

NEW SCENARIO IN CONTINUING EDUCATION: A CHALLENGE AND MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has transformed our life. In particular, the way in which teachers have evolved the learning methodology. Although it already had been on the rise before the crisis, through fully online or blended programs, digital learning suddenly became the only way to deliver programs through what is sometimes referred to as “emergency remote teaching”. The learning curve was steep for learners, teachers and course organizers. We had to learn several tools and software in order to modify our presence in the classroom to a virtual way of teaching. In essence, we had to change to a new paradigm of learning.

In UC3M, as an institutional norm, we began to use Blackboard Collaborate for the online classes, both for lectures and for workshops, and Google Meet for team work and tutorials. In order to capture the attention of students, we personalized our classrooms, getting constant feed-back from students and producing interaction with quick quizzes, and presentations. This transformation took place in record time, since in just two weeks, all teachers received University training and the TIC service was helping us thoroughly in each step: the learning process and the evaluation process. Given that the pandemic did not end in May, we decided to implement online exams using different tools and applications.

THE PAST. CHRONICLE OF EDUCATION TRANSITION

The transition begins in mid-March when the education system is closed and the university redirects face to face teaching to the online system using two basic tools: Blackboard Collaborate for teaching and Google Meet for tutoring.

All teachers were able to transform their teaching using these tools. In parallel, the University decides to delay by 15 days the end of course date to compensate for this adaptation period.

The assessment process also had to be adapted to the new circumstances. Decisions had to be made. In the UC3M system there are two calls, ordinary and extraordinary. The Vice-rector of Studies decided to evaluate students using remote tools; mainly Quiz in our intranet (moodle) using cameras or opening zoom.

Subsequently, in June UC3M School of Continuing Education, according to the university strategy, started planning the academic year 2020-21. To facilitate this, a form sheet was designed to receive information from Directors of the teaching model that best suited the characteristics of the program (e.g. many of the programs include face-to-face internships in companies).

SCE offered four options and different models as a guidance for planning the teaching in 20/21, to be considered by the management team of each program.

Directors had to select only the model that was understood to be the most appropriate for each program:

1. Suspension of the program. It was considered advisable not to offer the program the next academic year. The management team had to indicate the reason, as difficulties in obtaining external internships, reduction of the number of applications for admission, etc.
2. Synchronous online orientation, with exceptional face to face activities. Management team had to describe the model of tuition and the face to face activities and decide if attendance at face-to-face activities was mandatory in order to be evaluated. They also had to confirm the type of space required for activities and include proposals for tuition aid for students.
3. Bimodal. Part of the program is followed synchronously online and part face to face. Management team had to include a brief description of the model and number of face-to-face and online hours, a description of the type of space required for face to face classes and proposals for tuition aid for students.
4. Face to face orientation. Exceptionally offered if it was not possible to organize any synchronous online programming (Only in programs with less than 30 students). Management team had to include a brief description of the model and the number of face to face hours, a description of the type of space required for face to face classes and proposals for tuition aid for students.

As a result of considering these options:

- 33% of the programs have been offered using the synchronous online model, and are mainly programs with a high percentage of international students.
- 37% of the programs are taught in the bimodal model. About 50% of the teaching will be given from a university classroom, and the other 50% in synchronous online format without classroom use. These programs have small groups, so there are classrooms available with capacity enough for the delivery of the face-to-face teaching part.
- 40% of the programs continue with the completely face-to-face modality and will be used in the programs that have the facilities offered by different companies and institutions that have spaces suitable for the organization of classes with the required security measures.

In July the decision was to use a hybrid / mix system, with 50% of face to face so, in case the pandemic goes worse, we should move again to completely remote classes. Surveys were conducted among the students both in undergraduate and graduate. The levels of satisfaction were good, underlying the great effort performed by all academic personnel.

Finally, in October, after observing the evolution of covid-19 in Europe, some programs had to change to an online system. We also have programs addressed with institutions, firms that decided to move to their specific centres to offer face to face teaching, following the sanitary rules of Government. As a responsible institution, The School of Continuing Education (SCE) is aware that requirements are compliance. Because of this concern, the SCE proposed an action plan, with the collaboration of the Directorate of continuous education programs, offering teaching alternatives for the next edition.

