, they are not all-encompassing with the solutions for a pandemic case such as COVID-19. The international team had to react overnight and as quickly as possible as they decided the path of academic activities to take while keeping in mind what would be best for the students and staff.

Rayane Salloum, an international student from Lebanon, finds it easy to catch up with her lessons through the online lectures. "The spread of the virus took me by surprise. I stayed in Italy despite the situation. The professors have been helpful and opted for recorded lessons which I find convenient. I am able to follow them at my own pace. There are professors who have opened online discussion boards to pick up where we left from our last face-to-face lecture. Some Professors have dedicated live sessions with us to answer our questions. When in doubt, we can contact them through email, chat, or even a video conference," she says.

Emilie Brøndum-Jensen, an international student from Denmark, checks her email to see whether her professors have uploaded new video lectures. "I appreciate how my professors make sure that we continue our studies at home. They upload new videos and materials every week and answer our questions quickly. Some of them even do live sessions with us to make the lessons more interactive. Instead of feeling as if we are wasting our time being quarantined at home, we are quite busy thanks to the online lessons and materials," she says.

“WE ARE QUITE BUSY THANKS TO THE ONLINE LESSONS AND MATERIALS.”

Technical issues over online materials cannot be avoided, but Luca Baussola, an undergraduate student of the University, reaches out to his professors to address the problems. "We settle with a compromise where they re-upload the video or create a new one. There are also supplementary materials, just in case the video fails to load. They assure that

all the required reading materials are uploaded and even in advance. It may not be perfect, but they are working their best to give us the lectures we need," he says.

Professor Giovanna Mascheroni, an Associate Professor of Sociology of Media and Communication at Università Cattolica, admits that the online classes are her first attempt at remote teaching. She has set up an online blog forum to provide an interactive feedback-based channel where her students can apply and test what they have learned in their uploaded videos and materials by commenting on and engaging with the online community. "My background in sociology, media and communications helps me become aware that digital media can be helpfully employed in practices of a collective sense-making. Since my students come from all over the world, I thought this could be an opportunity for them to interact, share their everyday lives in this informal online space, and find a notion of normality for a while to reduce their anxieties," she says.

COVID-19 propels Università Cattolica to ponder. In times like this, institutional emergency protocols deem high importance. It darts everyone to take sound and grounded actions. It guides the personnel on how decisions should be made or what sequence of steps to take. "Emergency protocols for higher education institutions should be developed and it is evident why. They tell you what you need to do, who to contact, and how to carry out your plans. It is part of our responsibility to have them on hand once urgent cases like this occur," Dr. Mazzoleni says.

"EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED."

"With the remote classes that the University is doing now, it is difficult to disregard the pursuit of online education. Blended learning is a tool of this generation and maybe the future. It is time to study what works and what does not in learning, and we can start that by looking into the means of communication. It is our responsibility to learn and understand these means, such as social media platforms, to better educate our students.

We need to devise a model that can be the standard of this practice then do our best not to move down that bar. As a higher education institution, we need to take a step further in being more well-rounded and inclusive in education," Dr. Mazzoleni adds. As for the continuity of online education, he is positive that the university will delve further into its possibility.

There is a sanctuary of solace that buzzes in Italy. Buried in the worried eyes of the residents speaks a resolute belief that

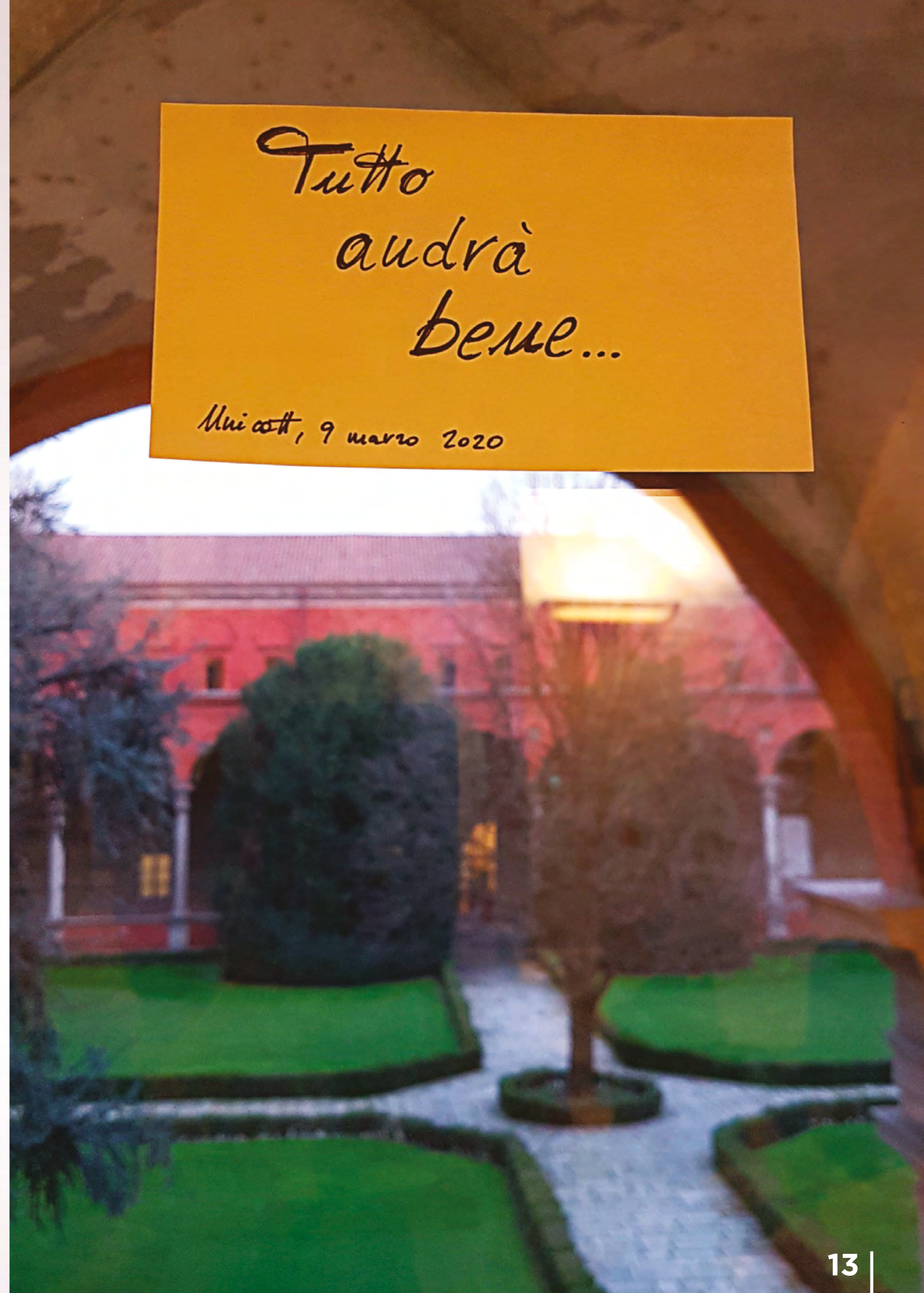
everyone will paddle safely to the shore. For now, the students of Università Cattolica nod well to the remote classes. The teaching staff tap into the means of communication to enhance their modes of teaching delivery. The administrative team indulges in providing the best service to local and international students, and members of the university.

"BLENDED LEARNING IS A TOOL OF THIS GENERATION AND MAYBE THE FUTURE."

In the deserted streets, Italian flags hang outside the windows. The green, white, and red streaks glimmer as the sun rises on the first day of Spring. Its rays glare at the flags, smearing the fragrance of patriotism. In other areas, spray paints fringe white cloths with Italy's vision in the near future: *Andrà tutto bene*. Everything will be okay.

The metros will hustle, the neighbors will interact, the employees will work, the schools will teach, the restaurants will serve, and the shops will open again.

AND EVERYONE WILL WATCH THE REVIVAL UNFOLD.



While the pandemic is affecting billions of people around the world, Cattolica is doing all it can to help counteract the effects of the emergency. Apart from finding ways to continue teaching and researching, Università Cattolica is also proactive in its contribution to the society and the community. It believes its mission doesn't end with graduation and its goal is to give back to society, especially in these times of unprecedented crisis.

