

COVID-19: Words of Support from all over the World

The transition to distance learning, the ban on events with big number of participants, postponing the international conferences and meetings - such measures are taken by universities and companies around the world to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection. The foreign partners of the Polytechnic University shared what they are doing to protect students and staff. As well, they send words of support to Russian colleagues and students: in the view of recent events this is especially important.



Following the recommendations from public health authorities (local and global), Federal University of Technology – Parana (UTFPR; Brazil) has suspended all on-site activities since March 16.

“The events that are happening today are an opportunity to improve distance learning. We will surely have learned a lot about our strengths and weaknesses and hopefully we will be able to improve as a community, focusing on our scientific values but also on cooperation and solidarity”, – underlined the international cooperation coordinator UTFPR Igor CORDEIRO.

According to Brazilian colleagues, accessibility is the main issue with distance learning. *“Even though we can offer courses to people who may not have the means to be present at the university and follow a specific class schedule, we must guarantee that there are options to reach people who don't own a computer, don't have access to a high speed connection, or don't have the appropriate space at home to focus for many hours. In other words, we can make distance learning even more accessible by considering the exceptional cases as well, – underlined Igor CORDEIRO. – We are, more than ever, together and we should face our challenges this way. The way each community deals with this situation may affect the whole world, so we should keep cooperating globally to find a way out”.*



The University of São Paulo (USP; Brazil) closed all the campus, maintaining a skeleton staff to maintain minimum operation. All activities that can continue are done virtually. Coordination and contact are limited to email and chat.

“For sure we cannot completely replace live communication with virtual. Nonetheless, some activities can really be complemented with distance learning, and this situation will help to break some bad opinions about it. However, good distance learning needs time and effort to put good material”, – commented USP Associate Director for International Cooperation Sergio OLIVA.

Forecasts for the future are all different, but mostly optimistic. Colleagues from Brazil believe that at the end of the pandemic, the situation in the world will

normalize and we will all return to normal life. *“Hang on, we will pass through this difficult time. Only with cooperation that we can endure and survive all this crises. You can count on our partnership during and after this period”*, – Sergio OLIVA added.



In the Netherlands universities and universities of applied sciences all turned to distant learning for their students. Buildings have been closed, exchange students are advised to return home.

“This has of course a huge impact on all involved. At the same time, you see an enormous amount of positive energy being geared towards online learning. Luckily, the last decade the higher education sector in the Netherlands has been investing a lot in digital infrastructures, which now pays off”, –Nuffic Neso Russia Jerke VERSCHOOR noted.

Lots of universities also offer additional free online courses. The situation – how dire it is – forces people to take initiative, help each other and develop even further the possibilities that are available with distant learning.

“Distant learning allows for larger groups of people to attend classes, and if the lessons are being recorded, to refer back to them at a later moment. Also, when you have a digital classroom, you can divide the group – online – in smaller groups to work together, without being bothered by others. As a teacher, you can still

enter each digital smaller room to discuss topics with these smaller groups. Smart software can really support new learning environments, attractive to the modern students, but not necessarily replacing all face-to-face contact. I guess for students the benefits are the amount of flexibility it offers, and also the option to follow courses taught in other countries”, - Jerke VERSCHOOR commented.

Despite the fact that the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in the new conditions are still not well understood, colleagues from the Netherlands are confident that corona crisis forces us to quickly adapt and benefit from this experience as soon as possible.

“We from the Netherlands Education Support Office in Russia wish all students, professors, lecturers and all those others working in and for higher education positive energy in the upcoming months. Let’s fight corona together by taking care of ourselves and others in the best way possible and as advised by experts and our governments. Internationalization in higher education will be hit hard, less student mobility is obvious. But this also forces us to reflect on the work that we are doing and possibly use this time to think about what we can do better after the crisis is over. Science and education is helping the world beat the virus. Let’s stay supportive of each other!” - expressed his best wishes the Director of Nuffic Neso Russia.



Kyonggi University (Republic of Korea) has taken serious measures to prevent the

spread of coronavirus infection. All education process is transferred to online mode. It is forbidden to be on the university territory without a mask. In addition, the university provides masks to foreign students: in pharmacies it is now difficult to find them. "We quickly adapted curricula to online classes. Employees of not only universities, but also other companies, whenever possible, try to work remotely. On the streets everyone is wearing masks. In addition, there are sanitizers everywhere for hand disinfection," said the outgoing academic mobility coordinator at Kyonggi University international office Eunji KIM.

"I appreciate very much to our sister universities for your support and cooperation. Many of students now facing so many issues though, if we support them continuously, things will change. We hope to see this outbreak will end soon. I wish you to stay health and safe!" – expressed his best wishes Eunji KIM.

On behalf of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University we send words of support to all our foreign colleagues, partners and friends. We are open to cooperation and new initiatives and we believe only in the best. We wish you good health, strength and mutual understanding!

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