

Studies with distance-learning support – your key to success

Would you like to pursue further quality studies but you doubt in successfully combining them with your sports career or other duties? Does moving to a new study destination represent an obstacle for you? Would you at the same time like to gain practical competences necessary at the labour market? Our studies with distance-learning support are the right choice for you. Check out how the University of Nova Gorica can help you realise your career expectations.

Recently, the University of Nova Gorica (UNG) has significantly increased the amount of online-learning support, and in the 2020/21 academic year the use of blended learning, that is combining **traditional and online teaching methods**, is supposed to further increase, leading to the introduction of more mixed study programmes in the years to come. You will be able to study partly online, while through practical courses and practical placements carried out in situ, on the university premises and at host institutions, you will gain valuable experience for your career path. Combining the traditional form of studies and distance learning offers you a high level of flexibility but at the same time guarantees high quality of studies.

Who are studies with distance-learning support particularly suitable for?

Blended learning approaches will make studies more accessible to candidates who demand high-quality studies and wish to benefit from direct in-class interaction and practical in situ activities, but at the same time need a considerable amount of online support, such as:

- candidates who cannot come to UNG in time at the beginning of the academic year due to possible epidemiologic restrictions in the candidate's country of origin, or due to other plausible reasons (eg. lengthy visa obtaining procedures),
- candidates who wish to combine studies and work, professional careers in sports, arts etc. and cannot be present at a study location at all times,
- parents of young children who seek flexible forms of study in terms of the location and timing,
- candidates with special needs who need a considerable amount of adaptations and/or extra equipment to be actively involved in the study process (persons of reduced mobility, hearing impairments, learning disorders etc.).

What scope of distance-learning support will be available in the 2020/21 academic year?

In the 2020/21 academic year, UNG will, in addition of the traditional forms of teaching in situ also offer the following forms of **distance-learning support**:

- online lectures (live streaming, using videoconferencing systems and platforms such as MiTeam, Zoom, big Blue Button etc.),
- other forms of e-learning (consultations, project work, interactive activities in virtual classrooms, online foreign language courses etc.),
- additional e-materials (recorded lectures, enhanced MiTeam and Moodle virtual classrooms),
- online examinations and other online forms of assessment (using videoconferencing tools and applications),
- online presentations and defences of seminars, Bachelor's, Masters and PhD theses).

The availability of distance learning options depends on the specific characteristics of individual study programmes.

Distance-learning support at first-level study programmes

The School of Engineering and Management is planning to introduce low-residency studies of **Engineering and Management** from 2021/22 onwards. Part of study activities (study visits, practical placements) will be carried out on the School's premises and in the field, while the rest will take place online. A certain scope of lectures and practical activities will be carried out online yet in the 2020/21 academic year. In this way, the students can learn how to use collaborative approaches and modern technologies enabling remote working.

Also the study programmes **Cultural History**, **Slovene Studies** and **Digital Arts and Practices** will offer a considerable number of online lectures, project and research activities, while practical

placements and certain workshops will still be carried out in situ, such as certain workshops part of the modules Photography, Videofilm, Animation or New Media at the School of Arts.

The study programmes **Physics and Astrophysics** and **Environment** will offer more distance learning opportunities, while practical exercises, research, field and project work will still mostly be carried out in situ. The very fact that the students can take advantage of the state-of-the-art research equipment in UNG's research units represents a huge privilege, giving the students key practical competences and a simultaneous insight into the latest scientific achievements. Moreover, our experience acquired throughout the years, has confirmed that, as both our graduates and their employers have confirmed the crucial role of upgrading the students' knowledge through practical activities to give the future graduates all vital competences and skills.

By using innovative approaches and collaborating with external partners, certain additional practically-oriented activities will also be carried out online. For example, remote live astronomical observations will be available to students, thanks to the new remotely-operated telescope in Chile, which is currently being constructed by UNG and the Spika astronomy magazine as part of the educational and non-commercial project **GoChile**.

The study programme **Viticulture and Enology** will offer a limited amount of distance learning activities, as the studies are highly practically oriented, requiring strong students' engagement in laboratories, and in fieldwork at the UNG estate, in wine cellars across the region etc.

All Schools will offer certain online assessment options (online examinations, presentations etc.), and online defences of Bachelor theses.

Distance-learning support at second-level study programmes

The School of Engineering and Management already offers a **mixed study programme – Leadership in Open Education**. This interdisciplinary programme, implemented in cooperation with UNESCO Chair on Open Technologies for Open Educational Resources and Open Learning at the Jožef Stefan Institute is partly carried out in situ, on the School's premises in Vipava, and partly online.

The second-level programme **Engineering and Management** also offers online-learning support,

and is expected to offer a low-residency option in 2021/22.

In this academic year, the first laboratory tutorials were carried out online, as part of the course **Internet of Things**. Using their networks, the students established a safe connection and performed the testing and running of their own software for capturing quantities and for the remote operation of devices. At the same time the students learned how to use new tools and how to build an online application, as well as a mobile application, with the help of pre-built blocks.

A larger share of distance learning activities will also be available at the study programmes **Slovene Studies** and **Digital Humanities**, while the programmes **Viticulture and Enology**, **Physics and Astrophysics**, **Environment** and **Materials Science** will offer a limited scope of online teaching and most of the practically-oriented activities (laboratory work, field work, practical placement etc.) will still be performed in situ to assure the high-quality education and the transfer of theory into practice.