*Apart
but
Not Alone*

If you can't avoid talking about it, you'll read about it in the news. Or if you've decided not to read the newspapers for the moment, you'll see it on the TV or overhear others talking about it. Let's face it: the COVID-19 pandemic will be the sign of an era, and we're not going to forget it quickly. This is true not just from a medical perspective, but also from the perspective of the impact the virus has on our lives in a broader sense: what unspoken feelings does it unveil? How does it feel to have your freedom to move around removed in the secluded world of local and global lockdowns?

But this is only part of the story. Cattolica, like other organizations around the world, is doing all it can to help counteract the effects of the pandemic. Moving classes to online platforms was just the first step. Apart from finding ways to continue teaching and research activities, the university is also proactive in its contribution to society and the community.

In line with this mission, the Policlinico Gemelli Foundation in Rome has transformed its Columbus Hospital into a Regional Covid Hospital. The new Columbus Covid 2 Hospital is equipped with 59 intensive care beds and a further 80 ward beds, all for the treatment of those suffering from COVID-19. The Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Rome is driven by a sense of community and is acting to deal with the pandemic. The Rector of Università Cattolica, Franco Anelli, and the Faculty Dean, Rocco Bellantone, are clear about the efforts that the current situation requires from health professionals. "We have answered the call to arms issued by the Lazio Region with a sense of responsibility, providing the health service with our clinical and medical competencies," Professor Bellantone says. The Rector is clear about the dedication of the hospital staff when he says, "The gratitude we feel towards our young doctors and nurses,

who were just students not long ago, is huge, and we are full of admiration and affection."

Students have been fast-tracked to graduation to become doctors and nurses. "We brought forward the date of your graduation so that we can respond quickly to the virus that is spreading through our cities. What will be asked of you will be arduous, intense, and even risky, as you embark on the care of patients," Rector Franco Anelli said in his speech to the new graduates. No ceremonies, no graduation parties afterwards, no proud parents attending the celebration of one of the greatest achievements of their children. Thirteen students graduated at least two weeks ahead of schedule in order to be ready to start work. Pro-Rector Mario Taccolini, also President of the Fondazione Poliambulanza in Brescia (one of the worst affected areas) is clear about the importance of those in the health profession, including the new graduates: "Being a nurse means choosing a profession whose main aim is to ensure people's wellbeing and provide health care, looking after the weakest and most vulnerable in our society. Graduating some weeks earlier than scheduled means that we can offer the local community the best, youngest and most qualified resources we have in order to help deal with this emergency that our country is experiencing."

Professors and faculty members are making every effort to deliver courses to students. Most classes are now being held online so that students can keep to their study program, and social media are being used by some professors to spread good practice to be followed at this difficult time. Professor Emanuela Confalonieri, who teaches Psychology of Educational Interventions, uses TikTok to share her advice on dealing with the stress that students might experience:

*At the end of the ambulance route, the patient is carried to the new Covid Hospital intensive unit**



*Inside the mobile first aid unit during a transfer. The healthcare professionals monitor the COVID-19 patient**

"The gratitude we feel towards our young doctors and nurses, who were just students not long ago, is huge, and we are full of admiration and affection."

* Photos courtesy of Luigi Avantaggiato on behalf of Fondazione Policlinico Universitario Agostino Gemelli IRCCS.

"It's much better to ask than sit at home worrying. The problem is clear but talking about it can help people feel less fearful." The directors of the Università Cattolica Specializing Programs have opened a page on LinkedIn entitled "Our voices in times of crisis" with the aim of discussing some of the most difficult aspects of this health emergency. The page touches on, among other things, individual and corporate social responsibility, human relationships with enforced physical distance, and the consequences the pandemic may have on the global economy.

The spirit and nature of Università Cattolica prepares students to be an active part of society, contributing with the knowledge and skills acquired here. Graduates from the university take this with them when they leave and it

becomes part of their own nature to serve the community. Giuseppe Miroglio, alumnus of the Faculty of Economics, is now Vice President of the Miroglio Group, which manufactures and distributes clothing and fabrics. To lend their support to the fight against COVID-19, the company has shifted production to making protective masks. When they reach full production, they will be producing 25,000 masks a day which will be provided to hospitals, pharmacies and municipalities in the Piedmont Region.

Despite the most difficult of times which sees many people suffer, there is a sign of the strength that communities are showing in their care for others.

"Despite the most difficult of times which sees many people suffer, there is a sign of the strength that communities are showing in their care for others."

*The healthcare professionals carry the patient in bio-containment from the Policlinico Gemelli's intensive care unit to the Columbus Covid Hospital.**



Thank You!

China may be slowly emerging from its tough battle against COVID-19 but Europe is now fighting the pandemic while at the peak of the curve of infected people. Although it is not uncommon to see acts of solidarity during times of crisis, Università Cattolica has witnessed incredible examples of international friendship during a time when there are difficulties maintaining medical supplies, even of simple items such as masks and gloves. Having seen what Italy is going through, the family of one of Università Cattolica's Chinese students sent 2,000 masks to the four campuses of the university; Jilin International Studies University and South West University sent more supplies of medical protective items to our Milan campus, including N95 special filter masks. More support has come from the Cattolica Chinese Students Association which joined other associations and the Confucius Institute to deliver 1,500 FFP2 masks for the citizens of Milan, while a second batch was gifted to the Niguarda Hospital in Milan.

Cattolica has witnessed incredible examples of international friendship.

A scenario, such as world-wide lockdown due to a global pandemic, was for many of us only conceivable as science-fiction, a cinematic experience. The scientific community, however, knew that sooner or later we would have faced the reality of a global pandemic. While past viruses have spread across continents, the speed at which COVID-19 virus has travelled is evidence of the globalization influence.

Renowned Infectious Disease Specialist, Professor Roberto Cauda, discusses the importance of international scientific cooperation, the history of pandemics, and the concept of 'One Health' that concerns both humans and animals.

A close-up photograph of two hands wearing white nitrile gloves, shaking hands in a firm grip. The background is dark, making the white gloves stand out. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced.

Standing Together for Science

Professor Roberto Cauda

PROFESSOR CAUDA

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 a 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.



In pandemic situations like the one we are experiencing, what is the role of the infectious disease specialist?

The infectious disease specialist has an extremely important role to play. Pandemics are due to the spread of infectious diseases and therefore the infectious disease specialist plays a central - not unique, but central - role. As seen with the COVID-19 pandemic and as also seen daily in the COVID-19 hospital which Università Cattolica together with the IRCCS Fondazione Policlinico Universitario Agostino Gemelli have built by converting the Columbus Hospital from a general to a specialistic hospital, there are multidisciplinary teams that manage these patients. So in the case of COVID-19 there is a team made up of infectious disease specialists, pulmonologists, internists, intensivists who with different skills and at different times have the opportunity to be able to approach and manage the patient. Therefore, infectious disease specialists in pandemics or forms of infectious diseases play a central role both in the management, diagnosis and therapy of patients, and in the ability to coordinate other specialists and coordinate their own work with other specialists.

Il Sole 24 Ore newspaper reported on 20 March that an agreement was signed by the Fondazione Policlinico Universitario Gemelli and the US Charitable Trust. What collaborations like this is the Gemelli Hospital carrying out? Is there one in particular that has impressed you?

The agreement with the US Charitable Trust is an example of collaboration between institutions, but it isn't the only one. The swift move towards supporting society has seen actions by ENI, by the Messaggero (which launched a fundraising action for the Policlinico Gemelli as well as for Spallanzani Hospital in Rome), and by a number of Rotary clubs. Private citizens have also contacted me personally to offer their help. The list is so long. My late friend, Ronald Kennedy, with whom I worked in the United States in particular during the HIV epidemic, said to me back in the 90s: "Roberto - epidemics bring out the very best and the very worst in people", and this can be applied to both individuals and communities. I must say that at this moment the dedication of our doctors, nurses and health workers, and the dedication of the media are commendable. I would like to say something about the journalists who I interact with on a daily basis. The work they do to communicate, inform people, and publish updates is certainly praiseworthy, and is just as important as all the charitable initiatives I referred to previously. There is also another initiative that is not based on economics, economics understood as a branch of ethics, which is the great solidarity among researchers. The fact that the internet, the infosphere, has given a total response to a total disease such as the pandemic, tells us that we are a truly closed community, not in the sense of being closed in on itself, but in the sense that we are community in which everyone knows each other and where a Chinese researcher work could be used here right away. And it is in this sense that the internet plays an important role. I have experienced eight epidemics in my life, including that of Ebola in Africa, but I believe that this will be the first one to have been "helped", as it were, by the web.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, the media actually abandoned the less important news and returned to what is essential, to the social function of the news..

