THE CROATIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
The Department of Biomedical Sciences in Rijeka

THE UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

COVID – 19 MESSAGES V

COVID-19 FROM STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: IMPACT, ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rijeka, November 27, 2020
10,00 am

P R O G R A M

| **10,00 – 10,30 h** |

OPENING

Snježana Prijić Samaržija, PhD., Professor, Rector, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

Daniel Rukavina, M.D., PhD., Professor Emeritus, Head of the Department of Biomedical Sciences in Rijeka, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Rijeka, Croatia

Tea Dimnjašević, Student Council of University of Rijeka, University of Rijeka, Croatia

| **10,30 – 11,30 h** |

I. KEYNOTE LECTURE

Chairman: Tea Dimnjašević

Blaženka Divjak, PhD., Professor, The University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia
Higher education challenges and responsibilities: facing (old) problems and finding (new) solutions

| **11,30 – 12,30 h** |

II. YUFE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON COVID-19

Chairman: Paula Petrinec

Jessica Winter, YUFE, The University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany
Good practice of YUFE students during the pandemic

Jens Matthens, YUFE, The University of Antwerp,Antwerp, Belgium
Hacking changes as student representative

Sven Sušanj, YUFE, The University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia
Studying during a pandemic: communication between students and the University

Break for refreshment: 12,30 – 13,00

13,00 – 14,30 h

III. DIGITAL ERA: ARE WE READY FOR THE NEW NORMAL?

Chairman: Paula Petrinec

**European Student's Union,
Students' life during the Covid19 pandemic: how Corona changed students' world**

Ivanka Živčić – Bećirević PhD., Professor**,** University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences**,** Rijeka, Croatia
How did students cope with the lockdown?

Luka Delak, Student Council of University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia
Online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they sprung up a nationwide student initiative

Tea Dimnjašević, Student Council of University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia
How did impossible became possible: online student elections at the University of Rijeka

Break for refreshment: 14,30 – 15,00

15,00 – 16,15 h

IV. ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: BEYOND THE COVID-19 - UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Moderator: Tea Dimnjašević

Panelists:

Snježana Prijić Samaržija, PhD., Professor, Rector, The University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

Blaženka Divjak, PhD., Professor, The University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

Leopold Mandić, President of the Student Council of University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

Sven Sušanj, Student Ombudsman of the University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

ABSTRACTS

Higher education challenges and responsibilities: facing (old) problems and finding (new) solutions

Blaženka Divjak
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, Zagreb, Croatia

Almost twenty years ago, many European countries including Croatia were faced with Bologna process and accompanying reforms. There were a lot of struggles with it not just due to a new paradigm and related changes in higher education system but mostly because there were many obstacles and existing problems in the system surfaced due to new challenges.

Similarly, today when the pandemic is forcing the higher education system and institutions to confront the fact that the current model of higher education is neither up to the challenges caused by pandemic and fourth industrial revolution nor up to those connected to the contemporary societal issues. Teaching and learning is still mostly factual and classroom-based and the campus model is neither sustainable nor efficient. Online learning does not enjoy high reputation due to the quality of delivery, boring and poorly prepared lectures, unmotivated students and presumption that students are cheating on exams. However, to be honest face-to-face teaching is not also far away from that, only being more disguised that online.

At the same time, many higher education institutions and systems seize the opportunity to speed up digital transformation, question teaching and learning quality, enhance it and find new solutions to old as well as new problems. Wise leadership introduce training for teachers how to improve teaching and learning by innovative pedagogies such as flipped classroom, work-based learning, problem-based learning, use of learning analytics for supporting students at risk of failure and in general, the meaningful use of ICT. Further, the wisest include students in that co-creation process to help them to bridge the gap in learning they might experience in their education but also to ask their help in the process of reshaping the university by creating new models for learning.

In the period of crises, the leadership is crucial. Strategic decision-making is not wide spread in academic community and it is even more difficult in complex or chaotic decision-making context (Cynefin model). Chaotic situation includes events and/or behaviors beyond our experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly equals the definition of a chaotic situation. At the beginning of pandemic, many educational leaders took some probing actions to answer the challenge and to see what happens and what works better. Therefore, in majority of HEIs different forms of distance teaching and learning were introduced with more or less success. Unfortunately, there were rectors, deans and even ministers that just wait for the crises to pass.