Distance-learning support at third-level study programmes

Doctoral studies at UNG are characterised by our individual approach to PhD students, which also includes online forms of teaching and learning. In the future we will continue to offer online lectures and seminars to all PhD students who cannot be present at UNG due to health-related, administrative- (visa-related) and accommodation-related or other reasons. Online support is also available to students in the form continuous online communication with their mentors and experts from UNG's research units, and videoconferencing systems are used for defences of doctoral dissertations. However, a certain amount of students' individual research work requiring laboratory or fieldwork research, cannot be performed online and will still take place in situ.

Distance-learning opportunities at the University of Nova Gorica: upgrading our tradition

The recent inevitable changes in the educational needs arising from the global public health challenges represented an opportunity for UNG to upgrade its existing tradition of using distance-learning approaches. To maintain a continuous and high-quality teaching process, we immediately

offered all our lectures online, since the previously introduced **tools and platforms** such as **Zoom, Big Blue Button, MiTeam and Moodle**, and soon also carried out the first online defence of a doctoral thesis.

Our successful and swift adaptation to the changing needs was the result of the years-long deliberate implementation of new teaching approaches, especially the so-called flipped learning, where the students are provided with the learning materials in advance, before lectures, and they study the materials themselves first and only then discuss the topics in class. UNG had actually been using certain online-teaching methods even prior to the outbreak of the pandemic to enable a more successful inclusion of students athletes, students with special needs as well as of guest lecturers from abroad who could not come to UNG at a particular point of time. For more than a decade, also doctoral thesis argumentations, which PhD students must hold in order to proceed with and successfully complete their studies, have often been carried out in a distant mode.

Besides lectures, other study activities such as consultations, project work, open days etc. are currently being performed in a distant mode, too. Online lectures are also recorded and thus available to all students who may not be able to follow the lectures in a real time, either due to the lack of technical equipment at a particular moment or due to other reasons. Certain examinations are performed online as well, using various videoconferencing tools and the **exam.net** application.

Advantages of blended learning

The increasing demand for online studies as a result of combining one's studies with work, and the Covid-19 pandemic led to significant changes in the educational processes, as the needs and abilities of the prospective candidates had considerably changed. In addition, the recent changes on the job market also had a profound impact on the candidates' career choices. While online teaching has become indispensable, UNG has identified a high potential of **blended learning and mixed study programmes**, that is combining the traditional teaching approaches by teaching practically-oriented activities in situ with a considerable amount of distance-teaching support.

While the **main advantage of teaching practical activities in-situ** is giving the graduates the

necessary **practical experience** and helping them develop their **social skills**, while, on the other hand, distance learning offers the candidates a high level of **individually tailored modes of study** and **more affordable study options**.

The main advantages of distance-learning are:

- **high flexibility of the study process** (individual adaptations in terms of time and place and following the study process from one own's comfort zone, the possibility of watching the recorded lectures at any time);
- **lower costs** related to studies, as you spend less money on accommodation and transport;
- **fewer health-related risks** (studying while staying at home during the periods posing possible health risks, easier inclusion of special needs students who need considerable adjustments, mothers-to-be etc.)
- **easier access to study materials**, as they are all available online;
- **higher motivation** for studying and **more efficient acquiring of knowledge** thanks to the tailored modes of study and learning speed;
- **a higher level of independence and responsibility** of student (eg. less nerves before presenting and asking questions in a remote mode, advance preparation of worksheets etc.);
- **easier networking** (yet taking part in a distant-learning process itself demands faster and more frequent networking, so the students become more skilled in networking; in case of networking it is easier for external partners such as cooperating businesses (potential employers of future UNG graduates) to take part in the educational process;
- development of **digital competences** and **written communication skills**.



Teaching online at the School of Arts, 2019/20
Photo credit: AU Archives



Statement of an international student of the School of Engineering and Management about distance learning in the Covid-19 epidemic period, April 2020

»How do we follow lectures during the epidemic period? Switching to online lectures was definitely not a problem for us, as the Moodle system had already been established. So most of the study materials had been uploaded into our Moodle virtual classrooms beforehand. Now each of us has one own's user account and with it we can access online lectures. This is actually the easiest way to carry out distance-learning activities. Our interaction with the professors has not been a probem, not even for a second, as they are always available – in a remote way, of course – both during the lectures and afterwards, by email. They answer our questions swiftly. I can thus say that their working hours are a bit longer in this period. Also in case of other study assignments such as homework tasks and seminar works, our professors assist us and we have no problems whatsoever. In a way, this study period has actually been a pretty nice experience, as we can remain in our own domestic environment, which is dearest to us. I am currently at home, in Sarajevo, too, I am following our online lectures and I have all I need. I can honestly say that at the moment online learning is very convenient for me, because we have more time for leisure activities. I hope you will also become a part of our community and that we will be able to follow online and regular lectures together.«

Nejra Ajanović, Bosnia and Herzegovina, undergraduate student of Engineering and Management
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Veronika Piccinini, 4th June 2020

Source: Franko, M. et al., 2020. University of Nova Gorica successfully performing distant-learning activities in the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency. Univerza v Novi Gorici (23. 4. 2020)
<http://www.ung.si/en/news/2132/university-of-nova-gorica-successfully-performing-distant-learning-activities-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-state-of-emergency/> (retrieved: 4. 6. 2020)