So, the epidemic - the pandemic - suddenly forced everyone to confront a health problem that emerged in Italy and I talk about this with the greatest respect for the more than 26,000 people who died in a short time, comparable to wartime: they have left broken lives and affections behind them, people who would never have in their wildest dreams thought that they would be experiencing such a situation.

I recently wrote an article on infectious diseases and cinema - how infectious diseases have been conveyed through film. The plague, HIV and Ebola are also frightening in films.

When we talk about infectious diseases we are referring to something invisible that comes to strike us, not the enemy with a bayonet or bombardment from the sky. It is an enemy that we can't see. And this means that the "enemy" could even be our best friend who transmits the infection to us. It is a significant eventuality. And the other unavoidable aspect is that precisely because of the type of disease it is - another example would be the plague of which there was the Manzonian plague - patients do not receive the comfort that they need, as testified to by many of the doctors and nurses in Brescia and Bergamo for example. They recount that patients are dying alone, with almost no comfort from their religion. That is something to reflect on. The other fundamental thing is that cremation is used not by choice but by necessity. COVID-19, all in all, however, is a striking parallel to the plague and images like the Pope giving his blessing in a deserted Piazza San Pietro become etched into history.

“Epidemics bring out the very best and the very worst in people.”

What is the international scientific community learning from this pandemic, or rather, what precautions and actions will have to be taken in the future to prevent these scenarios from repeating themselves?

I quote from an article by Corbellini, a well-known medical historian. At the beginning of the epidemic, before it had become a pandemic and was still limited to China, in the Sunday edition of Il Sole 24 Ore he wrote a review of a book on epidemics. The first sentence he wrote (and I hope I recall this well and don't misrepresent his idea) was this: "Epidemics are an inevitable evil in the history of humanity". Let me explain. Epidemics cannot be reset to zero and although technology can help us a lot it cannot solve or prevent the spread of a virus or other agent. Types of virus spreading like this will happen periodically over time and most will be the result of anthrozooses, i.e. diseases that pass from animals to humans, as was the case with the Coronavirus. Today it is the Coronavirus and yesterday it could have been Ebola, a flu linked to pigs and chickens, therefore a whole series of diseases. This can be because where there is a close mix between humans and animals, such as the market in Wuhan or the African forest which is encroached on by humans thus reducing the habitat for wild animals, there is more frequent opportunity for humans, wild animals

and domesticated animals to come into close contact. So, the first point to keep in mind is to preserve and improve 'One Health', for both animals and humans.

“Nobody saves themselves by themselves.”

What have you learned from this pandemic?

First of all, that the system is vulnerable, and there is a need to plan internationally for pandemics. Nobody saves themselves by themselves. This disease affects everyone in, if I may say, a very democratic way. I think the other important thing is the role that science has to play. Perhaps science has already learned this lesson since scientists are already pretty cohesive. For example, on 9 January, a few days after China announced there was a problem, researchers had already sent sequences of this new virus around the world (80% similar to SARS - 20% different). These sequences allowed, for example, a basic swab test to be made. So, the news we produce here today goes to China, from China to the United States - the world is global. The other thing that we should learn, at a national level, is that you cannot create healthcare centered on hospitals, i.e. focused only on large hospitals of excellence. They must be linked to medicine in the community. Family doctors are extraordinary people who have paid a very high price in terms of the sickness and the deaths and they deserve the greatest of respect and it is certainly not their job to organize the management aspects. Perhaps when everything is over, those in government positions of responsibility will think of creating different relationships with the young people coming out of university. In my opinion, patients shouldn't be tied to a single doctor - rather, local doctors should create networks. Regardless of the controversies, I believe that health care should be rethought not so much in the construction of new hospitals and more beds, but by aiming towards a stronger care-oriented vocation in the area by leveraging these extraordinary players - the general practitioners.

In these last few weeks, which have certainly been intense, has there been an episode that particularly affected you?

There have been many episodes. The thing that struck me most, because it reminded me of images that I had only read about in books and never thought I would ever experience, was the long line of trucks leaving the cemetery in Bergamo with that cargo of humanity and all the sadness

that they had left behind. This was an incredibly powerful image which is very difficult to forget.

Another extraordinary thing is the dedication that we are seeing in our hospitals. The effort you see drawn, painted, on the people who are working - effort which is of service and shows solidarity with others, and which is not only physical but psychological too.

And then the enthusiasm of the young people. This is something I have witnessed. We sent them to the frontline. We sent the third- and fourth-year specializing students, the ones we kept "protected" until yesterday. They found themselves at the forefront and responded with great maturity and responsibility.

What differences are there between the COVID-19 pandemic and pandemics in the past?

One of the differences is the speed with which it grew as a result of the world being globalized. To find a similar pandemic we have to go back to one which I have a very faded memory of because I was just four or five years old at the time. It was the Asian pandemic of 1956-1957: we are talking about a virus that was transmitted like this, by way of droplets, more or less like the flu, with a diffusion then very widespread. And there are remarkable differences. One is that the Asian flu began in China (almost all epidemics begin in Asia) and arrived in Europe 18 months later, while COVID-19 arrived in Europe immediately, by air. It got there very quickly because it was linked to today's means of transport. Another difference is that the Asian flu grew with no attempts to stop it i.e. people got sick, went back to work and then got sick again. The COVID-19 pandemic for the first time has seen - on a worldwide level - that posts have been positioned, that is, the virus is being directed towards its elimination. The more we know about the world of viruses and germs, the more we find ways to contain them, which in our case is the use of the lockdown, while in other cases there may be other ways. This indicates how science has made significant progress towards understanding how pandemics can be combatted at the same time as using co-responsibility on the part of populations.

“Family doctors are extraordinary people.”



PREVENT COVID-19



Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol based.



Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or do it into your upper sleeve or elbow, NOT your hands.



Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.



Wear mask and gloves when you are outside of your home.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



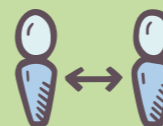
Avoid touching or shaking hands with people.



Stay home if you get fever above 37.5 °C and call your GP.



Stay healthy: eat a balanced diet, get rest, avoid stress.



Always keep a distance of at least 1 meter from everyone.



If you don't have any important reason to go outside, STAY HOME

riding the new digital wave

Every industry and sector has been affected by the measures put in place to contain the spread of COVID-19. In late February, as the outbreak of the virus was confirmed in the Lombardy region and the first social distancing measures were promoted, universities were among the first institutions to close their doors to the public. Università Cattolica had to shift, in a matter of a few weeks, its traditional in-class learning and teaching to online platforms, thus impacting various aspects of its IT and computing infrastructure. Additionally, the University had to rethink its assessment methods and other academic activities. We spoke to Prof. Federico Rajola, Director of ILAB (Center for Digital Innovation), and Giuliano Pozza (Chief Information Officer at Cattolica) to understand the challenges and opportunities that this unanticipated and rapid digital revolution has generated.

FEDERICO RAJOLA



FEDERICO RAJOLA holds a degree in Banking and Finance as well as a PhD in Information Systems Management. He is Full Professor of Organization Studies at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and visiting scholar and Professor at INSEAD. In 2018 he was appointed Rector's Delegate for Innovation. On top of his academic roles, Prof. Rajola is CEO of CeTIF a research Centre on Technology, Innovation and Finance as well as director of ILAB, the Innovation Center of Università Cattolica.

What is ILAB?

ILAB deals with innovation of the online didactic activities of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. It is a research center that also handles information technology and digitalization of the University. It supports the students and academic staff with their online activities, harnessing innovative methods and solutions of the learning tools.

How has ILAB handled the COVID-19 situation?

The Rector and the Executive Management of the University have always invested and advocated for innovation and technology in the past years. As a result, we had our bases covered with technology that could ease the online learning transition. ILAB has built a solid foundation thanks to its specialized and competent team. 20 years ago, we had already started some distance-learning courses through satellites before we adapted to the rise of the Internet and brought about **Blackboard***, improving the overall learning experience to better adapt to multimedia materials and the changing demands of technology. Such case has been a determining factor as to how we would face the strong impact of COVID-19 to our academic activities and available technology.

