

NEWSLETTER

Issue # 5. Special coronavirus focus: challenge or opportunity?

Nearly every person and every aspect of our life has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses of all different sizes and industries of all different sorts have been substantially impacted. And the higher education sector has not become an exception. Coronavirus effects on universities are multifaceted and quite complex. Whether it concerns recruitment, admission, learning, or teaching, COVID-19 is making a significant and more likely lasting impression on HEIs all over the world. And those universities that adapted and innovated their processes during the hard pandemic times will no doubt come out with stronger technology solutions, more efficient student and staff support systems that will serve them for years to come.

In this issue of the newsletter, we would like to share the experience of ESSENCE partners about how they worked under the coronavirus. **So, in spring 2020 the Universities went online...**



Moving from physical to virtual space

Educational process at universities was greatly affected by COVID-19. Indeed, within a very short period of time ALL people associated with the higher education – students, teaching and technical staff, administrative personnel – had to adapt to the new online environment.

The three of ESSENCE partners that have launched new/modernized SES master degree programs in fall 2019 (P5/INRTU, P6/UrFU and P7/KSPEU) as well as P10/HUMG that has

piloted two ESSENCE courses in the spring semester 2019/2020 report that they have successfully overcome the challenges set by the pandemic and organized the teaching and learning process in the online format. The well-coordinated work of all university staff and their dedication made it possible to deliver lectures, organize discussions, and take tests and exams. ESSENCE partners share their experience:



Konstantin Suslov, academic supervisor of ESSENCE project at P5/INRTU, master program supervisor: “The almost immediate turn to online format has become a big challenge to both our teachers and students. We worked very hard to organize the educational process. The main platform for online teaching and learning became Moodle. We also used ZOOM and Tencent Meeting platforms as well as other communication tools such as e-mail, WhatsApp, phone. Depending on the course, the assessment was organized in the form of interviewing or testing. The major problem we faced but couldn’t solve at least at that moment of time is related to laboratory works. The labs required the physical presence of students and staff and couldn’t be performed virtually using specialized software. Therefore we postponed laboratory works for the next semester. But we accepted the challenge and are searching for the solution to this problem.

Despite all difficulties, we do appreciate the experience we acquired. We will definitely use the elements of online teaching by standard “offline” delivery of our educational programs.

It should be also mentioned that our University administration and IT services did their best to secure the smooth transition to and realization of online training. E.g. webinars on how to use Moodle as well as other tools for online teaching were organized. IT specialists were available for counselling and support”.



Aleksandra Khalyasmaa, ESSENCE project quality team member, course developer at P6/UrFU: “Under the conditions of COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms have become the key and necessary tools enabling the interaction with students: delivery of lectures, record, and publication of training materials, counselling, assessment, etc. Using technological solutions offered by Moodle, Microsoft Teams, Discord, we succeeded in online training of our students enrolled in the master program “Design and operation of power engineering systems”. The use of such tools as Google Classroom, Zoom, YouTube, and others also allowed us to fill the taught courses with new type of information – more demonstrative – and adapt them for online format. So that online educational process is efficient and successful, we had to ensure that all participants of the educational process had access to online technologies.

COVID-19 created a lot of challenges. We understood that we have to unit to generate the common educational space through distance learning. We furthermore grasped that education requires new approaches and resources. We have to consider the pandemic as an opportunity to analyze our experience and re-think the existing educational models to adapt them to new conditions and to the new future”.



Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao, administrative coordinator of ESSENCE project at P10/HUMG: “Like numerous other universities in Vietnam, HUMG partly closed and we worked at distance in the period from March to May 2020. Lectures and meetings were carried out by switching to virtual teaching, distance and home learning, home working via digital channels. The university has set up a crisis team that constantly monitors the current developments surrounding the Coronavirus and is in permanent contact and coordination with the national and regional health authorities. In line with this coordination, we have adopted all recommendations made by the Vietnamese government to provide adequate precautionary measures. All HUMG students and staff have been instructed by email to follow the national guidelines and informed on the hygiene measures to adopt. We keep them updated as more information comes in and make every effort to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the current situation.

As far as the piloting of ESSENCE courses is concerned, in spring semester 2019/2020 two disciplines were delivered to 7 students of the master program of electrical engineering: power system analysis and optimization for SES. We used Microsoft Teams to conduct online teaching, the University provided Microsoft account to all staff and students. Students could communicate personally and directly with their teachers via email and by Zalo as well (Zalo is an application developed by Vietnamese technicians, and popularly used in Vietnam). By lab works realization, we used blended teaching and learning mode. Students were assigned to perform an experimental project that allowed them to use free trial software at home and attend classes scheduled in the computer lab. That helped to reduce the face-to-face time, which should be limited in the pandemic period. The assessment was organized with traditional placed-based mode”.