The second phase, at the beginning of summer 2020 some unknowns become knowns and we can plan better, prepare more and be proactive and not just reactive. Again, the wise leaders analyze the situation and lessons to be learned taking actions at the same time to meet the challenges of the new academic year better and on time. This usually includes (staff) trainings, (new) equipment and (online) services.

Finally, the wisest leaders seize the opportunity and start with structural reforms of higher education.

Key words: online learning, COVID -19 pandemic, distance teaching,

Hacking changes as student representative

Jens Matthens
YUFE, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis has fundamentally changed the Belgian society and so has the University of Antwerp. UAntwerp is a young university. It was the product of a merge in 2003 when three smaller universities decided to form one big Antwerp University. Since then a lot has changed but in the UAntwerp culture there are still remains from the small scale universities. This culture is today the foundation of the UAntwerp Student Council. The more than 200 student representatives hold strong tights with their governors and take profit of the low-key thresholds of student participation. This is the main driver of student-centred crisis management in COVID-19 times.

Key words: Belgian society, UAntwerp culture, student participation, student-centred crisis management

Studying during a pandemic: communication between students and the University

Sven Sušanj
YUFE, The University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

During this difficult time of pandemic, swift and efficient communication between students and their teachers, as well as university administrations, proved essential. The appeal of online courses in these arduous times also became apparent.

The idea of having joint YUFE online courses predates the pandemic. However, the need for universities to interconnect became manifestly apparent only when states began imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement or assembly. Organising classes and lectures the way they used to be before was no longer possible.

Student bodies of the University of Rijeka reacted immediately and organised a series of polls to discover what were the main problems students were facing and made various recommendations to the University accordingly. Furthermore, some faculties, like the Faculty of Law, introduced regular monthly online sessions with the vice-deans so students could directly present their ideas and problems to the administration.

To conclude, a strong emphasis must be made on allowing students to take part in deciding how courses are held. In addition, university and faculty administrations should pay great attention to the opinion of their students and react adequately to all difficulties students face. Conversely, students should actively participate in decision-making, affirming that everyone involved in the education process, both them and their teachers, are dealing with extraordinary circumstances.

Finally, the YUFE network should provide guidance to its members and develop different models on how universities could cope with the pandemic. Joint courses mentioned above certainly present one excellent idea that works well in a time of pandemic. Students, teacher and the university and faculty administrations must work together and, most importantly, listen carefully to what the other party has to say. Only then can the academic community fully live up to its universally accepted values of openness, cooperation and dialogue.

Key words: communication, YUFE online courses, decision-making participation, YUFE network

How did students cope with the lockdown?

Ivanka Živčić-Bećirević, Sanja Smojver-Ažić,
Tamara Martinac Dorčić, Gorana Birovljević
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rijeka, Croatia

COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of sudden changes in student academic and everyday life to which they had to adjust in a very short time. Many universities around the globe report about negative effects of pandemic on students' wellbeing.

This study was focused on the sources of stress that students experienced during the lockdown in spring 2020 and their effects on students' psychological and academic functioning. The sample included 923 students aged 19 to 28 (73% females) from different faculties at the University of Rijeka. Out of total 65% of the students changed their residence to attend university and 86.7% of them have returned back home during lockdown. The students completed Stress Source Questionnaire, Academic Functioning Questionnaire and Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21).

We have identified four groups of stress sources. The consequences of isolation represent the strongest stress source, followed by academic stress, the possibility of infection, and family sources of stress. Females experience all sources of stress more intensely than males, and students who changed the residence experience family problems and the consequences of isolation more stressful than students who live continuously with their families. Females and students who have not changed their residence have better academic functioning. Students who went back home during lockdown experience more family stress and higher stress due to social isolation.

Students experienced slightly elevated level of depression, anxiety and stress in average, with 19.6% of students expressing high or severe depression, and 23.9% high or severe anxiety. Even 12.7% of the students report suicidal ideation which is more than we usualy find.

The consequences of isolation have the strongest contribution to the level of depression and anxiety in students, as well as the strongest negative effect on their academic functioning. Depression and anxiety level are also significant additional negative predictors of students' academic functioning.

The results strongly support the relevance of student mental health issues and the need for providing institutional support, especially in time of extreme stress and for those students who moved from home. It is also important to early recognize the first signs of psychological problems, like anxiety and depressive symptoms, in order to promote better academic functioning and to prevent more serious and prolonged problems.

Preventive and proactive activities are very important as we have found that 31.48% of the students in the sample were thinking about seeking professional help during lockdown (more of those with higher depression), but only 4.61% really asked for help during the lockdown, even if it was available to them.