In the past 10 days, we have assisted 4,500 professors to deliver their multimedia materials online and continue their remote teaching to more than 40,000 students. To top that, we have also trained 50 additional administrative staff to assist professors and students during the transition. If we had not had the extensive experience of 20 years, we would not be able to produce such efforts and results.

The problem does not only revolve around how we can turn over the didactic materials from in-person to remote, but it also tackles how we adapt the materials of the teaching staff to their online system requirements. There are various ways and criteria to think about how to provide and execute solutions. We start our day with a problem but end it with a result. I am grateful to have a formidable team who has taken the initiative to carry out their respective tasks and beyond. The University has also formed incredible groups who have responded to setbacks in the nick of time.

How do didactic materials change and adapt to online platforms?

There is an essence of transformation here. If a student sits in a classroom to listen to their lecturer, the student and lecturer can interact. The lecturer then can assess if it were possible to dig deeper into the topic they are discussing. It rarely happens in remote teaching.

Webinars, streams, and downloadable lesson notes are not enough. We need to revisit and rethink our approaches. After every lesson, we strongly recommend a short quiz or writing activity to check the understanding of the students on the lesson.

The professors have also been under the watchful eye of this change. Most of them are used to in-person delivery of a two- or three-hour lecture. It does not come off easily that, all of a sudden, they record the lessons that amount to 20 to 25 minutes per video.

The University ponders on how it can deliver post-lesson assessment online in a way that minimizes the technical challenges on the students' part. The

teaching staff expands their ways in giving exams and assignments that fit best online since, at present, paper-based tests are no longer feasible. Aside from that, they must be prepared to answer the questions of the students, even regarding the technical problems on the system.

We also pay attention to the needs of our students with disabilities and think of solutions that are specialized and catered to their specific needs. That plus a look into the cases of digital divide where a student living in the countryside might not have the best internet connection to access the uploaded materials.

What are the most challenging experiences ILAB faced during COVID-19?

From the onset of the virus, we have implemented a few strategic plans. We first started working on the worst-case scenario which was the University being closed until the summer. From there, we have built a pile of strategies. One of the challenges we have encountered is the massive delay in the delivery of technological materials. Overnight, every activity shifted to remote and we had to provide some of the staff, both academic and administrative, with additional hardware solutions. Since the production in China has been halted, the orders we made faced the same issue. We put on our thinking caps and managed to provide an alternative source without allowing the quality of the content to suffer.

How can the COVID-19 incident become an opportunity for the University?

For the long-term, it can have the upsides. This is the time the University revamps its models in teaching, materials, and technology. We have an abundant supply of technology on our side and, for now, it is enough to provide our students. What we learn from this experience takes us further in an important phase.

Technology provides us with tools that complement what we use inside the classroom, on the internet, and, most especially, on social media platforms. We will witness an even more connected world and the previous generations will necessarily converge around Gen Z. The University has taken the challenge to improve its mode of delivery, contents, and even research online until beyond this period. We are aware of the bandwidth issues that many are experiencing nowadays. Everyone is at home and uses the Internet. We want to ensure that the bandwidth will not affect the quality of the online materials.

One of the projects we are implementing is to equip all classrooms on campus with state of the art cameras and audio-equipment to allow live streaming of the lecture for the students who want to catch up online. We believe it bridges the generational gaps in terms of technological advancement.

In the end, I would like to thank every member of the staff who has been with us throughout this tough period: The Rector, the administrative directors, and every department of the University. We would not be able to do any of this without their help. They have displayed a sense of bond and teamwork that I have never seen before. Each one of them has worked more than what they were tasked to, putting the needs of others before theirs. And that, I believe, is a learning experience to keep and remember.

** Blackboard is the largest education technology and services company in the world serving nearly 100 million users*

THIS IS THE TIME THE
UNIVERSITY REVAMPS
ITS MODELS IN TEACHING,
MATERIALS, AND TECHNOLOGY.

giuliano pozza



GIULIANO POZZA is CIO (Chief Information Officer) at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Before joining Cattolica, Giuliano was CIO at San Raffaele Hospital, Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation Onlus and Humanitas Clinical Institute. He is the former President of AISIS (Associazione Italiana Sistemi Informativi in Sanità – Italian Association for Information Systems in Healthcare) and he is still part of the Executive Committee of the Association. He started his career in IT working for Accenture consulting company. When not spending time with his family, Giuliano enjoys going to the mountains, keeping up with the latest technology, reading and sometimes writing. If you want to know more please visit his [LinkedIn profile](#) or his [tech blog](#).

The use of technology has meant that we have been able to continue to deliver courses to our students via distance learning and has given staff the possibility of working safely from home. IT is so often taken for granted but in situations of emergency like this although it operates behind the scenes it ensures normal (or extraordinary) activities to carry on. As CIO, how did you manage the IT situation that emerged from the COVID-19 emergency?

Like most universities and institutions in Italy, we have been somewhat overwhelmed by this crisis. In fact, nobody was ready for it. Fortunately, there were a number of platforms and resources already available and we have a tight, professional team that meant we could react in the space of two weeks. It is no exaggeration to say that in three weeks we have done what would normally have required three years. We have compressed everything. To achieve this result there were a number of fundamental things.

- Team collaboration and the sacrifice of e.g. evenings and weekends, not only by the information systems professionals but by the other administrative staff that were involved as well.
- Working closely with other corporate functions was key: ILAB, Academic Services, Logistics, Organization, and so on.
- Full support from University top management and the understanding demonstrated by colleagues.

From the point of view of management of the emergency situation related to COVID-19 I would like to highlight the following points:

- Setting up integrated teams focusing on specific topics. We set up various teams: an IT team dedicated to remote working; an IT+ILAB team with a focus on eLearning; and

an IT+Teaching & Learning team for exam management. It is now very clear that projects can no longer be considered as just IT projects and coordination with other corporate functions has become essential, as are speed in execution and constant feedback from the users. There are core principles of agile governance we are trying to apply.

- Daily emergency meetings with other directors for alignment. To avoid the risk of differing paths being taken or time not being used efficiently, daily meetings with other directors were organized so as to share and resolve critical points effectively and proactively.
- Setting up an integrated emergency Helpdesk (IT+ILAB) on tech and eLearning in just three days - for all users, but in particular for teachers. Building on the structure of the existing IT Helpdesk, at peak demand time it would involve ten people at first level and as many again at second level. Although there were some teething problems initially, everyone got on board with different levels of difficulty. One aspect worth highlighting is how understanding everyone was, considering that the transformation from analogue to digital delivery was not a simple change to enact.

Can you describe the steps you had to take to adapt the University's technological resources to the changing situation?

To date we have experienced three big waves of change (and the fourth is coming):

- Activation of eLearning for everyone. Rather than being an issue of technologies (the University had already been using Blackboard, a leading platform, for a number of years) this was more a question of change management. We have not introduced different platforms, since in times of emergency it is better

to use what you already have in house. We analyzed the type of usage by teachers and estimated the support that would be required. We activated daily ILAB + emergency Helpdesk webinars, as well as training where needed.

- The second wave of change was remote working for everyone: from 0 to 1200 administrators all doing remote working. Given the large numbers and relative supply problems, a traditional approach (portable + VPN) was not in the plan. Within one week, secure remote access solutions were organized for all and the SOC security controls were strengthened at the same time.
- The third wave dealt with course exams and final exams. This too was an issue of change management. The TEAMS platform was chosen but the problem here was to do with what people were used to. To support users (both teachers and students) daily webinars were organized. Sometimes the problem is more to do with getting used to the platform rather than training in the basics. Psychological aspects also play a part, especially anxiety and tension related to exams. During the webinar the technician in charge did 15 minutes of training in the basic functions. Together with the Learning & Teaching team a Q&A offered technical, regulatory and didactic support. Another tool that we offered were free-flow sessions (tests to check usability) with a view to lowering anxiety levels. These sessions were open 24/7 with a technician available during office hours. Our aim was to provide a 360° service, not only from a technical point of view: even what might seem like trivial suggestions really made a difference and removed a lot of anxiety. We held sessions with more than 200 students connected.

Now we have to think about "the day after tomorrow", which will be the fourth wave. We understand that there won't be a black and white changeover, but it is likely that there will be a gradual reopening with some students physically in attendance and others connected from home. In addition, there is the issue of managing social distancing and a "Smart campus" is fundamental for this. Alongside the many opportunities, there is also a level of risk which challenges us to avoid the digital divide which might leave behind categories such as disabled students or those who do not have adequate technological resources available.