THE PRESENT. NEW PARADIGM

A safe return [1]

UC3M aimed for everyone to return under safe conditions. To guarantee the safety of the University Community, a series of measures and protocols have been put into place. The commitment of each one and strict compliance with hygiene and safety measures are of essence to combat the spread of COVID-19.

A framework of general measures has been established in the work and academic environment and a series of specific measures in classes, offices, laboratories, cafeterias, Schools and Centres. Measures have been also taken for individuals at risk. Practical guides for both students [2] and teachers [3] are available.

Organisation structure to manage the incidence in UC3M

To facilitate the return to face-to-face academic activity at UC3M, following the recommendations prepared by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Universities to adapt the 2020/2021 academic year to the new scenario, UC3M adopted a series of preventive measures to facilitate a safe return to face to face classes.

A procedure was required to ensure rapid containment of the infection, agile management of students who initiate symptoms, and early identification of cases, quarantine and follow-up of close contacts and identification of possible sources of transmission.

The organizational structure for decision-making and the management of the actions derived from COVID-19 in UC3M was established as follows:

A **Commission** constituted to monitor COVID 19 cases at UC3M, made up of different academic authorities.

Its competencies are:

- Monitoring the evolution of COVID 19 cases at UC3M.
- Making the appropriate decisions according to the circumstances of the cases detected among the students, teachers, and staff of UC3M services.

An **advisory committee of experts** is set up in order to advise the Commission on decision making.

It is designated a **Global Head of Management** of actions derived from COVID 19 in UC3M, whose functions will be:

- Coordinate the management of actions and information for the follow-up of cases within UC3M.
- Provide the support required by the Covid Commission.
- Provide the information required by the health administration and by the rest of the competent bodies and services of the State Administration and of the Government of Madrid.

Delegated managers responsible for Covid management in the centres are also appointed to support the Global Head of Management in the necessary steps.

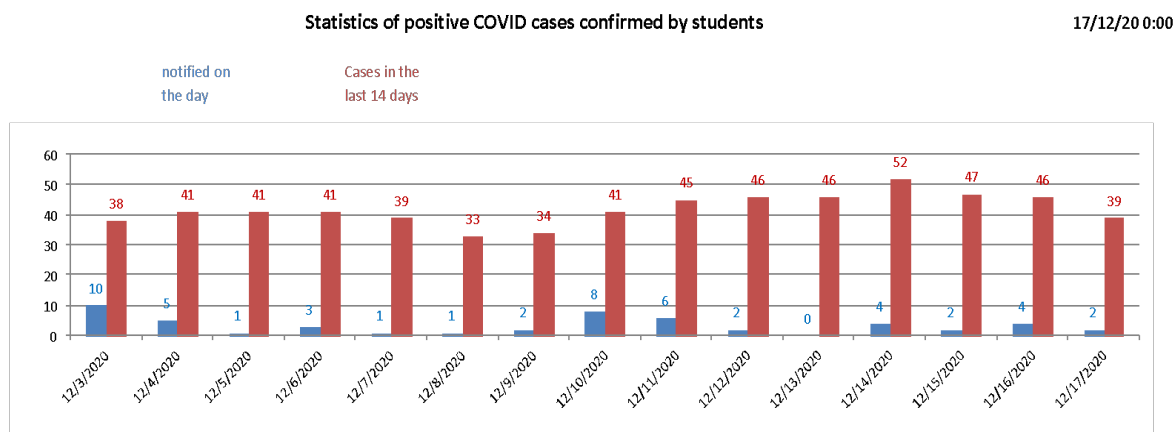
The functions of these team are:

- Support the Head of Management in the steps that are necessary for the location, communication and information to the students.
- Manage the specific measures established by the Deans in relation to laboratories and external student practices.

CURRENT SCENARIO AND FUTURE PLAN

To what extent is the situation controlled?

The evolution of the data of covid cases confirmed by students since the beginning of the course in September until the Christmas holidays has been:



We need to reinforce the system and procedure, coordination and organisation is crucial

Maybe, in the future we will have to maintain a hybrid system.

For the academic year 2021/22, the courses on offer in the School of Continuing Education programs have incorporated novelties, in many cases as a result of the experience acquired in the new scenario, which we hope will reflect improvements in the teaching and monitoring systems of the classes.

REFERENCES

- [1] <https://www.uc3m.es/covid19/home>
- [2] <https://www.uc3m.es/covid19/student-guide>
- [3] <https://www.uc3m.es/covid19/teacher-guide>