Student recruitment and enrollment go online

Along with the problem of moving the educational process online, the universities worldwide – including ESSENCE partners – have also faced the challenge of recruiting new students in the midst of the global pandemic. We surveyed P5/INRTU, P6/UrfU, and P7/KSPEU who have been recruiting students for ESSENCE master programs about the measures taken to ensure the enrollment of new students as well as peculiarities of the admission campaign 2020.

This spring, the HEIs canceled all traditional on-campus recruitment events such as open-door, educational fairs, visits to schools, meetings, etc. It became clear that the only way to reach prospective students – both national and international – is using digital tools and channels such as social network groups (vKontakte, Facebook, Instagram), webinars, messengers (WhatsApp, Viber), mailing lists. Promotional videos on TV, banners and billboards, advertisements on radio have been also used more extensively than in the past years. The application deadlines at Russian universities have also been extended. The efforts made proved to be efficient since notwithstanding the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus, the number of enrolled students didn't decrease compared to the previous year: INRTU enrolled 15 students to its master program "Digital power engineering", UrFU – 6 students for the program "Design and operation of power engineering systems" while KSPEU admitted 6 students for the English-taught master program "Smart energy systems".

The admission process 2020 has also undergone considerable changes, i.e. everything moved online. Applications were made through the online application system; all the required application documents were uploaded to the personal account. There was no need for prospective students to come to universities in person. Depending on the partner, students had 1 or 2 entrance examinations which were also taken online in the form of an interview or a test: applicants at each of three partners were interviewed/tested in professional knowledge (power engineering) while UrFU prospective students also took an exam in IT and KSPEU applicants in English.

P7/KSPEU mentioned a positive aspect of moving the admission online: the geography of prospective students expanded. Graduates from HEIs in Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Kyzyl, Ufa, Chelyabinsk, Ivanovo, Izhevsk, Yoshkar-Ola, and other Russian cities applied for the program while the most applicants of the last year were the graduates of Kazan universities.

COVID-19 closes borders but opens up opportunities

Ural Federal University (P6/UrFU) has successfully implemented **online international internship** on the basis of ESSENCE project. Six students of the French university ENSEA completed an online internship at UrFU organized by the Department of International Educational Programs together with Ural Power Engineering Institute and Institute of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. The SVEL Company Group, one of the leading Russian manufacturers of electrical equipment, has become the partner company.



SVEL set the project task “Power Transformer Technical State Assessment.” Each participant presented his/her own version and an algorithm for solving it. The expert committee identified two finalists for the internship – Josef Salah and Tusan Thalayasingam. Students have received an opportunity to publish research results in a journal indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. All students received electrical certificates from UrFU and recommendation letters from the SVEL group.

More information at <http://essence-erasmus.org/2020/07/24/urfu-has-established-international-internship-online/>. Watch the promo video: <https://youtu.be/5rDiFFcd81Y>



On August 20, 2020 a visionary lecture “Smart Power Industry. Actual projects in Europe” was held in Zoom within the framework of P6/UrFU international scientific and methodological center lecturing campaign. The speaker was the world-renowned scientist Dr. Raphael Caire in Engineering and Head of the Smart Grids Laboratory at the Grenoble Institute of Technology (P2/Grenoble INP).

“This visionary lecture is a good case of international collaboration that sprang up and is developing within the current project “Establishing smart energy system curriculum at Russian and Vietnamese universities” (ESSENCE). Also, thanks to the collaboration within ESSENCE and despite the pandemic, the Ural Power Energy Institute of UrFU in tandem with Grenoble INP submitted a joint grant proposal from the Russian Science Foundation in 2020, so we can say that interaction within the educational process boosted to scientific cooperation between universities.”- Stanislav Eroshenko says, project manager at the Ural Federal University.

More information at <http://essence-erasmus.org/2020/09/01/visionary-lecture-of-dr-raphael-caire-at-p6-urfu/>. Watch the lecture: <https://youtu.be/Kp88l6KymGw>



Not only teaching and learning activities have been turned on remote mode but even the project monitoring activities. In July 2020 the National Erasmus+ Office in Russia carried out **remote advisory monitoring**. Overall despite the circumstances, the project development and results have been highly evaluated and useful recommendations have been provided to further improvements by the monitors. Certainly, not all the project activities have been and can be performed as planned and not all the partners have easily adapted to the changes. The situation with COVID-

19 forced us to extend and modify the project. But we are confident that the changes enrich our collaboration because **“Life is what you make it. Always has been, always will be.”** (Eleanor Roosevelt).

So, let's keep in touch, to be continued also in 2021 ...

For more information