Was there already a plan for smart working for the majority of university staff or did you have to specially prepare something?

No. There were only specific people e.g. IT technicians who were already enabled and equipped with technology for remote connections in an emergency. The infrastructure team did a splendid job of getting remote working solutions up and running in just one week.

What was the role of your team in supporting the technological adaptation of teaching and learning services?

We have provided a lot of support:

- A revision of the architecture and evolution of e-learning products: Blackboard has been a reliable partner but there has been an incredible increase to deal with. In fact, we must also take into account the increase in demand for cloud services (Blackboard has seen an increase of 20 times its previous capacity, Microsoft 700% more).

- Training on collaboration platforms such as TEAMS and setting out back-up plans (establishing primary and secondary platforms in emergencies).
- The important role of the IT Helpdesk. We would normally have had three people operating the telephone Helpdesk and this number went up to ten at this stage. We provided support to users, "protecting" some of our most valuable resources, the ILAB experts. The risk was that they would be overwhelmed by demand for support. We therefore created this first level emergency Help Desk made up of IT technicians and with ILAB responding only at the second level, keeping their specific skills separate from the onslaught of general questions.

Based on your experience at this time, what suggestion would you give to colleagues in another university?

I think I would give three suggestions:

- Always have a plan B. There is stress on tech platforms.
- Monitor a few basic key performance indicators e.g. the number of recorded lessons, the number of support requests still active, and the type of support requests. We also managed a feedback questionnaire for teachers to keep on top of the detail of support. With this monitoring we would have been travelling blind.
- Internal coordination and communication are of paramount importance.

One last point: this has been a violent digital transformation – in fact it has been a revolution rather than a transformation. But "violent delights have violent ends", to cite Westworld. This crisis is proving a great opportunity. We must now recover the true meaning of digital evolution which is not to simply change analogue to digital but to change the way we do things. For example:

- Rethinking methodology e.g. the flipped classroom.
- Inclusion is essential e.g. for disabled students and for those who do not have adequate tools.
- Reviewing evaluation. AI tools are fine as far as using them for proctoring is concerned, but everything has to be rethought. The notional exam no longer makes sense and the teachers are well aware of this. Digital transformation requires rethinking your habits and integrating tools to give you more possibilities.

I cannot close without reminding myself that the "human factor" is the real key success factor in these difficult times. I want to thank in a special way every team involved in operations and development in IT and in all the other departments: without the contribution and sacrifice of every single person it would not be possible to manage this difficult transition. And I want to thank as well any colleague and any student who gave us precious feedbacks on service status and on unmet needs: we achieved so much but we are conscious that we have still so much to do together!

HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION VS COVID-19

The outbreak of the coronavirus has become a major disruption to colleges and universities across the world, with many institutions canceling in-person classes and moving to online-only instruction. The pandemic also threatens to significantly alter nearly every aspect of college life, from recruitment and admissions, to international student mobility and internship programs. These concerns extend to the health and safety of students travelling abroad. Probably one of the greatest lessons that higher education institutions have learned from the emergency is that advance planning for any challenge or crisis can help respond to any potential incident.



Gary Rhodes



GARY RHODES is a Professor and Coordinator of the Higher Education Administration and Leadership Graduate Program and Director of the Center for Global Education at California State University at Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). He developed the Center in 1998 at the University of Southern California (USC) after working as a study abroad administrator for USC from 1989 - 1998. He moved the Center to Loyola Marymount University in 2004, then to the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA in 2010, before moving it to its current home at CSUDH in 2015. The Center for Global Education at CSUDH serves as national resource to support internationalization of higher education, with a special focus on student mobility issues. The Center supports research and develops online resources focused on international learning and student mobility programs to support faculty, staff, students, and parents. The Center's SAFETI Clearinghouse supports faculty, staff, and students by providing comprehensive information and support in the area of health, safety, and crisis management for colleges and universities in support for study abroad. He holds a BA in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara, as well as an MA in International Relations, MS Ed. in Education, and a PhD in International Development and Higher Education, from the University of Southern California.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR A UNIVERSITY TO HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN READY FOR SITUATIONS LIKE THIS?

For most students, study abroad can be a very important and life-changing experience by living, learning, and studying in a country outside their home country. While there have been other viruses that have been significant health issues in the recent past that have impacted higher education, study abroad and countries around the world, including the Highly Pathogenic Asian Avian Influenza (H5N1)¹ in 1997 and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)² in 2003, the impact of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has closed most higher education institutions around the world, converted in-person courses to online courses, and has made it difficult for students to both go to study abroad destinations outside their home countries and for students already abroad to return home. Not since the 1918 Pandemic Influenza³ has a health issue impacted higher education globally to the level of COVID-19.

There are a wide variety of health and safety issues that can impact universities on their home campuses. Some of the health and safety issues that can impact student mobility programs include:

- Alcohol and drug use and abuse
- Conflict between students or between students and program faculty/staff
- Crime and violence
- Crisis management
- Emergency communication
- Environmental challenges/disaster response
- Faculty and staff leaders with limited knowledge and skills to support effective decision-making for health and safety support
- Fire safety
- Kidnapping and terrorism
- Legal issues abroad
- Medical/physical health response
- Mental health support
- Political instability challenges/response
- Responding to discrimination abroad
- Responding to guidance of World Health Organization, and Government International Health Organizations, Including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other national health organizations
- Responding to Government International Travel Safety Organizations, Including the U.S. Department of State Abroad. Private international travel health and safety companies can also provide useful guidance
- Science laboratory hazards
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Supporting students with special needs and disabilities
- Transportation safety
- Tropical diseases/special health issues in the developing world
- Water safety
- Other health and safety challenges⁴

While most health and safety issues impact individual students, individual faculty and staff, individual campuses, individual countries, and individual regions, COVID-19 has had a global impact on higher education. Whether it is to support students at their campus or supporting students studying around the world, universities around the world continue to respond to COVID-19 and they will continue to respond to its impact for the rest of 2020 and beyond.

The time to prepare to respond to COVID-19 or any of the other health and safety issues in the list above is not after an incident takes place. COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of taking health and safety issues seriously and being prepared to respond to the many potential health and safety issues.

Most universities have an emergency planning committee that meets on a regular basis to limit health and safety challenges and to plan for effective response if an incident takes place. It is important that international health and safety issues and staff from the international office are included on these committees to support effective planning. The international office should also be developing health and safety plans and have at least one staff member who has a targeted role to monitor national and international health and safety issues and support pre-departure, while abroad and re-entry planning for students, faculty and staff, leading efforts to disseminate and practice and update plans. It is important that these plans are not only in writing, but that staff and faculty who support programs are trained to implement them. It is also critical that students, before and during study abroad are provided with guidance on how to prevent and respond to health and safety challenges.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST LESSON THAT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ARE LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

On the one hand, the COVID-19 crisis has provided additional focus on the importance for higher education institutions to take health and safety issues and challenges seriously and that advance planning for any challenge or crisis can help respond to any potential incident...in this case, COVID-19. I think that a presentation I did at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, with staff in the international office and other parts of campus provided an opportunity to focus on health and safety issues. That focus helped to enhance campus action plans, which supported the COVID-19 response. The challenges of COVID-19 have placed a clear focus at higher education institutions around the world that global health and safety issues can impact their faculty, staff and students and their financial stability. I think we should also find ways to respond to this global pandemic in ways that reinforce the importance of the role of higher education for global health and safety and global cooperation and understanding.

Higher education institutions are currently living through the COVID-19 crisis. Many university leaders, international office staff, faculty, and students are currently working, studying and doing research from home, when they can. Borders are closed; the numbers of airplanes to travel internationally are limited. At the same time, university research is critical to develop new vaccines to limit the potential of COVID-19 to impact people in the future as well as to develop new medicines to treat those who have been impacted by COVID-19. It is critical for universities to continue to take a lead in responding to the many impacts of COVID-19. It is important for higher education institutions to inform their local, national and global communities that they have a role in moving forward after COVID-19. Many in the international higher education field have made the case that peoples, countries, and cultures around the world are interconnected and the challenges that impact others in countries outside of their home can impact people at home. COVID-19 has made this case clear. A health issue that started in China has made a significant global impact.