Key words: changes, sources of stress, lockdown, student mental health, professional help

Online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they sprung up a nationwide student initiative

Luka Delak[1,2], Sara Kinkela[1,3]
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As the pandemic appeared abruptly, it proved to be a serious and unprecedented challenge in academia, for which we were all but prepared. Professors and Course Leaders were set back on their heels as they were expected to continue to provide quality education for their students, while being unable to do it in person. Hence, widespread distance learning through online courses was implemented. We as students have only occasionally used such learning tactics, but never to a degree at which all our learning was set in an online environment. As it proved to be a challenge to all of us, we as the Student Council set out to determine how well, in the eyes of the students, did Course Leaders and Faculties cope with the difficulty, and what could have been done better. In April of 2020, we conducted a university wide survey that included over 2700 participants across 15 faculties and/or departments. The questionnaire consisted of 25 closed-ended statements to which participants could have expressed their level of agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale. Participants were also given the opportunity to freely express their opinions through 3 open-ended questions. After analyzing the answers, across the whole University, the result was an average passing grade. Overall, what worried students the most was the high level of uncertainty about what was going to be expected from them and how the academic year would end. Furthermore, a pervasive opinion was that the professors should have put in a larger effort in conducting the online courses with a higher standard of quality. The results of our study point to the conclusion that, based on student satisfaction, the response was not as adequate as it should have been. Taking into consideration that this study was conducted at the beginnings of the pandemic and since then there has been more time to adapt, a repeat study might be in order to assess possible improvements in the new academic year.

Nevertheless, students took the opportunity provided by the decreased workload at the time in order to help medical personnel across the country. In a nationwide initiative set in motion by the Croatian Student Council (to which the Student Council of the University of Rijeka joined in on from the start), students and volunteers were the first who joined forces in provisioning 3D printed face visors to different healthcare facilities, with the aim of aiding in the fight against the virus. As there was a shortage of personal protective equipment at the start of the pandemic, a total of about 12 000 visors created in only a month and a half (out of which 1100 at the University of Ri-

jeka), proved to be of great importance. The process and course of the initiative will be further explained in the oral presentation.

Key words: student satisfaction; online courses; online education; pandemic; COVID-19; student initiatives; visors; 3D printing.

How did impossible became possible: online student elections at the University of Rijeka

Tea Dimnjašević
Student Council of University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

COVID-19 pandemic has, in less than a year, reshaped our lives into a completely new form and it still continues to influence our business, private and all other aspects of our daily life. That which we considered normal and took for granted has become unimaginable; mass gatherings, using a gym, socialising with friends and family and regularly attending classes at universities are only some of the everyday activities which we now conduct in completely new circumstances, with rules and limitations. This new situation demands significant adjustments and understanding from the student population, as well as acceptance of new patterns of behaviour, especially those with which we protect the public health. Students and majority of pupils were faced with a completely new situation where they had to continue their education in a digital environment, which is definitely one of the most far reaching changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides this shift towards online education, students all over Europe also faced numerous other challenges in their life; from delivering different kinds of projects to leading an everyday student life. During the pandemic, University of Rijeka was supposed to hold its regular student elections for student representatives of all levels and constituents. In such circumstances, it was especially challenging to hold traditional student elections, which would be carried out on-site at different constituents, while at the same time guaranteeing the safety of the students. For this reason, already at the start of pandemics, University of Rijeka Students' Council, with the support of University of Rijeka management, started working on designing an online solution for holding elections, with emphasis on ensuring transparency, anonymity and integrity of election process and results. Substantial help was also provided by the staff of University Computing Centre (SRCE) which already had a voting software which nonetheless had to be adapted to our demands and requirements. SRCE delivered the software and offered support in adapting it to specifically student election. Software was adapted by the secretary of the University of Rijeka Students' Council with the help of software engineers and, of course, huge help from our vice-rector for informatisation and organisation. Adaptation took the whole summer, until September, when online elections were held. In order to ensure reliable identification and anonymity, electronic voting was accessible with AAI@edu.hr electronic identity and telephone number which served as a second layer of authentication through temporary password (token). Students could only access those constituencies in which they had right to vote, which was determined by voter lists delivered by student registries.

First online student elections in the Republic of Croatia held at the University of Rijeka truly demonstrated the direction in which we should be heading and further

develop and enhance this model of electronic voting. What helped immensely was the students' feedback through which they described this way of voting as simple, quick and efficient.