I would suggest that this is an opportunity for higher education institutions to not only provide support to the critical COVID-19 issues that are impacting the city, region and country where they are based, but also make the case that by helping others globally, universities are helping themselves. While there are some who focus on fear and long-term closed borders, universities around the world can make the case that they are one of the most important places where prevention of pandemics and effective global understanding and cooperation can be supported. While it may be challenging to think beyond the challenging current health tragedies of COVID-19, it may also be a time to think about how universities around the world can make the case for developing more teaching, research and community service initiatives to support global cooperation. Whether in-person, online, or through study abroad, it is important to make the case that through support for global initiatives, from the global issues in each academic field, to broad-based, interdisciplinary initiatives, that could respond to global challenges highlighted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals⁵, university faculty, staff and students can support a more positive future at home.

Reference Links:

- ¹ [Highly Pathogenic Asian Avian Influenza \(H5N1\)](#)
- ² [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome \(SARS\)](#)
- ³ [Pandemic Influenza](#)
- ⁴ [SAFETI Clearinghouse Program Audit Checklist: Crisis and Risk Management, Center for Global Education at CSUDH](#)
- ⁵ [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

“By helping others globally, universities are helping themselves.”

Léa Senn



LÉA SENN grew up in Switzerland but completed both her undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States at Georgetown University. She has worked for the International Student Exchange Program (ISEP) in Washington, DC from 1997 until 2005. Upon completion of her Master's degree, she moved to Italy in 2007 to take a position at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. Her initial responsibilities were to develop and implement a number of projects including the improvement of services dedicated to international students, first for the exchange and study abroad students, and then for degree-seeking students as well. In 2010 Léa took on the role of Head Manager for Inbound Programs and International Communications and was responsible for the development of a communication and recruitment strategy and admissions of international students at the Milan campus; and as of 2016 she became Associate Director of International Education and is responsible for inbound mobility programs and international student admissions for all 4 University campuses (Milan, Rome, Piacenza and Brescia). Léa is also currently enrolled at the University of Bath in a DBA program in Higher Education Management.

AS THE CRISIS UNFOLDED IN ITS EARLY STAGE, WHAT WERE THE MAIN CHALLENGES THE UNIT FACED?

The first thing we felt we needed to do was find a voice, a tone, that would define our messaging while communicating with our community. Due to the assault of individual inquiries, and emails from students and our partners, we could not provide one-to-one answers, especially because the questions were generally the same. We sorted, filtered, and consolidated our answers based on the predominant concerns and questions we received and would "package" our answers which we would send out to our community at large.

It was also difficult to give specifics, or even answers, as the situation changed and evolved every day. The messaging also had to be coordinated with the rest of the University, thus sometimes delayed sending time, so we would end up sending information that in some instances was already outdated and no longer pertinent.

HOW DID THE MOVE TO ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING COME ABOUT, AND HOW WERE THE SERVICES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MANAGED WHEN THE CAMPUS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC?

We do not have much experience with online teaching and learning, so making the switch was challenging. Well, first we were hoping that the online part would be a short-term solution to make it through the first couple of weeks of the semester until the campus reopened. Eventually, the courses would be held online for the entire semester as students started leaving to get back home. Generally, the faculty was favorable although not experienced in teaching online. Many of our courses for international students are designed to showcase Milanese or Italian culture including site visits or more generally experiential learning, which is of course challenging to translate into an online format. Also, since we are for many a short-term study abroad experience, the "studying abroad" part is somewhat moot when you offer courses online, which also challenges interactions with other international students, etc. Our main objective though was to ensure that those students who did not have alternatives to recover their semester in terms of credits, would have an option with us. About 60% of our students are continuing their semester with us via online learning.

As far as the services are concerned, well, we were all mainly focused on two aspects: 1. Getting the courses online started and getting the relevant information out; 2. Updating students and our partners on what was going on and keeping track of what our students were deciding, that is to stay or return home. We are now all working from home and slowly shifting our focus to the next Semester.

IF YOU COULD GIVE SOME ADVICE TO ONE OF YOUR COLLEAGUES FROM ANOTHER UNIVERSITY ABROAD WHO IS FACING THE SAME SITUATION, WHAT WOULD THAT SUGGESTION BE?

The key, I think, to managing a situation like this one, which hopefully will be unique, is managing your communications to your community. You get a sense of powerlessness as things spiral out of control and you also get overwhelmed by all the questions that your students and partners ask you when you do not have an answer to give most of the

time. So, you need a plan in managing those inquiries. Also, keep to what it is you know. It can sometimes be frustrating as you want to provide some reasonable advice, however we had to stick to the information we were getting from the local authorities no matter how vague they were. Also, relying on the rest of the team, running through the situation, discussing options, sharing perspectives, is essential. Each person in the office has a specialisation, an expertise, and therefore a particular understanding of the impact of the crisis on particular aspects of student and academic life. I honestly think this experience has strengthened our team.

“Relying on the rest of the team, running through the situation, discussing options, sharing perspectives, is essential.”

Gianluca Samsa



GIANLUCA SAMSA studied in Italy and has a degree from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Foreign Languages and Literatures. He has been working for the International Office since 2003. For four years he worked in the International Cooperation Unit managing cooperation projects with developing countries financed by the European Commission and other international donors. In 2007 he left that position to take over the supervision of the exchange/study abroad programs and international internship opportunities unit (of 12 staff) which sends abroad more than 2800 students every year. He is now Associate Director for Outbound Programs and Coordinator of the Experiential Learning unit. In 2010 he was also appointed Institutional coordinator for Dual Degrees (Inbound, Outbound and Exchange) and collaborates in this framework with several Institutions in Europe, USA, Australia, China and Latin America.

HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO KEEP YOUR TEAM ENGAGED, FOCUSED AND MOTIVATED AT THE PEAK OF THE EMERGENCY AND THEN AFTERWARDS?

The policy and work culture of Università Cattolica has always been based on a student-centred approach and for many years our operation has been organized so that everyone in the team is fully trained in the importance of the service we provide students throughout their time abroad. Even in normal times, we only see our pre-departure and post-return services as efficient if we maintain a high level of contact with students, partner universities and international authorities. As far as safety is concerned, for some years now we have included training on procedures and tools for safety while abroad in the pre-departure orientation meetings and the students all install an app which facilitates calls to emergency numbers in the host country, the insurance company helpdesk and our office (which is active 24/7). The app also allows students to give us their geo-location in real time while they are abroad.

[To read more about the app go to page 11]

Even with all this preparation, I was still impressed by the dedication and serious-mindedness that came to the forefront in the response to the emergency situation around the spread of the Coronavirus. We had roughly 700 students already abroad and almost 200 ready to depart on many different types of programs in practically all continents: Exchange, Study Abroad, Internships and Double Degree programs. Everyone worked literally day and night so that none of our students missed out on support in that phase. Apart from the official communications that were sent out at crucial moments, even greater time was spent on managing individual situations that came to our attention. In some cases we made sure that students were able to get back home via complicated routes and in some of these cases the attention and dedication shown by the team was amazing and moving.

The whole team is now just waiting for the moment that we can return to advertising new outbound programs and initiatives without the worry that they will have to be cancelled or postponed again.

WHICH PROCEDURES AND RESOURCES DID YOU PUT IN PLACE TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE STUDENTS WHO WERE ABROAD WHEN THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY STARTED?

We have kept in contact with students at all times and have passed on communications from local and international authorities: WHO, the Italian government, foreign governments, the University etc. Working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassies has been particularly useful for us to reach realistic balanced judgements which take into account the students' worries and the worsening health situation in Lombardy which made it far from simple to take a decision to return from abroad.

Practically all of the students who returned and all those who stayed abroad have had the opportunity to continue their studies or internships remotely, as a result of the incredible flexibility shown by all the partner universities and companies. Where this has not been feasible, initiatives have been prepared with the various Faculties to ensure that no student is penalized with regard to recognition of credits or approval of their international tracks.

All means of communication have been used to contact our students and make sure they know that Cattolica is supporting them. The International Office also used social media to post updates and stories so that although the offices were closed there was still, as far as possible, a personal relationship with them and so that the students could feel supported throughout all the steps of this difficult moment.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE LEARNING FROM THIS MOMENTOUS EXPERIENCE AND YOU WANT TO SHARE?

In an emergency, nobody can be competent in every single field, and relationships become even more fundamentally important. The worst thing to do is to get caught up in anxiety and think you can make decisions just based on your own experience. Even more than in normal life, in the precarious situation we found ourselves in our network of relationships and others we know has proved to be an invaluable resource for locating information, sharing points of view, making clear judgments and, yes, for sharing human comfort at such a worrying time.

I am immensely grateful to the professionals, our colleagues at Cattolica and international colleagues who have endured my endless calls: our field is rather unique in that we are not just colleagues, but a global network of friends.

“The worst thing to do is to get caught up in anxiety and think you can make decisions just based on your own experience.”

STUDENT MOBILITY

in the time
of COVID-19

COVID-19 has created a “new normal” for international mobility, transforming the landscape of the sector, and reshaping our students’ experiences. Each year Università Cattolica sends over 2.800 students abroad for a study or internship program in more than 84 countries. Many of them who were abroad during this time of crisis had to make the difficult decision whether to stay or go back to their home country. We interviewed Corrado and Andrea, two students who decided to stay respectively in South Korea and China despite the COVID-19 outbreak in these countries.

the choice

is yours



CORRADO CAVALLI

Age:
24 years old

Study program:
Economics of Markets and Financial Intermediaries

Destination:
Seoul, South Korea

Host University:
Hanyang University

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO STAY ABROAD TO CONTINUE YOUR EXCHANGE PROGRAM RATHER THAN COME BACK TO ITALY?

Cattolica emailed me on 27 February suggesting I go home because of the sudden increase in cases here in South Korea. The host university gave the exchange students three options: to curtail the program, to postpone the program to the autumn semester or to continue with the program. At that time I didn't think I would find myself in a better situation in Italy so whatever I did I would have to deal with the situation of confronting the epidemic. Maybe a moment of recklessness - and a touch of bravery - led me to decide to stay despite the fact that South Korea had the second highest number of cases.

HOW DID YOUR HOST UNIVERSITY REORGANIZE TO DEAL WITH THE EMERGENCY? ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE HAD AND THE ACADEMIC OFFER SO FAR?

The host university was very well organized right from the start, postponing the start of the semester by two weeks so as to provide for the quarantine period for students who showed symptoms when they arrived in the country. Later, given the increase in cases, they decided to proceed with 3 weeks of on-line lessons and they also provided us with masks and disinfectant. To date, to access the facilities you have to fill in a form every day, have your temperature checked and preferably wear a mask all the time.



WHEN THE WIND OF CHANGE BLOWS, SOME PEOPLE BUILD WALLS, OTHERS BUILD WINDMILLS.

HAS CATTOLICA BEEN SUPPORTIVE AT THIS TIME?

Many of the exchange students in my dormitory had to go home because they had problems with insurance or because their universities cancelled all their study abroad programs. I was given the various options and once I decided to stay I had all the right support from Cattolica staff who have stayed in constant contact asking for regular updates on the situation. I really appreciated the email from Cattolica saying that there was an extra insurance policy we could sign up to that would cover us should we get infected; this was way above what my other exchange friends were being offered by their universities.

ARE YOU LEARNING ANYTHING FROM THIS EXPERIENCE? HAS IT CHANGED YOU IN ANY WAY? HOW ARE YOU FEELING RIGHT NOW?

I think I am learning a lot from this experience. I am acting responsibly towards the wider community, wearing a mask and avoiding crowded places. I know that doing this I am thinking of the effect I can have on others before I take care of myself. Living through this epidemic far from home is certainly much more difficult because you are alone as you fight an enemy that you can't even see but you can sense it through the eyes of the people you meet on the street.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING EVERY DAY?

This is certainly not how I expected to be living, but I feel lucky to be here and to be able to continue the program so I am totally prepared to accept compromises. In the morning I usually stay in the dormitory, I take lessons on-line and every now and then I do some outdoor sports. In the afternoon I go with the other exchange students to the "study cafes" which are very well-known here and in the evening we go out to eat, always staying in the neighborhood so we don't have to take public transport.

HOW DO YOU STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY? DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

I try to keep updated on what is happening in Italy and I speak daily on video calls to my family and friends so that I know that they are all fine. However, we are 9,000 km apart with an 8-hour time difference so it is really difficult to get a clear picture of what is happening in Italy and how everyone is dealing with the situation. When I can, I listen to podcasts of the daily news but social media are definitely the best way to keep updated on everything.

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW ARE KOREANS DIFFERENT FROM ITALIANS AS THEY FACE THIS SITUATION AND LIVE THROUGH IT?

After spending a month here I feel I can say that Korea is a very developed country and I did not think I would find a culture of such respect. From the first day it was clear to me that Koreans trust their government and that there is no need to resort to reporting those who don't follow the rules as unfortunately happens in Italy. As I mentioned before, masks can prevent the spread of the virus if everyone wears one, even if they are perfectly healthy. Although wearing a mask wasn't compulsory you didn't see anyone not wearing one even where there were only 300 cases across the country.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO OTHER STUDENTS TO HELP THEM BE STRONG AT THIS TIME?

"When the wind of change blows, some people build walls and some build windmills." I have thought a lot about this Chinese proverb and I think I will in the future too. Fortunately, we are in the year 2020, which means that with a computer and an internet connection we can do so many things and transform what may seem like a boring day into something else. We all have the tools, and it is up to us to choose what use we make of them.



ANDREA RICCIÒ

Age:
26 years old

Study program:
Food Marketing and Business Strategies

Destination:
Shanghai, China

Host University:
Groupe ESSCA Shanghai

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO STAY ABROAD TO CONTINUE YOUR EXCHANGE PROGRAM RATHER THAN COME BACK TO ITALY?

Having decided to focus heavily on this program and not to do a curricular internship, I really didn't want to give up after just one month. The problem started right here in China and I never thought it would have become a global issue. Thinking about it I realized it was a pretty big problem but believed that in time, and with the measures that the country was putting in place, things might have improved. My thoughts were that "I'm here for the long run, and unless I find myself in extremely dangerous situations or the Italian Consulate forces me to return, I will live this experience as it is and I'm sure that I will gain something from having lived through it in any case."

HOW DID YOUR HOST UNIVERSITY REORGANIZE TO DEAL WITH THE EMERGENCY? ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE HAD AND THE ACADEMIC OFFER SO FAR?

I have to say that the university was very well organized and a short time after the schools closed at the end of the Chinese holiday period they set up a Microsoft Teams portal so that we could do lessons on-line. It was certainly an unusual situation but after a bit you get used to it. The professors were up to it and the program allowed for a lot of interaction. The only thing that I found difficult to get used to was the lesson timetable: the times were late in the

“ LIFE IS MADE UP OF GREAT CHALLENGES AND UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES.”

evening so that they could include the students who had returned to Europe. The university also kept us updated on the situation and made sure we knew what measures to take at the beginning.

HAS CATTOLICA BEEN SUPPORTIVE AT THIS TIME?

I believe the University gave us a lot of support. As soon as the problem became serious I was immediately contacted by the International Office in Milan and Piacenza who asked me how I was and what I wanted to do.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF DISTANCE LEARNING?

Well, it's different. Face-to-face methods are certainly better. Those teaching on-line need to have good communication skills and know how the platform works. There is one good point – you don't have to spend time traveling to class on public transport.

ARE YOU LEARNING ANYTHING FROM THIS EXPERIENCE? HAS IT CHANGED YOU IN ANY WAY? HOW ARE YOU FEELING RIGHT NOW?

I feel different, for sure, as I have done every time I have found myself out of my comfort zone. I like to get involved and learn. Certainly, living in China is rewarding and it opens your mind in many ways. Living alone on the other side of the world certainly leads to personal growth. Putting yourself on the line in a foreign university, taking exams in English, getting used to living in a country with a totally different culture with difficulties like and the local language are definitely all challenges to overcome.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING EVERY DAY?

I wake up in the morning, I work on group work and projects for the subjects I am studying, I cook or order something in, and then at 3 p.m. I start my first online lesson. My second lesson goes from 6.30 to 9.30 in the evening. Late evening I sometimes spend finishing my assignments, or otherwise I might relax or spend time with my international friends. If I don't have lessons during the day, I go to a cafe to work or wander around the city.

CAN YOU RECOUNT ANY EPISODES THAT TOUCHED YOU ABOUT THE WAY THE CHINESE DEALT WITH THE WORST DAYS OF THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY?

What made an impression on me was how a city like Shanghai could be so deserted. I went out occasionally to do some shopping and took the opportunity to take a long walk, which was allowed at the time. What struck me were the measures that they took and how quickly they took them. Some of these precautionary measures are still being used to monitor the situation. Temperatures are checked at the entrance to restaurants, companies and shops, where note is taken of names and phone numbers, and hand gel is available. There are machines that measure your temperature automatically as you go into the subway. Delivery services don't leave items by your door any more. Things are delivered to the main door of the building and often, apart from the receipt, there is a sheet of paper with a note of the temperature reading of the cook and the delivery person and a note certifying that the item has been sterilized. You have a Health QR code on your phone which you often have to show when you go into restaurants and bars etc, which depending on your geolocalization during the day tells you how near you have been to someone with the virus. Green shows you are safe. When people go back to their normal routine, nearly everyone wears a mask.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO OTHER STUDENTS TO HELP THEM BE STRONG AT THIS TIME?

To not give up. Life is made up of great challenges and sometimes there will be unexpected difficulties. This situation has touched everyone and will continue to do so in the future. You just have to keep to the rules and do this not just for yourself but for your communities and the society you live in. We have to stay at home more than usual – it's not easy but you have to try not to think about the bad things and keep busy. There are so many things you can do: read, cook, meditate, study, watch movies, keep fit, and so much more.

Student voices from the lockdown

Study abroad is referred to as the experience of a lifetime. And it has been a quite unique experience for all international students studying in Italy during the Spring 2020 semester. When several countries banned entry to and from Italy, most international students were invited by their home institutions to go back as part of their emergency plans. Some left and some decided to stay. Nevertheless all of them were offered the opportunity to take their courses online. We asked some students to recount their experience so far and tell us what they'll do when the lockdown will end.





Isabella Ciccone

The College of New Jersey

My experience as an international student at Cattolica with the emergency and online classes has been good. I have decided to continue my studies at Cattolica to be fully immersed on Italian culture and take home a study-abroad experience. The distance learning has been a bit of a challenge at the beginning, especially due to technology and internet connection issues. Some people are even in different time zones. It was upsetting that I did not get the chance to step foot into a classroom, and meet my professors and classmates in person. However, I am satisfied with the assistance that I received and the academic offering of Università Cattolica. I also feel more confident in reaching out to people for help. Moreover, I have learned to appreciate more the people around me even though we cannot meet in person. I feel upset that I had to leave Italy and go back home because I had to leave a country that I fell in love with and a culture that I wanted to be immersed for longer than two months. I encourage my friends and classmates that we reach out to each other, whether they need help or just want to talk, because community is important in difficult times like this. We must stick together and help one another. One thing I know for sure: the first thing I'll do when things get back to normal is try to find a way back to Italy.



Laura Resende Qual

Universidade de São Paulo

I decided to stay in Milan and continue the program because I still think that I am learning lots of new things. My university chose me for this program, giving me this amazing opportunity to study different subjects and gain new perspectives. Despite the situation, I must say I am quite enjoying the distance-learning classes. Considering that now I have more free time, I am trying to focus more on my studies. However, I miss the interaction in the classroom with my classmates and professors.

During this difficult time, I reflect on how we must live in the present and not only focus on our future plans because we don't know what the future holds. If I could, I would tell all my friends and classmates that we must live what life offers and learn from it. If we only long for the experiences that we could be living, we are not going to realize how much we are missing out on our present lives. The global pandemic has questioned what matters to us, and if we learn from it, there might be a better future for us. And when all of this finishes, I will run to Panificio Luini, near Duomo, to buy and eat a good panzerotto then watch the sun set in Duomo as I catch up with my friends.



Warner Hellyer

North Central College

I have decided to continue my exchange program via online learning while back in the States, because I needed to be sure to receive credits for this semester to graduate on time. Plus, I am very excited for the courses I have enrolled in at Cattolica. My online learning experience has been different from what I expected when I first flew to Italy – mostly due to the fact that the materials, assignments, and structure were all designed to be in person and in the city of Milan. It has been challenging to follow, retain, and grasp the lectures. However, there is so much grace and appreciation to the Professors on how much effort they have put into converting their classes to online teaching.

Through this experience, I have learned how important community and building strong relationships are. I used to share stories and cups of coffee with my friends, but today we log in on Zoom and talk about our day in our pajama. Then, I realize how important it is to support and encourage one another in this tough time.

The first thing I am going to do when things go back to normal is go out, celebrate, dance, and laugh with my friends!



Zijin Xu

Xi'an International Studies University

"To leave or not to leave?" I was at a loss when the pandemic broke out in Italy, but, in the end, I decided to stay in Milan and continue my exchange program.

I love it here! I enjoy the study life at Cattolica and I've gotten used to the life in Milan. I have dedicated a lot for this academic year in Milan, and I am not willing to lose this precious opportunity. Even though the epidemic situation in China is getting much better, it doesn't mean that I will be 100% safe. Going back could mean spending dozens of hours at airports and on the plane, which could lead to a higher risk of infection on my way home. Università Cattolica has switched in-person classes to online learning. I am quite satisfied with the transition. Moreover, there is the constant support from the International Office as they keep in touch with the international students.

I try to look at this difficult period as an opportunity, where I learn to keep my spirit up, and to take care of myself. As the situation gets better in Italy, I become more relaxed and calm.

I look forward to hosting a big party at a delicious Chinese restaurant with my friends. I haven't seen most of them for more than two months. And I can't wait to go back to Cattolica as soon as possible!



Looking Forward

A conversation with Professor Antonella Sciarrone Alibrandi



- Vice-rector of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and Chairman of the Board of Cattolica Alumni – Associazione Ludovico Necchi
- Chairman of the EDUCatt Board (Ente per il Diritto allo Studio dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)
 - Full professor of Banking Law at the School of Banking, Finance and Insurance Sciences

Could you describe how the Università Cattolica Alumni group has involved members in these times of the Coronavirus?

Right from the beginning of the emergency we thought it was important to make the best out of the situation because it was clear to us that the University should be seen to be active even when being on campus and attending classes wasn't possible. Many of our alumni by now live in cities away from our campuses, some even outside Italy, so it has actually created an opportunity for us. Online activities were a new departure for us but they have been extremely positive and I think that we will continue to propose these sorts of initiatives in the future too.

We focused specifically on two sorts of virtual initiatives:

- We contacted some of our alumni to launch a series of videos where they recount how they are experiencing this unprecedented moment. Using the hashtag #Storiechefannobene (stories that do good), the idea behind these videos is to share ideas, good practice, and how to react and keep going during this crisis.
- We used the Blackboard platform to hold live online events along two lines:
 - a. One-hour webinars aimed towards offering a key to understanding particularly complex and debated current issues in order to deal with them. Via a round table, the various speakers talk on such topics as

technology and health, the role of Europe or communication in times of crisis.

- b. Cultural evenings with a musical and theatrical slant. During the Easter period we held performances of the Night on the Mount of Olives and the Gospel according to Pilate. Given the high number of participants, we have extended this calendar of events until late June.

Università Cattolica recently set up the Agostino Gemelli Fund. Can you describe how this came about?

The Rector, Professor Franco Anelli, began working on this project at the beginning of the crisis. We immediately looked at the economic consequences of the COVID-19 emergency and how they will affect the many Italian families who will find themselves in difficulty when it comes to their children studying at the University they have chosen. In the first instance, a decision was taken to set up a fund to meet the needs of families experiencing immediate difficulties due to the crisis, and this manifested itself in the allocation of an initial contribution of € 1 million. Further donations will follow, e.g. this year the '5 per thousand' (a public taxation scheme in Italy) will be totally directed towards supporting students. The fund also welcomes contributions from individuals, associations and institutions who share the idea that for the country to really get going again, investment in the talent and skills of young people is an absolute necessity.

"We firmly believe that to recover from this crisis it will be decisive for universities to play their part since by their very nature they act as poles of attraction for young people who, with their intelligence and enthusiasm, are able to sustain society, culture and the economy of today and the future."

Prof. Franco Anelli

WORLD BOUND



UNIVERSITÀ
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No. 4

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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
the Coronavirus crisis:**

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* Founder of Università Cattolica

